DEMOCRACY for the FUTURE

*Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, many have talked of an acceleration of democracy's retreat around the globe. Against that backdrop, members of the Democracy for the Future project research team discussed their assessments of the current state of democracy, how democracy has been challenged by this infectious disease, how Japan should engage with democracy around the world, and why democracy is important anyway. The following is a record of discussions held on November 19, 2020, which were originally published in Japanese.*

# Research Team Trialogue: The Spread of COVID-19 and Its Impact on Global Democracy

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**Contents**

1. The Biggest Danger to Democracy Today
2. Threats Posed to Democracy by the COVID-19 Pandemic
3. How Japan Should Engage in Democracy Around the World

## The Biggest Danger to Democracy Today

**Hikotani:** Today, I would like to discuss with you the theme of "The Spread of COVID-19 and Its Impact on Global Democracy." Thank you for your time.

First, I would like to hear your views on the state of democracy these past few years based on your fields of expertise. One point often raised in relation to COVID-19 is democratic regression. A V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy) project has a "Pandemic Backsliding Index" which considers seven factors: (1) discriminatory measures; (2) derogation of non-derogable rights; (3) abusive enforcement; (4) no time limit (for emergency measures); (5) limitations on legislature; (6) official disinformation campaigns; and (7) restrictions of media freedom. Touching on these kinds of factors if you can, please tell us specifically in which areas you see the biggest dangers.

**Yabuki:** As an attorney, I come from a legal background. Through the Japan Federation of Bar Associations, I have engaged in support activities for the development of legal systems for over 25 years, especially in developing countries. I have also undertaken the same kind of work at the International Bar Association and other similar organizations. As such, I would like to speak from my experience about the legal systems and political systems of the many countries with which I have engaged.

My first point is about what I see as a significant deterioration in democratic values around the

world. I fear that there is an increase in both authoritarian countries and countries without functional democracies. As an attorney, rather than viewing democratic values from a political perspective, I always consider them in terms of guaranteeing human rights and how that relates to human security. As you know, democracy is about allowing citizens of a country to choose the government, thus political freedom and protection of human rights are essential elements. The human rights that are relevant to politics include freedom of speech, the right to access information, freedom to carry out political activities, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly and association, among others. A fair electoral system, including the right to elect and be elected, is another important element. US political scientist Larry Diamond says democracy consists of four basic elements: (1) free and fair elections, (2) the active participation of citizens in political and civic life, (3) protection of human rights, and (4) the rule of law. Of these, I believe civil society and the rule of law are extremely important. It is crucial that the rule of law be applied to all people in an inclusive and equal manner for both legal procedures and substantive laws built around human rights.

Many authoritarian countries have strong centralized authoritarian rule and the political freedom of others is restricted. Even countries with one-party rule or military rule often adopt formal democratic systems with party parliamentarians and elections, but I believe these methods function only to solidify the rule of the centralized authoritarian government. During the Cold War, from the post-war period until the 1970s, there was an increase in such countries, but when the Cold War between the East and West ended in the late 1980s, with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, many countries sought to become democracies. That situation is in flux again in the 2000s. That's because there are countries like Russia and China, which have introduced market-oriented economic reforms into their socialist and communist systems, that are on the rise with growing national power. And there are countries in the Middle East and other areas where the traditional ruling elite continue to maintain their hold on power. In light of these factors, I believe that we must recognize that right now we are at a crossroads for democracy. Democratic countries like ours are being compelled to act in the face of the expansionist policies of authoritarianism. I'm not sure if these are the best examples, but China is expanding into the East China Sea and South China Sea, and it is implementing policies like the Belt and Road Initiative to appear to be benefiting the economies of other countries. And then there were the new limits placed on human rights as a result of the June 2020 enactment of the Hong Kong national security law, such as limits on political activities and the introduction of closed trials. These actions can be highlighted as examples.

Even the US, which we considered the master of democracy, is a nation divided because of chaos after the presidential election. As Professor Hikotani mentioned, in Europe too, one effect of COVID-19 has been an erosion of national power. At the same time, we are witnessing the rise of political populism and the beginning of a weakening of support for democracy. It is these many various elements that lead me to believe that democracy has now reached a crossroads.

**Hikotani:** Professor Takenaka, what are your thoughts on this?

**Takenaka:** My original research was on democracy and I had been away from it for a while, but recently I have received more requests to speak at democracy workshops. They contact me saying, "Professor Takenaka, you used to research the fall of democracy, is that correct?" I never thought I would be asked to speak on that theme. About 20 years ago, when I was studying for my doctorate, there was an outpouring of hope for democracy, and it was thought that many countries would undergo democratization. It was like the debate on the collapse of democracy was closed and no new research was being started. In 1978, The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes produced by three leaders in the field—Juan Linz, Seymour Lipset and Alfred Stepan—was like the bible for the topic, and we all felt, "This is the final word on the theory of democratic breakdown."

I personally feel quite conflicted about being called on in recent times to discuss democracy breakdown theory. The fact that research is being conducted on democracy breakdown exposes the reality of a rise in threats to democracy in society today. As Mr. Yabuki said, if you take the macro view, there has been a continuous rise in the number of democracies. However, we see a decrease when taken as a proportion of total country numbers. According to data from Freedom House, in addition to the numbers falling as a proportion of the total, we are seeing an increase in the number of authoritarian regimes, as well as middle-of-the-road style regimes, such as those that are semi-democratic or competitive authoritarian regimes. We need to consider what this situation really means.

Why are such long-term changes occurring? From 1975 onward, a wave of democratization spread, and when democracy really took hold after the end of the Cold War, there was a tendency to view economic prosperity and democracy as a package. Advanced countries had great economic capacity, and by making democracy a condition for economic aid, they were offering an incentive to authoritarian regimes to democratize. In the 1960s, Lipset released a thesis that "economic development leads to democracy," kicking off lots of research into how economic development leads to democratization in some way. Many came to believe this causal relationship.

However, if we look at how this theory fares today, we find the emergence of what you might call the "Singapore Model"—although Singapore might get mad at that—where countries are continuing to enjoy economic development while succeeding in maintaining authoritarian systems. We know that democracy is stable in situations of successful economic development, but this suggests that, in fact, authoritarian systems can also realize steady economic development. I think there is no question that China is aiming for this Singapore Model. The economic development of authoritarian countries is also impacting the democratization of other countries, one good example being Cambodia. If we look at what is happening now, authoritarian countries are also dispensing economic aid. Europe was keen to support countries on the basis of democracy as democratization spread in Europe, and the US was extremely fervent about spreading democracy. But in recent years, advanced democratic nations have become more inward-looking and are not as passionate about spreading democracy as before. I think the lower incentive from an aid perspective is one cause for the lack of drive to democratize that we are seeing now.

The challenges faced by advanced democratic nations are the emergence of populist political parties even in Europe, and the fact that America—the supposed model of democracy—has an incumbent president who criticizes the media extensively and who, even prior to the election, has said that he won't believe the outcome. From the time of the 2016 presidential election, he has made grandiose statements like, "These election results are suspicious" and "I don't believe a word the media establishment says." And he continues to say he won't trust the results of this election either.

Rather than collapsing suddenly one day as a result of a coup d'état or other events, democracy tends to regress gradually. This is something that Juan Linz references and is also written about in a recent book by Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt called How Democracies Die, in which they have revised the research of Linz and Lipset. The regression of democracy occurs with the gradual erosion of respect for the rules that must be defended

within democracy, as was just outlined by Mr. Yabuki. Complaints about and a lack of trust in election results is one example, and it causes a portion of the population to lose faith in the legitimacy of democracy, which in turn leads to regression in democracy.

I spoke earlier about economics, but one more factor is the importance of standards. Validation comes from the fact that many people believe democracy is really the only way. Even totalitarian states like North Korea that clearly are not democracies have the word "democratic" in their official country names. I believe we had validation for democracy, but when events occur like those happening in the US—the model of democracy—dictators and leaders of authoritarian states start to say, "Their actions are no different than ours." When it comes to competing standards, I am deeply concerned that we have come to a place where we can no longer maintain the predominance and legitimacy that we have enjoyed to date.

There is one more thing I am concerned about. Not a great deal of economic data has been released yet, but COVID-19 has dealt a serious blow to the economically vulnerable, while the wealthy continue to grow their wealth, thereby broadening the wealth gap. One condition for a stable democracy is the presence of a solid middle class. But a deepening collapse of the middle class in advanced democracies would widen disparities, leading to dispersion of political thought. And because this heightens the division between left-wing and right-wing people, there is the possibility that this will further fuel the momentum of political parties that uphold extreme principles.

**Hikotani:** Thank you for sharing the big picture perspective, including how the very character of the US and Europe has changed. And thank you for telling us about your experiences to date, Mr. Yabuki.

## Threats Posed to Democracy by the COVID-19 Pandemic

**Hikotani:** I would like to ask you both about the threats posed to democracy by the COVID-19 pandemic based on your fields of expertise and experiences to date. Is it accurate to say that COVID-19 has been the cause of deteriorating democracy, or that in countries that were already experiencing democratic backsliding—those that were already suffering from chronic issues, so to speak—that COVID-19 has further damaged their situation? On the flipside, which countries' systems of democracy have proven to be resilient to the crisis posed by the pandemic?

I live in New York, and in the early days of this pandemic, this city faced the gravest situation in the US, and we experienced a true lockdown. My feelings from that experience were that even in a democratic society, the most minor of things can bring about elements of authoritarian tendencies. It forced me to think about where the resilience resides. For what purpose does the government seek modified behavior and why do citizens adhere to those requests? When emergency measures are invoked, how do the citizens take it? In New York's case, the state government publicized all the bad news too, and I think the fact that citizens trusted the information supplied by the government was an extremely important factor.

**Takenaka:** COVID-19 has impacted democracy in several ways. In times of pandemic, I believe that short-term limits on people's movements are unavoidable, even in democratic countries. In several countries, there has been opposition from citizens who felt the limits on freedom of movement were excessive, making it impossible to contain the virus. I think it may be best to consider this issue separately from the question of the erosion of democratic values in traditionally democratic nations.

Much more serious is the issue that, going forward, countries like China and Vietnam, which successfully contained COVID-19 with strict countermeasures, raise their appeal that authoritarian systems are superior in some ways. When competing for legitimacy, up until now no matter what

was said, democracies had legitimacy, and you could even say, “Surely even people in authoritarian states believe in their hearts that democracy is better, right?” When asked, those people have no response. When it comes to dealing with the pandemic, some authoritarian states clearly performed very well. Singapore also did well. In those circumstances, it is no surprise that the response capability of democracies comes into question. One method was the one employed in New York that Professor Hikotani mentioned. If Japan faces a graver situation going forward, people will say, “So Japan’s method didn’t work after all,” making the future situation in Japan critical.

With regard to the future impact of disparity, the economic conditions brought about by the pandemic could cause even greater disparity and increase unemployment numbers. People harboring discontent will begin to support political parties with extremist policies. They may be right-wing, left-wing or even populist parties. I think populism situates itself on both the left and the right. Support for such extremist parties leads to great divisions in politics, thus destabilizing democracy. I am very fearful about that.

The existing leaders in semi-democracies—countries whose governments lie somewhere between authoritarian and democratic—have limited the movement of their people by declaring states of emergency. Thailand is an excellent example of this. It has extended the state of emergency this whole time, using it as a pretext to restrict people’s behaviors. I believe the real purpose of restricting people’s behavior is to prevent anti-government movements. In spite of this, many demonstrations are taking place in Thailand. The idea of leaders in that grey zone between authoritarian and democratic using a state of emergency declaration for suppressing the pandemic as a pretext for cracking down on antigovernment movements to solidify their own control is truly frightening.

**Hikotani:** Mr. Yabuki, I understand that in addition to Cambodia, you undertake aid activities for the administration of justice in Mongolia, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Nepal. Do you feel that the pandemic has actually served to prove the superiority of the Chinese model of authoritarianism, thus slowing down democracy’s momentum?

**Yabuki:** I feel very strongly that is the case. I have been working in Cambodia for 25 years. At the start there was cooperation among the donors, with Japan serving as the chair of donor countries. These days, Prime Minister Hun Sen is completely committed to China. When contemplating why, it seems to be the success of the authoritarian model. I think he feels that if Cambodia follows China’s path, they can succeed too.

The biggest success, as mentioned by Professor Takenaka earlier, is in economic growth. The Washington Consensus was led by the US and formulated by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) based on the idea that support for market-oriented economic reform would bring about democracy. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was a key player in implementing this model based on the Washington Consensus. However, there is no answer for the fact that even authoritarian countries that have implemented market-oriented reforms have been able to attract aid and develop. China sees very active share trading and it has formed the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, through which it provides economic aid and attempts to export its political framework for authoritarianism. I think countries looking at those successful experiences start to feel that “maybe this is the way after all.”

In addition, authoritarian countries are able to implement COVID-19 measures faster and more effectively. At first, China was in a state of panic

and was criticized by the United States, but now it is managing to keep the virus under control. So those types of countries are thinking they can keep it under control in the same way. In actuality, the centralized power of authoritarianism does enable such states to implement policies rapidly. Even in the absence of laws, the administrations can execute political measures using their far-reaching discretionary power. In many cases, these countries are surveillance societies, facilitating city closures and lockdowns and enabling monitoring of citizens' movements. One good example is Hungary's Prime Minister Orbán, who declared a state of emergency in March, expanding his powers as prime minister with no time limit and simultaneously limiting the freedom of the press. In democracies, on the other hand, these processes take time because there are many constraints based on the constitution and laws, and political parties must coordinate the response. Surveillance of citizens is considered a breach of privacy and resolving issues such as these naturally takes time.

When considering how this is viewed by civil society, one factor that holds extremely important value is that of conforming to the decisions of leaders elected by the people themselves. It means the people can monitor and insist on change if a leader's actions are inadequate, and that is what underlies the value of democracy and the civil society that supports it. I believe that as long as we have civil society, democracy will not die.

In the US, there has been much backlash and confusion surrounding COVID-19, but I expect that these things too will be absorbed, and the US will ultimately return to its former self. That's because I firmly believe that US civil society still holds fast to the value of having one's voice heard and supporting good leaders. If we look at Japan, the existence of constitutional restrictions mean that a lockdown cannot be imposed, even under a state of emergency declaration, based on the so-called Special Measures Act (Special Measures for Pandemic Influenza and New Infectious Diseases Preparedness and Response). And there is the idea that if businesses are requested to close, a certain level of compensation should be made. This support is seemingly based, to an extent, on a broad interpretation of Article 29, item 3 of the Constitution, which states the need for "just compensation." I believe this is the case because the eyes of the nation are on the government. There is no requirement to compensate if you impose something on the people, but the administration and the legislature that supports it are deeply aware of the need to earn the support of the people again in the next election. Those are some of the dimensions of democracy.

My conclusion is that the question of the COVID-19 response and democracy versus authoritarianism should be considered as separate issues. Professor Takenaka said something similar at the outset and I also believe these are separate issues. I think this might be the perfect time to look back and consider once more why democracy is important.

In the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 4, item 1 states that in times of public emergency, some restrictions may be imposed. However, it is also written that those measures must not, under any circumstances, involve discrimination on the grounds of race, color, sex, language, religion, or social origin. Thus, restrictions can be applied as needed in emergency situations, but that which should be protected must be protected without exception. I suspect our challenge is how to share these values with other countries.

**Hikotani:** Thank you. The reason I asked is because I wondered, when it comes to the question of whether COVID-19 has accelerated democracy's deterioration, if we need to sort through which factors to link in and which to exclude.

I believe Professor Takenaka has a soon-to-be released publication regarding Japan's response. One of the most intriguing points is that even among democracies, there have been quite substantial differences in response to the same disease, COVID-19. The biggest difficulty for democracies is the issue of privacy and restricting people's actions, because it is hard to make these compatible with democratic values.

In an essay published in a special coronavirus edition of International Organization, University of Texas political scientist Sheena Greitens outlined three criteria for strengthening surveillance to prevent the spread of infectious disease without

causing democratic erosion: (1) ensuring measures are necessary, proportional to the need, and not excessive; (2) ensuring they are limited in time, scope, and target, cannot be expanded indefinitely, and include criteria for bringing them to they an end; and (3) ensuring they are subject to proper mechanisms for monitoring and oversight.

Professor Takenaka, how would you assess Japan's response to date from this perspective?

**Takenaka:** Under (1) surveillance, do you mean in regard to the extent of protection of privacy?

**Hikotani:** Regarding how much surveillance and tracing by a government is acceptable.

**Takenaka:** Is that in terms of standards established by the government? For example, the Diet giving its approval, the government publicizing surveillance standards, and mentioning that information gathered will be properly safeguarded and not used for other purposes?

**Hikotani:** Communicating in advance who has access to what, after how many days data will be erased, and things like that. The premise, to some extent, is that information supply will be undertaken in an impartial manner. Especially in regard to the balance between the administration and legislature, I feel that another factor to look at is how much of a role the legislature has to play given the tendency for a strengthened administration.

**Takenaka:** I feel I could write another thesis on this novel approach you have given. Thank you for the idea (laughs)! My book is not about that, but looking at these three criteria you mentioned, in the case of Japan, we can breathe easy knowing that tracing cannot be done without consent. Public health offices can't investigate where you went or who you went to eat with, because such investigations cannot be undertaken forcibly. It's all based on consent. I don't think there was much discussion about how public health offices would ultimately use the personal information collected by local governments. I think at the foundation is an unspoken understanding that such information is safeguarded and cannot be investigated without consent. In actual fact, this is causing quite a few problems for Japan. Especially in the early days, infection was said to be spreading via so-called entertainment-based restaurants and bars, but when asked, many people wouldn't tell the truth, saying, "I haven't met up with anyone." There were so many cases where the source of infection was recorded as unknown, but with further questioning over time, it turned out that at least in the first wave, infection did occur at such venues. In Japan's case, infection spread because there was no legal force behind the investigations. Enforcing them raises issues of democratic rights and protection, so I think with regard to point (1), you could say Japan's response throughout has placed great emphasis on democratic principles.

On point (2), Japan did issue a state of emergency declaration, but it was very loose; the lockdown was not enforced and there were no punishments. Nor were there penalties for businesses that didn't close — they have merely been requested to do so throughout the lockdown. There was a specific time limit, and limits by region as well. About ten days in, infection had spread around the country, but I believe many people understood from the message "the emergency will be lifted wherever it can be," that this was not something that was going to last forever.

But when it comes to criteria, they were not set in a clear manner. The medical system became strained, Tokyo started running out of hospital beds, as did Osaka, and it was the concern that the medical system would collapse that led the prime minister to invoke a state of emergency. There were no criteria for what constituted a sudden increase in infections. Osaka Prefectural Governor Yoshimura spoke out about the lack of criteria, and local governments raised the question of conditions for the emergency to be lifted. Initially, the government was very reluctant to provide numerical criteria, but they did, in the end, establish a certain standard and decided to lift the emergency should infection numbers fall below that level. The problem now is that there are no criteria for reinstituting a state of emergency. Osaka Prefecture and other locales have created clear criteria that indicate a worsening situation. Tokyo's stance is a

little looser, saying it will "make a comprehensive judgement." In the case of New York, mentioned earlier, the criteria were very clear, including that schools will be closed if the positivity rate goes over 3 percent. Japan has not determined such criteria because it wants to leave room for discretion and because it is leaving it up to local governments. Citizens are not concerned as much with the actions of local governments and the media doesn't follow them extensively. Maybe they are tracking them, but doing so for 47 prefectures is a big job, which I feel explains why Japan is a little loose when it comes to setting criteria.

With regard to the third issue of oversight, I get the sense that mass media is rather unsparing in its assessment of the government's actions. But media reports have been criticized for stirring up people's fears by going from one extreme of telling them not to worry too much to declaring, "this is grave." There are so many people introduced as experts, besides those on the government's expert panel, and looking at it from the outside, their opinions seem so divided that I think it's hard for the general public to determine the true seriousness of COVID-19.

Finally, I would like to discuss two points that I raise in my book. The first is about the relationship between central and local governments. Because of the abundance of actors with jurisdiction over infectious disease responses, we are not seeing a unified response. In fact, the central government has very little authority to respond. Prime Minister Abe was trying his hardest to act in the beginning, but in actual fact, really the only thing he had the power to do was to issue a state of emergency. Beyond that, all he could do was say, "Please," and the rest was up to local governments and whether they listened to that request. Furthermore, the local governments of large cities have a multilayered structure with authority divided between prefectures, designated cities, and special wards. It is public health offices that have the authority for infectious disease testing and tracing. In the Tokyo metropolis, the metropolitan governor has absolutely no power of command over the public health offices of the 23 wards. The application of public health office resources is in the hands of the mayors of each of the 23 special wards. Infectious disease spreads, so if the response of one local government is unacceptable, the surrounding local governments suffer the negative impact of the poor response. To a certain extent, responses need to cover broad regions, but authority in Japan is highly decentralized. This is not an issue with democracy itself, but rather on the question of how to distribute power within a democracy.

**Hikotani:** It's crucial for local governments—in the US that refers to state and city governments—to take action on an initial response. It's also important for them to adopt a detailed approach. In New York too, there were cases where the state and city did not agree. In terms of the extent of limits on people's movement across state borders, detailed measures are being undertaken on how many days to quarantine if you've crossed a state border and testing early to finish quarantine early. It's because of a certain level of trust that these things are possible.

Because infection can be spread without realizing, there is nationwide and statewide agreement on the need to test. There are considerable levels of voluntary testing and the basis for this is the creation of indicators for decisions on school closures and indoor dining at restaurants. I think the starting point had something to do with the lack of misgivings around the indicators. Of course, everyone has different opinions and it's only natural that some people will complain about schools being closed when the positivity rate tops 3 percent, despite restaurants being able to operate to 25 percent capacity and until 10 p.m. There are people who feel the indicators are arbitrary and others who don't like the obligatory nature. But I think the fact the government shows itself to be seeking a scientific basis and compelling evidence is the reason everyone thinks "there's not much we can do about it." Nowadays, I get the sense people are accepting of the situation, feeling "this won't go on forever," and building their expectations around the development of vaccines.

As Professor Takenaka touched on earlier, the question is about the long term and the extent of

the economic impact. And with COVID-19 now exposing economic disparities and the ways in which access to healthcare differs by race and income level, the issue of how to respond is truly a long-term one. In what way will politics be affected by those responses—will we see more or less polarization? I think it will take some time before we know the answer.

## How Japan Should Engage in Democracy Around the World

**Hikotani**: From your perspective as an attorney, Mr. Yabuki, can you please share your thoughts on the features of the Japanese response as they pertain to democracy?

**Yabuki:** Listening to you both talk, I want to touch on transparency. It occurred to me just how important it is that the Japanese people can see the heated debate going on between the central government and local governments, and between the Tokyo governor and special ward mayors. With a parliamentary cabinet system and long-term Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) administration, the function of the legislature to monitor governance and inform citizens has been greatly weakened. One positive from the COVID-19 response has been the public exchange of opinions between the central and local governments. Seeing that has made it possible for us to decide for ourselves. That is the only point where I feel that Japan's democracy is still functioning well. Perhaps it's misleading to say the "only point."

One more thing I want to talk about is indicators. Just yesterday (November 18, 2020), Tokyo had its highest number of cases ever, at 493. Governor Koike said the reason for the sudden jump to close to 500 is an increase in testing. It's only natural for infection numbers to rise with increased testing, but TV programs continue to report only the case numbers. You can't begin to understand the situation until you know how many positive cases there were from how many tests—that is, the positivity rate. Based on test numbers, case numbers could be 100, 200, or 500. It's confusing for the Japanese people. Ultimately, if you do not carefully inform the public with transparent information, the people will struggle.

In Japan, even with the crisis being elevated to the highest level based on a set of indicators, there has been no urgent request for restraint. They say, "We will consider that based on a comprehensive assessment," after which one or two weeks simply pass by. It should be explained more clearly to the people that if figures reach a certain number, we will have an initial week of restrictions, and if the situation settles, we will repeal them. This is the best way within a democracy to apply the accelerator and brakes properly and as needed. Then politicians and government leaders are held accountable. Administrations seek stability so it's not ideal to accelerate today and put the brakes on again tomorrow. That's probably one of the biggest issues caused by Japan's excessively big government.

Before, you spoke about privacy and surveillance societies. I think it's critical to have the ability to trace and reflect upon what was done, as long as necessity and proportionality remain closely guarded. One key function of civil society is to monitor the government, which is why making information public is so important. A major problem we face presently is that Japan is way behind in terms of disclosure of public documents. Only once a safe harbor is created, allowing civil society monitoring, do the people engaged in government and politics work with a sense of accountability.

While we need to strengthen systems that allow citizens to play a monitoring role, improvements are also needed on the citizens' side of things. In

2019, Japan ranked 24th in the Economist magazine's democracy index, earning the label "flawed democracy," or as I say, "a democracy with issues." The next rank down is "hybrid democracy," an idea mentioned earlier by Professor Takenaka. Japan's 24th-place ranking was attributed to the immaturity of its political governance and the democratic political culture, as well as weak political participation by citizens. These are elements that must be improved upon. An additional important factor is whether Japanese citizens really understand why democracy is important. I think our efforts need to be directed at helping people understand this point.

On the radio the other day, I spoke about the UN's World Happiness Report in which Japan is ranked 62nd. The ranking stems from a low level of tolerance and open-mindedness in Japan around people's freedom to choose how they live and access to social supports. This tolerance is a democratic value that must be guaranteed above all else in a system of democracy, in which individual dignity is paramount. I believe democracy exists to protect human dignity, but on this most fundamental element, Japan is lacking. Responsibility for developing a democratic political culture rests with us, civil society. Like Professor Takenaka said, the middle class is falling behind, so the issue is about how far we can go in cultivating stable individual economic power and then drawing a connection with political participation. In efforts to advance that process, it's possible Japan could become the leading democracy in East Asia. If we consider Japan is still in the growth stages of democracy, this COVID-19 crisis could be seen as a chance to value democracy more highly and to start taking steps in a positive direction.

**Hikotani:** One point I would like to make as an extension of that is that COVID-19 seems to have created a sense of urgency as people felt that casting one's vote is a matter of life and death, and that had a definite influence on lifting voter turnout in the US presidential election this time.

Professor Takenaka, I believe there is a piece you wrote about electronic voting on the JCIE website. The timing of tabulating votes and other issues in this year's presidential election caused quite a lot of chaos, but it made me realize that a surprising variety of voting methods were available, even amid the pandemic. These included early voting, which in New York began more than one week before the election, and mail-in voting. And based on the reports from various commissions that monitor voting, things went relatively smoothly. I think whether these various voting methods will be seen as a this was a positive experiment or whether they lead to future problems is a critical point for American democracy.

You have already answered some of the points related to our third topic, but I would like to ask about how Japan can engage with democracy around the world and why democracy is important. Mr. Yabuki, carrying on from what you mentioned previously, in what ways do you think Japan serves as a model for other countries seeking democracy or opportunities to improve?

Also, I am extremely interested in the topic of tolerance you raised earlier. With COVID-19 and the pandemic, behaviors will never change if people can't spare a thought for strangers becoming ill. It made me think about how Japanese people are not very good at that. I would really like to hear your thoughts on that and what opportunities this presents for Japan with regard to democracy in the world. Most recently on the COVID-19 response, Korea and Taiwan have been praised a lot, but Japan, unfortunately, has not been featured much.

**Yabuki:** In their book titled How Democracies Die, Harvard University professors Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt write that the fundamental elements of democracy are mutual tolerance and self-restraint, and democracy falls apart if these don't exist. I think this is absolutely the case. Having self-control and tolerance for others are key elements in democracy. Like you mentioned, Professor Hikotani, not just during the election, but over the next several months, the United States will be tested in terms of tolerance and self-restraint.

What I fear most with Japan and the coronavirus crisis is the spread, through SNS and other methods of slander, of discrimination against medical workers and people who contract the virus. SNS is great for quickly spreading information, but

if slander spreads, we lose tolerance and self-restraint, and consequently, democracy. I feel that slander against medical workers and infected persons has a deep connection with democracy.

Audrey Tang is Taiwan's digital minister. I read her book and noticed that it was woven together by the concept of "gratitude." If someone like that is leading the COVID-19 response, it's only natural for citizens to adopt a similar approach. I mentioned Japan as still being in the developing stages, and this is one area where I would like Japan to absorb ideas and learn from others. Currently, we have extremely high tensions with the East China Sea situation. This is another area in which I hope Japan can go deeper and attempt to move in the direction of strengthening democracy. It is with hopes such as those that I believe the world has its eyes on Japan.

**Takenaka:** Taiwan and Korea have been highly regarded for their COVID-19 responses, and I believe the contrasting low appraisal of Japan is related to insufficient testing. Japan as a country is not strong at initial responses. And to a certain extent, that could be related to the dedication to Japan's democratic principles. The experiences this time have revealed just how strong local governments are. On the question of testing, Professor Hikotani said that there is consensus around it in New York, but here in Japan there are still experts who say that testing is not necessary. They always say, "We should maximize testing, but it's not necessary for everyone to be tested."

I have done some research around the financial crisis. It took ten years to build consensus after that crisis. Ten years to build a system for dealing with financial crises, and it happened in the end largely because of a forceful push by Heizo Takenaka. The system is so good that an individual in the IMF financial crisis response division described it as "the best system in the world." The COVID-19 response is another product of Japan's healthy democracy. Different styles of democracy include the Westminster and consensus styles, and if you include local governments, Japan is clearly a consensus-style democracy. The situation doesn't allow for so much time to be taken, but because there are three tiers, consent must be obtained even from the mayors of special wards. One politician said, "In democracy, it's a strength to gain consensus." Authoritarian states can forcibly impose measures on their people, and thus excel in initial responses. However, this politician went on to say that democracies are stronger because everyone is satisfied once you have succeeded at building consensus. I want to believe this is true.

This is the first time in the postwar period that Japan has faced a pandemic. It experienced the financial crisis, but I think coordinating the COVID-19 response is much more tiring than that. It's sad to say, but experts and the government cannot afford to criticize the current system in terms of the response of public health offices, testing systems, and building capacity. So, it's not surprising that they provide justification saying, "The policies we are currently implementing are appropriate." They say that the current system is sufficient, there's no need for new capacity building, no need for more tests than being run at present, and no need to revisit our system of decentralized authority. Of course, there is a need to go further, but the fact is that it is still going to take more time.

I think the appeal we can make to the people of Asia is that, whatever is said, Japanese democracy is stable and that despite the slow pace, various reforms are being instituted. Listening to Mr. Yabuki speak, I feel he has very high expectations for Japan. I am a bit more cynical in that regard. Don't get me wrong—Japan is working very hard. The Meiji Restoration took place around 1867-1868, and in 1889 the Meiji Constitution was enacted and the Imperial Diet was created. England enacted its

Bill of Rights in 1689, the French Revolution occurred in 1789, and the US Declaration of Independence was drawn up in 1776. Japan got its start about 200 years later than England, for example. From that perspective, Japan is doing really well; it implemented democracy early and is working to mature it. Freedom of speech is also guaranteed in our country. There are various issues, such as the issue of tolerance, but I do believe Japan can take steps in the right direction from here.

**Hikotani:** As a result of COVID-19, authoritarianism has accelerated in some countries, and in others, chronic issues have led to broader authoritarian tendencies. But if you think about countries that are resilient in the face of crisis, I think it is those with comparatively well-developed legal systems and civil societies that have been resilient on this occasion. I think perhaps where Japan can make a contribution is in supporting resilience-building. Exactly the kind of work Mr. Yabuki has been engaging in—legislative support projects for the countries of East Asia. Support for building legal systems and creating long-term resilience rather than short-term responses is where I think Japan can make more of an impact.

**Yabuki:** My work has been in aiding the establishment of legal systems in Asia, and to date, Japan's engagement in this realm has always been on a government-to-government basis within the scope of Japanese ODA. But after 20 years of these activities, the imperative now is to spread the law. This raises issues of how to familiarize local government officials and citizens with the law, and the direction has shifted to projects focused on how to include awareness-raising in education at universities and other institutions, and how to familiarize people with the law in society in general. This means that Japan's business model of aid for legal system establishment, essentially its business model for democracy, will no longer be intergovernmental. The key factor will increasingly be how much Japan can immerse itself in civil society. From that perspective, the very long-term work we have done on building legal systems has been extremely good both for democracy and for building trust in Japan.

**Hikotani:** Thank you both very much. The importance of that has come through very strongly in our discussions today. I definitely think that's something we can pursue further in this research group.

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