SOCIAL COHESION, GLOBAL GOVERNANCE
AND THE FUTURE OF POLITICS

Maintaining Social Cohesion through Democratic Liberalism

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Abstract

This policy brief outlines and suggests solutions to deal with the dangers of political disillusionment, populism and ill-managed migration policies and uphold social cohesion across the G20. The emphasis is placed largely on Japan, and a cross-cutting theme throughout the brief is the importance of an inclusive and diverse policymaking process that includes not only the government, but also think tanks, academics and civil society. The brief also makes suggestions on how to navigate tensions that can arise between a foreign policy agenda of liberal internationalism and public sentiment that tends to be less liberal and open to populist mobilization.

Challenge

The foundations of the liberal international order are in crisis. U.S. unwillingness to play its traditional role as protector of liberal values of open borders, free trade, and multilateralism has left a void in global politics. In this space, emerging economies and authoritarian states have increased their influence. It is in the interests of the G20 countries including but not limited to Japan, as long-term beneficiaries of the liberal order, to take a leadership role in promoting the values of liberalism and democracy. At home, the threat comes from antagonistic populism based upon socio-economic inequalities that drive anti-pluralist and restrictive ideologies that threaten social cohesion. The proposals we suggest collapse into three broad categories:

I. Populism, Disengagement and Social Cohesion - dissatisfaction with politics across the G20 is detrimental to the health of democracy and undermines social cohesion regardless of whether such dissatisfaction manifests itself in the form of populism (e.g. U.S., Europe) or youth disengagement (e.g. Japan).

II. Migration, Social Cohesion and Populism - mass migration flows and the instability they cause have created space for populist anti-immigration narratives (e.g. Europe), while other countries face similar challenges are they begin to increasingly open their borders toward foreign nationals (e.g. Japan)

III. Domestic-International Linkages - across the G20, there is a risk of a disjuncture or discord between foreign policy goals of upholding the liberal international order, and domestic policies aimed to maintain or improve social cohesion.

Proposal

I. Populism, Disengagement and Social Cohesion

Across the G20, rising dissatisfaction with politics and the subsequent breakdown of social cohesion are growing concerns that are symptomatic of an "unhealthy" or ill-functioning democratic system. Citizens have come to feel increasingly neglected by a system which they believe fails to give a voice to the people. In some countries, this has driven populist movements and political polarization, yet in other cases, this has resulted in political resignation and public apathy (Hayashi, forthcoming).

In Japan, while populism has not become widespread, political resignation and public apathy has become a recurring problematic issue especially among the youth. The dominance of the rural electorate has prevented populists from tapping into rural dissatisfactions that have been the base of support for many populist leaders in Europe (Funabashi, 2017), while a restrictive immigration policy has minimized space for populists to use anti-immigration rhetoric to capture the minds and hearts of citizens (Lind, 2018).

Instead, Japan's ageing demographics have resulted in a preference for "silver" policies geared towards maintaining unsustainable welfare benefits that exacerbate high levels of public debt across the G20. This phenomenon has led to growing frustration among the youth who have instead opted to disengage from politics altogether, thus undermining the function of a "healthy" democracy. This has resulted in a widening gap between an active elderly generation and a passive and inactive younger generation (Hirano, 2012). **A participatory political culture must be established and channels for political participation must be reinvigorated in order to engage an apathetic public in policy and decision making.**

At a broader structural level, the absence of a strong opposition and policy alternatives can undermine the healthy functioning of democracies. In Japan, leadership has come at the cost of a vigorous and vibrant democracy characterized by strong citizen engagement, open and alternative news media, and effective opposition parties. Factionalism and division have become pervasive in the opposition especially since the demise of the Democratic Party

of Japan in 2012, resulting in the absence of ideologically coherent and viable alternatives to the rule of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) (Solis, 2019). The continued dominance of the LDP risks resulting in the widening of the disjuncture between public sentiment and government policy that could result in the further spread of political disillusionment.

Across the G20, governments have been both complicity and openly encouraging of the crackdown on media that opposes government narratives (RSF 2018). At a deeper level, the rapid change in the media industry has seen the decline of traditional media platforms and the rise of social network sites and web-based platforms. This transformation has driven political polarization by creating "homophily-driven" echo chambers (Sunstein et. al, 2016) and created a fertile environment for the rapid cascade-style proliferation of fake news (Vosoughi et. al, 2018).

In Japan, challenges faced by the media industry across the G20 are further exacerbated by a conformist media landscape. This is the result of the institutionalization of homogenous reporter circles within the *kissha club*, and the normative foundations set by the persistence of *sontaku* (the social expectation of consensus and predictability in institutional settings). This lack of diversity in the media landscape creates a society in which certain anxieties and issues, and especially those of minorities, are consistently left ignored (Hayashi, forthcoming).

A. **Channels for political participation.** Considerations must be made to increase methods for political participation that go beyond electoral turnout. It is widely argued that younger generations are turning to less conventional channels to express their interests. **The strengthening of civil society (NGOs, charities, media among others)** would help create and develop both formal and informal channels for participation. This would not only help prevent disengagement and apathy for countries such as Japan, but also has potential to contribute toward reducing space for populist rhetoric by creating an effective feedback loop for citizens to channel their concerns and complaints.

B. **Participatory political culture.** Civic and voter education should be fully integrated into classroom curriculums to stress the importance of voting

and rights, helping to cultivate informed students and encouraging a practice of political participation through raising awareness.

C. **Pluralistic and multiple-stakeholder policymaking.** To encourage the critical discussion over policy proposals, governments should embrace competition in the market of policies by working closely with academics, NGOs, think tanks and others (Funabashi, 2019a). This will not only result in healthy critical debate and discussion over government policy, but also serve to ensure policies are effective, inclusive and evidence-based. These suggestions are particularly valuable to countries such as Japan, where the absence of a strong opposition can result in one-sided policymaking.

D. **Embracing a functioning opposition**. Governments should seek to embrace the existence of a functioning opposition, as inter-party competition on policy is vital for the health of a democracy. In the case of Japan, opposition parties must escape the trend of factionalism and division that has characterized politics since the demise of the DPJ in 2012, and instead work together to develop "ideologically coherent" policies that offer viable alternatives to LDP rule (Solis, 2019) through integrating more policy experts in the development of their own policy program.

E. **Supporting a diverse and inclusive media landscape.** Through embracing and actively encouraging the continued pluralization of the media landscape, member states across the G20 can ensure that wide-ranging voices of citizens are heard and influence the policymaking process. Despite widespread decline in use of traditional media (television, radio and newspapers), in many countries such as Japan, such outlets still possess agenda-setting influence and can provide groups such as immigrant, LGBTQ+ and ethnic minority communities with a voice and platform.

II. Migration, Social Cohesion and Populism

Across the G20, and especially in Europe, the inability of countries to manage the destabilizing mass inflow of immigrants and refugees has created space for anti-immigration populist rhetoric to flourish. This has brought to light the risk of tension between maintaining a healthy democratic order at home and pursuing liberal migration policies through maintaining open borders. At the same time, as globalization continues apace and increases geographic labor mobility, mass migration looks set to become a theme of the 21st Century. As a force that risks undermining social cohesion, it is crucial that member states of the G20 collaborate to proactively address the issues of immigration in a globalizing world characterized by increasing mobility.

In countries such as Germany, Italy, U.K. and U.S., populists have capitalized on and mobilized those destabilized and concerned by mass migration and its consequences. Yet Japan has been able to avoid such widespread populist anti-immigrant sentiment. This has resulted from a wide range of factors: the country's restrictive immigration policy (see Challenge I for a full explanation), a generous and "egalitarian" welfare state (Shiozaki, forthcoming) and a consistently low unemployment rate that has been a downward trend ever since the global financial crisis when it reached 5.5%. Put simply, Japan does not deal with the same sets of problems that face its European counterparts. In countries such as the UK, for example, the lack of jobs became a central part of the inequality narrative that drove populist anti-immigration rhetoric.

Despite this, it is no secret that Japan is purposely treading a slow path of pro-immigration policy changes to address the problems of a dwindling workforce who must support an expanding social welfare system (Rich, 2018). Although the Japanese government may be framing the issue as "plain labor market politics," as the immigrant community increases Japan will inevitably find it difficult to maintain social cohesion especially given that the Japanese population is not ethnically diverse.

  A. **Encourage idea-sharing in the policymaking community on migration.** By creating a thick network consisting of think tanks, academics, policymakers and beyond, lessons learnt about anti-immigration populism can be shared especially between Europe and Japan. This will

help to prevent the repetition of past mistakes and ensure migration policies are evidence-based. The challenges and failures of Europe in managing anti-immigration rhetoric offer important lessons for countries such as Japan that are seeking to gradually open up their borders to foreign workers and immigrants. At the same time, Japan offers an important alternative and learning lessons as a country that has been able to largely contain virulent anti-immigration rhetoric at a regional level (Hijino, forthcoming).

B. **Integrating immigrants and building a flexible yet diverse national identity.** G20 member states should seek to integrate immigrants into local communities. In the case of Japan, regulation should be made more easily accessible for the non-Japanese population, and barriers to participation such as racially prejudiced practices toward non-Japanese tenants should be minimized. By incrementally allowing immigrants to fully participate in both society and politics, while also remaining aware of the needs of the local population, member states can help prevent the isolation of immigrant communities. Across member states of the G20, this process of integration should contribute toward the long-term goal of building *multivocalism* (Kaufman, 2017) - a nationalism that is flexible enough to accommodate a diversity of visions for the nation and maintains a degree of "constructive ambiguity".

C. **Implement a pragmatic pro-immigration policy.** Member states must balance their desire to open borders with pragmatic concerns over the readiness of society to absorb a large number of immigrants. For most countries such as Japan, the suggestion would be to maintain or initiate a moderate yet pragmatic pro-immigration policy. The European experience of managing mass migration demonstrated the difficulties and dangers associated with explicitly open borders. Through the integration of immigrants into local communities (as described in B), the capacity of countries and their societies to take in more migrants without undermining social cohesion can be increased to allow for incremental increases in freedom of movement.

III. Domestic-International Linkages

Tectonic shifts in geopolitics have seen emerging countries such as China and India take an increasingly important role in shaping inter-state relations — it seems that the "Future is Asian" (Khanna, 2019). As inevitable power shifts take place, however, there is also a high risk that liberal democratic values are replaced and the normative human rights that are a pillar of the liberal international order are compromised both domestically and in the sphere of inter-state relations. As Luce (2017) notes, more than twenty democracies have shifted away from liberal democratic values since the turn of the millennium, which has made clear that hope of the inevitable spread of liberal values in the post-war era was both naive and misplaced.

As the U.S.-led liberal order has turned inward, it has become imperative that Japan become a leader in shaping and upholding the liberal order in the Asia-Pacific. The Abe administration is taking the first step toward this by strengthening and reviving the multilateral institutions underpinning the order (Lipscy, forthcoming), and

taking leadership over the talks for the Comprehensive Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) in the aftermath of the decision by the Trump administration to withdraw from the original Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

Japan support other countries seeking institutional reform of international organizations and take active leadership to strengthen and revive the institutions underpinning the liberal international order.

 In Japan and beyond, while the importance of upholding the liberal international order is clear, the process by which governments can contribute is less clear. Healthy domestic politics that supports liberal democratic values often require limitations on the liberal nature of a country's foreign policy (Wohlforth and Lind, 2018). A foreign policy that develops independently and detached from domestic concerns risks being perceived as being an "undemocratic liberalism." Such perceptions undermine social cohesion and drive populism that takes an "illiberal democratic" form (Mudde, 2016).

A. **Harmonize multilateral agreements with domestic policies.** Member states of the G20 should ensure that multilateral agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) are harmonized with domestic policies to cushion against the domestic social changes that may subsequently result (Shiozaki, forthcoming). Although multilateral agreements are vital for consensus-building at the international level and in the promotion of liberal democratic values, they are only sustainable if the domestic consequences are fully-considered and appropriate policies for immigration and the welfare state are in place to absorb structural changes in the economy that may result from trade liberalization. As the example of the European Union demonstrates, a lack of domestic harmonization can result in a popular backlash and the framing of multilateralism as an elite-led phenomenon that overlooks the concerns and the needs of the everyday citizen.

B. **Overcome historical issues that feed exclusivist nationalist discourse.** The inflammation of relations over historical issues creates space for exclusivist nationalist discourse to prosper. Such rhetoric risks undermining social cohesion by driving polarization and discriminatory practices. In turn, this threatens the image of democratic countries such as Japan that seek to become a "rule-shaper" of the liberal international order. In particular, the rapid deterioration of Japan and South Korea over issues of wartime laborers and so-called "comfort women" from the period of Japanese colonial rule (Funabashi, 2019b) is providing fuel to nationalists at home in both Japan and South Korea. At a time when the power dynamics in the Asia-Pacific are undergoing rapid change, the use of grievances and disputes as diversionary tools to generate "rally-round-the-flag" effects may be tempting (Jung, 2014), but governments must refrain from such practice. The use of geopolitical tensions to whip up nationalist fervor undermines liberal and diverse communities by driving an anti-immigration rhetoric that directly undermines social cohesion.

Proactively set standards and rules for data governance and technology. The pervasiveness of technology in our day-to-day life means that while it has foreign policy implications, its consequences are directly felt and are close to home. As Prime Minister Abe has suggested, the G20 offers an ideal opportunity to set global standards and rules in the technological sphere and build "trust" in the use of data both at the domestic and international level (WEF, 2018). All G20 members should directly recognize the **domestic consequences of international frameworks on data governance and technology** such as automation, changes in lifestyle and data privacy concerns. Member states should build upon Abe's suggestion of a "Data Free Flow with Trust" (DFFT), starting with the upcoming G20 summit in Osaka to develop a virtuous circle through developing domestic and international frameworks that are mutually reinforcing and contribute toward building trust on data use practices.@

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