

**Japanese Municipal Government Disincentives to Local Political Participation: City Council Composition and the Relationship to the Electorate**

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## **Abstract**

This paper argues that on a municipal level, where politics are closest to the people, there is an institutional disincentive for citizens to participate actively in politics and policy decisions. Critics of strong centralized Japanese government claim that the central government yields too much power in deciding how local Japanese governments run their municipalities by dictating the allocation of funds collected from local taxes. However, the municipal government's lack of citizen participation in policy decisions parallels the criticized unilateral decision making of the national government. Though some activist mayors and municipal governments enlist issue oriented groups' input in related decisions, a space for widespread citizen participation is not created. This paper, which is based on data collected from public municipal meetings, and interviews with Oita city council members and citizens, maintains that citizens are prevented from engaging in the decision making process by local assembly proceedings that are opaque and comprised of city council members that directly represent specific local industries. Political reforms on the national level such as decentralization, which have received media attention in the last few years, will do little to bring decision making closer to the people until institutionalized space is created where policy dialog is regular, publicized, and open to citizen participation.

## **Introduction**

The last eight years in Japan have seen eight prime ministers take office, along with the Democratic Party of Japan's (DPJ) historical usurpation of power from the Liberal Democratic Party's fifty year stronghold. The electorate, instead of viewing the momentous political upheavals with optimism, continues to hold the same cynicism towards politics they have had for the last thirty years (Hijino: 2010). In 1975, when a study was conducted to assess democratic political attitudes of various countries, Japanese trust of political institutions was low, as was the level of efficacy to affect political change, compared to the other democracies studied. Twenty-five years later,

when the study was revisited by Pharr and Putnam, attitudes towards politics in the other countries studied had significantly worsened, while Japanese attitudes had remained the same (Pharr: 2000, 173). The other countries increasing mistrust of government was ascribed, partly, to a continuing decrease in social capital, while in Japan, where social capital was still vibrant, the general malaise towards politics was attributed to widely publicized “bad acts” and “corruption by public officials” coupled with “poor policy performance” (Pharr:2000,173, Yamada: 2008, 12, Richey & Ikeda: 2009, 21). Nevertheless, as the Asian Barometer report shows, Japanese, especially when compared with citizens in neighboring Asian nations, have the tendency to underestimate the level of cleanliness in their own political system(Yamada: 2008, 12). What variable then is different in Japan than other countries to explain a consistently low sense of political efficacy?

This paper argues that negative feelings towards the government and particularly, low levels of political efficacy is due, in large part, to citizens lack of access to the political decision making process. This research looks at politics at the municipal level where government is supposed to be closest to the people to elucidate the causes of this general discontent. By examining the relationships between city council members and the limited access that citizens have to policy making, even at the lowest level, it can be understood how the lack of access leads to negative feelings about politics that are carried up to the national level. This research is concerned primarily with “regular” “in the system” forms of participation, assuming that protests happen as a last resort, usually when “in the system” modes of participation have been exhausted. Though protests are definitely a prevalent form of participation, they are not specific to democratic systems as can be seen in neighboring countries with authoritarian systems and therefore, beyond the scope of this research. This paper further argues that the patronage framework that gives citizens limited access to policy decisions, albeit sporadically, also re-enforces the barriers to more direct participation by pushing those without a patron-politician away from politics. Moreover, the composition of the city council grossly underrepresents women. The large number of council members creates a low threshold of votes needed to win an election which in turn allows for special

interests and industry to have a disproportionate voice in the political process by running their own candidates irrespective of support from the electorate at large.

## **Background**

### **The Importance of political participation**

In a society such as Japan where citizens basic needs such as healthcare and pension insurance are being met by the state; where employment is high, and local bureaucracy ensures daily services such as roads, electricity, water, police, public schooling, and daycare, some might argue why citizens need to be concerned with the governing of the state. Everything is running fairly smoothly, if there is a problem one can just go to the city hall bureaucrats for answers or if need be, call one of the municipal, prefectural, or even national politicians to intervene. Why does the average citizen have to waste their limited free time engaging in policy discussions that can be dealt with by politicians who are paid to address such matters? (Paraphrased from retired volunteer officer respondent at local “kouminkan”- neighborhood center) Many of the informants participating in this research share the view, that in the end, it is the role of the politician to address policy decisions and it is the role of the citizen to choose a capable representative, who may or may not solicit input from the electorate regarding the occasional decision. Mary Alice Haddad further supports this argument by highlighting the difference between Confucian political thought, which Japan was founded on, and western liberal ideals, which Japan embraced much later in its history, claiming that instead of focusing on the institutional constraints that western ideals do, Confucianism relies on “social pressure and human relationships” to compel leaders to act in citizens best interests (Haddad: 2012, 25). Though the relationship is historically and culturally based, one has to question whether those relationships are truly enough to assure the representation of citizens’ opinions and needs in modern times. Or if they are being clung to by those in power to deter citizens from claiming more direct access to decision making. Furthermore, might citizen participation have further benefits beyond the mere securing of representation of opinions and lead to positive feelings of government

and efficacy or as Avenell deems, “performative citizenship” in which politics are made “one’s own”? (Avenell: 2010, 1)

In Oita city there are few occasions for citizens to directly participate in municipal government policy decisions. The city council meetings, which are held quarterly and last for one to two weeks, are open to a limited number of citizens to observe, but prohibit private citizens from speaking in them. City council committees, at times, solicit citizen testimony, usually experts or citizens directly involved in the issue being decided. Citizens, theoretically, also have the chance to speak at these meetings assuming they know the schedule of the meetings, what will be discussed, and they apply to speak prior to the meeting. According to city council respondents, only a couple of people a year speak in such a way.

### **Town meetings**

For the last five years, the city council has also organized an annual week of “town meetings” held throughout the city. These meetings, which are held at area community centers from approximately 7-9 at night, are not widely attended, averaging 20 citizens per meeting. As most city council respondents attested, the meetings are “just for show”- only the same faces representing the local neighborhood associations (chounaikai) are in attendance each year<sup>1</sup>. In the meetings, council members broadly report on their activities from the year and then respond to questions asked of them at the prior years’ town meeting. Though there is a short amount of time for questions from citizens, there is no real dialog about policy as the city council does not discuss the deliberations before decisions are made, as one respondent put it, “the city council must speak with one voice to the public.” This particular attitude greatly inhibits dialog possibilities in the meetings. City planning meetings have also been held for about a year in preparation for the major renovations that are being done to the train station and downtown area. One city council respondent complained that those, too, have been poorly attended and conclude that it is proof that citizens do not want to participate in government decisions. When asked how the ideas generated from those meetings were

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<sup>1</sup> See Pekkanen, 2006, and Broadbent, 1998, for an in depth analysis of the role of neighborhood associations (chounaikai) in Japan

used when making policy decisions, the respondent could not answer. The danger lies in these forums that in title are deliberative, but in practice merely cover usual top-down reporting and elite decision making with a thin layer of democratic legitimacy. When in actuality there is no access to the decision making process, no discussion, no deliberation, the public easily becomes disillusioned with so called “participatory forums” and feelings of lack of political efficacy are further cemented.

### **Methods**

The research employed structured and semi-structured interviews with city council members, town meeting attendees, neighborhood association members, city officers, politician support group members and average citizens. The city council members were selected for interviews according to their; party and political affiliation, age, number of terms in office, electorate support, and former industry. Participant observation was also conducted at an annual, week long group of town meetings held in various areas of Oita city, along with community development and neighborhood association meetings, and various community activities in which aforementioned respondents were in attendance.

### **Results**

Oita city, population 474,000, located on the eastern coast of the Japanese southern island of Kyushu, is the capital of Oita Prefecture. The rural prefecture boasts little in the way of fame, being most known for its ailing hot spring resort town, that was recently rejuvenated with the building of an international university which introduced a badly needed infusion of young people to the area, including half the staff and student body coming from foreign countries, making the city, Beppu, the most densely populated area of foreign residents in Japan. Kyushu prefecture, as a whole, is famous for being conservative, the expression “Kyushu danji,” referring to a man who subscribes to patriarchal, chauvinistic ideals of men lording over the household, exempt from house chores or taking care of children, can still be readily seen even in the

younger generations in Oita. Oita city being a particularly conservative area despite its proximity to the large influx of foreigners in the neighboring city is also a bastion of the LDP. Heavy industry and manufacturing, historical supporters of the LDP, was introduced in the area in the 1970's allowing for the city to grow and prosper. What makes Oita city a particularly interesting location for a case study on politics is the ability to see political practices that have fallen out of practice in more urbanized areas, such as political support networks- koenkai, even on a prefectural level, along with more traditional methods of campaigning and political patronage systems.<sup>2</sup>

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## **Composition of City Council**

### **Size**

The city council, which occupies the front half of the city hall, is composed of 46 councilors, though the number will be reduced to 44 after the election in February 2013, in response to citizen complaints. The number, while large by American standards, is within Japanese guidelines for the creation of seats in a city council according to the Local Autonomy Law Articles 90-91 which stipulate the maximum number of members corresponding to a population/representation equation (Ohsugi: 2008, 2). The neighboring prefecture of Kumamoto's capital, Kumamoto city, has 48 city council members, though their eligible voting population is also larger- 564,000 to Oita's approximately 373,000. Oita's southern neighbors, Miyazaki's capital city has 46 council members, though only 316,750 eligible voters and only 144,330 of those who actually vote.

During the last city council election in Oita city, 2,734 votes or more were needed to win one of the 46 seats in the council (Oita-Press: 12-1-2012). The largest number of votes received by any one candidate was 6,669. 214,654 of Oita's 372,943 eligible voters voted in the city council elections. The percentage is higher than the voting percentage rate of

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<sup>2</sup> In the 1960's, Gerald Curtis conducted extensive political fieldwork in Oita prefecture proving for interesting comparison between today's government, see References.

its two neighbors Kumamoto and Miyazaki city council elections which had below 50% turnout rate.

The voter turnout in Oita has been exceptionally high (Hrebenar:2000, 18), especially when compared to western elections, in the United States, for example, where the average turnout for city council is well below that of national elections (Hajnal: 2003), and those are only on average a little over 50% (59.4% in 2012 presidential election) (McDonald: 2012). One might attribute the larger voter turnout to the close, clientelistic relationships that some voters have with their representatives and the ability to “deliver their vote” when requested (Kabashima: 2010, 5). One could also argue that Japanese, in general, live by social rules and a sense of social responsibility, one of which responsibilities is voting (Richardson: 1997, 21). Finally, since local politics affects issues closer to citizens daily lives, such as schools, roads, and general public services, some voters might have incentive to vote to make sure that their candidate wins (Montambeault: 2011, 92).

Though not specific to Oita, in general, the size of Japanese city councils affects the kind of representation candidates provide. In contrast to some developed countries in the west with similar sized cities, the number of city council members in Japan is quite large. In Oita’s sister city of Austin, Texas in the US, the city council is comprised of only five members. In comparable sized British and Swedish cities, the council size are much larger than American councils, with upward of 100 elected council members in the largest Swedish councils and around fifty or more in British councils (Purdam:2008, 4). However, city council members from the aforementioned European countries run from and represent a specific district of their cities, whereas Oita city council members run from the city as a whole, in a multi member district. Some members unofficially represent specific geographic areas/districts, especially when they are from more rural areas, but for council members who live in the central part of the city (which is many),

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they have no clear district they are responsible to.<sup>3</sup> During one town meeting, a retired citizen complained that he had no idea who the city council members were, or which one represented him or his area. The size of the council compounded by the lack of segmented areas of representation leads to specific deficits in democratic representation and accountability (Reilly: 2007, 61). 1) The larger the number of city council members, the lower the threshold of votes needed to take office. The lower the number of seats needed to take office, the easier it is for specific interests including industry to siphon power away from the electorate at large. 2) There is an incentive created for city council members to court organizations that can promise votes needed to win a seat, rather than appealing to their districts electorate as a whole, further bolstering the patron-client relationship, and undermining accountability and individual voters' access to the political process.

## **Gender**

Oita city is a conservative area. Traditional views of men's and women's roles in society still prevail, nowhere is this more readily seen than in the city council where only one out of 46 members is a woman, compared with six women councilors in the two neighboring prefectures' capital cities. The lack of women is not unique to Japan, both developing countries and modern democracies, confirm the difficulties arising from women trying to work in municipal government- obstacles overcoming traditional ways society view women, harassment and sabotage by male colleagues and "old boys clubs" (Pini: 2001, 5). Further difficulties arise when campaigning, as women candidates often have less access to business networks for votes and funding (Pranab: 2008, 489). The effect of a grossly disproportionate number of men to women city council members on city council voter relationships must also be considered. If citizens do not have access to political participation outside of direct relationships with politicians, as this paper has argued, women must enter into a patron-client relationship with male city council members if they want access to political decision making. It could be hypothesized that since women have less access to business networks which lead to a lack of female

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<sup>3</sup> The one exception are the communist party candidates who receive much support and organization from the national level and divide the city into quadrants, running one candidate from each quadrant, and further representing that district once elected.

representatives to begin with, they will also be less courted by politicians who are used to garnering support from business and industry for which they are probably not a part of.

### **Parties/Factions**

In the Oita city council, city council members represent seven different factions and parties. The main national parties LDP- Liberal Democrat Party(Jiminto), DPJ- Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto), the largest number of council members, with 16 and 11 councilors, respectively. The city council also has representation from The New Shimin (citizen) Club, a group of six city council members who are also employees of the largest companies in Oita, to be discussed further in the next section under “former/present industry.” The communists and komeito, the two parties with strong central party support have 4 and 5 members respectively. Finally, there are also a substantial number of council members who run as independents. Many of the city council respondents confirmed that party was not so important to them or to their electorate as they cultivated personal relationships, not necessarily party organized relationships. On the city council level in both countries, the national party does little if anything to support the candidates. In the case of municipal elections in Japan, due to the large number of members from the same party competing for the same seats, distinguishing candidates, strictly by party, would not be possible. This is true in all cases except for komeito and the communist party which are more ideologically oriented parties who get more financial, organizational and policy support from the national party (Ehrhardt:2009, 9, Hrebenar: 2000, 180). The Japanese Communist Party in Oita divides the city into four quadrants and runs candidates to represent each of these quadrants irrespective of where they live or where their employment might be. The strategy has worked, getting all four of their candidates elected in the last elections.

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### **Industry Support**

As in much of Japan, Oita city council members come from the usual backgrounds- teachers, public officers, police and fire, career politicians, the medical field, and then all

of the large industries of the area, including- steel, chemical, electronics, banking, and rail. In a way, on account of the sheer number of councilors and their varied backgrounds, the council itself has expertise on many issues that pass before it, without the solicitation of outside expert testimony. The issue of industry or business support of city council members can be delineated into three categories- support of city council members from a single industry or group which they currently belong; support of city council member from industry or group they no longer belong; and support of a group or industry that they are not working for nor have ever worked for. The latter category solicits votes directly from industry which it has never worked in but has somehow made ties with. As this form of support is not unique to Oita, or Japan, no further explanation will be addressed.

### **Former career**

Council members coming from the city hall and the prefecture office are prohibited from holding dual positions. As explained by one former public officer turned city councilor, “the government cannot allow you to do two jobs and expect you to do them fully, with two full salaries.” When further questioned about his political support, he rather reluctantly admitted that some of his support naturally came from his former office. But here it is important to distinguish between support from an office who knows the candidate, and an office who wants special relationship/consideration in the city council so they run their own candidate. Former bureaucrats might count on a certain amount of votes from their former department or office colleagues, but then must seek out other areas of support, either directly to the electorate where one lives or works, or through other groups which the city councilor might have or be able to create a relationship with. Other former public employees such as retired teachers, police and fire officers have similar backing when running for office.

For city council members without a large industry or group support, they must appeal directly to the electorate for votes. Since local government in Japan, as in the United States, is not particularly party driven, candidates, as discussed before, cannot distinguish themselves merely according to party platform. Instead, Japanese city council members, in essence, choose their constituency. They can unofficially run from

an area they work in or have business. They can run from an area they live in, or they can run from an area that they have particular industry or group support. Some city council member respondents run from two areas, while others concentrate on just the one. One respondent, whose former career was as a city bureaucrat explained his time consuming method of securing electoral support while reaching out to the electorate. After each of the four city council sessions held yearly, said city council respondent prepares a report of the issues talked about and decisions made, onto a large A3 double sided paper which he folds into a pamphlet for distribution. He then spends the next month, to month and a half, personally delivering the 9-10,000 pamphlets door-to-door to his constituents in the semi-rural area of the city in which he and his family live. When asked why he doesn't gather the constituents into area town meetings to save time, he replied that many citizens wouldn't attend and if they did, most wouldn't speak in a large group setting. He said that he liked the direct contact he could get with the electorate by the method of going door-to-door. Though the approach is time consuming, he thinks that more politicians should reach out to the electorate in similar ways, adding that he knew of only one other council member in the city who had the same approach. Similar door-to-door communication was reported by other city council respondents as a way of reaching their constituents, though no others to the same extent.

This form of representation has democratic strengths and weaknesses. In one respect, citizens who are approached in such a manner have the opportunity to be informed about decisions in the city council without having to search by themselves. They can speak directly to a city council member about issues that they are personally concerned with without having to sit through other issues that are of no concern. They can save time by having the council member come to them instead of having to go to town meeting, or neighborhood meeting. People who might not normally be concerned with politics can be reached. Citizens can have direct access to city council members ( in the above case, at least 4 times a year) leading to a close relationship both to the council member and perhaps, feeling closer to government. For these reasons, city council and prefectural assembly election turnout has been high in Japan. The personal relationships constructed have left many Japanese content in their local political

representative, especially those who enjoy a close relationship to a council member, but this personal form of representation also has serious democratic deficits. Primarily, the system encourages dependence on one city council member for information and access to municipal government instead of direct access to decision making meetings. The close relationship between constituent and council member also discourages citizens from shopping around for other city council support on different issues- the supporter becomes married to the council members' stances on issues when he/she gives their support. The information that is received from the city council member is also biased according to council members' views when compared with information that might be obtained from a more neutral source such as a newspaper or even the city council website and quarterly newsletter. While this form of clientelism lacks the nefariousness of turn-of-the-century party machines as seen in the United States or more recently in developing democracies, intimidating citizens and buying of votes by local bosses (Sanborn, 16), it does discourage independence in the access to policy, issues, and information and a reliance on an intermediary to the democratic process.

Other city council members reported attending neighborhood association meetings and offices, *kouminkan*, *chounaikai*, to talk to citizens, but complained that especially at the neighborhood meetings, there were always the same faces in attendance and very few young people. To contact younger people some of the council respondents went directly to clubs that catered to younger people such as club sports practices, and other recreational club activities. Other approaches to contacting younger voters were via social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. The city council members along with the mayor also visit schools and universities to talk to students about what is happening in the city, however, it is unclear the kind of reception as this researcher has not attended any such meetings and the respondents city council members comments were ambiguous on the subject, with comments such as "fine" and "ok."

When asked if citizens had enough access to the political process, via participation, most respondents admitted the system could be better. One respondent explained there was a committee that discussed how participation could be improved, but that nothing ever came of the discussions. Some respondents, both council members and individual citizens voiced the similar opinion that Japanese citizens didn't care about politics, and

that politics were too difficult for the average Japanese citizen to understand. The first part of this statement that citizens don't care about politics can be addressed in a few ways- first, national surveys like The Asia Barometer, suggests that Japanese citizens actually do care about politics, they follow politics on various media sites, and they vote regularly (Yamada: 2008, 16-17). The second part of the statement, "politics are too difficult for citizens to understand," can be viewed from various perspectives. One, it is a clear expression of feelings of low political efficacy to say that something is "too difficult." But why do citizens think it is too difficult? Is it because the decision making process is opaque, preventing citizens from seeing how decisions are made? Is it because citizens are marginalized in politics even on the local level and only allowed to voice their opinions through city council intermediaries? Is it a self-fulfilling prophecy that is told to citizens by those in power that government is "too difficult" and better left to politicians to deal with. Or perhaps, is it just that there is no incentive to make the decision making process transparent and open and accessible to public scrutiny.

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### **Currently employed**

The last of the categories are council members that fall into the "currently employed" category- those working for large companies, and those not. Those not working for large companies are often small business owners, one of the few kinds of employment that would allow enough time and flexibility in their schedule to have two jobs, such as taxi and restaurant owners. As they are often not the only councilors in the same industry, they cannot represent the industry as a whole or depend on votes from everyone in the same industry. Their industries may also be too small or too diverse to be able to have one overarching, easily representable interest.

The city council members who work for large companies, on the other hand, have a clear interest to represent the company and their companies' workers' union. Due to the small size of Oita city, especially when compared to the "mega-cities" in Japan, large company employed council members are required to hold dual jobs as their companies' outreach coordinators and city councilors. Currently there are four public company and two private company employees who hold dual jobs as city councilors and large

company employees. Since all of the companies have more employees than votes needed to win office, they do not need to go to the electorate, at large, to secure votes. These members have formed their own party, The New Shimin (citizen) Club, in order to solely represent their unions and companies without the outside pressure of a national party dictating policy. In some instances, respondents explain that their unions and companies forbid them from joining national parties, despite their own political leanings. Some of these city council members do claim to act in the best interest of their communities in which their companies are located, stating that if they can help the community as a whole, the citizens of that community will have a better image of the company and want to support it more fully.

According to one respondent, when big industry first entered Oita in the early 1970's, there was a need to protect the interests of the company by sending multiple employees to sit in the city council, but as the city has grown and become more dependent on the industries for its' citizens' livelihoods, the companies have decreased the number of city council members from a high of 14, 9 of which were from public companies, to a low of 6, 4 of which represent public companies and now only have single representation per/company. This was said also to be in response to citizens' growing suspicions of the relationship between these industries and government. One city council respondent of a public company speculated that in the future there would probably be no more need for each company to send an employee, but instead, the unions of the companies would share representatives to the city council.

Other restrictions to big business running current employees comes from new "Compliance Laws" which limit the ways in which campaigns can be run. Respondents talked about how the details of these laws are difficult to interpret and practices involving support staff for campaigns, equipment and resources coming from the company must be paid attention to so as not to infringe on the new law. Even ones' New Year's cards, which are sent out by city councilors in the hundreds, are restricted by this law, commented a city councilor respondent.

While there seems to be closing-in by the national government on the ability for large companies to run candidates for office, the local city council also seems to be opposed to

these obvious direct relationships between government and business. City council respondents all spoke negatively about the role employees of big business played in city office, stating that they did not represent the electorate, and that they worked for the good of business only. Some respondents also explained that the large company city council representatives got into trouble anytime environmental issues were brought before the city council, one of the main complaints of the community towards heavy industry (see Broadbent, McKean for discussion of environmental issues in Oita). One might conclude that the city council members who respond negatively to the large company council members resent the ease of electorate support the company employees can receive, along with the campaign financial support and the double incomes that they are allowed. However, some city council members might be less vocal about the inherent conflict of interest of being an employee for a large corporation and also a city council member on account of their own interests which arise from being unofficially supported by a large company, but not an employee. According to one city council respondent, some of the large companies are so large, with so many subsidiary companies and contractors totaling over six thousand votes in some instances, that they can distribute their votes to other candidates that are “friendly” to their company, by discreetly coordinating one union to vote for their employee city councilor, but another company union to vote for another specific candidate.

One has to wonder the effect such representation has on large company workers' and non-large company workers' alike sense of political efficacy. Though it is clear that a number of city council respondents resent the large company council members' relationship with industry, perhaps partly due to the ease in which they are able to secure electoral support, or perhaps for truly democratic concerns. But respondents from large companies have also reported displeasure at being forced into campaigning for the city council representative in the form of working at phone banks and other campaign activities. This forced participation must also lead to negative perception of politics and negatively affect their perception of their efficacy in politics. For citizens who live in neighborhoods around the companies, seeing the company council member in the neighborhood or attending neighborhood meetings might also be confusing. Can

regular citizens recognize in which capacity the council member is working- that of the company representative or that of a city representative?

### **Conclusion**

This research argues that there is little incentive on the part of the individual city council members to encourage direct citizen participation in the decision making process via town meetings, citizen panels and forums, as it would undermine the bond that politicians spend so much time cultivating between themselves, citizens, and industries. Due to the lack of institutionalized space for citizens to participate locally in policy decisions, citizens are forced into default client-patron relationships with individual politicians in the absence of ability to directly affect policy, which in turn leads a low sense of efficacy. Without institutional access to participation in the form of regular town or public meetings, citizen panels, forums, or citizen councils, direct interactions with local politicians remains the only feasible “in the system” alternative to affect policy. The patronage that ensues, in some situations, significantly benefits the client/voter as they are given direct access to the politicians who make policy decisions. However, the relationship also encourages citizen reliance on politicians to affect policy change instead of encouraging citizen autonomy which encourages positive perceptions of efficacy. Moreover, owing to the lack of alternative space to direct participation, the city council and its members, become increasingly important for scrutiny, as does its composition. The size, gender, political affiliations, and industrial support of the council have a direct effect on the city councils’ ability to represent the interests of the electorate at large. The size of most Japanese city councils, and the low threshold of votes required to obtain office, encourages council members to run with the support of special interests, instead of having to appeal to the broad electorate, marginalizing individual citizens. Moreover, the prevalence of industry representatives as city council members exhibits how power can be easily usurped from citizens when participatory checks on democratic systems are not in place.

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