

Advisory Opinion

On the Reform of Institutions and Work Environment for the Promotion of Women's Participation in Politics



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Science Council of Japan

**Subcommittee on Comparative Politics of the
Deepening and Backsliding of Democracy**

Subcommittee on Gender Law

This advisory opinion compiles and publishes the deliberation results of the Subcommittee on Comparative Politics of the Deepening and Backsliding of Democracy under the Political Science Committee, and the Subcommittee on Gender Law under the Law Committee of the Science Council of Japan.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I Background and Current Issues

Women's participation in decision-making processes in Japan remains significantly limited, and addressing this imbalance is an urgent policy issue. Achieving gender parity in the political sphere—particularly in legislative bodies—is of critical importance, as progress in this sphere is closely linked to advancing women's participation across other sectors, including the economy, society, education, and research.

The Act on the Promotion of Gender Equality in the Political Field (hereinafter, the Gender Parity Act) was enacted in 2018. The Act establishes as a fundamental principle that political parties shall aim to endorse male and female candidates in equal numbers. Further, it stipulates that political parties set numerical targets concerning the gender composition of candidates for public office as their obligations of effort. A significant amendment was made in 2021, three years after the Act's enforcement, where improving candidate selection processes, implementing human resource and candidate development initiatives, and addressing sexual harassment and maternity harassment were added to these obligations of effort (Article 4). Moreover, Article 9 newly codified the responsibilities of the State and local authorities—including the Diet and local assemblies—to adopt measures against such forms of harassment. In addition, the obligations related to improving the work environment (Article 8) and fostering human resources and candidate development (Article 10) were elevated from obligations of effort to formally mandated responsibilities.

As a result of the enactment of this Act, political parties and national/local assemblies have taken various steps to promote gender equality. Recent elections show an upward trend in the number of female candidates and of successful ones, in both national and local elections. In the 2024 House of Representatives election, women accounted for 23.4% of the candidates and 15.7% of the elected members. In the 2025 House of Councillors election, although the proportion of female candidates fell below the previous figure at 29.1%, the share of elected women reached a record-high 33.6%. Nevertheless, these figures remain below both the Act's underlying principle of gender parity and the numerical target of 35% female candidates in national elections outlined in the Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality (Cabinet Decision of December 25, 2020).

Against this backdrop, this Advisory Opinion focuses on political parties and legislative bodies, which bear primary responsibility for implementing necessary reforms. It identifies measures likely to be effective in improving the current situation. The analysis concentrates on national politics and is premised on the current electoral system.

To strengthen political parties' efforts to endorse more female candidates, it is imperative

to further enhance the effectiveness of measures designated as obligations of effort under the Gender Parity Act—namely, the formulation of numerical targets, improvements in candidate selection processes, and human resource and candidate development. Accordingly, this Advisory Opinion outlines necessary reforms for party organizations.

Furthermore, in order to facilitate additional efforts by political parties, it is expected to be useful to introduce external incentives—in particular, utilization of the political party subsidy system. After examining the constitutional implications and the purpose of the Political Party Subsidies Act, this Advisory Opinion proposes adjusting the allocation of the vote-based component of party subsidies by reducing allocations to parties in accordance with each party's gender ratio among candidates as an objective criterion.

Given the significant role of the Diet in promoting women's political participation, this Advisory Opinion also proposes measures to advance the development of "gender-sensitive parliaments." Above all, in view of the urgency of countermeasures against harassment, specific institutional reforms applicable to both the Diet and political parties are presented.

II Main Points of the Advisory Opinion

This Advisory Opinion proposes the following measures:

(1) Political parties should critically assess whether their candidate selection processes facilitate the recruitment and appointment of diverse individuals including women, and should undertake additional internal reforms to eliminate structural biases towards men. Specifically, it is expected to execute the following organizational reforms:

1. Re-examine party organizational structures from a gender perspective and rectify gender disparities in personnel assignments. Particular emphasis should be placed on achieving gender parity among party executives (including regional branches) and staff members.
2. Ensure gender parity within the bodies responsible for candidate selection and reconsider selection criteria from a gender-equality perspective to address the structural disadvantages faced by women in the selection process. Enhance transparency in the selection process to promote candidate diversity, and ensure that individuals involved in candidate selection receive training to mitigate the influence of gender stereotypes on decision-making for the candidate selection
3. Promote actively the development and support of prospective female candidates and foster internal and external networks to encourage women's candidacy.

(2) Political parties, when endorsing candidates, should not only set numerical targets for the proportion of female candidates but also implement concrete strategies—under clearly defined leadership responsibility—to ensure that the number of successful female candidates is actually increased.

(3) The Diet should reexamine the political party subsidy system in light of the objectives of the Gender Parity Act and reflect the extent to which each party respects the Act's principles in the distribution of subsidies. For example, reductions could be applied to the portion of party subsidies distributed based on the vote share, in accordance with each party's gender ratio among candidates. Given the constitutional considerations involved, careful institutional design will be required, involving a thorough examination of those contested issues.

(4) The Diet, from the perspective of establishing a "gender-sensitive parliament," should review existing parliamentary practices and implement measures to facilitate women's full and equal participation. Specific measures include the following:

1. Formulate an action plan based on the results of the "Survey on Parliamentary Gender Sensitivity Evaluation."
2. Publish gender-disaggregated data, for each session, on the composition and leadership of all committees and related parliamentary bodies.
3. Establish within the Diet Committees on Rules and Administration a dedicated body to advance gender-sensitive parliamentary management.
4. Introduce systematic opportunities to evaluate all legislative deliberations from a gender-equality perspective.
5. Assign gender-policy specialists to the parliamentary secretariats and incorporate gender perspectives into training for policy secretaries.

(5) The Diet and political parties should improve and strengthen the anti-harassment mechanism. Specifically, they should consider the following:

1. Adopting codes of conduct and formal anti-harassment regulations.
2. Requiring a harassment training session at least once a year for all stakeholders involved in parliamentary and party activities.
3. Establishing harassment consultation desks accessible to all persons engaged in Diet and party activities, along with an independent body to ensure appropriate complaint procedures.