

Advisory Opinion

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



17 November 2025

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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This English version is a translation of the original written in Japanese.

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.

RECOMMENDATION

Revitalizing Japan's Research Ecosystem under Crisis: Advancing a Sustainable Future for Academia and Society



27 November 2025

Science Council of Japan

This Recommendation is largely the outcome of the deliberations of the Committee for Academic Development and Enhancement of Research Capability in Japan, Science Council of Japan, and is issued under the auspices of the Science Council of Japan.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I Background

In recent years, social structures have undergone significant transformation as multiple complex shifts occur simultaneously, including declining population and demographic aging, intensifying climate change and natural disasters, the spread of infectious diseases, rising geopolitical tensions, deepening value-based societal fragmentation, and rapid technological innovations such as generative AI. To address these multifaceted changes and prepare for future challenges that have not even yet foreseen, the creation, accumulation, and societal utilization of diverse knowledge are indispensable, in which academia plays a key role.

However, for more than a decade, it has been pointed out that Japan has been experiencing a decline in its research capabilities. This decline is evident not only in the stagnation of output indicators such as the number of academic publications, but also in the weakening of the overall health of the research ecosystem that enables the continuous emergence of creative and exploratory research. Thus, comprehensive reform of the foundational systems that support research is indispensable for enabling researchers to demonstrate their abilities and for establishing research careers as attractive professions for the next generation. The Science Council of Japan, as an organization composed of diverse experts ranging from the humanities, social sciences, to natural sciences, bears the responsibility to provide recommendations grounded in the realities of the research environment.

II Current Status and Issues

Discussions on “research capability” in Japan have primarily relied on quantitative indicators such as the number of papers and citation counts. In international comparisons based on the number of highly cited papers, Japan's ranking has fallen from fourth to thirteenth. However, these indicators are merely proxy and highly aggregated measures that do not sufficiently reflect the distinctive characteristics of each academic field or the diversity of research practices. Moreover, excessive dependence on such indicators causes researchers to follow overseas trends, which potentially undermines Japan's capacity for original and creative research.

This report defines research capability as “the ability to sustainably generate both academic contributions and socio-economic impact by dynamically advancing cutting-edge research grounded in a robust foundation of fundamental research.” When viewed through this definition, the sense of crisis over declining research capability is shared beyond

boundaries of disciplines. In physics, international leadership and academic visibility have been diminished; in materials engineering, the decline in the number of young researchers and international students, together with the weakening of research strength at regional universities, has become pronounced; in medical science, the depth of the research community has become thinner except the one of the top tier; and in sociology, international outreach and network-building capabilities have continued to be weakened.

Factors underlying this decline in research capability, which are commonly observed across disciplines, include the diminished attractiveness of research careers (such as faculty staff and research institute positions) which results in an outflow of young talent; insufficient baseline funding for fundamental research; the fragmentation of competitive funding schemes, the increased burden of grant applications, and the uneven distribution of resources across universities and individual researchers; and the reduction of research time caused by excessive non-research administrative duties. Notably, career instability has been increased due to the expansion of fixed-term employment has heightened, which has also accelerated the outflow of top talent to industry. The decrease in core funding (Management Expenses Grants) provided by the national government has not kept pace with surging research costs caused by inflation and the depreciation of the yen, which results in threatening the continuity of research activities. Competitive funding is short-term and narrowly scoped, and researchers are forced to submit an increasing number of applications as its success rates are decreasing. This has caused heavier administrative workloads and researcher burnout.

In addition, discipline-specific challenges further exacerbate the situations. These include a lack of genuine commitment to industry–academia collaboration; insufficient support structures for the early independence of young researchers; the aging of research facilities and vulnerability of shared research infrastructure; reduced research opportunities for graduate students resulting from changes in graduate education (such as increased curricular formalization and a greater emphasis on coursework); and weak international outreach and institutional misalignments. The convergence of these factors is severely undermining the sustainability of Japan’s research ecosystem.

III Main Points of the Advisory Opinion

To address common challenges across disciplines, the following measures are recommended as means to revitalize research capability.

(1) Establishing a Sustainable Researcher Employment System (Achieving Both Stability and Mobility)

Growing job insecurity and worsening working conditions for young researchers has ruined the appeal of research careers and pushing young talent out of academia. To change this situation, it is essential to significantly expand core funding while also

maximizing flexibility in the use of external funding so that it can be allocated to stable employment. Furthermore, it is expected to introduce mechanisms whereby ministries (including those outside MEXT) and national R&D institutes establish research centers within universities to provide long-term stable employment, similar to the WPI program.

Universities must convert their personnel management from a position-based model to total personnel cost management and develop medium- to long-term recruitment plans that take age balance into account. To promote this conversion, the national government is expected to provide fiscal incentives, for example by incorporating the conversion of young researchers' employment to permanent one and the expansion of tenure-track posts into common indicators used for allocating core funding. In addition, universities are expected to make effective use of senior researchers, utilizing competitive funding to support their employment in ways that do not compete with the one of young researchers, so as to sustain international networks and contribute to the development of young researchers.

While financial support for doctoral students has been strengthened, it is necessary for the government to consider creating stable mid-term positions lasting approximately five to ten years after completion of the doctoral degree. It is also essential for the government to consider establishment of systems in which national R&D institutes employ outstanding researchers and assign them to universities, as well as models in which universities invest in creating non-profit R&D corporations that provide stable employment for researchers and to expand such employment models for achieving a balance between stability and mobility in the research workforce.

Furthermore, in order to prevent the non-renewal of contracts and the use of short-term appointments immediately before conversion to a permanent employment contract the government should indicate appropriate ways of interpreting and applying the Labor Contracts Act and its Enforcement Regulations, taking into account the specific characteristics of researchers. In the medium- to long-term, it is desirable for the government to review the framework of the Labor Contracts Act itself in light of the specific characteristics of researchers. Similar problems also arise for research assistants, for which corresponding measures are required.

(2) Review of Research Funding and the Financial Framework (Strengthening and Balancing Core and Competitive Funding)

The sustainability of the research ecosystem has been undermined as the core funding was reduced and shifted to competitive funding which is short-term in nature and lacks flexibility in its allowable uses, following national university corporatization. In line with the UK's "balanced funding principle," the ratio of core to competitive funding and its impacts on research practice should be continuously monitored, and allocations adjusted accordingly. At the same time, mechanisms should be explored to allow a portion of competitive funding to be used flexibly as core funding.

With regard to core funding, in response to the growing range of expected functions of

universities, it is desirable that the national government should incorporate high-performing initiatives currently supported by external funding into core funding streams and thereby institutionalize them as permanent programs. It is also desirable that the Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research program should be expanded to increase both the overall level of funding and the success rate, and to promote the design to reduce application and review burdens through appropriate adjustments to funding levels on a per-project basis. The government should consider the measures such as transferring certain funding allocation functions to field-specific national R&D institutes, and develop the systems to enable organizations with specialized expertise to provide agile and substantive support that leads to stimulation of research.

(3) Escape from Research Bureaucracy (Maximizing Research and Educational Outcomes)

Excessive auditing practices are consuming research time and reducing productivity. To curb “research bureaucracy,” universities and associations should play a central role to establish a whitelist system to shift management practices to the minimum necessary. Furthermore, it is also expected for the national government and universities to drastically expand professional staff, including those responsible for research, education, and student support, and improve the effectiveness of faculty research and education through appropriate staffing. It is essential to ensure a minimum level of research time and funding for faculty members, including those at regional and smaller universities, and to ensure resilience of the national academic foundation in order to secure nationwide research diversity and depth and in order to enable swift and flexible responses when new research fields emerge or begin to flourish. At the same time, it is required to maximize research and educational outcomes. This includes developing and sharing on-demand teaching materials, reducing faculty burdens while maintaining educational quality through educational DX, and introducing flexible and inclusive evaluation practices based on diverse faculty workstyles to create environments in which diverse human resources can demonstrate their capacities.

The national government should adopt measures such as introducing a two-stage review process for large-scale research funding, in which only applicants who pass a simplified initial screening submit detailed proposals for full review, and sharing review results across funding programs to reduce burdens on applicants and reviewers. It should also secure basic regular funding (high-trust funding) to support nascent research for a defined period to mitigate application burdens. Universities and other institutions should refrain from using competitive funding application rates as KPIs.

(4) Reforming Graduate Education as a Core Driver of Advanced Talent Development

In addition to increasing the number of doctoral students, it is essential to improve the quality of doctoral programs and strengthen their connection with society. The national government should position doctoral students as “professional researchers” and strengthen

systems that enable them to be employed and compensated through external research project funding in addition to fellowship. The national government and universities should clarify the core competencies guaranteed by a doctoral degree, while promoting acquisition of transferable skills beyond specialized expertise through research activities. Universities must rigorously assess research preparedness in entrance examinations for doctoral course and promote team-based supervision by multiple faculty members, formulation of individual development plans, and faculty training in research supervision.

To promote talent development through collaboration among academia, industry, and society, the government should support the return of working professionals to graduate programs. Looking ahead, it will be necessary to establish joint doctoral supervision systems involving industry, government, and academia, by utilizing national R&D institutes as hubs, in order to build a talent ecosystem in which individuals develop through fluid movement across diverse sectors. Furthermore, because companies sometimes lack mechanisms to appropriately value doctoral talent, it is expected for them to develop organizational designs that enable their capabilities to be properly recognized and utilized. In addition, to respond to rapid population decline and societal and academic changes, it is required for graduate schools with robust internal quality assurance systems to be granted certain regulatory flexibility and to enable agile restructuring and enrollment adjustment.

(5) Establishing a Research Capability Monitoring System

Alongside advancing the above-mentioned improvement measures, it is necessary to establish a mechanism for continuously monitoring research capability as an indicator of the capability of Japan's research ecosystem. The Science Council of Japan should leverage its strength as an organization composed of researchers from diverse academic fields to consider establishing a long-term monitoring system based on appropriate qualitative and quantitative methods. Given the current global trend of wavering public trust in academia, the monitoring system should incorporate features that help communicate the public value and credibility of academic research to society, including indicators that visualize responses to societal challenges of academia.