Laidlaw Scholars Undergraduate Leadership and Research Programme

Research Report

Voices of the Future: A Study of Youth Protest Culture in Japan

Rie Aiyama
Supervisor: Dr. Phillip Lipscy

Abstract

While mainstream headlines portray youth-led protests as a rising global force, Japan presents a notable divergence. Despite being a "free and stable" democracy, Japanese youth have been characterised as politically apathetic, with low levels of participation in protests in particular. This research investigates the contemporary state of youth protest in Japan, focusing on how young people understand protest in relation to democratic participation and what factors shape their attitudes. Employing a mixed-methods approach, this study first produces a quantitative analysis of the World Values Survey to conduct cross-national comparisons across indicators of non-electoral political participation in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. In the majority of indicators, Japanese youth reported the lowest levels of actualised civic participation, as well as reduced levels of willingness to participate and highest levels of rejection; these results distinguish Japan from its regional peers. Moreover, the paper presents novel qualitative insights from interviews with current Japanese university students to get direct testimonies of protest sentiment and political attitudes. This paper finds that Japanese youths' apathy towards protest is driven primarily by a perceived lack of immediate grievances and by collectivist norms that render political expression socially undesirable. Secondary factors such as concerns about social media backlash and weak civic education reinforce disengagement, while historical memory and resource constraints play a marginal role.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to those who supported me throughout my first independent research project. I'd like to thank my supervisor Dr. Phillip Lipscy, for his continued guidance and expertise; the University of Toronto Laidlaw Scholars Programme, especially You Jia Lee and Shraddha Prasad, for their time and support; and the Laidlaw Foundation for providing the generous funding that made this project possible. I owe a special thanks to my mother for assisting with interview contacts and translation during my fieldwork in Japan, as well as to the seven students who kindly dedicated their time and perspectives to my research – their insights greatly enriched my understanding of the issues at the heart of this project.

Introduction

We live in what scholars have branded the "Age of Mass Protests", marked by unprecedented global demonstrations in frequency, scope and size[1]. Between 2006 and 2020, the number of protest movements is estimated to have tripled[2], driven in large part by youths who have demonstrated their capacity to mobilise, advocating for rights, justice, and democracy. From the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong to Black Lives Matter in the United States, young people around the world have led the narrative of informal political participation. Yet global trends can also obscure the national particularities in which unique 'protest cultures' manifest. Japan presents an anomalous case, where despite its functional democratic institutions, youth protest participation has been strikingly low and the younger generation has been frequently portrayed as politically apathetic and disengaged.[3] This phenomenon forms the central question: *Why are Japanese youths so reluctant to engage in protest?*

Protest, broadly defined as "a collective, public action by non-state actors … with the expressed purpose of critique or dissent together with societal and/or political demands"[4], has long been recognised as a necessary and legitimate mode of participation in healthy democracies. Beyond electoral means, protest enables citizens to articulate grievances, influence policy, and demand government accountability when institutional channels appear unresponsive. Furthermore, it can signal the preferences of underrepresented populations such as youth, minorities, and the politically disengaged. Recent scholarship suggests that protests can reflect widely held grievances and mobilise the "exhausted majority", referring to citizens that may be disconnected from traditional political processes like voting.[5] As such, protest should be understood not as a threat to democracy but a valued aspect of civic life. Building on this definition, the term 'protest culture' is employed to encompass the particular attitudes, norms, and perceptions that occupy protest in specific national contexts. Japan's protest culture diverges from that of other democracies due to its unique protest history, collectivist social norms, and institutional structures.

The existing literature on Japanese protest has two notable limitations. First, most studies tend to examine the phenomenon through a singular theoretical lens – whether cultural, historical, or institutional – without attempting to understand the explanatory factors in parallel. Second, research on Japanese protest has been dominated by the quantitative form, which may overlook the nuanced perceptions of youth themselves. To date, no study has broadly mapped the various, interlinked factors that shape youth attitudes towards protest. Seeking to address the gap, this paper employs a mixed methods approach. First, it situates the current protest climate within its historical context, analysing the 1960 Anpo protests and 2015-16 SEALDs movement. It then integrates a literature review of applicable social movement theory, as well as analysis of cross-national survey data and original qualitative insights from a series of interviews with Japanese students. This paper argues that Japanese youths' disengagement is the outcome of multiple interacting conditions, but primarily a lack of perceived immediate grievances and collectivist social norms that stigmatise political expression. By foregrounding the voices of today's youth alongside a theoretical investigation, this paper aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of Japanese protest culture.

---

[1] Christian Stirling Haig, Katherine Schmidt, and Samuel Brannen, "The Age of Mass Protests: Understanding an Escalating Global Trend," www.csis.org, March 2, 2020, https://www.csis.org/analysis/age-mass-protests-understanding-escalating-global-trend.

[2] Isabel Ortiz et al., "An Analysis of World Protests 2006–2020," *World Protests*, November 4, 2021, 13–81, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-88513-7_2.

[3] Intifar Chowdhury, "Why Young People in Asia Are Disengaging from Democracy," East Asia Forum, October 7, 2024, https://eastasiaforum.org/2024/10/08/why-young-people-in-asia-are-disengaging-from-democracy/.

[4] Brian Doherty, "Protest," in *The Oxford Handbook of British Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 719–34, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199230952.003.0039.

[5] Erica Chenoweth et al., "Who Protests, What Do They Protest, and Why?," *National Bureau of Economic Research Discussion Papers*, April 1, 2022, https://doi.org/10.3386/w29987.

Historical Context

Protest, while in decline today, has not been entirely absent in Japanese history. One of the earliest recorded mass protests in Japan was the Hibiya Incendiary Incident of 1905, a popular uprising responding to the Treaty of Portsmouth following the Russo-Japanese War. This event marked the beginning of what is referred to as the Era of Popular Violence (1905–1918), characterised by a series of widespread urban riots across the period.[6] More recently, the anti-nuclear movement borne out of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in 2011 mobilised thousands of citizens nationwide in calls for the closure of Japan's nuclear reactors and shift toward renewable energy policy.[7] This paper will examine two major youth-led protests in modern history: the Anpo Protests of 1959–60, and the SEALDs (Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy) Movement of 2015–6. These two cases provide critical context for understanding the form, status, and legacy of protest in contemporary Japan, and informs the theoretical framework developed in this study.

1960 Anpo Protests

"On the evening of June 15, students led by the radical Zengakuren federation forced their way into the Diet compound through the south gate, clashing with police for several hours before they were finally driven out. The violence surrounding this incident, which included police attempts to disperse the demonstrators with fire hoses, became a turning point in the protests. Hundreds of students and scores of police were injured, and one student was killed." [8]

– Excerpt from "Tokyo 1960: Days of Rage & Grief" by MIT Visualising Cultures

fig 1. Photography by Hamaya Hiroshi (1960); Protestors from Shizuoka join the demonstrations in Tokyo on June 11 [9]

fig 2. Photography by Hamaya Hiroshi (1960); Student protestors break down the south gate of the Diet building

Arguably the most significant and large-scale protest in Japanese history was the nationwide demonstrations against the revision of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (*Nichibei Anzen Hoshō Jōyaku*,

[6] Andrew Gordon, "The Crowd and Politics in Imperial Japan: Tokyo 1905-1918," *Past & Present*, no. 121 (1988): 141–70, https://www.jstor.org/stable/650914.
[7] Justin McCurry, "Fukushima Protesters Urge Japan to Abandon Nuclear Power," *The Guardian*, September 19, 2011, sec. World news, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/sep/19/fukushima-protesters-japan-nuclear-power.
[8] Justin Jesty, "'Tokyo 1960: Days of Rage & Grief' by MIT Visualizing Cultures," MIT.edu, 2012, https://visualizingcultures.mit.edu/tokyo_1960/anp2_essay01.html.
[9] Hiroshi Hamaya, *Shashin No Seiki, Shashin Taiken 66-Nen (Century of Photography, 66 Years of Photography)*, 1997, Photography, 1997, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography.

abbreviated as *Anpo*) in 1960, which had enabled the presence of U.S. military bases in Japan.[10] In the context of the global Cold War, many viewed the treaty as a threat to Japan's constitutional postwar peace provision, and widespread concern grew about potential involvement in another war. At the same time, the movement reflected Japanese citizens' underlying dissatisfaction with the Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) government, which had pursued rapid industrialisation causing societal disorientation and labour unrest.[11] After Kishi's forcible railroading to pass the bill in the House of Representatives, the movement's central slogan shifted from "stop the security treaty" to "protect democracy".[12]

Between March 1959 and June 1960, an estimated 30 million people mobilised to participate in protest activities in Tokyo[13], including students, intellectuals, trade unionists, peace activists, farmers, white-collar workers workers, and housewives.[14] Amongst these groups, students played a particularly key role. The *Zengakuren,* or the All Japan League of Self-Governing Student Associations, was a nationwide student activist organisation characterised by their radical views and direct, often violent tactics.[15] Although originally closely aligned with the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), a political opponent of the LDP, they eventually experienced an ideological and strategic divide as the Zengakuren protestors pursued increasingly radical and violent tactics. These methods came to define the public perception of youth protestors beyond Anpo. On June 15, approximately 5.8 million protestors participated in strikes and 100,000 people surrounded the Diet building.[16] Following the forceful occupation of the Diet building, the protest turned to violence as the clash between police and protestors resulted in the death of a female university student, Michiko Kanba. On June 23, Prime Minister Kishi announced his resignation, but the Security Treaty remained ratified and the movement's main objective had failed, leaving the movement's legacy largely debated.

Scholars of Japanese history and political science find that the 1960 Anpo protests had a profound long term impact on how protests continued to develop and came to be viewed in Japanese society. Nick Kapur, in his book *Japan at the Crossroads: Conflict and Compromise after Anpo,* argues that the Anpo protests signified the peak of the postwar Japanese labour movement, triggering a gradual decline in organised labour, student activism and intellectual leadership after 1960. He discusses the emergence of the term *"Non-Pori"* ("Non-Political"*),* reflecting the state of general disillusionment with traditional forms of political organising that had been delegitimised by the Anpo protests' outcome.[17] He describes: "the left as a whole would never again possess the shared vision, unity, or organisational strength to mount the kind of truly massive nationwide protest movement".[18] Meanwhile, he suggests that a new generation of activists became prominent, defined by their localised and issue-specific style of activism. These included *Shimin Undō* ("citizen movements") and *Jūmin Undō* ("resident's movements"), which focused on issues like consumer protection, pollution mitigation and women's rights.[19]

On the other hand, institutional barriers to protest increased after 1960, such as the reinforcement of stringent police control. Protest routes had to be negotiated and approved in advance;

[10] Nick Kapur, *Japan at the Crossroads: Conflict and Compromise after Anpo* (Harvard University Press, 2018).
[11] Nick Kapur, *Japan at the Crossroads*, 3.
[12] Saruya Hiroe, "Protests and Democracy in Japan: The Development of Movement Fields and the 1960 Anpo Protests" (PhD Dissertation, 2012), 77.
[13] Nick Kapur, *Japan at the Crossroads*.
[14] Meri Tuuli Elina Timonen, "Between Power and Protest: The Japan Times and Anpo Protests in 1960" (Master's Thesis, 2020), 18.
[15] Justin Jesty, "'Tokyo 1960: Days of Rage & Grief' by MIT Visualizing Cultures," MIT.edu, 2012.
[16] Saruya Hiroe, "Protests and Democracy in Japan", 77.
[17] Nick Kapur, *Japan at the Crossroads*.
[18] Nick Kapur, *Japan at the Crossroads*, 266.
[19] Nick Kapur, *Japan at the Crossroads*.

the contents of signs and banners were subject to monitoring; and demonstrations were entirely banned from politically sensitive spaces like the National Diet and U.S. Embassy.[20] Furthermore, the Supreme Court's ruling in July 1960 to uphold the constitutionality of local "public safety" ordinances established a legal precedent for the further restriction of protests. These ordinances, guaranteed under Article 21 (Freedom of Speech and Assembly) of the postwar Constitution, required individuals or groups intending to hold protests and public gatherings to submit advance notification to local authorities. University culture also shifted to discourage political activity on campus. Prior to 1960, university campuses were known to be relatively accommodating for student political actors, some upholding a policy to prohibit police from entering campuses unless invited by administrators.[21] Such institutional restrictions marginalised protest as a form of political expression by the masses, shifting it to the tactics of the extreme left and right fringes. Hence, Anpo can be seen as an important starting point to understand protest in contemporary Japan.

2015-16 SEALDs Movement

fig 3. Photography by Shinta Yabe (2015); Student protestors gather with placards and microphones [22]

fig 4. Photography by Mainichi Shimbun (2016); Protestors gather in front of the Diet building in Tokyo[23]

While widespread youth protest appears to wane in the 21st century, one case defied the narrative of apathy: the SEALDs Movement in 2015–6. Emerging in May of 2015, SEALDs (Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy) was a student-led mass movement that marked the most prominent protest that garnered mainstream interest since the Anpo era.[24] The central catalyst for its emergence was Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's reinterpretation of Article 9 of the Constitution – which renounces war as a sovereign right and prohibits the maintenance of military forces – through a series of security bills advocating for the expansion of the capacity of the Japanese Self-Defence Forces (JSDF) to provide military assistance to allied states in the name of collective self-defense.[25] Beyond opposition to the secrecy bills, the movement rallied around a variety of topics including voter

[20] Nick Kapur, *Japan at the Crossroads*.
[21] Daniel Falch and Christopher D. Hammond, "An Analysis of the Student Movement Known as SEALDs,".
[22] Shinta Yabe, "Shinta Yabe Photography," Tumblr, 2019, https://shintayabe.tumblr.com/.
[23] The Mainichi, "Photo Special: After Creating New Waves in Japan's Civil Movement, SEALDs Dissolved - the Mainichi," The Mainichi, August 15, 2016, https://mainichi.jp/english/graphs/20160815/hpe/00m/0in/001000g/20160815hpe00m0in001000q.
[24] David H. Slater et al., "SEALDs (Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy): Research Note on Contemporary Youth Politics in Japan - the Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus," The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus, September 14, 2015, https://apjjf.org/david_h_-slater/4375.
[25] Daniel Falch and Christopher D. Hammond, "An Analysis of the Student Movement Known as SEALDs,".

participation, social security, and wealth disparity, united under a broad cause to "protect Japan's liberal democratic values and promote constitutionalism".[26]

At the height of the movement in August 2015, over 120,000 participants mobilised in Tokyo outside the National Diet building.[27] Their tactics diverged from the historical precedent, embracing both online and urban spaces to build momentum and communicate their message. While posters, documentaries and slogans spread on social media, members held informal political discussions in underground clubs featuring prominent students, academics and social figures.[28] SEALDs leaders consciously sought to differentiate themselves from the image of violence and ideological extremism that had become intrinsically associated with protest since Anpo, utilising youth culture to communicate their relevance to a broad youth population. One SEALDs member at the time quotes: "Social movements before us seemed unapproachable, scary and uncool for young people … it's an important factor to be fashionable and to use music in order to attract our generation so that we can raise our voice".[29] Instead of aligning with a particular political party, ideology, or openly positioning itself as revolutionary, SEALDs called for a 3-point agenda of "Constitutionalism", "Social Security", and "National Security"[30], framing the protest movement in the interest of the nation as a whole.

The success of SEALDs was not felt in its immediate policy – Prime Minister Abe remained in power, and the Secrecy and Security bills were passed without effect – but in its ability to revitalise a population that was thought to be politically apathetic.[31] The SEALDs movement officially disbanded in August 2016, and its leaders continued to pursue different projects.[32] Ten years on, its legacy is to be debated. Aside from small-scale localised gatherings, no other major protest movement has emerged in its wake, as the passion from the protest begins to fade in the current youth generation. Regardless, it stands as an important piece of context for the status of youth protest today.

Japanese sociologist Tominaga Kyoko argues that negative memories of past social movements, including Anpo as well as the Zengakuren movement in the 1960s and SEALDs movement, discourages Japanese people today from participating in politics and civil society.[33] Based on the results from a 2020 survey experiment, she finds that negative evaluations of the Anpo protests showed a significant negative association with "participating in demonstrations", "signing paper petitions", "boycotting products for political reasons", "volunteering", and "donating to social or political causes". This affirms that Anpo had implications far beyond the security treaty issue. Similarly, negative impressions of the 2015 SEALDs were found to have a significant negative correlation with "participating in demonstrations", "signing paper petitions", "signing online petitions", "volunteering", "expressing opinions to politicians or civil servants", "donating to social or political causes", "expressing political opinions online", and "retweeting as a form of protest". This causal link is further investigated in the qualitative analysis of this paper.

---

[26] David H. Slater et al., "SEALDs (Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy)".
[27] Daniel Falch and Christopher D. Hammond, "An Analysis of the Student Movement Known as SEALDs,".
[28] David H. Slater et al., "SEALDs (Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy)".
[29] Robin O'Day, "Differentiating SEALDs from Freeters, and Precariats: The Politics of Youth Movements in Contemporary Japan," *Asia-Pacific Journal* 13, no. 50 (September 2015), https://doi.org/10.1017/s1557466015021865.
[30] SEALDs, "SEALDs (Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy)," www.sealds.com, 2015, https://web.archive.org/web/20160711004928/http://www.sealds.com/.
[31] Daniel Falch and Christopher D. Hammond, "An Analysis of the Student Movement Known as SEALDs,".
[32] Nicole Baret, "SEALDs: Where Are They Now?," Shingetsu News Agency, September 13, 2021, https://shingetsunewsagency.com/2021/09/13/sealds-where-are-they-now/.
[33] Haruya Sakamoto, Kyoko Tominaga, and Yusuke Kanazawa, "How Do Negative Evaluations of Past Social Movements Affect Political Participation," *The Nonprofit Review* 23, no. 1&2 (2024): 47–57, https://doi.org/10.11433/janpora.NPR-D-22-00013.

Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

Drawing on literature including survey statistics, social movement theory and Japan studies research, this section builds the justification for research into Japan's relative disengagement and political apathy, as well as a theoretical framework for its causation.

Status of Youth Protest in Contemporary Japan

While there is far from extensive data on current youth opinion of protest in Japan, several statistics present the case for political apathy and disengagement. A 2021 report by the Japanese Trade Union Confederation (*Rengo)* presents survey statistics showing young people have a negative view of demonstrations. When asked which form of political activism they did not want to take part in, 46.8% answered "rallies, demonstrations, marches and parades" compared to 20.7% who answered "discussing on social media" and 19.5% who cited "crowdfunding, donations etc".[34] Furthermore, 60.5% of respondents in their 10s and 53.3% in their 20s reported that they perceive demonstrations as "negative, scary or extreme". Meanwhile, the Nippon Foundation's Awareness Survey of 18-Year-Olds[35] affirms that political engagement in Japan ranked the lowest among eight other countries where the study was conducted (China, South Korea, United States, and United Kingdom). The data reported that 20% of Japanese youth "believe they can change their country or society", while regarding to the current state of politics in Japan, 54% of respondents replied that "young people are becoming less interested in politics," while 46% replied that "politics is becoming less relevant to young people."[36]

On the actual occurrence of protest, a textual analysis of newspaper articles by Yamamoto and Nishikido (2004) confirms the decline in frequency of social movements since the 1980s. Moreover, Cantoni et al. (2023) models a global map of past protest occurrence (1995–2020) based on the ICEWS dataset, which classifies Japan as having 0–1 protests per 100 other events (figure 4).[37] This is in contrast to the figures observed in other stable democracies such as the United States, South Korea and Australia, where more than 1 protest has been recorded per 100 events. Based on the scope of these findings, Japan's youth protest culture appears significant to conduct further research.

Social Movement Theory

A large body of existing sociological literature cites various structural and individual factors relating to protest occurrence and participation as a global phenomenon. These include grievance-based motives (i.e inequality, injustice, poor economic conditions); political opportunities (i.e policy changes, weakened political institutions); individual attitudes and preferences (towards politics, cultural values, democracy etc.); resource mobilisation capacity (i.e availability of resources and organisational networks); as well as inherent social and cultural norms, among others.[38][39] Yet current research is not conclusive about the factors with greatest significance; each case of protest is influenced by a combination of factors which manifests differently by its context.[40] With regards to Japan, sociologist Kyoko Tominaga's research helps to elucidate specific factors which may be key to

---

[34] Japanese Trade Union Confederation (Rengo), "Opinion Survey on Social Movements and Labour Unions 2021," April 27, 2021, https://www.jtuc-rengo.or.jp/info/chousa/data/20210427.pdf?43.
[35] The Nippon Foundation, "Awareness Survey of 18-Year-Olds," The Nippon Foundation, October 26, 2024, https://en.nippon-foundation.or.jp/what/projects/culture/eighteen-survey.
[36] Kyoko Tominaga, "Why Are Japanese Youth Distancing Themselves from Social Activism?," nippon.com, March 30, 2021, https://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/d00668/.
[37] Davide Cantoni et al., "Protests," A.19.
[38] Davide Cantoni et al., "Protests," *National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) Working Paper Series*, 2023, A19.
[39] Conny Roggeband and Bert Klandermans, *Handbook of Social Movements across Disciplines* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017).
[40] Camila Teixeira, "Youth, Protests and the Polycrisis", 11.

understanding its lack of protest activity. Her 2024 paper[41] raises several theoretical explanations: a) cultural theory, referring to confucian values and collectivist social norms in Japan; b) social network theory; c) economic inequality theory; d) institutional theory, pointing to Japan's restrictive political and legal system; and e) negative historical memories of past protests.

Generally, sociological research on social movements adopt either a structural or cultural perspective; the former places emphasis on the distribution of material resources, organisations and institutions, while the latter focuses on how individuals and social groups perceive these material conditions.[42] This paper addresses both approaches and presents an overview of five relevant factors found in both global and Japan-specific literature.

I. Grievance Theory

In the literature, many traditional explanations of protest emphasise grievance theory, which posits that social movements naturally emerge from accumulated grievances, dissatisfaction, and perceived injustices among groups in society.[43] In his foundational work, *Why Men Rebel* (1970), Ted Gurr proposes the theory of relative deprivation which he defines as the perceived discrepancy between social actors' "value expectations" (conditions of life that they believe they are entitled to) and their "value capabilities" (conditions of life they actually experience).[44] This argument suggests that individuals or groups experiencing significant deprivation – such as prolonged unemployment, unfair taxation, or systemic discrimination – are motivated to engage in collective action to challenge the status quo. Applied to Japan, this logic would suggest that the absence of youth protests reflects a general lack of significant grievances, whether economically, socially or politically, among young people today. In other words, without issues to protest for, there is little motivation to mobilise. However, various scholars since have discredited the explanatory power of grievance theory on its own. Tarrow (1998) observes that while grievances are abundant, social movements rarely arise to challenge them[45]; Lichbach (1995) challenges it from a rational choice perspective, arguing that protest mobilisation has a collective action problem which requires adequate resources.[46] Others critique the applicability of relative deprivation theory to social movements, highlighting that Gurr's study focused on civil strife – political violence such as riots and rebellions – rather than non-electoral forms of participation like peaceful protest.[47] Thus, while grievance theory remains foundational within structural social movement theory, it cannot fully explain the emergence or absence of protest.

II. Political Opportunity & Institutional Barriers

Beyond grievances, political opportunity theory explains protest as a rational and strategic response to the structure and volatility of political institutions. Foundational theorists such as Charles Tilly (1978) and Doug McAdam (1982) argue that protest is not solely a function of grievance, but contingent on political conditions which allow for mobilisation. Tilly (1978) contends that social movements are most likely to emerge when windows of opportunity open in the polity; in other words, when political systems allow for public participation without fully integrating or repressing

[41] Haruya Sakamoto, Kyoko Tominaga, and Yusuke Kanazawa, "How Do Negative Evaluations of Past Social Movements Affect Political Participation,".
[42] Conny Roggeband and Bert Klandermans, *Handbook of Social Movements across Disciplines,* 13.
[43] Conny Roggeband and Bert Klandermans, *Handbook of Social Movements across Disciplines,* 13.
[44] Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (1970; repr., Routledge, 2015), 24.
[45] Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, *Cambridge University Press*, 1998.
[46] Mark Lichbach, *The Rebel's Dilemma* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995)
[47] Joshua K. Dubrow, "Why Men Rebel: Ted Robert Gurr, Civil Strife, and Relative Deprivation," Political Inequality: A Blog Since 2010, September 24, 2022.

them.[4849] In the Japanese context, Tominaga (2023) observes a relatively restrictive legal framework towards civil society, especially for advocacy-oriented organisations. Until the 1998 Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities, oppositional groups faced substantial difficulty in securing legal recognition or tax benefits. Moreover, since the 1970s, protest activities in public spaces have been subject to strict policing and surveillance.[50] These institutional constraints may create logistical or legal hurdles for youth to freely organise or join demonstrations.

Building on this, McAdam (1982) suggests that social movements are catalysed by shifts in political opportunity – such as elite divisions, decreased repression, electoral instability – which create the perception that collective action is possible and necessary. Other triggers might include sudden policy changes, political scandals and leadership crises, or institutional reforms. Tilly also notes that groups may be more readily mobilised by threats, since they are able to rely on existing networks and practices, whereas opportunities require new forms of organisation and strategy.[51] Historically, large-scale protests in Japan like Anpo in 1960 and SEALDs in 2015 demonstrate how youth have responded to moments of perceived democratic crisis, such as the ruling party's constitutional amendment or reinterpretation. Given this perspective, it may be that there is a current absence of perceived political opportunity in Japan, which may explain contemporary youth disengagement.

However, critics like Goodwin and Jasper (1999) have argued that political opportunity theory is too structurally deterministic, overlooking how individuals perceive and interpret opportunities.[52] Instead, they place significance on cultural and emotional conditions which drive social movements. In Japan, even when certain political opportunities arise – as in the LDP slush fund scandal in 2023 – protest participation has remained limited. Thus, institutional constraints cannot fully account for the prevailing sense of political apathy and disengagement that is so strong among youth.

III. Resource Mobilisation Theory: Organisations & Networks

Another widely cited structural theory is resource mobilisation theory (RMT), which has been explained by McCarthy and Zald (1977). On the basis that grievances are continuous and abundant in any given society, RMT focuses on *when* and *how* discontent can be catalysed into organised collective action.[53] It looks at the availability of resources (i.e. money, labour, leadership, time), organisations, strategies, and opportunities that make social movements a rational choice for participating individual actors. In addition, they consider "mobilising structures" including formal organisations (SMOs) but also informal social networks, which drive sustained movement activity beyond initial mobilisation.[54] With this theory, a lack of resource availability or mobilising structures in contemporary Japan might explain the lack of youth protest activity in Japan. Since the 1970s and the dissolution of leftist student networks such as the Zengakuren, activists have struggled to construct new organisational infrastructures.[55] The current decline in labour union membership rates and university student groups, such as councils and clubs, further corroborates this. These developments may have eroded the institutional infrastructure that once enabled youth to mobilise. With fewer platforms for organising and recruiting, social movements have suffered lower visibility in society.

---

[48] Charles Tilly, *From Mobilisation to Revolution* (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1978).
[49] Conny Roggeband and Bert Klandermans, *Handbook of Social Movements across Disciplines,* 16.
[50] Takemasa Ando, *Japan's New Left Movements: Legacies for Civil Society* (Routledge, 2014).
[51] Conny Roggeband and Bert Klandermans, *Handbook of Social Movements across Disciplines,* 17.
[52] Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper, "Caught in a Winding, Snarling Vine: The Structural Bias of Political Process Theory," *Sociological Forum* 14, no. 1 (1999): 27–54, https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1021684610881.
[53] Conny Roggeband and Bert Klandermans, *Handbook of Social Movements across Disciplines, 226*.
[54] John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 6 (1977): 1212–41, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2777934.
[55] Carl Cassegård, "Lovable Anarchism: Campus Protest in Japan from the 1990s to Today," *Culture Unbound* 6, no. 2 (April 17, 2014): 361–82, https://doi.org/10.3384/cu.2000.1525.146361.

Meanwhile, Ikeda and Richey's (2005) study directly examines the impact of social networks as a resource for political participation in Japan. Their empirical analysis reveals a strong positive relationship between political participation and involvement in formally organised associations, as well as informal social networks.[56] These findings may be explained by Putnam (2000), who suggests that voluntary civic organisations function as "schools of democracy" facilitating citizens' socialisation, trust in others, and the perceived efficacy of political institutions to produce an increased likelihood of participation.[57] As a result, youth disengagement in Japan may be due to the absence of resources and organisational networks necessary to bridge the gap between discontent and large-scale collective action.

IV. Social Norms, Cultural Stigma & Historical Memory

Cultural approaches within social movement studies gained prominence in the late twentieth century as a response to the limitations of structural and rationalist models. These emphasise the role of shared values, ideologies, emotions, habits, collective identities and historical memories which influence civic participation.[58] From this perspective, protests do not emerge solely from objective conditions such as inequality, institutional failure, or resource availability, but a collective perception of these as unjust and urgent. In addition, various nationally inherent cultures can inform how protest itself as a form of political participation is perceived.

Kobayashi (2021) presents a cross-cultural experimental study that examines how collectivist cultural values shape social attitudes towards political activism.[59] They hypothesise that relative to individualistic countries, political demonstrators in collectivist societies such as Japan are socially avoided because they are perceived as threats to interpersonal harmony. Because the 'self' is conceptualised as intrinsically embedded within a larger social network, protest is stigmatised as a disruptive behaviour that weakens social ties. In the data, the authors found significantly higher levels of social avoidance in Japan and China, while a weaker correlation was observed in Hong Kong and South Korea. It aligns with earlier characterisations of Japanese political culture as a "spectator" democracy, in which people tend to observe politics "from the sidelines with a curious interest but without any signs of emotion or personal involvement".[60] This cultural aversion to confrontation contributes to a social environment where many youth are hesitant to express dissent or engage in confrontational actions such as protest, leading to widespread disengagement amongst youth in Japan. However, the cultural explanation for protest inactivity in Japan is not without critique. Some argue that it is unclear how collectivist tendencies diverge in Japan and South Korea, while others point to the historical cases of protest that refute the narrative of intrinsic apathy.[61]

Within cultural approaches to social movements, collective historical memory could also inform societal attitudes towards protest. In Japan, Tominaga (2023) makes the argument that negative

---

[56] Kenichi Ikeda and Sean E. Richey, "Japanese Network Capital: The Impact of Social Networks on Japanese Political Participation," *Political Behavior* 27, no. 3 (September 2005): 239–60, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-005-5512-0.
[57] Haruya Sakamoto, Kyoko Tominaga, and Yusuke Kanazawa, "How Do Negative Evaluations of Past Social Movements Affect Political Participation,", 49.
[58] Elżbieta Ciżewska-Martyńska, "The Cultural Perspective in Social Movement Theories and Past Research on the Solidarity Movement," *Polish Sociological Review*, no. 201 (2018): 27–45, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26449221, 28.
[59] Tetsuro Kobayashi et al., "Why Are Politically Active People Avoided in Countries with Collectivistic Culture? A Cross-Cultural Experiment," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 52, no. 4 (April 13, 2021): 002202212110086, https://doi.org/10.1177/00220221211008653.
[60] Tetsuro Kobayashi et al., "Why Are Politically Active People Avoided in Countries with Collectivistic Culture? A Cross-Cultural Experiment,", 391.
[61] Haruya Sakamoto, Kyoko Tominaga, and Yusuke Kanazawa, "How Do Negative Evaluations of Past Social Movements Affect Political Participation,", 49.

impressions of past protests influences public perceptions and attitudes towards political participation today. This stems from the large-scale leftist demonstrations of the 1960s and 1970s, which were ultimately unsuccessful and escalated into violence, leaving behind enduring images of protest as "frightening", "disruptive to social order", and "unrealistic and intolerant".[62] Based on a 2020 survey experiment, Tominaga finds that negative evaluations of past protest – particularly the 1960 Anpo protest and 2015-6 SEALDs movement – significantly correlated with lower participation in a range of non-electoral political activities such as protest, petition, and donation.[63] In this view, collective memory functions to actively diminish the perceived efficacy and legitimacy of protest, contributing to widespread disengagement. However, the applicability of this argument to youth specifically is limited. The survey sample comprised adults aged 20 to 69, including older generations who directly experienced the protests in question. Their evaluations do not accurately represent the sentiments of contemporary youth, many of whom may be unaware of the events. Indeed, approximately 40% of respondents answered "don't know" when asked to evaluate past protests, indicating a significant lack of public awareness on the history of social movements in Japan.[64] This weakens the claim that negative historical memory notably impacts youth protest aversion.

V. Individual Attitudes & Beliefs: Civic Education

Lastly, social movement theory addresses how individual-level attitudes and perceptions influence political behaviour, explaining why some individuals choose to protest while others abstain. Almond and Verba's (1963) seminal work *The Civic Culture* posits that stable democratic regimes depend on a robust civic culture defined by citizens' acceptance of the authority of the state and belief in participation of their civic duties.[65] This is characterised by a particular set of shared values and norms such as tolerance for diverse views, trust in government, interpersonal trust, and a sense of political efficacy.[66] Almond and Verba determined the formative role of schools in early political socialisation, as they closely approximate political systems in comparison to households. They found that participatory activities like discussions and debates were related to an increased sense of political efficacy among students. In addition, substantive, explicit political education can increase an individual's sense of political competence.[67] In the context of Japan, the underdevelopment of a participatory civic culture might explain contemporary youth disengagement with protest. In particular, low levels of perceived political efficacy – the belief that collective actions like protest can produce tangible change – could be a potential barrier. According to sociologist Hamada Kunisuke, who refers to the 2015 Comprehensive Survey of Social Inequality in Contemporary Japan, Japanese youth are ranked the lowest among seven advanced nations in the belief that individual participation could influence social outcomes.[68] While Japan's education system is globally recognised for its achievement in sciences and mathematics, its civics curriculum may be insufficient in promoting political socialisation, fostering a culture of apathy before citizens formally enter the political sphere.

---

[62] Haruya Sakamoto, Kyoko Tominaga, and Yusuke Kanazawa, "How Do Negative Evaluations of Past Social Movements Affect Political Participation,", 50.
[63] Haruya Sakamoto, Kyoko Tominaga, and Yusuke Kanazawa, "How Do Negative Evaluations of Past Social Movements Affect Political Participation,", 55.
[64] Haruya Sakamoto, Kyoko Tominaga, and Yusuke Kanazawa, "How Do Negative Evaluations of Past Social Movements Affect Political Participation,", 51.
[65] Iain McLean and Alistair McMillan, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics (3 Ed.)*, *Oxford Reference* (Oxford University Press, 2009), https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095613999.
[66] Bertrand Badie, Dirk Berg-Schlosser, and Leonardo Morlino, "Civic Culture," in *International Encyclopedia of Political Science International Encyclopedia of Political Science*, 2011, https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412994163.
[67] Gabriel A Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 358.
[68] Kyoko Tominaga, "Why Are Japanese Youth Distancing Themselves from Social Activism?,".

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed methods research design that integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches to address the following questions:

(1) How do behaviours and attitudes towards civic engagement in Japan compare to other East Asian democracies?

(2) How do contemporary Japanese youths perceive public activism, specifically *protest* as a form of political participation?

(3) What factors influence their attitudes toward protest?

Quantitative Data: Cross-National Survey Analysis

The quantitative portion of the paper draws on data from the World Values Survey (WVS) Wave 7 (2017–2022)[69], focusing on respondents aged 18–29 in four East Asian countries: Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. These countries were selected due to their comparable levels of economic development, shared democratic or semi-democratic institutions, and regional and cultural similarities as East Asian nations. All of these nations have demonstrated democratically-motivated protest movements in the past 25 years with significant participation by youths. The WVS data provides valuable comparative insight into political participation attitudes and behaviours, including responses to protest-related actions such as "attending lawful demonstrations", "joining in boycotts", and "organising political activities, events and protests". Through a cross-national analysis, the paper aims to assess whether Japan is an outlier amongst its regional peers in terms of youth political disengagement. It also will inform preliminary hypotheses regarding the factors which affect apathy, which are further explored through the interviews.

Qualitative Data: Analysis of Youth Interviews

To investigate the factors that influence youth disengagement in protest and political activity, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Japanese university students in Tokyo during a fieldwork trip in July 2025. A total of seven participants were interviewed, representing diverse academic institutions, interests and backgrounds, as well as gender and levels of personal political interest. An interview guide was developed to extract interviewee's opinions and prior experiences with protest, organised along these headings: a) general perceptions of protest; b) personal experiences with protest; c) non-protest political participation. In addition, different hypothesised factors were explored, organised by these thematic explanations: d) cultural factors; e) education & historical awareness; f) lack of protest issues and salience; e) social media and online activism; and f) resource constraints. Interviews were conducted in-person in Japanese for a fixed period of one hour and thirty minutes, recorded with verbal consent and transcribed for analysis. Responses were manually coded and interpreted to address each factor.

[69] World Values Survey, "WVS Database, Wave 7 (2017-2022)," www.worldvaluessurvey.org, 2022, https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV7.jsp.

1. Quantitative Data: Cross-National Analysis

This section presents a cross-national quantitative analysis using Wave 7 (2017–2022) of the World Values Survey (WVS)[70], addressing the research question: *How do behaviours and attitudes towards civic engagement among Japanese youth compare to those in similar East Asian democracies?* The analysis draws on survey responses from individuals aged 18 to 29 in Japan (N=137), South Korea (N=248), Taiwan (N=236), and Hong Kong SAR (N=352). Nine variables were selected from the WVS dataset as appropriate indicators of political engagement and attitudes towards protest encompassing various forms of action. These consisted of a common set of response options, "Have done", "Might do", and "Would never do", allowing for direct comparison between the countries. Notably, respondents in Japan were presented with an additional "Don't know" option, which complicates cross-national comparability; this is addressed as a limitation in the interpretation of the results.

In the majority of indicators, Japanese youth reported the lowest levels of actualised civic participation ("Have done"), as well as reduced levels of willingness to participate ("Might do") and highest levels of rejection ("Would never do"). This pattern distinguishes Japan from its regional peers and warrants further qualitative inquiry into the cultural, institutional, and historical factors which contribute to these outcomes.

	% of Respondents aged ≤29 answered "Have Done"			
WVS Variable	**Japan (N=137)**	**Taiwan ROC (N=236)**	**Hong Kong SAR (N=352)**	**South Korea (N=248)**
Q211 Political Action: Attending Lawful/Peaceful Demonstrations	1.5%	7.2%	24.0%	11.3%
Q209 Political Action: Signing a Petition	26.3%	23.8%	22.3%	19.0%
Q210 Political Action: Joining in Boycotts	1.5%	9.8%	10.1%	4.8%
Q212 Political Action: Joining Unofficial Strikes	0.0%	0.2%	3.9%	0.4%
Q213 Social Activism: Donating to a Group or Campaign	35.8%	33.3%	40.0%	13.7%
Q215 Social Activism: Encouraging Others To Take Action About Political Issues	0.7%	5.6%	19.1%	2.8%
Q218 Political Actions Online: Signing an Electronic Petition	1.5%	24.5%	30.9%	8.9%
Q219 Political Actions Online: Encouraging Other People to Take Any Form of Political Action	1.5%	10.8%	17.1%	2.4%
Q220 Political Actions Online: Organising Political Activities, Events, Protests	0.0%	0.2%	11.4%	2.0%

Table 1. Percentages of youth respondents (age 18–29) who selected "Have Done" across nine political and social action variables in the World Values Survey (WVS). Lowest participation % value for each variable shown in red.

[70] World Values Survey, "WVS Database, Wave 7 (2017--2022),".

Table 1 summarises the percentage of youth respondents in each country who reported having engaged in nine forms of political and social action, as provided by the WVS dataset. The data reveals a consistent trend: Japanese youth exhibit the lowest levels of actualised participation in seven of the nine indicators, including attending peaceful demonstrations, joining boycotts, unofficial strikes, and encouraging others to take political action. Notably, only 1.5% of Japanese youth reported having participated in lawful demonstrations, compared to 24% in Hong Kong and 11.3% in South Korea. Similarly, only 1.5% had signed an electronic petition, a figure significantly lower than in Hong Kong (30.9%) and Taiwan (24.5%). Two variables stand as exceptions where Japanese youth reported comparatively high participation rates were donations to social activist groups or campaigns and signing of physical petitions, for which South Korea reported the lowest rates of participation (13.7% and 19.0% respectively). These deviations may suggest that South Korea also exhibits similarly low levels of civic engagement as culturally similar contexts. Overall, the data could suggest that Japanese youth do not participate where there are high barriers to engagement, such as protests, boycotts, strikes, and organising political activities.

1.1 Protests & Public Demonstrations

Protest-related activities, whether through attendance or organisation, constitute some of the most visible and socially risky forms of civic engagement. The WVS data captures considerable cross-national variation in behaviours and attitudes towards protest.

Figure 6[71], *attending lawful/peaceful demonstrations (Q211)*, finds that Hong Kong demonstrates the highest rate of actual participation (24%) and the strongest prospective engagement (50.8%), suggesting an active local political culture reflected by recent mass protests such as the Umbrella Movement in 2014 and Democracy Protests in 2019-2020. Meanwhile, South Korea shows high openness to protest (54%) but considerably lower reported participation (11.3%); however, this figure may have changed after the large-scale Martial Law protests in December 2024[72]. Similarly, Taiwan has high willingness to participate (49.5%) but low actual participation (7.2%). In contrast, Japan reports significantly low protest attendance (1.5%) as well as the lowest willingness (25.5%) and highest refusal to engage (46.7%) among the four countries. Furthermore, 26.3% selected the "don't know" category, indicating notable uncertainty or disengagement.

Figure 14, *organising political activities, events, and protests online (Q220),* reveals a similar pattern. The sample of Japanese youth reported no prior participation (0%) in online protest organisation, along with a low willingness to engage (10.9%). By contrast, Hong Kong reported the highest engagement (11.4%), likely reflecting its recent protest context. South Korea (2%) and Taiwan (0.2%) find minimal levels of participation. Interestingly, a significantly large number of Taiwanese youths (82.3%) declared their outright refusal of future engagement; this may be an area for further research. Overall, these results corroborate that there is a strong sense of political passivity and aversion to demonstrations in Japan.

1.2 Economic Disruption: Boycotts & Strikes

Figures 8 and 9 present youth responses to two forms of economic protest: *joining in boycotts (Q210)* and *joining unofficial strikes (Q212).* Both actions involve collective disruption of institutions or markets, carrying a degree of visibility and social risk. Cross-national comparisons of WVS reveal that Japan significantly reported the lowest levels of actual (1.5% for boycotts; 0% for strikes) and potential engagement (18.2% for boycotts; 19.7% for strikes) with these forms of protest, as well as

[71] Refer to Appendix for figures.
[72] Helen Regan and Eunseo Jeong, "South Korea Martial Law 'A Painful Reminder of How Easily Democracy Can Be Threatened,' Protesters Say," CNN, December 4, 2024, https://edition.cnn.com/2024/12/04/asia/protesters-south-korea-martial-law-intl.

highest levels of rejection (51.5% for boycotts; 50.4% for strikes). These results suggest a strong aversion to confrontational or disruptive collective action in Japan, which may be consistent with cultural theories of protest aversion relating to respect for collectivist group harmony (cite). Furthermore, it is consistent with the historical decline of labour unions in Japan since the 1990s[73]. In contrast, youths in Hong Kong show the highest levels of engagement in both categories, with 10.1% having joined a boycott previously and 3.9% in an unofficial strike. These figures accurately reflect the widespread general strike that took place in 2019.[74] South Korea displays a high level of willingness for both actions but limited actual participation, while Taiwan shows relatively high levels of openness but also a high level of rejection. Overall, these findings highlight an absence of economic-related protest culture in Japan, potentially due to its high barrier to participation.

1.3 Petitioning: Online and Offline

Figures 7 and 12 examine youth engagement with petitioning, including both conventionally *offline* (Q209) and *online* (Q218) means. As a form of political participation, petition is typically characterised by low cost, low visibility and institutional legitimacy, making it an accessible method of political expression for youth (cite). The WVS data reveals interesting variation between the four countries as well as between analogue and digital platforms. Hong Kong demonstrates a high level of participation (22.3% offline; and highest levels of openness to petitioning (56% offline; 45.5% e-petitions). Taiwan reports the second highest rate of offline petition participation (23.8%) yet also the highest rejection of both modes (31.5% offline and 43.8% online). South Korea presents a case where actual participation in both forms of petitioning is low (19% offline, 8.9% online) but over half of respondents expressed a willingness to engage (52.4% offline; 51.2% e-petition). Interestingly, Japan records the highest level of offline petition participation (26.3%), yet also the lowest participation of e-petitions (1.5%). This gap suggests that online activism is perceived uniquely by Japanese youth, and may require further study. The absence of engagement with digital petitioning, which is widely perceived as one of the lowest barrier forms of activism, further reinforces the narrative of Japan's disengagement with political action.

1.4 Low-Risk Individual Actions

Figure 10, 11 and 13 present actions that may be defined as low-risk, individually initiated forms of civic engagement, including *donating to a group or campaign (Q213), encouraging others to take action about political issues (Q215)* and *encouraging other people to take any form of political action online (Q219).* These forms of participation are typically low in visibility and resource demand, carrying minimal exposure to institutional sanctions or public scrutiny. Japan reports the second highest level of previous participation in donations (35.8%) as well as a low rate of rejection (15.3%), standing as an anomaly to Japan's otherwise low participation rates across all other variables. This could be explained by donation as a relatively non-confrontational, passive form of political expression compared to protest. Hong Kong had the highest rate of prior participation with 40%, while South Korea had the lowest rate with 13.7%. At the same time, Japanese youth exhibit low engagement in encouraging others to politically participate, both offline (0.7%) and online (1.5%). These figures rank as significantly lowest among their regional counterparts; Hong Kong reported 19.1% of respondents had encouraged others offline while 17.1% had done so online. These differences underscore a reluctance among Japanese youth to engage in interpersonal political

---

[73] Alex Bryson et al., "What Is Happening to Unionization in Japan?," *IZA Institute of Labour Economics Discussion Paper Series*, no. 18010 (2025), https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5361073, 3.
[74] Lily Kuo and Christy Choi, "Hong Kong Protests Descend into Chaos during Citywide Strike," The Guardian, August 5, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/05/hong-kong-riot-police-fire-teargas-at-protesters-as-two-cars-ram-crowds.

discussions, a behaviour that could be perceived as socially intrusive, confrontational or inappropriate given collectivist cultural norms. The paper will provide further qualitative data on this phenomenon. Meanwhile, youth in Taiwan and South Korea demonstrate moderate participation in both offline and online forms of political encouragement (Taiwan with 5.6% offline, 10.8% online; South Korea with 2.8% offline, 2.4% online). Overall, the divergence in Japan between passive and active means of engagement further suggests that Japanese political disengagement is selectively skewed towards high-visibility, confrontational actions with social risk, such as protest.

A key methodological limitation of this analysis lies in the cross-national inconsistencies in sample size and survey design within the World Values Survey dataset. First, the sample size of youth respondents varied significantly across cases, with Japan having the smallest sample (N=137) relative to Taiwan (N=236), South Korea (N=248) and Hong Kong (N=352). While this limits the generalisability and statistical precision of the Japanese data, the directional trend is consistent across multiple indicators. Second, a unique feature of the Japanese survey data is the consistent presence of the "Don't know" as a response, which was absent in the corresponding questionnaires for South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong. This introduces a structural asymmetry in survey design which limits the validity of the cross-national analysis. Looking at the data, the "Don't know" response appears to function as a substitute for "Might do", which are both applicable to respondents who may experience uncertainty or discomfort towards political participation. Thus, the lower rates of willingness observed in Japan across multiple indicators should be interpreted with caution, as they may have understated latent willingness for action. Nevertheless, these limitations do not undermine the central empirical finding, which finds a clear trend in which Japanese youth reported consistently lowest actual participation rates in political and protest-related activities compared to its regional peers. The combination of minimal participation and ambivalence affirms the claim that civic inaction is a significant phenomenon in Japan, setting the stage for further qualitative investigation.

2. Qualitative Data: Youth Interviews in Japan

This section presents the findings from seven semi-structured interviews with Japanese youth, aged between 15 and 24, aiming to capture their opinions, attitudes and experiences regarding protest. Conducted manually, transcripts were coded into thematic categories ranging from general perceptions to specific factors influencing participation. Select quotations (translated in English) were extracted to illustrate these themes. This analysis not only emphasises common sentiments but points of divergence, offering a broad range of perspectives that appears to be present amongst contemporary youth. Overall, the qualitative insights suggest that many Japanese youth view protest as legitimate in principle, but generally negative and ineffective in practice. Most affirmed a disinterest in participating, which can be explained by two central conditions: a perceived lack of immediate grievances, and collectivist cultural norms that stigmatise overt political expression. Peripheral factors, including concerns over social media backlash and weak civic education, further reinforces disengagement. By contrast, historical memory and resource constraints appear to exert a marginal influence on their behaviour.

2.1 Protest Perception & Participation

Across the interviews, students consistently characterised protests as legitimate but unappealing in practice. A majority described the public perception toward to be generally negative, in part due to a cognitive association of protest with partisan politics rather than broad social or environmental causes. When asked to explain this image, Student G cited protestors' extremist tendencies, drawing parallels with religion: *"People participating in protests tend to have unified beliefs … where [they] become quite extreme and people can't see what's going on around them".* Another interviewee shared that their image of protest is strongly informed by domestic media coverage of protests abroad, which have been occasionally violent and confrontational with police. Others stressed the potential disruptive effects of protest on everyday life as unappealing, such as road closures and noise:

> *"[It] ends up involving people who have nothing to do with it. It affects everyday life. People with no connection or interest in the issue get dragged in, and I don't agree with that."*

Generational differences were also noted. Student D shared their perception of protest as mainly driven by older generations, particularly working people in their 40s and 50s who appear to have strong fixed opinions about politics, whereas youth remain largely uninvolved due to indifference. When asked to rate their level of resistance from 1–5 (extreme resistance – no resistance), individual responses varied but most positioned themselves at 3 or 2. This indicates some degree of conditional willingness; youth are not fundamentally opposed to protest but do not currently see themselves partaking. Direct experiences with protest were significantly limited; most of the interviewees reported they had only seen small-scale protests living in Tokyo. One student, Student C, reported they had previously participated in a demonstration, which they elaborated was for the advocacy of Zainichi Korean rights. They expressed their minor resistance to protest, which was due to their university research, which allowed them to talk to actual protestors and Zainichi community through university research and empathised with their situation.

Despite the generally negative image, some students expressed their support for protest, suggesting that protest is not fully delegitimised as a form of political participation:

> *"Personally, I absolutely think those kinds of actions should be taken. For example with strikes, the point is to cause a disruption, right? Even if there are people who might see it as a nuisance, I have no intention of criticizing that."*

2.2 Non-Protest Political Participation

The interview also asked about participation in means of political participation other than protest, including voting, petitions, volunteering, donations, and online activism. This aimed to build a wider picture of civic engagement amongst Japanese youth. While respondents expressed ambivalence towards protest, most indicated relatively greater comfort with lower-risk, non-electoral activities. Petitions and donations were regarded favourably due to their minimal public visibility and personal risk. By contrast, several students indicated discomfort with online activism, emphasising its permanence and perceived high visibility. Meanwhile, voting was generally recognised as an obligation, with all eligible interviewees expressing their intent to vote in the House of Councillors election in August 2025. Some described logistical barriers such as the difficulty of accessing party information. Moreover, almost all interviewees noted that discussions about election preferences, or politics in general, are rare in their social circles. One student shared that they had never shared their party preferences, even with family or friends. This makes voting a largely solitary activity, where access to information is dependent on individual initiative:

> *"Many 18 or 19 year-olds who've just gotten the right to vote don't know how to vote. That kind of information doesn't really spread through friends. During election seasons, there are voting guides that show up online, but it depends on whether you're interested enough to access them yourself."*

These findings suggest that while Japanese youth demonstrate a willingness to engage in elections and low-risk civic activities, high visibility activities such as online activism and protest remain unappealing – suggesting the influence of cultural norms.
Next, the interview insights are categorised by thematic factors that act as barriers to protest.

2.3 Perceived Lack of Grievances and Protest Urgency

The most consistently suggested barrier to youth protest participation was the perception that current social and economic conditions in Japan do not constitute sufficient urgent or compelling grievances. Several students acknowledged that problems such as inflation, low wages, and rising living costs are of increasing concern, but these were described as inconveniences rather than crises. Everyday life remains relatively peaceful and materially secure: *"even if you don't join a protest, your life will still be protected."* Others explicitly stated that they could not identify any significant dissatisfaction in their lives, which makes it difficult for them to imagine participating in protest.

> *"Honestly, I can't really picture myself participating in a protest. I can't imagine feeling that strongly—having such intense dissatisfaction or a strong enough message—to actually go out and protest. But I do think protests themselves are a good thing, so it's not that I'm critical of them. It's just that, when it comes to whether I would take part, I still feel a bit of resistance."*

This sentiment demonstrates that while students do not oppose protest in principle, they struggle to identify grievances that reach a threshold of urgency to justify personal participation. This aligns closely with grievance theory, which posits that mobilisation requires a widespread sense of deprivation. When speaking on issues like economic stagnation or rising costs, some respondents described these as long-term, structural problems rather than immediate crises. One student expressed that there is no shared consensus on what the alternative could be, or what actionable solutions there are:

> *"There are many possible issues — for example, recently prices have been high, and economically everyone is struggling a bit — but there's no shared agreement on what the best solution is."*

Another student explained that *"things get worse, but then it starts to feel 'normal' again"*; capturing how gradual deprivation is normalised in time, eroding the sense of urgency that is required for protest mobilisation. These reflections speak to the significance of political opportunity structures in the Japanese context. Even where discontent exists, it is normalised and fragmented; some catalyst is required to frame it as an immediate concern.

2.4 Cultural Norms: Fear of Judgement and the Stigma of Politics

Another major barrier to protest participation was identified in cultural norms that discourage individuals from standing out or creating conflict. This echoes Kobayashi's (2021) argument that collectivist social norms lead to social avoidance of political demonstrators, who are perceived as threats to interpersonal harmony. Describing their impression of Japanese social culture, many interviewees referred to *kotonakare shugi* ("事なかれ主義"), an attitude of avoiding confrontation. This norm appears to inform youths' public attitudes, especially relating to civic engagement: *"Protesting inevitably makes you stand out, and when you stand out, there's a high chance you'll be criticized. I think a lot of people avoid it because they don't want to deal with that.".* Almost all students also recognised the prevalent cultural norm of "和" (*wa,* the Japanese ideal of group harmony), as well as the unspoken understandings of "空気を読め" ("read the air") and "波を荒らすな" ("don't stir up the waves"). Several youths admitted their consciousness towards others' perception of themselves – especially those of family and peers. For instance, one student shared that many parents would likely openly oppose their child's participation in a protest, while several others admitted they would be more inclined to protest if invited by friends. The perceived risks of social exclusion were also mentioned:

> *"I think people who stand out with political opinions tend to get distanced from their communities – whether at school or in the workplace. When someone is visibly political outside of those spaces, it probably makes it harder for them to fit in within them."*

However, not all students reported such fears; some stated that they had never personally experienced social exclusion or feared its risk. It is likely that cultural norms are internalised to varying degrees according to the individual.

The stigma extended beyond protest to politics more generally. Several interviewees described how discussion of politics is "uncomfortable", with one referencing a well-known saying about the three taboo topics in Japanese society: *"politics, religion, and baseball"*. The majority of respondents reported that they very rarely discussed politics in their social circles, except for the occasional election season. One recalled being explicitly told by a parent not to reveal who they intended to vote for, as it might pressure others. Another noted they would rather keep their political preferences ambiguous in avoidance of potential conflict, describing the *"tendency not to make your position explicit ... feels very Japanese"*. In this sense, stigma operates at two levels: not only does it discourage participation in protest, but also everyday political discussion and thought, thus reinforcing a habit of apathy and disengagement. Cultural norms function less as a direct catalyst for protest mobilisation and more of an underlying disposition that influences how other barriers are perceived. While it is difficult to measure the direct effect of cultural norms on protest participation, the testimonies suggest they play a significant indirect role by rendering political engagement socially uncomfortable, risky, or inappropriate.

2.5 Education: Limited Political Literacy and Civic Socialisation

Another factor of relevance was the secondary education system in Japan and its impact on young people's values and attitudes towards politics and protest. This explanation suggests that civic socialisation – learned in educational spaces – can have a significant influence on how political participation is understood.

Responses by students diverged along their experiences in public and private schools. All of the interviewees described their *kōmin* (civics) curriculum as highly fact-based and memorisation-heavy, designed to prepare for paper tests and university entrance exams. On one hand, students from public schools recalled few opportunities for discussion or debate, finding little opportunity for critical engagement on politics and social issues. One public school interviewee recalled: *"My teacher once told me that there's an educational norm of objectivity that teachers aren't allowed to impose their own beliefs on students. Because of that, I think there weren't many opportunities to develop an interest in politics"*. Meanwhile, those from private schools mentioned that there had been opportunities for presentations and group discussions on social issues. They described how teachers actively posed questions for group debates and gave out assignments to research topics of personal interest. Student B noted that their social sciences teacher had encouraged them to volunteer in voting campaigns outside of school, and also described how mock elections were held at their school to facilitate awareness about election procedures. When asked whether they felt that the Japanese education system actively encouraged civic socialisation, responses were mixed. While some students found that their schools did not do much to encourage political awareness, others argued that schools did the best that they could while maintaining objective integrity and it was the students that lacked interest and initiative.

There was also an impression that students lacked political literacy about the importance of civic engagement, which translated into a sense of political inefficacy and hesitance to take action. One student explained: *"Firstly, the hurdle for gathering political knowledge and information is just too high in the first place. Second, there's this kind of resignation – whether it's politics or anything else, I can't change it on my own anyway."* Another described a reluctance to voice political opinions without having considerable expertise:

> *"Unless you're someone who studies it professionally, if you don't have knowledge about an issue, speaking out from the outside won't necessarily change anything … In Japan, I think there's a kind of tendency to feel embarrassed about speaking on something you don't know much about. Because of that, discussions tend to stay within small communities."*

Overall, education does not appear to be a direct cause of youth disengagement but a notable environment which influences how knowledge, attitudes and values about politics and protest are formed. Furthermore, many youths expressed their reluctance to openly participate due to a lack of political literacy and knowledge about societal issues.

2.6 Social Media: Risk or Opportunity?

Another recurring theme was the role of digital platforms in youths' political expression and attitudes towards protest. For most students, the internet and social media was raised as the primary means to which they obtained political information or news about protest. Several explained that social media could be seen as a safer, accessible alternative to voice opinions compared to street protests, especially if using anonymous accounts:

> *"There are people who don't talk about politics with their friends but do talk about it online or on social media. Platforms like X don't require you to use your real name, so it's easier to post anonymously. That makes it easier for people to support specific political groups and talk about various issues."*

Despite this, all interviewed participants claimed they were not active on social media for political reasons, instead preferring to observe passively if they were to come across such content. However, some interviewees voiced concern with the visibility and risks of backlash that are associated with being politically active on social media. They described how posting in Japanese online communities – particularly on X (formerly Twitter) – is prone to harassment and backlash, which can gain rapid momentum and result in identity exposure. Others simply expressed their dislike for having their face or identity online:

> *"I worry about having a photo of myself posted online. Not just with protests — for example, if someone is filming for YouTube and I end up in the video, I'd hate that too. So it's not limited to protests; I just really dislike it in general."*

One student in particular, who had previously attended protests, highlighted this concern as their main barrier to participating in future demonstrations. They explained how photos of protests shared online could easily be taken out of context and used to attack individual participants. Especially when advocating for a politically sensitive topic, they worried about being misidentified and becoming the target of harassment by opponents. Overall, the interviews reveal how online platforms create both an opportunity and risk for youth civic engagement.

2.7 Historical Memory of Past Protest

Unlike cultural norms or grievances, the legacy of past protests did not emerge as a substantial barrier to participation among youth. While the majority of students acknowledged that protests carry a negative image, this was described as influenced by recent news, personal experiences and popular discourse. Five out of seven interviewees explicitly stated that historical impressions of the 1960 Anpo protests has had no influence on their current perception of protest. They recalled briefly learning about the events at school, but it was mostly perceived to be insignificant. Interestingly, none of the students were aware of the SEALDs movement in 2015, noting that they had been too young at the time. This suggests that even just a decade later, SEALDs has left little resonance with the current generation of youth. Nevertheless, two students demonstrated meaningful awareness about past protests, expressing their opinions on its legacy. Student C argued that the generation who directly participated in or witnessed those protests now occupy positions of power in government, bureaucracy, and corporations, and that their negative impressions continue to shape popular discourse.

> *"They probably carry a sense of regret from their own era, when students became 'too radical'. Because of that, those in power voice very negative views about outspoken political expression, and I think that filters down so that younger generations internalise those negative images."*

Although this student had personal exposure to the Anpo movement through a family relative who was at Tokyo University at the time, they admitted that for most young people feel disconnected from historical events: *"Even if they learn about those events at school and know bad things happened,*

[they] feel it's not really connected to them… they don't feel personally affected". Meanwhile Student A, who learned about Anpo through school, reflected on their impression of protests:

> "*Protests still carry a certain image, even for our generation. There's this association with the intense left-wing student movements from about 50 years ago, which sometimes involved violence. That association probably gives protests a negative impression. People might not know the details, but I think they have a vague image of it, shaped by school, TV, or the internet rather than by their parents."*

Thus, while a number of youths do retain a negative impression from historical events, it can be deemed insignificant as a direct barrier to protest participation for today's generation. The dominant image of protest as ineffective or disruptive is created less by collective memory and more by contemporary media portrayals, discourse and other factors.

2.8 Time & Resource Constraints

Similarly, time and resource constraints did not emerge as a significant barrier to youth participation in protest. Most interviewees emphasised that as university students, they generally do have time to spare and have not experienced substantial financial problems that would hinder participation. One student commented: "I have time, and I don't think protests cost much money. That's not really a barrier." Instead, several students framed protest participation in terms of opportunity cost. An interviewee noted that while they feel some dissatisfaction, they have never felt strongly enough to *"expend [their] own time or energy"* on protest. Another suggested that the effort required to spend one's free days protesting was a disincentive, and that many young people are *"tired and don't have the capacity to go out to protest"*. Another dimension that was considered was the lack of organisational networks. Several students admitted that they were unaware whether political student groups and civic organisations existed on their campuses. Because most interviewees had never actively sought to participate in protest, their testimonies are not sufficient to understand the true accessibility of organisational resources – more research on this factor is necessary. Overall, these findings suggest that material resource constraints such as the lack of time, money and energy do not particularly hinder protest participation. However, they interact with existing perceptions of protest inefficacy and play a part in the opportunity-cost calculations which inform behavioural decisions.

2.9 "If Things Got Worse, Maybe": Catalysts for Participation

Although the general consensus was that most could not see themselves joining protests, several students indicated a conditional willingness to partake under certain circumstances, such as an economic or political crisis. They recognised the legitimacy of protest itself but were unconvinced of the current necessity and benefit of attending a protest. This suggests that the presence of a strong catalyst is required to trigger mobilisation. When asked to determine what kind of issues they would consider protesting for, responses varied – some could not think of any – but there were repeated mentions of economic issues, such as tax increases and new policies that could directly affect livelihoods. Another suggested that restrictions on youth subcultures, such as gaming and manga, could generate widespread youth anger and mobilisation. Other catalyst conditions that emerged was peer influence, existing leadership and visible momentum. Many respondents shared that they would be more likely to join a protest if invited by friends or if they could see that large enough public support had been mobilised:

> *"If participating meant that my involvement would have an effect … then I'd probably join. But if it's just a small group that can't really achieve anything … then the benefit of me being there isn't that significant. Basically, if a fairly large movement had already been created, I guess I could be part of it."*

This overcomes the collectivist cultural logic by making protest participation an activity of group harmony rather than a rebellious disruption, while simultaneously reducing social risk and perceptions of inefficacy. Additionally, some students mentioned the significance of a pioneer or leadership figure who could articulate clear demands and rally youth. Student D commented that *"if there were some kind of leader to guide [young people], maybe they would act"*. However when asked if they would personally become that person, they testified *"no, never"*; most youth appear to be content to wait for some kind of figure to eventually appear. Therefore, protest mobilisation appears to be highly conditional, where disengagement persists because these catalysts are currently not present.

Perceived Order of Significance

At the end of each interview, six students were asked to rank the following factors in order of significance as barriers: a) Perceived Lack of Grievances and Protest Urgency; b) Social and Cultural Norms; c) Education: Limited Civic Socialisation; d) Social Media Backlash; e) Time and Resource Costs; f) Historical Memory. An average of the results produced the following ranking:

1. Perceived Lack of Grievances and Protest Urgency (2.00)
2. Social and Cultural Norms (2.83)
3. Social Media Backlash (3.17)
4. Education: Limited Civic Socialisation (3.67)
5. Time and Resource Costs (4.50)
6. Historical Memory (4.83)

While not intended as definitive quantitative data, this exercise offers an illustrative indication of how participants viewed the relative importance of factors discussed in this paper. The results reinforce the qualitative analysis; the absence of urgent, widely shared grievances and the influence of cultural norms emerge as the most significant obstacles to mobilisation, whereas resource concerns and historical memory appear marginal in hindering Japanese youths' protest activity.

Discussion & Conclusion

This paper pursues a comprehensive study of the political disengagement of Japanese youth, examining both their attitudes towards protest and the broader theoretical explanations for low participation. Cross-national data from the World Values Survey confirms that Japan is an outlier among regional East Asian democracies: across nine indicators of civic engagement (attending peaceful protest, signing petitions, boycotting etc.) Japanese youth consistently reported the lowest rates of participation and willingness, alongside high rates of rejection. The literature on social movement theory and the qualitative interview findings bring clarity to this phenomenon. A majority of students indicated negative impressions of protest, describing how protest appears legitimate in principle yet ineffective in practice. The explanation for disinterest was found in two key conditions: first, a perceived lack of immediate grievances to justify action, and second, the presence of collectivist cultural norms that stigmatise overt political expression. In other words, youths fail to recognise urgent issues that necessitate collective action, while protest itself is viewed as socially risky and undesirable. Secondary factors further compound these barriers. A fear of social media backlash deters participation by posing direct reputational consequences, and weak civic socialisation

contributes to a widespread lack of political literacy and sense of inefficacy. Meanwhile historical memory and resource constraints have some but limited influence on protest participation. In this sense, the causes of disengagement are multiple and interdependent.

While the insights are substantial, it is necessary to address the limitations of this study. First, the quantitative data was based on a relatively small survey sample for Japanese youth, while the inclusion of an additional "don't know" response category complicates its validity. Furthermore, the qualitative data is drawn from a limited sample of seven university students in Tokyo, many who are attending prestigious institutions, and therefore cannot claim to represent the full demographic diversity of Japanese youth. Semi-structured interviews are also susceptible to biases, where participants' responses may reflect the interviewers' questions. Moreover, the relative significance of each explanatory factor is yet to be empirically tested; the insights concluded are grounded in the author's interpretation. Nonetheless, the integration of historical context, theory, survey data, and interviews is a necessary starting point to understand the complexity of youth protest culture in Japan.

— Should we be pessimistic or optimistic about the future of youth protest in Japan?

On one hand, the evidence points to stagnant attitudes. Structural and cultural barriers to mobilisation remain entrenched in the near future. Given the historical diminishment of large-scale protest since the 1970s, it is easy to conclude that Japan's protest culture is in terminal decline.

However, the historical cases of Anpo and SEALDs propose a nuanced narrative. While Anpo was thought to be the turning point in widespread protest, SEALDs demonstrated that under the right conditions, young people can and will mobilise. Insights from the interviews affirm this possibility; while students expressed little interest to protest under current circumstances, several indicated a conditional willingness to mobilise in the face of an emergency or if movements garnered visible momentum. Japanese youth simply require a catalyst to frame grievances as urgent and widely shared.

Recent political developments also signal a potential shift in youth apathy. The House of Councillors elections in August 2025 recorded an overall voter turnout rate of 58.51%, exceeding the previous rate of 52.05% in 2022.[75] The turnout for 18 and 19-year olds was 41.74%, a 6.32 point increase from the previous election in 2022. Most notably, this election saw the collapse of the LDP's long-held majority and gains for new right-wing populist parties, reflecting growing disillusionment and fatigue by younger voters.[76] These outcomes illustrate the current fluidity of Japan's political context and represent potential new opportunities for mobilisation.

Amidst Japan's ageing society, where older generations dominate both the electorate and policymaking, the voices of youth risk becoming increasingly marginalised. In this context, protest and other forms of civic engagement are especially important mechanisms to articulate underrepresented interests. Cultivating an environment where protest is viewed as both legitimate and effective is therefore vital – not only for the health of Japanese democracy today, but for strengthening the political agency of a generation whose voices will determine the country's future.

[75] Yomiuri Shimbun Online, "参議院選挙:［データで振り返る　参院選］18・19歳　投票率41・74％," Yomiuri Shimbun Online, July 27, 2025, https://www.yomiuri.co.jp/election/sangiin/20250727-OYT1T50176/.
[76] Shaimaa Khalil, "Sanseito: How a Far-Right 'Japanese First' Party Gained New Ground," *BBC*, July 21, 2025, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly80nnjnv5o.

References

Almond, Gabriel A, and Sidney Verba. *The Civic Culture : Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963.

Ando, Takemasa. *Japan's New Left Movements: Legacies for Civil Society*. Routledge, 2014.

Badie, Bertrand, Dirk Berg-Schlosser, and Leonardo Morlino. "Civic Culture." In *International Encyclopedia of Political Science International Encyclopedia of Political Science*, 2011. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412994163.

Baret, Nicole. "SEALDs: Where Are They Now?" Shingetsu News Agency, September 13, 2021. https://shingetsunewsagency.com/2021/09/13/sealds-where-are-they-now/.

Bryson, Alex, Ryo Kambayashi, Susumu Kuwahara, Akie Nakamura, and Jacques Wels. "What Is Happening to Unionization in Japan?" *IZA Institute of Labour Economics Discussion Paper Series*, no. 18010 (2025). https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5361073.

Cantoni, Davide, Andrew Kao, David Y. Yang, and Noam Yuchtman. "Protests." *National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) Working Paper Series*, 2023.

Cassegård, Carl. "Lovable Anarchism: Campus Protest in Japan from the 1990s to Today." *Culture Unbound* 6, no. 2 (April 17, 2014): 361–82. https://doi.org/10.3384/cu.2000.1525.146361.

Chenoweth, Erica, Barton H Hamilton, Hedwig Lee, Nicholas W Papageorge, Stephen Roll, and Matthew Zahn. "Who Protests, What Do They Protest, and Why?" *National Bureau of Economic Research Discussion Papers*, April 1, 2022. https://doi.org/10.3386/w29987.

Chowdhury, Intifar. "Why Young People in Asia Are Disengaging from Democracy." East Asia Forum, October 7, 2024. https://eastasiaforum.org/2024/10/08/why-young-people-in-asia-are-disengaging-from-democracy/.

Ciżewska-Martyńska, Elżbieta. "The Cultural Perspective in Social Movement Theories and Past Research on the Solidarity Movement." *Polish Sociological Review*, no. 201 (2018): 27–45. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26449221.

DeepL. "DeepL Translator." Deepl.com, 2024. https://www.deepl.com/en/translator.

Doherty, Brian. "Protest." In *The Oxford Handbook of British Politics*, 719–34. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199230952.003.0039.

Dubrow, Joshua K. "Why Men Rebel: Ted Robert Gurr, Civil Strife, and Relative Deprivation." Political Inequality: A Blog Since 2010, September 24, 2022. https://politicalinequality.org/2022/09/24/why-men-rebel-ted-robert-gurr-civil-strife-and-relative-deprivation/.

Falch, Daniel, and Christopher D. Hammond. "Social Activism and 'Spaces of Autonomy' in the Context of Japan: An Analysis of the Student Movement Known as SEALDs." *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 18, no. 4 (May 12, 2020): 435–48. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2020.1762167.

Goodwin, Jeff, and James M. Jasper. "Caught in a Winding, Snarling Vine: The Structural Bias of Political Process Theory." *Sociological Forum* 14, no. 1 (1999): 27–54. https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1021684610881.

Gordon, Andrew. "The Crowd and Politics in Imperial Japan: Tokyo 1905-1918." *Past & Present*, no. 121 (1988): 141–70. https://www.jstor.org/stable/650914.

Gurr, Ted Robert. *Why Men Rebel*. 1970. Reprint, Routledge, 2015.

Haig, Christian Stirling, Katherine Schmidt, and Samuel Brannen. "The Age of Mass Protests: Understanding an Escalating Global Trend." www.csis.org, March 2, 2020. https://www.csis.org/analysis/age-mass-protests-understanding-escalating-global-trend.

Hamaya, Hiroshi. *Shashin No Seiki, Shashin Taiken 66-Nen (Century of Photography, 66 Years of Photography)*. 1997. Photography. Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography.

Hiroe, Saruya. “Protests and Democracy in Japan: The Development of Movement Fields and the 1960 Anpo Protests.” PhD Dissertation, 2012.

Ikeda, Kenichi, and Sean E. Richey. “Japanese Network Capital: The Impact of Social Networks on Japanese Political Participation.” *Political Behavior* 27, no. 3 (September 2005): 239–60. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-005-5512-0.

Japanese Trade Union Confederation (Rengo). “Opinion Survey on Social Movements and Labour Unions 2021,” April 27, 2021. https://www.jtuc-rengo.or.jp/info/chousa/data/20210427.pdf?43.

Jesty, Justin. “‘Tokyo 1960: Days of Rage & Grief’ by MIT Visualizing Cultures.” MIT.edu, 2012. https://visualizingcultures.mit.edu/tokyo_1960/anp2_essay01.html.

Kahan, Kim. “Fighting for Modern Japan: The University Protests of 1968–69.” Tokyo Weekender, April 27, 2023. https://www.tokyoweekender.com/art_and_culture/japanese-culture/japan-university-protests-1968/.

Kapur, Nick. *Japan at the Crossroads: Conflict and Compromise after Anpo*. Harvard University Press, 2018.

Khalil, Shaimaa. “Sanseito: How a Far-Right ‘Japanese First’ Party Gained New Ground.” *BBC*, July 21, 2025. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly80nnjnv5o.

Kobayashi, Tetsuro, Asako Miura, Dani Madrid-Morales, and Hiroshi Shimizu. “Why Are Politically Active People Avoided in Countries with Collectivistic Culture? A Cross-Cultural Experiment.” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 52, no. 4 (April 13, 2021): 002202212110086. https://doi.org/10.1177/00220221211008653.

Kuo, Lily, and Christy Choi. “Hong Kong Protests Descend into Chaos during Citywide Strike.” The Guardian, August 5, 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/05/hong-kong-riot-police-fire-teargas-at-protesters-as-two-cars-ram-crowds.

Lichbach, Mark. *The Rebel’s Dilemma*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995. https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.13970.

McAdam, Doug. “Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970.” *The Journal of American History* 70, no. 2 (September 1983): 455. https://doi.org/10.2307/1900286.

McCarthy, John D., and Mayer N. Zald. “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory.” *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 6 (1977): 1212–41. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2777934.

McCurry, Justin. “Fukushima Protesters Urge Japan to Abandon Nuclear Power.” *The Guardian*, September 19, 2011, sec. World news. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/sep/19/fukushima-protesters-japan-nuclear-power.

McLean, Iain, and Alistair McMillan. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics (3 Ed.)*. *Oxford Reference*. Oxford University Press, 2009. https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095613999.

O’Day, Robin. “Differentiating SEALDs from Freeters, and Precariats: The Politics of Youth Movements in Contemporary Japan.” *Asia-Pacific Journal* 13, no. 50 (September 2015). https://doi.org/10.1017/s1557466015021865.

Ortiz, Isabel, Sara Burke, Mohamed Berrada, and Hernán Saenz Cortés. “An Analysis of World Protests 2006–2020.” *World Protests*, November 4, 2021, 13–81. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-88513-7_2.

Pekkanen, Robert. *Japan’s Dual Civil Society: Members without Advocates*. Stanford University Press, 2006.

Rees, Anna. “Digital and Online Activism.” Digital for Good | RESET.ORG, August 6, 2013. https://en.reset.org/digital-and-online-activism/.

Regan, Helen, and Eunseo Jeong. “South Korea Martial Law ‘a Painful Reminder of How Easily Democracy Can Be Threatened,’ Protesters Say.” CNN, December 4, 2024. https://edition.cnn.com/2024/12/04/asia/protesters-south-korea-martial-law-intl.

Roggeband, Conny, and Bert Klandermans. *Handbook of Social Movements across Disciplines*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017.

Sakamoto, Haruya, Kyoko Tominaga, and Yusuke Kanazawa. “How Do Negative Evaluations of Past Social Movements Affect Political Participation.” *The Nonprofit Review* 23, no. 1&2 (2024): 47–57. https://doi.org/10.11433/janpora.NPR-D-22-00013.

SEALDs. “SEALDs (Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy).” www.sealds.com, 2015. https://web.archive.org/web/20160711004928/http://www.sealds.com/.

Slater, David H., Chiharu Takano, Love Kindstrand, Robin O’Day, and Satsuki Uno. “SEALDs (Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy): Research Note on Contemporary Youth Politics in Japan - the Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus.” The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus, September 14, 2015. https://apjjf.org/david_h_-slater/4375.

Tarrow, Sidney. *Power in Movement*. *Cambridge University Press*, 1998. https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511813245.

Teixeira, Camila. “Youth, Protests and the Polycrisis.” Unicef Innocenti: Global Office of Research and Foresight, March 2024. https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/7761/file/UNICEF-Innocenti-Youth-Protests-and-the-Polycrisis-%20report.pdf.

The Constitution of Japan. The Constitution of Japan (1946). https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html.

The Mainichi. “Photo Special: After Creating New Waves in Japan’s Civil Movement, SEALDs Dissolved - the Mainichi.” The Mainichi, August 15, 2016. https://mainichi.jp/english/graphs/20160815/hpe/00m/0in/001000g/20160815hpe00m0in001000q.

The Nippon Foundation. “Awareness Survey of 18-Year-Olds.” The Nippon Foundation, October 26, 2024. https://en.nippon-foundation.or.jp/what/projects/culture/eighteen-survey.

Tilly, Charles. *From Mobilisation to Revolution*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1978.

Timonen, Meri Tuuli Elina. “Between Power and Protest: The Japan Times and Anpo Protests in 1960.” Master’s Thesis, 2020.

Tominaga, Kyoko. “Why Are Japanese Youth Distancing Themselves from Social Activism?” nippon.com, March 30, 2021. https://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/d00668/.

Wichuta Teeratanabodee. “Thailand’s 2020–2021 Pro-Democracy Protests: Diversity, Conflict, and Solidarity.” *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, September 29, 2023, 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2023.2258131.

World Values Survey. “WVS Database, Wave 7 (2017--2022).” www.worldvaluessurvey.org, 2022. https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV7.jsp.

Yabe, Shinta. “Shinta Yabe Photography.” Tumblr, 2019. https://shintayabe.tumblr.com/.

Yomiuri Shimbun Online. “参議院選挙:［データで振り返る 参院選］18・19歳 投票率41・74％.” Yomiuri Shimbun Online, July 27, 2025. https://www.yomiuri.co.jp/election/sangiin/20250727-OYT1T50176/.

Appendix

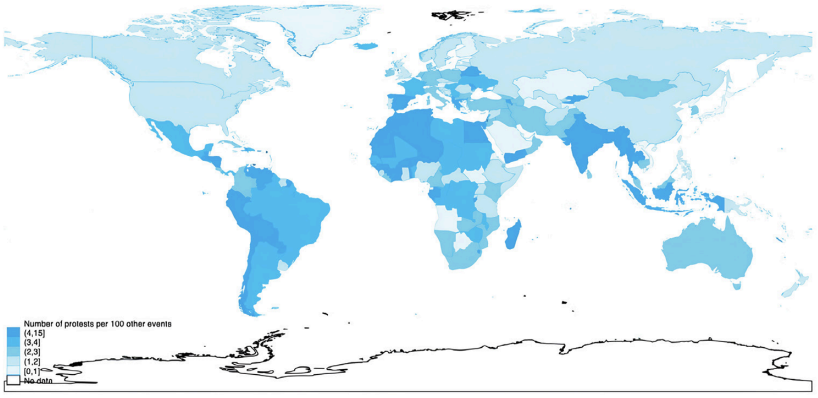

fig 5. Visualisation of cross-national data of protest occurrence (measured by protest per 100 other events) from ICEWS in Cantoni et al. (2023)

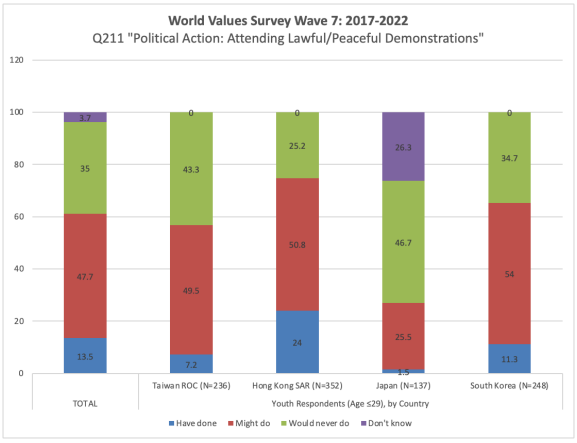

fig 6. Youth responses to "Political Action: Attending Lawful / Peaceful Demonstrations", by country

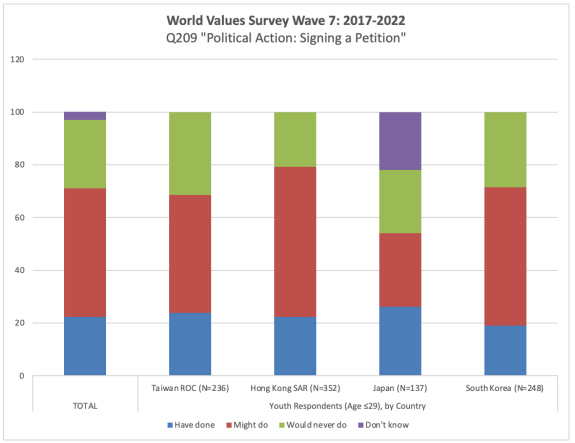

fig 7. Youth responses to "Political Action: Signing a Petition", by country

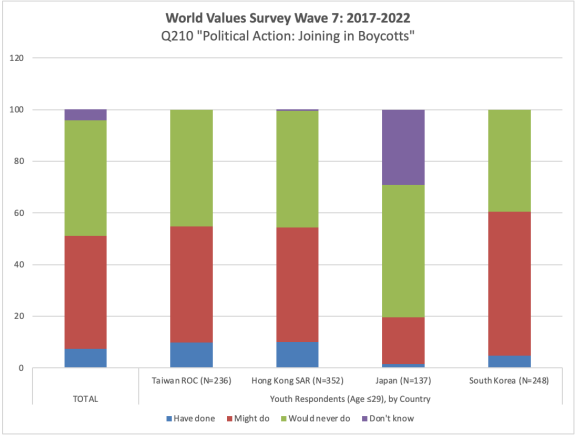

fig 8. Youth responses to "Political Action: Joining in Boycotts", by country

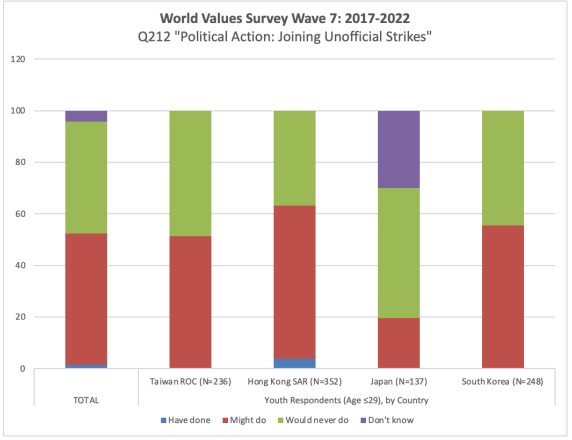

fig 9. Youth responses to "Political Action: Joining Unofficial Strikes", by country

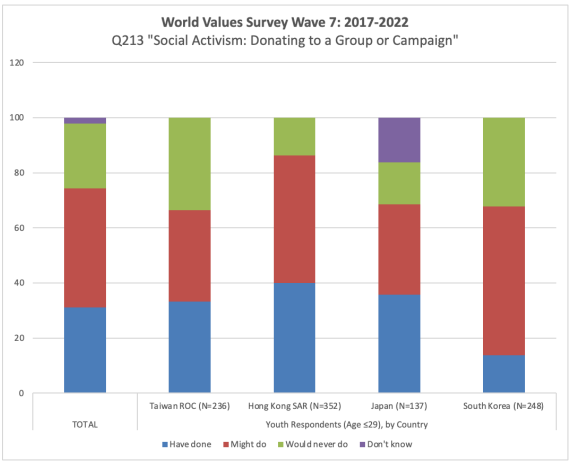

fig 10. Youth responses to "Social Activism: Donating to a Group or Campaign", by country

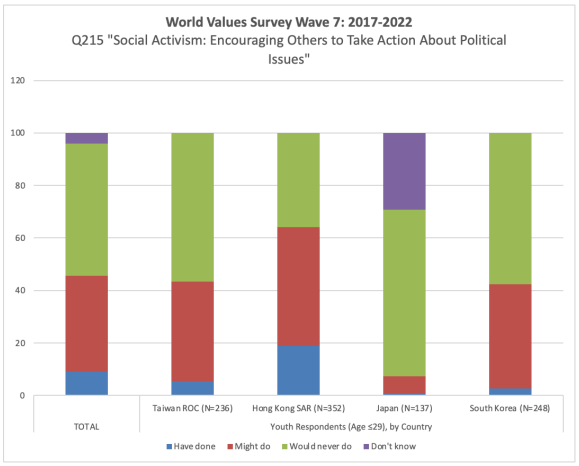

fig 11. Youth responses to "Social Activism: Encouraging Others To Take Action About Political Issues", by country

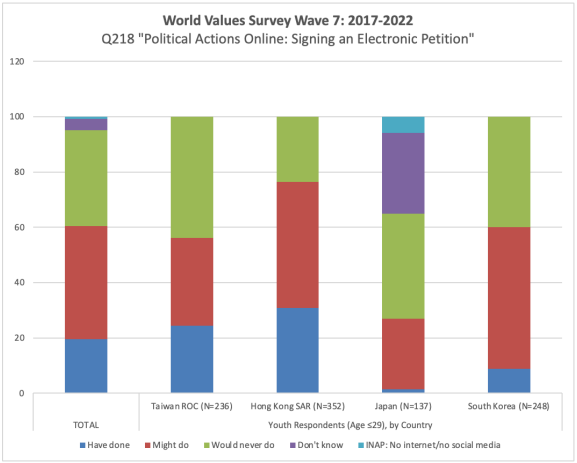

fig 12. Youth responses to "Political Actions Online: Signing an Electronic Petition", by country

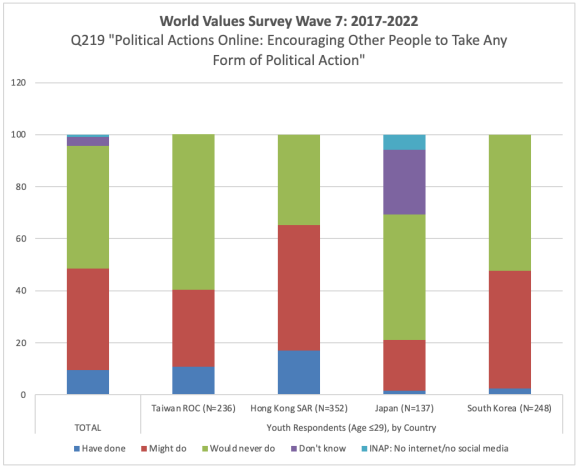

fig 13. Youth responses to "Political Actions Online: Encouraging Other People to Take Any Form of Political Action", by country

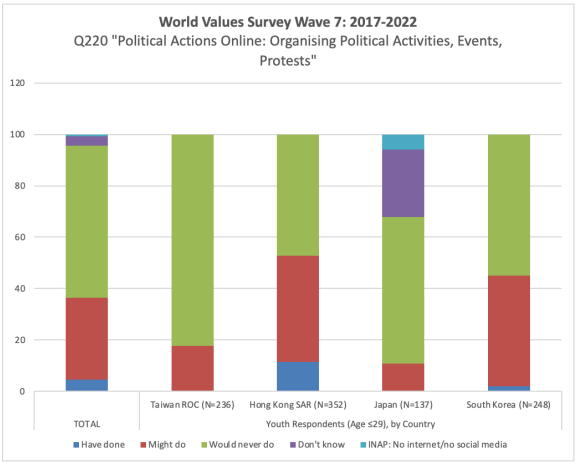

fig 14. Youth responses to "Political Actions Online: Organising Political Activities, Events, Protests", by country