



Japan and the G20: Globalisation of Home

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Executive Summary

Since their conception, the G-summits have acted as a platform of opportunity for global leaders to come together to discuss relevant international issues. The decisions taken at them have impacted the global community and have also offered the host countries an opportunity to project their domestic issues into the international spotlight. This policy brief explores Japan's levels and methods of engagement with the G-summits and argues that they have used them as an opportunity to gain international legitimacy for domestic issues. The case study of Osaka could signal the inception of higher level engagement for Japan at the G20.

Japanese Engagement: Background and Context

Since the turn of the century, G-summits have become increasingly important in terms of their [domestic reception](#) and Japan is no exception. The country has utilised its influence as a G7 member and host nation to seek international validation for a plethora of issues. The most successful of these

is the [abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korea](#), the [recognition of the Ainu people](#) as the official indigenous people of Japan, the proposed [closure of American bases](#) in Okinawa and the induction of [Abenomics](#).

By highlighting these issues, the Japanese government was able to gain legitimacy from the international community at the G-summits. It is the sole representative of Asia during the G7 (and was at the G8) and continues to benefit from the vast scope of media coverage, soft power *quid pro quos* and trade relationships intrinsic to the summits. Until recently, the G7 members have continued to work toward increasing open trade relationships among other things and the Japanese government has been successful in gaining support when guising domestic issues as regional ones due to the [shared values of democracy, individual liberty and social advancement](#).

By contrast, not all G20 countries abide by the democratic and liberal status quo. China's membership often results in [Japan's issues being overshadowed](#), with whom the

Japanese have had enduring historical tensions. Even at the Osaka Summit, negotiations were tainted by the US-China trade war. As a result, Japan has been [reluctant to fully commit to and engage in the G20 framework](#), where its domestic concerns have struggled to find a secure footing.

So, what does Japan want?

Japan seeks to further global cooperation through [free trade and multilateralism](#). It promotes the G20's initial role as the '[premier forum for international economic cooperation](#)' and seeks to reap the benefits. However, as dichotomies form regarding protectionist policies in both the global North and South, chairing a successful G20 becomes increasingly difficult. The Osaka Summit represented an opportunity for Japan to demonstrate its multilateral leadership and increase its international prestige on the global stage.

Maintaining mutually beneficial bilateral relationships has previously proved trying due to a 'revolving door' of Japanese prime ministers. Between 1972 and 2012, the average tenure in office was a mere [588 days](#) for Japanese PMs, resulting in weak and unstable leadership. Deviating from this trajectory, and now in his seventh consecutive year in office, Abe Shinzo has utilised his longevity to develop effective inter-state relationships with myriad world leaders. [Tokyo has](#)

[extended the G20 invitation](#) to a further eight countries, including Spain and the Netherlands in an effort to ensure that Japan's economic interests continue to be heard in Europe as the UK prepares to leave the European Union.

Osaka, which is set to host the World Expo 2025, and its businesses are invested in seeing the G20 succeed. The city presents itself as the vanguard of Japan's Society 5.0 initiative – a digitalisation of society. It has already achieved many of the [United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals](#), is a cultural heritage site and also continues to act as a centre for Japanese commerce (and e-commerce). Showcasing Osaka in the run up to the [World Expo](#) will draw international media and tourist interest, thus providing an opportunity for Japan to share its vision for a global, and domestically beneficial, future. If Society 5.0 is successful, then as a pioneer in robotics and Artificial Intelligence research, the next wave of technological advancement in the global market may present Japan with an opportunity to assert itself once again as a regional leader in Asia.

Japan's Performance in Osaka

The initial levels of success of the Osaka Summit are debatable. While the majority of the G20 member countries stand beside Japan in its promotion of economic cooperation,

their unity has less to do with Abe's performance as chair and more to do with the risk of economic disaster should Trump continue to impose further tariffs on Chinese goods. Abe stressed the role of the G20 as the catalyst to pull up the world economy and reaffirmed Japan's commitment to the body's move towards the digitalisation of the economy, with a consensus to be reached by the leadership by 2020.

Abe declared [innovation as the locomotive of the economy](#) with a focus on (Japanese) robotics as the key to both economic growth and resolving many existing global social issues. An assortment of Japanese robotic technology was available to view and interact with at the summit's [Innovation Lounge](#) as testimony to the country's readiness to engage in the future. Japan also agreed to engage in a more open dialogue with China, developing coordinated interests of the two countries in a bid to increase security and scientific innovation in the region.

Positive engagement with G7 countries alone will no longer be sufficient. In an age of globalisation, engaging with future G20 summits will become imperative to increasing Japan's international standing. Japan should continue to develop bilateral and personal relationships with countries that lie outside of the G7 to bolster against protectionism at a time where the [future of world trade hangs in the](#)

[balance](#). Encouraging multilateralism and gathering support for free trade agreements will be in Japan's best interest, especially if its bid to become the next world leader in robotics and environmental innovation should not be fully realised. By improving diplomatic relations and exploring more globalist policies the Japanese will reduce the risk of losing their voice in international discussions.

The government has received international criticism for its [reactive policies](#), but in Osaka it has demonstrated its ability to create and showcase innovative methods for environmental protection. By continuing to invest in and share innovative technologies the country can strengthen its international standing. Abe expressed a desire for Japan to [lead the world in the reduction of marine plastics](#), which was discussed in detail during the Karuizawa Ministerial Meeting prior to the summit. The government also made a point of showcasing its [plastic waste initiative in South East Asia](#) during the summit, as a documentary-style video which was shown on screens throughout the media centre and during official transport and the official Partners Programme included a symposium titled 'Oceans - A Precious Resource for our Lives'.

The official communiqué urged the adoption of the 'Osaka Blue Ocean Vision' across the wider international community with the aim of reducing

additional pollution by marine plastic litter to zero by 2050. Even if implementation methods are vague, Japan has been [recognised as a world leader](#) in environmental protection action. For future engagement with the G20 to be effective, though, it must continue to be proactive in environmental innovation. However, it is the effectiveness with which these innovations are enacted that will be key if Japan is to re-establish itself as a regional, and perhaps even a world leader in, especially, technological practices geared towards better environmental protection.

The Japanese elections which are scheduled for later in July were not mentioned during the Osaka Summit, despite the fact that this would have been directly in line with national interests. Despite the G20 members remaining divided by issues related to protectionism, from a Japanese point of view the Osaka Summit should be seen as a tentative victory. Japan was able to position itself as a global leader in robotics as well as strengthen its bilateral agreements with G20 members, [including China](#). Whether or not these resolutions will be long-standing is yet to be seen. However, by

providing the momentum to incorporate new environmental initiatives into the G20 despite a conflict of interests between countries, Abe demonstrated a strong front to the Japanese people: an approach that is likely to be rewarded in the upcoming elections.

In the decades since the Second World War Japan has continued to benefit from increasing levels of global cooperation, especially in terms of trade deals and open economic policies, which aided its development into an economic superpower. However, the negative effects of escalating trade frictions between China and the US are beginning to be [reflected in the global markets](#). With Britain's role as Japan's gateway to European trade heading toward a permanent lockout, it is within Japan's best interest to continue to work toward the protection of the international order, primarily through the continued alignment of domestic and global policies.

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