

Research Material
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Democratic Backsliding in Recipient Countries: Aid Trends and KOICA's Strategic Responses

The aim of this study is twofold: firstly, to analyze the present status of ODA for democracy in accordance with the political systems of recipient countries, and secondly, to draw implications for the setting of an effective direction for KOICA's assistance.

For this purpose, this study first examines the patterns of change in political systems in recipient countries through a literature review and summarizes the main findings of the 34th OECD GovNet Plenary and interviews with representatives of major donor institutions on the “key discussions on the phenomenon of de-democratization in the context of development assistance.” Secondly, this study reviews the development cooperation policy/strategy documents of DAC donor countries to examine the status of the explicit inclusion of democracy in each country's strategic documents. Finally, to understand the status of ODA for democracy by political system, an analysis of the number of assistance programs of DAC donor countries was conducted using OECD DAC data and v-dem ERT data from 2011 to 2022. □

The key findings indicate that, despite the prevalent emphasis on democratic values, the donor countries in question tend to prioritize such values as universal principles, rather than explicitly articulating them within their respective development cooperation policy and strategic documents. Moreover, an analysis of the historical record of ODA for democracy provides evidence that, while donor aid to authoritarian states is greater, there is no significant variation in the prioritization of aid sectors, types, and channels depending on the political system.

It can be observed that ODA for democracy projects account for the highest proportion of DAC donors' efforts to achieve SDG16. Furthermore, DAC donors tend to focus on projects through NGOs in the field of direct democracy, irrespective of the political system of the recipient country. By contrast, Korean government and KOICA place considerable emphasis on statebuilding ODA, with a relatively modest allocation to democracy projects. Their ODA for democracy comprises a substantial number of training initiatives in the domain of women's and human rights, identified through government-to-government channels and independent of the political system of the recipient country.

In light of these findings, this study puts forth two potential avenues for KOICA's ODA for democracy, with a particular emphasis on aligning its assistance with the prevailing political systems in recipient countries.