



# Building Resilience Through Social Ties: COVID-19 and 3.11

*The following is a transcription of Asia in Washington's podcast episode "Building Resilience Through Social Ties: COVID-19 and 3.11" featuring Dr. Daniel Aldrich. It was created using a speech recognition program with edits made by hosts and Reischauer Policy Research Fellows, Jada Fraser and Adriana Reinecke, sound editor, Lauren Mosely, and, Producer, Neave Denny. You can find us on [Apple Podcasts](#), [Google Podcasts](#), and [Soundcloud](#). To keep up to date with upcoming Reischauer Center events and programs, please follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#).*

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Jada Fraser

Welcome to Asia in Washington, the podcast examining key questions animating debate in DC on the Indo-Pacific region. I'm Jada Fraser, here with my co-host Adri Reinecke, recording in Washington D.C. at the Edwin O. Reischauer Center for East Asian Studies at Johns Hopkins SAIS. You can find a transcript of today's episode on the Reischauer Center website at [www.reischauercenter.org/podcasts](http://www.reischauercenter.org/podcasts).

Adriana Reinecke

Today we're joined by Dr. Daniel Aldrich, Professor of Political Science, Public Policy and Urban Affairs and Director of the Security and Resilience Studies program at Northeastern University. An award-winning author, Dr. Aldrich has published five books, including *Building Resilience* and *Black Wave*, as well as more than 70 peer-reviewed articles and op-eds for the New York Times, CNN, and Asahi Shimbun, along with appearing on popular media outlets such as CNBC, MSNBC, NPR and the Huffington Post. Dr. Aldrich has spent more than five years carrying out fieldwork in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, and his research has been funded by the National Science Foundation, the Fulbright Foundation and the Abe Foundation.

Jada Fraser

Today we'll be speaking with Dr. Aldrich about the important role social ties play in disasters and shocks. Dr. Aldrich, we're really excited to have you on the Asia in Washington podcast today. Your seminar at the Reischauer Center generated quite a robust discussion, and we're



really looking forward to diving deeper into some of those questions that were raised in today's episode.

Daniel Aldrich

Thank you so much for having me. It's an honor to be here.

Adriana Reinecke

So, to start off, I thought it would be helpful to bring our listeners up to speed on some of what you discussed with us in your talk. You had described three types of social capital that shape responses during and following major disasters and shocks. To begin, can you describe for our listeners, what those are and how they interact to influence disaster response and resilience?

Daniel Aldrich

Yeah, I think all of us recognize we're buoyed and generous with our networks of friends. We all have friends nearby, friends on the internet, friends from back home, friends from school. But social scientists really try to pin down the different types of connections we have using three main categories, and we call those *bonding*, *bridging*, and *linking ties*. And 'bonding ties' connect people who are quite similar. So, if you sound like, look like, listen to the same music as someone, probably that's a bonding tie. So, the friends that you grew up with, a family that you spent your childhood with, the people that came from the same schools, probably those are bonding ties. The fancy word for that is 'homophilous ties': people who are similar ethnically, religiously, and so forth. The good thing about humanity is we go beyond those bonding ties to make connections with people different than us. We call those 'bridging ties.' And, funnily enough, those often come through institutions – churches, synagogues, mosques, clubs, schools, even workplaces. And these are chances for us to meet people who have a different way of thinking, speaking, [and] understanding the world.

Where bonding and bridging ties are horizontal ties – people with the same levels of power – the third type of connection we call a 'linking tie.' It's a vertical tie between me, a normal person, and someone with power and authority. So, maybe the dean there at SAIS, or maybe I know someone in FEMA up in the hierarchy. And those three different types of ties are so critical during shocks and disasters. This might be as a minor thing like a fire in our neighborhood, to a major event like an earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdowns. And what happens is, those ties that we have really step in and help us when we're in a crisis.

So, imagine, for example, if there's a car accident in a neighborhood, or there's a fire. Neighbors living nearby would immediately go out to the street, I hope, go help the person out of the car, put out the fire, if there's a fire, alert the authorities. So, well before the authorities arrive, local members, people, residents nearby, people involved in the accident or the disaster, they're



helping each other, right? And that's the very first type of connection that we see. People on the scene with those connections can save those lives well before the firefighters or police officers – people that we need – but again, they can't be everywhere, right?

Other ways that those help us is, in the long term, our mental health is really strengthened by having people in our lives who help us feel that we're not going through something bad alone. You know, whether it's an evacuation or even a long-haul COVID symptom holder – like some of my students right now, who can't come to class, can't necessarily walk – having those friends who check in on them, who send them gifts, who send them funny memes; those are just ways of letting people know, in the long term, that people were thinking about them. And it's funny, those kinds of ties, those kinds of strengthening bonding ties might actually be as important as other types of medical care. There's a lot of studies right now on loneliness – people who lack these ties – and how devastating that can be to our health, actually; mental and physical health.

And finally, those linking ties, we mentioned the vertical ties, those are so important because oftentimes information and resources come from people in authority, right? So, someone who has a map of my entire region can see more than I can about the vulnerable areas, and can guide me and my colleagues to safe ground if there's a flood coming, for example. But also, of course, people in power and authority often have access to money, to resources, to rebuilding equipment. You know, many times a whole area is devastated, but certain areas seem to bounce back quicker. And our research shows those are often areas which have stronger vertical ties to people in power and authority.

Jada Fraser

Thanks for that really great explanation of social ties, Dr. Aldrich, and you've conducted in-depth research on the role of social ties in Japan, both in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima reactor incident, and then more recently, with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. So, both of these constitute shocks, but they're shocks of different natures. Did you observe that the impact of stronger or weaker horizontal or vertical ties held across both cases? Or did the fundamental differences between these two cases lead to different outcomes?

Daniel Aldrich

Yeah, this is a great question more broadly, right? Do the same factors work differently under different conditions? And the cool thing about these kinds of social ties is, in a sense, how universal their effect is, right? So, whether it was the Fukushima reactor, or the COVID ongoing pandemic, in both cases having stronger bonding, bridging, and linking ties was protective. Meaning that, if you were someone who had a strong network — friends, family, maybe a faith-based community, people who lived nearby that you spent time with, you know friends you usually go out to drink with or whatever — those ties, both during a nuclear disaster, but also



during a disease pandemic, would help keep you safer. That would mean, for example, in the Fukushima case, you might have left earlier, because information got to you earlier. If you were immobile, if you were someone who was disabled and couldn't move, maybe someone got you out of your house in the Fukushima case. And with COVID, having those stronger ties meant both information, but also resources. And I've actually seen in a small community — I live in Brighton right near Boston — and in our neighborhood, individuals with stronger ties, especially the elderly and vulnerable who didn't want to leave, they immediately began getting deliveries of food, masks, medicines, toilet paper, a little note saying “How are you doing?” I see this all the time — those individuals who have those ties can feel safer, feel protected, and also keep away from the danger. So, too, in Fukushima, individuals with these stronger ties had better mental health. I think I mentioned this earlier, they're able to feel more secure, that they weren't the only ones going through this kind of shock.

Adriana Reinecke

So, one thing that really struck me in your talk is you did a very robust quantitative analysis of various factors that contributed to the recovery from the Fukushima incident. And I think, if I'm remembering correctly, your argument wasn't just that social ties mattered, but that, in fact, *ceteris paribus*, they might, in fact, be the most important factor in determining resilience. Is that correct?

Daniel Aldrich

Oh, yes, absolutely.

Adriana Reinecke

Can you talk just a little bit about that?

Daniel Aldrich

Let me step back a few steps and talk about disasters broadly, and how we respond. If you think about most disasters that people encounter, and in North America, where I live now, it's things like floods, let's say, heat waves and fires. And oftentimes the kind of things that we try to predict about future events, and then protect against, involve building something physical, right?

So, for example, here in Boston, we're talking about building a seawall, a very large and expensive seawall to protect us. Because if you've ever been in Boston during the high 'king tides,' as we call them, several of our southern stations area[s] flood, actually. So, those kinds of moments happened enough that the city of Boston wanted to protect against future shocks. Their first response was building this large-scale seawall. Now, we can talk more about the efficacy — does it actually work? I'm pretty skeptical, having a lot of data now from Japan and elsewhere, whether those actually protect us against the kind of events, like a flood, for example.



But more importantly, here's the thing: in past floods, our team has shown it's more important to be in a resilient community, defined by social ties, than one protected by very strong concrete walls. So, here immediately, we think about resilience, we think about mitigation of climate change, our first impulse often is to build what's most visible; to build things that you can point to as a politician; to build things there's a political economy for, right, if you're a construction firm. Of course, you're gonna support building more concrete walls if your job is building concrete walls. But it could be — and I think we're trying to make this case now strongly in our research — that what really drives resilience has really nothing to do with the physical structures in which you live, but rather the social infrastructure and the civic infrastructure in which we're engaged.

Adriana Reinecke

That's a perfect segue, actually, into our next question, which has to do with what are the strategies that you've identified for developing and fostering horizontal ties and what role can or should the government play in those?

Daniel Aldrich

Yeah, this is my favorite part about my job because, you know, of course disasters, unfortunately, are all too common. Pretty sad, honestly, that our societies continue to face shocks that were in a sense preventable, like the COVID deaths we're seeing right now. So, yes, there are a number of ways societies can build stronger social ties. Again, this web, this fabric of society that helps keep us safe.

So, the first always goes back to Mr. Fred Rogers. And when I was a kid, every morning I would watch his show, and he encouraged us all to be good neighbors. And the simple reality is, if you ask most people, whether it's Tokyo or Bangladesh, “Do you know your neighbors, can you name them, first and last names?” The reality is most people can't name those neighbors. And here's why that matters: those neighbors will be the first on the scene if there's a flood, or an earthquake, or a fire, or a heart attack. And you need to be able to trust people that you live near to get their cooperation during that shock. So, Mr. Rogers told us to be a good neighbor. Thanks to our lab's work, Australia now has a ‘Neighbor Day.’ Because of the number of shocks Australia faces, they know that they can't protect against all of them with physical infrastructure — roads, bridges, walls. But they need to build a society that will work together. So, that's the first thing: Mr. Rogers.

The next kind of idea we can think about is at the neighborhood level. And we call these the ‘NeighborFest Party.’ And right now, San Francisco will give you \$5,000 every year to hold a party in your neighborhood. Not because they like parties — they might — but because they



know there's big shocks coming in the future. They know there's an earthquake coming. And they can't retrofit every building in the city to be safe through that major shock. But what they can do is make sure each block, each area, has people who can work together and be ready to go. So that \$5,000, that party, we have to organize that as local residents: someone's gotta bring the guacamole, somebody's got to get the speakers, someone's got to get the kids' events. Just the fact of organizing itself requires building these kinds of ties.

Then, think more broadly, beyond the neighbor and the neighborhood, to the city. Most people now — I think something like over two thirds of the population — is moving into cities. So, that means we need to have cities that encourage the creation of these social ties. And by the way, Jane Jacobs — she was brilliant and she knew this 70 years ago — she fully recognized that cities have to be organic and spontaneous. Meaning, it cannot be that you tell people, here's where you play, here's where you work, here's where you eat; sort of the high modernism that we tried in Brasilia and other places in Brazil. Real cities need to have spaces for interaction. And we call those spaces 'social infrastructure,' which is a fancy way of saying a space anyone can go to and meet someone they haven't met before, or meet a friend of theirs, right?

So, think about parks, dog walking areas, libraries, outdoor spaces, patios, beer gardens, right? And really beautiful, amazing cities — I'm thinking right now, I just had the luxury, actually, of spending some time in places like Panama City, actually, last week; before that was in Rotterdam, before that I was spending some time in Denver. All of those cities feel comfortable, because they put a lot of work into places like parks, outdoor spaces, open amphitheaters, dog walking areas. So, it's not just a concrete jungle, but it's a place where you can bump into someone you've seen once or twice, you can meet a neighbor of yours for lunch, you can take a walk outside and feel safe, you're not going to get mugged, or, or hit by a car, right? You can ride your bike without fearing you're going to get in an accident. That's the third thing we're designing right now, is social infrastructure.

Two more things that we've tried and that also have worked: one is simply increasing civic engagement and democracy. We want people to be involved, not just in voting, which is the most obvious thing we should get more involved with, but every meeting on zoning or school board. That's also building horizontal and vertical ties. If the same five people show up to every single school board meeting, that's really not showing a lot of diversity of thought or interest, right? We need more of us to be involved. So, our lab is trying to make those meetings more accessible and more interactive.

One last approach we've had, has used what we call 'community currency,' or 'time banking,' right? Again, we want more volunteers, we want more people getting involved in communities. Oftentimes people tell us "Well, I would get involved, but I'm so busy with my whatever." So,



oftentimes, a way to get around that is to say, look, if you volunteer for an hour here in Boston, we'll give you ten Boston dollars, or in Ithaca, New York it'd be ten Ithaca dollars, or in Onagawa, Japan it would be 1000 Onagawa yen. And those are currencies that cannot be taken to national chains. They only work in the cities where they're created. And then they're only taken by local mom and pop stores, farmers markets, bodegas, right? It's the small local businesses that we want to support. So, I volunteer, I'm getting out of my house, spending more time with the community, the community gets my labor, and then I get paid in a way that also circulates locally. All of these things I've been talking about — community currencies, civic engagement, time banking, all that kind of stuff — all of them have been proven in the field to increase trust and interaction. So oftentimes, I talk to people that say, “Oh, you know, I think it's a great idea but my community is just, we're so not connected, we're so, you know, disparate. We're all students,” whatever, they have all these reasons. They believe that they're not engaged. And I showed them you know, no, it's not actually true. We can build and recreate and update all of these kinds of things. None of them are set in stone. All of them are things that can be increased through programming.

Adriana Reinecke

So, one thing that occurred to me as I was listening to you, as you were talking about social infrastructure. And I'm wondering, how has COVID interacted with these social spaces? Have we seen a resurgence of them? Or has it dampened them?

Daniel Aldrich

This is a fantastic question. In fact, we are doing this right now, literally, as I speak to you, we've had three different ways of investigating this question. We've had graduate students from the School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs walking the streets of Boston with their phones and their cameras, capturing and ground-truthing things going on in social infrastructure. That's one thing. We've also been using cell phone data to track, at the aggregate level, how places like the Boston Commons — our biggest park — and other public use areas are being used. And we've been doing interviews with people. And there's good news and bad news.

The good news is that, for some groups, there has been an increase in places like Boston Commons, other public park use. The bad news, though, is it's only some groups. I've heard often-times the ‘K-shaped recovery,’ right? People who were doing well, did better. People in the bottom leg of the ‘K,’ unfortunately, are doing worse. And this is another example: people who had white-collar jobs, better paid jobs, had the free time, had the flexibility to take a two hour walk in the park with their dog, or to meet a friend outside for coffee, or to do yoga in the park. And people who had to work that two jobs, or they're on Amazon delivering packages, or they're a nurse, they stayed away from those kinds of parks — either because they recognize the risks they face from the job that they already had, or because they simply didn't have the time —



unlike their white-collar counterparts. So, what we have seen is an increased use of these spaces, but unfortunately, not in an equitable kind of way.

Jada Fraser

So, kind of switching gears a little bit, and moving into how this has specific implications when we're looking at East Asia. Demographic decline is an issue that's facing many countries in East Asia. And I'm interested in how that phenomenon is potentially impacting social resilience in those societies?

Daniel Aldrich

Yeah, this is another fantastic question, which you know, we are studying right now as I talk. It's hard to say what's happening, as we lose population. One argument is — and this is pretty common — smaller groups are simply easier to find connections within. If you've got a class of 1000 students, as opposed to a class of five students, of course, in the class of five, everyone's gonna know your name and all your business. In the class of 1000, you might be able to go to the back of the classroom and never be noticed. For that reason, oftentimes, we assume smaller groups are better and easier to organize.

Now, the weird thing, of course, though, is — let's talk about Japan specifically — in Japan, something like 90% of cities are shrinking, except for the big cities. We've been tracking Tohoku, which is where the triple disaster struck over a decade ago. Every single city in Tohoku, except for two, has been losing population — even before the 3/11 disasters. The only one I can remember that hasn't been losing, is the biggest city in the area, which is Sendai. Sendai, which already had a million people before the shock, and now is having more and more people. Again, imagine if you were living on the coast, you see the coast now as a place of vulnerability because of the tsunami. Sendai is much further inland, of course, it's got more infrastructure, better schools for your kids, Tohoku University is there; all kinds of good stuff. So, what we're seeing in Japan is, yes, the country as a whole is shrinking. Yes, rural areas especially are shrinking, but they're going to cities, and the cities are actually growing.

So, we have these two contradictory trends: rural areas are getting smaller — so that, for example, if you're elderly there, yes, you probably have, let's say, fewer neighbors, but you know them better — but in contrast, the cities like Tokyo, Osaka, Sendai, those cities are actually growing. And now you're getting more and more people coming in who've never met before. And maybe that population that we mentioned before, where they're not going to meet their neighbor because they're too busy working; they're the bottom person on the totem pole, they're putting in 70-hour work weeks, they only go home to sleep. It's a weird thing, and honestly, we don't have enough research on this question, which is how does demographic decline affect overall resilience during these big shifts?





Adriana Reinecke

I'm curious, I know, you said that you're still in the midst of researching this, but between a rural area that's been largely drained of its youthful population and a highly concentrated urban area where people may be living one on top of the other but not know each other, do these pose equal problems for social ties or is one easier to ameliorate than the other?

Daniel Aldrich

So, actually, I've done research in communities, rural communities, that are shrinking, that are primarily elderly, including one in Masaki-cho, for example, up in Tohoku-dai. And Masaki-cho has one of our projects called 'Ibasha,' which has deliberately asked people over 65 if they want to have a social infrastructure space as the center for daily activities. So, they do yoga there, they do libraries for kids, they have skill classes, they have cooking there, they make food for people, they send out the elderly to go change light bulbs in homes nearby. So, that group is incredibly connected. That's a great example of a strong bonding set of ties with very few bridging or linking ties. That elderly community is incredibly cohesive. People know everyone else's name, if you don't show up for a meeting, they definitely go knock on your door, they're worried about you, which is great. But there aren't that many younger people, different speaking people, outside people that are there. And that Ibasha project isn't necessarily politically connected, either.

Let's go look at Tennoji-ku in Osaka, or Hiroo in Tokyo. Those communities, in contrast, are much more heterogeneous. You may have foreigners there; you may have people from different ethnic backgrounds, like burakumin, for example; or Zainichi Koreans, people who have been there for generations. You might have more people going to international schools, you might have businesses catering to a broader population. You have a halal population, for example. In an urban setting, you have more heterogeneity. That is good in the sense that you have this broader mix of ties, but also more challenging to build those stronger cohesion ties.

So, if you said to me, 'where would you rather live?' it's a tough call. Of course, we all want to have people who know our names and would recognize that we're not there. But if you only have that bubble — in America it might be you're on Facebook or Twitter with your friends, all of whom are blue or red like you, so you don't really hear opinions, let's say, from across the aisle, you don't care about different types of thinking — I would say both are equally dangerous. A community that's completely homogenous, with no one on the outside, no bridging ties, has a lot of groupthink, and may not necessarily think through the shocks or ways to mitigate stuff in the future in creative ways. In contrast, a heterogeneous group may not necessarily be cohesive yet. But, on the other hand, there is a lot of external wisdom, broader ties, and more diversity there.



So, it's a good question, you know, which of those two communities would you rather live in? I think Japan, certainly, and other communities are definitely creating this strange [phenomenon], that's called the 'dualistic society,' when you do have very strong bonding ties in depopulating rural communities with their heterogeneous ties in cities.

Jada Fraser

We've been talking about the role of social ties from, to me, what seems to be largely a focus on maybe physical or geographic proximity to the people that you're building these ties with — so your neighbors and your co-workers. So, I'm interested in what role, if any, do you see social media playing in the establishment or maintenance of social ties? And do these kinds of social ties help provide the same levels of social resilience?

Daniel Aldrich

One of my students who is now a professor, Courtney Page-Tan, did her thesis on this question of what's the correlation between, let's say, being really involved "IRL" — in real life — and also being really involved in an online community. And she used a great platform called 'Next Door,' which is kind of like Facebook for a geographically contiguous area. Meaning that, you have to prove you live in neighborhood X, to be involved in discussions about neighborhood X. So, for example, as I mentioned, I'm in Brighton — in Boston — here. I couldn't join a community there in Baltimore or Washington, DC. My hypothesis was if you're super-duper involved in real life, probably you're not going to be the most online person. Right? You're not going to be the person sending out links to friends, or joining online slacktivism, and 'press this button to help me raise funds.' And also, conversely, if you're really involved in an online community, maybe you're ignoring your local community. And I was wrong, actually, that's very wrong. She proved very well that people who are really active in real life, in their neighborhood, handing out flyers, delivering foodstuffs, making masks, giving blood, are also really involved in virtual communities, making those impacted connections.

And actually, she showed that in communities with higher levels of online engagement, we also could predict high levels of rebuilding after a shock. She used some of the hurricanes happening in Houston, back in the late 20-teens, to show that those communities where we had online engagement, also got their building permits faster. Because, again, they exchanged information, they worked together, they helped each other collect debris. The challenge, though, of course, is an online community, when the power goes out here, and your batteries in your phone are about to die, or there's a flood in your community, and you need someone to get you a canoe or a kayak or an inflatable boat. If I've got friends in Japan, they can feel sympathy for me and they can send money, but they can't send a boat to me in the hour that I have left before the waters overtake my house. Similarly, if someone's having a heart attack nearby, it's great to have an



online group of CPR-knowledgeable friends, but unless I've got someone nearby who can do chest compressions, it's not going to help the victim with the heart attack.

So, I still remain a little skeptical, especially since so many of us spend a lot of our time online, and so many of our connections nowadays, of course, are deeply embedded in the ability of people to connect online. So much of our stuff — our schooling is online, for example, taxes, businesses are online, forms are online. Since we spend so much time online, I do wonder, are we not meeting as many neighbors, though, are we not making those broader connections locally? Are we spending less time at the park, because we have our phone? And there have been a few funny crossovers. I remember when Pokémon GO came out. They've actually shown using mobility data, that that was the highest number of people meeting outside in many communities in the last 10 years, from the number of teenage kids outside with their phones meeting to train Pokémon. So, that's a funny moment when the digital worlds and the real worlds overlapped very strongly. That's pretty rare though. If you could design a platform or program, or an app, where people would use that to connect and then meet in real life, that would, I think, be the ideal moment, right? Because then you're meeting people who live nearby, same interests — whether it's wine tasting, or dog walking — but then when that bad thing happens, that, you know that neighbor two doors down who can help you out.

Adriana Reinecke

Have you heard that Seoul has actually proposed that they're going to input this new Metaverse idea in terms of their municipal whatnot. So, like, if you want to meet with someone at City Hall to discuss something having to do with your district or whatnot, they're now going to be hosting that in this augmented reality Metaverse area. Have you heard this?

Daniel Aldrich

I have and that's fantastic. Again, the simple reality is people that are younger tend not to be involved in these sort of civic engagement stuff, often because they're starting school, they have jobs or families. The older you get, typically you think about the garbage pickup, school taxes, those kind of really boring, but critical issues. So, that's, I think that's a fantastic way to cross them over.

Adriana Reinecke

So, I guess what you're telling us is not that social media is inherently bad, it's just when your only social ties are in the digital realm, and you don't have someone who can be that physical first responder that it becomes a problem.

Daniel Aldrich



Exactly, yeah. If you exclude the creation of those in-real-life-communities, by the work that people are doing in your online communities, then we're in trouble. Hopefully, people are finding a good balance like we're discussing now, where they can still be that Pokémon hero, but also get out to City Hall or take a walk in the park. The spillover effects of IRL communities mean, for example, that if I have friends in real life, we're going to meet at businesses nearby, we're going to go out and do stuff. So, that's also a spillover to businesses. Businesses often worry, like, if we make it harder for cars to come nearby, or make it pedestrian traffic, will I lose business? Well, of course, we want people to be seeing their neighborhoods as active, lively, and a place where you want to stay. So, the more that we can do to build these ties, the more spillover we get where people go to get coffee, "Oh, I can go now to get a movie together, maybe I'll pick up my dry cleaning nearby." So, the spillover effects here are, you know, more than just getting us ready for disasters. They're building communities where you want to live, work and play.

Adriana Reinecke

So, you've given us a lot of really fantastic ideas on how to foster these horizontal, the bonding and bridging ties. But I'm curious, what about vertical ties? Can they be cultivated in the same way, or is it a matter of you either have them to leverage or you don't?

Daniel Aldrich

In the studies that we've done so far, oftentimes, it was pretty random if a community had access to that powerful person pulling levers of power, whether it's in Washington, DC, or in Tokyo. You can imagine, for example, if you were living in Nevada, and Harry Reid, were your representative, as opposed to, let's say, a very small person from Massachusetts no one's ever heard of, and that was where you were born and beyond your control. I have seen attempts to build vertical ties deliberately. For example, when I was in India, a number of the governments actually flew in communities to meet with people they'd never actually seen, who are their representatives, and legislator[s], and in local government, which is a great way to do it. So, again, rather than making local people wait for your visit, you bring them to you to show you what the kind of stuff that you do.

The flip side of that is, what if the powerful people embed themselves back in the community? Of course, we know most politicians have a home office, as we call them. What we've actually seen is a little bit different. These are agencies who go into the communities that they serve, and rather than waiting for a phone call, let's say, and someone asking, "Can you please give us X, Y and Z?" they've actually done the opposite. They've gone and sat in those local meetings — whether it's a school board meeting, or a 4H club, whether it's the Moose or the Kiwanis — and they've just been there so long that they've been able to build trust and connection. This was what I actually saw in New Zealand, there in Wellington. Their whole plan inverts the typical top



down communication strategy. They are the ones who go out and figure out what's going on in local communities.

Jada Fraser

So, as we get near the end of our conversation, I thought it could be interesting if we zoom out a little bit. I'm interested in your perspective on whether different political or economic structures — for example, democratic countries versus authoritarian countries, communist versus capitalist societies — if the differences between those kinds of societies would better lend themselves to the development of certain ties. Or, alternatively, have you noticed any differentiation across cultures vis-a-vis social ties, or trends that you've observed are more or less universal?

Daniel Aldrich

Yeah, actually, this is really a fascinating question. I had a student from Venezuela, who described the incredible crisis that country's been going through over the past few years. Literally, as prices have skyrocketed, people have fled the country from Venezuela to places nearby — whether it's, for example, Trinidad and Tobago, Panama, other places — and he described how, as a result of not being able to trust the government, communities began to trust each other even more. In a sense, because the police often, at least, as he described them, weren't that able to respond to calls, local communities organized their own, let's call them 'community watch patrols.' I heard the same thing, by the way, happening in Haiti after the earthquake there, when in a number of cases, the people who were helping keep people safe were not uniformed first responders, but rather community members.

So, in both those cases, state failure really pushed civil society to do more, precisely because they could not rely on them. So, does that mean, for example, in a country like Germany or Japan or America, people are less active? Not necessarily, right? Because there, there's more political representation, it's more of a political, formal channel. If you think about the Sunrise Movement right now or Extinction Rebellion, those kinds of groups that are really active in a number of areas. Or back in the era when AIDS was first coming out, right? ACT UP and other groups. So, again, there are different channels. I'm not sure we know enough right now to say, societies X, Y and Z, produce differences.

I will tell you that there's a study of what happened in more authoritarian countries. And what they found was, basically, negative interactions with the government reduced overall trust. So, for example, if your community were hit by a disaster, and the government said to you, "Well, sorry, we only support people from our political party," or, "Sorry, your group is no longer in favor with us." — and this actually, by the way, also happened a little bit in Japan — people overall lost confidence in the government. And again, that is to say, they did not see those vertical ties as producing what they wanted, and then focused more on their horizontal ties. So, I



think, yes, it's a great question. I think the broadest answer I could give, which is accurate, would be, definitely, negative interactions with the government push people away from trying to get the vertical ties toward more supporting the bottom-up horizontal ones. And especially in environments when we have this tremendous amount of shock and challenge, an inability to really get a good response from the government, we're going to see a stronger response from civil society.

Jada Fraser

Well, thank you so much, Dr. Aldrich. Before we end our conversation, we did want to ask one last question on a different line of thinking. And that is, many of our listeners are students and are young professionals, and it's a really great opportunity when we have experts on our podcast to be able to pick their brain on what advice would you give to students and people in the field that are just starting out that are interested in pursuing a career in East Asian Studies?

Daniel Aldrich

Oh, that's a great question. First of all, please do. I'll start with that. We definitely need more experts. And, as probably many of you all know listening, learning Korean, Chinese, Japanese, any language, really — the other romance languages — takes a lot of time and background. So, don't be discouraged. I think that's an important part of this. So, that's the first thing. So don't get discouraged, keep in the program.

The second thing is: Find a mentor. And we're incredibly lucky — we have tremendously strong mentors at places like Johns Hopkins, for example, places like George Washington, other schools there in the Washington, DC area. So, find a mentor, who can encourage you and guide you.

And then I think the other thing to do is fail forward. Don't be afraid of taking risks. I think COVID has pushed a lot of us sort of back into our shells, especially since travel has been shut down. And there are a lot of things we can do, even under COVID, in terms of apps that help us learn Japanese, or Japanese conversation tables, or online events, or watching the news, or being involved in local events. So, even as we feel this sort of conservatism, and this maybe a little bit of anxiety about getting more involved in stuff, this pandemic life we have now probably will be the future for some time. So, we really have to push through and figure out how do we use our ties — how do we use our resources — to develop ourselves, whether it's as a young scholar, for example, or somebody who wants to spend time in Asia, despite the presence of those challenges.

Adriana Reinecke



Thank you so much. It's truly been a pleasure. For anyone listening, to hear more from Dr. Aldrich, you can find him on Twitter @DanielPAldrich. Dr. Aldrich, we look forward to hearing more from you in the future.

Daniel Aldrich

Thank you so much for having me. It's been an honor.

Jada Fraser

Thank you for joining us for this episode of Asia in Washington. If you'd like to learn more about the Reischauer Center and our current research, please visit us at [www.reischauercenter.org](http://www.reischauercenter.org). If you have comments, questions or suggestions for the podcast, please feel free to email us at [EORC.Podcastsais@jhu.edu](mailto:EORC.Podcastsais@jhu.edu). Don't forget to rate and subscribe to stay up to date on the latest from Asia in Washington.

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