This course is an introduction to the politics and government of contemporary Japan. It explores how politicians have fought election campaigns, elected leaders, made policy, and governed in interaction with career bureaucrats, interest groups, the media and voters from 1955 until today. Special attention is paid to the effects of institutional reforms on Japan’s political system and to current policy challenges such as the rise of China and and disaster preparedness. The course includes the showing of the documentary film *Pictures at an Election* as well as clips from *Campaign*, and will involve in-lecture discussions in which student participation is required. No prior knowledge of Japan, Japanese politics, or the Japanese language is required.

**Instructor:** Dr. Amy Catalinac (Postdoctoral Fellow, Program on U.S.-Japan Relations, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University).

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**Office Hours:** By appointment.

**Course Website:** [http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k85550](http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k85550)

**Course Requirements:** You are expected to attend and participate in all lectures. Participating means completing the readings for the lecture before the lecture and using your understanding of them to answer the questions posed to you during lecture. The study questions at the beginning of each theme are meant to guide your reading of the material. In addition, you are required to complete an in-class mid-term examination (on March 5); an in-class presentation on a chosen research topic (on either April 23 or 25); and a final paper of 15 double-spaced pages on the same research topic (due May 4).

**Grade Breakdown:**

- Lecture Participation ............................................................. 20%
- Mid-Term .................................................................................. 30%
- Presentation ............................................................................... 20%
- Final Paper ............................................................................... 30%

**Presentation and Final Paper:** The lectures focus on how politics and government works (and does not work) in Japan. For the final paper, your task is to apply what we have learned in the course to a particular policy area. Your task is to select a policy area; identify a change in that policy area; and construct an argument, using evidence, as to what brought about that change in policy. While making your own argument, try to use evidence to point out why other potential alternative explanations are wrong. You are expected to decide the topic in consultation with me and do your own research for these papers.
You may use any variable at all to explain this change. You may find that a concept we have studied, such as the growing importance of the Prime Minister during elections or the declining incentives for interest groups to mobilize votes on behalf of politicians, can explain this change in policy. If so, make the case for why, using as much evidence as you can. If you find that the concepts we have studied are not useful in explaining this change and something else is, such as a demographic change, that is perfectly acceptable. You will be judged on your ability to identify a change in policy and construct an argument that explains this change, not on the degree to which you have “bought” the arguments of the scholars we have studied.

The in-class student presentations (on April 23 and 25) are designed to assist your writing of the final paper. You will each be assigned ten minutes and are to describe the policy change your paper will explain; the argument your paper will make (or at least, the argument you think you will make); and the kind of evidence you plan to use. Each student is required to attend both of these lectures and comment on other student’s presentations. This will count toward your participation grade for the course.

After the presentation, you will have until May 4th to complete the paper. Please do not ask for an extension. Everyone must operate within the same constraints. The paper is to be emailed to me and late papers will incur a penalty of one-third of a letter grade per half-day.

**Required Texts:** The following four books are required and can be purchased at the COOP:


**Assigned Readings:** The assigned readings for each week can either be downloaded from HOLLIS or have been posted on the course website.

**Important Dates:**

- No Lecture ................................. Monday, Feb 6
- Make-up Lecture .......................... Friday, Feb 17
- Mid-Term Exam ........................... Monday, March 5
- Screening of Documentary ............... Wednesday, March 28
- Guest Presentation and Q & A ............. Monday, April 9
- Student Presentations ..................... Monday, April 23
- Student Presentations ..................... Wednesday, April 25
- Final Paper Due ............................ Friday, May 4
Course Outline

Jan 23. Why Study Japanese Politics and Government?

There is no required reading for this lecture. Please purchase the assigned books at the COOP.

Supplementary Reading:


1 POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT, 1955-1994

1.1 ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

Japan is one of the few democracies in which political scientists have thrown themselves enthusiastically into understanding how politicians organize and fight election campaigns. These lectures focus on how politicians in Japan’s ruling LDP cultivated votes through informal institutions, both in their districts and in Tokyo, and the consequences of these vote-gathering strategies for the political system. Questions to think about include: what explains politicians’ choice of electoral strategy? Are politicians masters of their koenkai or slaves to it? Why is so much of Japanese politics conducted in institutions invisible to the public eye? Does it pay to be a dirty politician in Japan? Why?

Jan 25. Politicians in their Districts


Supplementary Reading:

Jan 30. Politicians in Tokyo


Feb 1. Consequence: Structural Corruption

- Schlesinger, Jacob M. 1997, Shadow Shoguns, pp. 36-45; 69-75; 82-90; 97-125.


Supplementary Reading:


Feb 6. NO CLASS (rescheduled to Feb 17)

1.2 GOVERNANCE

One of the biggest debates in Japanese politics concerns the locus of power, and who holds power over what, when, and why. These three lectures focus on this debate. The first explains why the Prime Minister was (arguably) a much weaker figure than in other parliamentary democracies. The second and third lectures present contending arguments in favor of career bureaucrats and LDP politicians, respectively. Questions to think about include: why were Prime Ministers so weak? What were the consequences? Are you convinced that career bureaucrats ran the show? Or do you believe they act in the shadow of politician’s preferences? What kind of evidence would help us adjudicate between these two explanations?

Feb 8. Powerless Prime Ministers

Feb 13. Who Runs the Show? The Case for Bureaucrats


*Supplementary Reading:*


Feb 15. Who Runs the Show? The Case for Politicians


1.3 REPRESENTATION

Why do Japanese consumers prefer rice produced locally, even though it is six times’ more expensive? Why do Japanese women choose abortions over birth control pills? These two lectures focus on who was getting what from the political system during this period. They explain why the vote-gathering strategies of politicians contributed to the formulation of policy that favored the interests of organized groups at the expense of the unorganized voter. Questions to think about include: are the explanations offered by these scholars sufficient to explain these policy outcomes? Why/why not?

Feb 17. Whose Interests Were Represented?


Feb 22. Whose Interests Were Excluded?


1.4 SOURCES OF STABILITY

Japan’s Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is arguably the most successful political party in the advanced industrialized democratic world. It won the most seats out of any party in every Lower House election from 1958 to 2009. In 1993, seven opposition parties managed to cobble together enough seats to form a government, yet a mere ten months later the LDP was back at the reigns. These two lectures introduce a variety of explanations for why Japan experienced unbroken LDP rule from 1955 to 1993, an outcome that appears decidedly undemocratic. Questions to think about include: how did the media extend tacit support for the LDP-led government? What prevented the media from acting as a watch dog? How was the opposition disadvantaged under this system? What did the LDP do to sabotage the opposition’s efforts to win elections? Was there any way for voters to kick the rascals out?

Feb 27. A Servile Mass Media?


*Supplementary Reading:*


Feb 29. A Toothless Opposition Or a Shrewd LDP?


*Supplementary Reading:*


**Mar 5. MID-TERM EXAM**

**1.5 FALL & REFORM**

Unbroken LDP rule came to an abrupt end in 1993, catalyzing a process that would lead to a series of electoral and other reforms in 1994. The first lecture explores why a group of LDP politicians defected from the party in June 1993 and formed a coalition government with parties they had spent most of their careers fighting against. The second lecture explores the reasons why this new government chose to reform Japan’s electoral system. Questions to think about include: what, if anything, did the LDP’s fall from power have to do with the bursting of the economic bubble? What, if anything, did it have to do with the string of corruption scandals that had surfaced in the preceding five years? Why didn’t defections produce multi-party coalition governments in earlier years? What provoked the coalition government to change the rules of the electoral game in 1994? What explains the system chosen? What other reforms were adopted at the same time?

**Mar 7. LDP’s Fall From Power**


*Supplementary Reading:*


**Mar 19. Electoral Reform**


*Supplementary Reading:*

2 POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT, 1994-

2.1 ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

The new debate in Japanese politics is whether electoral reform has had the effects reformers (and political scientists) anticipated. The reform was supposed to produce “party-centered election campaigns”, where politicians abandoned koenkai and relied exclusively on their party label and their party leader. Politicians were supposed to become “policy department stores”, as opposed to “policy boutiques”. These lectures explore what (if any) change has occurred. The first weighs up the evidence for changes in the way campaigns are run. The second explains why the Prime Minister has an electoral role to play in the new system, and how this has led to changes in the political role of the media. The third is a showing of the documentary film *Pictures at An Election*. Questions to think about include: how do parties help politicians under the new system? If parties are so useful, why are politicians still cultivating koenkai? What should a re-election-minded politician do between elections to increase her chances of winning the next election? How long should we “wait” for change?

Mar 21. From personalities to policies?


Supplementary Reading:


Mar 26. An Electoral Role for the Prime Minister?

Mar 28. Screening of a Documentary Film

2.2 GOVERNANCE

Debates about power in Japanese politics used to concern politicians and bureaucrats. Now, the question is: to what extent has power shifted away from both actors toward the Prime Minister? These three lectures use case studies to explore the degree to which Prime Ministers have been able to leverage their growing electoral clout into influence over policy decisions. The first lecture focuses on the battle over privatization of Japan’s postal service, a policy area with an entrenched interest group and a powerful ministry. The second lecture focuses on the battle surrounding the dispatch of the Self Defense Forces (SDF) to Iraq, an area without an entrenched interest group or a powerful ministry. The third lecture is a litmus test: did the incoming DPJ Prime Minister implement what he promised to after assuming power in 2009? Futori Hideshi, a former secretary and campaign manager in the 2009 election for DPJ politician Nagashima Akihisa will attend the lecture and help us answer this question. Questions to think about include: what thwarts the Prime Minister from doing whatever she wants? How have Prime Ministers themselves facilitated this power transfer? Why aren’t all Prime Ministers able to exercise the same clout?

Apr 2. Battle 1: Postal Privatization


Supplementary Reading:

Apr 4. Battle 2: Sending the SDF to Iraq


**Supplementary Reading:**


Apr 9. Litmus test: The DPJ Takes the Reigns


**Supplementary Reading:**


### 2.3 REPRESENTATION

Scholars have found new evidence that the interests of unorganized voters are being represented after electoral reform. This lecture focuses on the arguments scholars have made that recent changes in Japan’s welfare and fiscal policies are reflective of a need to move policy away from the preferences of organized groups and toward the preferences of the median voter. Questions to think about include: how do the arguments made by the three authors differ? Are you convinced that these policy changes are a product of electoral reform and not something else? Why/why not?

Apr 11. Policies for the Unorganized?


**Supplementary Reading:**


### 2.4 NEW POLICY CHALLENGES

In the context of these new electoral institutions and altered relationships between political actors, Japan is also being buffeted by geographic, demographic, and external forces, which create situations to which Japan must respond. These two lectures take two policy challenges, national security and the 3/11 disasters respectively, and examine how political actors have sought to respond to them. Questions to think about include: how has Japan responded to these policy challenges? How has Japan’s new institutional environment affected its response? Would Japan have responded the same way under the old institutional environment? Why/why not?

**Apr 16. The Rise of China and Threat of North Korea**


**Supplementary Reading:**


**Apr 18. 3/11 Disasters**


**Apr 23. Student Presentations**

**Apr 25. Student Presentations**