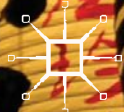
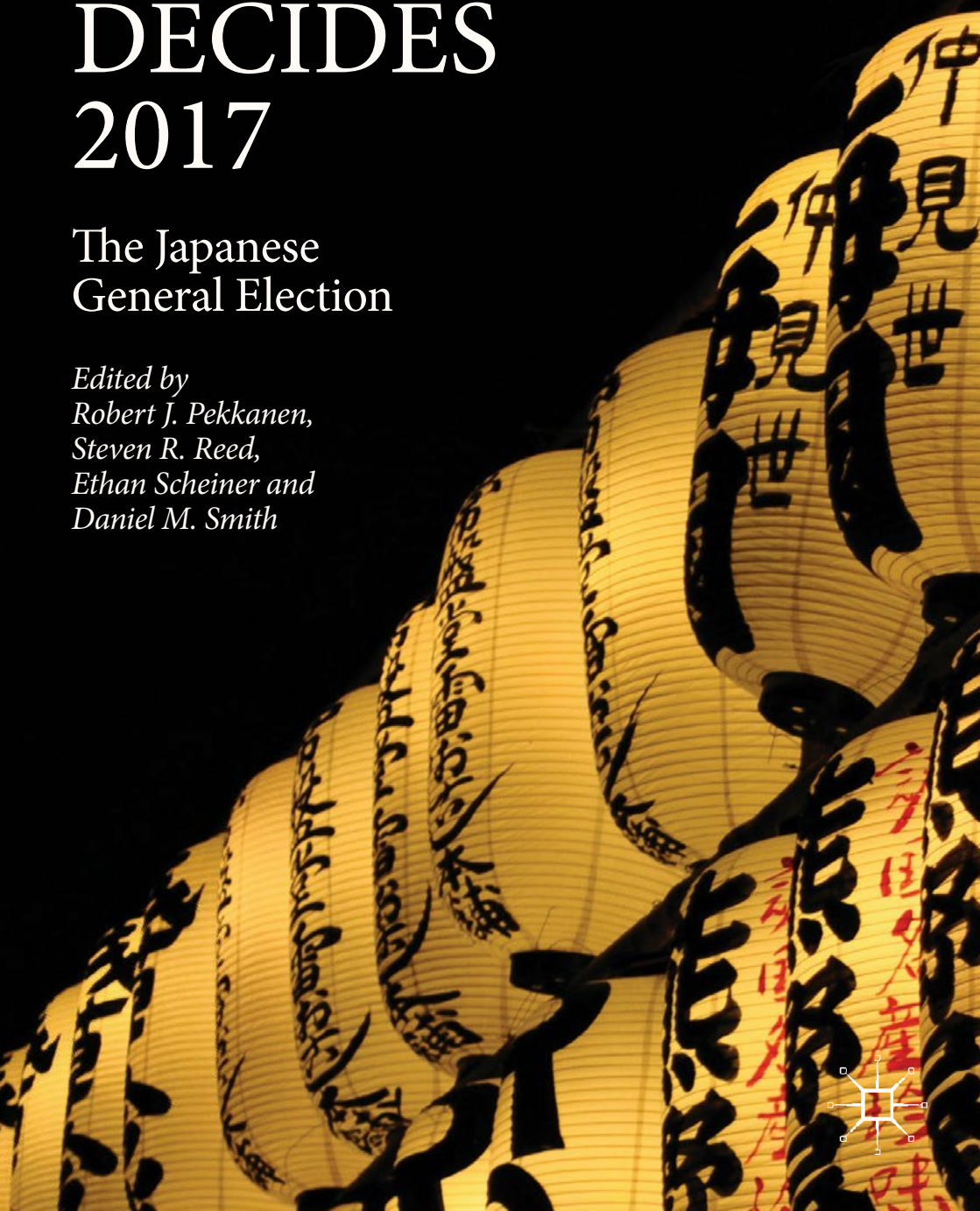


JAPAN DECIDES 2017

The Japanese
General Election

*Edited by
Robert J. Pekkanen,
Steven R. Reed,
Ethan Scheiner and
Daniel M. Smith*



Japan Decides 2017

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Editors

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To Michiko, who else?

—Steve

*To Steve, on the occasion of his retirement,
we dedicate this book to our longtime friend and teacher*

—Robert, Ethan, Dan

Acknowledgments

Shinzō Abe's calling of a snap election for October 22, 2017, threw the Japanese political world into a frenzied period of action, with dramatic and fascinating results. We feel the same remark can be made of the contents of this book. As editors, we first would like to thank the authors who produced such excellent chapters at extremely short notice. We feel that producing these election volumes always provides us with an excellent opportunity to learn from our authors, and this time was no exception. The chapters in this volume provide fascinating insights into several important aspects of the campaign, as well as Japanese politics more broadly. This volume marks the third installment in the *Japan Decides* series, following our previous accounts of the 2012 and 2014 general elections. This would not have been possible without the support of our brave editors at Palgrave Macmillan, Ambra Finotello and Imogen Gordon Clark. The three returning editors want to express their deep happiness that Daniel M. Smith has joined the editorial team. They have always felt that adding Dan to anything will make it better, and he proved them right (again). Besides his keen editorial instincts and native brilliance, Dan is a joy to work with. Robert thanks Saadia and Sophia for their support. This one sentence covers quite a lot, but he prefers to not go into the details. Steve thanks his coeditors first and foremost. Nothing is more fun for an old scholar than struggling to keep up with bright and

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Abbreviations

Political Parties

CDP	Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (Rikken Minshutō)
Daichi	New Party Daichi (Shintō Daichi)
DP	Democratic Party (Minshintō)
DPJ	Democratic Party of Japan (Minshutō)
JCP	Japanese Communist Party (Nihon Kyōsantō)
Ishin	Japan Ishin no Kai (Nippon Ishin no Kai)
Hope	Party of Hope (Kibō no Tō)
HRP	Happiness Realization Party (Kōfuku Jitsugen Tō)
Kokoro	Party for Japanese Kokoro (Nippon no Kokoro)
Kōmeitō	Kōmeitō
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party (Jiyū Minshutō)
SDP	Social Democratic Party (Shakai Minshutō)
TF	Tokyoites First (Tomin Fāsuto no Kai)

Newspapers

Asahi	<i>Asahi Shinbun</i>
Mainichi	<i>Mainichi Shinbun</i>
Nikkei	<i>Nihon Keizai Shinbun</i>
Sankei	<i>Sankei Shinbun</i>
Yomiuri	<i>Yomiuri Shinbun</i>

Other Abbreviations

DNLW	dually nominated list winner
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
FPTP	First-past-the-post
HC	House of Councillors
HR	House of Representatives
KPI	Key performance indicator
MMM	Mixed-Member Majoritarian
MP	Member of Parliament (or Diet Member, DM)
PR	proportional representation
SDF	Self-Defense Forces
SSD	single-seat district
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership

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Part I

Introduction



1

Introduction: Abe on a Roll at the Polls

Robert J. Pekkanen, Steven R. Reed, Ethan Scheiner,
and Daniel M. Smith

This is the third volume of *Japan Decides*, and the third volume to analyze an overwhelming election victory by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) under Prime Minister Shinzō Abe.¹ On October 22, 2017, the LDP won 284 of 465 seats contested in the general election for the House of

¹ See Pekkanen et al. (2013) and Pekkanen et al. (2016).

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Representatives (HR), the larger and more important chamber of Japan's bicameral National Diet. The opposition to Abe's LDP-led coalition government remains in disarray, with the two leading party alternatives, the Party of Hope and the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP), formed just a few weeks before the election in conjunction with a disorganized and hasty disbandment in the HR of the erstwhile main opposition party, the Democratic Party (DP). In calling the election when he did, a year earlier than constitutionally mandated, Abe once again demonstrated his mastery of political timing.

Add the 2013 and 2016 LDP victories in elections for the upper chamber, the House of Councillors (HC), and Abe's record now counts five election wins in just under five years. This half-decade record of stable victories for the LDP under Abe represents a remarkable run, and looks likely to continue in the short term, even as it remains highly unlikely to match the nearly four decades of LDP dominance from 1955 (when the LDP was founded) until 1993 (when it temporarily lost control of government for the first time). Abroad, the rise of China and the threat of a nuclear North Korea—the latter being a key reason given by Abe for calling the early election—are a major concern for most Japanese. Many voters are also worried about the future of the core security and trade relationships with the United States following the election of President Donald J. Trump in 2016, although Abe has navigated this relationship more skillfully than many other world leaders. At home, fears of weak domestic political leadership—Abe's first attempt at leading the nation as prime minister in 2006 fell short of expectations and ushered in a period of divided government and yearly replacement of prime ministers—seem to have receded with Abe's five years of stability.

The ostensible return to LDP dominance under Abe represents a break from the pattern that characterized Japanese party politics throughout the 2000s. In 1994, Japan adopted an electoral system for the HR that was designed to produce a two-party system with alternation in power. The system features single-seat districts (SSDs), which, according to what political scientists call Duverger's Law, should create incentives for voters and elites to gravitate toward two large parties.² From the first election

² See Duverger (1954) and Cox (1997).

under the new system in 1996 through 2009, the fifth election, Japanese politics largely appeared to obey Duverger's Law, as the LDP gradually lost its grip on SSDs and ultimately lost control of government to the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the precursor to the DP which formed in 1996 just before the first election under the new system.³ However, the inexperienced and internally divided DPJ failed miserably at governing the country during its three years in power, and the story of elections and party competition since 2012 seems to contradict theoretical expectations. There have been efforts to form a single opposition party capable of unseating the LDP, but very little evidence of movement in that direction—neither by voters, who are not sure which alternative party will be a credible challenger, nor by elites, who cannot seem to coordinate on a single vessel for challenging the LDP.

The DPJ was formed by collecting as candidates anyone who opposed the LDP, without serious reference to their policy preferences.⁴ The DPJ was only able to defeat the LDP in 2009 because the LDP was failing to govern effectively. In other words, voters chose “not the LDP”; they did not choose the DPJ. Since the LDP regained power in 2012, the LDP under Abe (in coalition with Kōmeitō) has governed effectively for the most part, but also with a fair amount of controversy and without enjoying a majority of support from the electorate. A simple amalgam of people who oppose the LDP, however, will no longer serve as an attractive alternative.

The Party of Hope and the CDP offer different paths toward creating an attractive challenger to the LDP. The CDP offers an alternative, whereas the Party of Hope offers an echo. The majority of voters have long been opposed to revising Article 9 (the so-called “peace clause”) of Japan's constitution and also opposed to continuing Japan's reliance on nuclear energy. Conservatives see these policies as unrealistic and the CDP as capable only of opposing rather than proposing feasible alternatives. The Party of Hope offers “realistic” alternatives that are predominantly variations on existing LDP themes. Party of Hope policies may often be improvements on LDP policy but they seldom look much

³ See Reed et al. (2012). On the DPJ's three years in power see Kushida and Lipsky (2013).

⁴ See Smith et al. (2013).

different to voters; they appear as echoes rather than alternatives. On the other hand, both parties are more internally coherent in terms of ideology and policy positions than the DPJ and DP were.

In the 2017 election, voters who wanted to vote “not the LDP” were split on which new opposition represented the ideal alternative, and many voters simply chose to stay at home. It is as yet still unclear whether further maneuvering by opposition politicians after the election will clarify the choice for voters in the future. Will the CDP be able to offer convincing policy alternatives to LDP policies? Will the Party of Hope be able to convince voters that its policies are not simply echoes of LDP policies? Will the LDP continue to govern effectively after Abe is replaced by a new leader? Will events outside the control of Abe—such as actions by North Korea’s unpredictable Kim Jong-un or the USA’s also unpredictable Donald Trump—trip up the Abe government’s agenda? And will political scientists be forced to revise Duverger’s Law for the Japanese case to include a final stage—the birth of a coherent opposition?

The 2017 Japanese general election did more to raise these kinds of questions than settle them. The major outcome of the election was a renewed mandate for the LDP-led coalition government and a strengthening of Abe’s position as leader of the LDP.

Summary of the Chapters

The chapters of this volume are organized into three parts, which are of topical relevance to the 2017 election.

Part I: Introduction

Part I provides the key background context for understanding the election. In Chap. 2, Pekkanen and Reed provide a detailed narrative of the events and developments after the 2014 general election, leading up to Abe’s decision to call the 2017 snap election. The chapter covers all of the major political events that occurred between the 2014 and 2017 elections, including the redrawing of electoral districts in both the upper and

lower houses in order to move closer to the “one person one vote” standard, as well as three important elections held between the 2014 and 2017 lower house races: the Tokyo gubernatorial election, the Tokyo Prefectural Assembly election, and the 2016 HC election.

In Chap. 3, Scheiner, Smith, and Michael F. Thies analyze the results of the election, putting them in perspective against recent general elections. Despite the reorganization of the opposition just prior to the election, the results for the ruling coalition appear to be nearly a carbon copy of the previous lower house election. The LDP managed to dominate across rural and urban districts, and would not likely have surrendered many seats had the opposition done a better job coordinating its candidate nominations. The party continues to appear most vulnerable in urban districts, where intra-opposition competition between the CDP and Party of Hope was most likely to occur, helping the LDP win seats with less than a majority of the vote. Voter turnout continued to be low and was further hampered by the arrival of Typhoon Lan on the day of the election. The authors conclude that any future challenger that hopes to unseat the LDP will have its best chance in the growing urban tranche of Diet seats, but must also find a way to exploit contradictions between the interests of the LDP’s rural voters and those in the cities, or among the supporters of the LDP’s coalition partner Kōmeitō. The opposition must also consider how to activate the near half of the electorate that stayed home for Abe’s three landslide HR wins.

Part II: Political Parties

Part II includes three chapters that cover aspects of the political parties in detail. Previous volumes—*Japan Decides 2012* and *Japan Decides 2014*—devoted a chapter to examining the LDP’s maneuvers between elections. Not much changed within the LDP this time around, with Abe still securely at the helm of the party and his policy agenda relatively unchanged, so the chapters in this part of the volume focus instead on recent developments in the LDP’s relationship with its coalition partner, Kōmeitō, and the rapidly changing kaleidoscope of opposition parties.

In Chap. 4, Axel Klein and Levi McLaughlin unpack the relationship between the LDP and Kōmeitō with a detailed look at how Kōmeitō supporters view the coalition and policy concessions that their party has made to stay in power. In particular, the chapter evaluates Kōmeitō's navigation between the interests of its coalition partner and its voter base, the religious lay organization Sōka Gakkai. The 2017 election results reflect a growing disaggregation of Kōmeitō voters. The analysis confirms that the primary interest of Kōmeitō voters is not constitutional reform. Rather, it continues to be social welfare and support for low- and medium-income households. The level of support for Kōmeitō may weaken with the rise of a new generation of Sōka Gakkai adherents who appear increasingly unwilling to treat electioneering as a necessary component of their religious practice.

In Chap. 5, Pekkanen and Reed focus more broadly on the state of the opposition. Examining the complex evolution of the opposition parties, they highlight the events that led to the split of the DP and the founding of the Party of Hope and the CDP. The resulting choice presented to voters consisted of the two government parties, the conservative opposition, and the liberal opposition. The authors conclude that the 2017 election presents three key lessons for the opposition to take to heart. First, in SSD competitions a divided opposition loses. Second, conservative opposition parties tend to lose votes, in part because voters do not see them as real alternatives to the LDP. Third, a liberal opposition party might win votes.

In Chap. 6, Ko Maeda takes a closer look at the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), the oldest political party in Japan. Historically uncooperative and a perpetual “spoiler” of district-level election outcomes because of its pattern of running candidates even where it has no chance of winning (thus splitting the opposition vote on the left), recent elections have witnessed a greater JCP willingness to cooperate strategically with other leftist opposition parties to combat the LDP. Maeda investigates the JCP's electoral performance in the proportional representation (PR) tier of Japan's mixed-member electoral system, as well as the SSD tier, and discusses the possible risks and benefits to coordination on the left. In the 2017 election, the JCP lost votes relative to the previous election in 2014, and the CDP appears to be the main recipient of those votes.

Although the JCP reduced the number of its candidates running in SSD contests, the presence or absence of a JCP candidate did not appear to influence the overall results.

Part III Campaign and Issues

Part III dives into the details of the campaign and the main policy issues that were at stake. In the first of five chapters providing a closer look at public opinion, policy positions, and party nomination strategies in the campaign, Matthew M. Carlson and Reed in Chap. 7 provide a detailed overview of the scandals that plagued the Abe administration between the 2014 and 2017 elections. After briefly profiling the cabinet members who embarrassed the government, the authors describe two scandals of a new type: *sontaku* scandals. These involve special treatment linked to projects associated with Prime Minister Abe or his wife, but do not charge either with having done anything improper.

Chapter 8 by Yukio Maeda chronicles the public opinion polls of the Abe cabinet over time. Abe is on track to replace Eisaku Satō as Japan's longest serving prime minister. Satō's long tenure in office has sometimes been credited to his mastery of personnel strategy within the LDP. In contrast, Maeda argues, Abe is a master of public opinion, deftly calling new elections when it will benefit him most and keep the opposition parties in disarray. A close examination of the timing and reasons for changes in public opinion reveals a deliberate strategy on Abe's part. When in trouble from scandals and other setbacks, he tends to emphasize valence issues, which are difficult for anyone to oppose, in order to bring up his approval rating. Once his support is improved, Abe switches to pushing his favorite position issues, such as constitutional revision, which triggers intense criticism from the opposition parties.

In Chap. 9, Kiichiro Arai and Miwa Nakajo provide an invaluable overview of where candidates in the election stood on policy. They report the results of a survey of the candidates' policy positions conducted by *Yomiuri Shinbun* and Waseda University. The chapter focuses in particular on the candidates' preferences with regard to free education and national security, which were key rationales given by Abe for dissolving the Diet. The

analysis finds that most candidates basically followed their party's manifesto policies on both issues; however, party unity varied across some other issues. The least united party is the Party of Hope, despite efforts of the party's leaders to enforce policy coherence in candidate nominations. Additionally, and notably, the surveys also reveal that the coalition parties, the LDP and Kōmeitō, share views on most issues save for revision of Article 9 of the constitution.

Kuniaki Nemoto in Chap. 10 takes a deeper look at “contamination” effects, whereby the simultaneous existence of both SSD and PR tiers in Japan's mixed-member electoral system produces behavior and results that are different from those that would exist under a “pure” system that does not combine the two types of rules. The chapter examines the extent of contamination throughout Japan's use of the system since 1996, but pays particularly close attention to the 2017 election, asking what might explain the surge in the effective number of candidates and the decline in the level of two-party competition at district level. Parties might oversupply candidates as long as they believe the benefits from the contamination effects outweigh the costs. Such contamination effects include: the “list contamination effect,” or the effect of a local candidate in a district to raise voter awareness and mobilize more list votes; and the “incumbency contamination effect,” or the effect of stationing dually nominated list winners (DNLWs) in districts.

In Chap. 11, Mari Miura tackles the important issue of gender, and the persistently low representation of women in parliament (10.1% of Diet members following the 2017 election). The chapter first analyzes the structural factors that account for this persistent and severe underrepresentation, then turns to a deeper look at the 2017 election by examining the characteristics and policy positions of the women who ran as candidates, as well as those who won. Finally, Miura examines the future prospects for a gender parity or quota law in Japan.

The two chapters that follow cover two other major social policy issues facing Japan today. Few issues have burned hotter around the world than immigration, in votes ranging from Brexit to the US presidential election. Michael Strausz analyzes the current issues and debate surrounding immigration reform in Chap. 12. The chapter first looks at what candidates thought about immigration in the 2017 election, drawing on