



# Japan Decides 2014

## *The Japanese General Election*

Robert J. Pekkanen, Steven R. Reed & Ethan Scheiner



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## The Japanese General Election

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*For Jack, Will, Adam, Dylan, Daniel, and Billy*  
– Robert

*For Kunkun for playing with Jiji-Baba*  
– Steve

*For Dick (Gaga) and Nila (Lola) Hurley*  
– Ethan

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# Abbreviations

*JD 2012* *Japan Decides 2012: The Japanese General Election* (we use this for parenthetical citations made in this volume to *Japan Decides 2012*; see Appendix for chapter list)

## Political Parties

Daichi	Shintou Daichi
DPJ	Democratic Party of Japan (Minshutou)
JCP	Japanese Communist Party (Kyouasantou)
JIP	Japan Innovation Party (Ishin no Tou)
JRP	Japan Restoration Party (Nihon Ishin no Kai)
Komeito	any one of the following Koumeitou, New Koumeitou, NK, Clean Government Party, CGP
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party (Jimintou)
PFG	Party for Future Generations
PLFP	The People's Life First Party (Kokumin no Seikatsu ga Dai-ichi)
PNP	The People's New Party (Kokumin Shintou)
SDPJ	Social Democratic Party of Japan (Shamintou); also called Social Democratic Party (SDP)
TPJ	Tomorrow Party of Japan (Nippon Mirai no Tou, literally The Future of Japan Party) The Sunrise Party of Japan (Tachiagare Nippon) The Sunrise Party (Taiyou no Tou) The Tax Cut Party (Genzei Nippon)
Unity	Unity Party
YP	Your Party (Minna no Tou)

## Other abbreviations

Asahi	Asahi Shinbun
HC	House of Councillors
HR	House of Representatives
JT	Japan Times

Mainichi	Mainichi Shinbun
MP	Member of the Diet, or Diet Member (also “DM”)
Nikkei	Nihon Keizai Shinbun
Nougyou	Nihon Nougyou Shinbun
Sankei	Sankei Shinbun
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
Yomiuri	Yomiuri Shinbun

Note that in-text references to newspapers take the form of (*Asahi*, December 16, 2014). References are to the Tokyo morning edition unless otherwise specified. References to the papers’ websites take the form of (*Asahi*, December 16, 2014, web).

# **Part I**

## **Introduction**

# 1

## Introduction: Take a Second Look at the 2014 Election, It's Worth It

*Robert J. Pekkanen, Steven R. Reed, and Ethan Scheiner*

At first glance, the December 14, 2014, Japanese General Election was as dull and meaningless as any in Japanese history. From the moment the election was called, there was no doubt that the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), along with its coalition partner Komeito, would easily win the poll. The campaign itself scarcely raised significant policy discussion or debate. Voter turnout reached an all-time low (52.7%) for Japanese House of Representatives (HR) elections. And the overall final results looked awfully similar to the 2012 General Election, in which the ruling coalition won roughly two-thirds of all seats.

However, viewing events through this lens misses just how significant the election really was and shabbily ignores the masterful political maneuvering of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the man behind Japan's political curtain. Abe's snap dissolution of the lower house caught nearly everyone by surprise, giving his LDP opponents no opportunity to challenge his leadership of the ruling party and denying opposition parties the time they needed to even try to defeat the LDP.<sup>1</sup> And following the LDP's trouncing of the opposition, Abe used the results of the election to claim a mandate to pass his entire policy agenda.

In this volume, the second in the *Japan Decides* series, a wide array of leading scholars of Japanese politics tell the story of the 2014 "bait-and-switch" election, as we call it in the Conclusion. This deeper analysis of the election pays dividends, as a second look shows that the 2014 poll arguably numbers among the most important Japanese elections in recent memory. At the time of the election, many observers complained about the lack of intrigue surrounding the race, but, as our volume indicates, in reality many of the truly significant events surrounding the 2014 election were unlikely to appear in standard

discussions of electoral campaigns and results. Our contributors shed light on important, deeper features of the election, such as a badly weakened opposition that is gradually reconsolidating, political parties whose organizations and strategies are evolving within the Japanese party system, and an LDP that is finding ways to benefit from its unique advantages. Probably most important, this book shows a prime minister who brilliantly flatfooted his opponents inside and outside of the LDP by calling a snap election, found ways to avoid discussing potentially controversial issues throughout the campaign, massively consolidated his political position, and then used the election results as justification to begin implementing his policy preferences.

In short, *Japan Decides 2014* discusses the latest General Election from a number of different vantage points to allow readers to take both a wide lens view of the race and drill down deeply into the key details of areas that were especially significant.<sup>2</sup> To help create a volume that coheres – as well as more fully weigh plausible interpretations of the election – there was considerable interaction and discussion among the authors in the planning and writing process, which then carried over into the chapters themselves. At its core, then, *Japan Decides 2014* tells the story of how actions (and strategic inaction) by Abe queued up the LDP to succeed so dramatically in the race and make possible the enactment of significant policy in a number of different issue areas. At the same time, the volume also provides detail on other features of the race – as well as Japan’s political system more generally – that will continue to affect Japanese politics irrespective of the success of Abe’s political and policy agenda.

## Summary of chapters

Just as was the case with *Japan Decides 2012*, the 2014 volume divides the contributions into four different parts.

### Part I: Introduction

Part I provides the key background to the election. There was much less drama between 2012 and 2014 than there was between 2009 and 2012, but the events were significant for the future of Japanese politics. In Chapter 2, Robert J. Pekkanen, Steven R. Reed, and Daniel M. Smith provide an overview of events between the 2012 and 2014 elections, highlighting the continued confusion among the opposition parties and Prime Minister’s Abe’s proactive leadership. In Chapter 3, Ethan



Scheiner, Daniel M. Smith, and Michael F. Thies analyze the election outcome. The bottom line looks similar to 2014: a divided and uninspiring opposition hands the LDP another landslide victory amid another drop in turnout and without much change in the LDP vote. The reasons behind this result are, however, quite different. In 2012, an increase in voter abstention and a divided opposition, both born out of disaffection with the then-ruling DPJ, spoiled a series of opportunities for non-LDP candidates to win. In contrast, in 2014, there were far fewer coordination difficulties among the opposition parties, but the declining number of opposition candidates also promoted a further decline in voter turnout.

## **Part II: Political parties**

Part II introduces the political parties that competed in the election. Again, the 2014 election cannot match the drama of the 2012 election, but the parties and party system have evolved in important ways and each party presented a significantly different profile from its previous incarnation. In Chapter 4, Masahisa Endo and Robert J. Pekkanen analyze changes in the LDP between the two elections, studying party organization and policy, but focusing on the areas that gave a leg up on its challengers when Abe called for the 2014 snap dissolution. In Chapter 5, Fumi Ikeda and Steven R. Reed analyze the DPJ's efforts to rebuild after its devastating defeat in 2012. They find that the party was active but focused first on mending fences internally and reforming itself. As a result, the general public was unaware of the party's efforts when Abe called the snap election. In Chapter 6, Robert J. Pekkanen and Steven R. Reed analyze the splits and reorganization of the "Third Force" parties. The splits were caused less by policy disagreements than conflict over strategy: whether to merge with other opposition parties to form an alternative to the LDP, or instead to remain independent; and, whether or not to cooperate with other parties, including the LDP, on a case-by-case basis. Those parties that opted for cooperation with the LDP virtually disappeared, leaving a single significant Third Force Party, the Japan Innovation Party (JIP). In Chapter 7, Axel Klein analyzes the LDP's long-time coalition partner, the Komeito, which faced many challenges dealing with Abe's policy agenda but managed to score a major victory in getting the LDP to agree to reduce the consumption tax on necessities. Electorally, Komeito is, like its coalition partner, winning seats without gaining votes because of declines in turnout.

### Part III: Campaigns, candidates, and districts

Part III analyzes the campaign, focusing in turn on the popularity of the Abe administration, the role of leaders in the campaign, candidate selection, the largely unchanging position of women (or lack of women) in Japanese electoral politics, and the birth of Internet campaigning in Japan. In Chapter 8, Yukio Maeda analyzes Prime Minister Abe's popularity, which was lifted up by hope (*kitai*) for Abenomics, even though most voters did not feel any improvement in the economy. In Chapter 9, Kenneth Mori McElwain analyzes campaign visits by party leaders, finding that Abe targeted marginal districts, non-incumbents, and districts with more independent voters. McElwain finds that these visits did seem to increase the number of independents who voted for the LDP. In Chapter 10, Daniel M. Smith analyzes candidate selection. In 2014, the number of candidates, as well as turnover in office, dropped dramatically. He argues that the snap election disadvantaged the opposition parties – who had great difficulty in finding candidates, while the LDP had a healthy stock of incumbents – even as the reduced number of candidates led to both greater de facto opposition and coordination. And, as we argue in the Conclusion, the lack of candidates contributed to a “no choice” election at the district level. In Chapter 11, Alisa Gaunder analyzes the extent to which female candidates contested and won seats in 2014, finding that due to the unanticipated nature of the election and the rigidity of incumbency there was scarcely any change from prior elections. In Chapter 12, Joshua A. Williams and Douglas Miller analyze a new phenomenon: Internet campaigning in Japan. They find that, despite the snap election, both candidates and parties were prepared to use online approaches to campaigning. As in many places in this book, these chapters show that a second look at the election reveals a very different picture from the initial impression.

### Part IV: Governance and Policy

Part IV turns to the role that policy issues played in the election and the policy implications of the outcome. Here each author finds a disjuncture between the former and the latter. These policy chapters are also essential to enhance our understanding of the concept we advance in the Conclusion about the nature of the election – a “no choice” election in policy. In Chapter 13, Gregory W. Noble analyzes Abenomics, the issue that drew the most attention from the media and was framed as “the” issue of the election. Noble finds surprisingly a few differences among

the major parties on economic policy and, indeed, a little specificity whatsoever in their policy proposals. Interestingly, although Abenomics was the main issue in the election, the election result had a few consequences for economic policy. This finding stands in pointed contrast to the other policy chapters, each of which finds that policies played a small role in the election but the election had serious implications for policy.

In Chapter 14, Patricia L. Maclachlan and Kay Shimizu examine agricultural reform, which has been blocked at every turn by the Japan Agricultural Cooperatives (JA). JA has traditionally been an important supporter of the LDP, but its electoral influence has been waning. Abe put the issue of JA reform on the back-burner during the election and the issue played little role in any party's election campaign. However, once the ballots were counted, Abe announced his plans to push ahead with reform. This "bait and switch" mandate claiming is a pattern in the election that we discuss in detail in the Conclusion. In Chapter 15, Ken Hijino analyzes the issue of regional revitalization policy and rural development, highlighting how the crisis of agriculture is more generally a crisis of rural areas. Because of policy convergence between the LDP and DPJ, the issue of regional development never developed was never really discussed by the major political actors in the election. In Chapter 16, Llewelyn Hughes considers energy and nuclear power policy, noting the absence of the issue in the election. Hughes points out that the Abe administration has committed to the unpopular policy of restarting Japan's nuclear power plants but shifted the responsibility for deciding when and whether to restart the newly established Nuclear Regulation Authority. In Chapter 17, Jeff Kingston analyzes nationalism in the election, surely one of the most interesting issues to those outside of Japan. Kingston poses what he cleverly dubs "the Abe Conundrum" – how Abe advances policies that are not popular, but stays in power. In the case of nationalism, he finds that Abe succeeds by not making it an issue. In Chapter 18, Ellis Krauss analyzes foreign policy and finds it similarly "missing in action" as an election issue despite the significant changes Abe has made and plans to make. In Chapter 19, Koji Kagotani analyzes the 2014 elections in Okinawa. Okinawa politics is dominated by the issue of US bases, therefore seldom follows national trends, and, in 2014, base opponents won every single-member district in the prefecture. In Chapter 20, Saori Katada and Scott Wilbur analyze the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade agreement. The Japanese public has generally favored Japanese participation, but several of the LDP's basic support groups were adamantly opposed. Similar to the

other issues discussed in this part of the volume, the Abe administration kept the topic of TPP out of the campaign, thus avoiding controversy that might have harmed the party's success in the race. The outlines of several patterns in these policy areas are probably already clear to readers. We think that this shows again the value of a "second look" at the election. And, we analyze some of these patterns in the Conclusion.

## Conclusion

In Chapter 21, we conclude by discussing the ways in which this election – so seemingly free of television drama – stealthily might be the most significant in the past two decades in Japan. An election that appeared to have been about nothing could ultimately have profound policy consequences.

## Notes

1. In case you are wondering, yes, your Editors were scrambling in November, too.
2. Our *Japan Decides 2012* authors wrote great chapters, but only a few reappear in this volume. As a matter of editorial policy, we decided to involve new authors in each volume of the series. In this volume, we were fortunate to have ten new authors pen chapters, and we feel this helps advance our goal for the series of developing new scholarship on Japanese elections.

# 2

## Japanese Politics Between the 2012 and 2014 Elections

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

Japanese electoral politics and leadership in the past decade have been anything but stable. Both the 2009 and 2012 House of Representatives (HR) elections resulted in landslide defeats for the party in power. Between the 2005 and 2009 elections, Japan was led by four separate Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) prime ministers in as many years, including Shinzou Abe in his first short-lived administration (2006–2007). Between the 2009 and 2012 elections, there were three years with three more prime ministers, this time hailing from the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ).

The 2014 election stands in contrast. For one thing, it did not result in a change in power – anything but, as the outcome of the 2014 election was quite similar to 2012, with the LDP–Komeito coalition winning a nearly identical supermajority over a weak and divided opposition (see Scheiner, Smith, and Thies, this volume). But perhaps more to the point, there were only two years and one administration between the 2012 and 2014 elections – with Abe again at the helm. The fundamental reasons for this difference in inter-electoral stability are that the second Abe administration did not disintegrate under pressure from either the opposition parties or within the LDP – quite the opposite. Abe proactively dissolved the Diet and called an election before any process of disintegration or credible challenge from the opposition could be mounted.

Even if the 2012 and 2014 election results seem as similar as any two Japanese elections have been, a lot happened in between the two elections. Throughout this period, the dominant politician was Prime Minister Abe (see Maeda, this volume) and the most prominent policy issue was his signature economic agenda “Abenomics” (see Noble, this volume). Yet in the almost exactly two years between the elections, Abe

accomplished a number of his other political and policy goals, in both the domestic and foreign policy arenas. Specifically, he began to implement his economic agenda, led the LDP to a comfortable victory in the 2013 House of Councillors (HC) election, and orchestrated the unilateral cabinet decision to adopt new Collective Self-Defense (CSD) Guidelines to expand the role and capability of Japan's Self-Defense Forces (SDF). Outside of his control, but certainly in his favor, the venerable progressive bastion *Asahi Shinbun* came under withering fire for scandals revolving around the misreporting of facts related to historical issues, and the "Third Force" parties that might otherwise have posed a threat to his administration collapsed and merged in kaleidoscopic patterns (see Pekkanen and Reed, this volume). All of these actions and developments helped to set the stage for a successful, albeit uninspiring, reprise of the LDP's 2012 election victory in 2014.

## The 2013 House of election

The LDP emerged from the December 2012 election in a great position – together with Komeito, the ruling coalition commanded a two-thirds majority capable of overriding any legislative disagreement from the HC. However, Abe was keenly aware of the governance problems that might arise should the LDP-led coalition lose control of the HC: in both the 2007 (during Abe's first administration) and 2010 HC elections (during the administration of the DPJ's Naoto Kan), the ruling coalition had lost its unified control of the Diet, resulting in the legislative obstreperousness and gridlock known as a "Twisted Diet." For this reason, the most important political issue of the first half of 2013 was the HC election. On the one hand, if the LDP lost control of the HC, its ability to govern could be seriously impaired (see Thies and Yanai, *JD*). On the other hand, if the LDP kept control of the HC, it would have clear sailing for three more years (at the time, no one expected Abe's snap election gambit).

Two issues loomed large in the run up to the July 21, 2013, HC election: Abenomics and energy. Elsewhere in this volume, Greg Noble provides the full context on Abenomics, which include the so-called three arrows of monetary easing, fiscal stimulus, and structural reform. After two "lost decades" of economic stagnation in Japan, Abe's economic policies were understandably the centerpiece of his administration and initially enjoyed popular support. The surge in the Nikkei Stock Index after the introduction of monetary easing early in Abe's term was pointed out as a sign that the policies were working. However, in June