The State: Parliament, Bureaucracy, Local Authorities

Introduction to Japanese Society Week 4
Philip Seaton

• The parliamentary system and recent elections
• Issues in politics: constitutional reform, nationalism, hereditary politics, corruption & scandal, women in politics …
  • Active Learning Reading Reports
• Bureaucratic Japan: Nagatacho vs Gaigodai
• Local authorities

The Government System

Let’s read about the government system in the Statistical Handbook

Japan Decides 2010: NHK World’s Coverage
The 2017 Lower House Elections (Wikipedia)

• Constitutional Reform: Let’s look at the Constitution of Japan. What exactly needs reforming?
• The shift to the right: Nakano Koichi, “Contemporary Political Dynamics of Japanese Nationalism”
• Hereditary Politicians: What percentage do you think it is …?
• Corruption and scandal: Where to start - how about last Friday? But how does Japan compare internationally?
• Women in politics …

Women in Politics

Emma Dalton: “Japanese politics still a man’s world”

Political Issues

• Constitutional Reform: Let’s look at the Constitution of Japan. What exactly needs reforming?
• The shift to the right: Nakano Koichi, “Contemporary Political Dynamics of Japanese Nationalism”
• Hereditary Politicians: What percentage do you think it is …?
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• Women in politics …

Politics and Sexism

Politicians show ignorance in attacks on women for not having children

Shimbun BCT (Source: The Asahi Shimbun)
The executive: A leader (prime minister / president) is elected, who then chooses the cabinet / leadership team.

Voting: Decisions are made by votes in parliament / faculty senates, or, by executive decision.

Politicians / Academics have decision-making authority in theory … but in practice the bureaucrats / admin staff are very good at steering decision-makers in the direction of what is “doable” or “sensible”.

There are many rules to follow and overt warnings to follow the rules, but there’s a tacit understanding that there is some “flexibility in interpretation”. Beware! Overstepping the boundaries of “flexibility” lands you in hot water!

Know the procedure: The point at which the decision is officially made (committee, vote in parliament/senates) is typically a rubber stamp at the end of a protracted behind-the-scenes decision-making process.

The organization is bigger than the individual: The system rarely accommodates mavericks. Change is incremental. Successful bureaucrats nudge things in a particular direction rather than changing the system.

Secure funding: Power resides in controlling the biggest purse strings.

Always use up the budget: Unspent surpluses mean “You can do without the money next time”.

Precedent rules OK: Unless there is a very good reason to change things, what worked last year will work this year, too.

Learn the Language: In Japan, “We will discuss this more” is a sign that people are unhappy they were not included in early-stage discussions. When something is “difficult”, it is not going to happen.