

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR “OVERVIEW OF JAPANESE POLITICS”

A DISCUSSION WITH DR. PHILLIP Y. LIPSCY

Organizing Questions

- What are some characteristics of Japan’s government and political system?
- What effect has the Constitution of 1947 had on Japan’s society, government, and foreign policy?
- What are some perspectives on the issue of Japan amending its constitution?

Introduction

In this lesson, students learn about the Japanese government and political system, its basic structure and characteristics, and how it has been shaped by the Constitution of 1947. The lesson begins with students creating a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the government and political system of Japan with the system in their own country. This introductory activity serves as a pre-assessment of student knowledge. Students then read a handout that provides basic information about the structure of Japan’s system as well as some background information about Japan’s constitution. The class then views a video lecture by Stanford Professor Phillip Lipsy that provides a more in-depth explanation of the Japanese political system. Students respond to prompts while viewing the lecture and then engage in a class discussion. The class is divided into six groups to complete a brief research project and teach other groups about their topic in a jigsaw activity. After students have learned about various perspectives on the issue of amending the Japanese constitution, they engage in an informal debate, providing facts to support their positions. To conclude the lesson, the class revisits the Venn diagram and adds information learned during the lesson, comparing their initial responses with their current knowledge.

Objectives

In this lesson, students will

- gain a broad understanding of the structure and characteristics of the Japanese government and political system;
- understand how Japan’s constitution has shaped its society, government, and foreign policy;
- compare and contrast the Japanese government and political system with that of their own country;
- consider multiple perspectives on the issue of whether Japan should amend its constitution; and
- engage in a debate over whether Japan should be allowed to remilitarize.

Materials	<p>Video Lecture, “<i>Overview of Japanese Politics</i>,” online at http://spice.fsi.stanford.edu/multimedia/overview-japanese-politics</p> <p>Handout 1, <i>An Introduction to Japanese Government</i>, 30 copies</p> <p>Handout 2, <i>Video Lecture Prompts</i>, 30 copies</p> <p>Handout 3A, <i>Jigsaw Research: Constitutional Revisions</i>, five copies</p> <p>Handout 3B, <i>Jigsaw Research: Security Issues</i>, five copies</p> <p>Handout 3C, <i>Jigsaw Research: The Perspective of Shinzo Abe</i>, five copies</p> <p>Handout 3D, <i>Jigsaw Research: The Perspective of Emperor Akihito</i>, five copies</p> <p>Handout 3E, <i>Jigsaw Research: The Perspectives of the Japanese Public</i>, five copies</p> <p>Handout 3F, <i>Jigsaw Research: The Perspectives of the United States and Asia</i>, five copies</p> <p>Handout 4, <i>Jigsaw Notes</i>, 30 copies</p> <p>Answer Key, <i>Video Lecture Prompts</i></p> <p>Teacher Information, <i>Video Lecture Transcript</i></p>
Equipment	<p>Computer with Internet access and a Flash-enabled or HTML5-supported web browser</p> <p>Computer projector and screen</p> <p>Computer speakers</p> <p>Board or butcher paper</p> <p>Markers, two colors</p>
Teacher Preparation	<p>Instructions and materials are based on a class size of 30 students. Adjust accordingly for different class sizes.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Make the appropriate number of copies of handouts.2. View Video Lecture, “<i>Overview of Japanese Politics</i>,” by Phillip Lipsky.3. Become familiar with the content of handouts, answer key, and teacher information.4. Become familiar with similarities and differences between the Japanese political system and that of your country.5. Set up and test computer, projector, speakers, and streaming video lecture. Confirm that you are able to play the video lecture and project sound audibly to students.
Time	Two 50-minute class periods
Procedures	<p>Day One</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Begin the lesson with a Venn diagram comparing Japan’s government and political system to the system where you live. On the board or a large piece of butcher paper, draw a Venn diagram. Label one side of the diagram “Japan,” and the other side with the name of

your country. Ask students to volunteer what they know about the Japanese government or political system, and decide as a class where the information belongs in the diagram. Prompt students, as needed, with questions about its structure, issues with which they may be familiar, current events, etc. Repeat with the information about your own country's government and political system.

2. Explain to students that they will learn about the Japanese government and political system as well as some controversial issues involving whether Japan's constitution should be amended. Ask students to share any questions they have and/or concepts they would like to learn more about. Record these at the bottom of the diagram or on a separate sheet of paper. Set the Venn diagram and list of questions/concepts aside to refer to at the end of the lesson.
3. Distribute one copy of Handout 1, *An Introduction to Japanese Government*, to each student. Instruct them to read the handout and consider their responses to the prompts at the end of the handout.
4. Facilitate a class discussion of the prompts on Handout 1, provided below.
 - Describe Japan's system of government in your own words.
Student responses will vary, but they should mention at least two of the following: what it means to be a constitutional monarchy, the roles of the three branches of government, the dominance of the Liberal Democratic Party, and the significance of the Constitution of 1947.
 - What are some ways the Constitution of 1947 changed Japan?
The new constitution stripped the emperor of his power and semi-divine status; granted additional civil liberties, such as voting rights for women; established the three-branch system; and made it illegal for Japan to wage war again.
 - Based on your current knowledge, do you think Japan should remilitarize? Explain your answer.
Student responses will vary.
5. Inform students that they will view a video lecture by Stanford Professor Phillip Lipsy. Distribute one copy of Handout 2, *Video Lecture Prompts*, to each student and instruct them to respond to the prompts while viewing the lecture. Allow time for students to read through the prompts on Handout 2 before beginning the lecture.
6. Begin viewing Video Lecture, "Overview of Japanese Politics." If necessary, pause the lecture at various points to allow students to complete the prompts on Handout 2.
7. Facilitate a class discussion of the lecture, using Answer Key, *Video Lecture Prompts*, as a guide.
8. Divide students into six groups, A–F, and assign each group a topic from Handouts 3A–F for further research. Distribute one copy of the corresponding handout to each student in each group. For example, each student in Group A will receive one copy of Handout 3A, *Jigsaw Research: Constitutional Revisions*. Each student in Group B will receive one copy of Handout 3B, *Jigsaw Research: Security Issues*, and so on.

9. Assign the research activity as homework. Instruct students to research their topic and complete the handout by writing their responses to the guiding questions, taking additional notes and writing one or two paragraphs about their topic to bring to the next class meeting.

Day Two

1. Instruct students to assemble with their group members to review and share notes on what they learned about their assigned research topic. Explain the jigsaw activity that the class will complete to teach each other about their research topics. Groups will have time to share what they learned and prepare to teach students from other groups. Then new groups will be formed with one student from each of the other groups, A–F. Students will have most of the class period to share what they learned with the members of their new group.
2. Allow groups about 10 minutes to review and prepare to teach their classmates.
3. Put students into new groups with one student from each of the six original groups A–F. Distribute one copy of Handout 4, *Jigsaw Notes*, to each student. Explain that each student has three to four minutes to teach their group members about their topic and can use information from Handouts 3 A–F to do so. While other group members are teaching, everyone else in the group should take notes in the spaces provided on Handout 4.
4. Facilitate an informal class debate by posing the following question: “Given what you have learned about the issues and perspectives involving Japan’s remilitarization, do you think Japan should be allowed to remilitarize?” Encourage students to articulate their rationale and provide facts to support their positions.
5. Conclude the lesson by revisiting the Venn diagram and list of questions / concepts from the beginning of the lesson. Ask students to add new information they learned throughout the lesson. Write these additions in a different colored marker so students can see and compare their initial responses to their final responses.

Assessment The following are suggestions for assessing student work in this lesson:

1. Informally assess student oral responses to questions on Handout 1, *An Introduction to Japanese Government*, based on sample answers provided in Day One Procedures.
2. Evaluate student responses to Handout 2, *Video Lecture Prompts*, based on Answer Key, *Video Lecture Prompts*.
3. Assess student responses on Handouts 3A–F, based on completion, quality, and thought demonstrated in responses, notes, and paragraph summary.
4. Evaluate student responses on Handout 4, *Jigsaw Notes*.
5. Informally evaluate class debate on whether Japan should remilitarize.

6. Assess student participation in group and class discussions, evaluating students' ability to
 - clearly state their opinions, questions, and /or answers;
 - provide thoughtful answers;
 - exhibit sensitivity toward different cultures and ideas;
 - respect and acknowledge other students' comments; and
 - ask relevant and insightful questions.

AN INTRODUCTION TO JAPANESE GOVERNMENT

A Constitutional Monarchy

Japan's government system is similar in structure to that of the United Kingdom, with a constitutional monarchy. In Japan the emperor is the ceremonial head of state, the prime minister is the head of government and the cabinet, and the parliament is elected by the people, according to the constitution. Japan's current system of government is a more recent construct than those in much of the West. And while Japan is a democracy, it differs from others due to the dominance of one political party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which has mostly maintained power, with a few short exceptions, since 1955.

constitutional monarchy—Japan's current system of government in which the emperor is the ceremonial head of state, the prime minister is the head of government and the cabinet, and the parliament is elected by the people, according to the constitution

cabinet—a group of senior officials appointed by a president or prime minister to advise on policy

parliament—the legislature, or lawmaking group, in a government

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)—Japan's largest political party, which has held power almost continuously since its formation in 1955. Considered a politically conservative party, the LDP has generally worked closely with business interests and followed a pro-U.S. foreign policy.

impeachment—the process of charging a public official with improper conduct in office before a proper tribunal

The Three Branches of Government

The executive branch of government consists of the emperor, the prime minister, and the cabinet. The emperor serves as the head of state. The prime minister is designated by the parliament from within its membership. The prime minister is head of the cabinet and selects the remaining 14 regular members, all of whom must also be members of parliament. Although a prime minister can serve a term of four years, the position is rarely held for a full term, resulting in high turnover, instability, and a challenging environment for policymaking. There is a dynastic quality to the office of prime minister, as many are descendants of former prime ministers, e.g., the four consecutive prime ministers who ruled from 2006 until 2009. The current prime minister, Shinzo Abe (as of 2017), the grandson of a former prime minister, is the first to hold the position twice; he previously served from 2006 until 2007.

The legislative branch of government is the National Diet, or Parliament, which consists of two chambers: the House of Representatives and the House of Councillors. Members of both houses are elected by the people. The House of Representatives (called the Lower House) has the power to override a vote by the House of Councillors with a two-thirds majority vote. The prime minister's cabinet is responsible to the House of Representatives and can be dissolved by this chamber if it passes a vote of no-confidence. In turn, the prime minister has the authority to dissolve the House of Representatives. The House of Councillors (called the Upper House) is responsible for approving legislation. This chamber cannot be dissolved by the prime minister.

The judicial branch is made up of the Supreme Court, High Court, and several lower courts. The Supreme Court consists of a chief justice and 14 associate judges, all of whom can be removed only by impeachment from the public. Members of the Supreme Court are designated by the cabinet, while the emperor appoints the chief justice. The job of the Supreme Court is to determine whether laws are constitutional, and their decisions are final.

The Constitution of 1947

Allied Occupation—the period after World War II during which Japan was occupied and controlled by the Allied Powers (mostly American), under the leadership of General Douglas MacArthur. The occupation ended with the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty on September 8, 1951, and Japan regained its independence in 1952.

Meiji Constitution—Japan’s constitution from 1889 to 1947, which was modeled after the constitutions of the West; established an elected parliament, granted basic human rights such as freedom to worship, trade, and own land; was based on the concept of the “divine emperor and absolute ruler,” meaning that the emperor, who was believed to have descended from the gods, was given absolute power.

Emperor Hirohito—(1901–89); emperor of Japan from 1926 until his death in 1989

sovereign right—authority possessed by a State that enables it (and its agencies) to act in the benefit of its citizens as it deems fit

belligerent—hostile; warring

referendum—a general vote by the electorate on a single political question that has been referred to them for a direct decision

Japan’s Constitution of 1947 was created during the Allied Occupation of Japan, under the leadership of General Douglas MacArthur. It replaced the Meiji Constitution of 1889 and brought about major changes in Japan’s government. The Constitution of 1947 was mainly drafted by General MacArthur’s staffers in a short period of time and differed from the Meiji Constitution in many ways: it stripped the emperor of his power, ensured more rights for women (including the right to vote), and transformed Japan into a pacifist nation.

In 1946 the Japanese people elected parliamentary candidates who supported the new constitution. It took effect on May 3, 1947. Under the new constitution, Emperor Hirohito became a figurehead (a “symbol of the state and of the unity of the people”), stripping him of his previously-held sovereign power and semi-divine status. It included 39 articles protecting civil liberties, similar to the American Bill of Rights, and established a three-branch system of government. One of its most notable components is Article 9, a “no-war” clause, prohibiting Japan from maintaining a military and waging war.

The Japanese constitution has governed the country for more than half a century and has never been amended. However, in 2016 Prime Minister Shinzo Abe proposed a bill to remove the military restraints set forth in Article 9. Remilitarization has been considered many times in the past as well and has always faced widespread opposition. Although the constitution has not officially been changed, over the last two decades the government has reinterpreted Article 9 to justify its gradual increase in military capabilities for self-defense purposes. Abe and his supporters argue that Japan needs a stronger military presence to be able to respond to China’s rising power in East Asia as well as other global security threats. Revising the constitution is a challenging endeavor, as it must be approved by two-thirds of both chambers of parliament and a majority of voters in a national referendum.

Assignment

Consider your responses to the following prompts and be prepared to discuss them.

1. Describe Japan’s system of government in your own words.
2. What are some ways the Constitution of 1947 changed Japan?
3. Based on your current knowledge, do you think Japan should be allowed to remilitarize? Explain your answer.

VIDEO LECTURE PROMPTS

1. Currently the head of state (the emperor) is _____, and the head of government (the prime minister) is _____.
2. What is the difference between a head of state and a head of government?
3. Japan's Constitution of 1947 was drafted by _____ and has been in effect since the end of World War II.
4. Professor Lipsky states that the Constitution of 1947 was transformational for Japan. For example, it included two progressive clauses: 1) an _____ clause, and 2) a _____ clause.
5. Article 9, a "no-war" clause, was also a very important part of the new constitution. What impact did this clause have on Japan?
6. Japan's military spending has gradually _____ over time.
7. How does Japan's military spending compare with that of the United Kingdom and France?
8. What was the original purpose of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) when they were established in 1954?

9. How does the SDF differ from military forces in other countries?

10. Before the reinterpretation of Article 9 in 2015, Japan's SDF was not allowed to aid another country's military forces in overseas peacekeeping operations. Now the SDF is permitted to engage in _____, which is the right to use military force to defend another country from attack.

11. How does Japan's military spending compare with that of the United States?

12. Since the end of World War II, Japan has had a _____ government.

13. Japan is unique in Asia in its ability to maintain a stable democracy since 1952, while many other Asian countries have struggled to maintain stability. What reasons does Professor Lipsky provide for Japan's ability to remain a stable democracy? Include structural and Japan-specific factors.

14. In Japan's parliamentary system, the prime minister is not elected directly by the people. The Japanese people elect _____ members from within small constituencies, and those Diet members decide who among them will be the _____.

15. The Upper and Lower Houses of the Japanese Diet are relatively co-equal in their abilities. How is this unlike other political systems?

16. The prime minister is generally a member of the _____ House.
17. What were the two general eras of Japanese politics in the post-war period and their characteristics?
- A. The _____ system
- i. Consolidated into mainly two parties—the _____ and the _____
 - ii. Very stable system that remained in place until 1993
 - iii. Dominated by the LDP
 - iv. LDP was able to govern without having to consider coalitions with other parties.
 - v. Relied on the United States for _____.
 - vi. Focused on _____ as a core national goal to recover from the devastation of the war and to expand Japan's economic role in the world.
 - vii. Population was _____ in its goal of economic development.
 - viii. Close cooperation between the LDP, the bureaucracy, and the _____ (mostly rural farmers and business owners)
 - ix. LDP and Socialists mostly differed around foreign policy issues: 1) should Japan maintain its alliance relationship with the United States, and 2) should Japan keep the _____.
- B. 1993 to Present
- i. Important changes to how Japanese politics works
 - ii. End of LDP one-party dominance
 - iii. When the LDP came back into power it was as a coalition government with other _____ and does not have the same power it had under the 1955 system.
 - iv. Changes to the electoral system have made the political parties more responsive to demands of the _____ rather than _____.
 - v. There has been a shift toward the leadership of the _____ instead of bureaucracy.
 - vi. Numerous economic reforms
 - vii. Maintained support for Japan's _____ with the United States
18. The most important question about Japanese politics is whether _____
-

JIGSAW RESEARCH: CONSTITUTIONAL REVISIONS

Topic: Constitutional Revisions**Assignment**

- Research your topic using at least three reputable sources.
- Answer the questions to guide your research.
- Take additional notes on what you learned.
- Write one to two paragraphs summarizing the main points that you learned about this topic.
- Bring your completed handout to the next class meeting. You will use what you wrote to teach your classmates about your topic.

Guiding Questions

1. What changes to the constitution have been proposed?
2. Why do Abe and his supporters believe Japan would benefit from amending Article 9?
3. Why has the constitution not been amended since 1947? What factors have changed that make amending the constitution more feasible now?

Additional Notes:**Paragraph(s):**

JIGSAW RESEARCH: SECURITY ISSUES

Topic: Security Issues

Assignment

- Research your topic using at least three reputable sources.
- Answer the questions to guide your research.
- Take additional notes on what you learned.
- Write one to two paragraphs summarizing the main points that you learned about this topic.
- Bring your completed handout to the next class meeting. You will use what you wrote to teach your classmates about your topic.

Guiding Questions

1. List and briefly describe the security threats Japan has faced in the last several years and currently faces.
2. How has Japan responded to each of these threats?
3. Should Japan's security be a concern to other East Asian countries? Should it be a concern to the United States? Explain.

Additional Notes:

Paragraph(s):

JIGSAW RESEARCH: THE PERSPECTIVE OF SHINZO ABE

Topic: The Perspective of Shinzo Abe**Assignment**

- Research your topic using at least three reputable sources.
- Answer the questions to guide your research.
- Take additional notes on what you learned.
- Write one to two paragraphs summarizing the main points that you learned about this topic.
- Bring your completed handout to the next class meeting. You will use what you wrote to teach your classmates about your topic.

Guiding Questions

1. What is Shinzo Abe's perspective on amending the constitution? Be specific.
2. What does he believe needs to be revised, and why?
3. What challenges must Abe overcome to be able to amend the constitution?

Additional Notes:

Paragraph(s):

JIGSAW RESEARCH: THE PERSPECTIVE OF EMPEROR AKIHITO

Topic: The Perspective of Emperor Akihito

Assignment

- Research your topic using at least three reputable sources.
- Answer the questions to guide your research.
- Take additional notes on what you learned.
- Write one to two paragraphs summarizing the main points that you learned about this topic.
- Bring your completed handout to the next class meeting. You will use what you wrote to teach your classmates about your topic.

Guiding Questions

1. What is the perspective of Emperor Akihito and the Imperial Family on remilitarization?
2. Do the Emperor's views on Article 9 and remilitarization have an impact on Shinzo Abe and the LDP? Explain.
3. What is Emperor Akihito's goal for Japan?

Additional Notes:

Paragraph(s):

JIGSAW RESEARCH: THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE JAPANESE PUBLIC

Topic: The Perspectives of the Japanese Public

Assignment

- Research your topic using at least three reputable sources.
- Answer the questions to guide your research.
- Take additional notes on what you learned.
- Write one to two paragraphs summarizing the main points that you learned about this topic.
- Bring your completed handout to the next class meeting. You will use what you wrote to teach your classmates about your topic.

Guiding Questions

1. What are the perspectives of the general public in Japan on amending the constitution?
2. What are some concerns of those who oppose remilitarization?
3. What are some concerns of those who support remilitarization?

Additional Notes:

Paragraph(s):

JIGSAW RESEARCH: THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE UNITED STATES AND ASIA

Topic: The Perspectives of the United States and Asia

Assignment

- Research your topic using at least three reputable sources.
- Answer the questions to guide your research.
- Take additional notes on what you learned.
- Write one to two paragraphs summarizing the main points that you learned about this topic.
- Bring your completed handout to the next class meeting. You will use what you wrote to teach your classmates about your topic.

Guiding Questions

1. What are the perspectives in the United States in regard to Japan's remilitarization?
2. What are the perspectives in other Asian countries in regard to Japan's remilitarization?
3. What are some concerns of those who oppose remilitarization?
4. What are some concerns of those who support remilitarization?

Additional Notes:

Paragraph(s):

JIGSAW NOTES

Take notes on each of the topics below (except for your assigned topic) while your classmates present their information.

Constitutional Revisions	Security Issues
The Perspective of Shinzo Abe and the LDP	The Perspective of Emperor Akihito

The Perspectives of the Japanese Public	The Perspectives of the United States and Asia

VIDEO LECTURE PROMPTS

1. Currently the head of state (the emperor) is Akihito, and the head of government (the prime minister) is Shinzo Abe.
2. What is the difference between a head of state and a head of government?
A head of state serves mostly in a ceremonial role and encompasses the spirit of a nation, whereas the head of government administers the government and implements policy.
3. Japan's Constitution of 1947 was drafted by the United States and has been in effect since the end of World War II.
4. Professor Lipsky states that the Constitution of 1947 was transformational for Japan. For example, it included two progressive clauses: 1) an equal protection clause, and 2) a marriage equality clause.

Additional background:

Article 14 ensures equality among all people under the law and forbids discrimination due to race, creed, sex, social status, or family origin. The concept of equality is given more concrete expression than, for instance, in the 14th amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Article 14 also prohibits the institution of peerage that existed under the Meiji Constitution, meaning that Japanese citizens are no longer entitled to special rights based on having nobility. This was also a significant change from the traditional hierarchical structure of Japanese society.

Article 24 states that "Marriage shall be based only on the mutual consent of both sexes and it shall be maintained through mutual cooperation with the equal rights of husband and wife as a basis." Under the feudal system in Japan, the father or husband was legally recognized as the head of the household. Granting women equal rights in marriage was a great departure from traditional Japanese laws and customs.

5. Article 9, a "no-war" clause, was also a very important part of the new constitution. What impact did this clause have on Japan?
Article 9 renounced Japan's right to war and its right to possess military forces. Japan could only defend itself from direct attack and could not defend another country's forces.
6. Japan's military spending has gradually increased over time.
7. How does Japan's military spending compare with that of the United Kingdom and France?
Japan's military spending is similar to those of the United Kingdom and France in absolute terms.
8. What was the original purpose of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) when they were established in 1954?
The SDF was created to help fight against communism during the Cold War.

9. How does the SDF differ from military forces in other countries?
The SDF has no offensive capabilities — no offensive weapons such as bombers, aircraft carriers, or long-range missiles.
10. Before the reinterpretation of Article 9 in 2015, Japan's SDF was not allowed to aid another country's military forces in overseas peacekeeping operations. Now the SDF is permitted to engage in *collective self-defense*, which is the right to use military force to defend another country from attack.
11. How does Japan's military spending compare with that of the United States?
Japan spends roughly one percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on military spending, whereas the United States spends between about three and five percent.
12. Since the end of World War II, Japan has had a *democratic* government.
13. Japan is unique in Asia in its ability to maintain a stable democracy since 1952, while many other Asian countries have struggled to maintain stability. What reasons does Professor Lipsky provide for Japan's ability to remain a stable democracy? Include structural and Japan-specific factors.
- *Its post-war constitution*
 - *Its negative experience with militarism in the 1930s*
 - *A well-developed economy before the war*
 - *A large middle class that supported democracy*
 - *A high level of education among the population*
 - *A high level of literacy*
 - *Some democratic experimentation in the 1920s*
14. In Japan's parliamentary system, the prime minister is not elected directly by the people. The Japanese people elect *Diet* members from within small constituencies, and those Diet members decide who among them will be the *prime minister*.
15. The Upper and Lower houses of the Japanese Diet are relatively co-equal in their abilities. How is this unlike other political systems?
In other systems with two legislative branches, the Lower House is much more powerful than the Upper House.
16. The prime minister is generally a member of the *Lower* House.
17. What were the two general eras of Japanese politics in the post-war period and their characteristics?
- A. The *1955* system
- i. Consolidated into mainly two parties—the *Liberal Democratic Party* and the *Socialists*.

- ii. Very stable system that remained in place until 1993
- iii. Dominated by the LDP
- iv. LDP was able to govern without having to consider coalitions with other parties.
- v. Relied on the United States for *security*.
- vi. Focused on *economic growth* as a core national goal to recover from the devastation of the war and to expand Japan's economic role in the world
- vii. Population was *unified* in its goal of economic development.
- viii. Close cooperation between the LDP, the bureaucracy, and the *private sector* (mostly rural farmers and business owners)
- ix. LDP and Socialists mostly differed around foreign policy issues: 1) should Japan maintain its alliance relationship with the United States, and 2) should Japan keep the *Self-Defense Forces*.

B. 1993 to Present

- i. Important changes to how Japanese politics works
- ii. End of LDP one-party dominance
- iii. When the LDP came back into power it was as a coalition government with other *parties* and does not have the same power it had under the 1955 system.
- iv. Changes to the electoral system have made the political parties more responsive to demands of the *public* rather than *interest groups*.
- v. There has been a shift toward the leadership of the *prime minister* instead of bureaucracy.
- vi. Numerous economic reforms
- vii. Maintained support for Japan's *alliance* with the United States

18. The most important question about Japanese politics is whether *the Japanese constitution should be amended and if so, in what specific way?*

VIDEO LECTURE TRANSCRIPT

Phillip Y. Lipsy

The Thomas Rohlen Center Fellow, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies

Japanese politics, just like the politics of any other country, is complicated and multi-faceted. So to begin with the very basic features of Japanese politics, Japan is a constitutional monarchy, and the head of state is the emperor, currently Akihito, and the head of the government is the prime minister, currently Shinzo Abe. The distinction between a head of state and a head of government is that the head of state serves mostly in a ceremonial role as essentially somebody who encapsulates the spirit of the country, but the head of government is really the person who administers the government and implements policy.

The Japanese Constitution, which has been in place since directly after the end of World War II, was drafted by the United States, essentially the Allied Occupation authorities, and it represented a major transformation of the Japanese political system from the pre-war period. And to give you one example, the Constitution was considered very progressive for the time, and one reason for this is a 22-year-old person named Beate Sirota Gordon was able to essentially unilaterally (in collaboration with other members of the U.S. Occupation authorities who were drafting the Constitution) include an equal protection clause and a marriage equality clause in the Constitution. And so this represented a very significant departure from Japanese cultural norms as well as the pre-war Constitution. The Constitution can be amended or changed, but this requires a two-thirds majority in each House of the Diet, which I'll talk about shortly, as well as a majority in a public referendum. So it's a relatively high bar, but not too high compared to the bar in other countries.

Article Nine is a very important article in the Constitution. Article Nine, and I'll read the text in full since it's quite important. So the first clause of Article Nine is, "Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation, and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes." And the second clause is, "In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces as well as other war potential will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized." So this is a fairly strong clause that renounces a country's right to war as well as the country's right to possess military forces.

But if you look at Japan's actual military spending, and this is a chart of military spending of Japan, the United Kingdom, and France from 1900 to 2007, or actually 2006, military expenditures spiked during World War I and World War II. And after the war, you see the blue line, which is Japan being very low, but you see a gradual increase over time. And, today, Japan spends in absolute terms a roughly similar amount on its military as the United Kingdom and France, which we typically think of as robust military powers.

And so, you know, a natural question is how is this consistent with Article Nine, which seemingly renounces the right of countries to hold military capabilities. And the answer to this is the Self Defense Forces. So the SDF was established in 1954 with the intensification of the Cold War, and it basically reflected a shift in the U.S. position from essentially the post-World War II immediate aim, which was to try to demilitarize Japan and make sure Japan would not become an international threat again, to basically trying to lift up Japan as a bulwark against

Communism in the intensifying Cold War.

So the SDF was created, and it's a credible military force, but it differs in important respects from military forces in other countries. For example, it has no offensive capabilities, and this includes things like bombers, aircraft carriers, and long-range missiles. So the SDF doesn't have these types of weapons that are seen as inherently offensive, and the SDF, however, has gradually increased its capabilities through reinterpretations of Article Nine. The SDF came into existence partly through a reinterpretation of Article Nine.

But recently [in 2015], an important piece of legislation was passed that allows the SDF to engage in what's called collective self-defense. So before the SDF could not engaged in military operations unless there was a direct attack on Japan or a very important Japanese interest. And so, for example, the SDF couldn't come to the aid of another country's military forces, even if Japan had sent the SDF on an overseas peacekeeping operation. So if they were jointly operating with a French force, and the French came under fire, Japan could not help them essentially. And so this was resolved with a reinterpretation in 2015, and so this is just one example of how Japan's relationship with its military has evolved over time.

If you look at military spending as a share of GDP, what's very clear, (and this is a comparison of how much countries spend on their military as a share of their economic size) is Japan, the blue line, has always hovered right around one percent, which is an informal target that the government has tended to hold up. And if you compare this to other countries that are seen as great powers or major military powers in the international system, Japan is quite a bit lower at one percent compared to the United States, for example, which typically spends about three to five percent of its economy on the military. And other countries like Israel and Saudi Arabia have gone as high as ten percent. So compared to other countries, Japan is still, spends far less on its military in relative terms, and has a very special military that is designed for defense, not for offense.

Another important feature of Japan since the end of World War II is democratic government. So since the end of the U.S.-Allied occupation in 1952, Japan has remained a very, very stable democracy, and if you look within Asia, this is somewhat unique. India is a partial exception, but most countries in Asia since the end of World War II have experienced some type of instability in its democratic institutions or has spent a fair deal of time being non-democratic. And so Japan's very stable democracy stands out in this respect. And in recent years, Japan has been joined by many other democracies in Asia, but Japan got a head start partly because of the Constitution that the United States created, but other factors mattered as well, like the negative experience with militarism in the 1930s that made people very hesitant to go back from its democratic institutions.

Japan's remaining democratic was not a foregone conclusion. Many U.S. allies, including South Korea and the Philippines, despite support from the United States, were not able to remain stable democracies during most of this period. And it's clear that Japan's democracy reflects both structural and Japan-specific factors. So when political scientists study democracy, they think of things like how developed a country is economically, and is there a large middle class that supports democracy. And so Japan, if you looked at both the pre-war period and coming after the war, despite the devastation caused by the war, you had very high levels of education, high literacy rates, and these kinds of factors are typically associated with democratic institutions. But like I mentioned, I think the Japan-specific factors, like the experience with militarism in the 1930s and some democratic experimentation that took place in the 1920s, also made it possible for Japan to consolidate democracy and remain a democracy for the post-war period.

When we talk about democracy, there are several types of democracy, and we often distinguish presidential systems and parliamentary systems. The U.S. system is presidential. There is a president who is directly elected as well as a Congress that comes from local areas, whether it be a state or a district within a state. The Japanese system is a parliamentary system, and that means that basically the prime minister is not elected directly but, instead, Japanese citizens elect Diet members from within small constituencies, and then those Diet members, in turn, choose who among them will be the prime minister.

Japan has two houses in the parliament, the Lower House, the House of Representatives, has currently 475 members with four-year terms. However, because the Lower House can be dissolved by the prime minister, generally speaking, it's very unusual for the full four years to be taken up by Lower House members. The Upper House, the House of Counselors, has somewhat less—242 members—with six-year terms, and every three years, half of the membership of the Upper House is up for re-election.

The houses are relatively co-equal, and so unlike other systems where the Lower House is much stronger, in Japan, the Lower House and Upper House are relatively equal in their abilities with some tilt towards the Lower House. The Lower House, for example, can override the Upper House with a two-thirds majority, but a two-thirds majority is generally difficult to maintain. So as a practical matter, in most cases, both the Lower House and the Upper House would need to approve the legislation in order to get it passed. The prime minister is generally a member of the Lower House by convention.

So I will close by describing two general eras in Japanese politics during the post-war period. The first is the so-called "1955 system" that started with the consolidation of Japanese political parties around the Liberal Democratic Party and the Socialists in 1955, and this was a very stable system that essentially remained in place until about 1993. There are a few important characteristics of this system. For example, it was very much dominated by the Liberal Democratic Party, the LDP, and the LDP generally was able to govern without having to consider coalitions with other parties, and in election after election, the LDP was able to secure victories.

The basic philosophy during this period was to rely on the United States and the security relationship with the United States to maintain Japanese security and instead focus on economic growth as the core national goal of Japan, and this had a unifying effect on the domestic population that was also very interested in expanding Japan's economic role in the world as well as bettering their own lives. And especially if you think about the post-war devastation, you can understand why the economic development aspect of national development was considered very crucial, because Japan had truly been devastated by the war.

There was very close cooperation during this period between the leading political party, the LDP, the bureaucracy, and the private sector, particularly rural farmers and large and small businesses. The nature of policy was multi-faceted, but one general feature of this period is what political scientists call clientalism, or the idea that the LDP would use government resources to help support specific interest groups that, in turn, delivered votes for the LDP and kept them in power. And so some of the major beneficiaries of this were farmers and small and medium businesses that were not internationally competitive but received subsidies and various protections so that they could remain viable, essentially, in Japan.

The main opposition party during this period was the Socialists, and the political cleavage between the LDP and the Socialists largely revolved around foreign policy issues. Essentially, should Japan maintain its alliance relationship with the United States, and should Japan keep

the Self-Defense Forces? And so if the Socialists had come to power, it would have represented a major shift in Japan's international policy, but part of the reason why the Socialists were unable to capture a majority in the Diet is probably because there wasn't a national consensus against these foreign policies that were maintained by the LDP.

So since 1993, there have been many important changes to the Japanese political system that have fundamentally altered how Japanese politics works. So one obvious factor is the end of LDP one-party dominance, first taking place in 1993. The LDP was no longer in power, and so this was something that hadn't happened for decades in Japan, and subsequent to this, the LDP has come back to power, but it has done so largely as a member of a coalition government with other parties. So even when it's in power, the LDP doesn't quite have the same type of ability to dominate the political system as it did in the 1955 system. The LDP has been out of power in 1993-94, and perhaps more importantly during 2009 and 2012 when the Democratic Party of Japan ousted the LDP in both Upper House and Lower House elections.

There have been many political reforms since the 1990s. Among the most important are changes to the electoral system, which is how politicians are elected into office, and political scientists would generally say that the changes to the electoral system have made the political parties more responsive to the demands of the general public as opposed to specific interest groups. There has been a shift of authority from the bureaucracy, which used to be very, very important in Japanese politics, and still is to a lesser degree, to the prime minister's office. So there's a shift from the bureaucracy to politicians, but also among politicians a shift towards the leadership of the prime minister. So we can typically think of Japanese politics as being more dominated by the prime minister than it used to be under the 1955 system. There have been numerous economic reforms to try to improve Japan's economic performance, which has not been quite as good since the 1990s.

There still remains very strong support for Japan's alliance with the United States. And, in fact, in some respects, the support is now stronger, because unlike the 1955 system where the principal opposition party thought that the U.S.-Japan alliance was illegitimate or not of the best interest of Japan, most of the major opposition parties today are supportive of the U.S.-Japan alliance in principle. So, arguably, the U.S.-Japan relationship is now on much stronger foundations than it was even during the Cold War, but a major question that remains, and one that will most likely be adjudicated in elections for years to come, is whether the Japanese Constitution should be amended, and if so, in what specific way.

So, currently, the LDP has large majorities in the Lower House, and in 2016, if the LDP is able to win a two-thirds majority in the Upper House, it would be able to start passing constitutional amendments. These would still need to be approved in a popular referendum. So there's some talk of, for the first time in post-war history, will Japan try to initiate reforms to its Constitution? And so this raises questions about will Article Nine, for example, be reformed, which would represent a significant break from Japan's post-war past. So this is probably the most important ongoing question about Japanese politics today.

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