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## Japan in 2012

### *Voters Swing, and Swing Away Soon*

#### ABSTRACT

This article describes Japanese Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko's policy-focused struggles in an environment where voters swing, then swing away soon.

**KEYWORDS:** Japan politics, Noda Yoshihiko, swing and then swing away soon, irresistible apathy of electorates, indefatigable contestation of candidates

#### JAPAN'S POLITICAL PROCESS

##### **Popularity Ratings Start at 50% to 60% and Steadily Fall to 10% to 15%, When a Revolving Door Replaces One Prime Minister with Another**

Noda Yoshihiko won the party leadership election of the incumbent Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in September 2011, half a year after the great East Japan earthquake and the ensuing tsunami and nuclear power plant disaster of March 11, 2011. Noda became the third DPJ prime minister of Japan. He has survived longer as a prime minister than his five predecessors, Abe Shinzo, Fukuda Yasuo, Aso Taro, Hatoyama Yukio, and Kan Naoto. But one common quality marks these six prime ministers, Liberal Democrat or Democrat, as their popularity rankings share a similar evolution: initial popularity usually registers between 50% and 60% and then falls at a steady rate of around 5% per month until about the one-year point, when the popularity of each leader reaches its nadir of 10% to 15%. At this time, another prime minister enters, as if through an automatic revolving door.<sup>1</sup> It

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1. Kobayashi Yoshiaki, *Seiken kotai* [Leadership change] (Tokyo: Chuo koron shinsha, 2012).

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is said that Noda has survived slightly longer in part because of his success in legislating a tax hike.<sup>2</sup> As of October 2012, his popularity ratings hovered around 20% to 25%. But the trend looks the same. Sooner or later, another prime minister will make his entrance. Rather than trying to give some explanations of this phenomenon here, let me try first to summarize what happened to Japanese politics as it evolved in 2012. After that, I provide some general evaluations.<sup>3</sup>

### How Noda Yoshihiko Became the Third DPJ Prime Minister

The DPJ's election campaign in 2009, which brought it to power in an overwhelming victory, contained two slogans—"Citizens' Livelihood First" and "Politics Takes Command" (not bureaucratic agencies).<sup>4</sup> Noda won a party leadership election in August 2011 after the "three founding fathers" of the Democratic Party each disappeared as their weaknesses were exposed: Ozawa Ichiro was indicted for his alleged money irregularities; Hatoyama Yukio was cashiered for his botched handling of Futenma, a U.S. airfield on Okinawa, and his East Asian Community idea; and Kan Naoto was booted for his inept leadership in handling the great natural and nuclear disasters of 2011. Ozawa's puppet candidate, Kaieda Banri, failed in the leadership election, and Noda won in a swift formation of an anti-Ozawa coalition in the second round of the leadership election. Noda was quick to gain the full support of two key bureaucratic agencies, Treasury and Foreign Affairs, agencies that dearly wanted to have the ear of the prime minister during hard times.

Hard times is used in two senses: both the Lehman Brothers' debacle of 2008 and the great disasters of 2011 (earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear) aggravated the government's financial positions, which worsened with the

2. The need to legislate a consumption tax hike was widely agreed to across political parties in light of astronomical budget deficits vis-à-vis GNP (gross national product), which, they concurred, would have very negative consequences, long-term. The governing DPJ, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and the New Komei Party agreed to legislate the bill. But all politicians were very afraid of supporting a tax hike leading to their electoral defeats. Still, Prime Minister Noda had the courage to carry it out on the basis of the tripartite agreement.

3. Takashi Inoguchi and Purnendra Jain, eds., *Japanese Politics Today: From Karaoke to Kabuki Democracy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Takashi Inoguchi, *Governance* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2012); John Keane, *The Life and Death of Democracy* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

4. Kobayashi, *Seiken kotai*.

DPJ's election promise and subsequent inept handling of social policy budgets. To add salt to the wound, Hatoyama's failure to get support from the U.S. government for base relocation exposed Japan to its neighbors' "onslaughts." That is, it activated territorial issues on three islands claimed by Japan and other regional powers: the Northern Islands or Territories (or southern Kuriles), Takeshima (Dokdo), and the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands.<sup>5</sup>

### **Noda's Four Missions: Recovery, Government Deficits, Social Policy, and Alliance**

Noda's first priority was recovery from the 2011 disasters. He was aware of the need for speed in garbage and debris collection from the disasters but was slowed by opposition coming from the places selected for disposal. A more fundamental issue, human resettlement had to be expedited from those disaster-stricken areas to new but temporary barracks that would lead hopefully to the eventual establishment of permanent homes, either at the original or the new address. Inter-agency adjustments take an enormous amount of time, months or even a year or more, and to hear "Go ahead" is music to those waiting. To get the economy to move ahead, infrastructure has to be reconsolidated. Most of those indispensable items such as water, sewage, electricity, gasoline, roads, bridges, railways, airports, telephone communication, TV, radio, newspapers, and the post were returned to normal.

One item that requires long, intermediate, and immediate planning and/or action is the 40-odd nuclear power plants scattered across the Japanese archipelago. The debates continued: how to tame a Prometheus unbound, whether to put an end to it, how to generate electricity efficiently without relying on nuclear power, how power generation can be achieved without unnecessary emission of carbon dioxide, how putting an end to nuclear power generation can alter international power configurations, etc. Japanese public opinion is divided as to whether nuclear power generation should be ended and how many years is necessary to prepare for a society powered by non-nuclear sources without causing a perennial power shortage for industrial and daily household consumption.

Immediately after the disaster of the Fukushima No. 1 power plant, the WIN-Gallup International polls conducted throughout some 50-odd

5. Kimie Hara, *Cold War Frontiers in the Asia-Pacific: Divided Territories in the San Francisco System* (London: Routledge, 2006).

countries<sup>6</sup> revealed that Japanese public opinion is divided on ending nuclear power but leaning to “facing it with calmness”<sup>7</sup> across income, occupation, and educational categories. Still, anti-nuclear demonstrations of notable size and vigor erupted continuously through much of August 2012, including public protests that numbered in the thousands and focused on the building of the Prime Minister’s Office. The demonstrators apparently sensed from the government responses to the government-, National Diet-, and non-profit organization (NPO)-sponsored assessment reports that officials were not really intent on abolishing nuclear power plants once and for all, however difficult it might be and however long it might take to do so. Protesters included anti-nuclear ecologists and anti-nuclear pacifists, who are fairly widespread. What is sensed as the government’s procrastination and inability to make an authoritative decision promptly has been a significant factor in the steady decline of popularity ratings. *Kimerarenai seiji* (politics that cannot make an authoritative decision) has become one of the phrases used to characterize Japanese politics.<sup>8</sup>

To be fair to the Japanese government and people, recovery has been fast by international standards. Aside from Fukushima No. 1 power plant, the recovery in negatively affected areas of Japan’s Northeast compares very favorably to that in other zones devastated by natural disasters, including New Orleans post-Hurricane Katrina and the 2008 Sichuan post-earthquake.

The second priority is government deficits. For the past 40 years, the Ministry of Finance or Treasury has nudged every prime minister to either introduce a consumption tax or to legislate an increase (say from 3% to 8% and then to 10%, as Noda’s tax hike accomplished). Noda was clever and skillful in legislating the hike despite all the adversities confronting him. Prime Minister Takeshita Noboru (in office 1987–89) legislated a consumption tax successfully but with the ultimate self-sacrifice, that is, resignation from his position. Most prime ministers, starting from Ohira Masayoshi (1978–80), had to face at least a significant reduction in popularity immediately after hinting even casually or merely raising the possibility of tax

6. WIN-Gallup International, “Global Snap Poll—Tsunami in Japan and Its Impact on Views on Nuclear Energy,” March-April 2011.

7. Yuichi Kubota, “Facing Crisis with Calmness? The Global Response to the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster,” *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 13:3 (September 2012), pp. 441–66.

8. “Kimerarenai seiji,” *Nihon keizai shinbun* [Japan Economic News] (electronic version), September 23, 2012.

legislation. Prime Minister Ohira passed away from a heart attack while campaigning during an election to introduce a consumption tax in 1980.

Noda's popularity ratings went up slightly when he legislated a consumption tax hike bill in August 2012. But soon his ratings were on a steady decline—as if automatic. With regard to government deficits, citizens have consistently rejected a tax hike for the past 40 years. The consequence is that the government has had to issue an astronomical amount of government bonds over time. Government bonds are purchased largely through banks and other financial institutions that normally hold a large amount of citizens' savings in bank accounts. Government bonds are largely backed by domestic savings and thus, according to many economists, do not necessarily cause Greece-like state bankruptcy.

Yet, the government budget looks odd in a sense.<sup>9</sup> First, the government pays a huge amount of interest to banks and financial institutions on a rate that may not be “reasonable” when ordinary savings accounts yield 0% interest. Government bond servicing costs ¥ 22 trillion (US\$250 billion) annually, which represents about 25% of the government budget.

No less significant is the transfer of money to local government, amounting to ¥ 16.6 trillion (\$190 billion), about 18% of the annual budget. Local governments handle the grassroots level of administration for social policy, hospitals, education, police, land conservation, transportation, and internal communications. The remaining 54% or so of the budget goes to numerous central government tasks such as foreign affairs, finance, internal affairs, health and labor, education and science, justice, treasury, agriculture, forestry and fisheries, the economy, industry and trade, the environment, defense, internal security, state strategy, Okinawa and the Northern Territories, anti-disaster preparations, gender equality, demographic decline, local government sovereignty, consumer protection and food safety, nuclear power plant administration, space policy, economic and fiscal policy, science and technology policy, new public goods, and administrative innovation. Social security accounts for ¥ 26 trillion (\$300 billion), about 28% of the budget. The long-term strategy of the Ministry of Treasury is twofold: (1) to use consumption tax hikes to achieve a balance between revenue and expenditure, rather than having to issue a large amount of government bonds for this

9. “Kuni no yosan doyatte tsukuruno” [How to make government budget?], *Mainichi Shinbun*, October 28, 2012.

objective; and (2) to direct a certain percentage of consumption tax to local governments, subsequently reducing the central government's transfer to them.

The third priority is social policy or the social entitlement promise made in the 2009 general election that caused a massive and dramatic DPJ sway in the electorate's decision.<sup>10</sup> At the time, the economic recession, sparked by the Lehman Brothers collapse in 2008, created a receptive atmosphere for prioritizing the public with the slogan "Citizens' Livelihood First," especially when then-incumbent LDP prime ministers held power without being tested by voters. Thus, the ratings of the first DPJ prime minister, Hatoyama, went sky high, reaching 70% to 80%. Then, voter support swung away as quickly as it had swung toward him. Although some anti-DPJ people have labeled the DPJ a liar on its social entitlement promise, the party, especially Prime Minister Noda, has been trying to ensure that the government keeps its promise whenever government revenue is available. If the government raises revenue high enough to sustain the minimum social entitlement that the DPJ promised in the 2009 general election (via a consumption tax hike now passed in the National Diet), cooperative legislation to implement that bill by the House of Councilors would be welcome.

The government party does not enjoy a parliamentary majority in the House of Councilors. The support of both the LDP and the Komei Party would be needed when Noda tables the bill to explicitly tie together the two policies of tax hikes and social entitlements. The problem is that the LDP is adamantly against Noda's "non-promise" of calling for a general election "in the near future (*chikaiuchini*)" as of August 2012, and thus threatened to table a non-confidence motion once the National Diet resumed in the autumn. The LDP position has forced Noda to postpone resumption of the National Diet for as long as possible. By early October, his cabinet was drawing popularity ratings of only 20% to 25%. The consumption tax hike to 10% will not enhance government revenue significantly, even if it is implemented in 2015. Thus, the argument to tie the two policies together looks superficial, although it represents, at least, a sincere argument in that direction.

Meanwhile, knowing that the popularity rating of the DPJ has been eroding so steadily, its parliamentarians, especially in the House of Representatives,

10. Horie Takashi, "Fukushi seiji to yoron" [Welfare politics and public opinion], in Miyamoto Taro, ed., *Fukushi seiji* [Welfare politics] (Kyoto: Minerva shobo, 2012), pp. 85–110.

appear to be leaving the party one by one, and sometimes in droves. As of October 8, 2012, the DPJ's parliamentary majority was tenuous: if five more DPJ members of the House of Representatives leave, then majority status will be lost and legislative efforts may become much more hazardous to Noda.

The fourth priority is alliance. Sick of U.S. unilateralism in response to the alleged Islamic fundamentalists' terrorism in the 2000s and the current U.S. pivot strategy of rebalancing and refocusing in response to the alleged aggressive rise of China in the 2010s, the alleged "anti-American" wing of the DPJ, headed by Hatoyama and Ozawa, tried to shift Japan's policy direction toward Japan's distancing itself somewhat from the U.S. and enhancing ties with China in 2009–10. Opposition both at home and abroad blocked the attempt.<sup>11</sup> This is due in part to the DPJ's slogan, "Politics Takes Command." Bureaucrats were disgusted by the slogan and spirit of making a decision without briefing and discussing matters with bureaucrats, especially those in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Moreover, Ozawa's visit to China that facilitated every DPJ parliamentary member to shake hands with Vice President Xi Jinping in Beijing, combined with Hatoyama's call for formation of an East Asian Community omitting the U.S., together raised instantaneous suspicion on the part of the U.S. government. Also, Hatoyama's speech to the Okinawan people saying he wanted to relocate the Futenma Air Base outside Okinawa Prefecture, preferably to other prefectures or even to non-Japanese territory, could not be realized. The result was that the people of Okinawa felt deeply alienated from, and furiously angry with, the government.

The consequences of their actions were the indictment of Ozawa for the alleged misuse of money and his resignation from the DPJ leadership (he was the leader immediately before the general election of 2009) and Hatoyama's resignation as prime minister. Two of the founding fathers of the DPJ, i.e., Hatoyama Yukio and Ozawa Ichiro, had to go at early stages of the new DPJ government because of alleged money irregularities and policy misdirection and mishaps. Prime Minister Kan stuck to the pro-alliance policy line,

11. Takashi Inoguchi, "Introduction to the Special Issue: Japan-China Fragile Partnership," *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 14:1 (March 2013); Takashi Inoguchi and G. John Ikenberry, eds., *The Troubled Triangle: Economic and Security Concerns of the United States, Japan, and China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming 2013); Magosaki Ukeru, *Nihon no kokkyo mondai* [Japan's territorial issues] (Tokyo: Chikuma shobo, 2011).



knowing that two of the DPJ troika had fallen in part because of the alliance. The maritime dispute with China over the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands in autumn 2010 led Kan to develop the policy line that was to be amplified by Prime Minister Noda.

On March 11, 2011, the triple disasters (earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear) took place. The U.S. armed forces, led by the aircraft carrier *Ronald Reagan*, were heading toward the western Pacific to prepare for a possible nuclear test by North Korea but instead redirected their mission toward the disaster-affected areas of Japan. The U.S. armed forces promptly reached these areas and carried out very effective rescue operations there as part of Operation Tomodachi (Friends). The Japanese citizens enthusiastically welcomed U.S. help. Trust in the U.S. among Japanese soared to heights not known for many years. Stressing the alliance with the U.S., Kan upgraded the security consultative committee (Japan-U.S. two by two, foreign and defense ministers of both countries sitting together) in June that year. At the end of 2011, Noda chose the American-built F-35 as the next generation fighter aircraft over some competitors, citing its superior ability of air penetration with stealth capability. Also, Kan and Noda stressed the East Asia Summit (meaning ASEAN [the Association of Southeast Asian Nations] plus Japan, Korea, and China plus India, Australia, and New Zealand), making no mention of the East Asian Community that Ozawa and Hatoyama had promoted. Japanese politicians debated Japan's entry into the Trans-Pacific Partnership but as of October 2012 it appears that Japan's participation will be delayed, possibly marred by domestic differences. Noda was eager to announce Japan's entry into the Trans-Pacific Partnership before a general election that he had to call "soon." Strong opposition from agricultural interests and widespread reluctance of politicians before an imminent general election prevented him from doing so.

Relations with Japan's neighbors have deteriorated recently. After the maritime dispute with China in autumn 2010, Noda declared the nationalization of the Senkaku Islands, only two days after Hu Jintao met with and told him the Chinese red line was that the islands must not be nationalized. Apparently, Hu was infuriated that Noda had not informed him of the imminent action of nationalization; in response, the Chinese leadership decided to mobilize anti-Japanese protesters on a massive scale throughout China. Sentiments ran high as many Chinese believe the islands, known in China as the Diaoyu, were stolen by the Japanese. Most events planned for

the 40th anniversary of the Japan-China diplomatic normalization in 1972 were cancelled. Chinese protesters attacked many Japanese stores and factories in China.

Relations with South Korea also worsened, particularly after South Korean President Lee Myung-bak in August 2012 visited disputed islets in the Sea of Japan or East Sea known in Japan as Takeshima and in Korea as Dokdo. Both nations claim these rocks; South Korea has a small coast guard force stationed there. Lee's visit angered the Japanese and prompted Tokyo to temporarily recall the Japanese ambassador. The president's brief trip occurred against a backdrop of enduring resentment of Japanese colonialism in the region. It raised public debate in Korea and elsewhere that was not limited to geography but rekindled memories of Japan forcing Korean women to be "comfort women" providing sexual services to Imperial Japanese forces.

The Trilateral Cooperation Dialogue among Japan, China, and South Korea was held in Tokyo in May 2011, and the three countries' leaders, i.e., Noda, Lee, and Wen, visited the disaster-affected region together. The dialogue was not held in Spring 2012. Instead, Noda "talked" to Lee and Hu separately, outside the sessions of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Vladivostok in September. It was not even a joint conversation.

## JAPANESE POLITICS IN AN ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

Viewed from afar, what does Japanese politics in 2012 look like macroscopically? Three features stand out.

### **Porous Borders**

First, interactions among civil society across borders have become salient.<sup>12</sup> Japanese civil society has been very much roused by territorial issues. Puzzled somewhat about why territorial disputes came to the forefront and why the government seemed ill-prepared to meet challenges from not only neighboring governments but also neighboring civil societies, segments of Japanese civil society reacted self-defensively, becoming more patriotic. The surge in patriotism that echoed the government's rigid stance on the Senkakus, Takeshima, and the Northern Territories was notable. At the same time,

12. Inoguchi, *Governance*.

members of Japanese civil society lamented what they regarded as the weakness and unpreparedness of their country.

But equally large segments of citizens seemed to take the issues calmly. Most noteworthy in relation to Japanese politics was that some segments of Japanese civil society paid close attention to what neighboring civil societies do well. Examples include Cui Weiping, a female novelist in China who led an Internet joint appeal by Chinese intellectuals entitled, "Restore reason in China-Japan relations."<sup>13</sup> Supporters of the appeal strongly opposed the Japanese government's nationalization of the Senkakus. But they also took issue with (1) political groups that promoted self-interest using nationalism, instead of asking the government to be responsible and show reason in leading Chinese citizens; (2) the use of violence in anti-Japanese demonstrations; and (3) publication bans on Japan-related books. Similar moves in South Korea were also reported in Japan. To what extent various actions in Chinese and South Korean civil societies impact Japanese civil society is not precisely known. But the fact remains that these actions are reported by widely read daily newspapers and monthly magazines as well as via the Internet. Vast numbers of literate citizens and Internet users act across national borders, both in terms of inflaming emotions and calming them.

### Declining Intermediate Organizations

Second, as the tide of globalization deepens, intermediate organizations in nationally organized societies decrease in number and vigor. By intermediate organizations, I mean those whose role is primarily to represent and/or mediate various interests of society between the state and its citizens. Here, we can include interest groups, political parties, the bureaucracy, the military, Parliament, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Take the political party. Paul Whiteley has dramatized the shrinking of political parties by asking rhetorically, "Is the Party Over?"<sup>14</sup> The figures he has assembled are not confined to Britain but include the whole world. Political parties in Japan have been predominantly parties of parliamentarians, not of grassroot-level members. If you look at the qualifications for candidates, running for the

13. Interview with Cui Weiping, "Reisei ni shimindoshi renkei siyou" [Let us calmly connect each other among citizens in China and Japan," *Mainichi shinbun*, October 28, 2012.

14. Paul F. Whiteley, "Is the Party Over? The Decline of Party Activism and Membership across the Democratic World," *Party Politics* 17 (January 2011), pp. 21–44.

election of the president of a party, whether the DPJ or LDP, the support of a certain number of parliamentarians of your party is the only requirement to make you a candidate. In the September 2012 party representative election of the governing DPJ and the party presidential election of the LDP, the total valid votes cast were only 326,974 for the DPJ and 491,205 for the LDP. Dropping membership numbers are almost ubiquitous across intermediate organizations.

Three conjectures are possible here. First, some intermediate organizations including political parties now have the option of being subsidized by the state (in Japan by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication). Second, NGOs are monitored by the state once they are registered as a tax free organization. Third, citizens can now freely voice their preferences independent of parliamentarians as people's deputies. They all participate across borders. Gallup International's poll results are a good testimony to this development.

### Lessening Meritocracy

Citizens are busier, say in comparison to 30 or 50 years ago. Work has become more organized, systematically monitored, and globalized. Without continually upgrading skills and teamwork, one cannot expect to increase one's lot. This means work is associated with stress of many kinds. The Internet, smartphones, and other devices facilitate communication and collaboration. Intermediate organizations do matter, but to a lesser degree. Citizens armed with the Internet, that is, netizens, have been on a steady increase in North Asia, more so in China and South Korea than in Japan in the 2000s. In the 2010s, Japan appears to have also caught up with an increase of netizens. The emergence of regionally specific initiatives, such as the *Ishin-no-kai* (Osaka-focused Restoration Society) or *Nagoya-focused Genzei Nihon* (Japan for Tax Reduction), has a lot to do with the development of netizens who are happy to be alone but are also happy to be virtually connected.<sup>15</sup>

Once conditions are met, it appears easier for Japanese society to be dominated by netizens than by more class-based, tribal-based, or ruthlessly meritocratic societies. Bureaucratic elites in Japan have one distinguishing quality from their counterparts in many other societies. Only a small number

15. Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2012).

of Japanese bureaucrats hold a higher academic degree, e.g., an MBA or Ph.D. When the Internet flourishes in society, many cleavages like class, religion, ethnicity, wealth, merit tend to be blurred or, in the words of Thomas Friedman, flattened.<sup>16</sup> Japanese society is even more easily flattened under globalization. So many citizens lean to one side as sentiments swing en masse in that direction. So do so many citizens swing away overnight, as sympathies recede. No less importantly, intermediate organizations like political parties and interest associations have weakened in number and vigor. At the same time, the tide of globalization deepens and sharpens the inequality in income and lifestyle. The Gini index has steadily gone up in Japan for the past decade or so. When there are few affiliating and anchoring organizations for individuals, and when sharing observations of daily life matters and sharing sentiments about small daily routines have become indispensable through social media schemes, feeling “alone together” is paradoxically an important factor of swing and then swing away soon.

Will Japanese politics continue to repeat this theme of swinging, and swinging away soon after? Not quite. Witness tens of thousands of protesters who protested, using smartphones and other electronic devices, amid the intolerable heat and humidity of summer 2012, against Prime Minister Noda’s decision to re-start those nuclear reactors that had been shut down since the disasters of March 11, 2011. The magnitude of demonstrations reached a level not seen during the past half century.

In the immediate post-Cold War years, Japanese politics was preoccupied with itself. The LDP gradually disintegrated and lost power briefly in 1993–94. In 1995, after U.S. Marines were accused of sexually assaulting girls on Okinawa, the Japanese Socialist Party and LDP cohabited government. The LDP came back fully in 1998 without the Socialists as a coalition partner. But under the LDP, Japanese politics was kept unstable for the succeeding decade. Junichiro Koizumi’s tenure (2001–06) provided a temporary boost to its popularity. On October 16, 2012, another U.S. Marine sexually assaulted another woman. This event took place amid anti-U.S. protests against the deployment of Ospreys, a long-range transport helicopter aircraft. Again, newspaper and TV underreported the degree of anti-U.S. protests. Some of the Japanese mainland elites have recently found something potentially scary

16. Thomas Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Globalized World in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005).

developing, albeit on a very small scale, in Okinawa. The rise of China has made Okinawa crucial to Japan's national security. But if Okinawans are alienated from mainlanders by the non-reciprocity and callousness of the Japanese central government and public opinion, the Asia Pacific pivot strategy of the U.S. and the alliance between the two countries could be weakened tangibly. One small rule introduced recently for the local civil service exam at Naha City, the capital of Okinawa Prefecture, is the need to have at least a minimal operational familiarity with the Okinawan language.

## CONCLUSION

In tandem with the demonstrators protesting against the start-up of the damaged nuclear power plants and the U.S. military bases, it seems fairly safe to note that voter swings (and swing-aways) and frequent leadership turnovers will continue to occur in Japan. Giuseppe Di Palma published in 1977 a book on the Italian political system entitled, *Surviving without Governing*.<sup>17</sup> The successive governments formed by the LDP and the DPJ, at a pace of one prime minister a year since 2006, may be assessed by critics in a similar fashion. Perhaps it would be harsh to use the title of the book to characterize Japanese politics for 2006–12. Nevertheless, oscillations in voter support are likely to continue for awhile.

## UPDATE

The penetration of borderless forces, the dwindling of intermediate organizations, and the degeneration of bureaucratic elitism and meritocracy in Japanese society seem to have enhanced the pronounced features of Japanese politics in the 2010s, especially in 2012. Hence, voters swing, and swing away soon. Prime Minister Noda was acting adroitly despite all the adversities the DPJ faced in 2012. But he did not succeed in running against the semi-automatic structural forces that curtail the longevity of a given prime minister. On December 16, Noda faced the general election he himself called. The die was already cast. The outcome was a disastrous defeat for the DPJ and an overwhelming victory for the LDP by default. The DPJ garnered only 57 seats (compared to 233 prior to the general election), while the LDP got

17. Giuseppe Di Palma, *Surviving without Governing: The Italian Parties in Parliament* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

294 (compared to 118). The paradox is that while participation rates were the lowest since 1946, the first general election after World War Two, the number of political parties increased next to 1946, when they mushroomed under the Occupation. This reflects the dissonance between irresistible apathy on the part of the electorate and indefatigable contestation among candidates.

Voters were bewildered by their choice as to whether political parties are good intermediating agents for them. To many, the DPJ was clearly bankrupt. The LDP looked too old-fashioned; many mushrooming smallish parties were not significantly reliable. Candidates were desperate to win seats they believed should belong to them. LDP candidates stuck together, knowing that solidarity begets benefits called political subsidies given by the Ministry of Internal Communication and Affairs. DPJ candidates, being certain about losing seats as long as their candidacy was associated with the DPJ label, left the party one by one and formed new smallish parties by expedience.

On December 26, 2012, Abe Shinzo was nominated as prime minister in the National Diet and formed the cabinet. On December 28, newspapers published popularity poll data on his cabinet, with 55%–65% approval. Abe calls his cabinet *kiki toppa naikaku* (cabinet overcoming multiple crises). Abe's new cabinet contains two key persons, former Prime Minister Aso Taro as vice prime minister-cum-treasury minister, and Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide. Aso is very close to Abe both in terms of economic policy and defense policy. Suga is solidly loyal to Abe. The foreign minister, Kishida Fumio, and defense minister, Onodera Itsunori, are not regarded as heavies, indicating that Abe, Aso, and the prime minister's key advisers will run the show. Attention should be paid to two fronts: how to change gear in macroeconomic policy regarding inflation targets, and how to consolidate or mend fences in bilateral relations with the U.S., China, and South Korea.

Heated and delicate issues such as free trade and nuclear power plants were assigned to two contestants at the LDP presidential election in December, Hayashi Yoshimasa and Ishihara Nobuteru. Appointment of key party positions focuses on how to win the July 2013 House of Councillors election with a major power contestant of the LDP presidential election, Ishiba Shigeru, who swept non-parliamentarians' votes in non-metropolitan districts, assigned as secretary-general of the party. Abe wants to stop the vicious cycle of voters swing, then swing away soon. A cabinet armed with the breakthrough weapons and strategies should be able to do so.