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Making Japan Great Again: Japan's Liberal Democratic Party as a Far Right Movement

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University of San Francisco

**MAKING JAPAN GREAT AGAIN:
JAPAN'S LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY AS A FAR-RIGHT
MOVEMENT**

An honors thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the distinction of

Honors

In the International Studies Department

In the College of Arts and Sciences

By

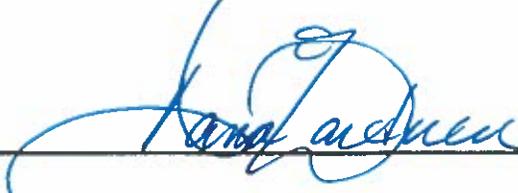
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ABSTRACT

In recent years, far right-wing political parties have gained power around the world. Far-right movements build a populist, anti-establishment support base through the use of ethno-nationalism and xenophobic policies and slogans. This article applies the models and party frames used to study European far-right movements and applies them to the case of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP), a party whose policies under prime ministers Junichiro Koizumi and Shinzo Abe have pushed the party from having a center-right stance to having more of a far-right nationalist and populist one. Using this framework I find that the LDP has utilized its electoral advantage, promises of economic revitalization, and populist slogans such as “Take Back Japan” to simultaneously gather support from both center and far-right conservatives to win the parliamentary majority necessary for Shinzo Abe’s primary goal of revising the postwar pacifist constitution. According to my analysis, the LDP is ultimately an old establishment party in Japan that has taken on strategies similar to that of far-right movements in Europe to advance and transform its aims, and it fits the framework set forth by the literature except for the fact that it is a longstanding establishment party. An important topic for future study would be the continued exploration of establishment parties who succeed in pushing themselves toward the far-right using tactics generally employed by anti-establishment parties.

KEYWORDS

Politics, Japan, Liberal Democratic Party, Shinzo Abe, Far-Right, Nationalism

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LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

DPJ – Democratic Party of Japan

LDP – Liberal Democratic Party

UKIP – United Kingdom Independence Party

U.S. – United States of America

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, far right-wing political parties have gained power around the world. Party leaders like Marie Le Pen, Nigel Farage, and most recently, Donald Trump have orchestrated breakout campaigns that cater to the disenfranchised, anti-immigration and migration voters that big money urban politics tends to ignore. These politicians run on populist slogans such as “Make America Great Again,” and promise to revitalize and return their country to greatness, while working solely for the interests of their citizens. These kinds of neoconservative, far-right populist parties have existed for quite some time, yet they have gained significant traction since the global recession began in 2008. As this is an emerging topic, it is important for those studying political science to study these new movements, as certain ideologies (including xenophobia, homophobia, and ethno-nationalistic tendencies) which precipitated WWII are often a big part of these movements and political parties. In response to this need for us to understand all different political ideologies, there now exists a strong story of powerful far-right party emergence and dominance that began in the 1980s and 90s in Western Europe, the methods from which will be used in this study.

What has not been studied as much is the case for establishment conservative parties that are able to engage the far-right while keeping their original supporters as well. This appears to be the case of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in Japan. What this work is primarily interested in is the unique nature of the current Japanese political situation since Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s return in 2013, and how he and his contemporaries have pulled the LDP, Japan’s most established political party, into a more right-wing stance. I explore how the case of Abe’s LDP is related to and different from that of the emergence of far-right movements in Europe and the U.S.

To do this, I will define the LDP’s place in the emerging spectrum of far- and new-right parties internationally, according to established party frames. As information and research about various right-wing politics has become more available in the last 20-30 years, it is now far easier to view political movements as being connected on a more global scale. As far right movements are becoming more prevalent throughout the world, it is important to study them, compare them, and understand the drive that fuels their vocal supporters. The LDP will serve as a case study of a party that has transformed from an establishment party into one which employs certain strategies indicative of right-wing movements. Specifically, this question will be addressed: **How**

is the rise of the LDP's neoconservative far-right group, led by Shinzo Abe, related to international instances of far-right party emergence? What about the LDP fits the far-right party model, and what doesn't?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political attitudes and ideological orientation are often talked about in terms of a left/right comparison. In terms of the far-right party emergence literature, "far-right" is characterized as having ideals similar but not limited to: preserving national cultural integrity and homogeneity through ethno-nationalism (Rydgren 2005), meeting national needs first and supporting the people through populism (Rydgren 2005; Cole 2005), and in some cases reverting to some sort of new nationalist society built off of glorified history and culture (Blee 2010). Firstly, I will review the general characteristics of the European and American far-right. Afterward, I will explore the mobilization and expansion strategies of these movements.

Characterizing the far-right in Europe and the U.S.

Since the 1990s, the study of far-right political movements has been growing in popularity due to the growth of these movements, most notably in western Europe. Having been marginalized after WWII on the basis of their previously racist and fascist ideologies, these sorts of parties and groups existed on the margins of the world's societies for many years (Rydgren 2004, 2005, 2007; Cole 2005). After the French National Front began its electoral successes, several other parties used the same methods and party platforms, based on a new far-right party master frame (Rydgren 2005).

The study of western far-right movements, which will be used as the comparison group for that of Japan's case, has come to somewhat of a consensus regarding the definition of a far-right political party, whether it be in Europe, the United States, or elsewhere. The parties capitalize on rhetoric like "the big parties are leaving you behind" to build a populist, anti-establishment support base in their electorate, and vow to properly represent constituents' views in the legislature (Arter 2010). At least in the U.S. case, indicating a new enemy that posed a threat to the integrity of "American" values was important, and in the U.S. case the chosen enemies are often immigrants, liberals, and sexual/gender minorities (Blee/Creasap 2010).

One of the earliest far-right parties to gain traction after the postwar period of marginalization was that of Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front in France, who essentially pioneered the undermining of the mainstream parties through smart political tactics. The National Front is considered to be one of the earliest pioneers of radical right party emergence in the postwar period and a "role model" of sorts to all parties that came after it (Rydgren 2005). In the 1980s, the National Front slowly gained its footing on the French political stage, breaking up the stable four-party system. The National Front's first electoral breakthrough happened in 1984, and provided the exposure needed for the party to grow its support. Le Pen used the issue of law and order and curbing immigration, only lightly touched on by mainstream parties, to his advantage, taking up supporters from the mainstream parties who thought that curbing the increasing immigration into France was a "political priority." Establishment party leaders underestimated two things: their vulnerable policy platform (not being radical enough for some of their supporters), as well as the unwavering loyalty of National Front supporters, loyalty no longer found in the establishment mega-parties (Schain 1987). Additionally, important to the rise of the National Front is that of Jean-Marie Le Pen and his effective push against the political elite. By portraying the mainstream as "too soft" to tackle modern societal problems, Le Pen presented a "less politically correct" platform for disgruntled voters frustrated with the more sensitive establishment that effectively legitimized and politicized xenophobia (Brechon and Mitra 1992).

If the story of the National Front sounds familiar, it's because many well-known far-right parties that emerged in Europe after the National Front have taken on similar character. Many far-right movements in other countries identified with the efforts of the French National Front, and essentially adopted similar strategies to mobilize their country's own disgruntled voters (Rydgren 2005). The works of Rydgren and Cole interpreted together introduce this idea of cross-national diffusion of political strategies and define an international (or at least European) far-right party master frame – an important set of ideas which I will summarize here. The European far-right mostly fits this sort of characterization: the party takes advantage of some "left behind" voters with platforms usually revolving around ethno-nationalistic positions on immigration/migration (Rydgren 2005); and the party takes a firm, direct, nationalistic position on the issues they choose to focus on, feeding off of situations of electoral uncertainty and low levels of establishment party affiliation (Cole 2005). Several parties fit this simple model,

including the French National Front (Schain 1987; Brechon and Mitra 1992), The Danish People's Party (Rydgren 2004), and the Austrian Freedom Party, the Italian Lega Nord, and the Republikaner of Germany (Cole 2005).

The case of the U.S. is a story of how far-right movements can influence the mainstream and pull an establishment party towards the far-right. Far-right groups have consistently been on the fringes of the American political environment due to the strong two-party system, but also because these American groups practice much more overt racism and anti-semitism compared to their European counterparts, which is not accepted by many urban mainstream party voters. Violence or depictions of violent acts of ethnic cleansing are more prevalent, and these movements are difficult to study due to a high level of secrecy and skepticism of scholarly study by the members of these groups (Blee and Creasap 2010). However, these far-right groups do influence mainstream politics, particularly the Republican party.

Research has demonstrated that the Tea Party movement spurred after the 2008 presidential election was a direct response to the election of Barack Obama and his campaign promises, especially healthcare reform. The Tea Party movement influenced much of the Republican party in that they were provided the opportunity to “rebrand” their conservatism with the Tea Party’s revolutionary ethno-nationalistic elements that have proven effective in Europe (Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin 2011). After the initial idea of the Tea Party as a revolutionary conservative movement was coined, various local “Tea Parties” started to form, and through social media and other online forums these local groups were able to link together and form the wider Tea Party organizations, such as The Tea Party Express, The Tea Party Patriots, The Tea Party Federation, and others. Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin (2011), as well as Burghart and Zeskind (2010) have established that despite the statements of national Tea Party organizations condemning racist slurs and bigotry within their local leadership, anxiety regarding issues of race and national identity in a country which has begun representing more diverse groups of people (both racially and in terms of sexual orientation) has always been at the core of the Tea Party ideology, and regardless of their national leaders various local groups in the movement still engage in overtly xenophobic and homophobic practices.

Characterizing mobilization strategies of the far-right

Most far-right parties appear to use the similar strategy of focusing on only one or two current, divisive issues in the national political scene (usually ones not fully covered by mainstream parties due to their sensitive nature) to begin their rise to power. For the National Front, although immigration control had been a part of the party's platform since their founding in 1972, a new push to focus on the immigration issue successfully rallied voter support (Schain, 1987). In the case of UKIP, xenophobic and ethno-nationalistic views were packaged into a massive and ultimately successful campaign for the United Kingdom to gain its independence from the European Union (Ford and Goodwin 2014). In Denmark, an originally populist, anti-establishment party that initially aimed to break up the elite political establishment slowly integrated xenophobic, ethno-nationalistic, anti-immigrant views into their party platform (Rydgren 2004). In the case of Italy and Germany, it was found that much of extreme-right discourses, despite being critical of the sitting establishment elites, simply advocate for the replacement of sitting leaders with the extreme-right's own elites, rather than expanding power to the general public (Caiani/della Porta 2011). Finally, in the U.S. Tea Party and other conservative movements have been making consistent use to internet forums, websites, and social media to connect with one another and form national movements such as the Tea Party Patriots (Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin 2011, Blee and Yates 2015).

Most studies explore the rise of far-right politics in the scope of one country or perhaps in a comparison between the movements in two countries. The difficulty with this, from an international studies perspective, is that far-right parties studied in this way are not adequately connected and analyzed on a more global scale. Doing so allows for the exploration of ideas on a broader scope, such as the international diffusion, sharing, and perhaps even copying through observation of far-right political strategies and mobilization tactics (Rydgren 2005), or a comparison of party manifestos and how the same kinds of far-right "key words" show up in far-right parties in various countries that appear to have nothing to do with one another (Cole 2005). In our increasingly interconnected and globalized world, it can no longer be assumed that political movements and strategies within individual countries are unique creations – instead, it must be considered that many political strategies and behaviors are inter-related with other movements internationally. With so much information available online and in the media, it's not hard to copy – intentionally or not – methods of others abroad that seem successful. The increased need for more international analysis of far-right political movements is the motivation

for this work, and I will be using Japan – a political system and culture seemingly less related to that of Europe and America – as an example to show that in Japan is an example of a far-right movement that adequately fits, and adds to, the qualifications for a far-right party already set out by the literature.

METHODS AND ANALYSIS

Although every far-right political party as well as the cultural contexts they exist in can be vastly different on the surface, this work will attempt to explore how at the most basic level many far-right resurgence movements since the 1970s and 80s (including that of Japan's far-right LDP members) are similar in terms of basic party platforms and campaigns. This work will primarily draw on existing literature and analysis of several far-right political movements around the world to attempt to characterize the LDP as fitting into the far-right populist political party frame given by Rydgren's "The Sociology of the Radical Right." In summary from the literature, a far-right party seems to need three things to succeed in politics: A Support Base – in the case of far-right parties, there needs to be some sort of support group disenfranchised with current established political parties and their platforms, who will be susceptible to supporting ethno-nationalistic claims and platforms; An Issue – some policy change or recent national trend that the party will take a nationalistic stance on; and finally A Chance – some opportunity or opening, which could be related to or stemming from the previous two factors, for the party to succeed in the political arena. These three factors will be discussed in the order presented above.

Following the three-part analysis I will discuss the current LDP's degree of fit regarding Rydgren's far-right party frame, and how the case of the LDP may suggest new additions to the far-right party framework and definition for future international study. Essentially, Japan's case will be compared with far right political party movements around the world to show that Abe's LDP does in fact fit into the growing family of radical far-right political parties; and that it should be considered for further study that a far-right movement CAN originate from the inside of a well-established party, as in Japan's case.

LIMITATIONS

Of course, there are some limitations to this study of the LDP. The first thing is that of a lack of access to the LDP itself. There are personal as well as external reasons for this. The time

frame and resources available for creating this work did not allow for travel to Japan nor assistance with exploring Japanese-language study on the topic of the LDP. Moreover, even without the above personal limitations, it is generally the case that right-wing movements and parties tend to not welcome scholarly study for fear of being portrayed negatively or exposing anything they may not want to share publicly (Blee/Creasap). Generally, the solution, as seen in the literature, is to focus on mostly external forces and opportunities that drive these movements, as well as by analyzing publicly available information on the web, in newspapers and media, and existing journal articles. In comparison to studies of non-establishment parties in the literature, the one plus of studying the LDP is that it is an establishment party, it is the ruling the power for the majority of the time frame studied, and there is decent mainstream media coverage of many aspects of the party. This work, then, will be a study of the LDP and international parties using all resources that are available to me, and I will attempt to indicate in the discussion where more study is required to fully corroborate my analysis.

DISCUSSION

Despite their name, the LDP has traditionally been a conservative/right party in terms of the Japanese political spectrum, however not a far-right one. This party has governed Japan almost continuously since the merger of the Liberal and Democratic parties in 1955, with an interruption in the mid-1990s and from 2009-2012. The LDP's uninterrupted hold on power is commonly referred to as "the 1955 system," and was a time where the LDP was split into several opposing factions. Despite constant conflict, the height of the 1955 system was referred to as a period of overall political stability as faction leaders negotiated among one another to all achieve parts of their factional policy goals and rotate their members through ministerial positions (Shinoda 2013).

From even before WWII, the political system has been characterized as having a weak leader (Jou/Endo 2015). The LDP carried on this tradition throughout most of the 1955 system, exacerbated by the constant rotation of ministers in the cabinet, including the Prime Minister, to accommodate the various factions in the party. Career bureaucrats and MPs with policy specializations instead were the officials truly knowledgeable about specific government policies rather than the minister in charge.

From the late 1970s onward, this system started to fall apart. The LDP was slapped with widespread political and financial scandals primarily involving faction leaders. In the 1990s some party members left to form their own parties and escape the factional system. These parties opposed the LDP more for structural/factional reasons rather than in terms of ideology, however fractured the LDP's hold over power, resulting in their losing the government in the mid 1990s. Around the same time (whether this was a coincidence or not is up for debate in the historical literature), electoral reforms were passed in the National Diet, ending many of the multi-member electoral districts where multiple LDP members of opposing factions could conceivably win Diet seats for the same electoral district. This important electoral change provided some opportunities which will be examined later.

In the early 2000s, further change came from mavericks in the political scene like Junichiro Koizumi and Shinzo Abe, who both will be discussed in more detail. These two Prime Ministers of Japan took the conservative route and advocated for deregulation of state postal and media industries (which was successful under Koizumi); increased defense capability in Japan as a response to growing military power in nearby China and due to increasing international conflict in the Middle East; and for official visits to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine, which enshrines all Japanese war-dead, including several class-A war criminals from WWII.

The LDP has always had right-wing elements advocating for military re-building and rejection of Japan's concession at the end of WWII to be a peaceful nation that "renounces war" (codified in Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan). The argument is similar to the one made for Japan's military expansion throughout Asia in the early 20th century. These factions and societies, primarily the *Nippon Kaigi*, a right wing group of which Shinzo Abe is a member, argue that Japan should have the tools to expand its national power via military operations just like western powers so often have done. With Japan's advanced technologies and efficiency, why is the country not a world power, and why does the country not have a well-trained standing army? These groups lobby for constitutional revision and in some cases even a revision of Japanese history that includes more elements of Japanese military power and might before and during WWII. This sort of thinking was heavily marginalized by the more moderate factions and pushed to the fringes of the party and the political sphere for decades due to the Japanese public's memory of the hardship and devastation of the war.

After years of apology and modesty by the Japanese government on the world stage, the public opinion is changing. Those who were alive during the war and physically experienced the devastation are too old to be deeply involved in politics any longer; public education talks little of the war and its devastation, so younger voters know little about the reasons why Japan must keep apologizing to the world; and overall public opinion has shifted towards the feeling that Japan has apologized more than enough for the War and should be allowed to move on (Matthews 2003).

So what has the LDP become? In summary, I find that the LDP has adapted in a way where policies can cater to a variety of its support groups that used to be served by different factions. The LDP's "all inclusive" policy framework makes it perhaps less like European far-right party like the few I have touched upon, but instead is like an establishment party which develops policy in a way such that in addition to center and moderate-right supporters, far-right groups are also motivated to vote for LDP representatives. Also, a note to begin: all Japanese political history and events have been sourced primarily from Tomohito Shinoda's *Contemporary Japanese Politics* (2013), and J. A. A. Stockwin's *Governing Japan* (2008) as well as information from the other cited studies.

The Support Base – rural voters and nationalists

In the sense of the far-right party frame, I find that the LDP already has an established support base, as they are an established party. The LDP, then is tasked with developing platforms to keep those voters, in contrast with European instances of far-right party emergence where the party has to first get the voters and then keep them. I will examine here how the LDP has adapted its policy in order to cater to as many of its historical supporters as possible – while still picking more radical far-right supporters as well.

The LDP has historically received the most electoral support from the rural districts, and has always adapted policies to serve this primary support group. Second, the LDP has a commitment to advancing Japan's economy in that its biggest funders are corporate interests from the *Zaibatsu* – the financial and industrial conglomerates that form the backbone of Japan's economy. Previously, the LDP could cater to all of these different interests separately – due to the multi-member electoral districts and the factional nature of the party. Multi-member districts allowed for at least two opposing LDP factions with possibly different policy platforms to win

seats for a single district. While some seats in the National Diet are still elected this way through proportional representation on a prefectural/national level, most electoral districts are now single-member, akin to U.S. congressional districts, and only one candidate may win a seat in most districts. This has resulted in the weakening of the factions because they can no longer engage in pork-barrel politics which difference one faction from another (Cox, Rosenbluth, and Thies 1999).

The LDP's challenge in the late 1990s and early 2000s, then, was this: how can the party retain all its rural voters, bolster the economy in the aftermath of the bubble economy's demise, and in Koizumi and Abe's case, push forward personal policy issues like collective self-defense and constitutional revision? The solution, modeled to cater to the widest range of supporters, was branded by Abe in his electoral campaign in late 2012: "Take Back Japan."

The Issue – national defense, economic stimulus, and "Taking Back Japan"

Both premierships (2006-2007 and 2013-present) of Shinzo Abe have centered around the need to "Take Back Japan," which is structured around three key goals: revitalize the economy, find a solution to the changing geo-political and security situation in the Asia-Pacific, and revise Japan's constitution to allow it to have a standing military and gain a stronger leadership position in Asia and the world (Burrett 2017). Each of the policies above answer a need presented by a section of the LDP's supporters, and is what makes this sort of platform strong.

For both the corporate interests as well as the rural farmers, revitalizing Japan's economy and finding a policy solution to ensure continued growth outside of the conditions of the bubble economy is an important goal. Abe therefore has instituted his key reform and stimulus program, Abenomics, which involves the "three arrows" of quantitative easing, fiscal stimulus, and structural reform. Although initially many were skeptical of the program, Japan's economy is showing slight signs of recovery, and although nothing can yet be attributed specifically to Abenomics, certainly these recent signs have helped public support of Abe.

For the far-right/constitutional revisionist groups, the "Take Back Japan" plans resonate because these groups often have always felt as if Japan's bid for becoming a world power in Asia was unfairly reprimanded by Western powers who have historically engaged in practices not dissimilar to Japan's expansion in Asia leading up to WWII (Matthews 2003). The quiet increase

in activity by the Self Defense forces under Koizumi and Abe have perhaps gone unnoticed in the mainstream and global media, but have bolstered the support of these groups.

Abe was also able to gain the support of right-leaning politicians both inside and out of the LDP during the passage of the State Secrecy Law of 2013. Though commonplace in the U.S. and in many Western countries in the post 9/11 era, this act officially empowers the Japanese government to designate matters of defense and national security as “state secrets” and classify any related information. This empowers the government to take military and security action without having to disclose such operations to the public, which is seen as a step towards military re-armament (even covertly).

A possible argument against the LDP as being related to far-right parties comes up here. Many studies in the literature indicate that a far-right party must have some ideological elements related to xenophobia or preserving cultural integrity. However, Japan’s case is different from Europe and the U.S., like much of Asia, in that even in the present the country remains extremely homogenous and most citizens are at least hold indirectly xenophobic views purely because there are a lack of foreigners or minorities in the country. I argue that in this case there is no need for the LDP to have xenophobic or ethno-nationalistic views because there isn’t a large minority/immigrant population in the country for the public to target.

Of course, implementing these policies is not enough to consolidate Abe’s power. Despite the support, there is plenty of opposition to Abe’s platform and his government’s actions since 2013. However, The Chance for Abe’s LDP lies in the voters, as well as Abe’s carefully deceptive crafting of policy and patience to not make large changes too fast.

The Chance – lack of opposition and national security

Shinzo Abe was not always a popular nor effective prime minister. Chosen to be Koizumi’s successor in 2006, Abe was left with the unpopularity of Koizumi’s deregulation and privatization of many previously state-run departments, like the postal service. These disadvantages, plus the resurgent dissent in the LDP following the exit of the powerful Koizumi, were topped off by a health scare, likely from stress, on Abe’s part. After losing the majority in the upper house of the National Diet, he announced his initial resignation a year and a day into his term. What has been suggested by Burrett (2017) as a reason for the loss of the upper house

and Abe's fall the first time is that he also prioritized constitutional reform over economic stimulus, which at the time did not reflect the priorities of the Japanese electorate.

His second chance in office, which continues at the time of this writing, was a time of many chances for Abe. The failing Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) had not been effective from 2009 to 2012 in revitalizing the economy, which was pushed further down due to the global recession and U.S. mortgage crisis. Additionally, the DPJ government's handling of the major 2011 Northeast Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, as well as the subsequent Fukushima nuclear disaster, did not earn the party any support points. Additionally, in the summer of 2012 Noda passed a bill in the lower house of the Diet to raise the consumption tax from 5% to 10%, which caused much controversy and significantly lowered confidence in the DPJ, although the policy was never passed into law. These inter-party conditions cemented the accession of Abe's LDP, and since 2012 no other party has made a formidable stand against the LDP.

Once in office, Abe focused on his "Take Back Japan" policies, and prioritized economic revitalization over constitutional revision. Presently in 2017, all three arrows of Abenomics have been implemented, and there appears to be a positive, though slow, effect on the economy. In terms of intra-party politics, Abe appears to have solidified his hold over the LDP, at least at the cabinet level. This is possible because of the previously discussed demise of the factions. Abe is free to choose who he wishes, and has surrounded himself since 2012 with loyal supporters to carry out his policies.

With the changing security situation in Asia since his last time in office in 2006-2007, Abe has been able to bring more public support for bolstering national defense, especially regarding North Korea and their nuclear program. As mentioned, Abe passed the State Secrets Act, allowing defense operations to be done in secrecy (for obvious reasons it's currently unclear whether any operations have been taken).

Although Abe has been successful, from my analysis it cannot be clear that Abe would have similar success should one of the above factors regarding political opposition and the national security situation not been present. Further research would be needed for that topic, and makes up a study that can stand on its own. What is evident here is that Abe has surely incorporated strategies and elements of the global far-right movement, whether directly through observation (Rydgren's diffusion hypothesis) or through his own making. The events and strategies of the past couple years have shown that Abe has maintained his Support Base, chosen

An Issue, and taken advantage of The Chances given to him to push the LDP into accepting and utilizing far-right support while also keeping its main supporters satisfied.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I will discuss how the LDP now carries far-right party traits, but as an old establishment party is in a slightly different category than the far-right parties of Europe. The LDP, perhaps, is closer to the U.S. republican party after the Tea Party in how previously it was more moderate but has been influenced by far-right groups and ideologies domestically.

As demonstrated above, the LDP fits the “Support Base, Issue, Chance” framework that I developed from the literature on European far-right movements. There are policies to cater to voters who identify with more far-right ideals in terms of revising the constitution and making sure Japan can take a strong national stance on the world stage once again. However, the LDP is still the largest party in Japan, and in order to remain so, it needs to continue to satisfy its long-time supporters and not enact social/military change quickly. The LDP has the classic establishment characteristics of being slower to decide and unyielding to change due to its size, and since 2013 Abe has been navigating that maze to achieve his policy goals of revitalizing the economy and increasing national defense, patiently and step by step. “Take Back Japan” has so far been a generally successful campaign slogan in the elections that have tested Abe’s government since his taking office, and will undoubtedly keep being effective as long as the North Korea situation remains unsolved and Japan’s economy is not growing at a decent rate.

This study is one of the first I know to have studied the far-right characteristics of an establishment party in any country. The LDP’s repositioning of itself to retain public support and gain the support of the Japanese far-right through its generalized and wide-reaching policies and campaigns, while taking advantage of all opportunities for them to consolidate political capital, was necessary to retain its hold on power. Several topics, in my opinion, need to be explored in further research:

1. The global trend of ideological polarization – the “right” is moving towards the extreme right and vice versa
2. Far-right party frames and their relationship to grassroots activism
3. What factors affect the success and failure of political parties in Japan

4. General research about the intra-party politics of conservative and right-wing movements everywhere

I hope this is the beginning of a wider discussion on what conservative political parties and movements are doing to hold onto or gain power throughout the world. It seems to me that academics and young, educated people throughout the world are more frequently identifying with the ideas of democratic society, globalization, equality, and social justice. Perhaps this is just the bubble I live in. Nevertheless, conservative parties and far-right groups have been adapting their strategies, often using grassroots tactics that were originally used by groups advocating for equality and democratic society, to expand their support base in societies they exist in. This appears to be a global trend, and there are many unanswered questions, the answers to which may change how we view our world.

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