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### Unprecedented Immigration: The Ramifications on Japan's Party Politics

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University of San Francisco  
**UNPRECEDENTED IMMIGRATION:  
THE RAMIFICATIONS ON JAPAN'S PARTY POLITICS**

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 Science

by

**Keiko Hirano-Lee**

December 2020

Approved by:

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## ABSTRACT

Although the immigration discourse is a taboo subject in Japan, the aging demographics and the need for workers has brought the topic into discussion. Part of the OECD community, Japan remains the eldest liberal country who up till recently avoided immigration to maintain its unique image. This thesis builds on Japanese and immigration scholarship to examine how new pro-immigration policies of the conservative Liberal Democratic Party may affect their electoral standing. By looking at official statements, newspaper polls, and the wording of policies, it will help examine new spaces of contestation that have yet to be studied. As a forward thinking political analysis, the LDP's maintenance of electoral power and the progression of Japan's immigration remains uncertain. Changes that should be made can be predicted by observing the rhetoric of the discourse, successful wording of policies, disconnect of efforts, bureaucracy as a monopoly and the disapproval in the governmental approach.

## KEYWORDS

Immigration, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Keidanren, Nikkeijin, Ministry of Justice (MOJ), jus sanguinis

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## INTRODUCTION

Center right governments use their cultural connections to their policies to successfully debate for anti-immigration policies because they view immigrants as a threat to national identity. (Schain 2008) The Liberal Democratic Party of Japan is the country's largest political party that has a consists of a wide spectrum ranging from nationalists to liberal politicians and favors the nation's business interests. Since the LDP occupies a conservative to moderate position in the political space, there has been opposition within the party regarding some issues, however, due to the conformity ethics that exist in the society, the opposition is not widely known. Mirroring examples of the US and Germany, the internal lack of cohesion within the party, challenges the stance towards immigration. Particularly in Japan, the center right parties have used the argument for identity through engraining the culture of conformity through the education system. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology works to form obedient students who conform to social norms to both schools and the society through controlling the teaching material as well as preventing individual uniqueness. Through the school system, the consciousness of outsiders and the importance of uniformity is taught to students, all of which is understood to be key to maintaining national identity. (Dobbs, 2019)

Japan's added complexity of demographics has increased the delicacy of the immigration politics discourse. As part of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and one of the oldest liberal democracies, it has sustained a large economy that has remained true to its conservative policies to avoid change to its cultural homogeneity. According to Statista, the fertility rate is averaging below the normal recording 1.4, the population growth is -0.21% and is estimated number of people over 65 years old will be 36.8 million by 2025. (*Demographics in Japan-statistics and facts*, Statista) With the high rate of aged individuals, the number of people working to stimulate the economy is not enough to support the pension system. At this rate, the current welfare system will collapse, the economy will shrink, which will make Japan step back from its position as a great power. This demographic dilemma is not new, having been approached with various policies to increase birth rates, such as increasing childcare services as well as providing mothers with work and monetary benefits. Countries like Japan who experience an inverted age demographic where the top is larger than its base, implement policies that raise the retirement age to keep workers employed for as long as possible in attempt to buy time via relieving some pressure off welfare systems. By increasing the retirement age, it delays changes

brought on by immigration while reaping maximum economic benefit. Under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Abenomics was introduced to regenerate the country's economy. To solve the gaps in labor, rather than relaxing its immigration policies, the government zeroed into the domestic female labor and delaying the retirement age. Historically, the heads of organizations and party leaders are predominantly male who benefit from power structures, strongly suggesting that reforms remain useless unless accepted by employers and political leaders. With increased childcare centers, better working conditions for both women and mothers, and a push for more female leadership positions, labor participation has surged. Since the majority of the female workforce in part-time positions, bodies of work have predicted that an increase of female numbers in full time jobs or longer part time hours would boost the economy. (Matsui, Suzuki, & Tatabe 2019) However, by investing in the female labor force, it offsets the balance between maintaining the economy and raising the birth rate, which is accurately represents the Japanese case.

Japan's shift towards immigration is controversial as they face "the liberal paradox between economic need for openness and political pressures" like other advanced countries have. (Hollifield, 2017) To continue as an economic power, it will need to become dependent on immigrants. Considering that population growth policies have failed to be successful, multiple scholars have identified immigration as inevitable. Japan, like others who underwent the transition, will face changes that are associated with it. Since immigration is thought to mess with the Japanese traditional sense of nationhood, the 'transition' implemented by the LDP, has been through side doors such as the Economic Partnership Agreements and the short-term trainee system, to avoid the expected political fallout. While the public supports and understands the need to move towards a pro-immigrant stance, it clashes with the government's stubborn approach, creating tension.

It is unclear if the conflicting immigration policies will affect the electoral politics of the Liberal Democratic Party. In a conservative country, the LDP's formulation of policies have allowed it to sustain governmental power since its formation. However, due to its mixed member supporter base and the rise in the public's opposition towards the governmental approach to immigration, the future of the LDP's dominance remains uncertain. By working closely to appease business interests, the LDP created the trainee program and political economic agreements with other Asian countries to bring in foreign laborers. Regardless of the recent revision to increase the number of short term visas, the high institutional barriers

restrict these foreign laborers from a smooth integration and the sham of the trainee program leads to contradictions within the discourse. Ultimately, by keeping these barriers in place, it sends a mixed message between keeping immigrants away and inviting them in. For example, while the trainee system is presented to teach skills and better working conditions to draw laborers in, the façade has been slipping, revealing the reality of the inhumane conditions that the workers are forced into. Between the lack of transparency of the party's communication and the reality of the dire predicament, the contrasting policies at play will impact the electoral chances of the LDP.

Keeping in mind that Japan's political party holds its ties to nationhood and culture to a high standard, how will the LDP maintain its nativist agenda while seeking out a pro-immigration stance? Although the most recent revision to the policy is monumental, the conservative ties keeps the LDP hesitant to open its doors wide. The balance of opening the country to a sudden influx of immigrants and maintaining the composition of the initially pure blood race is delicate. As the concepts of nativism and immigration are polar-opposites, the equilibrium can tilt easily and drastically change both the party politics and policies. As a nation who previously maintained anti-immigration policies, Japan's unexpected prioritization reveals new areas of study that have not been covered and discussed before. Adding onto the analysis and frameworks formed by past scholars. This forward thinking study examines the effect of the abrupt policy change, specifically how the lack of time and preparation influences the host county's ability to cope with immigrants.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Global literature*

With immigration being the subject of constant political scrutiny, center-right governments are pressured to solve the dilemma to either appeal to business interests or keep up the nativist composition. On a broader level, countries who struggle with the same predicament face the difficulty of choosing between social conservatism and liberal free market. For both the US and Germany, the governments are in the spotlight and need to make a choice if they can maintain a traditional political front while utilizing a more liberal approach on the socio-economic front. The internal tensions within the businesses of Germany and the US project larger multinational companies to favor more flexible immigration policies because it "provides a steady supply of human resources" (Menz, 2015).



While multinational companies can bear the expense of creating a more diverse labor force, smaller companies are unable to compete because the problems outweigh the benefits.

Italy is an example where the demand for a workforce over-rode the conservative agenda, which forced the lawmakers to adjust the country's legislation to match the market dynamics. With competition and the need of profits, employers hired immigrants to combat the ongoing labor shortages and in doing so, reduced the prejudiced concerns and opinions. The economic role that the immigrants took up was recognized and gave way to their political legitimacy in Italy. The European standard of accepting an immigrant worker provided the basis of certain rights such as health, education, and pension. The economic phenomenon and the reality collided to negate the adverse political rhetoric. (Ambrosini 2011) Immigrants in Italy are denied their civil and full citizenship rights due to the denial of the center-right party as well as the inability to come to an agreement with the center-left power. While they are given the minimum of rights, some local governments developed restrictive policies like requirements for housing, which excluded them on the grounds of security reasons. Italy gives off the perception of being receptive and knows of the economic benefits, yet immigrants are not recognized legitimately in the society.

### *Integration into society*

One thread of research circles around who and how many will be admitted rather than how will their adaptation be supported. With intentional response to the urgent labor need, the local governments are readily supporting the small immigration population that managed to get through the nation's doors at great lengths while the national government is debating the need for foreign labor. (Strausz, 2019) With all the research focused on how immigration will impact the society and contribute to the shrinking working force, the foundation of

getting people drawn to the country is missing. Current research into the policies made by the right wing Liberal Democratic Party has scholars looking at other countries that previously underwent or are experiencing the same phenomenon. Based on ethnocentrist ideologies of blood purity, Japan's unwillingness to acknowledge foreign workers as immigrants is a reflection of Germany's early policies.

The attainment of citizenship status is an essential part of the integration process, but is often met with hesitancy on behalf of the host nation. Citizenships are attached to the national culture and the politics of identity, both of which is used to argue against granting immigrants the rights while also overshadowing strategic political interests. Rogers Brubaker proposed that citizenship laws are formalizations of a nation's rooted cultural idioms, which is resistant to change. A country's history largely contributes to the opposition because past events inform who is part of "us" and who is seen as "other", and citizenship signals an acknowledgement of the immigrant as part of "us". In the case of Germany and France, when conflicting policies were made by the left and right-wing parties, James Hampshire (2013) questioned whether the disagreements arose from protecting national culture, strategic political calculations or electoral competition. Hampshire (2013) divided processes of integration into 4 models for immigrants in a liberal state; assimilation, differential exclusion, integration and multiculturalism. Assimilation is characterized as a one-sided process where immigrants are required to relinquish their linguistic and cultural characteristics so as to become incorporated into the host society. Differential exclusion is the temporary incorporation into the labor market but exclusion from citizenship and political participation. Integration is the soft form of assimilation where mutual accommodations are made but the final goal is the absorption into the dominant culture. Multiculturalism pursues the inclusion of immigrants without an expectation that they give up their own culture, religion or language. Out of four integration models, Japan currently utilizes a mixture of assimilation and differential exclusion based on the type of migrant. In 2018, revisions to the system allowed for two versions of the visa to appear. The first type of visa is catered towards low skilled immigrants, providing them with 5 years of temporary residency with the option of renewals. The second visa focuses on skilled immigrants and allows them to bring their family if they meet a certain set of criteria. Despite the move towards social integration, former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Cabinet discouraged the local governments from passing an ordinance that would allow immigrants the right to vote, after finding out about the increase of polling systems that were inclusive of non-Japanese residents. The LDP's

primary concern was that by giving non-Japanese voting rights, they would have an influence on the nation's politics which violated the Constitution by undermining the principle of sovereignty. (Mie, 2014)

### *Comparison to the global phenomenon*

Both the German and Japanese governments have implemented diversity management policies in regards the growing aging population. The value of the knowledge and experience that senior employees hold explains the government's decision to raise the pension eligibility age to keep them in the workforce as long as possible. Likewise to the Japanese demographic, Germany raised its retirement age (to 67) as well as creating policies to reduce the incentives to retire early. Although older people have an opposite image compared to Japan, the government has implemented initiatives to improve the perception of seniority and eliminate prejudices. (Kemper, Bader, & Froese 2016) To compensate for the lack of labor, both countries have enacted practices to integrate the use of older workers in the growing diverse workforce.

Since the credibility of the political party weighs heavily on the electoral vote, conservative governments need to be attentive to align immigration policies to the mainstream societal expectations and norms. Japan's center right party crafted their immigration policies to fit with the culturally conservative and patriotic values, swaying the voters to continually support the LDP. However, since center right parties unite a disparate set of voters, the assumption is that most of the support is not susceptible to more radical positions. Christina Bosewell (2007) and James Hollifield (2017) examine the nature of conservative governments in mobilizing strategies to limit immigrants and multiculturalism while having to consider the risk of losing legitimacy and voter support. Restrictive policies can conflict with a range of policy goals embraced by the center right, usually economic policy, human rights commitments, business interests, foreign policy and free trade. Boswell (2007) continues to find that "center right parties need to be careful not to deviate from mainstream societal expectations about norms governing treatment of immigrants and ethnic minorities", or else it undermines the credibility of the political party. The credibility also rests on the government's backing of supporting organizations. Provided that the party does not create policies that support the organizations, it risks the legitimacy and the voting support because views are being disregarded.

## *Uniqueness of the Japanese case*

Although scholars have compared Japan to other countries to suggest solutions to the shortage of labor and the aging demographic, the uniqueness of the situation itself presents an array of challenges. The historical background surrounding the contention of adjusting the 1990 Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, the divisions in the ministries, and the gap between the government and business all contribute to the uncommon case. (Milly, 2014) On top of everything, instead of following the path that other industrialized countries took post-war to fuel economic growth with foreign labor, “Japanese officials and corporations opted to automate production, shift production abroad, and tap into alternative sources of domestic labor such as women, students, elderly and rural migrants.” (Hollifield, 1994).

With cabinet support rate being instrumental in politics, Japanese newspapers send out opinion polls to the public. The reader’s choice of news organizations and the forecasts of elections are closely related. Each of the outlets reveal the reader’s interest, evaluations of political parties, and political problems. The three major daily newspapers are the Asahi, Mainichi and Yomiuri, all of which take a different stance. Out of the three, Asahi and Mainichi lean towards the left while Yomiuri reports have a conservative stance and one of the few that holds a center-right position. Seeing that Japan’s liberal government is center-right, I will primarily look at articles and polls published by the Yomiuri newspaper because I think it represents the most accurate proportion of the conservative population. In particular, the Yomiuri newspaper has 14 million in print circulation, compared to Asahi’s 12 million and Mainichi’s 5.5 million. By looking into the results from the polls and seeing that the public supports the actions of the government as well as giving their approval, it helps me partially to understand the reasoning behind the nation’s policies regarding immigration.

Despite there being an overwhelming popularity for the Liberal Democratic Party over the opposition, there are more than 10 ministries, excluding the Immigration Bureau, involved in the process of setting guidelines or conditions for admission of immigrants, suggesting that there will be officials or ministries in contention with the proposed policies. Since immigration impacts infrastructure such as health, education and social welfare among others, official statements from the different ministries will vary. With that in mind, if immigration remains a priority above others, the rest of domestic politics will have to undergo a change to accommodate the adjustment.

### *Japanese scholars*

In his analysis of the most recent revision to the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, Nobuhiro Aizawa (2019) identifies the opposition, where political fault lines divided the party members. In a broader context, Aizawa zeroes in on the overruling power that the LDP holds in the government and uses to its advantage to push this policy forward before getting consensus. The urgency of finalizing the draft law provoked the split in opinion where criticisms fell into two categories; the use terminology of “foreign workers” instead of “immigration” and the need for the national government to find the equilibrium of power & burden sharing. (Aizawa, 2019) In the rush of this policy revision and the refusal to frame the revision as “immigration reform”, the LDP legal commission undertook the responsibility in trying to address concerns including the competition of jobs between natives and foreigners, the lack of social arrangements, the absence of social security as well as the missing legal protection, over a period of 5 days, many of which were left unanswered. (Aizawa, 2019) Furthermore, he also identified the imbalance of power and sharing the burden of responsibility between the national and local government. The local LDP prefectural branches do have a relationship where they hold influence in demanding for unskilled foreign workers, however, the national government does not provide adequate support services, leaving the regions that have high demands for foreign workers with low budgets to serve the migrant workers. In finding the disconnect between the different levels, it is recognized the national level holds all the power while the prefectural bodies are left with the responsibility to find ways to support the influx of migrants, when it should be a collaborative effort from both ends. (Aizawa, 2019)

Among the few Japanese scholars, Takeyuki Tsuda analyzed the pressures of national security and the preservation of homogeneity that the government faced, which led to the political compromise of the ‘side door’, allowing both second & third generation descendants to temporarily live and work. As an emerging migration state, like other liberal democratic states, Japan deals with similar balancing troubles between policymaking, markets and rights. On top of that, with the unique identity collectivization, the role of culture is heightened which elevates the difficulty. Looking into the paradox of the demand for foreign labor and the protection of the social contract, common ethnic ancestry, Tsuda argues the compromise was to appease both the business interests and the conservative ideas stemming from the Ministry of Justice. (Tsuda, 1999)

## BACKGROUND

Globally, the rise for managed labor migration is increasing in demand. The scale of immigration that would be needed to offset population ageing and maintain dependency ratios is so large that it is deemed politically unviable. According to the United Nations Population Division (UNPD), for the EU to maintain its dependency ratio, it would require 674 million immigrants between 2000 and 2050. With the demand being so high, immigration cannot be a panacea for demographic problems in industrial countries (Hampshire, 2013).

Since Japan relies on the US for military security from the end of WWII, as a great power, it heavily depends on its economic strength. However, the contradiction between wanting to maintain a blood pure race and its demographics has the country barely holding onto its great power status. Basing their conceptions off the problems other liberal democratic states face when welcoming large numbers of immigrants, Japan utilized the compromise made by Keidanren and the Ministry of Justice to implement a program that revolved around the notion of *jus sanguinis*, where only second and third generation descendants of *Nikkeijin*, Japanese descendants who emigrated, were permitted to live and work temporarily within the country. Currently, the discourse remains as a delicate topic as the government is in denial of Japan needing to become a nation of immigrants.

The Liberal Democratic Party is the largest political party in Japan that continues to hold power since its formation in 1955. As a conservative alternative to the socialist and communist parties, it has worked closely with business interests and has a wide range of members from right-wing nationalists to liberal politicians. Splits within the LDP are common with the younger generation of politicians supporting immigration while the older generation uses a more cautious approach. The political scene in Japan vastly differs from the environment in the US. According to a poll put out by Asahi newspaper, the approval rate for Abe's administration was 45% among those who participated and under 30 years old, which was conversely higher than the 35% approval rating from those in their 60's. (Rich and Yamamitsu 2019) Despite the lack of transparency of the LDP's agenda, the youth tend to continue to vote for them because it is most clear among all the political parties and from the fear of upsetting the current stability. Rather than voting for the conservative ideology, the youth support the LDP to avoid political chaos. Unlike the US, political activity is rare in Japan and demonstrations are usually led by the older generation. Although young people

were active in the 1960's, since their demands were defied and neglected, it led to the continuous political disinterest. Despite the majority of young voters supporting liberal social views on issues like same-sex marriage and diversity, it does not directly correlate to a shift in voting behavior. The combination of the relatively peaceful conditions under Abe's leadership, political disinterest, voters being taught not to disagree with those in authority and the low voter turnout, allows the LDP to maintain their power.

Unlike other countries that opened their doors wide, Japan approached immigration in ways that concentrated on limiting outsiders as much as possible. The development of Japanese immigration policies from 1951 to 2019 starting from the creation of the Immigration Control Order to the most policy revision shows the progress of the government's thinking towards the immigration discourse. (see Table 1)

Table 1: Development of the Japanese immigration policies from 1951-2019

Development	Year	Development
	1951	Immigration Control Order Issued
Immigration Control Order Abolished	1982	Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act enforced
	1989	Reforms to Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act
Special law on Immigration Control	1991	
	1993	Technical Internship Trainee Programme introduced
	2004	Reforms to Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act-to decrease number of unauthorized foreign residents
Shinzo Abe sworn in as Prime Minister (resigns in 2007)	2006	Guidelines about the Permission for Permanent Residence established
Economic Partnership Agreements with Indonesia, Vietnam and Philippines created	2008	
Points Based System for Highly Skilled Foreign Professionals introduced	2012	Shinzo Abe sworn in position as PM

	2014	Technical Internship Trainee Programme expansion
Modest policy reforms made to Immigration Control act	2015	New ministerial posts created within government
Expansion of visa programs to allow more than 345,000 new workers to enter over next 5 years	2019	
		(Akashi, 2014) (Kondo, 2002) (Kondo, 2015) (Kashiwazaki and Akaha, 2006)

The historical context of WW2, Korean War and the Cold War all influenced the formulation of the strict policy that remains. For example, the tensions of the Korean War impacted post-war Japan. Koreans that were conscripted by the Imperial Army and had remained in Japan drew unwanted hate from being associated with communist groups. Primarily, the Cold War sentiment fueled the US' negative outlook of Koreans, which translated into Japan's feelings towards the neighboring country. Due to the mutual distrust arising from nationalist incidences, policies were created to protect the political nationhood via example of stripping citizenship from foreigners who were born in Japan, rendering them as foreigners and stateless. Congregating people of foreign descent to potential criminals, Japan maintains their strict immigration policy to limit similar incidents. (Rao, 2017)

Over the course of 15 years, the Ministry of Justice held conferences and outlined the immigrant discourse at the state level. Throughout these conferences, 4 Basic Plans were created to guide policy reform and brought together key policy actors to support the gradual move to accepting 'immigrants'. (see Table 2) Both the Keidanren and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had been lobbying for policy reform and the increase in legal intake of foreign workers. Despite the success of initiating discussions and the forward progress of Japan's immigration policy, it is minimal when compared to what needs to be done. The seriousness and the effects that the domestic problems are causing is unmatched by the pace of policy development.

Table 2: 4 Basic Plans formed between 1990 and 2015

Basic Plan #	Main Points



1	Main thinking/purpose of the conferences and Ministry of Justice conveyed
2	Addressed the need to find ways to cope with a rapidly aging population, low childbirth, and decreasing workforce. Some members of the conference voiced that Japan should replenish the population and workforce numbers with foreigners. Others argued that with the history of Japan, it would not be smart or realistic to introduce a large population of foreign laborers. The conclusion was that there would be an attempt to accept foreigners that caused minimal friction in the society while maintain the vitality of the socio-economy. (MOJ 2000: 1)
3	Came to an understanding that there is an urgent need to accept foreign workers specifically in the fields for elder care, including nurses and care workers. Noting that the productive population is predicted to shrink to 53.89 million by 2050, resulting to accept 650,000 foreigners per year. To meet the capacity of the elderly, nursing-care workers would be in demand, and specificities of whether and how to accept workers in the field were discussed. (MOJ 2005)
4	It was discussed that to revitalize the economy, highly qualified human resources, foreign students and tourists of foreign countries were required. The emphasis was placed on bilateral Economic Partnership Agreements with other Asian countries to recruit foreign workers based on a point system and promote the acceptance of applicants into technical fields. (MOJ 2010: 21)
	Adapted from “Testing the Limits of Welfare State Changes: The Slow-moving Immigration Policy Reform in Japan” Ito Peng

## METHODOLOGY

With the party being made up of multiple factions, I gathered statements from both officials of different ministries, opposition parties as well as Japanese immigration experts to assess the variety of views that are hidden under the layer of collectivization. Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe pursued policies that addressed the economic stagnation due to labor shortage by increasing foreigners but declined to attend to the integration of foreigners into the society. Keeping immigration as a top priority as part of an economic imperative exposes

a plethora of issues that fall onto the rest of the ministries to deal with such as racism and inequality. Finding statements from the mouths of current officials and ministers was difficult because the comments of opposition are rarely in newspapers, and much less so on social media platforms such as Twitter. For most of the comments that I have found, I have been accessing them through newspaper articles and the official reports published by the Keidanren, which is the official Japanese Business Federation. The Keidanren is an economic organization that represents companies of Japan, nationwide industrial associations, and regional economic organizations for all prefectures as well as advising the government specifically on economic policies. It played a major impact in the creation of the LDP in 1955.

Although some statements fell into previously created and studied categories of disagreement, some revealed new spaces of contention, which increases the unpredictability of the LDP's tactic of keeping electoral power. I categorized the statements and the associated polling statistics based on Nobuhiro Aizawa's analysis of the areas of disagreement; the aversion of using "immigrants", lack of support systems for social integration as well as the imbalance between national and local government. (Aizawa, 2019) For the statements and numbers that did not fit into the previously mentioned categories, I formulated new spaces for discussion, as it particularly revolves around the effects of the public's involvement on party politics. Since the policy adjustments was sudden, the support for the new spaces of disagreement grew. Branching off of Rogers Brubaker, James Hollifield, and Takeyuki Tsuda's reasoning for conservative governments' resistance to change, the success of the policy wording and the homogenization of anti-immigration sentiment are areas that need to be observed when discussing Japanese immigration politics.

Limitations:

Part of the unifying nature of the people and the government is that opposition is not always stated in the most direct form or is not as visible. In the rare occasions that opposition is verbalized or typed out, the statement is usually taken back once the person is in official position or relegated to another post. While it is known that the LDP was and is currently divided over the immigration issue along with public knowledge that the bill caused controversial debate, the documentation of the debate is not online or on the official government website. With the handful of statements that I have identified among officials,

there is bound to be opposition because there are 11 ministries in the Cabinet, implying that there is more division that may be applicable.

Since I took quotes and statements from multiple newspapers, the variety of opinions from different people are diverse. The variety of opinions allowed me to see the contrasting sides to the delicate topic of immigration. However, each newspaper has a different political stance whether it is more conservative or more liberal, suggesting that the newspaper chooses quotes specifically to support their political argument or report. Given that Yomiuri holds a conservative stance, I thought that it would accurately represent the public. While I was looking into the opinion polls sent out by the newspapers, the questions were worded in a way that it leaned towards their political stance, altering the perception of the answer. On top of that, since polls are distributed online, it can be assumed that most of the answers are submitted by the students and young professionals, which sways the majority opinion to report a pro-immigrant stance. With the age difference in link to technology, the elderly population are most likely not replying to these polls, thus not voicing their opinions. The generational difference affects the types of responses received by the newspapers.

As one of the oldest democracies globally, the average age of the population is 48 years old. (Statista) While former Prime Minister Abe was 66, the new PM finishing off Abe's term is 71 years old. Although aging can guarantee wiser decisions to be made, it can also negatively influence the attitude, ideas and approach to new policies because stubbornness is positively correlated with age. (Lau and Redlawsk, 2008) With members of the older generation of the population leading the country, it is harder to implement new concepts as the leaders lean more towards sticking to tradition. Apart from aligning with the cultural homogeneity, when Abe was in power, he was reluctant to implement immigration policies because he wanted to uphold traditional practices, specifically Confucian beliefs of respecting the elders. With some exceptions, most of the quotes are coming from older officials who associate their opinions with negative situations that happened in other countries that underwent changes due to immigration or previously established ideas, ultimately influencing the possibility of further opening the national doors to immigrants.

## FINDINGS

### *Rhetoric of immigrant discourse/Government's wording of immigration*

The rhetoric of immigration policies created by the government is purposeful to avoid political fallout for the LDP. In the conservative country of Japan, with the help of the United

States, the path since WW2 for modernization focused on the advancing the economy without the help of immigrants. To maintain the blood lineage and appease the social contract of being a culturally unified nation, the use of the word “immigrant” is steered away from and swapped for “foreign workers” that are on temporary contracts to refrain from implementing changes to other policies such as insurance, welfare health and housing. The “permanent” cautionary tape is a fine line that Japan tries to avoid in efforts to tamper probable contestation from the greater public. Despite the public’s majority opinion banking on increasing immigration, the age gap that exists between the public and the government contributes to the stubbornness of leadership. In the perspective of the government, by using the rhetoric of immigrants, it implies the acceptance of future citizens that are not ethnically Japanese, therefore violates the social contract of being a racially unified country.

By avoiding the use of the term “imin”, the Japanese word for “immigrant”, the LDP defers from creating extra policies that would be necessary for their integration into society. The formulation of policies like pension, health insurance and education can be avoided because foreign workers are not considered as official immigrants. However, with the revision of the policy to accept 345,000 workers over the next 5 years, the construction and implementation of new policies is inevitable. The absence of the phrase “immigrants” and immigrant policy from public media and legal discourse has been recognized and of heated contestations within Diet debates. One debate aspect that has continuously been brought up is the national notion of harmony and peaceful in conjunction to crime. A 2006 Cabinet Office survey recorded that 84.3% of the public felt that the safety declined, the majority reason being that the crimes committed by foreigners had increased. However, due to the decline of the foreign population in 2009, the perception of foreigners as criminals dropped as evidenced by the results of the exact same survey in 2012. Politically, the government employs the replacement euphemisms to maintain the tough hurdles, avoiding the influx of unskilled workers and restricting access to Japanese nationality. (Burgess, 2014)

Current policies are phrased in such a way that allows Japan to come up on top when disagreements appear in in the nation’s approach to immigration. For example, in response to claims of hardships that existing foreign laborers get on the receiving end, former Prime Minister was noted to have stated, “it would be wrong to force our values on foreigners. Instead, it’s important to create an environment in which people happily co-exist”. Similarly, as a response to the debate that Japan does not do a good job with the integration process, foreign minister Taro Kono explained, “We are now trying to find a new work permit policy, so if you are willing to blend in with Japanese society, everyone will be welcomed”. By

cleverly crafting their replies, both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister alluded to Japan being a welcoming society where the blame was placed on the foreigners for not being able to adjust to the host society, playing to the public's opinion of Japan's uniqueness.

### *The success of the policy wording*

The passive-aggressive, roundabout wording of the policies has shown to be successful because not only has the Liberal Democratic Party remained in power since its establishment in 1955 up till now, with an exception of the period from 2009 to 2012, but also tampers public opposition. As a conservative nation, the government creates policies "based on elite prejudices and public perceptions instead of logic" and oftentimes have appeared as "irrational or contrary to national interest" (Burgess, 2014) Up till recently, the anti-immigration principle contributed to the nation's discourse of homogeneity, most notably implied when former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe indicated that if migrants were to enter, the traditional harmony and cooperation would be disrupted. By phrasing immigration in context of harming national identity, the LDP utilizes the public's understanding to emphasize that immigration would only implicate more social barriers for the society rather than assisting in balancing the economic system, thus salvaging the nation's status.

The continuation of traditional policies towards immigration up till recently was built on the negative stereotypes that were constructed when observing the necessary changes that other countries had to undergo when they opened up to the immigration movement. Particularly using the concern about job competition and security, upper house panel chief, Yoshio Kimura stressed that the proposal "should not be misconstrued as an immigration policy and rules should be established to offset negative impacts on jobs and public safety". (Sieg, 2016) In observing the immigration movement that took place in the US and in Europe, the past policies have been based on trying to avoid the conflicts that would arise. By avoiding the use of immigration as a strategy to alleviate some of the domestic problems, it also evades the issues that would emerge as the result in increased diversity.

The success of the policy wording is partly attributed to the aftermaths of historical events and the education system. Under the US Occupation and the Cold War, nationalist Chinese and Korean incidents largely influenced the strict policies that exist in attempt to keep similar events to a minimum. In combination of the age of officials in leadership positions, their lasting memories consist of noteworthy politicians being killed by the foreign nationalists, so foreign laborers tend to be associated to the terrible history. Noting that these

events are part of the Japanese education, the native population are taught to have the same perceptions as the officials in leadership. Growing up in the knowledge cycle that depicts a clear linkage between foreign residents and violence is a hard conception to break. Using political nationhood as one of the main reasons, the government has been successful in convincing that becoming a country receptive to immigrants is a negative attribute to have.

As mentioned in the introduction, the conservative nature of the leadership is more likely to hold an anti-immigration stance, especially when the discussion is rooted in cultural and economic areas. Through the education system, students are educated on the importance of conformity and the consciousness felt towards outsiders. The compliance that is instilled shapes thought processes of what national identity is supposed to be. Catering to the interpreted meaning of national identity, the policies have been successfully worded in a way that opposes what the native population had been taught. The government capitalizes on the understanding that opening the country to foreign residents is detrimental to changing what it means to be Japanese. As part of the national identity, the belief that uniqueness contributes to the strength of the nation remains strong in some of the minds within the government as well as the older population. To avoid the disintegration of community that firmly believes in the blood pure race, the secretary general of the LDP coalition partner Komeito, Tetsuo Saito is one individual who deems it “necessary to maintain Japan’s vitality”. (Odanaka and Takeuchi, 2018) The government has successfully conveyed the uncomfortable discourse and consciously made efforts for the public to acknowledge them as foreign laborers. Even in the midst of recognizing that immigration is inevitable for Japan to continue as it is, the automatic response that both citizens and officials have demonstrates the success of the LDP repeatedly framing outsiders as a disruption.

Table 3: Approval rates of the Shinzo Abe and the Cabinet over the years

Year	Approval rating (%)
2013-2014	66
2015	40
2016	50

2017	49
2018	40
2019	48
2020	39

Despite the lasting governmental reign of the Liberal Democratic Party from 1955 up till now with the exception of 19093-1994, the table above shows Abe to have a decrease in approval ratings, specifically stemming from his inability to follow up on his Abenomics plan. While the newspaper polls show an increasing percentage of the public that supported the revisions to immigration policy, they also display the objections felt towards the process and reasoning behind the changes. The three main newspaper organizations; Yomiuri, Mainichi and Asahi have varying political stances, but the results reflect the common perspective that the national government rushed the introduction of the policy without having a clear plan.

*Disconnect of efforts by national and local government (integration into society)*

While the national government is dealing with the process of immigrants entering and the worries that arise, the local prefectural governments are the ones who implement infrastructures that allow for the social integration of immigrants into society as well as being on the receiving end of the potential political fallout. Besides the disconnect between the two administrative bodies, the LDP's position as the electoral party is questionable as they are not able to properly manage the changes associated with the influx of immigrants but also are incapable of shaping Japan as a destination for immigrants. In the sudden prioritization of immigration, the lack of time to properly prepare the nation is visible in the disconnect between the national and local government. The share of efforts heavily weighs unfairly on the local prefectures which have quickly become more adaptable to the changes with the influx of foreign laborers while national efforts remain minimal. Scholars outside of Japan that look inwards, neglect to notice the contrasting work put in by the two bodies of administration, thus making their argument that Japan is not an immigrant country, inaccurate. When the national government is dealing with the legal processes of immigrants

entering and the stubborn nationalistic worries that arise, the local prefectural governments are the ones who implement infrastructures that allow the social integration of immigrants in Japanese society. For example, Kawasaki city created the Kawasaki City Representative Assembly for Foreign Residents allowing foreign “residents” to express their concerns because voting rights are not granted to them by the federal government. (Nagy, 2008) It has progressed to a point where the prefectural government have solely taken on the responsibility to ensure that foreign laborers are settled by providing services that the national government overlooks. Instead of both bodies coordinating to fulfill the duties, it falls on the side of the locals to ensure the success of foreign laborers in being ready to assist the national economy.

For the immigrants who managed to settle into society, they revealed the hardships that they faced, which seemingly only sways local governments to improve and does not affect the logic of the national body. However, in recent debates, members of the LDP have spoken up about the need to change as criticism mounts against the nation, particularly wrongly placing the blame. Articulating this worry, LDP lawmaker Hirohiko Nakamura called for change by emphasizing the past where

“Brazillians of Japanese descent were brought in and nothing was done to help them in terms of welfare and afterwards. People then blame the foreigners for the problems, even though it’s Japan that invited them here and didn’t do anything for them.”  
(Reynolds, 2008)

The blame is wrongly put on the foreigners that come to Japan to help, when it is the nation that should be at fault because the focus of both administrative bodies are not synchronized. Through the newspaper and opinion polls, the public shows that they also pick up on the lack of coordination. Since the burden is on the local government to handle, it reveals problems that could only be avoided had preparations been made prior to the arrival of immigrants, which conversely was not communicated by the federal body. For example, missing sufficient support systems such as language classes for foreign laborers directly affects the relationship between the Japanese employer and the employees/trainees, but also indirectly affects how the native perceive the foreigners to be. Foreigners not integrating into society is an incorrect assumption that is formulated as a result from the disconnect between the national and local governments.



The hardships that are faced and the confusion caused by the two governmental bodies conditions Japan to not be a desirable place for immigrants. Despite being in need for immigration, the mismatch of the efforts have caused a decline in incoming foreign population. On surface level, the technical trainee program provides skills that can be imparted and used back home. However, there is a gap between what the government says and the reality of the program. Before a new policy was implemented in 2019, in 2017 the Labor Standards Inspections Office visited 6,000 employers who accepted trainees and found 4,200 violations. Only after 2 years was the new policy of requiring employers to submit proof of appropriate wages and paid holidays implemented. (Chu, 2019) While the national government being distracted with whether or not to open for immigration, the prefectural bodies are under immense pressure to provide proper systems, ensure integration and make sure trainees are in suitable working conditions because they were not provided with any sort of funding. The delay of the policy implementation revealed the uncoordinated efforts of the governing bodies, making immigrants not wanting to stay or not wanting to come at all, which makes the LDP agenda unclear.

#### *Japan's elitist bureaucracy as a monopoly*

With bureaucrats holding the influence of policies and their single focus of economic benefit, it not only stagnates the efforts from the LDP-supporting organizations as well as the local governments who advocate for change in priorities, but also impacts the LDP's electoral power because opinions are not being considered. When examining the progression of the discourse from 1951, policies regarding the basic rights like equality and respect are absent, revealing the publicly disliked process of bureaucratic policy making and their prioritization of the economy. (See Table 1) By understanding the primary reason for accepting outside sources of labor, it reflects the type of rigid political leadership within Japan's bureaucracy. The Ministry of Justice oversees the Immigration Services Agency and published documents regarding the discussions it had about the discourse, which involved leaders from business conglomerates, policymakers and bureaucrats. Due to solely framing immigration for economic benefit without providing essential rights, Japan is not able to draw in the influx of immigrants that it needs, which affects the LDP because they are not able to appease the demands of the country. In matching the newspaper polls to the outcomes of the conferences, it reflects the public's opposing views and doubts casted towards the decisions made by the current policymaking system.

Although not new knowledge, the need of reframing immigration politics extends to the elitist style of policymaking that exists. The traditional makeup of the bureaucracy composes of a total of 2000 members who are influential representatives of the LDP, senior officials from ministries, and executives of large business conglomerates. (Rothacher 2016) Instead of politicians leading the policy making process, the responsibility is in the hands of the bureaucrats. As the elitist bureaucrats who served one ministry or company for most of their career, they remain one of the biggest obstacles to the reforming of policies because they exert their power to sway the policies to “protect the interests of the organization.” (Takenaka, 2019) Since these bureaucrats that lead the policymaking processes are solely focused on policies that benefit their ministry or conglomerate, their close mindedness prevents them from being receptive to possible reforms. The rigidity of the elite bureaucrats impedes progressive policies from being implemented because “this system encourages officials to tell politicians only what they want to hear, and stifles bottom-up initiatives.”(Kawamoto. 2020)

Since immigration is seen as a solution to economic problems, the policy aligns with the interests of the bureaucrats, especially the ones from conglomerates. For example, between 1990 and 2015, the Ministry of Justice brought immigration experts, policymakers, bureaucrats and labor representatives together to formulate immigration policies. Reforms were made because the majority of people involved were either employers or part of business conglomerates. Despite fully knowing that demographic change and internationalization meant immigration was unavoidable, the economic approach that was taken is outlined in the 4 Basic Plans that were produced in the 10 conferences over 15 years. (Peng, 2016) As it was imperative that solutions for the economic shortage be developed, the Economic Partnership Agreements became a way to avert the immigration discourse. By forming the bilateral agreements, it met the requirements of filling in the labor shortage over short-term as well as stabilizing the economy.

With the bureaucracy at play, the most recent policy revision bulldozed its way through the Diet without opening it up for discussion before its implementation. As a demonstration of using its power of monopolization, the policy was put into effect before getting majority consensus from the rest of the government. In a newspaper poll sent out by Mainichi, when asked about the bureaucracy’s intent by overlooking the legal revisions, 66% stated how policymakers should have discussed the issue without rushing or setting a deadline. By taking the time to deliberate with the rest of the politicians and government, it would have garnered more support as voices would have impacted it. Even among those who

supported the revisions, 76% said more time should have been used within the Diet to deliberate. The minority 9% approved the way this policy was passed. (Kuraoka, 2018) The small percentage of the public reflects the widespread public disagreement regarding the disproportionate power that the bureaucracy holds and the need for a new policy making process.

### *Disapproval in governmental approach*

Despite the government's brief acknowledgement and attempt to diminish the severity of the problematic domestic landscape, discussions have been ongoing since 2000's to appeal for the government to take action but have been overlooked, leading to the political party running policies that are at the risk of making people unhappy. The main drivers of the opposition to immigration are businesses, which ramped up their efforts in 2007. As a compromise, the *Nikkeijin* and "side door" policies was created by the Keidanren and the government to address the labor concerns. However, the government arms the misconception of immigrants to their advantage, to successfully shaped the wording to be "foreign laborers", addressing the topic as solely an economic fix rather than in its combined context of a demographic and financial discussion. With the demographic crisis being in the shadow of labor shortage, the foundational work that needs to be settled for the incoming immigrant population to smoothly integrate into the society is overlooked. Even with the revisions to the policy, by introducing immigrants as "foreign workers or laborers", the long term duration of their stay offsets the maximum capacity that many institutional systems are able to handle. The rapid influx of 'immigrants' and the period allowed for their stay will upset the limitations of systems including health care, pension insurance, housing and education due to the surplus of people. To be put simply, if a surge in immigrant numbers stay for short while, the increased number of people will overwhelm the support system and resources provided by the nation. During the debate in passing the most revision to the policy, Yoichi Kaneko, an Upper House member of the Democratic Party of Japan, voiced opposition due to the missing groundwork and infrastructure stating:

“the most active advocate for welcoming immigrants is the corporate world, which wants to use foreign workers on low wages. But this overlooks the broader costs of housing immigrants, such as education and health care. The only costs companies will pay by accepting immigrants is just their salaries. If the nation is accepting immigrants as long-term workers, we have to think of managing their pensions and

their unemployment insurance as well as giving them a chance to learn Japanese. Many immigrants are likely to bring families with them, and Japan will have to shoulder the expenses of providing social and educational support for them as well". (Murai, 2016)

Former economist Kaneko projected the worry of increased costs for the society in the case of opening doors to immigrants. Similarly, the revamping of the governmental approach is needed to maintain the forecasted population goal of 100 million people by 2065. The newspaper polls told narratives of the conditions under which foreign laborers work, the trainee system being an example of how problematic it has become to in only considering immigrants as a source of economy. The trainee system began in 1993 as "international contribution" for the transfer of both skills and knowledge from Japan to developing countries through the use of foreign workers through letting them work for Japanese firms. However, Eriko Suzuki, a professor specializing in labor issues, points out that this system uses false pretenses to gain workers for fixed set of terms under not so ideal circumstances such as lower wages than minimum. To further explain, Suzuki points out that "hiring foreign trainees, who go back home after a few years discouraged employers from improving working conditions," also making these workplaces unattractive for Japanese workers as well. (Murai, 2016) Since the government considers them as human resources for the economy, it does not take into consideration of the current quality of lives that the foreign laborers live. With conditions of the workplaces being unattractive, the prospects of immigrants wanting to come and work in Japan diminishes, suggesting that the nation will "find itself increasingly isolated, economically and socially" if not improved. (Keidanren, 2018) Although former Prime Minister Abe facilitated the revisions to the immigration policy in 2018, he explained that "Japan will only accept foreigners who have specific skill sets and can work immediately to address serious labor shortages, only in sectors that genuinely need them". (*Japan eases immigration rules for workers* 2018). His approval rate dropped to the second lowest it had been since 2013 to a 40% (See Table 3 for reference) Despite the reactions from opposition parties, the unconventional immigration policy is accepted and tolerated by the public, especially among the younger population. In a 2018 newspaper article, Asahi disclosed that 54% the population favored the progression of the policy as well as commenting

“Whether they are called immigrants or not, the government has a responsibility to lay out a viable and convincing vision of the future of Japanese society where foreign workers and Japanese citizens can live together in harmony and feel secure. The change was bound to have a far-reaching effect on society.” (McCurry, 2018)

Although the public shows tolerance and understands the need to open the country to immigration further, it also illustrates their disapproval in the government’s lack of preparation and plan to accommodate the changes that immigration would bring. With the younger generation being more vocal about the necessary changes as well as speaking on behalf of the working population, the government feels more compelled to reverse its position on immigration politics. Especially with emerging biracial public figures like Naomi Osaka, Rui Hachimura and Ariana Miyamoto, the younger generation are more inclined to favor foreign workers and diversity policies. (Chung 2019) As former immigration bureau chief, Hidenori Sakanaka discussed the impending changes that need to be made to lower the hurdles that the current system insists on, summarizing “the system will turn out to be an embarrassment, almost nobody will pass and they will be told to go home. There is no way forward but to accept immigrants”. (Reynolds 2008) Instead of only relying on Economic Partnership Agreements and the trainee system, institutions should be in the process of making drastic changes by lowering the obstacles that stand in the way of making Japan an attractive destination for immigrants.

This contentious issue has been around since 1950 and is not been a new phenomenon. With Japan delaying their efforts in confronting the situation, businesses leaders and think tanks have taken on the responsibility to push for official reforms by submitting proposals for the government to concentrate to come up with viable solutions. (See Appendix A) Despite the increasing wariness of the problematic demographic, social and economic situation that the public and private sector identified, the government remained unresponsive due to the fragmentation and inability to reach a consensus within the governmental body.

## CONCLUSION

Alike other developed nations, Japan faces the challenges associated with opening up to immigration with an extra layer of complexities as its cultural discourse is essential to its national identity. Although it had a breakthrough in its policy to cope with the domestic issues of aging and labor shortage, it is realistically not a sufficient long term solution. The

sudden shift coming from a center-right government is causing ripple effects for the nation, whose history largely impacts the societal conformity, perception of foreigners and the construction of nationhood. While examinations of the why and who aspects of Japanese immigration have been done, the process of how to implement and adjust to the changes have yet to be studied. As Japan is strategically wording policies to avoid calling the shift “immigration”, details of how the government will proceed is difficult to predict, seeing that Japan is an exceptional case study. The disconnect between the governmental bodies and the structure of the nation’s bureaucracy need to be analyzed further as they are key players that shape policies, determining whether the society is capable of becoming an immigrant destination.

As a center-right and developed nation, Japan faces the challenge of maintaining their unique cultural homogeneity or sacrificing their notion of cultural nationhood to save their demographic and economic predicament. Although their domestic issues are not a new phenomenon, the country has consistently tried to delay approaching the topic of immigration because preserving the traditional identity was the priority. Until their economic strength and other infrastructure systems were threatened to collapse, alternative measures were used as short-term solutions. The recent revision to increase the number of visas is a breakthrough for a country who has strict policies, however, this alone is not a realistic solution. The drastic increase of foreign laborers on visas already has Japan in frenzy, as there is a lack of a foundational preparedness provided by the government. Despite the long-awaited policies voiced by businesses, the advancement is considered minor in comparison to what needs to be done.

The longer the LDP holds out on the strict immigration policies, the worse the predicament will become. Through mass emigration or the rise of another party, the current Japanese political party will lose its voter support out of disagreement due to economic decline and the current labor shortage. By maintaining a hardline approach on immigration, it will eventually lead to a rise in both political interest and the voter turnout. The combination of the increased participation in elections and the high global demand of labor will reflect negatively on the LDP. With the public, especially the younger generation opposing the government’s approach to using immigration as a source of economic supply, the LDP is in an unpredictable position as they face the risk of losing their supporter base, thus losing electoral power.

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## Appendix A.

Date	Organization	Proposal
2007	Japanese Business Federation (Keidanren 2007)	-introduced test to assess balance of labor supply and demand -consider restricted # of foreign workers to secure human resources
2008	LDP, Division of National Strategy (LDP, 2008a)	-10 million immigrants -large scale structural reforms of legal system
2008	LDP, Division of National Strategy (LDP, 2008b)	-short term admittance for foreign workers without restriction of occupation/ business type
2008	Tokyo Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TCCI 2008)	-make up for shrinking population by increasing immigration -desirable to grant permanent residency under given conditions
2008	Japan Economic Research Institute (Nikkeicho 2008)	Softening employment permits
2008	Japan Business Federation (Keidanren 2008)	-increase acceptance of skilled foreign workers in specific fields to sustain economy
2009	Japan Immigration Policy Institute (JIPI 2009)	-necessary transformation for nation to turn into immigration country by bringing large numbers of foreign nationals -education measures to avoid friction with host society
2010	Council on Population Education (Jinkō mondai kyōgikai 2010)	-introduction of Japanese-style immigration policies -permanent residence -education and training in Japan, especially the language
2010	Japan Forum of International Relations (JFIR 2010)	-careful consideration of unskilled foreign workers -identify sectors that are lacking and increase human resource development

2011	Sasakawa Peace Foundation (Sasakawa Peace Foundation 2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-introduce employee permit system</li> <li>-consider an increase acceptance of immigrants in health sector and household tasks</li> </ul>
2013	Kansai Association for Corporate Executives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-revision of immigration law to deal with shortages in farming, forestry and fishery</li> <li>-public supports targeted at settled migrants</li> <li>-foundation of “foreigners office”</li> </ul>

