

# U.S. and Japanese Election Systems

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Japan Institute for Social and Economic Affairs

# What Makes Elections Work Well in a Democracy?

\*Talk to those seated near to you to devise a list of 3-5 characteristics of a free and productive election.

# Essential Question

How do Japanese and American election cycles differ? What do they have in common?

# American and Japanese Systems at a Glance

## Japan

- Parliamentary system
- Shorter campaign cycles
- Regular election cycles
- *Koenkai*
- Strict electoral rules
- “Americanization” of elections

## United States

- Presidential system
- Long campaign cycles
- Regular election cycles
- Professional campaign managers
- Consistent media coverage
- Rise of social media

# Japanese Election systems

- Similar in makeup to United States (1945 Constitution)
- Lower House: House of Representatives (4 years)
- Upper House: House of Councillors (6 years)
- **VERY** short campaigns (only 12 days)
- **NO** door-to-door campaigning, **NO** political ads
- In order to go around this restriction, the *koenkai* is a crucial part of the election.

# What is a ‘Koenkai’

- Japanese political candidates engage in “cultural” or “academic” activities year-round.
  - Builds local name recognition and community ties
- Bolsters reputation in the community (similar to U.S. politicians attending local events)
- Local support is tied to political branding and funding

Reference : Image

<http://www.apimages.com/metadata/Index/Japan-Okinawa-Election/0390afcf404649d9aeba5b6877ece749/102/0>

# Japanese campaigning techniques

- Koenkai
- Campaign vans
- Political advertisements (flyers)

Reference : Images

<http://www.apimages.com/metadata/Index/Japan-Election-Photo-Package/b653affdc8c54975ae7fd585a00bb3f6/4/0>

<http://www.apimages.com/metadata/Index/SIPA-Richard-Atrero-de-Guzman-NurPhoto-Sipa-USA-/2b597bcf77084243b4961e8d0f1c3f80/13/0>

# Advantages and Disadvantages of Japanese Election Processes?

Task: In small groups, identify three perceived advantages and disadvantages of Japanese campaigning techniques.



# American Elections

- House of Representatives (2 years), Senate (6 years), President (4 years)
- Long, expensive campaigns 2016: \$6.5 bn (Presidential \$2.4 bn)
  - Campaigning begins as early as 18 mo. before campaign
  - “Official” campaigning around 6 mo. for Congress
- Professional campaign staff
  - Presidential campaign managers command 6-figure salaries
- Personal appearances (bus tours), similar to *koenkai*
- Campaign laws enforced, but not as strict as Japan.
- “Brand” carries significant weight in American elections



# American Campaign Techniques

- Media advertising
- Social media (Obama, Trump)
- Bus Tours “whistle-stops”
- Merchandise and slogans



Reference: Social media

<https://www.facebook.com/barackobama/>

<https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump>

# American Election Process

1. Primaries: races within political parties to choose a single party candidate for office.
2. Convention: Step in which candidates in a presidential race are presented to the public, along with the party platform (agenda)
3. General: Candidates from each political party run against each-other to determine the winner of the office.

# Advertisements

- May focus on positive aspects of the candidates, or attack opponents
- PACs (Political Action Committees) make campaign ads that support a candidate without their cooperation. Most campaign money comes from PACs

<https://youtu.be/ZYI7qPO5wVw>

<https://youtu.be/mrX3QI31URA>

# Advantages and Disadvantages of American Election Processes?

Task: In small groups, identify three perceived advantages and disadvantages of American campaigning techniques. Think back to your experiences during the prior election cycle.

# Questions for Consideration:

1. Define:
  - a. Koenkai
  - b. PAC
2. Compare and contrast Japanese and American election systems (5 similarities/5 differences).
3. What is the biggest advantage and disadvantage of each system?
4. How could these two systems incorporate ideas from the other to solve their own disadvantages?
5. If you were a voter in these nations, which system would you prefer? Why?  
**(Discuss with partner)**
6. Which system do you consider to be more democratic? Why? **(Discuss with partner)**
  - a. Consider limitations on voting/role of media in each nation's system.