

Content Area(s)/Course/Grade: Social Studies/Government/Civics 6-12 grades

Progression: Designed to be an enrichment activity following a study of U.S. elections. Ideally this activity would come after the students have studied elections in the U.S. and have learned about the role of interest groups, PACs, and political parties on the election process.

Learning Objectives: Students will be able to identify the challenges created by shorter campaign periods in Japanese elections in getting new and/or popular candidates into office. Students will be able to identify how U.S. elections are susceptible to influence from special interest groups (specifically in relation to funding and a clearly identifiable electorate support.)

Student Outcome(s): Through small group and whole class discussion, students will improve their ability to analyze and apply concepts of U.S. government (specifically related to elections) in comparison to other democratic forms of government. Through this analysis, students will gain a deeper understanding of the unintended consequences of policy and law on elections.

Additionally, students will be practicing annotation, text-supported discussion, and synthesis skills as they complete the activities.

Context for Learning

While there is little background knowledge of Japan's government system necessary for this lesson, a handout with a basic description of their three branch system taken from the official website of the Japanese Prime Minister is provided for the teacher's benefit. The important point to stress is that both systems are representative democracies but that their governing bodies are structured differently.

Instructional Delivery

Warmup (approx. 5 minutes):

Identify an element of the U.S. election process you would change and why?

Have students turn to a partner and discuss their answer to the warm up question.

Procedures:

1. Handout the accompanying article and provide time for students to read and annotate (approx. 10 minutes)
2. In small groups have the students work together to complete the comparison chart. They should include specific text based references from the article whenever possible. *The teacher should encourage discussion amongst group members that includes the student's experience with U.S. elections including (but not limited to) candidate advertising, debates, media commentary, etc.* (approx. 15 minutes)
3. Once the groups have completed the chart the teacher should lead a whole class discussion of the following questions (approx. 15 minutes):
 - a. Why do you think the author spent so much time listing their credentials in the beginning? Did this impact the way you viewed his perspective?
 - i. *Student answers will vary but should focus on the credibility of the author based on both education and practical experience.*
 - b. The influence of special interest groups is often a concern that comes up during U.S. elections. How does the Japanese campaign rules explained in the article and in the provided background handout address the concern of special interest influence?
 - i. *Student answers will vary but should bring up that the length of campaigns in Japan do limit the influence of special interest groups. However, the short length of time also creates a challenge to getting new politicians into office and has led to increase in political dynasties. The U.S. by comparison has longer campaign periods which have increased the need to court funding and support from special interest groups.*

Discussion can continue as long as the teacher prefers but should have students reference back to the text frequently to support their answers.

Assessment/Evaluation (Formative/Summative)

- The whole class discussion questions can be modified to be used as an individual writing assignment.
- The charts can also be turned in for a formative grade along with the annotation of the article.

Closure (approx. 5 minutes):

Reinforce to students that democracies take many forms. Rules and guidelines meant to discourage one challenge like special interest influence (by shortening campaign periods) can lead to unintended challenges (getting new politicians into office.) No system is perfect but the underlying motivation to maintain an engaged and participatory electorate are the same.

Teacher Key

Using the article *Comparing election in the U.S. and Japan; the good, the bad, and the ugly* from the Japan Times compare the elections of both countries using the chart below.

| | Japan | United States |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| Length of the campaign period | <p><i>“official campaign periods lasting around two weeks.”</i></p> <p><i>Japanese campaign cycles are very short compared to the U.S. particularly for the Presidential race.</i></p> <p><i>This can lead to political dynasties where family name recognition can play a significant role in a candidate’s electability.</i></p> | <p><i>Can last for more than a year. Presidential campaigns are the longest sometimes starting as early as 18 months before the official election.</i></p> <p><i>The length (and subsequent expense) of the elections can prove an opening for interest groups who provide fundraising support and advertising (through PACs).</i></p> |
| Style of campaigning | <p><i>“sound trucks”</i></p> <p><i>The article implies the definition but if students need more clarification. Sound trucks refers to the literal trucks that role candidates (and their representatives) around their district with loud speakers shouting messages to sway voters and pausing for pop up speeches.</i></p> | <p><i>“mud-slinging, ad hominem attacks, and the distractions and corruptions of political celebrity...”</i></p> <p><i>The U.S. has seen a shift away from party line candidacies and more toward individual personality focused campaigns.</i></p> |
| The role of political parties | <p><i>“Japan essentially has only one party – the Liberal Democratic Party –...”</i></p> <p><i>Japan’s proportional election system gets some of the same criticism that the Electoral College does (i.e. the ability of a candidate to lose the popular vote but still win the election.) It favors party candidates by allowing them to gain extra seats in the Diet.</i></p> | <p><i>The U.S. has two major parties with third parties holding very little influence.</i></p> <p><i>“...you get ridiculed for wasting your vote and knocking out the more viable candidate. No third party has ever come close to winning a presidential election...”</i></p> |

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| Style of messaging by candidates | <i>Very general. "...candidates generally get away with mere ganbarimasu (do-my-best) sound-truck platitudes."</i> | <i>Candidates focus on a "few firebrand issues....there are manifestoes and explicit policy clarifications expected of a candidate, i.e. where they stand on the issues."</i> |
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Reference:

The Japan Times _Comparing elections in the U.S. and Japan_ the good, the bad and the ugly

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2016/10/02/issues/comparing-elections-u-s-japan-good-bad-ugly/>