

Japan



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A Comparative Politics Presentation by Mrs. Morey

Introduction to AP Comparative Politics

Unit 1: Political Systems, Regimes, and Governments

Unit 2: Political Institutions

Unit 3: Political Culture and Participation

Unit 4: Party and Electoral Systems and Citizen Organizations

Unit 5: Political and Economic Changes and Development

Exam: Early May (official dates change each year)

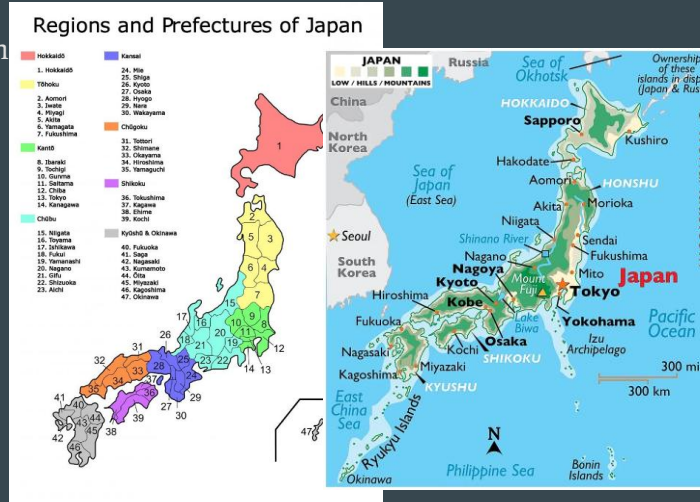
Final Project: Research a country outside the AP6 to present on through the lens of the five units; summary slide should identify which of the AP6 is most similar to your country and why.

Unit 1: Political Systems, Regimes, and Governments

Japan is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system of government based on separation of powers.

Japan is a unitary state that is divided into 47 prefectures that are organized within 9 regions.

It is a democratic regime.



Political Scientists analyze data to compare countries

U1

Population: 124, 270, 947 (2023)

Human Development Index: .925 This indicates very high development, ranking 23rd out of 193 countries and territories. As of 2023, life expectancy at birth was 84.71 years; Japanese have 15.51 years of expected schooling (mean 12.68 years), and the gross national income per capita is \$47,775.

GDP: 4.24 trillion (USD, 2023).
GDP per capita: \$33,766.53 (USD)

Gini Index: 32.9; income inequality has been increasing since the 1980s (Khera & Gao, 2024).

Freedom House: Political Rights 40/40; Civil Liberties 56/60. Considered "Free".

Corruption Perceptions Index: 71/100 ; 84% think government corruption is a big problem; 2% said they had paid a bribe in the past year (Transparency International, 2024)

Japan is not considered a failed or fragile state; it is considered a sustainable state.

Japan: A Constitutional Monarchy with a 2-Chamber Parliament

Japan's head of state is Emperor Naruhito, who ascended to the Chrysanthemum Throne in 2019. He is the 126th monarch, according to the order of succession. His role is largely ceremonial and symbolic.

He has a history degree and enjoys jogging, hiking, and mountaineering.



U2

Japan's Head of Government

Japan's head of government is the Prime Minister (PM). The Emperor appoints the Prime Minister that is chosen from the National Diet (the Parliament). Each house of Parliament chooses a candidate for PM and holds a run-off election until a candidate has a majority. If the PM is not the same candidate from each house, they hold a joint committee to try to choose. If they can't agree, the House of Representatives' choice is nominated. Typically the leader of the majority party in the House becomes prime minister, but in more recent years a coalition government has been necessary.



U2

Former Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, 2024-2025, whose LDP party has been losing support is likely to be succeeded by Sanae Takaichi, the first female PM.



Japan's Legislature

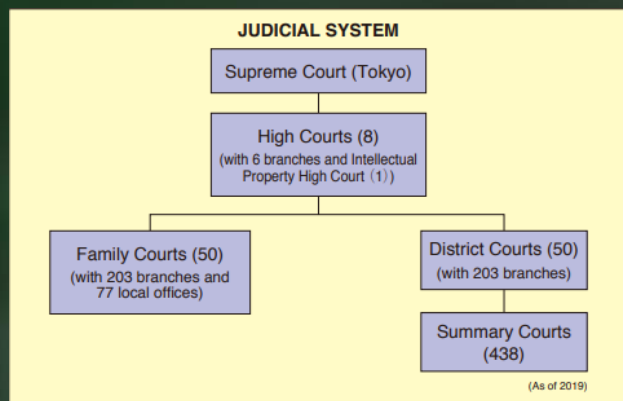
U2

Japan has a bicameral parliament – the Diet. Although the two chambers share legislative powers, the Lower House (House of Representatives) prevails in the legislative process and is empowered to adopt the final decision on the budget and on the approval of international treaties. The Upper House is known as the House of Councillors.



Japan's Judicial System

U2



The Judicial system in Japan was created by the Constitution that went into effect in 1947. The structure is similar to the US Government judicial system as the Constitution states “the whole of judicial power is vested in the Supreme Court and in such lower courts established by law” (Courts in Japan, 2020). There is a Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and 14 associate justices. Many appeals are handled by “petty benches” a small number of these justices. Issues of constitutional interpretation require a quorum of at least 9 justices (they do have the power of judicial review).

Japan's Political Culture & Political Ideology

U3

Since 1955, the main party in power has been the LDP, which is a more conservative party. However, the party has adapted to different interests over time, and in recent years has shifted coalition partners.

The democracy is stable and has "strong institutions, regular elections, and a thriving free press" (Nilsson-Wright, J. & Wallace, J., 2022, para. 1).

The Asahi Shimbun | Asia & Japan Watch

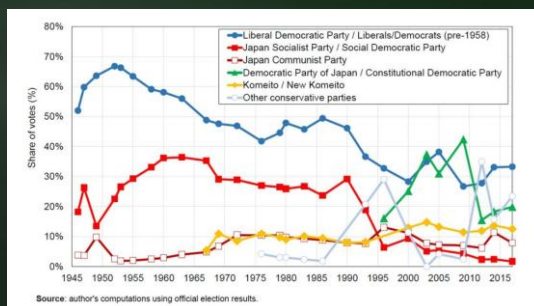
the japan times

THE INDEPENDENT VOICE IN ASIA



Cleavages in Japan

Historic cleavages between capital and labor in the 1950s and 1960s and between differences in value systems related to age, education, and place of residence; these cleavages weakened with economic growth (Schmidt, 2003)



Politically, the country has shifted from LDP dominance to having more competition (Gethin, 2021)

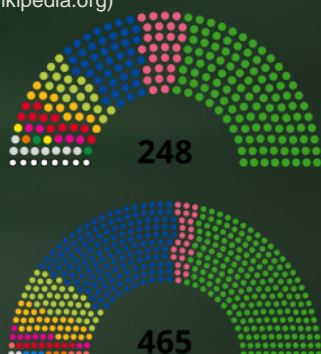
Some younger Japanese are interested in identity-based politics with concerns over lower living standards and potential threats from countries like nearby China and North Korea. (Nilsson-Wright, J. & Wallace, J., 2022)

U3

Japan's Key Political Parties

U4

713 Total Seats in National Diet: 248 in House of Councillors; 465 in House of Representatives (Graphs from wikipedia.org)



Since 2024, the coalition in government is the Liberal Democratic Party (green left) and the Komeito Party (pink). The LDP is the major nationalist and conservative party since 1955 and the Komeito Party is a centrist and socially conservative party that has been around since 1964. The main opposition party (blue) is the CDP-SDP, a combination of the liberal Constitutional Democratic Party and the Social Democratic Party. Several other minor parties win seats as shown.

Influential Interest Groups in Japan

U4



The interest groups that have significant power in Japan are often professional groups such as the Japanese Medical Association, the Japan Teacher's Union, and the Japan Dentist's Association. They can donate money to support candidates and political parties. They do not lobby the way that interest groups in the US would. (Asia for Educators, 2025).

U5

Political Changes

- The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which used to dominate the country's politics, lost its majority coalition in both the Upper and Lower House of the Diet in 2025 and 2024 respectively. The LDP has been criticized for its relationship with the Unification Church, described by opponents as a “cult”, and for a political funding scandal (Khalil and Ng, 2024; Jain, 2025).
- On the rise is the populist Sanseito Party, which increased its seats from 2 to 15 in the 2025 Upper House elections, on a platform of “Japanese First”. They are critical of foreign tourism and immigration (Jain, 2025).
- In the fall of 2025, the Komeito Party broke its coalition with the LDP over “political funding scandals and ideological issues” (Govella, 2025, para. 1).
- The LDP is now forming a coalition with the Japan Innovation Society (JIP) after agreeing to reduce the number of Diet seats by 10% and creating a “second capital” should Tokyo be affected by a disaster (The Yomiuri Shimbun, 2025, paras. 1 & 6).

Japan and International and Supranational Organizations

U5

Japan is a member of several international and supranational organizations.

Major international organizations:
United Nations, Asian Development Bank, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.

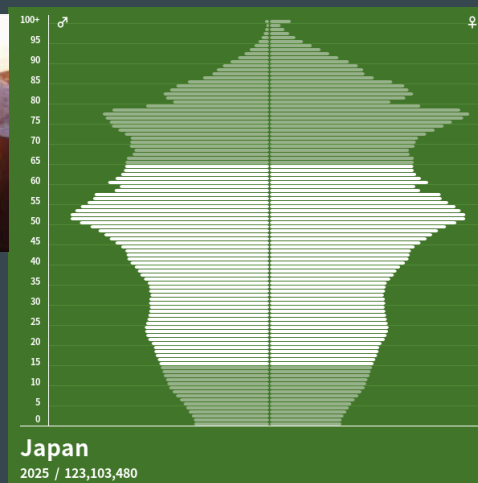
Major supranational organization:
World Trade Organization



Globalization, Natural Resources, & Population

U5

Japan has definitely experienced globalization. Their primary natural resource is fish! The population aging is a concern.



Conclusion: Comparison to the AP6

Although Japan is closest geographically to China, politically it is closest to the United Kingdom. Both countries have head of a state who is a monarch that inherited their position: King Charles in the UK and Emperor Naruhito of Japan. The head of government, the Prime Minister, is appointed by these monarchs but their real power is derived from the legislature: Parliament in the UK and the National Diet in Japan. The lower house also has more power in the choice of the Prime Minister in both countries.

Both countries are consolidated democracies with high levels of economic development. Each faces contemporary challenges of immigration, climate change, and economic issues such as inflation and tariffs.

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