



Documentation Center on Contemporary Japan (Reischauer Institute, Sponsor): Elections

Kazuko Sakaguchi
Documentation Center Director

With repeated political corruption and scandals as well as opaque alliances and split political parties and factions, the political world of Japan has appeared particularly dismal in the past ten years. Some now perceive it as a “lost decade” in politics. Political cynicism has gradually deepened, but citizen participation in politics has grown active over the Internet despite simultaneously declining in the voter booth. Many believe that as expressions of dissatisfaction or complaints about politics alone are not likely to change anything, citizens need to be better informed about candidates and take action in politics by voting in accordance with their own beliefs and convictions. A current civil movement is spreading nationwide that not only solicits voters to participate in politics by becoming better informed and voting but also demands that politicians disclose information on campaign contributions. Since the Internet is becoming an important source of information exchange, this civil movement has become more evident here as well as in the traditional media. As nationwide local elections are approaching in April this year, I would like to feature several interesting rapidly-expanding websites on elections.

Association for Promoting Fair Elections

<http://www.akaruisenkyo.or.jp>

The Association for Promoting Fair Elections, which is an auxiliary organization of the Ministry of Home Affairs, stems from the League for Fair Election (founded in 1952), one of the pioneers of citizens’ movements in the postwar period. Supported by more than 120,000 volunteers throughout Japan, the Association has been engaged in promoting “a fair and clean election” that is not influenced neither by bribery nor personal connections. The

Association works closely with the Public Offices Election Law and Election Administration Committee. One can obtain useful election data on voter turnout rate changes on both national and local levels, from the 22nd Lower House Election that took place in 1946 to the present, as well as public opinion polls on each postwar election. Moreover, through a linked homepage of each regional Election Administration Committee at a local level, one can obtain various breakdowns on election information, such as the number of voters by municipal levels, overseas voter registration enrollment, and absentee voting.

Election

<http://www.election.co.jp/>

In Japanese election campaigns, it would not be uncommon that political parties and candidates simply distribute posters and fliers while bowing and yelling, “Please! Please! (vote for me)” on the campaign trail. However, the Internet is now playing a more influential role in this familiar scene. Citizen groups in Tokyo and Fukuoka launched a site called “Election” when the Lower House election took place in 2000 to encourage voters who have become disillusioned by politics to increase their political awareness and participation. In addition to search functions to identify politicians by political party and election district, the site provides voters with various opportunities to feel more familiar with politics. This website offers open forums where a politician and a citizen can engage in a virtual encounter on the Internet. For instance, a voter can send a message directly to a politician by using a form for “cheering” (lending support) or “questioning” which links to the politician’s email address. Furthermore, when selected, one also has opportunities to interview and participate in discussions with politicians. Moreover, one can listen to a designated radio program on elections (also called “Election”) through multimedia. During election times, the website also provides transcriptions of campaign speeches and simultaneous reports on election results. Volunteers provide substantial amounts of regional election information from across the country. From this site one may sense the ardent passions toward politics in Japan. Also, data updating

is frequent, and in addition to on-line opinion polls, one can efficiently obtain in-depth information about elections that range from Japanese domestic elections to the U.S. Presidential election.

Rakusen Undō, or Throw-Out-the-Crooks Campaign, Shimin Rentai, Nami 21 (Citizens Solidarity, Wave 21)

<http://nvc.halsnet.com/jhattori/rakusen/>

According to a recent poll, the number of citizens who do not support any particular political party has been increasing. These non-partisan voters are not necessarily apathetic about politics and society but instead more likely to be critical toward current politics. Thus it is these voters who are the target audience of the rapidly spreading grassroots movements which seek to influence politics throughout Japan. *Rakusen undō* or “throw-out-the-crooks campaign” is a negative campaign to oust incompetent politicians. Based on online voting by non-partisans, lists of “defective politicians” viewed as corrupt and disqualified to be elected legislators are released on the Internet, inclusion in which can often lead to defeat in elections. Criteria for the blacklist include scandals and corruption, alleged violations of law, failed fulfillment of campaign pledges, inappropriate remarks and actions, and low Diet session attendance. The *rakusen undō*, which originated in South Korea, led to evicting 70% of the blacklisted “defective politicians” in their general election in April 2000. Inspired by this successful negative campaign, a number of citizens groups throughout Japan initiated such campaigns on their own while developing cooperation with each other, including the original group in Korea. Among various negative campaign websites, either locally or nationwide, Citizens Solidarity, Wave 21 is perhaps the leading one. This site can be accessed through i-mode, Japan’s most popular cellular network service, and has an automatic translation system that allows the web page in Japanese to translate into English and vice versa, from which one may perceive the ambitions of the global citizen movement.



Council of Rating Politicians

<http://www.seijika-hyoutei.com/frame.html>

There are several varieties of *rakusen undō*. The Seijika Hyōtei Kaigi (Council of Rating Politicians), which was launched in April 2000, is designed to judge candidates' qualifications as legislators. As the policies of candidates are often unknown to voters, the Council releases politician responses to questionnaires on its homepage, instead of publicizing a list of "defective politicians." The intention of publicizing politicians' campaign pledges and policy positions is not to evaluate the effectiveness of politicians but instead to provide the public with a yardstick to judge election candidates. The Council watches carefully what individual politicians' stances are towards national policy problems and how they approach the resolution of pending issues, such as budget deficit reconstruction and constitutional amendments. A record of the utterance and policy for each politician enables voters to compare and evaluate politicians. Having been deceived or disappointed with political campaign pledge failures after candidates' successes in elections, what the Council is doing could be viewed as a proactive "self-defense measure." A print version of questionnaire results is available at most bookstores in Japan. (Planet Publishing, 500 yen)

Statesmen and Policies Database System (Kōsō Nippon)

<http://www.kosonippon.org/>

The Statesmen and Policies Database System (SPDS), launched by a private think tank, Kōsō Nippon (Japan Plan), is fundamentally similar to the above-mentioned website, the Council of Rating Politicians (CRP). Unlike CRP, which shows the 2000 survey only, SPDS publicizes survey results from policy questionnaires sent to Diet members, which are conducted continuously, and, thus, data updating is more frequent. The SPDS intends to be a website where voters can search and retrieve information about politicians from all over the country at any time. In response to a demand to change the former behind-the-door politics to a transparent policy-making process, the site offers voters ways to check a politician's parliamentary activities. This open checking system available to the public

might become an indispensable tool for a democracy in which citizen participation is welcomed. One can obtain all 732 incumbent Diet member profiles and their constituency information. The SPDS allows one to perform a variety of searches, such as campaign pledges and speeches. Moreover, the framework of the database is well designed and user-friendly so that one can easily trace changes in each politician's policies and thinking. It is understandable that the site won the Good Design Prize in 2001, awarded by the Japan Industrial Design Promoting Organization.

Open the Cyber-Politics

<http://www.hirake.org>

Open the Cyber-Politics (OCP) is a website that evaluates a politician's homepage. Massive enthusiasm for launching politicians' homepages began in 1996 when the Lower House election took place. Currently, more than 80% of the Diet members have homepages. The Internet, which has distinctive features of expansion and bi-direction, has become a more dominant instrument day-by-day as a medium for politicians' publicity activities. Over the Internet politicians are now able not only to introduce their profiles and policies but also to provide more in-depth reports on their political activities by using multimedia functions, such as animation and sounds, not to mention improving the communication with their voters through e-mail and mail magazines. OCP does not present either a simple evaluation of homepages or politicians' policies. Instead, emphasis is placed on each political candidate's achievements and accomplishments while providing a close-up look at the candidate's accountabilities in persuasion, explanation, and information sharing. Based on clearly defined criteria, which consist of five categories (degree of updating, policy, activity, actual result, and expression of other viewpoints), each homepage is evaluated on a hundred-point scale, along with comments for possible improvement. Some politicians are willing to have their homepages evaluated and introduced at this site. Voters can check the evaluation of the politician websites by category, and each category can be searched by various classifications, such as launching date, constituency, and political party.

Center for Political Public Relations

Inc. <http://www.seiji-koho.co.jp/>

Nowadays most biographic information about incumbent Diet members can be obtained on various websites free of charge, and thus it would not be necessary to purchase access to such profiles for current politicians. However, if one wants to obtain information on former Diet members, the web version of "Diet Member Directory" by the Center for Political Public Relations Inc. (CPPR) might be useful. This database provides information on assemblymen since the first Imperial Diet (1890). The search function is, however, somewhat limited to a name search only, using either the fifty Japanese syllables or a keyword search by name. When clicking a linked name on the list of Diet members, which can be classified by age, political party, faction, and number of successful elections, one is taken to the Center's uniform format with biographical information such as number of successful elections and activities on cabinets and committees (postwar period only) along with terms and dates of service and birth date (and date of death, if applicable). In addition, the database also provides further information, such as secretaries' names, the location of the constituency, and public disclosure of personal assets. It also provides detailed election information for the Lower House and Upper House, and the municipal level. The database can be regarded as a web version of the *Political Handbook*, which is published annually by CPPR, and the biographical information on each politician is more detailed than the print version of *Political Handbook*. Moreover, since the link expands in many directions to take advantage of the distinctive features of the Internet, a list of hierarchical information and data intricately organized in the booklet is well synthesized and user-friendly. Currently access to this web version of the Diet Member Directory, however, is available only through CPPR membership (with an annual fee of 18,900 yen). No trial access is available, though monthly subscription arrangement can be available to overseas users (credit card payment only).



**Japanese Politicians, Nagatacho
(Dynamic Strategies Asia)**
<http://www.japanesepoliticians.com>

Those looking for an incumbent Diet member's profile written in English may occasionally have difficulty obtaining information due to a lack of suitable reference materials. Japanese Politicians is a database which offers biographic information combined with a search engine for Japanese politicians' careers and political activities in English. This database was developed by Americans who are experienced in working with policy-making staff in Nagatacho, the center for Japanese politics. It was originally intended for internal office use at Dynamic Strategies Asia Inc., a consulting company for clients planning to do business in Japan. However, since no English tool of this kind was available, the database has been released for public use on a fee basis (annual subscription: \$600). The data cover over 70 categories, such as birth date, university, specialization, political party, parliament and committee activities, cabinet-member experience, and so on. One can retrieve search results by simply combining each choice listed for every category. For instance, one can easily identify how many politicians have served as the Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the names of these individuals. Nevertheless, since the search engine lacks the capability of a generic keyword search that is often found with most databases, input of various keywords can often retrieve no results. Although the framework of the database is in English, most linked information is in Japanese; therefore Japanese language skills will be necessary to exploit the full capacity of this database.

**Political Studies Data Bank
(Kabashima Seminar, University of Tokyo)**
<http://politics.j.u-tokyo.ac.jp/>

The Political Studies Data Bank, which was established as a data service center for scientific research on politics, exhibits digitized data collected by students participating in year-long annual seminars offered by Professor Ikuo Kabashima at Faculty of Law at the University of Tokyo.

Currently the available data on the Internet are from the 1st to the 3rd seminar. The Data Bank offers perhaps the most exhaustive available data on new political parties, Diet members, and Lower House elections. For instance, by using the category "Diet member data" compiled in the 2nd term seminar, which collected and analyzed the data about the Diet members from 1990 to 1998, all the data regarding a Diet member's activities, such as each assemblyman's plenary session attendances (both number and percentage), legislative initiatives, political party changes, faction changes, and voting record in nominating Prime Ministers, can be obtained easily. The data analysis made from various viewpoints offers another perspective on each politician's profile; indeed, such data can depict the politicians' reality more eloquently. Nevertheless, it is amazing that such a vast quantity of data has been collected, not to mention building such a magnificent database. One cannot help but admire the students' intellectual industriousness. In addition, detailed survey results about Japanese political awareness conducted by the Association for Promoting Fair Elections at the time of parliamentary assemblyman elections since 1970 can be obtained through this Data Bank.

Japanese Political Posters
<http://homepage.mac.com/election-posters/>

A campaign poster is still an important medium of political communication in Japan. Political parties and candidates always pay attention to its impact on election campaigns. Some candidates even publicize their draft campaign posters on the Internet before printing and ask voters/supporters to choose their favorite poster design by voting online. Until recently, however, campaign posters have been seldom considered as a subject of scientific research. The Japanese Political Poster is a unique site that displays a collection of campaign posters. This image database is a joint project developed by young scholars at Hitotsubashi University and the University of Hawaii. So far the database contains limited numbers of campaign posters since the Lower

House general election in 2000, which were distributed primarily around the Tokyo metropolitan area, and offers invaluable images of politicians that cannot be obtained through any other data sources. As political campaign posters usually reflect each candidate's campaign strategy, either "intentional or unintentional" as well as "conscious or unconscious" (Ikuo Kabashima), the poster collection possesses priceless research value to understand Japanese political culture. This particularly interesting material can be especially valuable for research on political communication theory and campaign strategy. In the above-mentioned seminar offered by Professor Kabashima, "the campaign poster" was selected as a research topic for the 4th seminar. As of this writing, data analysis from this seminar has not been mounted on the web yet; however, *Research on the Campaign Poster* (2002), published from Bokutakusha Ltd. Publishers, is available.

While the relationship between the Internet and the election process is deepening steadily, the use of the Internet for election campaigning is practically banned because the Home Affairs Ministry's Election Division takes a position that "letters and images" on the Internet are subject to restriction according to the current Public Offices Election Law. Currently candidates shall neither ask voters to vote for him/her nor to update their homepages after the official announcement of their candidacy. Moreover, citizen group websites on elections also voluntarily restrict their activities to avoid potential violation of the Election Law. Nevertheless, as seen by the recent presidential campaign in South Korea, voters cannot be stopped from using the Internet for political information. To respond to urgent requests to modify the current Election Law, action has been taken to lift the ban on the use of the Internet in election campaigns. As a virtual arena where voters can participate in discussion on elections, politics and policies as well as exchange information, cyberspace will become more active as an election approaches and will serve as a potential information source for those interested in studying current political trends in



Japan. Although there are some concerns that political activities on the Internet may lead to the danger of manipulating public opinion and promoting demagoguery and populism in politics, it is more likely that voters

will overcome such problems and have a chance to hone their understanding by viewing politics on the Internet.



Scenes from the 50th Anniversary of the Fulbright U.S.-Japan Exchange (see p. 14): Left: concert of Japanese virtuosi; Right: Reischauer Institute Director Susan J. Pharr and Mrs. J. William Fulbright (Fulbright photos by Gwendolyn Stewart)

Address ideas and correspondence about *TsUSHIN* to Dr. Galen Amstutz, Institute Coordinator, at the Reischauer Institute address, or via e-mail to gamsutz@fas.harvard.edu. Most of the content of *TsUSHIN* is available on the Reischauer Institute's Internet website: <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~rijs>.

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HARVARD UNIVERSITY
EDWIN O. REISCHAUER INSTITUTE OF
JAPANESE STUDIES
 1737 Cambridge Street, Room 319
 Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138
 Telephone: (617) 495-3220
 Fax: (617) 496-8083
 Internet Website: www.fas.harvard.edu/~rijs