

Prosperity's Children: Generational Change and Japan's Future Leadership

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study measures generational differences in the views of Japanese legislators across three key areas of Japan's political discourse—economic policy, security policy, and cultural issues related to right-wing nationalism. The study then explores the policy implications of these differences through three plausible midterm scenarios.

MAIN FINDINGS

The study of generational differences provides only a limited explanation for the dynamics of Japanese politics. (1) Generational differences are most significant in domestic economic policy, where the eldest cohort favors maintaining the institutions of Japanese-style capitalism more than both younger cohorts. (2) Although the youngest cohort favors more muscular security policies than do the elder cohorts, only one instance of this generational difference proves statistically significant. (3) Even though there are no statistically significant differences between generations on cultural issues related to right-wing nationalism—an unexpected finding in itself—that the midcareer cohort, which is the primary object of this study, is more progressive than the other cohorts in this area is surprising.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Given that generational differences in two of the three most salient dimensions of Japanese politics are statistically significant in only a few instances, the findings of this study do not support expectations for impending policy transformation based on generational change.
- Japanese leaders are likely to continue trying to reform the domestic economy, especially in areas such as fiscal policy and public works.
- U.S. and Japanese alliance managers should expect continued support from Tokyo for enhanced Japanese roles and missions over the medium term despite an increasing number of questions over U.S. motives and intentions.
- Because the range of security and economic policy preferences is less extreme than is sometimes presumed, U.S. policymakers should not overreact when Japanese leaders question U.S. policies.
- Barring an unforeseen event, the study finds no evidence that right-wing nationalism in Japan will become a major problem for U.S.-Japan relations.

A new generation of politicians will rise to occupy the highest positions of political leadership in Japan over the next five to fifteen years. In the course of this transition future leaders will face challenges both new and old. On the one hand, these leaders will need to navigate a political landscape in which many traditional “paths to power”—the stepping stones in career trajectories leading to the highest party and government posts—appear to have been undermined by over a decade of electoral, campaign finance, and party reforms; by the development of a nascent two-party system; and by increased volatility in voting patterns among the electorate. On the other hand, these politicians will be called on to deal with long-standing issues on the national agenda, such as constitutional revision, the pressing need to reform government spending practices, and demands from both home and abroad for Japan to assume a more activist security posture. How will members of this new generation respond to this changed—and still changing—political environment? Will they cohere as an identifiable group with shared values and preferences, or will fundamental differences in political orientation cause this generation to fragment into different policy camps? Will the new distribution of values and preferences differ from that of the generation currently in power?

This study considers whether generational change spells political change for Japan. Drawing on Diet member survey data and elite interviews, this article examines the preferences of over 450 of the 480 members of Japan’s House of Representatives (HOR) in order to gauge the policy views of those who will come to lead Japan over the next fifteen years and compare these views to the policy views of the older and younger age cohorts. The study finds that however much change is afoot, much continuity remains in the distribution of policy preferences among Japanese elites—and that party affiliation is consistently more important than generational location in defining this distribution. Generational differences appear strongly significant in economic policy, where the younger generations are clearly less supportive of the institutions of Japanese-style capitalism than the older generation. In security policy, however, although the youngest cohort’s enthusiasm for strengthening Japan’s defense capabilities distinguishes this generation from the current leadership generation on many important issues—including whether to reinterpret the constitution to allow Japan to exercise the right of collective self-defense—no significant divisions among the three generations are apparent. Finally, in what may be the study’s most surprising finding, the sides in Japan’s “culture war” over history and traditional values do not appear to be drawn along generational lines. In sum, generational differences matter

more on economic policy issues, less on security, and almost not at all on cultural issues.

This article is divided into four main sections:

- ≈ pp. 18–24 clarify the study’s theoretical assumptions and methodological approach through a review of the literature on political generations
- ≈ pp. 24–38 develop generational classifications for postwar Japan and map the contemporary political discourse to provide context for the policy dimensions examined
- ≈ pp. 38–45 focus on the midcareer cohort—first comparing the members of this generation with their younger and elder colleagues and then considering what promising figures from this key group might assume future leadership roles
- ≈ pp. 45–51 assess the possible implications of the study’s findings for policymaking in three midterm scenarios

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Assumptions

The concept of political generation is intuitive but at the same time deceptively complex. Though theorists have proposed several different models for explaining how generations shape political change, two are dominant: the experiential model and the maturation model.¹ First offered by Karl Mannheim in 1928, the experiential model is still used most widely.² Mannheim suggests that political values formed by particular historical experiences become an enduring part of a youth’s intellectual orientation. Yet contemporaneity is not a sufficient condition for the formation of a political generation. A group of similarly aged individuals becomes politically relevant only when “endowed...with a common location in the historical dimension of the social process”—that is, when such individuals also experience the same historical events.³ Mannheim refers to these events

¹ For a review of the full range of approaches, see Richard J. Samuels, ed., *Political Generations and Political Development* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1977); and Richard G. Braungart and Margaret M. Braungart, “Political Generations,” in *Research in Political Sociology*, volume 4, ed. Richard G. Braungart and Margaret M. Braungart (Greenwich: JAI Press, 1989): 281–319.

² Karl Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations,” in *From Karl Mannheim*, 2nd edition, ed. Kurt H. Wolff, (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1993), 351–95. For recent comparative applications, see Bruno Wanrooij, “Youth, Generation Conflict, and Political Struggle in Twentieth-Century Italy,” *European Legacy* 4, no. 1 (1999): 72–88; and Olena Nikolayenko, “The Revolt of the Post Soviet Generation: Youth Movements in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine,” *Comparative Politics* 39, no. 2 (2007): 169–88.

³ Mannheim, “Problem of Generations,” 79.

as “crystallizing agents.”⁴ When shared crystallizing agents are absent there will be greater diversity of “generational units” within the same cohort. In Mannheim’s view distinctive politically relevant generations are more likely to form in times of rapid social change:

Whether a new generational style emerges every year, every thirty, every hundred years, or whether it emerges rhythmically at all depends entirely on the trigger action of the social and cultural process.⁵

The maturation (or “life cycle”) model is often associated with S.N. Eisenstadt’s structural-functional model of individual development in a stable society.⁶ In Eisenstadt’s view values change as individuals age. The demands of adult life temper youthful rebelliousness, with adult roles shaping new social and political orientations. Eisenstadt sees the smoothly functioning society as one that allocates roles in part on the basis of age. Political orientations are thus temporal in such a society. Although initially formed as a response to an established order, political orientations change as youths adjust to adult society.

There have been relatively few studies of political generations in Japan. Kenneth Pyle has analyzed the Meiji generation of young leaders and identified how this generation both instigated political change and inspired social and intellectual trends.⁷ In a longitudinal study of the careers and political orientations of radical students in postwar Japan Ellis Krauss provides evidence for the usefulness of the experiential model, especially for analyzing the most highly politicized members of his sample.⁸ Through an examination of Japanese survey data Nobutaka Ike suggests that more than one variety of generational change prevails.⁹ More recently Tanaka Aiji

⁴ Ibid., 365, 385.

⁵ Ibid., 385.

⁶ S.N. Eisenstadt, *From Generation to Generation: Age Groups and Social Structure* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1956). For application and elaboration of this model, see Richard A. Settersten, Jr., and Karl Ulrich Mayer, “The Measurement of Age, Age Structuring, and Life Course,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997): 233–61; and Michael J. Shanahan, “Pathways to Adulthood in Changing Societies: Variability and Mechanisms in Life Course Perspective,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 667–92.

⁷ Kenneth B. Pyle, *The New Generation in Meiji Japan: Problems of Cultural Identity, 1885–1895* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969).

⁸ Ellis S. Krauss, *Japanese Radicals Revisited: Student Protest in Postwar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

⁹ Nobutaka Ike, “Economic Growth and Intergenerational Change in Japan,” *American Political Science Review* 67, no. 4 (December 1973): 1194–203.

and Clyde Wilcox have compared political generations at the mass level in the United States and Japan.¹⁰

There is anecdotal evidence in Japan to support both the experiential and the life cycle models. For example the Japanese media commonly refers to the “Taisho,” “Showa,” and “Heisei” generations—or to “prewar” and “postwar” generations—each a notionally different experiential group.¹¹ Likewise a 2001 survey on Japanese attitudes toward the reliability of the national pension system yielded results consistent with the life cycle model by showing how confidence in the system decreased with age.¹²

In this study we follow convention and focus our analysis on Mannheim’s experiential model. In part because we find only limited support for the life cycle model, but also because we do not have the data necessary to test each model fully, the article will highlight maturation effects only when suggested by the data.

Data and Methods

This project combines elements of two distinct research programs: the study of political elites and the study of political generations.¹³ In work on democratic societies students of elite politics have tended to rely on semi-structured interviews and on analysis of legislative voting records, while students of generational politics have relied largely on analysis of polling data or focus groups designed to be representative of national populations. In applying the political generations framework to the study of Japanese political elites we have adopted a hybrid approach. On the one hand, the study taps into the rich vein of data captured in the *Asahi Shimbun*-Tokyo University Elite

¹⁰ Tanaka Aiji and Clyde Wilcox, “Beikoku yoron chosa no doko to Nichi-Bei kankei” [Trends in U.S. Opinion Surveys and U.S.-Japan Relations], in *Amerika no tagenteki henka to Nippon* [America’s Multidimensional Changes and Japan], ed. Miyamoto Seigen (Tokyo: Dobunkan, 1993).

¹¹ Examples include “Posuto Kaifu de Miyazawa, Watanabe-shi ‘Taisho sedai no seiken wo’” [Miyazawa, Watanabe and a Post-Kaifu Government by the Taisho Generation], *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, March 19, 1991, 2; and “92-nen zenhan no seikai wo tenbo—henshuiin zadankai” [Editorial Staff Roundtable Discussion: Surveying the Political World for the First Half of 1992], *Asahi Shimbun*, January 16, 1992, 5.

¹² Tanaka Aiji, “Seijiteki Shinrai to Sedaikan Gyappu” [Political Trust and the Generation Gap], *Keizai Kenkyu* 53, no. 3 (July 2002): 213–25. Important to note is that Tanaka is skeptical that this intergenerational difference is actually the result of a life cycle effect. As the panel data required to rule out the life cycle hypothesis is not available in this case, however, we cite the survey here only as a potentially illustrative example.

¹³ For examples of work on political elites, see Robert D. Putnam, *The Comparative Study of Political Elites* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976); Sidney Verba and Steven Kelman, eds., *Elites and the Idea of Equality: A Comparison of Japan, Sweden, and the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); and Richard J. Samuels, *Machiavelli’s Children: Leaders and Their Legacies in Italy and Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

Survey (ATES) to map an issue space for nearly all members of the HOR. On the other hand, we also conducted interviews with both Japanese academics and politicians to gather background information on HOR members and place the study's survey findings in context.

Additionally we developed a database on the 480 HOR members elected in September 2005 (the most recent election) in order to comprehensively explore the rising generation of leadership. The database collected not only basic demographic information—such as age and gender—but also information on each member's background, including family, education, and pre-Diet career.¹⁴ We then added data on each politician's electoral situation, including the type of seat held—single-member district (SMD) or proportional representation (PR)—the level of urbanization in the home district (if an SMD seat), and the number of times elected.¹⁵ The database also recorded factional affiliations for the 296 Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) members.¹⁶ Finally, to assess the policy views of individual members we added their responses to the ATES survey.¹⁷ The survey was administered to all candidates prior to the 2005 election—with a response rate of more than 94% (452 of 480) among the eventual winners—and asked respondents to provide views in a variety of policy areas, ranging from short-term political issues to long-term institutional matters. In total the survey contained ten multi-part questions covering security and foreign policy and domestic economic policy as well as social and cultural issues.

Assembling the data in this way enabled us to analyze the policy views of individual politicians in a variety of dimensions, including partisanship, factional affiliation, and (for the purposes of this study) generational cohort. This approach also facilitated the selection of candidates who met established standards for prospective leaders. We conducted in-depth interviews with four of the Diet representatives who responded to the survey. In virtually all cases the opinions these representatives expressed were consistent with their survey

¹⁴ This information was taken from the following Diet guides: Seisakujiho, *Seikan Yoran* [Handbook of Politicians and Bureaucrats] (Tokyo: Seisakujihosha, 2005 and 2007) and Kokusei Joho Center, *Kokkai Giin Yoran* [Handbook of Diet Members] (Tokyo: Kokusei Joho Center, 2007).

¹⁵ Some basic electoral information was included in the ATES survey data, including district type and whether the member was a winner in a single-member district (SMD), was only on the proportional representation (PR) list, or was a dual-listed candidate who ended up with a PR seat. Sugawara Taku of Tokyo University calculated the level of urbanization for each of the 300 SMD districts and his findings are available at http://freett.com/sugawara_taku/data/2003did.html. All other data is from *Seikan Yoran* or *Kokkai Giin Yoran*.

¹⁶ Faction affiliations as they stood in end of September 2005 and the end September 2007 were taken from *Seikan Yoran*.

¹⁷ The results of the ATES for the winning candidates were published in “To no sonbo, toshu shidai” [The Life or Death of the Party Is Up to Its Leader], *Asahi Shimbun*, September 13, 2007, 7.

responses, giving us confidence in the validity of the survey overall. On the whole this hybrid method has provided insights into that ever-elusive quarry, “the next generation of leadership.” As with any methodological approach, however, this method involves trade-offs.

First, although we considered previous work on political generations in the general public when developing the boundaries of our generational analysis, we did not examine generational effects among the broader population in the study. Instead the study is primarily concerned with understanding the political generations or generational units that may exist among current political elites.

Second, we have limited our analysis to politicians. In so doing we do not mean to imply that members of the national bureaucracy or of important interest groups—such as Keidanren (business), Rengo (labor), or the Jinja Honcho (religion)—play no role in shaping national policy. As the long-standing debate over “who governs” in Japan has made clear, these and other actors in civil society influence political decisionmaking.¹⁸ Recent work on Japanese policymaking, however, suggests that the salience and policy expertise of the country’s political leaders have increased in recent years.¹⁹ If these changes continue, the next generation of leaders will assume power at a time when their input will matter more than ever.

Third, we have narrowed the scope of this study to members of the HOR, which is the more powerful of the two chambers of the Diet. This decision was driven mainly by the study’s focus on leadership. During the postwar era the vast majority of cabinet members, party leaders, and faction chiefs have come from this chamber.²⁰ Although the results of the 2007 House of Councillors (HOC) election—in which the opposition parties, led by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), seized control of the upper chamber—have increased the profile of the HOC in national politics, we expect members of the HOR to continue to dominate government and party leadership positions because

¹⁸ Ellis S. Krauss, Thomas P. Rohlen, and Patricia Steinhoff, eds., *Conflict in Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984); Chalmers Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy, 1925–1975* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982); and Richard J. Samuels, *The Business of the Japanese State: Energy Markets in a Comparative and Historical Perspective* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

¹⁹ Muramatsu Michio and Kume Ikuo, eds., *Nihon Seiji Hendo no 30-Nen* [Japanese Politics: 30 Years of Change] (Tokyo: Toyo Keizai Shinposha, 2006); and Shinoda Tomohito, *Reisengo no Nihon Gaiko* [Japanese Foreign Policy after the Cold War] (Tokyo: Minerva Shobo, 2006).

²⁰ Hayao Kenji, *The Japanese Prime Minister and Public Policy* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1993), 99.

the institutional roots of this dominance have not changed.²¹ First, because Article 67 of the Constitution gives the HOR precedence over the HOC in the selection of the prime minister, Japan's postwar prime ministers have always come from the lower house.²² The prime minister is thus primarily dependent on the HOR contingent that voted him into office—a dependence that is strengthened by the fact that only the HOR can pass a non-confidence resolution forcing either the cabinet to resign en masse or the prime minister to dissolve the HOR and call for a general election (Article 69). This combination of institutional factors places pressure on the prime minister to reward supporters in the HOR, one particularly important means of doing so is with appointments to high-level government and party posts. The large disparity in size between the two chambers also sustains HOR dominance—the HOR is nearly twice the size of the HOC. Thus even a prime minister wishing to give special consideration to supporters in the HOC chamber is constrained by the fact that more than two-thirds of Diet members sit in the HOR.²³ For these reasons our interest in understanding future leadership dictates the study's focus on the HOR.

One final methodological issue involves the use of surveys in the assessment of individual policy views. Surveys are best suited for legislatures, such as Japan's Diet, where high levels of party discipline mask individual policy preferences and where rebellion against party leadership does not occur often enough to reveal legislators' policy views.²⁴ Although a low response rate is a common problem with surveys at the elite level, the ATES achieved an impressive response rate of more than 94%. When properly done, surveys are also a particularly efficient means of identifying the presence or absence of generational differences. A single survey can uncover the situation that Huntington argues is central in the study of generations in politics: “two

²¹ In the July 2007 upper house election the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) achieved an historic victory, supplanting the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) as the largest party in the upper house for the first time since 1955. The resulting divided government—a lower house dominated by the LDP and its coalition partner, New Komeito, and an upper house controlled by the DPJ and its allies in the opposition—has raised the profile of the House of Councillors (HOC) in the policymaking process in so much as it now serves as the opposition's primary lever of institutional power.

²² The HOR also takes precedence over the HOC on budget (Article 60) and treaty (Article 61) votes.

²³ Even the DPJ, currently so dependent on its upper-house contingent to influence Diet affairs, bowed to this arithmetic when appointing members to the third Ozawa “Next Cabinet,” the party's shadow cabinet, in September 2007. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of the appointees are from the lower house. For a critique of the upper house by a famous former member, see Ishihara Shintaro, *Kokka no genei* [Illusion of a Nation] (Tokyo: Bungei Shunju, 1999), 215.

²⁴ For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Taniguchi Masaki, “Shugiin no seisaku ichi” [The Policy Positions of Lower House Diet Members], *Nihon Seiji Kenkyu* 3, no. 1 (January 2006): 91–94.

different generations doing two different things at the *same* point in time.”²⁵ Important to concede at this juncture, however, is that no single survey can alone provide sufficient data to select between the experiential and maturation models of generational change in the event that generational differences are discovered. Untangling these models requires the use of comparable panel data gathered over long periods of time—a resource not yet available from the ATES.

GENERATIONS, POLITICAL DISCOURSE, AND ISSUE LOCATION

Three Generations Under One Roof

Following Mannheim’s experiential model we have identified three groups of lawmakers with the potential to form political generations or otherwise to divide into generational units.²⁶ In developing these groupings we first attempted to pinpoint potential “crystallizing agents”—either a set of political events or gradual shifts in the larger environment that might have been salient to the members of a particular age cohort during their “impressionable years” (ages 18–25). Most work on political generations credits major political and economic events—such as the Nationalist takeover of Taiwan, the New Deal in the United States, or the Italian “Hot Autumn”—with shaping the political views of age cohorts. Likewise past work on generations in postwar Japan has generally identified World War II, the collapse of the empire, and the harsh aftermath of the war (e.g., the occupation and severe economic problems) as “crystallizing agents” determining generational boundaries.²⁷

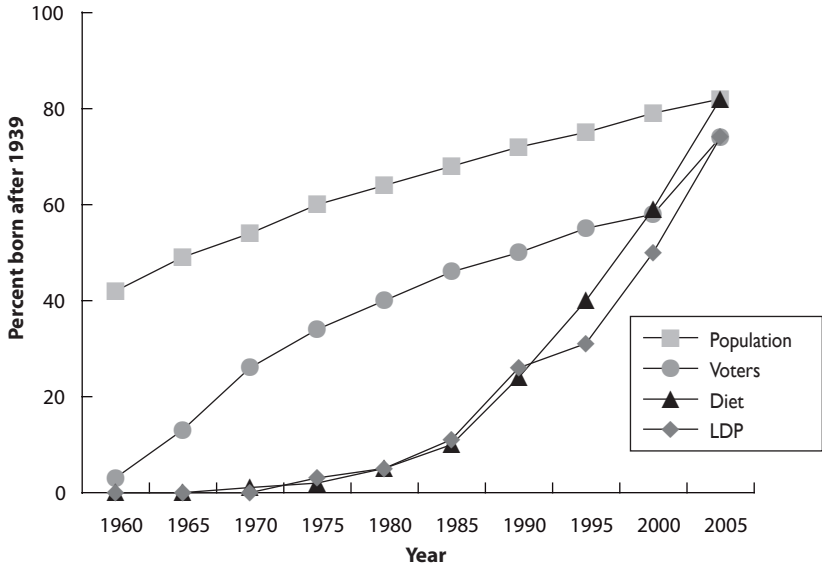
For the purposes of this study, however, an analysis of these major events will not be particularly useful. Only three current members of the lower house turned 18 before 1945, and none had reached the age of 25 before the Pacific War ended (see **Figure 1**). Only seventeen members even have adult (considered age 18 or older) memories of the occupation. Furthermore, only forty-three current HOR members (approximately 9%) are old enough to have received even a single year of education under the imperial system. In short, relevant

²⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, “Generations, Cycles, and Their Role in American Development,” in *Political Generations and Political Development*, ed. Richard J. Samuels (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1977).

²⁶ Although we use the terms “generation” and “cohort” interchangeably to refer to these three groups, we do not assume these groups to be Mannheimian “political generations” because determining their nature is the object of this study.

²⁷ See, for example, Tanaka and Wilcox, “Beikoku yoron chosa no doko to Nichi-Bei kankei.”

FIGURE 1

Changing Age Distribution of Japan's Political Actors

Source: Mary Alice Haddad, *Making Democracy Real: Late Democratization in Japan* (unpublished manuscript, 2007).

experiences from the war years and their immediate aftermath no longer can serve as Mannheimian criteria for an analysis of Diet generations.²⁸

It thus was necessary to draw the boundaries between potential political generations according to different criteria. The study posits that three categories of factors—international politics, domestic economic conditions, and domestic politics—divide Japan's postwar experience into three distinct periods, each with the potential to produce a politically relevant generation.

The elders (1949–74) ≈ Japan arguably faced a higher level of threat and uncertainty during the first half of the Cold War than during the latter half. From the 1950s to the early 1970s Japan was quite weak militarily, with the country's national security almost entirely dependent on the alliance with the United States. This was a time of “mutually assured destruction” and U.S. hegemony, not one of high confidence in autonomous national capabilities. Moreover the United States was engaged in a series of “hot” wars in neighboring Korea and in nearby Vietnam that threatened to

²⁸ See Haddad, *Making Democracy Real*.

entangle Japan. The country also faced considerable insecurity on the economic front: the period began in the devastating aftermath of the Pacific War, which was marked by inflation and a lack of foreign exchange, and ended with Japan's storied economic miracle. On two occasions in the early 1970s the actions of the United States jeopardized this economic success—first, when Richard Nixon unilaterally ended the gold standard and, second, when Nixon recognized the People's Republic of China. Domestic politics during this period saw the highest levels of popular mobilization and political involvement in Japanese history, including multiple waves of student and environmental movements and intense ideological division. In particular the conflict over the revision of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty in 1960, which pitted the Left against the Right on issues of security policy and spawned the largest mass demonstrations in the postwar period, was likely a formative experience for many in this generation. The common themes across all these areas are rapid change, instability, and uncertainty.

Hypotheses related to the political attitudes of those who came of age during this period include: the likelihood of polarization along right-left ideological lines (resulting in generational units), a relatively friendly attitude toward the United States, a tendency to view Japan as a “small” or “middle” power that should maintain a low profile in international politics, and a relatively favorable view of growth-oriented and redistributive economic policies at home. This is the cohort of Cold War builders and strivers that is currently in power. The shared experience of this cohort is one of “optimistic uncertainty.”

The midcareer cohort (1975–88). ≈ Those leaders who came of age in this second period are the main target of this study. Their formative experiences occurred during a “sweet spot” in Japan's postwar history. Few international conflicts affected Japan during this period. Although the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iran-Iraq war heightened Cold War tensions, this period began with détente and ended with glasnost. By this stage the Cold War had stabilized through the formation of institutions that reduced threat. At the same time Japan gradually but significantly improved the country's defense capabilities. In addition by 1975 Japan's economy had recovered from the first oil shock and proceeded to grow steadily. By the end of this second period Japan was recognized throughout the world as an economic and technological superpower.²⁹ Trade friction with the United States was merely an annoyance—the cost of Japan's great technological and economic

²⁹ Ezra F. Vogel, *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

success. Although the Plaza Accord and resulting yen reevaluation briefly flattened Japan's economic trajectory, the economy quickly recovered and was accompanied by the inflation of an asset bubble. Many, if not most, Japanese had never had it so good.

Finally, in the realm of domestic politics the public began to demobilize. Social movements retreated as the LDP co-opted many of these movements' issues while also taming labor unions and left-wing parties.³⁰ In addition many of the conventions associated with the LDP's long period of one-party rule were by now firmly in place: seniority advancement, factions, policy tribes (*zoku giin*), interparty collaboration and compromise (*kokutai seiji*), and bureaucratic dominance were all taken for granted, which was of particular importance to those seeking careers in politics.³¹ Although the LDP's numbers neared parity with the combined opposition parties during this time, the party maintained control of both houses and then prime minister Nakasone's huge victory in 1986 seemed to portend a new era of LDP dominance. Overall the picture of Japan during this period is one of stability and certainty. The country was richer, more secure, and more confident than ever before in managing affairs both at home and abroad.

Hypotheses related to political generation formation among those who came of age during this period include: less polarization along right-left ideological lines (reducing the likelihood of generational units), a less favorable view of the United States than the view held by the elder cohort, a tendency to view Japan as an important player in world affairs and an increased willingness to improve Japan's profile in international politics, and a relatively favorable view of redistributive economic policies at home, at least more so than the midcareer cohort's younger colleagues. This is the cohort that will succeed the current generation of leaders. The shared experience of this cohort is one of "prosperity's children."

The youngest cohort (1989) ≈ This period of optimism ended in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of share prices on the Tokyo Stock Exchange, and the loss of the LDP's upper house majority. Although the end of the Cold War, the economic difficulties of the 1990s, and the persistence of coalition governments would not become fully apparent for a few years, the third period has been marked by high levels of instability in international affairs and uncertainty both in the domestic economy and in politics. The

³⁰ See Richard J. Samuels, "Leadership and Political Change in Japan: The Second Rincho," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 29, no.1 (Winter 2003): 1-31.

³¹ Bradley M. Richardson and Scott C. Flanagan, *Politics in Japan* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1984).

collapse of the Soviet Union, the rise of China, the missile threat from North Korea, and U.S. interventions in the Middle East and Central Asia forced the Japanese to begin reconsidering national security policy.³² The economic downturn also generated doubts over the future viability of traditional postwar economic policies, especially the government's role in redistributing revenue from growth. Finally, the LDP's inability to regain sole control of the upper house coupled with the party's temporary loss of the lower house led to electoral reform ushering in an age of coalition governments. A strange political coalition of Liberal Democrats and Socialists shattered Cold War ideological lines, paving the way for a protean two-party system. At the same time many of the familiar institutions of the LDP's long one-party rule (e.g., seniority advancement and factions) either have morphed or have become dysfunctional altogether.

Hypotheses related to political generation formation among those who came of age during this period include: the possibility of generational units forming across new (non-right-left) axes due to increased instability and uncertainty, a more favorable view of the United States as an alliance partner in an uncertain environment, and an increased willingness to revise past practices and try new approaches in foreign and domestic policies (such as supporting the use of force, allowing collective self-defense, and reducing support for developmental economic and industrial policies). This is the post-Cold War cohort of "brave new worlders" that is in gestation and the last cohort currently in line for power. This cohort's shared experience is one of "true uncertainty."

Three potential Mannheimian generations therefore comprise individual Diet representatives who turned 25 years old during one of these periods.³³ This results in an age range of 44–57 (as of December 31, 2007) for the targeted generation of this study, the midcareer generation. Given that the average age of the current cabinet is 60 and that some top LDP and DPJ officials are even older, barring a complete breakdown of the link between seniority and advancement, the midcareer cohort will likely fill leadership positions for the

³² Richard J. Samuels, *Securing Japan: Tokyo's Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

³³ We note that most studies of political generations use the lower number of the "impressionable years" age range (in our case 18). We depart from this convention and use the higher number (25) because we are seeking to understand leadership over the medium to long term (5–15 years in the future). This requires analysis of the younger members of the midcareer generation. Calculating from the high number ensures that the younger members of the age cohort are most exposed to the target period and should thus exhibit the strongest generational effects.

next fifteen years.³⁴ In addition this three-way division of periods provides a basis for comparison between potential political generations—the eldest cohort has 210 members in the HOR (44%), the middle cohort has 187 members (39%), and the youngest cohort has 83 members (17%). Though relatively small compared to the older cohorts, the youngest cohort is still sufficiently large for statistical analysis.

Japanese postwar history is a journey from instability and uncertainty (1949–74) to stability and certainty (1975–88), followed by a regression to instability and uncertainty. Our targeted “generation in waiting” is the product of the middle period, which was notable for prosperity and stability rather than for any specific crystallizing events. If this period did produce a coherent political generation, this generation was likely formed through environmental shifts occurring as a result of higher standards of living and the increasing number of economic opportunities enjoyed by young people during these years.

Mapping the Japanese Political Discourse

There are three key dimensions of Japan’s contemporary political discourse: security, the economy, and cultural issues. Though each issue area is vigorously contested, none follows simple ideological, party, or institutional logic.

Consider first the discourse on Japan’s security policy.³⁵ The Left and the Right agree that the U.S.-Japan alliance diminishes Japanese sovereignty. Differences in security policy, however, do not strictly reflect party lines. For example, even though the ruling LDP supports the U.S. alliance unconditionally, the party remains divided on the issue of how to deal with Asia. Conversely the DPJ is unified on the issue of regional integration but divided over the U.S. alliance.³⁶ Moreover the contemporary discourse on Japanese grand strategy is dominated by strange—and shifting—coalitions. Heirs to prewar nativism share antipathetic views of the U.S. alliance with heirs of the old Left. Though agreeing that the alliance is important, today’s small Japanists (those who think of Japan as a mercantile power) and big Japanists (those who think of Japan as a great power) disagree fundamentally on how much Japan should pay for maintenance of the alliance—and whether

³⁴ “Fukuda naikaku no heikin nenrei, wazuka ni wakagaeri, 60.2-sai” [Marginally Younger, the Average Age of the Fukuda Cabinet is 60.2], *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, September 26, 2007, 4. We note, however, that leadership transition is not a one-way street. In 2006–07 the leadership of both the LDP and the DPJ was transferred from younger to older politicians.

³⁵ This argument is elaborated in Samuels, *Securing Japan*.

³⁶ For an incisive analysis of these differences, see Shiraiishi Takashi, *Teikoku to Sono Genkai* [Empire and Its Limits] (Tokyo: NTT, 2006).

part of that cost should include Japan's becoming "normal." The deck is reshuffled yet again on the issue of accommodation with China.

The security policy preferences of contemporary Japanese scholars, commentators, politicians, and bureaucrats can be sorted along two axes. The first axis measures the value placed on the U.S.-Japan alliance. At one extreme is the view that the United States is Japan's most important source of security and thus must be embraced. The scope of U.S. power and the limits of Japanese capabilities are central to this view, which emphasizes the strategic importance of the alliance for Japan's security. On this account U.S. bases in Japan are critical elements of any coherent national security strategy. At the other extreme is the view that in a unipolar world the United States is a dangerous bully that must be kept at a distance for fear that Japan might become entangled in U.S. "adventures" abroad. The presence of U.S. bases in Japan increases the likelihood of such entanglement. Finally, located in the middle of this axis are those who call upon Japan to rebalance relationships with Asia and United States. Though attracted to the idea of regional institution-building, this group is not yet prepared to relinquish U.S. security guarantees. This first axis therefore is a surrogate measure of the relative value different groups place on the dangers of abandonment and entanglement. Those groups with a high tolerance for abandonment are willing to maintain a greater distance from the United States than are those with a high tolerance for entanglement.

Those with a high tolerance for entanglement, however, are not all status quo-oriented. This camp is divided along a second axis measuring the willingness to use force in international affairs. Support for the revision of Article 9, for the adoption of a more proactive and global defense posture, for the integration of Japan's military forces with the U.S. military, and for the dispatch of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) abroad are all indicators of where individuals stand on this second axis. Some who support the U.S. alliance are more willing to deploy the SDF to "share alliance burdens" than are others who prefer that Japan continue to limit itself to rear-area support. The former group wishes for Japan to become a great power again and adopts the position that Japan should become "normal." According to these "normal nation-alists" the statute of limitations for Japan's mid-twentieth-century aggression expired long ago; it is time for Japan to step onto the international stage as an equal of the United States. The latter group, "middle power internationalists," believe that Japan must remain a small power with self-imposed limits on the right to belligerency. The country's contributions to world affairs should remain non-military. Among those who prefer that Japan maintain a greater distance

from the United States are both “neoautonomists,” who support the creation of an independent, full-spectrum Japanese military capable of using force, and “pacifists,” who eschew the military institution altogether.

The economic dimension is equally contested. By the mid-1990s the wheels had fallen off Japan’s largely idealized system of corporate paternalism, alliance capitalism, state guidance, and collaborative competition.³⁷ The benefits of the “developmental state” were widely questioned.³⁸ Lifetime employment in the private sector, *keiretsu* (business group) solidarity, the use of public works to sustain employment levels, government intervention in production and pricing decisions, and the use of Keynesian measures to stimulate the economy were all seen as core elements of Japan’s postwar economic model. In response to Japan’s long economic slide in the 1990s commentators and practitioners actively debated the viability of Japanese-style capitalism. Suddenly, *laissez faire* economics was receiving a hearing and the developmental state was taking a beating. Active debate over the benefits and risks both of the “big bang” liberalization of Japanese capital markets and of deregulation and unfettered competition came to dominate the national discourse. Neo-liberalism—once the *bete noir* of Japanese business and government elites—had powerful advocates on the archipelago for the first time.³⁹ As in the debate over security, the advocates for change and the defenders of an idealized status quo defy conventional labels. Some agents of change (e.g., former prime minister Koizumi) are conservative politicians whose efforts to move Japan away from the postwar system were met with opposition from both the Left and the Right. Indeed Koizumi battled his own party in order to reform the postal savings system. Even bureaucrats within the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) were divided between those who favored hoary techniques of state-led intervention in the economy and those who thought the time for the heavy hand of the state had past. Business elites meanwhile argued over the cost and benefits of free trade.⁴⁰

“Culture war”—a common characterization of a major fault line in U.S. politics—applies *mutatis mutandis* as well to Japan as to the United States. Before becoming prime minister, Abe Shinzo outlined the route Japan should

³⁷ Ronald Dore, *Taking Japan Seriously: A Confucian Perspective on Leading Economic Issues* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), chap. 9.

³⁸ Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle*, 1982; and Meredith Woo-Cumings, ed., *The Developmental State* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

³⁹ Steven K. Vogel, *Japan Remodeled: How Government and Industry are Reforming Japanese Capitalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

⁴⁰ Takenaka Heizo, *Kozo Kaikaku no Shinjutsu: Takenaka Heizo Daijin Nisshi* [The Truth about Structural Reform: Minister Takenaka Heizo’s Diary] (Tokyo: Nihon Keizai, 1996).

take to reconnect with the country's traditions.⁴¹ His jeremiad served as a comprehensive statement from the Right on the cultural issues gripping public discourse. Disputes over how to understand the Pacific War—whether the war was one of aggression or necessity, for example—are compounded by disputes over the appropriate role of the imperial household in the 21st century as well as over how to balance individual freedom with the collective good and deference to authority. Some currently see immigration as the solution to Japan's social ills, while others see immigration as a cause. Are citizens too fixed on individual rights and too complacent with respect to social duties? Should individual privacy be protected or protected against? These disputes collectively amount to nothing less than a battle over the right to define true Japanese virtue and national identity—a battle often, though not always, waged by supporters of right-wing nationalist ideas. As in the debates over security and economic policies, combatants in the culture war are often allies in other domains. Former prime minister Nakasone called Abe's vision an “unrealistic revival of tradition and culture.”⁴² Both current prime minister Fukuda Yasuo and former prime minister Koizumi Junichiro support female succession to the imperial throne in opposition to many fellow conservatives. Familiar left-right divisions thus do not hold on every front of the culture war. The reliably conservative newspaper *Yomiuri Shimbun* has found common cause with the liberal *Asahi Shimbun* in opposing conservative efforts to normalize prime ministerial visits to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine.⁴³

These debates are occurring within an HOR that is controlled by the LDP in coalition with the New Komeito (NK). Since September 2005 the LDP and NK have together occupied more than two-thirds of the HOR seats. The largest opposition party is the DPJ, which holds 113 seats in the HOR and—importantly—has controlled the HOC since July 2007.

Even though none of these parties is organized along generational lines, newer members of the lower house—self-declared junior legislators (*wakate giin*)—have for years formed groups that share political goals.⁴⁴ In the 1970s the Seirankai—a conservative, anti-mainstream group that included future prime minister Mori Yoshiro and future Tokyo governor Ishihara Shintaro—formed in the LDP in opposition to then prime minister Tanaka Kakuei's

⁴¹ Abe Shinzo, *Utsukushi Kuni E* [Toward a Beautiful Country] (Tokyo: Bungei Shuju, 2006).

⁴² Masaru Tamamoto, “Japan's Politics of Cultural Shame,” *Global Asia* 2, no.1 (Spring 2007): 15.

⁴³ “Shusho no yasukuni sanpai wo ‘okashii’ to hihan” [Prime Minister's Yasukuni Visits Criticized as “Inappropriate”], *Asahi Shimbun*, January 4, 2006, 2.

⁴⁴ For a list of some of these groups, see the longer version of this article to appear in a forthcoming NBR publication that will be available at <http://www.nbr.org>.

overture to the People's Republic of China. Meanwhile a group of younger and more moderate former bureaucrats in the LDP, led by future prime minister Miyazawa Kiichi, established the Hirakawakai in 1973. There have been a great many subsequent examples of such groups, many of which—for example the Jiyu Shakai Kenkyukai, founded in 1977 by future prime ministers Takeshita Noboru, Kaifu Toshiki, and Miyazawa Kiichi—were supra-partisan. The most widely discussed contemporary example is the Young Diet Member's League to Consider Japan's Future and History Education (Nippon no Zento to Rekishi Kyoiku wo Kangaeru Wakate Giin no Kai), founded by Nakagawa Shoichi and Abe Shinzo, among others.

Yet before examining the relevance of these parties and potential generational groups for the core issues of Japanese political discourse, we will first describe the key characteristics of the target midcareer generation.

Key Characteristics of the Midcareer Generation

In some respects the background characteristics of the midcareer generation are little different from those of the general population of the HOR. For example the distribution of the pre-Diet careers among members of this generation is approximately the same as the distribution of pre-Diet careers among lower house representatives as a whole. Of the members of the midcareer generation, 33% are former Diet secretaries, 29% have business experience, 26% were local politicians, and 14% were bureaucrats. This is approximately the same distribution in exactly the same rank order as the HOR overall. More than one-third of the members of this cohort in both the DPJ and the LDP have experience working as a secretary to a Diet member. Another similarity is the concentration of graduates from three elite schools—Tokyo, Waseda, and Keio universities—that accounts for slightly less than half of the midcareer cohort. Nearly one-fourth of this generation graduated from Tokyo University alone, and a similar proportion of members of this cohort within the NK and the DPJ attended graduate school.

What distinguishes the midcareer generation from other generations is that 60%—a higher percentage than in either of the other two generations—entered national politics after having worked in two or more different types of professions. Moreover this generation produced five members with undergraduate degrees from foreign universities—which again is more than any other cohort has produced. The SMD winners from the midcareer cohort are evenly drawn from urban, rural, and mixed districts, whereas the elder generation is weighted more toward rural districts and the younger

generation is more urban. The relatively high number of women belonging to this cohort—more than 12%, which is the highest percentage among the three cohorts—also distinguishes the midcareer generation from the others.

Nearly 90% of leaders from this cohort were elected after 1993, with more than 57% first elected after 2000. As a result more than half of the midcareer leaders possess fewer than eight years of experience in nationally elected offices. Of this cohort 23% (43 members) are affiliated with the DPJ and 62% (116 members) belong to the LDP. Additionally the midcareer cohort constitutes more than half (16 of 31 members) of the NK contingent in the lower house.⁴⁵ The largest subset of the LDP group (40 members) has no factional affiliation.⁴⁶ Nearly half of the former Mori faction, however, and more than 60% of the small Komura and Tanigaki factions belong to this cohort. Indeed more than 20% (24 members) of the midcareer cohort in the LDP were members of the former Mori faction, the largest faction in the LDP. On a partisan basis DPJ members of the HOR are more evenly drawn from each generation than their LDP counterparts, with roughly a third of DPJ members belonging to each of the three generational groups. The LDP's membership is concentrated in the two older cohorts, with nearly 46% belonging to the eldest. Interesting to note, however, is that the midcareer cohort constitutes nearly the same percentage of the LDP (39%) and the DPJ (38%) contingents in the HOR.

Location in Individual Issue Dimensions

The survey data on which this study is based illuminates each of the three policy dimensions outlined above.⁴⁷ There are five questions relevant to the cultural discourse. The first question elicits attitudes toward official prime ministerial visits to the Yasukuni Shrine. These visits are highly controversial because the shrine is associated with a particular religion (Shinto), with an imperial war in Asia, and with the enshrinement of convicted war criminals.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Interesting to note is that neither of the two traditional left-wing parties—the Japan Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party of Japan—has even a single lower house member in the youngest cohort.

⁴⁶ Please note that we used factional affiliation data that was current as of September 2005 and that this data will have changed somewhat since then. Different rates of affiliation across generations are consistent with the life cycle model explored above. Nearly 70% of the youngest generation is unaffiliated, while 35% of the middle generation and only 16% of the eldest generation are unaffiliated with factions in the LDP.

⁴⁷ A translation of the survey questions along with the results by generation and party will be included in a longer version of this article to appear in a forthcoming NBR publication that will be available at <http://www.nbr.org>.

⁴⁸ For an excellent discussion of the Yasukuni matter, see Takahashi Testuya, *Yasukuni Mondai* [The Yasukuni Issue] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shinsho, 2005).

A second question measures attitudes toward the construction of a secular national memorial as an alternative to Yasukuni. A third question asks whether individual politicians believe Japan's actions in the Pacific War were justified. A fourth question concerns the trade-off between civil liberties and public safety, a classic dilemma in social policy that in Japan speaks to politically volatile but informal norms concerning the relative importance of the individual versus the group.⁴⁹ The final question addresses attitudes on whether non-citizens who are permanent residents should be allowed to vote in local elections. Responses to this question reveal attitudes both toward the integration of Japan's long-term-resident alien minorities into the Japanese mainstream and toward immigration.

Eight questions directly address the security discourse. The first question measures attitudes on the expansion of Japan's defense capabilities. The second gauges support for strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance. In addition multiple questions measure attitudes toward the use of military force—specifically, support for Japan's right to take preemptive action in the face of imminent threat, support for reinterpretation of the constitution to allow for collective self-defense, support for constitutional revision, and attitudes toward deployment of the Japanese SDF to Iraq. Two final questions—one concerning whether Japan should become a permanent member of the UN Security Council and the other concerning whether Japan should favor pressure over dialogue in dealings with North Korea—generate little variation and are of limited analytical utility.

Six questions address the domestic economy. The first two questions ask Diet representatives for their views on funding social security. The third question measures attitudes toward the proper size of government. The fourth is a proxy for attitudes toward the traditional Japanese employment system. The last two questions gauge attitudes on fiscal policy.

With one minor exception none of the differences across generations in response to the questions on cultural issues is statistically significant.⁵⁰ That said, the study finds that the targeted midcareer generation is the most cautious on the issue of Yasukuni visits. Only 15% of this cohort favored unconditional

⁴⁹ An additional question concerning perspectives on female succession to the imperial throne produced little variance and is thus not analytically useful. In our view this lack of variance owes to the timing of the survey. In September 2005 the only legitimate heir to the throne was female: thus opposing female succession possibly entailed opposition to maintaining the monarchy. This situation has since changed, however, with the birth of a male heir in September 2006.

⁵⁰ To assess the statistical significance of differences in the responses of our three generational cohorts, we performed chi-square tests for nominal scale data (questions 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6, and 7) and ANOVA tests (Bonferroni and Games-Howell) for interval scale data (questions 8 through 9.12). Our criterion for statistical significance is the 0.05 level.

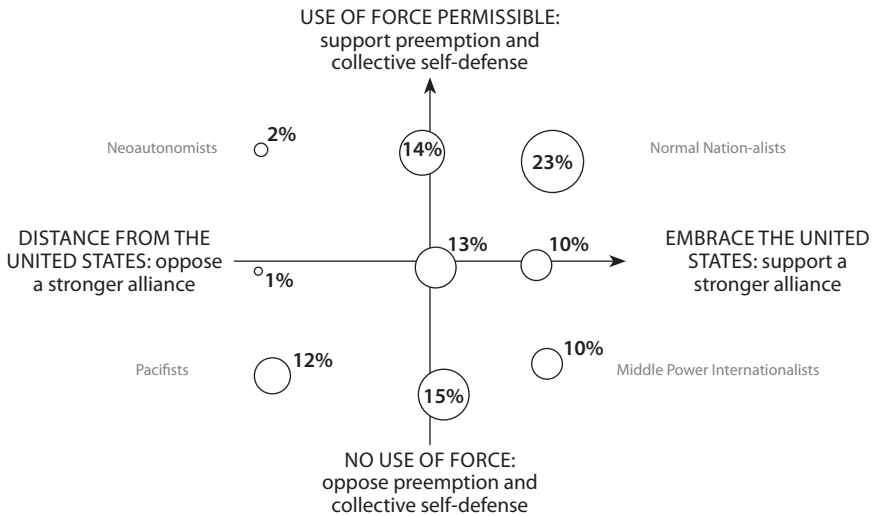
visits to the shrine by the prime minister—the lowest level of support among the three generations. Moreover this group proved more willing than other cohorts to take international factors into account when judging the rectitude of these visits. These responses collectively reveal that midcareer leaders assume a more conciliatory attitude than their elders toward China and other Asian neighbors. Likewise the midcareer generation's evaluation of the Pacific War separated this generation from the oldest and youngest generations. Only 9% of this group—a lower percentage than in the other generations—believes that Japan's actions in the Pacific War were justified, and 38% of this generation—a higher percentage than in other generations—believes the Pacific War was a misguided war of aggression. The midcareer generation was also the most willing of the three to allow non-citizens to vote in local elections. This generation, however, was not consistently the most progressive in our sample on cultural issues. Of the three generations midcareer politicians proved the most willing to restrict individual rights in order to preserve public safety; the youngest cohort registered the most liberal response to this question. The one statistically significant finding on cultural issues obtained within the DPJ, where the eldest cohort was more liberal than the successive generation on the issue of granting voting rights to non-citizens.

As in the case of the analysis of the cultural dimension, we have found only a limited number of statistically significant results with regard to security issues. The most striking result is that the youngest cohort is more supportive of strengthening Japan's defense capabilities than the midcareer generation. Interestingly the elder generation is also more hawkish on this question than the midcareer cohort is, as well as on the question of preemption, though not at statistically significant levels. Overall the study found that the youngest generation is consistently more hawkish than the two older generations on the issues of the U.S.-Japan alliance, collective self-defense, preemption, and the expansion of Japanese defense capabilities.⁵¹ As noted above, however, only the difference between the youngest and midcareer generations on the latter issue was statistically significant. Within the DPJ the younger two generations were more supportive of strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance than the eldest—differences that proved to be statistically significant in both cases.

Figure 2, using the two security axes in our original model—attitudes toward the United States and toward the use of force in international affairs—

⁵¹ Although the youngest generation was also more hawkish on the questions of the deployment of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF) in Iraq and the revision of the constitution, the differences between the midcareer and youngest generation on both questions were extremely small.

FIGURE 2

The Midcareer Generation in the Security Policy Discourse

helps locate the members of the midcareer generation in Japan's contemporary security policy debate.

The figure is revealing. First, the normal nation-alists, who favor both strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance and relaxing existing constraints on Japan's ability to use force overseas, form the single largest group (23%). Second, the normal nation-alists face significant levels of opposition from pacifists (12%) and middle power internationalists (10%). Third, the neoautonomists, who oppose a stronger alliance but favor a more muscular security policy, are so few as to be almost non-existent. Another finding, however, overshadows these: more than 50% of the midcareer generation sits on either one or both of the two axes. A cumulative majority therefore is ambivalent toward strengthening the alliance (29%), using force (11%), or both (13%). This pattern also obtains for each of the other two generations and for the HOR sample as a whole.

This interpretation of the data leads to two conclusions. First, despite enjoying success in academia and publishing, the neoautonomists have failed to make significant inroads among national politicians. This finding provides strong evidence that fears of a return to the unilateralist and aggressive security policies of the prewar period are unfounded. Second, even as the largest single group in both the midcareer and youngest generations, the normal

nation-alists still face considerable opposition; higher percentages of both generations are ambivalent over changes in alliance policy, the constraints on Japan's use of force, or both. Taken together these findings indicate that security policy is likely to remain an important cleavage in Japanese politics for some time to come and considerable room remains for realignment on issues of security.

The most significant generational differences are found on issues of economic policy. On the questions of lifetime employment in the private sector, the use of public works to stabilize aggregate employment levels, and the use of fiscal stimuli as an instrument of economic policy the eldest generation was in every case more supportive of traditional forms of Japanese economic practice than the members of the younger two generations at statistically significant levels. Moreover no significant difference existed between the two youngest generations on these issues; both expressed less support than the eldest cohort for traditional Japanese economic practices. In all three cases, however, the midcareer generation proved marginally more enthusiastic about these institutions than the youngest cohort. In a result that was not statistically significant, the midcareer generation was more supportive of small government than the eldest group but less supportive than the youngest. Even within parties we found similar distributions of responses, some at statistically significant levels. For example within both the LDP and DPJ elders were more supportive of maintaining lifetime employment practices in the private sector than either of the younger generations. Within the DPJ this relationship also obtained with regard to using public works to support aggregate employment levels.

Having provided a general portrait of the midcareer cohort in the HOR, this study will now turn to identifying individuals within this cohort who are likely to become leaders of Japan.

IDENTIFYING FUTURE LEADERS

Japanese politics has witnessed more change in the last fifteen years than in the previous thirty. Parties have split, coalition governments have obliterated conventional conceptions of the ideological spectrum, the largest opposition party of the Cold War era collapsed, and opposition parties have formed and dissolved at such an alarming rate that finding new party names has grown challenging for would-be founders. Although many of the formal and informal institutions of the classic 1955 system persist—such as *koenkai* (local support groups), factions, and the LDP itself—none of these institutions

has remained unaffected by the changes to the system. Thus changes in previously stable patterns of advancement, or “paths to power,” in the political world should be expected.⁵²

For example during the golden years of the 1955 system a candidate for LDP party president (and thus for prime minister) was expected to meet a relatively rigid set of criteria: candidates were on average around 65 years old, though not older than 72; had served more than 25 years in the lower house; had won at least ten elections; and were either the formal or acting head of a faction.⁵³ Though not a prerequisite, experience as minister of finance was also strongly associated with success as party president.⁵⁴ These patterns were so well established by the late 1980s that political journalists accurately predicted four of the seven LDP party presidents (Kono, Hashimoto, Obuchi, and Mori) between 1989 and 2001.⁵⁵

With the beginning of the new millennium, however, this predictable pattern broke down. None of the three LDP party presidents and prime ministers since 2001 had served as formal or acting head of a faction or as minister of finance. Only one (Koizumi) had served for 25 years in the lower house and won ten elections. Abe Shinzo, who at 52 was the youngest prime minister in postwar history, became party president with only five electoral victories, which would not have guaranteed even a cabinet post in the years when seniority advancement was the rule.⁵⁶ Although Fukuda Yasuo was endorsed by eight of nine faction leaders in a successful bid for party

⁵² Our focus here is only on the top positions in the executive branch and major parties. In the government these positions include the prime minister and other cabinet ministers, including the chief cabinet secretary. In the LDP these positions include the party president, party secretary-general, chairman of the General Council, chairman of the Policy Research Council, and chairman of the Diet Affairs Committee. The top positions in the DPJ include president, acting president, secretary-general, chair of the Policy Research Committee, and chair of the Diet Affairs Committee.

⁵³ Hayao, *The Japanese Prime Minister*, 96–121.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 110. From when Hatoyama Ichiro assumed office in 1954 to when Miyazawa Kiichi left office in 1993, nine of fifteen prime ministers had served at least one term as minister of finance, while eight had served multiple terms—both records for an individual ministry in this category.

⁵⁵ Ito Masaya and Fukuoka Masayuki, *Korekara 10-nen Sengoku Jiminto* [The LDP: The Next Decade of Civil War] (Tokyo: Daiichi Kikaku Shuppan, 1988), cited in Hayao, *The Japanese Prime Minister*, 99. To be sure, Ito and Fukuoka did not make point predictions. Instead they generated a list of sixteen LDP politicians who met general criteria. This list included the four men who became LDP party president as well as Hata Tsutomu, who subsequently left the LDP but served briefly as prime minister in a non-LDP government in 1994.

⁵⁶ Gerald L. Curtis, *The Logic of Japanese Politics* (Columbia University Press, 1999), 105–6.

leadership in 2007, nearly a third of faction members likely voted for Fukuda's opponent, Aso Taro, against the wishes of faction leaders.⁵⁷

Given that formerly well-trod paths to power no longer guarantee success, we have sought to understand the new and evolving selection criteria for party leaders in order to develop a profile of future leadership. Based on interviews, the first step in this process focused on the electoral strength of individual politicians.⁵⁸ It seems that whether or not a Diet member can "own" an electoral district—that is, win repeatedly in a convincing fashion—is a measure of leadership potential.⁵⁹ Diet members with an iron grip on their home districts gain the respect of their peers and are more likely to be around in five to fifteen years to assume the top posts. In constructing our profile pool of future leaders we thus limited consideration to members of the midcareer generation who won in SMDs in 2005 (116 members). We then determined the number of times each had been elected and eliminated those who had been elected fewer than three times as too untested. We also excluded Diet members who had won six or more elections, such as Nakagawa Shoichi (LDP) and Okada Katsuya (DPJ)—both of whom entered politics before their peers and already possess enough leadership experience to qualify as current leaders. This left 65 members who were elected three to five times.⁶⁰ We additionally eliminated members of smaller parties and one independent, resulting in a list of 48 LDP members and 13 DPJ members. We then sorted the remaining 61 members by margin of victory over the nearest opponent (in vote-share terms) in the 2005 election and removed from the list members who failed to beat the average SMD victory margin for the midcareer generational cohort in their party.⁶¹ As an additional measure of electoral strength we limited consideration to

⁵⁷ LDP party presidents are currently selected by a vote of LDP Diet members and local chapters. Although Diet members vote by secret ballot, it is clear that many faction members ultimately ignored the endorsement of faction leaders and voted for Aso. If one assumes that Aso and Fukuda split the vote among non-aligned LDP members and that all members of Aso's own faction voted for Aso, then approximately 29% of faction members, or nearly one-third, voted against the wishes of faction leaders.

⁵⁸ Author interview, Aburaki Kiyooki, Keidanren Political Affairs Group, Tokyo, December 13, 2007.

⁵⁹ Recent analysis of leadership appointments that finds a positive relationship between appointments to "high-policy posts" (in areas such as finance, foreign affairs, defense, and the cabinet) and margin of victory in a SMD partly supports this approach. See Robert Pekkanen, Benjamin Nyblade, and Ellis S. Krauss, "Electoral Incentives in Mixed-Member Systems: Party, Posts, and Zombie Politicians in Japan," *American Political Science Review* 100, no. 2 (May 2006): 190–1.

⁶⁰ This distinction was supported in our interview with DPJ representative Watanabe Shu, who identified his seniority in terms of the number of elections won rather than in terms of his chronological age: "Those of us who have been elected five times are next." Author interview, Watanabe Shu, DPJ representative, Tokyo, January 24, 2008.

⁶¹ The use of the vote-share differential between the first- and second-place finishers as a measure of electoral competitiveness is discussed in Matthew Carlson, *Money Politics in Japan: New Rules, Old Practices* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2007), 31n15.

members who were “straight-winners”—that is, who have not lost an election after their first victory. Finally, we excluded members, such as Abe Shinzo, who had already achieved the highest posts and are known quantities on the international stage.⁶² Through this process we identified sixteen successful midcareer politicians (twelve from the LDP and four from the DPJ) who are well-positioned to assume the reins of power within the next fifteen years. The results appear in **Table 1**.

The above method effectively identified experienced leaders in the midcareer generation. For example all of the LDP members identified already possess some form of cabinet experience, compared to only 59% of LDP members belonging to the midcareer generation overall. Likewise all four DPJ members have been appointed to the party’s shadow cabinet at least once, compared to only 51% of midcareer DPJ members overall. In addition, although they were excluded from the final list for the reasons noted above, our procedure initially identified seven members of the middle generation who have already served as prime minister, cabinet ministers, or chief cabinet secretary. We thus have confidence in the study’s parameters. Although we do not claim to have identified every individual who will rise to power, we are confident that we have identified a representative sample of the next generation of Japanese leaders.⁶³

LDP Future Leaders: Background Factors

The twelve midcareer Diet representatives we have identified as likely future LDP leaders all have served in senior sub-cabinet positions (parliamentary vice minister or vice minister) with a wide range of important portfolios—foreign affairs, defense, education, justice, transportation, and agriculture. This group includes a significantly higher percentage of women (17%) than the LDP as whole. The majority of members were educated in the social sciences at Japan’s elite universities. One-third were local politicians before stepping onto the national stage. In

⁶² In addition to Abe, those Diet members excluded in this last category included: former chief cabinet secretary Shiozaki Yasuhisa; former defense minister Koike Yuriko; Tanahashi Yasufumi, former minister of state for Science and Technology Policy, Food Safety, and Information Technology; Kishida Fumio, current minister of state for Okinawa and Northern Territories Affairs; Motegi Toshimitsu, former minister of state for Okinawa and Northern Territories Affairs; and Watanabe Yoshimi, minister of state for Financial Services, Administrative and Regulatory Reforms in the Fukuda cabinet.

⁶³ Four of the sixteen future leaders identified above were interviewed for this study: Miyakoshi Mitsuhiro (LDP), Kono Taro (LDP), Nakagawa Masaharu (DPJ), and Watanabe Shu (DPJ). Extended profiles on these individuals will be included in a longer version of this article to appear in a forthcoming NBR publication that will be available at <http://www.nbr.org>.

TABLE 1

Likely Future Leaders of the LDP and DPJ

LDP	DPJ
Hamada Yasukazu	Kikawada Toru
Ishida Masatoshi	Kondo Shoichi
Ito Shintaro	Nakagawa Masaharu
Kajiyama Hirhoshi	Watanabe Shu
Kaneko Yasushi	
Kono Taro	
Matsushima Midori	
Miyakoshi Mitsuhiro	
Ono Shinya	
Shimomura Hakubun	
Takagi Tsuyoshi	
Tsuchiya Shinako	

addition more than 40% served as Diet secretaries, and an equal number are hereditary politicians. We also note that one-third of this group entered national politics with corporate experience.

As a whole these twelve are more conservative on cultural issues and, perhaps not coincidentally, come from districts that are more rural than either the midcareer cohort or the LDP overall. For example only 10% insist that the prime minister not visit Yasukuni shrine—half the level of the entire midcareer cohort on this response. Likewise only 8% of these twelve potential LDP leaders take the position that the Pacific War was a mistake—less than half the corresponding LDP level. In addition this group is more willing to restrict privacy and individual rights for the sake of public security than the LDP or the midcareer generational cohort overall.

With regard to defense and security policy these twelve LDP members favor strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance, with one representative describing the maintenance of this alliance as Japan's "obvious" first principle (*tozen da*).⁶⁴ The twelve, however, exhibit more ambivalence toward the security alliance than did the LDP respondents overall. This pattern also

⁶⁴ Author interview, Miyakoshi Mitsuhiro, LDP representative, Tokyo, January 24, 2008.

obtained with regard to strengthening Japan's defense capabilities. On the thorny issue of constitutional revision these potential leaders unanimously support change—a level significantly higher than the level of support from the midcareer cohort as a whole (80%). Given the opportunity to identify the section of the constitution that they would first target for revision, seven of eleven representatives specified Article 9, which deals with national security (one representative did not respond). In addition these potential future leaders more strongly favor reinterpreting the constitution to allow for the exercise of the right of collective self-defense than the midcareer cohort overall, although less so than the LDP party average. The twelve, however, are significantly more supportive of Japan's right to preemptive attack in the face of imminent threat than the LDP overall or the larger midcareer generational cohort. These potential leaders are also slightly less willing than their LDP colleagues—but more willing than both the midcareer cohort and the HOR as a whole—to assume a hard-line position in negotiations with North Korea.

On economic policy these twelve representatives are largely indistinguishable from most other members of the LDP or the midcareer cohort. These individuals support lifetime employment practices in the private sector at the same levels as the larger groups do and—similar to the LDP overall—are moderately supportive of measures to ensure aggregate employment through public works projects. Gauging this group's economic policy preferences is difficult, however; when asked directly if fiscal policy should be used to stimulate economic growth, the group was more cautious than the LDP or the midcareer generation as a whole.

DPJ Future Leaders: Background Factors

Given that only four DPJ representatives survived the filters we applied to identify those with strong leadership potential, the study profiles only a small slice of future DPJ leadership. Moreover the small number of potential DPJ leaders in the sample requires that we be modest in our claims. Finally, this number likely would have been significantly larger had the DPJ not suffered such a massive defeat in the September 2005 elections—an event that eliminated a number of promising DPJ leaders from our sample.

As in the LDP group profiled above, all four of the midcareer DPJ representatives we have identified as likely future leaders have enjoyed the full confidence of party leadership. Each has been a member of the DPJ shadow cabinet, with portfolios in such areas as general affairs, finance, the economy, trade and industry, and the environment. In addition one of these

four representatives served in a leadership position in the Liberal Party, which merged with the DPJ in 2003. Three of the four have served as vice chairs of the DPJ Diet Affairs Committee. Although our small sample excludes women and public university graduates, this group is otherwise representative of the DPJ overall: three are from urban or mixed districts, all four studied in the social sciences, and none hold graduate degrees. In addition half the representatives in the sample have studied abroad—more than twice the corresponding figure for the midcareer generation as a whole. Three entered national politics through local political careers, and two worked as news reporters. Only one is a hereditary politician (25%)—compared to 17% of DPJ representatives overall.

Unlike the LDP group discussed above, these four DPJ members have expressed views on cultural issues that are in line with the views of the party overall. On the issue of Yasukuni this group opposes prime ministerial visits at roughly the same rate as their DPJ colleagues. Moreover the group is even more uniformly supportive of plans to construct a secular national war memorial. All four representatives in the sample also agree with the majority of DPJ and midcareer representatives that Japan's actions in the Pacific War were mistaken. None of the four embraced the view of the small number of LDP representatives who believe that Japan's actions in the Pacific War were justified. Half instead identified Japan as the aggressor in the Pacific War, which is the dominant view within the DPJ. Interestingly this group is significantly more conservative on the issue of the trade-off between individual rights and public security, with half agreeing with the statement that it is proper to suspend the former in the interest of public security.

As is consistent with the DPJ overall, these four leaders adopt a moderately cooler attitude toward strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance than does the midcareer cohort as a whole. One representative complained that the Japanese government was too credulous in its acceptance of U.S. claims regarding the presence of WMD in Iraq and concluded that “[Japan] should be more distant from the U.S. in security affairs.”⁶⁵ That said, this group did not express any extreme views on the alliance and basically supports the status quo. Three of four support constitutional revision to some degree, though for different reasons. Moreover, despite selecting the “cannot say either way” answer, the fourth representative indicated an interest in adding “environmental rights” to the constitution. Two representatives registered strong opposition to allowing

⁶⁵ Author interview, Watanabe Shu.

the exercise of collective self-defense, while one was ambivalent and another did not respond.

This small group reflected the full range of opinion on whether Japan should strengthen the country's defense capabilities, with one representative supporting stronger defense capabilities, two opposed, and one in the middle. Similarly there was no consensus on the issue of whether Japan should take preemptive action in the face of an imminent threat. One legislator strongly supports the right to preemptive action, while two strongly oppose this right. There is also division on policy toward North Korea, with one representative in the sample strongly supporting the use of pressure over dialogue, one strongly opposing it, and the remaining two representatives conflicted over this issue. This consistently broad distribution of security policy preferences suggests that the next generation of DPJ leaders holds as diverse a set of views as the current generation.

The four future DPJ leaders in the sample consistently expressed a preference for economic reform. This group is indifferent toward lifetime employment practices in the private sector, unenthusiastic regarding the use of public works as a means to ensure employment, and objects to the promotion of growth and reduction of government debt through fiscal measures. On each of these issues the four are significantly less supportive of Japanese-style capitalism than the DPJ or the midcareer cohort as a whole.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored generational differences across three important dimensions of Japanese political discourse. Though the available data was not sufficient to adequately test the relative utility of the two dominant models of generational politics, the study does support some tentative conclusions regarding each model. First, in the absence of panel data we did not find strong evidence supporting the life cycle model in the form of statistically significant differences moving in one direction from the youngest to the oldest cohort or vice versa. Either the model is underspecified or political preferences among Japanese politicians are more fixed than the life cycle model would predict.

Second, the data only partially supported our hypotheses based on the experiential model—the bulk of this study. For example, contrary to our expectation we did not find any significantly different level of left-right polarization within the eldest generation. Although there are coherent policy differences between individual politicians of the same party (e.g., between Aso Taro and Kato Koichi, both from the LDP) as well as across parties (e.g.,

between Hiranuma Takeo, who is an independent, and Yokomichi Takahiro from the DPJ), the study does not find strong support for Mannheim's concept of "generational units" forming within any one generation in this study. In addition, although the model predicted that the midcareer generation would hold a less favorable view than the oldest generation of the United States, the data did not support this hypothesis: the middle group in fact favors strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance at a higher rate than the eldest cohort.

These limitations notwithstanding, the study did generate interesting and significant results, some of which are particularly striking. For example there is now compelling evidence that Japan's culture war is not fought on a generational battleground. The study supports this conclusion for three reasons. First, there were no statistically significant differences on any of the five cultural questions between any pair of generations in our study. Second, the study finds that cultural conservatives (such as Abe Shinzo), who have received so much media attention, are actually a minority within the midcareer generation, which proved to be more progressive on cultural issues than any other. Cultural conservatives are in fact distributed across the three generations without dominating any single one. Although concentrated in the LDP, cultural conservatives are outnumbered by the combination of the cultural progressives in the opposition and the large minority in the LDP. Finally, the widely touted institutional basis for generational politics among Diet members on cultural issues is not what it seems. The study explored the generational composition and policy efficacy of young Diet member groups—such as the Young Diet Member's League—and found that membership in these groups is not always limited to young Diet members. For example among the founding members of the Young Diet Member's League, two-thirds of both the leadership and the membership belong to the most senior cohort analyzed in this study—an anomaly that was corrected when the group eventually dropped the term "young" from its name.⁶⁶ Apparently youth is measured not only chronologically but also in electoral terms—most members of the Young Diet Member's League had been elected five or fewer times when the group was first founded. This same pattern obtains in other so-called youth groups in the Diet; for example Representative Kono Taro stated that after

⁶⁶ The names of the 26 founding leaders and 46 members were taken from Young Diet Member's League to Consider Japan's Future and History Education [Nippon no Zento to Rekishi Kyoiku wo Kangaeru Wakate Giin no Kai], *Rekishi kyokasho he no gimon* [Questions about History Textbooks] (Tokyo: Tendensha, 1997), 516–17. Judging from references to the group's name in news reports, the name change occurred in late 2004 or early 2005. The first reference appearing in *Asahi Shimbun* without the term "young" was in January 2005. See "NHK Bangumi Kaihen" [Changes to an NHK Program], *Asahi Shimbun*, January 18, 2005, 33.

being elected for the fourth time he stopped receiving invitations to these groups' meetings, even though he is younger than many who do.⁶⁷

The policy efficacy of these groups receives mixed reviews. According to Kono, who reported having joined nearly two dozen such groups: "They don't last and most have no policy relevance."⁶⁸ Another Diet representative, who is not currently a member of any such group, expressed a more positive view of their efficacy: "Young guys are always on the front line. They sharpen the issues." This representative added, however, that "these groups come and go as needed."⁶⁹ It seems that young Diet member groups serve both policy and political functions. First, these groups raise the salience of selected issues and clarify the contours of national debate. Second, such groups allow Diet members with relatively little experience to position themselves in certain policy areas to impress constituents during reelection campaigns. Though it is clear that these groups do help establish cross-factional and cross-party ties, the study also found that the groups do not consistently function as primary conduits for generational political action.

Although the study found that the youngest generation appears more hawkish on security issues than the older generations, the results in the security dimension were less robust than we expected. The exception was the finding that support in the youngest cohort for increasing Japan's defense capabilities is stronger than in the midcareer generation—a statistically significant result. Otherwise no pair of generations varied from one another on security issues at a statistically significant level. In addition, given that the elder generation is more hawkish than the midcareer cohort on the issues of preemptive action and stronger defense capabilities, it cannot be concluded that younger cohorts always favor more muscular policies than older generations. More importantly the study finds support across all generational cohorts for strengthening both the U.S.-Japan alliance and Japan's own defense capabilities. The breadth of this support suggests that if the current distribution of preferences holds, generational factors will not drive major changes in Japanese security doctrine.

The economic dimension, however—where the electoral stakes are higher than in the security dimension—consistently generated statistically significant results. There is a robust difference between the two younger generations and the current ruling cohort on issues of economic policy. Being far less

⁶⁷ Author interview, Kono Taro, LDP representative, Tokyo, January 21, 2008.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Author interview, Nakagawa Masaharu, DPJ representative, Tokyo, January 24, 2008.

attached to the traditional institutions of the Japanese economy, the younger generations are significantly more likely to oppose state intervention to maintain employment levels and Keynesian solutions to economic problems. Nor do these generations support traditional, but inefficient, practices in the private sector, such as lifetime employment. Given this result, and assuming that the current distribution of preferences remains in place, continued political support for the transformation of Japanese economic institutions should be expected. That said, although the relatively negative view of Japanese-style capitalism held by the younger cohorts may indicate an openness to neo-liberal policies—in the sense of increased preferences for market-based solutions and less government involvement in the economy—this result is not evidence that these younger generations have adopted such views to the same degree and extent as have leaders in Washington or London.⁷⁰

To place these generational results in context, we also analyzed the distribution of policy preferences against party affiliation and factional affiliation within the LDP. In seventeen of the twenty questions we examined, differences across the three largest parties (LDP, DPJ, and NK) were statistically significant. In only three cases did this result obtain when comparing LDP factions.⁷¹ Because differences in responses to six of these questions were statistically significant among the generational cohorts, we conclude that generations are more closely associated with policy views than factions but considerably less so than parties.

When identifying the three generational cohorts earlier in the study, we speculated on the policy positions each would embrace relative to the other generations. A number of these hypothesized relationships held—many at a statistically significant level. The eldest generation stood out vis-à-vis the other two on issues of economic policy in terms of support for the traditional institutions of the Japanese economy. Likewise the youngest cohort differentiated itself from the other two on security policy by being the most hawkish. Finally, the middle cohort was marginally more progressive on cultural issues than either the eldest or the youngest generation. These relationships are summarized in **Table 2**.

⁷⁰ For a nuanced analysis of the current state of economic reform in Japan, see Vogel, *Japan Remodeled*.

⁷¹ This result contradicts Prime Minister Fukuda's recent call for LDP factions to be viewed as "policy groups" (*seisaku gurupu*). See "Habatsu suitai tomarazu" [The Decline of Factions Has Not Stopped], *Asahi Shimbun*, October 5, 2007, 4.

TABLE 2

Summary of Generational Positions in Japan

Dimension Generation	Culture	Economics	Security
Eldest	Moderate	Anti-reform	Weak Hawk
Midcareer	Progressive	Pro-reform	Weak Hawk
Youngest	Weak progressive	Pro-reform	Hawk

Note: Shaded cells indicate statistically significant differences.

The table illustrates that one generation is always different from the other two in each policy dimension and that the outlier is different in both cases where statistically significant results obtained.

In sum, this study has found significant generational differences in economic policy preferences, less significant differences in security policy, and to our surprise no significant generational differences on cultural issues. Changed structural circumstances—either domestic or external—could of course result in a reshuffling of this deck. We therefore conclude this study by exploring the possibilities for generational impact on politics in three plausible medium-term scenarios, assuming that the current distribution of policy preferences across generations is maintained.

The first scenario is the current status quo in which the LDP and its coalition partner, the NK, continue to govern. The second presumes an unprecedented change of government in which the DPJ takes power, possibly with the NK. The third presumes a realignment of the current party structure in which all three major parties become irrelevant.

Assuming all else remains constant, if the LDP continues to govern in coalition with the NK, we should expect continued reform in economic policy (especially in the use of fiscal policy and public works), continued or enhanced support for the U.S.-Japan alliance, and little change in the culture war. We base these conclusions on two sources of information. The first is the distribution of preferences among the sixteen midcareer LDP and DPJ representatives who were identified as likely future leaders. The second source is a comparison of the midcareer cohort in each of the two major parties, which reveals that differences will remain across parties as the new generation assumes power. These differences therefore will likely continue to define partisan politics in familiar ways for the next fifteen to twenty years.

Although this first scenario presumes the status quo, even under status quo assumptions it has not been possible to imagine LDP governance without considering the DPJ position since the DPJ achieved a near single-party majority in the upper house in July 2007. Thus our predictions for this first scenario are tempered by the expectation that the DPJ will continue to influence policy outcomes even as the ruling generation is replaced.

In the event that the DPJ actually becomes the governing party (the second scenario) we should expect the next generation of Japanese leaders to embrace the United States as an ally with moderately less enthusiasm than the current leadership does. Comparing the midcareer generation of the DPJ to the current LDP leadership (the most relevant comparison for this scenario), the study finds that the future DPJ leaders are more ambivalent both with respect to the reinterpretation of Article 9 to allow for collective self-defense and with respect to the use of preemptive force. Although by no means dovish in the conventional sense of Japanese politics—that is, supporting unarmed neutrality—the DPJ leadership is less enthusiastic about the use of military force than the current LDP leadership. Likewise the DPJ will likely support economic reform with even greater enthusiasm than at present. Finally, because there is little support within the party for conservative positions on cultural issues, a future DPJ government will find itself with allies from the midcareer cohort across party lines—a situation that could further isolate the most culturally conservative elements in Japanese politics.

The third scenario presumes party realignment in which there is no longer a LDP or a DPJ and in which the current leadership generation is no longer politically active. Any speculation concerning this scenario must derive from the distribution of views within the current midcareer cohort, leavened by the views of what is today the youngest generation. First, under this scenario political realignment is unlikely to occur in the cultural dimension because most cultural conservatives are already concentrated in a single party (the LDP). Looking to the other dimensions, two types of party systems can be imagined. The first is a competitive system that builds upon the relatively wide distribution of preferences in the security dimension. For example, although the midcareer generation and the youngest cohort are not deeply divided internally over the value of the U.S.-Japan alliance, each generation is evenly divided over the efficacy of the use of force in international affairs. The second is a hegemonic party system in which a reformist economic consensus attracts a near supermajority of politicians—the inverse of LDP governance during the Cold War. This possibility is conceivable both because economic issues have consistently driven electoral outcomes in recent years and because

there is a strong consensus within the midcareer and youngest generations in favor of economic reform. Both outcomes are plausible given the distribution of preferences in our data.

Explanations of political change invoke a great many factors: parties, class, interest groups, factions, ideology, and—as in this analysis—generations. This study has explained some factors more than others. Parties remain the single most important organizing unit of policy ideas in Japan. However much the Japanese media associates the rise of right-wing nationalism and cultural conservatism in Japan with an angry and alienated youthful generation, this connection is not reflected in the distribution of preferences among Diet members. To the contrary this study finds that the distribution of preferences is far less extreme than many fear. Though democratic discourse remains active and vibrant in Japan, we find little evidence that either the midcareer generation or the youngest generation will stake out a radically new course for the nation. 