

WEBINAR SUMMARY:

Populism and New Political Divisions in Japan after the Election

Talk by Professor Masato Kamikubo, moderated by Ra Mason

Wednesday 30 July 2025

Professor Masato Kamikubo's talk:

Hello, I'm Masato Kamikubo from Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto. I'm truly grateful for the opportunity to speak to you all today about the future of Japanese politics. However, this is a very challenging topic, and to be honest, I don't know all the correct answers. The situation is changing every day, whether Ishiba desires it or not. By sharing my thoughts, I hope to encourage discussion among you all and perhaps provide a catalyst for generating better ideas. I will now share my slides and start my presentation.

Here are the contents of today's lecture. First, I will examine the 'Sanseito phenomenon' that emerged from the House of Councillors election. Next, I'd like to consider the future of Japanese politics. I would like to start by outlining the main arguments of my lecture because this might be helpful for the discussion later. My presentation today consists of four main arguments:

- First, the rise of Sanseito is due to conservative voters who had nowhere else to go following the dismantlement of conservative factions, such as the former Abe faction of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). These voters cast their vote for Sanseito.
- Secondly, conservatives who make xenophobic statements have always existed since World War II. However, they were previously kept in check by the conservative mainstream of the LDP. With the disappearance of the LDP's conservatives, these statements have come to the fore through Mr Kamiya and Sanseito. They represent a vocal minority whose numbers have not significantly increased.
- Thirdly, through repeated criticism and the need to revise their statements, Sanseito may gradually evolve into a more typical conservative party. However, the party will not disappear because they have built a strong system of local organisation from the time of their founding, and their local base remains stable. This will make the revival of the LDP's conservative faction difficult.
- Fourthly, the LDP is no longer the world's strongest catch-all party. A battle is now underway within the party over whether it will become a centrist or conservative party. This is a struggle that will determine the future direction of Japanese politics: whether it becomes a conservative party, leading to

polarized and confrontational politics, or a centrist party, resulting in moderate politics that form a consensus with opposition parties.

Firstly, I will start with the result of the House of Councillors election. The ruling coalition of the LDP and Komeito saw a significant reduction in their share of seats, falling short of a majority. Many opposition parties remained largely unchanged, with neither a significant increase nor decrease in seats. Notably, the Democratic Party for the People and Sanseito were parties that gained seats. Now, let's summarize Sanseito first. Sanseito expanded its support through nationalist rhetoric and actions, often expressed as 'Japanese first', 'Nippon first' and 'Nipponjin first'. For example, they say serious crimes by foreigners are increasing.

Is that true? Either way, when their statements are criticized, Sanseito quickly retracts them or offers excuses, much like Donald Trump's characteristic approach of always chickening out. I call Kamiya's attitude in my articles 'Kamiya always chickens out', or *kakosama*. I think this kind of behavior will continue in the future.

Right, then, let's consider the Sanseito phenomenon. First, let's look at Japanese politics before the rise of Sanseito. When we talk about Japanese politics, we must mention the LDP – the Liberal Democratic Party. Until Sanseito emerged, populism did not grow in Japan because right-wing populists didn't exist. The left-wing Reiwa Shinsengumi holds less than 10 seats in parliament. That's very small compared to European countries. This is because the LDP has kept populism suppressed until recently.

I refer to the LDP as the world's strongest catch-all party. 'Catch-all' literally means to encompass everything; it assumes no rigid ideology. Anything goes for the LDP, with the sole exception of communism. They gain support by distributing benefits. This means they secure support not only from their own base but also by extending benefits to those who support other parties. This is a key characteristic of a catch-all party. They even extend their support base to opposition supporters.

Why is the LDP the strongest? For one, the LDP has maintained the longest-running regime in any democratic country. They adopt opposition party policies, allocate budgets and then implement those policies. Japanese politics has consistently been composed of the ideals of the opposition and the realities of the ruling party. For instance, welfare and environmental policies in the 1970s were initially devised by the opposition parties like the Socialist Party, Shakaïto. But the LDP later allocated funds and brought them into fruition during Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei's administration, the Fukushima, in the first year of the welfare state in Japan. Consequently, the opposition parties had their support taken by the LDP, enabling the LDP to establish a longer-term government.

The LDP also contained a far-right faction within the party. Above all, Prime Minister Abe himself acted as a restraint. Before becoming Prime Minister, Abe repeatedly made statements similar to internet ultra-nationalists, using the slogan 'A beautiful country, Japan' (*Utsukushii Nippon*), for example. But once he became Prime Minister, he launched economic policies like Abenomics.

Here is the LDP's homepage. Its slogan was: 'More opportunities for women.' Mr. Abe's expression is also calm. As Prime Minister, Abe introduced social democratic policies such as free education, work-style reforms, greater social participation and the acceptance of immigrants. In terms of domestic policies, Abe appeared more like a social democrat than a right-wing politician.

What about the LDP's support base? Many LDP politicians have attended meetings of organizations like *Nippon Kaigi* and the Unification Church. At these events, politicians made remarks such as, 'Japan is the land of the gods', 'I believe Japan is god' and 'Japan is a divine nation'. These sound very similar to Kamiya's comments. However, the policies promoted by these conservative organizations were never actually implemented. The LDP consistently implemented only social democratic policies to deprive the opposition of support. Conservative groups would never vote for the opposition, so the LDP has not given much importance to them. It can be said that actions of conservative organizations have been effectively suppressed by the LDP.

However, after the 2024 House of Representatives election, a new political situation emerged. The ruling and opposition parties became almost equally matched in terms of seats. The LDP ceased to be a catch-all party, as many conservatives lost their seats. Now, consensus-based politics has begun, driven by centrist groups across both ruling and opposition parties. The LDP-Komeito coalition holds policy discussions with the CDP, DPP and Ishin no Kai. The politics of opposition ideals and ruling party realities has been revived. Topics such as the optional separate surname system are being discussed again.

Now let's turn our attention to key figures who are likely to shape this emerging era of consensus politics. As you can see, this includes Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba himself, Yoshihiko Noda of the CDP and Seiji Maehara, the co-leader of Ishin, among others. What do these individuals have in common? First, they all share a common political history. They were deeply involved in the political reform movements of the 1990s, belonging, at that time, to what was called the 'non-LDP camp', working together to challenge the longstanding dominance of the LDP. Second, many of them were political disciples of former Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa.

Hosokawa's philosophy was encapsulated in the phrase: 'one cabinet, one task'. This means that governments shouldn't cling to power long-term but should focus on accomplishing one key objective. A good example is former Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda. His administration focused solely on raising the consumption tax. After achieving that, he resigned. This is an example of the 'one cabinet, one task' philosophy. This stands in stark contrast to the approach of the former Prime Minister Abe, who was preoccupied with maintaining a long-term government. His group pursued power.

Beyond those explicitly mentioned, other prominent political figures who emerged from the Hosokawa school include Seiko Noda, Toshimitsu Motegi, and Yukio Edano, former leader of the CDP. Finally, very interestingly, even Sanae Takaichi, a prominent conservative today, started her political career in the non-LDP camp. This highlights her past ties with opposition figures such as Ichiro Ozawa.

However, this new consensus-based politics is facing challenges. The fiscal deficit worsened due to massive public spending. Public dissatisfaction is now focused on potential tax increases. The situation has reached a

point where demonstrations calling for a dismantlement of the Ministry of Finance are even taking place. The imperialists on both the left and right are dissatisfied with consensus politics, which, while favored by the experts, is difficult to understand and boring for the public. As a result, government approval ratings are dropping, giving rise to populism.

Now, let's look at the collapse of the Abe faction. Many Abe faction members lost their seats due to the slush fund scandal (*uragane mondai*) and other issues like ties to the Unification Church. With the collapse of the conservative faction, the LDP can no longer span from liberal to conservative. Core conservative supporters, disappointed by the LDP without the Abe faction, have shifted to Sanseito. Let's look at this shift in the House of Councillors' proportional representation vote. I will compare it with the 2022 election, which was just before the assassination of the former Prime Minister Abe and when his influence was strong. It's a very interesting result: both the LDP and Ishin lost 9 seats. Meanwhile, the DPP and Sanseito gained 9 seats, exactly the same number. Other parties saw little change. This suggests that centrist LDP supporters who backed the Abe cabinet moved to the DPP, while conservative voters shifted to Sanseito. This resembles the 2024 UK general election, where the Conservatives lost votes to Reform UK, Nigel Farage's party, resulting in a victory for the Labour Party, even though Labour's support didn't increase. Similarly, by suppressing populism and undermining the Labour support base, in the 2019 general election Prime Minister Boris Johnson gained results very similar to that of the former Prime Minister Abe.

More specifically, let's consider what happened to the core conservative support base. This demographic has continued to exist even after Japan's defeat in WWII. They have always believed in the pre-war emperor-centric state, militarism, misogyny and xenophobia. They make up about 10% of Japan's population, by my estimation. Their ideology had largely been suppressed by the LDP and rarely came to the fore. However, with the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe and the decimation of the LDP's conservative faction, there is no longer anything to hold them back. Enter Kamiya. Kamiya deliberately made statements in an attempt to gain an all-conservative vote. That is the outcome of this election. So, xenophobia in Japan hasn't suddenly increased; it's just no longer restrained.

Sanseito and the LDP's conservative faction are similar. But many ordinary citizens remain sceptical. Sanseito's extreme statements will be criticized by journalists and the public. Kamiya, known as *kakosama*, may repeatedly row back on his words. Over time, Sanseito may become an ordinary conservative party. However, Sanseito will never disappear, even if heavily criticized, because its local organization is exceptionally strong. It's unlike other small parties. Currently, Sanseito has 287 branches nationwide and 160 local councillors. Why? When it was founded, it was guided by the Communist Party-style organization theory by Joichiro Shinohara, one of Sanseito's founders and a former Communist Party staff member. He's an experienced political operative. As a result, it will be difficult for the LDP to win back the conservative base it lost to Sanseito. This will hinder the revival of the LDP's conservative faction. It is likely that the LDP will not return to being the world's strongest catch-all party, but will become an ordinary center-right conservative party instead.

Now, let's consider the future of Japanese politics. First, will Prime Minister Ishiba resign? This is the most difficult question. Normally, LDP presidents resign after losing an election. For the first time since its founding, the LDP lost a majority in both houses. Naturally, this is a situation where Prime Minister Ishiba ought to resign. However, Prime Minister Ishiba has stated he will remain in office. Interestingly, according to an Asahi Shimbun poll, only 41% think Ishiba should resign, while 47% say he should stay. It means that half of Japanese people think defeat is a problem for the LDP as a whole, not just the prime minister. In other words, it's not Ishiba's politics, but Abe's politics that failed. Public opinion is split between centrists and conservatives.

However, pressure for Ishiba's resignation is intensifying within the LDP. I believe there are four main post-Ishiba candidates. There may be some young backbenchers, like Nakasone Yasutaka, but here are four strong contenders: Sanae Takaichi and Takayuki Kobayashi, both backed by conservatives; Yoshimasa Hayashi, supported by the former Kishida faction and currently Chief Cabinet Secretary, who may appeal to both centrists and conservatives; and lastly, the very popular Shinjiro Koizumi, son of former PM Junichiro Koizumi. I believe this contest will be a very important battle as it will determine whether the LDP's future lies in being a centrist conservative party.

However, whether Prime Minister Ishiba resigns or another Prime Minister takes office, a coalition with opposition parties will be necessary. Here, another key issue emerges: will politics become polarized and confrontational, or will moderate centrist forces form a consensus-based politics? According to political science, a 'minimum winning coalition', one that barely exceeds a majority, is most effective. Fewer parties mean more stable governance. Sanseito, although popular, holds only three seats. That's not enough to form a majority, so Sanseito will be excluded. The LDP will proceed with a coalition negotiation, first with the DPP, then Ishin no Kai. But since both are centre-right, this may provoke a backlash from other opposition parties. Politics could become polarized and consequently unstable.

Another option is a grand coalition with the CDP, the biggest opposition party. As mentioned, these parties share ties from the 1990s reform era. A grand coalition would create a moderate consensus between the ruling and opposition parties. Of course, it may split both the LDP and CDP. But I think defections would be limited to a small minority. A grand coalition has unexpected advantages, such as strengthening national security policy. Until now, ruling and opposition parties rarely discussed security policy. As a result, decisions were made through forced vote, leading to instability. This is the first situation of this kind after World War II, and it presents an opportunity to advance security policy. It may even increase trust from the Trump administration in the US, which is very interesting.

Another advantage is that a grand coalition can counter populism. As I said, the LDP once suppressed populism. But now, with its conservative faction gone, Japan must adopt more orthodox methods. In this regard, Germany's grand coalition serves as a useful reference. Germany has a history of forming grand coalitions on multiple occasions, primarily to suppress the rise of neo-Nazis. So, I think there's value in Japan following that path.

Okay, that concludes my presentation. Thank you very much for your kind attention. Thank you very much.

Discussion with Ra Mason:

Ra Mason: Thank you very much indeed, Kamikubo-sensei, for a fascinating presentation. Thank you as ever to the team at Daiwa for hosting us. If I could just make a few very brief comments and then I'd like to hand back over to you with some questions to get your thoughts on them. Certainly looking at the key points from this, at least four emerge, one of which is the idea that essentially Sanseito and perhaps other populist parties are not really representing a rise of something new and different in Japan, but are rather simply replacing conservative forces within the LDP. This is something I think which not everybody is necessarily aware of, or there might also be some disagreement about it, but it's a very interesting thesis.

The second is perhaps the idea that, and correct me if I've misinterpreted this somewhat, the idea that actually there isn't a substantive or significant move to the right overall in Japanese politics, but that because the LDP conservative faction has collapsed and Sanseito has risen, it makes it appear as though there is a kind of populist right-wing movement occurring in Japan, which is actually very limited. In terms of left-right kind of comparisons, we have something like a status quo. Then I thought what was very interesting is that you seem to be suggesting that perhaps a grand coalition might actually be the most effective and stable way to go forward. So that is quite a striking statement, particularly in relation to an establishment where we've seen the LDP thought of as a kind of centrist right or perhaps even right-ish leaning party. So that would represent something of a change.

Finally, the fact that this seems to be representative of an international trend. So you mentioned the UK as a comparative example, which was very interesting. I wonder if that's something which we've also seen quite dramatically across a number of different, particularly advanced, economies. So if I could translate that into a couple of key questions, my first question for you would be, if it is the case that Sanseito is essentially replacing a right-leaning conservative faction of the LDP, do the most recent election results actually amount to a significant change in Japanese politics?

Masato Kamikubo: I think that this is a significant change. It's different from other cases of populist emergence. For example, with the NHK Party and in several other cases, they seemed the same to me. Also, the Tokyo Ishin movement as a reaction to the Tokyo government. I don't know, if you're a governor of a prefecture, maybe you have a populist image. But that's just temporary popularity.

However, something is different this time. Because, as I said, Shinohara Joichiro, the former communist, gave advice to Sanseito when it was founded. He taught them the Kyosanto method, which was the Communist Party method. That has spread nationwide, and they've created local assemblies. That's very surprising. So, it's different from other small parties. It can survive. Even though Kamiya rowed back because of his comments, I think Sanseito can survive, and will survive. Also, there are other factors. Of course, the LDP's conservative

faction collapsed. That happened at the same time; it was a coincidence. Before the election, Sanseito's seat count was very small. There wasn't really a movement happening. However, the movement started because of the collapse of the LDP's conservative wing. That collapse happened at the same time, coincidentally, but it really benefited Sanseito. Of course, some of Sanseito's politicians might be a bit problematic. But even if their seats are temporarily reduced at the next election, I believe Sanseito will survive in the long term because their local organization is very strong. So, maybe in the future, at the local level, new candidates will emerge and become national politicians. So yes, I think Sanseito will survive.

Ra Mason: So this is very interesting as well because am I right in thinking that you're saying that even though Sanseito will survive, that would still not represent a significant move to the right in national Japanese politics, that there is still a nexus, shall we say, on a certain level. You mentioned 10% of xenophobic or right-leaning political forces, but that Sanseito would essentially just represent those, that the national opinion is not moving significantly to the left or the right. Would that be correct?

Masato Kamikubo: Yes, that's correct. I think in Japanese politics, the key is who has the decisive power in elections. Who decides the outcome? I believe it is the people in the centre. I call them the silent majority. The silent majority includes independents, mutohaso and moderate party supporters. My image is that about 70 percent of Japanese voters are in the centre. They are regular salarymen, people raising children, the younger generation, the working generation and also retired salarymen of the older generation. They are very moderate, normal and peaceful. These are ordinary Japanese people. That 70 percent is the decisive power. The left wing and right wing are just noisy minorities. Their voices are very loud, but they do not have the power to decide the election. It is the same in European countries.

In Europe, the decisive power also lies with the centrist group. A good example is the French general election last year with the two-round voting system. In the first round, people supported the right wing. But in the second round, they voted for the left wing. It was a strange situation, with right-wing voters switching to the left wing. Who made that decision? Centrist voters. In Japan, the same thing is happening. Even now, populist voices are spreading through social media, strongly influencing voters. But in the end, the real power lies with very ordinary people. That does not change. So I think the right wing, like Sanseito, has a loud voice, and they may gain some influence. But they do not have the decisive power.

Ra Mason: This is fascinating because I think particularly looking at it from an international perspective, there is definitely still a lot of concern: that populism is on the rise, that there is more than simply a loud voice, but that in a number of countries, we're actually seeing populism begin to dominate politics and push a significant portion of the population towards voting for something quite extreme. So I'd definitely like to hear your thoughts a little bit more on what it is that's really preventing populism from taking hold in Japan. Because, whether it be the rise of Trump and the MAGA movement or the rise of Reform UK or the ADF in Germany, we have definitely seen powerful populist forces emerge. So what else, apart from the catch-all party phenomenon, is preventing populism from taking hold in Japan in the future?

Masato Kamikubo: I think not only in Japan, but also in other countries, the division between two big parties is a problem. I recommend a grand coalition, or something like the LDP-style catch-all party, to counter populism. Because the two main parties' policies are very similar now. This is not only true in Japan, but also in countries like the UK. It used to be that Labour and the Conservatives were ideologically opposed, but now their policies are quite similar. For example, from Blair to Boris Johnson, policies did not change that much.

So why are they divided? Because both sides are split, and that gives populism a chance to develop and gain votes. The German experience and their strategy of forming a grand coalition is very wise. The LDP in Japan has also been very successful in suppressing the far right from 1945 until now. If the existing two big parties, or even three or four smaller parties, keep fighting each other, the situation will get worse. Right now, Japan is in that kind of situation. The opposition parties are fighting with each other. It is like a war. I would say it is stupid.

So of course, if those parties formed a grand coalition or merged into one party, that would be very good. Because now, politics is not just about right and left. It is about existing parties versus populism. So I think the important thing is, if the large or existing parties remain divided, populism will continue to emerge more and more in the future. That is my idea.

Ra Mason: I wonder if maybe external factors could also affect that. So you mentioned the use, for example, particularly by Sanseito, of talking about how foreigners are very visible now in Japan or, you know, foreign crimes are suddenly rising. I mean, do you think, for example, there are now a larger number of tourists in Japan? Certainly, in particularly conservative Japanese media, we see a lot of depictions of foreigners in Japan as causing problems, whether that be violent crime or disorderly behavior, or even things like the rise of *minpaku* or *minshuku* in cities, hotel apartment blocks which are being rented as essentially short-term lets for foreign tourists, and claims that this is creating problems where people aren't throwing away their rubbish or they're talking loudly on the train or something. Do you think this kind of demographic change and the pressure to increase immigration could be a catalyst to affect these political dynamics?

Masato Kamikubo: I think I'm optimistic about the changes in Japan because ordinary people, moderate people, are accepting the situation. In Japan, the concept of who is Japanese is becoming very diverse. For example, Darvish Yu, the professional baseball player, or Saliba Abdul-Hakim, the athlete, are very popular. Naomi Osaka as well. She is very popular. Japanese people accept them.

Also, in 2019, the Abe government implemented a new amendment to the immigration law, which allowed low-skilled foreign workers to come to Japan for the first time. It was because of demand; Abe responded to requests from LDP supporters. Small- and medium-sized companies, as well as the agricultural sector, strongly requested Abe to introduce immigration. It is a reality. At my university, I supervise over ten foreign students, including postgraduate students. It is a reality. Our university has approximately 1,800 Chinese students. That is a reality, and I accept it. So in business, agriculture, universities and other fields like sports, Japanese people, moderate and ordinary people, are accepting the situation. That is why I am optimistic.

So I want to emphasise that it is only the loud voices of minorities who are attacking foreign people. That is all.

Ra Mason: Yeah, well, I admire your optimism, definitely. There's one more area I'd like to ask about just before we open up for questions. (We already have quite a lot of questions from the audience.) That's security policy. So you mentioned specifically that the grand coalition could be effective in agreeing a stable security policy, which is also interesting to me because there is often the idea that perhaps right-of-centre or powerful conservative voices are able to inflate or exaggerate or emphasize external threats, whether that be North Korea or China or Russia or whatever else, and thereby justify a more robust security policy. So could you outline or describe your vision for how grand coalition politics would aid or assist security policy?

Masato Kamikubo: Yes. I have some friends in the DPP and CDP. They are specialists in security policy. I strongly recommend that they hold a conference with the LDP and the opposition parties. I think the opposition parties are actually conservative. Their ideas are very similar to those of the LDP conservatives. I know, because they are my friends. So they should have a conference to work together, to create countermeasures for security issues. Of course, trade policy is also very important. For example, Noda Yoshihiko said, I don't want to criticize the government's policy, especially regarding negotiations with the Trump administration. Because they understand that building consensus is very important when it comes to national security, tariffs, trade and related matters. It is a very serious situation.

So I think, after the new cabinet is formed, they should first invite the opposition parties to join a conference. All parties can participate. It is possible. This is a special situation, a kind of exception since World War II. It is partly due to experiences from the 1990s that led to this situation. So Japanese parties need to further develop their policymaking system. Now, I believe it is possible.

Ra Mason: I suppose that would also include perhaps reconceptualizing what we mean by security. I mean, you mentioned tariffs. When people talk about security policy, they often think of geo-strategy or military security. But do you think there is a need to rethink and reframe security in a more comprehensive way? For example, including energy security, economic security and environmental security?

Masato Kamikubo: It's very important. Especially now, Japan is developing relationships not only with the USA, but also with the UK. That is very important. The UK is a very experienced country. I sometimes give suggestions in my articles or elsewhere. For example, regarding infectious disease countermeasures, like during the COVID-19 pandemic. I believe Japan and the UK can cooperate in that area. The UK is very experienced in health security and related fields. So not only traditional concepts of security, but also broader definitions, this is something we can develop further. So I think the Japan-UK relationship will be very important in the future.

Ra Mason: Thank you for your comprehensive answers there. I'm going to move on to questions from the audience.

Q&A with audience members:

Audience member: Thank you very much. First of all, thank you very much for the fascinating lecture. I am a PhD candidate from Heidelberg University dealing with transcultural studies and populism in Japan and Israel. I have many questions, but I'm trying to be very concise. First, what makes you so certain that Sanseito will evolve into a normal conservative party? The second one is a two-part question. Are you really certain that coalition governments are the solution, especially when looking at Germany? Germany has had a long succession of grand coalitions, and these grand coalitions are getting smaller and smaller to the point that people are not sure how grand they are anymore, nor are they particularly popular or successful. Following this question, do you think that the LDP or this grand coalition in Japan actually have the competency and ability to solve Japan's current big problems? Thank you very much.

Masato Kamikubo: To answer your first question, I think Sanseito will become a moderate conservative party. Mr. Kamiya's strategy is to boost popularity. Kamiya is, I think, a clever guy, basically. So Kamiya gains popularity, and when he gets criticism, he changes his comments quickly. He repeats that pattern. He gets criticized, then changes his comments. But for now, gaining popularity is the key. Sanseito is just at the first stage as a political party. However, as I said, the important thing is not Kamiya himself. What's more important is the local organization. It's really strong. Really strong. Maybe it can even replace the conservative base of the LDP. So Sanseito can survive. Maybe, as the leader's comments change, Sanseito will become more moderate. In the next phase, maybe within ten years, Sanseito will grow stronger and stronger. Please understand, right now, Sanseito is just taking its first steps as a political party.

With regard to your second question, yes, a grand coalition is very difficult. Of course, now, in Germany, the grand coalition is unpopular. However, I think it is still better than having the two major parties, CDU and SPD, divided. Because if CDU and SPD are divided, then the right-wing party, I forget the name, will become more prominent. So I think the grand coalition is a strategy simply to stop populism. It is difficult to make the grand coalition popular. But it is useful to prevent the growth of populism. It is not the best strategy, but it is a better one.

Maybe Japan is an exceptional case. But I've been watching Japanese politics since the 1990s, when I was young. At that time, I was excited about the political reforms of the nineties. But later, I became disappointed. However, now, I think the LDP's center-right, centrist group, and the CDP's conservative wing should naturally join together. That would be a real political party. The LDP versus the opposition is an old structure. It's an old framework. Now, people like Ishiba, Noda, Edano, Maehara and Noda Seiko, they all seem like they could belong to the same political party. That seems more natural than the current LDP versus opposition divide. So I strongly recommend it.

It's very difficult. I know. It's very difficult. But I recommend it as a political scientist. I'm not a politician, so I may not be realistic. But I want to speak ideally. I think if the two camps could merge, and of course separate themselves from the more extreme conservatives, it would be more natural. Sorry, it's not a perfect answer, but that's my answer. Thank you very much.

Audience member: Thank you very much for your presentation. You talked so much about party politics and the sort of move to the future and the sort of new arrangements in party politics. I'm just wondering about the possibility of institutional changes. The reason I ask this is because you mentioned consensus politics a lot and you mentioned the name Moteji Toshimitsu, and I have always thought that he was going to be a candidate for a possible future prime minister because of his viability amongst the LDP. But you also mentioned that he's a Hosokawa disciple. Actually, he's from the Heisei Ishinokai, and he's a former McKinsey consultant. He was in Ishinokai. They were bringing in sort of consultancy, sort of managerialist, sort of policymaking. They were also a sort of grassroots group, quite similar to what Sanseito is now, although Sanseito is quite more established. The Ishinokai had a sort of grassroots, participation thing. The closest thing after the Heisei Ishinokai disbanded, bringing in the managerialist efficiency, new public management sort of policymaking processes was the Ishinokai, Osaka Ishinokai. They created a very strong local base in Osaka, as you're probably aware. But they established their party through things like *juku* and, you know, educating new disciples in the party, but also Hashimoto Toru actually changed the sort of policymaking structures using consultants and new institutional variations within the government that helped establish their power in dominance in Osaka.

So I'm wondering, can we see some sort of institutional arrangements that might be affected by things like, you know, managerialist ideas or, you know, new sorts of ideas that might try to change the political policymaking system at the national level? What are your thoughts on Saiso no Michi? You know, they tried to get Ishimaru Shinji elected as governor, almost made it, and then failed, etc. But here's a sort of a rehash of this kind of managerialist populism. He was bringing the ideas of populism in 2004, on social media, and that sort of thing. But obviously, Sanseito overtook that. So I'm just wondering about sort of institutional arrangements that might affect or limit this populism, or maybe even see a different shift towards not xenophobic, but maybe more different types of populism in Japan. Sorry for the long question.

Masato Kamikubo: So the policymaking is very closed, I think. When I say closed, I mean within the LDP: bureaucrats, central bureaucrats and industry, it's a very closed circle. It's the so-called 'iron triangle'. However, now, new sources of political participation are emerging. Of course, SNS is one way. Grassroots activity has expanded a lot. Of course, some people say AI can be used. They say that AI can be used to collect a large amount of information from across the country. I think it seems confusing, but very interesting. Everything and everyone can now participate in politics. That's a very new trend. Sometimes, with this trend, divisions in society emerge. Some people criticize the division of society, but I'm basically optimistic about it, because even though division is happening, more people are participating in politics than before. Many opinions are competing with each other. So it appears to be division, but in fact, it's increased engagement.

I think the criticism of division in society often comes from the elite side. From the grassroots point of view, more participation is a very good thing. So how to handle or solve this increase in political participation is a very big issue now, and will continue to be in the future. Of course, Sanseito's influence on the policymaking process will be strong going forward. What I can say is that the collapse of the iron triangle is obvious. That's the answer.

Everybody can now express their opinion in politics. That's my answer. The answer is not simple. It's very difficult to define. But the collapse of the iron triangle is clear. That is my answer. Thank you.

Audience member: Yes, thank you very much for the extremely clear and really insightful presentation. I have one question because I used some government funding for my PhD and postdoc (JSPS), and I just received a notification that this funding is going to be closed for foreigners starting from spring 2026. I've felt a wave of worry from foreign researchers in Japan. I was wondering if you think that this future you say, of grand coalition or minimum majority, is something that will go through short-term changes that will kind of appease these more conservative factions? As you mentioned, this kind of noisy minority is trying to say, we're doing something for you. So the grand coalition could say, we are closing off to foreigners, we're not giving them as much space as before whilst kind of fulfilling the more long-term definition of a new party coalition. Thank you very much.

Masato Kamikubo: Firstly, Sanseito's opinion about foreign students is just misinformation. All media outlets have confirmed it as misinformation. Of course, many people understand that. Very few foreign students actually receive funding from the government. Obviously, in Japanese universities, the policy is Japanese students first. When I studied in the UK, the UK also had a UK students-first system, but I think it was better than Japan. I think it was better. My student environment there was very good. It's a very good memory for me.

So even now, it's Japan first. Sanseito's opinion is mistaken. Please understand that. Japanese universities and the Japanese Ministry of Education have never changed their policies to prioritize foreign students. In Japan, there's a labor shortage and a declining birthrate, so excellent foreign talent is necessary. That's obvious. So Japanese universities are accepting more foreign students than before. Now, Kamiya-san and Sanseito are gradually changing their comments, and maybe their opinions will change too. It's obvious. So I don't think there's any need to worry about the future of studying in Japan. That's my answer. Thank you.

Audience member: Hello, thank you very much, Kamikubo-sensei. I was a Labour Member of Parliament. A party wishing to maximise its national vote aims to stand in all constituencies, as does a disruptor party. But Sanseito has said it only aims to stand 90 candidates next time for the House of Representatives. So why is this? Is it mainly concentrating on proportional representation seats, or is it also seeking to influence the direction of the LDP, the positions of its candidates, the selections of the LDP candidates, through the threat of standing in single-member constituencies?

Masato Kamikubo: Sanseito is still a small organization, and in order to win in a single-seat representational system, not only the party organization but also the personality of the candidate is important. So in this situation, Sanseito cannot win. Now, of course, Sanseito can get some seats, but it is still weak. In terms of personality, maybe the problem is sensitive because the quality of the candidate or the quality of the politician is a very important point. So maybe from the grassroots, new good candidates will emerge in the future, but now it is a bit strange that candidates stand for election now, in particular for small single-seat representation and also proportional representation. So as I said, Sanseito is just a starting point now.

Also, the LDP's candidate selection is a problem. The hereditary candidates are still very much common. So it means if his father or mother was a politician, the son or daughter will become a politician. Do you know the LDP's youth organization? The youth organization, Seinenkyoku, has a leader who is Nakasone Yasutaka. As you know, he is the grandson of the former prime minister Nakasone Yasuhiro and the son of former foreign minister Hirofumi Nakasone. So many elite politicians from rich families form this group. Of course, as in the West, the LDP holds the candidate selection in all constituencies. However, in the majority of constituencies, hereditary candidates are still very common.

Audience member: I agree that the LDP is in trouble and struggling to sustain its model of catch-all-ism by compensating any losers in Japanese society through pork-barrel politics, and because the more right-of-centre electoral base is adrift and looking toward more populist parties. However, the demise of the LDP and its catch-all-ism has been foretold many times before, whether it was displacement by Hosokawa's coalition and then its displacement by the DPJ. But the LDP found its way back into power. It has done this through co-option and takeover of the positions and personnel, and sometimes discarding, when no longer useful, other parties, whether it be the SDPJ, Komeito or anti-mainstream conservatives. The incompetence of opposition parties has also been key. So is your theory of grand coalition the same historical pattern and co-optation of the LDP by another name?

Masato Kamikubo: That's a very interesting point. When the DPJ, the Democratic Party of Japan, merged with the Liberal Party, Ozawa Ichirō's party, in the early 2000s, Prime Minister Koizumi joked that the Liberal Party merging with the Democratic Party is a liberal democratic party, the LDP. It was a bad joke by Koizumi. However, yes, the Liberal Democratic Party is a catch-all party. It's comprehensive.

The term 'liberal' has two concepts. In 1955, the Liberal Party and the Democratic Party merged. The new party was the LDP. I think the name 'LDP Grand Coalition' is fitting. It's a very new LDP, a new Liberal Democratic Party. It's interesting because a grand coalition is originally similar to the moderate LDP. The LDP is right-wing and the CDP is left-wing. It's center-right and left. This is the original form of the Liberal Democratic Party. So, yes, 'New Liberal Democratic Party' is the right name.

Audience member: So I just want to ask a very specific question about something specific that you mentioned. You mentioned that Sanseito was co-founded by somebody who used to be a Communist Party staffer. I'm very interested in this kind of overlap between far left and far right, and where the two things sometimes meet in the middle, and where radicalism sometimes shifts between far left and far right. I was just wondering, is that significant at all, the fact that the guy used to be a Communist Party staffer, and has there been any relationship between Sanseito and the kind of far left or conspiratorial arm of the far left?

Masato Kamikubo: I never said this in the presentation, but the Communist Party will be replaced by Reiwa Shinsengumi, because the average age of Communist supporters is over 75 years old. It's very unpopular among young people. But the far left among young people will survive. Young far-left supporters now support Reiwa

Shinsengumi. The result of this election for Reiwa wasn't very good, but the organization is gradually becoming stronger. That's the strategy of the party leader, Yamamoto Taro.

So I want to emphasize that Reiwa Shinsengumi will emerge along with leftwingers, replacing the Communist Party and growing more and more. I expect this. Of course, the left wing is necessary in politics, so I expect Reiwa Shinsengumi to rise. Their organization and strategy are very good, I think. In particular, the candidates are very good. The quality of the candidates is very high. Their candidate selection is very, very good. So I think it's better than Sanseito in terms of candidate quality. That's my answer.

Ra Mason: Thank you very much. So on that very balanced and pragmatic note, we will say a huge thank you once again to everyone at Daiwa, and most of all to our speaker, Professor Kamikubo. Thank you very much indeed. We look forward to seeing you again.