Citizen-government Congruence and Ideological Understanding: An Appraisal of Japan's 'Right Turn'

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ABSTRACT

Representative democracy rests on citizens controlling the direction of policy-making through free elections. Building on the literature dealing with the congruence between citizens and their governments, this paper investigates whether changes of government resulted from corresponding changes in voter preferences by examining data from Japan. The rarity of government alternation in Japan may suggest notable shifts in public opinion when it does occur. Results of the 2012 and 2013 elections, which returned the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to power and confirmed its legislative dominance, have been interpreted as the country taking a significant right turn. This paper analyses survey data to answer the following questions: 1) did the election of a conservative government reflect a rightward shift in the electorate, as theories of responsible party government would suggest, and in which policy fields is this trend most evident? 2) to what extent do the ideological semantics of ‘right’ and ‘left’ encapsulate the same meaning as the conventionally used labels ‘conservative’ and ‘progressive’, and how do these sets of vocabulary differ with respect to perceived party positions and underlying issue contents?

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Introduction: Japan Moves Right?

Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) won an overwhelming victory in the House of Representatives election in December 2012, returning to government after three years on the opposition benches. Reports in a number of international media sources depicted this event as a significant rightward turn in Japanese politics, as exemplified by the caption on the cover of Time magazine: 'Japan Moves Right: Why the country is the most nationalistic in decades - and why that's dangerous'. Evidence cited for this characterisation include new prime minister Shinzo Abe's statements and actions questioning past government declarations about the country's responsibility during World War II, and visits to a shrine honouring wartime leaders who were convicted as war criminals. Moreover, the same election saw the rise to national prominence of another party whose leaders took explicitly nationalistic stances.

To the extent that elections serve as instruments of democracy, the government formed based on the results of the latest election should better reflect popular opinion than that of the previous cabinet (Dalton, Farrell, McAllister 2011). While one must take into account the mechanisms through which votes are translated into parliamentary seats, the logic above suggests that the assumption of power by a right-wing, nationalist party is likely attributable to a shift of public opinion in the same direction. The present paper investigates whether and how Japanese voters (as opposed to the government) had moved toward the right by analysing survey data, looking in particular at the relationship between ideological orientations on one hand and attitudes toward parties and politicians, evaluation of government performance in a number of policy areas, and voting behaviour on the other hand.

Furthermore, the paper explores the related question of how ideological semantics are understood among the electorate. Specifically, whereas 'right' and 'left' are widely used in comparative studies at both the elite and mass levels, surveys in
Japan often employ the alternative labels 'conservative' and 'progressive', respectively. In recent years the designation 'liberal' has also been introduced into the political vocabulary. To what degree do these terms overlap as far as individual and party ideological placements are concerned, and do voters associate these alternative labels with the same issue dimensions? Many previous works have treated these schemas as equivalents. With data from a new experiment, now we are able to empirically test this assumption.

In short, the present paper examines two main topics: 1) did the landslide victory of the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) indicate an electorate making a rightward turn? 2) what meaning(s) do citizens associate with the term 'right' (and 'left'), and how do they understand alternative ideological semantics? We begin with a brief review of the literature on the ideological schema in general and its application to Japan in particular, followed by presentation and discussion of survey data showing the relationship between ideological orientations and attitudes toward parties and their leaders. Next, we trace trends over time, and compares mean voter and government positions on a range of issues. We also devote some space comparing three sets of ideological labels, specifically contrasting how they differ with respect to perceived party locations and underlying issue dimensions, before closing with a summary and concluding remarks.

Usage of the Ideological Schema

The use of ideological shortcuts as a guide to electoral choice has long been a subject of scholarly attention (Fuchs and Klingemann 1989; Sniderman, Brody, Tetlock 1991). The same can be said of the spatial theory of voting, which postulate that citizens rationally choose ideologically proximate candidates or parties over those that are further away on the same ideological scale (Downs 1957; Enelow and Hinich
1990; Ordeshook 1976). Theories of party systems, for instance the seminal work by Sartori (1976), are often based on both the number of parties and the distribution of their positions on the left-right spectrum. Sani and Sartori (1983) famously link the functioning of democracy with the level of party system polarization.

Ideological semantics such as right and left have found resonance not only among practitioners and scholars of politics but also ordinary citizens, presumed to be cognitive misers who would spare the time and effort to acquire detailed political knowledge by relying on cues instead. While many voters may not hold consistent views across multiple policy areas, ideological labels provide a useful means of bundling disparate issues into a coherent package. While a number of studies asserted that voting behaviour is driven more by the direction of ideological orientations rather than proximity (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989), this proposition still upholds the importance of ideology as a guide to political action.

However, scholars have noted that the ideological distance separating parties has declined since the 1980s (Mair 1997), in part due to the end of the Cold War and the widespread acceptance of market economics. The cleavages that had 'frozen' party systems in most advanced Western democracies, especially the conflict pitting owners against labourers (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), have gradually decreased in importance, while new axes of competition such as materialists vs. post-materialists (Inglehart 1990) or winners vs. losers of globalization (Kreisi et al. 2006) have emerged. As a result of these developments, some scholars point out that the relationship between ideology in conventional left-right terms and vote choice has weakened (Hellwig 2008).

That said, the definition of ideological semantics does not need to be fixed. While 'right' and 'left' in advanced Western democracies have long been associated with lesser and greater government intervention in the economy, one should
remember that ideological labels capture the most important issues of the day (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976). In other words, a fading industrial cleavage need not imply the decreasing pertinence of the role of ideology per se for electoral choice. Indeed, one reason for the prevalence of the left-right schema is precisely its adaptability across cultures (Laponce 1981), i.e. its ability to transcend specific social and economic contexts that first gave rise to its use. This means that ideological terms can be meaningfully utilized as a tool of political communication in countries that have followed very different historical trajectories from Western Europe and North America, a fact worth keeping in mind as we apply them to the setting of Japan.

While electoral rules affect modes of interaction between politicians and voters, in most parliamentary systems even candidates who claim an individual, territorially based mandate can rarely exert any influence on policy-making except through their affiliation with parties. In most cases, party labels matter much more than personal credentials in ensuring election. Party nomination is naturally even more crucial for candidates elected through proportional lists. A party is expected to garner votes based on its policy stances, and if it enters government, to seek the fulfillment of these policies, and the degree of policy or ideological congruence between parties and voters carries important implications for the quality of policy representation.

According to Page and Shapiro, ‘the responsiveness of government policy to citizens' preferences is a central concern in normative democratic theory' (1983:175). This is the basis for exploring whether and to what degree the latest government alternation in Japan – a rare event in the country – came about as a result of shifting preferences in the electorate.

**Political Ideology in Japan**

In contrast to most advanced Western democracies, the main axis of party
competition in Japan throughout its post-World War II history has centred around foreign and defense policy issues (e.g. Kabashima 1998; Otake 2000), a fact that has found empirical confirmation through expert surveys and examination of party manifestoes (Laver and Benoit 2005; Proksch, Slapin, Thies 2011). This was shaped by the context of the Cold War, with right-wing or conservative forces favouring a close alliance with the United States, and the left-wing or progressive parties advocating neutrality in international affairs. Moreover, analysis of a voter survey a quarter-century ago show that among four issue clusters, only the one containing security questions yields robust correlations with party choice (Kohei, Miyake, Watanuki 1991). Another persistent bone of contention surrounds the constitution, with the left camp supporting the maintenance of a clause that prohibits foreign military engagements, while the right camp seeks to loosen such restriction.

Economic and social policies have traditionally played a lesser role in political debate, due in part to the absence of salient religious, ethnic, linguistic or regional cleavages, and also because parties did not adopt significantly different positions in these issue areas.

For nearly four decades starting in the mid-1950s, the Japanese party system was notable for its stability, with the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) continuing in power and none of the opposition parties ever having a realistic chance of forming government. This unusual longevity of single-party rule marked Japan as an 'uncommon democracy' (Pempel 1990). However, the party system went through a drastic overhaul in the early 1990s, a process that initially caused, then was powerfully shaped by, an overhaul of the electoral system for the House of Representatives (the lower, and more powerful, chamber of the Japanese legislature). This period saw in quick secession the establishment, merger, split and disappearance of many new parties, and only after a decade did a new party configuration seem to
stabilize in the form of a two-party system given the incentives toward bipolar competition under an electoral rule that assigns a majority of parliamentary seats through single-member districts (Reed 2005).

Even as the party system moved toward an apparent new equilibrium, featuring the LDP and the centre-left Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) as plausible governing alternatives, policy differences between the two leading contenders for power became less obvious. One reason for this is that the DPJ comprises of politicians from diverse backgrounds, ranging from former socialists to LDP defectors, and encompassing every hue of opinion in between. It wrested the reins of government from the LDP in the 2009 election, but was decisively rejected by voters at the next polls in 2012, and has shown scant sign of recovery since. The LDP not only won a huge majority in the 2012 election, but repeated this performance in a snap election two years later, and has enjoyed a wide lead over all competitors in every opinion poll. Indeed, its recent dominance has raised questions about a return to long-term one-party rule that continued for nearly four decades during the Cold War. Our inquiry focuses on the related topic of whether recent political developments have been driven by a noticeable rightward shift in public opinion.

The Impact of Ideology on Attitudes toward Parties and Government

Assessment

Takenaka (2014) has demonstrated a decline over the past thirty years in the proportion of citizens who identify with extreme positions on the conservative-progressive scale. This centripetal propensity can also be observed when the alternative ideological labels of ‘right’ and ‘left’ are used, as evidenced in a survey conducted jointly by the University of Tokyo and the Asahi Shimbun
newspaper in 2012 (UTAS survey hereafter; N= 1680). Respondents were asked the place themselves on a 0-10 left-right scale, with higher values referring to more rightist orientations, and the distribution is shown in figure 1. Self-identified rightists slightly outnumber their counterparts on the left, but the most striking result is the high proportion of centrists: more than half of all respondents chose the middle category. While this number may well include respondents who lack political interest or knowledge (Converse and Pierce 1986), it is also possible to interpret this result as suggesting that a detachment from ideology among a large portion of the electorate. We are thus prompted to ask: do ideological semantics still provide meaningful cues to voters?

Part of the answer can be glimpsed in figures 2 and 3, which plot respondents' ideological self-placement on the horizontal axis, and feeling thermometer scores for selected parties and politicians on the vertical axis. These scores range from 0 to 100, with higher values denoting greater favourability. Ratings for the three largest parties in the 2012 election are shown, along with those for their leaders. The Japan Restoration Party (JRP), formed immediately prior to the election through the merger between a regional party based in Osaka and a nationalist group with a small legislative representation, declared itself a 'third pole' and campaigned against the vested interests of the political establishment. It obtained 54 seats in the lower house, compared with 294 for the LDP and a disastrous 57 for the incumbent DPJ. In fact, the JRP garnered a higher share of party list votes (20.4%) than the DPJ (15.5%).

Figure 2 reveals that the LDP had the clearest ideological profile in voters' minds,
with much higher feeling thermometer scores on the right side of the spectrum (Pearson's r= 0.29). Correlations for the DPJ and JRP, at -0.11 and 0.12, are also significant at the 99% confidence interval, albeit not as strong as the LDP. That the incumbent DPJ failed to elicit positive ratings from what should have been its core supporters in the centre-left was both an explanation for its catastrophic defeat and, more importantly for the purpose of the present study, evidence of its vague ideological profile. This conclusion is reinforced by the result shown for DPJ leader (and incumbent prime minister) Noda in figure 3, which is not statistically significant. In sharp contrast, feeling thermometer scores for LDP leader Abe were clearly distinguished by respondents' ideological orientations (Pearson's r= 0.33), with rightists professing a much more positive view. Equivalent figures for the JRP's two co-leaders, Ishihara and Hashimoto, are also significant and positive, but once again not as high as that of Abe.6

Figures 2 and 3 highlight the fact that ideology remains relevant when voters try to distinguish between different parties, even in the case of a new party that by definition had no previous policy records. In addition, the figures also demonstrate that voters in 2012 had a clear idea about the rightist inclination of the LDP and its leader. This held true in the aftermath of the election as well. A survey conducted by the same organisations in 2013 asked respondents if they approved of the new Abe cabinet's performance, with five response categories ranging from 'doing well' to 'doing badly'. These evaluations are correlated with respondents' ideological self-placement at 0.30, with right-leaning citizens giving significantly more positive assessments. This is hardly a surprising finding, in view of the new government and

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6 Shintaro Ishihara, an ex-governor of Tokyo and former LDP MP for twenty-five years, was famous in his hawkish stance. His co-leader Toru Hashimoto, then the governor of Osaka Prefecture and currently the mayor of Osaka City, has been a vehement critic of inefficient union workers and takes a conservative position.
What warrants more detailed investigation is whether and how the correlation between government evaluation and ideological self-placement differs by policy area. Respondents were asked to assess the performance of the Abe cabinet on a range of issues. As figure 4 shows, some issues are more ideologically charged than others: there is a stronger relationship between approval of government policy in the fields of defense and foreign policy (left panel) than others questions that featured prominently in the 2012 election campaign such as restarting the operation of nuclear plants and participating in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade agreement (right panel).

Debates over strengthening the US-Japan alliance and amending the constitution have been issues of contention since the early post-war years, and neither geopolitical changes brought by the end of the Cold War and a massive reconfiguration of the party system seems to have affected their continued salience in structuring citizens' understanding of right and left. By contrast, except for respondents on the extreme right and left, the government's stances on energy and free trade - policies which are likely to divide opposite ideological camps in many other advanced democracies - did not elicit notably different responses from centre-right and centre-left voters in Japan. The same observation can be made about appraisal of the government's signature fiscal stimulus plan, which differed sharply towards both extremes but was similar across broad swathes of the left-right spectrum.

It is also worth noting that, compared with security and constitutional issues, fiscal stimulus and TPP participation commanded a higher rate of approval overall. Indeed, economic concerns topped voters' priorities in the lead-up to the election, and the LDP conducted its campaign around the theme of so-called 'Abenomics', an economics package composed of stimulus spending on public works, quantitative easing of money supply (with the objective of inducing a modest level of inflation),

prime minister's unambiguous ideological profiles.
and (vaguely outlined) promise of structural reforms, rather than more ideological polarizing issues such as revising the constitution. Insofar as voters were motivated to cast their ballots for the LDP due to the attraction of 'Abenomics', and in view of the point noted above that economic issues do not apparently constitute an ideological divide, one may have cause to question whether the LDP's landslide victory should be interpreted as a rightward shift in the electorate.

In a cross-national study, Dalton (2010) found that the importance of ideology in vote choice is positively related with the degree of party system polarization. With the centripetal movement of parties along the ideological spectrum shown in figure 5, one would expect ideology to play a less important role when Japanese voters try to distinguish between parties. Indeed, Kabashima and Takenaka (2012) identified a decline in the influence of ideological considerations in voters' minds, and also pointed to the emergence of dimensions of competition other than the traditional conservative vs. progressive axis.

The extent to which electoral support was based on ideological considerations can be tested more directly. Results of logistic regressions for three largest parties (LDP, DPJ, JRP) in the 2012 House of Representatives and 2013 House of Councillors elections are shown in table 1. In addition to the standard demographic controls of gender, age and education, we include feeling thermometer scores toward the party in question as well as ideological self-placement as independent variables. Not surprisingly, how respondents feel toward each party exerted a significant and substantive impact on their likelihood of casting a ballot for it. For the purpose of the present study, the (non-)finding that stands out is the general insignificance of

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7 The age variable in the original dataset contains categories of ten-year age groups instead of respondents’ raw age. Education is coded 1 for primary and junior high school, 2 for high school, 3 for junior college, and 4 for university and graduate school. Feeling thermometer variables were recoded by brackets of ten degrees.
ideology after controlling for attitudes toward parties, particularly for the LDP which, as shown in figure 2, was the most ideologically polarising party. One cannot rule out the possibility that feeling thermometer scores already absorb some element of positioning on the left-right spectrum. Nevertheless, one can infer from table 1 that the 2012 and 2013 elections were not ideologically charged contests, thus giving pause to those who would interpret the electorate's verdict in ideological terms.

**Longitudinal Comparisons**

The discussions so far have been based on static snapshots of data. To test whether any shift in public opinion has taken place, it is necessary to make comparisons across time. As mentioned in the introductory section, both domestic and cross-national surveys in Japan usually use the labels 'conservative' and 'progressive' in place of 'right' and 'left', respectively. For the purpose of longitudinal comparability, we must rely on datasets containing questions on respondents' placements on a conservative-progressieve scale. Specifically, we compare data from earlier waves of the Japan Election Studies (JES) series with those from recent surveys conducted after the inauguration of the Abe cabinet. Figure 5 plots the mean ideological self-placement in the JES I (1983) and JES II (wave 4, 1994) surveys alongside equivalent numbers in 2013 and 2014, as well as the perceived positions of the LDP and the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), which are traditionally seen as the most conservative and progressive parties on the ideological spectrum, respectively. All placements are converted to a 0-10 scale to facilitate ease of comparison.

Of the three lines plotted in figure 5, those for the LDP and the JCP show a clear centripetal tendency, meaning that the range of ideological competition has narrowed considerably over the past thirty years. In short, and not dissimilar to many other advanced democracies, the level of party system polarization has markedly declined.
The mean self-placement of the electorate, on the other hand, has not undergone dramatic changes. In fact, both the average citizen in 2014 and her counterpart back in 1983 occupied a position almost exactly at the midpoint of the ideological spectrum. Once again, one does not detect evidence suggesting a rightward swerve underpinning the LDP’s return to power. Indeed, the LDP itself was seen as somewhat more moderate (albeit still by far the most conservative party) than it was three decades ago.

**Citizen vs. Government Positions**

However, one cannot rule out the possibility that the very standard by which the entire ideological spectrum as understood by the citizenry has moved toward one direction over time, so that a policy stance regarded as extreme in the past may now be deemed relatively moderate. More concretely, if the public opinion in Japan has indeed shifted to the right, one would expect that despite the mean position being located around the midpoint of the conservative-progressive scale throughout the past few decades, this midpoint itself would be defined more conservatively today compared with thirty years ago.

To test this, we can compare views on a specific issue and trace whether opinions have shifted during this period. As discussed above, one issue that has consistently structured the understanding of the ideological schema in Japan is constitutional revision. Standardizing responses to surveys questions on this topic on a 5-point scale (with higher values referring to maintaining the status quo, i.e. the leftists’ position), the mean value for respondents in the 1994 survey is 3.07, almost exactly at the midpoint. This can be contrasted to 2.85 for the perceived position of the LDP, a slightly pro-revision stance. Prime minister Abe has actively advocated an easing of requirements for constitutional amendment, and the web survey in 2014
solicited opinions on this measure. The mean respondent position on a 5-point scale is 3.39, i.e. somewhat opposed to this proposal. Not surprisingly in view of its oft-repeated rhetoric, the perceived government opposition on the same scale is 1.88. This highlights the fact that, even after the LDP scored landslide victories in the 2012 House of Representatives and 2013 House of Councillors elections, the party's commanding legislative majority does not indicate that citizens have moved closer to its views on an issue that has long been politically salient.

If the government did not receive widespread support - and was presumably not elected due to - this issue, in which policy areas did the LDP appeal to the electorate? The aforementioned web survey solicited views on a wide range of issues, a selection of which is listed in table 2. In addition to the question of requirements for constitutional amendment, one also notes wide gaps between the mean citizen and (perceived) government positions on issues such as re-starting nuclear plants; expanding military personnel, equipment and budget; participating in collective self-defense (in effect, with the United States); joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade bloc; and having the prime minister visit the controversial Yasukuni Shrine, on all of which the government is seen as much more enthusiastic than the general population. Note that with the exception of nuclear energy, all these issues concern the realm of foreign or defence policy, the issue dimension that has long shaped ideological understanding in Japan. On the other hand, the gaps are considerably smaller with respect to economic stimulus, foreign residents' right to vote in local elections, approving same sex marriage, and wives keeping their maiden names after marriage. Except for stimulus spending, these issues have attracted little attention. But one can still conclude that the government received support based on its stances on economic and social policies - areas that are not strongly associated with the main ideological axis of competition.
Comparing Ideological Scales: Conservative, Progressive, Liberal, Right, Left

As mentioned above, the terms 'right' and 'left' have long been used interchangeably with 'conservative' and 'progressive', respectively, in empirical studies; in fact many cross-national surveys containing an item on left-right placement automatically change this to progressive-conservative placement when the question is asked in Japan (e.g. World Values Survey; Comparative Study of Electoral Systems). The same vocabulary are commonly found in works by many Japanese scholars, as well as in media sources, though there are exceptional cases when the terms 'right' and 'left' are used (for example, the UTAS survey analysed in the preceding section). However, empirical tests on whether these two sets of labels, as well as other terms often used to characterise certain policies or politicians, are conspicuous by their absence.

An additional motivation for exploring this topic is the observation made in a recent study concerning generational differences in perceptions of party locations on the conservative-progressive scale (Endo and Jou 2014). Specifically, while the LDP is still widely seen as the most conservative party by all respondents, the Communists, traditionally regarded by both scholars and the media as anchoring the progressive side of the spectrum, are no longer thus identified by younger cohorts (20s-40s), who tend to place the JCP close to the midpoint on the scale. Instead, the perceived as the most progressive political force the newly established Japan Restoration Party (JRP), known for its leaders' nationalistic rhetoric and a record in local government of cutting expenditures and combating public sector unions. This raises the question of what constitutes progressivism in citizens' minds, and whether it is the equivalent of leftism.

One of the co-authors conducted an on-line survey in February-March 2014 (N=
that randomly divided respondents into three groups, presenting each group with one of the following ideological labels: conservative vs. progressive; conservative vs. liberal; and right vs. left. In each case a 0-10 scale is used, with higher values denoting more conservative/rightist positions. In addition to self-placement, respondents were asked to position nine parties on the same scale. In addition, they were also asked whether they deem each set of labels appropriate for capturing political dynamics.

Figure 6 shows mean placements on the conservative-progressve scale by age category. This confirms the aforementioned generational difference: for respondents in their 40s and above, the LDP and JCP are seen as furthest away from the centre, in accordance with the prevailing perception among most politicians, media, and scholars. However, for respondents in their 20s and 30s, it is the JRP that anchored the progressive end of the scale. While it lies beyond the scope of the present paper to analyse the reasons behind this generational discrepancy, we can speculate that, since the term 'progressive' has gradually faded from political reporting since the 1980s, younger cohorts who have grown up since then are unfamiliar with this label, and may link it with the idea of seeking 'reform', i.e. challenging established political elites. It is not difficult to imagine the JRP, being a newly founded party that explicitly and often vehemently criticizes established parties, assuming the mantle as the party of reform.

A similar picture of emerges for the group of respondents asked to place themselves and various parties on a conservative-liberal scale (figure 7). Once again one observes a generational gap, indeed one that is more conspicuous than on the conservative-progressve scale. In this case respondents up to their 40s regarded the

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8 The web survey was conducted during 14 February – 1 March 2014. The sample was drawn from those registered on the Nikkei Research online panel.
JRP as the most liberal party. Since the introduction of this term into Japanese politics is of relatively recent vintage, and few empirical studies have explored its meaning, it is worth examining in greater detail citizens' understanding and usage of this label.

Turning to labels of right and left, figure 8 does not show the same cross-over between the JCP and JRP shown in the preceding two figures. All age groups gave the same ranking of parties along the spectrum, with the Communists consistently placed on the left. Moreover, while older cohorts always perceive wider differences between parties regardless of the set of labels used, one observes that the youngest cohorts see greater party system polarization on a left-right spectrum than on the two alternative scales. In addition, though for the sake of simplicity only the placements of three parties are displayed in figures 6-8, when the perceived positions of all parties are plotted, more parties were regarded as conservative than progressive or liberal, but the number of parties seen as leftist exceed those identified with the right.

Based on the criteria of consistency of ranking and clarity of differences, it may appear that 'right' and 'left' are the most suitable labels for capturing political dynamics in Japan, in line with many other democracies around the world. Yet a note of caution is necessary before drawing such a conclusion. When asked which labels are the most appropriate, the percentage of respondents citing the conservative-progressiv axis (45.7%) is considerably higher than those who favour either a conservative-liberal (31.1%) or right-left (29.1%) spectrum. This holds true for every age group. We also asked about the labels 'hawks' and 'doves', which were often used to describe parties' or politicians' foreign and defence policy stances. The proportion of respondents who prefer this set of semantics (27.1%) also falls below those who opt for the conservative-progressiv axis; indeed, 'hawks' and 'doves' seem to mean little to those aged below 40, i.e. the generation who underwent political socialization after the end of the Cold War.
Summary and Conclusion

The election of an LDP-led administration under prime minister Abe in December 2012 had been described as a significant rightward, nationalistic turn for Japan, and the government's rhetoric and legislative actions have done little to dispel this impression. The forceful passage of new security bills through the House of Representatives in July 2015, aimed at allowing Japanese military engagements abroad in cases where the safety of the country or its nationals are threatened, can be cited as the latest example of this 'right turn'. Similar to most other advanced democracies, a most hawkish international stance is often associated with the right. Moreover, political ideology in Japan is shaped by foreign and security policy debates to a greater extent than most other democracies. These considerations lead to observations that the Japanese government has indeed shifted to the right. The central question we have attempted to address in the present study is: do the overwhelming electoral victories won by this government indicate a corresponding rightward movement among ordinary citizens?

Analysis of public opinion data suggests a negative answer. Employing surveys from a number of sources, the preceding pages have shown that 1) the distribution of ideological orientations is not significantly skewed toward the right; 2) the position of the average citizen has changed little over the past thirty years, while the party system has become (or at least has been perceived as) less polarised; 3) the new government's (perceived) right-wing positions are not shared by the general public. The LDP under Abe most likely attained its electoral dominance by appealing to the electorate through promises of competent economic management, not a higher profile as a regional power. It may not be too much of an exaggeration to assert that the LDP under Abe won despite, rather than because of, its 'right-wing' policy stances.
We have also undertaken an investigation into the equivalence of different sets of ideological vocabulary that previous works mostly took for granted. Many surveys in Japan, including those conducted as part of cross-national projects, employ the labels 'conservative' and 'progressive' in their questionnaires instead of 'right' and 'left', since the former terms are more frequently used in both journalistic and scholarly discussions of politics. Through the design of a unique on-line survey, we have been able to compare respondents' self and party placements on three scales - conservative vs. progressive, conservative vs. liberal, and right vs. left - as well as how preferences on a wide range of issues relate to each scale. We have identified a notable generational gap with respect to which party anchors the progressive/liberal end of the spectrum, but at the same time established that all three sets of labels are for the most part structured by issues involving foreign and defense policy rather than economic or social affairs.

It is necessary to acknowledge a number of shortcomings in the present study. While the web surveys follow similar wording to standard election studies to allow for longitudinal comparisons, one may raise concerns about the representativeness of the former. To confirm the validity of our results, one has to wait until the latest round of the election studies become publicly available. Another question involves whether, instead of looking at the entire electorate, it would be more appropriate to concentrate on the attitudes of LDP supporters, since under an electoral system with a large first-past-the-post component, a party may only need 30-40% of votes to attain a parliamentary majority - and in the past few years the LDP has been the only party that can command this level of support. It is worth examining the possibility that, while the electorate as a whole has not moved along the ideological spectrum, an increasingly right-leaning group of core supporters have propelled the party rightwards. Finally, we have only identified a generational gap with regard to
perceived party placements, but have not delved into its causes and potential consequences. These are possible topics for future research.
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Figure 1. Distribution of Ideological Self-placement on Left-Right Scale

Data: UTAS survey in 2012

N=1,680
Figure 2. Left-Right Self-placement and Feeling toward Parties

Data: UTAS survey in 2012
Figure 3. Left-Right Self-placement and Feeling toward Party Leaders

Note: Noda = DPJ leader; Abe = LDP leader; Ishihara, Hashimoto = JRP co-leaders

Data: UTAS survey in 2012
Figure 4. Left-Right Self-placement and Evaluations of Government Policies

Source: UTAS survey
Figure 5. Self- and Party Placements on Ideological Scale

Sources: JES I (1983); JES II (1994); Web Survey in 2013; and Web Survey in 2014

Figure 6. Ideology by Age Groups on Conservative-Progressive Scale

Source: Web Survey in 2014
Figure 7. Ideology by Age Groups on Conservative-Liberal Scale

Source: Web Survey in 2014

Figure 8. Ideology by Age Groups on Left-Right Scale

Source: Web Survey in 2014
Table 1. Logit Analysis of Vote Choice in the PR tiers in 2012 and 2013

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<td>-6.06 **</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>-7.14 **</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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<td>0.21</td>
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<td>0.43 *</td>
<td>0.16</td>
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<td>Party Feeling Thermometer</td>
<td>0.63 **</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.78 **</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.87 **</td>
<td>0.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>Left-Right Ideology</td>
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<td>Pseudo R²</td>
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<td>1163</td>
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<td>940</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

** p>.001  * p>.05
Data: UTAS survey

---

Table 2: Mean Citizen and Government Positions on Selected Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>mean respondent position</th>
<th>(perceived) government position</th>
<th>gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>amend constitution</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expand military personnel &amp; budget</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>0.86</td>
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<tr>
<td>collective defense</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>1.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>wives keeping maiden name</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>0.11</td>
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<td>same sex marriage</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>0.23</td>
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<tr>
<td>foreigners' franchise</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>0.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>economic stimulus</td>
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<td>1.79</td>
<td>0.65</td>
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<tr>
<td>prime minister visits Yasukuni Shrine</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>1.23</td>
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<td>join TPP free trade agreement</td>
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<td>1.80</td>
<td>0.92</td>
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<td>re-start nuclear plants</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: Web Survey in 2014