Understanding Ideological Semantics in Changing Contexts: 
A Longitudinal Analysis

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Abstract
Ideo logical semantics have long been utilized as a tool of political communication and an informational shortcut between voters and political elites. As usage of ideological labels such as left and right is extended to non-Western settings, there have been debates about the adaptability of these concepts to reflect issue dimensions beyond debates over economic policies that structure the ideological space in most Western democracies. The present study explores whether and how the meaning of ideological labels evolved in Japan over the period 1976-2010. We analyze longitudinal survey data over the span of a quarter-century to investigate 1) to what extent do citizens understanding the ideological spectrum in terms of foreign and security policy at the expense of other issue dimensions, as previous studies have documented; and 2) whether the end of the Cold War marked a fundamental shift in ordinary citizens' understanding of ideological semantics. By examining the case of a non-Western democracy, our study contributes to the discussion on the continued relevance of ideological heuristics.

Keywords: ideology; context; public opinion; longitudinal study; Japan

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I. Introduction

A voluminous literature has discussed the role of ideological semantics, based on the premise that an ideological schema provides a means of orientation and communication between voters and political elites (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976; Fuchs and Klingemann 1989). Labels such as 'left' and 'right' have served as cues that summarize the policy stances of various parties or candidates, and helps to simplify voters' choices. Traditionally scholars associate these spatial terms with a conflict in economic philosophy: rightists favor free enterprise and individual incentives, while leftists prefer a greater role for the state in pursuit of equality (e.g. Lipset 1960; Budge et al. 1987). A capital versus labor cleavage long underpinned the left-right divide in most Western democracies (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), and other cross-national studies confirm the continuing importance of this dimension (e.g. Caul and Gray 2000; Knutsen 1995). The present study investigates the extent to which this applies in a non-Western setting, and also seeks to trace whether and how popular understanding of ideological labels has changed over time.

Several studies have shown that, in new democracies, economic issues is often overshadowed by debates over the pace of transition, legacies of past authoritarian rule, and the institutional distribution of power under the new regime (Moreno 1999; Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2009). But even in established democracies, the extent to which the ideological spectrum is chiefly structured by an economic dimension depends on political context. In the following pages we examine the case of Japan, an advanced industrial country with more than six decades of continuous democratic governance.
Exigencies during the Cold War shaped patterns of political competition that centred on foreign and security policy, with other dimensions, including economic issues, playing a considerably lesser role. There is a consensus in both scholarly and journalistic circles that ideological labels in Japan refer mainly to opposite views on the country's external alliances and defense capabilities rather than bread-and-butter issues.

In this study we set out to address two main questions. First, did Japanese voters in fact understand ideological semantics in terms of foreign and defense policy at the expense of other issues dimensions such as the economy and social values? Second, has this understanding changed with the end of the Cold War, as well as the transformation of the party system that was sharply polarized on geopolitical and security issues? Rather than views of political elites discerned through party manifestoes and legislative speeches, we focus on individual understanding of ideology by analyzing public opinion data. While this is certainly not a novel approach, our study covers the period 1976-2010, a longer span than many previous studies, in order to make a longitudinal comparison. In the next section we elaborate on a number of policy dimensions that could exert an influence citizens' understanding of the ideological spectrum, followed by descriptions of our data and variables. Section four presents and discusses empirical findings, and the last section summarizes the results and concludes.

II. Dimensions of Ideological and Party Competition

Specific issues most salient to voters obviously vary from one election to the next, but it is possible to categorize broad policy dimensions structuring the party space. While
some scholars adopt an inductive approach without prior assumptions regarding which issues voters deem most important (e.g. Gabel and Huber 2000), analyzing surveys that do not contain the same questions across different time periods prevents us from using this method. Instead, we identify *a priori* policy dimensions as well as an overarching left-right (progressive-conservative) scale to explore factors that have structured citizens’ understanding of ideological semantics over a span of more than three decades, with reference to not only policy dimensions described below, but also partisan and socio-demographic anchors of what constitutes ‘conservative’ and ‘progressive’ in the minds of ordinary citizens. Tanaka (2009) identifies four main axes of competition structuring the ideological space in Japan: free market vs. welfare spending, assertive vs. consensual foreign policy, centralization vs. decentralization, and traditional vs. modern social values. This categorization provides the analytical framework for our study.

Party competition in Japan during most of the latter half of the twentieth century took place under the framework of the ‘1955 system’, which refers not only to the establishment of the two largest parties, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the opposition Japan Socialist Party (JSP), in that year, but also more broadly to the set of issues that divided their core electorates and delineated the space of party competition. Regarding the level of ideological cognition, Kabashima and Takenaka (1996) report that a majority of the electorate are able to identify ideological positions along a conservative-progressive axis. Furthermore, in addition to the LDP and JSP, parties founded in subsequent years also aligned themselves along the same axis. This enabled most voters to both identify parties along a uni-dimensional scale and rank them consistently (Otake 2000:127). Evaluations of party positions by experts point to a
similar conclusion, namely that ‘policy based party competition in Japan is inherently one dimensional: no matter which substantive dimension of policy is considered, the parties are ranked in essentially the same way’ (Laver and Benoit 2005:202). However, Tsutui posits that political competition had shifted from a bi-polar to tri-polar pattern, with liberals, neo-conservatives, and social democrats staking distinctive positions on welfare policies, decentralization, and the economy (1994:7-11). Similarly, Kabashima observes declining ideological constraint as policy competition becomes increasingly multi-dimensional (1998:188-90).

During the Cold War, issues surrounding foreign and security policies constituted the primary dimension underlying the conservative-progressive axis (Kabashima 1998:165-166), pitting defenders of the US-inspired ‘pacifist’ constitution against advocates of constitutional revision aimed at allowing Japan to maintain a full-fledged army and play a more assertive role in regional security. Since a pro-Soviet posture was unpalatable for democratic and capitalist Japan in the context of the Cold War, progressives advocated neutrality while conservatives stressed strong ties to the US to counter the threat of communism. According to Otake, ‘the defense issue emerged in the early 1950s, and the pattern of conservative-progressive confrontation was institutionalized by the 1960 political crisis over the renewal of the [US-Japan] Security Treaty, shaping Japanese politics for the next 30 years’ (2000:128). This implies a uni-dimensional space of party competition. Using voter surveys, Kohei et al. (1991) demonstrate that among four issue clusters, only the one containing questions on security yields robust correlations with party choice. Both text analysis of party documents and expert surveys confirm that foreign and defense policies exert a large
influence on party locations on the left-right scale (Laver and Benoit 2005:197; Proksch et al. 2011).

The end of the Cold War did not seem to make the security issue obsolete; in fact, post-Cold War conflicts such as the two Persian Gulf Wars rendered debate over Japan’s contribution to the international community more salient and exigent. Empirical studies demonstrate that controversies over whether Japan should dispatch armed forces to Iraq and aid in refueling US naval vassals that took part in belligerent military action load on the same factor as collective defense and constitutional revision (Hirano 2007:122), and that this policy dimension was as preeminent an anchor of the progressive-conservative schema into the 1990s and 2000s as during the 1970s (Kabashima 1998:181). What change took place involved party positions along the ideological scale. For example, skepticism toward the US-Japan alliance and the need for strengthening the military ceased to be significantly related to support for the JSP in 1996 (Hirano 2005:73-74), since the party renounced its longstanding stance on security issues when it formed a governing coalition with the LDP in 1994. Similarly, supporters of Komeito, a party originally established on a pacifist platform, have moved so closely to LDP supporters on constitutional and defense issues that the two groups’ views were no longer distinguishable by 2005 (Hirano 2007:130, 188-89), following more than half a decade of coalition government between these two parties.

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1 One can extend this dimension to incorporate attitudes toward the very nature of the postwar Japanese polity, as voters toward the progressive end of the spectrum were much more likely to harbor anti-system sentiments (Tanaka 1995).

2 Abe and Endo (forthcoming) find that the Komeito supporters are even more conservative on the issue of Japan Self Defence Force’s involvement in UN peacekeeping operations during the early-1990’s.
In contrast to the generally agreed significance of foreign and defense policies, issues of economic distribution have a more ambiguous role in shaping ideological positions. While it is possible to identify an economic aspect of the conservative-progressive schema centring on the size of government and the welfare state (Kume et al. 2003:25), unlike most established Western democracies, questions over the state’s economic role are often subordinated to debate over its political power (Tanaka and Mimura 2006:119). Judging by their policy documents, positions of the LDP and JSP on economic issues were more often than not indistinguishable (Proksch et al. 2011:121). Several explanations account for this exceptional feature of political competition in Japan. First, the gap between rich and poor remained relatively modest throughout most of the post-war era, and an expanding economic pie meant that every stratum could claim a share. Second, an economic cleavage did not develop because ‘both progressive and conservative political parties have endorsed expanded welfare services,’ and shared a consensus concerning government intervention in the economy (Otake 2000:128; see also Hiwatari 1995). Finally, the advent of globalization in recent years has weakened state capacity in determining economic outcomes, and eroded the fiscal basis for generous welfare policies in the face of increasingly stringent budgetary constraints, so citizens may no longer expect political solutions to economic difficulties (Saito 2004:2-3).

Consensus on economic policy has apparently survived, or even become strengthened

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3 Miwa (2014) suggests that from the 1990s onwards some voters perceive ideology as conflicts over welfare rather than defense issues, while others retain the traditional understanding.
4 While the Gini index started to increase during the 1980s, most citizens still agreed with the statement ‘all Japanese are middle class (ichioku sochuryu)’. Economic inequality only became politically contentious after the Koizumi reforms in the 2000s.
by, party system changes in the past two decades. While the JSP adopted a new economic platform in 1986 rejecting its traditional adherence to a command economy and accepting capitalism (Shinkawa 2000:178-79), ten years later party supporters still took a markedly pro-welfare position compared with the overall electorate. However, analysis of a 2004 survey shows that respondents identifying with different parties did not hold a significantly different position from one another on the welfare issue (Hirano 2005:74-75). Otake points out that the goal of some electoral reform advocates to ‘realign the party system along the issue of neoliberalism versus big government’ was not achieved despite the change of government in 1993, since non-LDP coalitions followed the same neo-liberal script as previous LDP administrations (2000:139-41). Similarly, Ida reports that voters’ ideological self-placement on the conservative-progressive scale is not significantly correlated with their views on either income inequality or welfare (2007:182-183). However, Tanaka and Mimura contend that views on welfare played a bigger role in influencing evaluations of the LDP and JSP and its successor party by 1996 (2006:139-14).

A related, though not overlapping, policy dimension concerns the size and powers of the central government. This refers not only to the economic arena described above, but also involves the question of central-local relations. Successive governments in the past quarter-century have proposed administrative reform measures aimed at streamlining the civil service and devolving powers to sub-national administrative units; examples include the Rincho committee in the early 1980s, the reorganization of government ministries in the late 1990s, and the reform of central-local financial transfers and postal privatization bill in the 2000s. These reform efforts have underscored the objective of
shifting power away from a central bureaucracy perceived to be too powerful and inefficient, toward both politicians who are regularly accountable to the electorate, and sub-national authorities better able to accommodate the needs of each locale than one-size-fits-all policies of the central government. Decentralization entails transferring not just executive functions to local governments, but also sources of revenue which they traditionally lack.

Unlike security and economic policies, the dimension on the scope of governmental power has featured different specific issues over time, for example the overwhelming salience of postal privatization in the 2005 election, and the Democratic Party of Japan’s (DPJ) emphasis on political (as opposed to bureaucratic) control over policy-making in the 2009 polls. Views on postal privatization, which generated both inter- and intra-party conflicts, do not load on either the security or economic factors (Hirano 2007:122-123). LDP voters are significantly more likely to support this reform proposal than supporters of the DPJ, SDPJ, and the Japanese Communist Party (JCP). This distinction may not hold consistently over time, however. While positions taken by the LDP, DPJ, and Komeito on the role of government became more differentiated from 1999 to 2000, this trend was reversed in the first half of the 2000s (Kobayashi 2008:117).

Social values form a separate dimension of policy competition, entailing questions such as women’s rights (Hirano 2005:65-66). This broadly corresponds to the authoritarian versus libertarian cleavage described by Flanagan and Lee (2003), and rose in salience in the 1970s (Kabashima 1998:169). Political culture theories highlighting acquiescence
to authority have been offered as an important explanation of one-party dominance in Japan (e.g. Richardson and Flanagan 1984; Watanuki 1967), but such attitudes are increasingly challenged by younger generations who profess more independent and individualistic sentiments. One should note that whereas one of the defining features of post-materialism in Western societies is a shift from egocentric concerns to preference for a less impersonal, more human society, almost the reverse is true in Japan (Inglehart 1990:145-6), since conservatism in the Japanese context is associated with prioritizing group interests, and progressivism stresses individual rights. This is confirmed by Rochon’s finding that attitudes on youth discipline and respect for parents load on a different factor from questions concerning community harmony and solidarity (1981:26), and calls for caution in applying the materialist versus post-materialist analytical framework.

While some issues may belong to more than one policy dimension, and others may be left out, the four arenas of competition detailed above summarize the most salient issue clusters in contemporary Japanese politics. Some scholars have identified alternative cleavages, such as that of “LDP versus non-LDP” (Hirano 2007), or pro- and anti-establishment views (Kabashima and Takenaka 2012), but these formulations do not describe policy-oriented differences. Policy contestation between a ‘business-labor union coalition’ and sectors dependent on government redistribution (Ito 1998) can probably be captured by different interest-driven preferences rather than occupational status itself. Our analysis therefore concentrates on changes in ideological understanding by utilizing and operationalizing Tanaka’s (2009) categorization of four policy dimensions structuring contemporary Japanese politics.
III. Data and Variables

To examine how ideological labels are understood by Japanese voters, and whether their understanding has changed over the course of more than three decades which saw dramatic transformations in both the country's external environment and party system, we analyze public opinion surveys from 1976 to 2010. The 1976 survey, JABISS, is one of the first surveys conducted in Japan that probed respondents' ideological position, stance on a range of issues, and attitudes toward various political parties. This was followed in subsequent decades by the Japanese Election Study (JES), which began in 1983. While it is possible to add other surveys to our analysis, especially for recent years, we decide to use JABISS and JES data because they cover the longest time span and consistently ask about preferences on many issues, thus permitting longitudinal comparison.

Nevertheless, the battery of questions is not exactly the same in all surveys, and some of the leading parties also changed over the period covered in our study. Thus we analyze each survey separately, instead of pooling all data. The dependent variable in each year

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5 We acknowledge the principal investigators of JABISS, JES I, JES II, JES III, and JES IV for making the dataset available through Leviathan Databank or their website. JABISS is the two-wave panel survey for the 1976 general election. JES I is the three-wave panel survey for the Upper House election in June 1983 and the general election in December 1983. In this analysis, we mainly utilize the third wave after the general election. JES II is the seven-wave panel survey conducted in 1993 (general election), 1994, 1995 (UH election), and 1996 (general election). JES III is the nine-wave panel survey conducted in 2001 (UH election), 2003 (general election), 2004 (UH election), and 2005 (general election). JES IV is the seven-wave panel survey conducted in 2007 (UH election), 2009 (general election), 2010 (UH election), and 2011.
is individual respondents' ideological self-placement, with higher values denoting a more conservative position. Note that, even in cross-national surveys, it has long been conventional to use the terms 'conservative' and 'progressive' when probing the ideological leanings of Japanese voters, instead of the familiar spatial labels 'right' and 'left' used in other countries; many studies assume that the two scales are equivalent. We can only follow this convention due to the question wording in the available surveys, but will offer some thoughts on this assumption in the concluding section.

There are two sets of independent variables in this study: stances on issues and ratings of parties, plus the standard socio-demographic controls (age, gender, education, income, size of residential town). Party ratings are measured by a feeling thermometer toward each party ranging from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating a more favorable view. While Japan has long been a multi-party system, and small parties remain active even after the adoption of electoral rules aimed to facilitate bipolar competition, we limit the number of parties in each year to three: first, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), a long-time (and current) ruling party anchoring the conservative end of the ideological spectrum in Japan; second, the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), a perennial opposition party located on the far left; third, the largest opposition party to the LDP (a status that the JCP never attained) at the time each survey was conducted or, if the LDP was in opposition, the largest governing party. Assessing the meaning of ideological labels without taking party ratings into account risks overlooking an important factor that often influence citizens' understanding of political discussion in general and the ideological space specifically.
Issue variables are chosen in line with the four dimensions discussed above, with another criteria for selection being the availability of a given item in surveys taken during at least two different decades so one can compare its impact on the dependent variable across time. All surveys include a large number of questions pertaining to foreign and security policies, confirming the salience of these issues that many studies have documented. These include items on the US-Japan alliance; strengthening defense; relations with Russia; possession of nuclear weapons; and apologies to other Asian countries for acts committed during World War II. In contrast, the number of questions on the remaining three dimensions is more limited. Two economic variables are included: welfare spending and workers' right to strike. Unfortunately the term 'decentralization' rarely appeared in surveys, so we use the item on whether respondents prefer a smaller government as a proxy for powers of the central government. The social values dimension is measured by whether respondents favor policies that promote the status of women. Finally, we include views on the emperor's political role to see if attitudes toward the political system, in which the constitutional monarch has a purely symbolic role, affect ideological self-placement.

IV. Empirical Analysis

The results of ordinary least squares (OLS) analysis are displayed in table 1. Note that some cells are blank since not all issue questions were asked in each year. Concerning the socio-demographic variables, it is no surprise that older respondents are more likely to identify as conservatives, though this relationship did not reach statistical significance before the 2000s. Perhaps more noteworthy are two non-findings. First,
income is rarely associated with ideological positioning, which hints at the absence of an economically-rooted cleavage, and corroborates previous studies which found little distinction between parties’ economic policy platforms. Second, while election results show that, similar to most other established democracies, rural districts tend to vote for conservative candidates, size of residential town in itself is insignificant.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Results for the party rating variables are mostly significant in the expected direction. Conservatives are more likely to assess the LDP positively, while progressives express a more favorable opinion of the JCP and the leading opponent of the LDP. The latter position was occupied by the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) until the early 1990s, the short-lived New Frontier Party (NFP) in the mid-1990s, and the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Only the coefficients for the NFP in 1996 and the DPJ in 2005 do not have a p value smaller than 0.05 (though both are significant at the p< 0.1 level). The NFP was a relatively new party in 1996, and comprised a motley collection of politicians from both conservative and progressive parties, so voters might have difficulty pinning it to any point on the ideological spectrum. The DPJ was overwhelmed by the LDP’s catch-all appeal in the 2005 election, and did not register as the main opposition force throughout most of the campaign, which probably had the effect of obscuring its policy profile in the minds of the electorate.

A glance at table 1 suggests that, despite a trend of electoral de-alignment documented
in several studies, ideological understanding in Japan still contains a sizeable partisan element. An increasing proportion of voters may no longer be attached to any party, but party names continue to offer useful points of reference with respect to distinguishing conservative from progressive stances. As circumstantial evidence affirming this observation, several recently established parties explicitly described themselves as conservative. And since parties are very much present in election campaigns and debates over legislative bills, while ideological semantics are largely abstract concepts, one can surmise that it is attitudes toward parties which affect ideological self-placement, more than the other way round.

At the same time, it is worth pointing out that the percentage of variance explained by the three party rating variables has fallen considerably over the three and half decades covered in this study. In 1976 and 1983, party variables account for slightly more than half of all the variance explained by the model, but by 2010 the equivalent figure has fallen below one-third. In other words, feelings toward parties remain significant ideological cues today, but play a less substantial part than heretofore. One possible elucidation lies in party system de-polarization: the distance separating conservative and progressive standard-bearers on the ideological scale is smaller today than in the 1970s and 1980s.

The main focus on this study concerns the structuring of ideological space around different issue dimensions, and we can draw several conclusions from the results for the ten policy questions in the bottom half of table 1. Among the five items related to foreign and security policies, possession of nuclear weapons is always insignificant,
presumably because this has never been seen as a realistic possibility. Perhaps more surprising is the irrelevance of attitudes toward Russia, both during the Cold War and in recent years when a territorial dispute over a number of islands put Russian-Japanese relations under the spotlight. As one would expect, respondents favoring greater defense capabilities lean toward the conservative side of the ideological spectrum. Equally consistent is the link between preference for strengthening US-Japan security ties and conservative self-positioning. The fact that this factor retains a strong impact long after the dissolution of the communist bloc confirms that the American alliance as a political issue, as well as the strong feelings it arouses among supporters and opponents, does not simply reflect Cold War geopolitical calculations such as potential threats from the ex-Soviet Union.

Compared with the US-Japan alliance, defense, and even relations with Russia, the questions of whether Japan has apologized sufficiently for what it inflicted on neighboring countries during World War II may appear to be a minor issue, one mentioned by few politicians or in the mass media today. It attracted public attention in lead-up to the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II, when the then prime minister issued an official statement apologizing for wartime damage and suffering (thus the question was not asked in surveys before 1995). However, rather than generating consensus and reconciliation, the motivation and actions of Japan's overseas conquests are still debated in some quarters, and territorial disputes with China, Russia and South Korea are all rooted in the war. Furthermore, every time prominent cabinet ministers visit Yasukuni Shrine, the Chinese and Korean governments invariably issue

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6 This is a facility honouring the war dead, including political and military leaders
statements criticizing Japan for trying to whitewash history. In this sense, the topic of wartime apologies is not just a historical issue, but also has contemporary relevance, with progressives more likely to believe that Japan has not expressed adequate remorse and repentance.

Of the two economic variables, the question of whether greater resources should be devoted to welfare services such as pensions and medical care for the elderly, which delineates the ideological space in many other established democracies, does not play a similar role in Japan. This does not mean that these issues are ignored by Japanese voters; rather, the results suggest that they are less politicized along an ideological axis. On the other hand, opinion on workers' right to strike clearly distinguishes conservatives from progressives, though the impact of this variable has declined in recent years. In fact the term used for 'workers' in some survey questionnaires carries a political connotation, similar to 'proletariat'. While there is no labor party in Japan, labor unions have comprised a key constituency of the JSP and later the DPJ. The rarity of large scale industrial action belies the influence that opinion on strikes exerted on ideological understanding.

Following a trend that began in several Anglo-Saxon democracies, Japan has seen the privatization of several large scale public enterprises starting in the 1980s, from the national railway to the postal system. These measures might be politically contentious at the time of implementation, yet table 1 shows that questions over the size of government are orthogonal to the ideological axis. We interpret this variable as a proxy during World War II who were convicted as war criminals.
for views on the appropriate scope of governmental power, which in recent years have been linked with debates over relations between central and local authorities. While ideas about devolution have been raised, the issue of decentralization does not appear to be owned by a particular ideological camp. The same can be said about proposals to promote the status of women, specifically by introducing gender quotas for higher positions. Gender equality is often used as an indicator of liberal social values, which are in turn associated with the (new) left in many advanced democracies. However, this does not turn out to be case in Japan. Finally, the political role of the emperor only rarely affects ideological understanding, suggesting that the postwar political system commands support from citizens across the ideological spectrum and is no longer a subject of political debate.

One can observe a steady decrease in the adjusted R squared over time, meaning that the variables used in our model have declining explanatory power. Despite the unavailability of several issue questions, the model in 1976 accounts for 40 percent of respondents' ideological positioning, whereas a model with a more complete set of variables in 2010 can only account for less than 20 percent of variance. In sum, one observes a decrease in the substantive effect of both party and policy variables. One may speculate that the labels 'conservative' and 'progressive' today are no longer defined by the same issues that defined the ideological space two or three decades ago. If so, it is natural to ask: what new issues have emerged or gained salience and come to re-shape citizens' ideological understanding? One possible answer, proposed by Kabashima and Takenaka (2012), lies in the opposition between forces seeking to conserve and overhaul the status quo. This offers a topic for future research.
V. Summary and Conclusion

The preceding pages have explored how ideological semantics are understood by ordinary citizens in Japan. The period covered by our analysis saw significant transformations in the country's geopolitical environment, economic conditions, political institutions, and party system, and therefore offers fertile ground for tracing changes and continuities in factors that structure what it meant to be conservative or progressive. While several studies have examined ideology in Japan, very few have utilized public opinion data over a long time span. This is the scholarly vacuum that the present study attempts to fill. Building on the theoretical framework by Tanaka (2009), we test the impact the four sets of issues on ideological understanding: foreign and security policy; economic policy; scope of government power; and social values. A long line of literature emphasizes the salience of the first dimension, and the relatively minor role of the second. While this has become conventional wisdom, we deem it worthwhile to both test the assumption empirically and, just as importantly, look for possible changes as a consequence of major developments such as the end of the Cold War, the overhaul of electoral rules, and the emergence of a two-party system.

Corroborating previous studies (Otake 2000; Proksch et al. 2011), empirical results confirm the salience of foreign and security policies, particularly the US-Japan alliance and well as the strengthening of defense capacities, in structuring the ideological space. In addition, the question over the extent of Japan's apology for its wartime action in neighboring countries constitutes another persistent divide between conservatives and
progressives. Economic issues are not entirely irrelevant: welfare policy exerts little impact on ideological understanding, but workers' right to strike does, especially during earlier decades covered in this study. This suggests that, similar to many other advanced democracies, a capital versus labor axis has in fact been present. Scope of government and social values turn out to be insignificant in our model, though the limited range of questions on these dimensions precludes a more thorough investigation. For instance, there are no questions specifically soliciting opinions on decentralization or environmental protection in successive surveys. This is a notable shortcoming in our analysis, and a point worth keeping in mind when designing future surveys.

Finally, while most scholars have long followed the practice of using a 'progressive-conservative' in place of a 'left-right' scale to measure and analyze ideology in Japan, including in cross-national surveys, one may ask whether the two sets of labels are indeed equivalent. While a longitudinal study is necessarily constrained by survey question wording to follow the conventional practice, we have conducted a survey asking respondents to locate themselves and various parties along one of three scales: progressive-conservative, liberal-conservative, and left-right. Without delving into details, suffice it to say that with regard to party placements, the LDP is consistently located toward the conservative and right pole of each spectrum, but the identity of the most left-wing and most progressive parties varies. In short, respondents made some distinctions between differently worded scales. This is a point worth keeping in mind for future studies that examine ideology in Japan, or include the country in cross-national analysis.
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*** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05
References


