

Webinar "Japan After Abe"

# Transformations of Japanese Politics and the Abe/Suga Administrations

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# Questions and Fundamental Thesis

- Why has the Abe Administration become the longest-running government in modern Japanese political history?
- Policymaking Process in Japan has been transformed due to institutional reforms since the 1990s.
- The Abe Administration was a product of these transformations, which will have effects on the Suga Administration.

# Institutional Reforms in the Japanese Polity

- Electoral System Reform (1994/1996):  
Lower house: SNTV → SMD/PR mix;  
Upper house: almost unchanged
- Executive (administrative) Reform (1999/2001):  
Strengthening the functions of the cabinet;  
Establishment of the cabinet office;  
Merger of ministries

# Expected Effects of Reforms

- Concentration of Power:  
Governing party MPs are subject to the party executives.
- Competition to Power:  
Competition to power between two major parties works as restraints on political power.
- Centralised Policymaking:  
The centre of policymaking is the PM and the cabinet rather than the "tribe" MPs and ministerial bureaucrats.

# New Policymaking Process

- *PM-centred, Top-down Policymaking:*  
The "Westminsterization" of Japanese Polity (?)
- *The ranges of policy changes are widen:*  
"Traditional" constraints on the PM and government have been almost disappeared; the PM can play more active roles to set new policy directions and priorities.
- Roles of oppositions are quite limited:  
Failure of the DPJ government (2009-12) makes the general public less interested in what oppositions say.

# Major Results of New Process

- Koizumi Administration (LDP, 2001-06):  
Economic policy—Orientations toward "structural" reforms and small government.
- Hatoyama Administration (DPJ, 2009-10):  
Foreign policy—Challenge to change the agreement related to Okinawa US air bases.
- Abe Administration (second term)(LDP, 2012-20):  
Security policy—New security bills partially permits the exercise of the right of collective self-defense.

# Abe's Specific Reasons for Success

- *Process:*

Clever usage of centralised process to show how significant the strong PM leadership and stable governing parties are.

- *Policy:*

"Abenomics" and new security policy had been recognised to establish for years before his second term.

- *Opposition:*

Weak and divided due to the failure of the DPJ government.

# Problems of New Process

- Over-centralisation of Political Power:

The PM and cabinet staff could exercise almost unrestricted political power, due to too weak competition between government and opposition.

- Keep Wrong Policy Tracks:

Proper alternative views with plural processes were not offered to PM and cabinet.



# Measures against Covid-19

- Not a Fatal Error, at Least by International Standards, But...
- Ad hoc and unscientific:
  - Sudden school closing without any regulations to commuter rush and commerce in downtown areas;
  - Distribution of two cloth masks;
  - Sudden shift to quasi-lockdown;
- Lack of Explanations:
  - The PM held some press conferences, but he just gave the speech on his policy w/o enough Q&As.

# What's Next?

- *Abe is Not an Exception:*

Policymaking process and style of his government comes from the institutional reforms and has many aspects in common with other administrations.

- *Suga will Succeed Both Strong and Weak Points:*

It is difficult to expect whether the general public react to strong or weak aspects;

Oppositions will not keep silent.

# The Suga Administration is Supposed to be...

- More Centralisation?

The PM assembles his most trusted colleagues and bureaucrats to the cabinet office to make more centralised policymaking.

Having controlled the cabinet office for years is Suga's most significant political resource.

- Policy Agendas the PM Wants to Deal with are Still Unclear.

# FYI: Actual Changes of PM Behaviour

- As Results of Institutional Reform:

The PM has begun to be in greater contact with limited members of the inner circle (core executives);

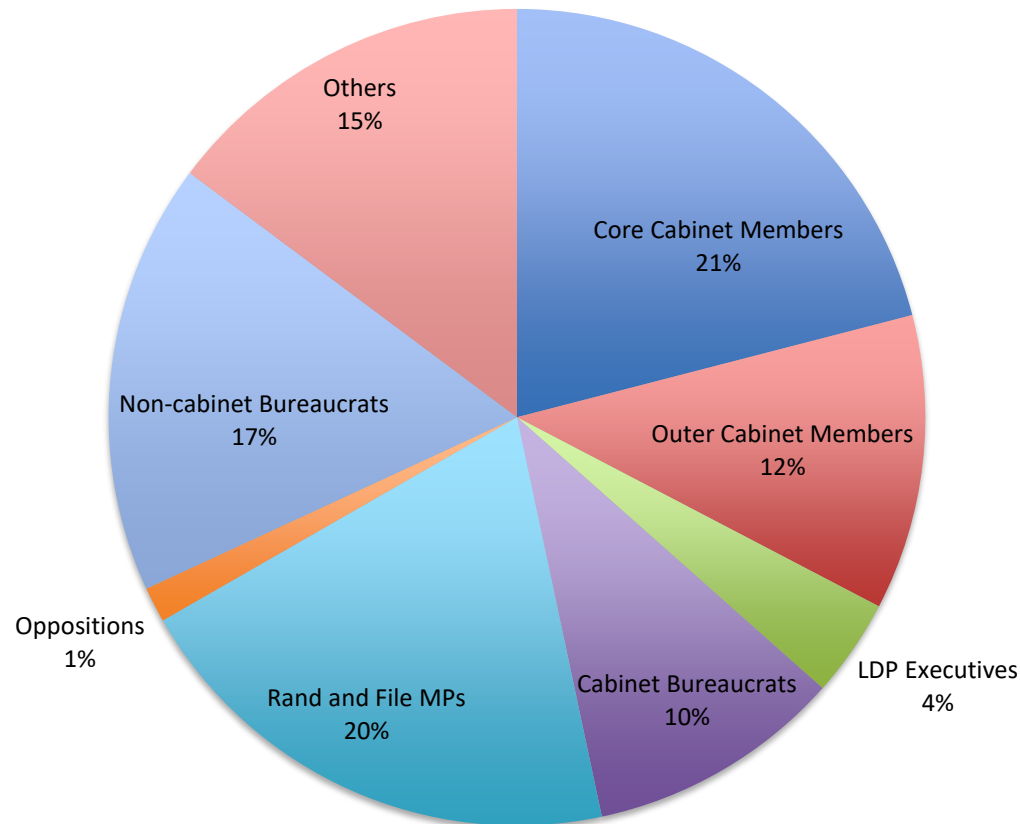
The PM has begun to have less contact with rank-and-file governing party MPs and bureaucrats outside the cabinet secretariat and cabinet office.

# FYI: PMD Data

- Appearing Everyday on Major Daily Newspapers for More Than 40 years.
- Containing All Information about the Activities of the PM: When, for How Long, Where, and with Whom does He/she Meet?
- Recently Newspaper Companies Sometimes Analyses the PMD Data for Their Own Articles (e.g. *Nikkei Shimbun* on Dec. 31, 2019).

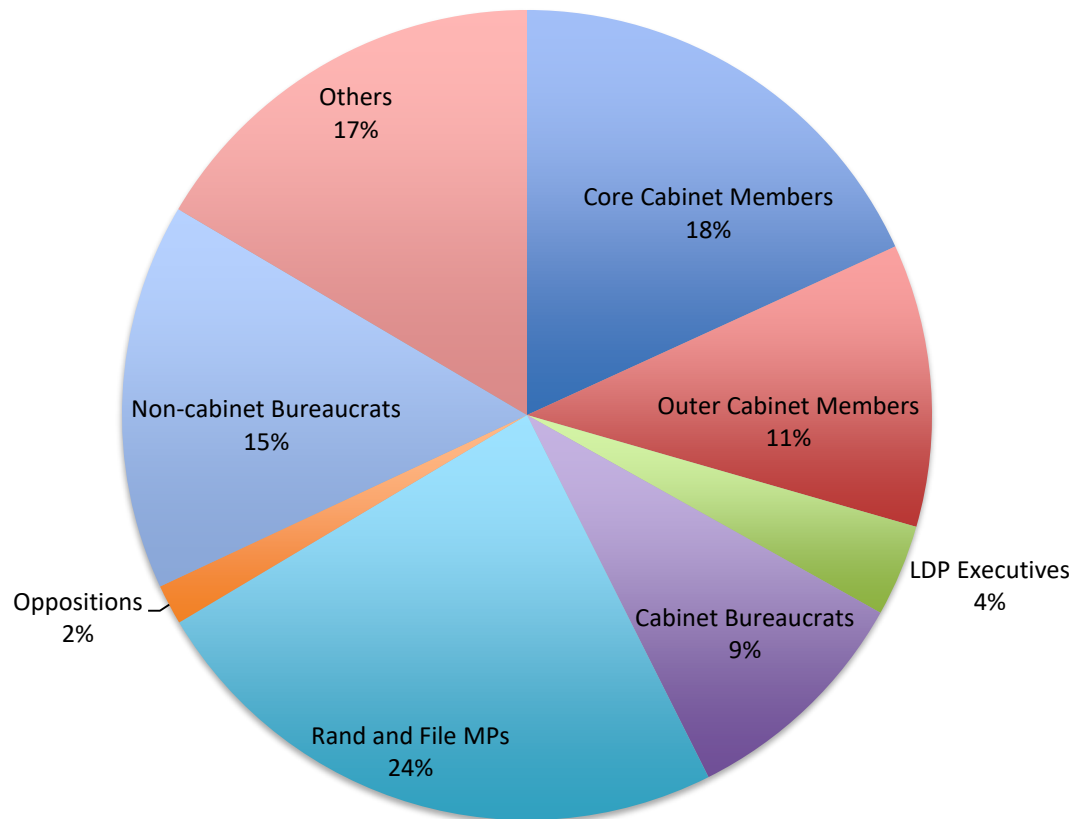
# FYI: PMs' Meeting Pattern (1)

**Figure1: All the PMs, 1979-2016 (N=124880)**



# FYI: PMs' Meeting Pattern (2)

**Figure 2: Pre-Executive Reform Period, 1979-2001 (N=74224)**



# FYI: PMs' Meeting Pattern (3)

**Figure 3: Post-Executive Reform Period, 2001-2016 (N=50656)**

