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Party system fragmentation, demographic change, and the representation of social inequalities in Japan, 1953-2017

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Webinar - In English

Mandatory registration: events_ffj@ehess.fr

This study exploits political attitudes surveys conducted between 1953 and 2017 to document long-run changes in the structure of political cleavages in Japan. The author analyzes the transformation of Japan's one-party dominant system from the hegemony of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to the disintegration of conservative forces into multiple splinter parties and the rise of a new centrist coalition. Throughout Japan's contemporary history, persisting divides based upon foreign policy and remilitarization have remained a key axis of democratic conflicts. These divides have coincided with lower-educated voters showing greater support for the LDP and other conservative parties, which have generally advocated expansion of military spending and overseas interventions. The strength of the LDP in postwar decades also relied on a unique coalition of poorer rural areas and business elites, while socialist and communist parties relied on urban unionized wage earners. Urbanization, declining rural-urban income gaps, the expansion of education, and the subsequent fragmentation of the party system have put an end to these coalitions and have been associated with the depolarization of Japan's political space. I also analyze the long-run transformation of generational divides in relation to changing attitudes to war memory and political parties.

This work is planned for inclusion in a forthcoming collective book co-directed by Amory Gethin, Clara Martínez-Toledano and Thomas Piketty, *Political cleavages and social inequalities. A study of 50 democracies*. The volume will bring together case studies and comparative chapters examining the long-run transformation of political cleavages in fifty countries from the mid-twentieth century to the present.

Speaker



Amory Gethin
(Paris School of Economics)

Amory Gethin is a research fellow at the World Inequality Lab and a PhD candidate at the Paris School of Economics. His research focuses on the study of economic inequality, redistribution, and the politics of inequality in contemporary democracies. He has contributed to several projects on the historical evolution of income and wealth inequality, with a specific focus on Europe and South Africa, and participated to the development of the World Inequality Database. He has also worked on the long-run evolution of voting behaviors and political cleavages in a comparative perspective, including studies on India, Brazil, South Africa, and Japan.

Discussant



David Chiavacci
(University of Zurich)

David Chiavacci is Professor in Social Science of Japan at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. His research covers political and economic sociology of contemporary Japan in a comparative perspective. His main focus is on social movements, social inequality as well as on Japan's new immigration and immigration policy. His recent publications include *Civil Society and the State in Democratic East Asia: Between Entanglement and Contention in Post High Growth* (Amsterdam University Press, 2020, co-edited with Simona Grano and Julia Obinger) and *Japanese Political Economy Revisited: Abenomics and Institutional Change* (Routledge, 2019, co-edited with Sébastien Lechevalier).