



## Changing Politics in Japan

By Ikuo Kabashima, Gill Steel

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*Changing Politics in Japan* is a fresh and insightful account of the profound changes that have shaken up the Japanese political system and transformed it almost beyond recognition in the last couple of decades. Ikuo Kabashima—a former professor who is now Governor of Kumamoto Prefecture—and Gill Steel outline the basic features of politics in postwar Japan in an accessible and engaging manner. They focus on the dynamic relationship between voters and elected or nonelected officials and describe the shifts that have occurred in how voters respond to or control political elites and how officials both respond to, and attempt to influence, voters. The authors return time and again to the theme of changes in representation and accountability.

Kabashima and Steel set out to demolish the still prevalent myth that Japanese politics are a stagnant set of entrenched systems and interests that are fundamentally undemocratic. In its place, they reveal a lively and dynamic democracy, in which politicians and parties are increasingly listening to and responding to citizens' needs and interests and the media and other actors play a substantial role in keeping democratic accountability alive and healthy. Kabashima and Steel describe how all the political parties in Japan have adapted the ways in which they attempt to organize and channel votes and argue that contrary to many journalistic stereotypes the government is increasingly acting in the "the interests of citizens"—the median voter's preferences.

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### Review

"This book is rich in detail and provides a valuable summary of all of the tumultuous events that have occurred in Japanese politics since the early 1990s. A major strength of the book lies precisely in its broad sweep . . . . The authors provide a refreshingly balanced account that points not only to institutional but also to longer term socio-economic factors as drivers of change in Japanese politics."?Reiko Kage, *Social Science Japan Journal* (Summer 2011)

"The study is concise and well documented with many statistics and other sources. The authors 'set out to demolish further the once prevalent myth that Japanese politics are a stagnant set of entrenched systems and interests that are fundamentally undemocratic' (p. 1) . . . this book provides very balanced and concise overviews of Japanese politics."?Koji Murata, *Journal of Japanese Studies* (Summer 2012)

"Ikuo Kabashima and Gill Steel have done it! They have insightfully and forcefully revealed how the Japanese 'regime change' of 2009 was prepared at the grassroots level. *Changing Politics in Japan* features a vast amount of data from the 'perspective from below,' the citizen/elite and voter/party relationships. This is a very accessible book for understanding the 'changing Japan.'"?Takashi Inoguchi, President, University of Niigata Prefecture and Professor Emeritus, University of Tokyo

"*Changing Politics in Japan* provides an up-to-date, integrated, and historically salient argument about the links between parties, politicians, and elections in postwar Japan. Ikuo Kabashima and Gill Steel expand on the rising role of the media and changes in the nature of the Japanese bureaucracy."?T. J. Pempel, University of California, Berkeley

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