

Japan's political system is a '**multi-party parliamentary representative democratic constitutional monarchy**'. The 'Monarchy' part is really just historical and ceremonial, as in the U.K.

The **Emperor** acts as the **ceremonial head of state**. The Japanese constitution defines the Emperor as "the symbol of the State and of the unity of the people." The latter is of enormous modern historical importance, as MacArthur (aka "Magaddah" to the Japanese, and "The Last Shogun" in my view) made the crucial, some say dishonest, but highly practical decision to pardon the Emperor. As Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP), MacArthur allowed the Emperor to stay in "power" ceremonially as a means to maintaining unity and dignity for the Japanese people. Mac created the spin that Hirohito had been a puppet of Japan's military regime. Evidence before, during, and since that time clearly shows that this was a distortion – Hirohito was very much a string-puller. Be that as it may, MacArthur and the US occupying forces also made certain that the Emperor was no longer viewed as a god (that was actually a condition of surrender which delayed Japan's surrender by several days, even after the atomic bombings). Shinto, Japan's age-old animistic religion – which had been hijacked by the militarist regime just like today's Islamofascists have hijacked Islam - was no longer allowed to be the official state religion, ending the cult of imperial divinity. That is not to say that the Japanese creation myth of their descent from the sun goddess, Amaterasu, is no longer of importance. The new Emperor, Naruhito, ascended the throne on May 1, 2019 after his father, Emperor Akihito, abdicated at age 87 after 30 years of rule. He is the first Emperor to abdicate in over 200 years. His reasonable rationale was: time to retire. Naruhito's reign initiates a new era, known as *Reiwa* ('Peaceful Harmony' is the best and simplest translation). Naruhito brings promise of greater reconciliation with Asian neighbors as he has been known for his honest acknowledgement and regret about Japan's bellicose past, without hedging or denial.

The **Prime Minister is chief of the executive branch and the actual head of government**. He/she is head of the **Cabinet**, which directs the executive branch. The PM is elected by the Diet and is virtually always the leader of the political party in majority power. For almost all of the post-War period, this has been the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Of note, the Diet selects the PM but the Emperor must still officially appoint him. This is dictated by the Constitution. In Japan there is less doctrinaire adherence to a party platform, and politicians may espouse an interesting mix of classically liberal and conservative beliefs and policies. As an example, the current PM Shinzo Abe is a right-wing hawk in foreign policy but a hands-on "big government" interventionist in fiscal policy. As a general rule, the L of LDP is a misnomer, as they are typically the more conservative party.

Shinzo Abe was appointed by the Diet as Japan's 57th Prime Minister in December 2012 after previously serving in the same role 2006-7 but resigning for health reasons. He is the scion of a prominent political family - most notably his maternal grandfather was a member of the infamous Tojo regime of World War II and was jailed as a war criminal in 1945 and then rehabilitated with the USA's blessing as an ardent anti-Communist 'Cold Warrior' and elected Prime Minister in 1957. Abe is a member of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) which currently holds the largest block of representation in the Diet. LDP is a bit of a misnomer as they are mostly on the moderate right. Abe stepped down in September of 2020, again for health reasons, and was succeeded by Yoshihide Suga who served for only a year largely because his response to the COVID-19 epidemic was judged inadequate. He was succeeded by Fumio Kishida, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defense. He describes himself as an ideological moderate though many would call him conservative. He is less hawkish compared to his predecessor 'Abe The Hawk' (who was brutally assassinated in July 2022 reportedly because of his ties to the Unification Church which the alleged assassin detested). Hailing from Hiroshima, Kishida is an advocate of limiting the development of further nuclear energy facilities. He considers himself a 'new capitalist' with emphasis on reducing income disparity. He continues the LDP's strong pro-USA alliance and implemented strong sanctions against Russia in 2022. He speaks fluent English, having spent his childhood in NYC as the son of a diplomat.

Legislative power is vested in the **National Diet**, which is analogous to Congress. The building they meet in in Tokyo is called the National Diet Building and is analogous to the U.S. Capitol Building. The Diet as a legislative body consists of the **House of Representatives** and the **House of Councillors**, analogous to the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate, respectively.

Judicial power is vested in the **Supreme Court** and lower courts. Although Japan is a constitutional

monarchy, it has a system of **civil law**.

The US developed and implemented Japan's post-war **Constitution** in **1947**, which replaced Japan's 1889 'Constitution of the Empire of the Japan' (aka "The Meiji Constitution"). It contains 103 articles organized into 11 chapters. Perhaps most famous is **Article 9, "The Renunciation of War,"** which has metonymically given Japan's entire constitution the nickname "Japan's Pacifist Constitution." Japan's constitution has never been amended - a movement to amend Article 9 was begun and spearheaded by the late PM Shinzo Abe (aka "Abe The Hawk") to allow deployment of Japan's very well-equipped Japanese Self Defense Force (JDSF) internationally. This is one of the most controversial issues in Japan today. It is without question a response to a rising and increasingly assertive China under Xi Jinping, China's most authoritarian and aggressive leader since Chairman Mao. Abe said it clearly in 2013: "I envision a resurgent Japan to counterbalance China." By all indications, the US is fully on board with that. North Korea's looming threat is also an important factor. The JDSF was only founded in 1954, and many considered it "unconstitutional" at the time. It has evolved into a potent *de facto* military force. Supporters of amending Article 9 say it is simply being honest - amending the Constitution to fit the reality. Detractors say it is a sad perversion of Japan's Pacifist Constitution. I would say there is validity to both assertions, but tipping the balance is the need to contain an extremely assertive China under Xi Jinping and a persistently bellicose North Korea.

Japan's first post-war elections were held in 1948. Japanese women were enfranchised for the first time ever. The LDP as we know it today was actually formed in 1955 from a merger of two like-minded parties, just as the major opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) has evolved from mergers of like-minded parties.

As a final note: Japan's true democracy demonstrates that the idea that "It is impossible to impose a democracy" is not true. Occupied Japan serves as a counter-example to occupied Iraq, where democracy did not and could not take root. Japan is a country with no democratic tradition, ever, yet emerged from occupation (which ended in 1952, except Okinawa, where it ended in 1972) with a durable functioning democracy. Japan's example shows it is not categorically impossible to implant and build a durable democracy where only autocracy pre-existed.

JAPAN'S POLITICAL SYSTEM, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons:

