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Changing Politics in Japan

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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