Political apathy in Japan:

A study on how Japanese political parties address youth

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Abstract

Political participation among Japanese youth has been on a steady decline since the peak of the major activist and protest movements of the 60s and 70s. Legislation, restrictions, and social realities have also contributed to the strained relationship between youth and politics. The past few decades have been characterized by mistrust and dishonesty as a result, affecting youths' willingness to participate politically. This thesis examined 4 political parties and their published material around the 2019 Lower House election to understand how they address youth. Through discourse analysis of the published material, three primary discourses surrounding youth were constructed to comprehend in what ways each party talked to and about youth, in the context of the political realities that have contributed to youths' decline in civil society. The analysis found that parties use different material and speech depending on if they talk to or about youth. Moreover, their speech contributed to discourse in various ways, where the JCP and CDP often emphasize youth as a hopeful but institutionally disadvantaged group, while the LDP and Kōmeitō constructed a picture of youth as means to state survival. All parties acknowledged the political apathy among youth, with different severity and reasoning behind it.

Keywords: Japan**,** Youth, Election, Political participation, Political apathy, Voter turnout, Discourse analysis, Discourse theory

Acknowledgments

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Abbreviations

CDP   Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan

CDA   Critical Discourse Analysis

DA   Discourse Analysis

JCP   Japanese Communist Party

JSP   Japan Socialist Party

LDP   Liberal Democratic Party

MIC   Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications

1. Introduction

October 31, 2021, marked the latest general election in Japan and turnout was one of the lowest in the post-war era at 55.93 percent (MIC). This pattern has been persistent in the past few decades, with declining interest and turnout for elections that rarely exceed 60 percent. Examining the turnout numbers more carefully, disparities can be observed when comparing turnout between different age groups. In the latest election, Japanese in their 60s had a 71.43 percent turnout, the highest among any age group. This would generally not be unusual by any means, but in the context of Japan, this number is considerably higher than the national average. The age group with the lowest voter turnout was people in their 20s at 36.50 percent (MIC).

There is a wide variety of research and explanations offered for this voter apathy among younger Japanese. One key aspect that I believe deserves more attention, is the role of political parties in addressing Japanese youth, which this thesis investigates. Specifically, how political parties are addressing youth through their website publications by analyzing discourse. By investigating this aspect, it is easier to not only understand how parties speak to youth but also put it into perspective with past research on political participation in Japan and historical contexts.

As a result, these are the research questions used to guide the thesis:

• How do political parties in Japan address young people on their websites?
o - What discourses surrounding youth are identified?

1.1 Academic contribution

The discourse of politically apathetic youth is reiterated not only by political parties in Japan but also in domestic and international media. It is an issue that is affecting Japan's democratic legitimacy internationally. By analyzing the speech and presentation of youth among political parties and connecting it to larger bodies of research and historical context, we obtain a better understanding of how all these elements work together in shaping the issue. It is not only valuable to understand Japan, but also to learn from Japan.

1.2 Disposition

The purpose and goal of the thesis are established in this introductory chapter, and the remainder of the thesis will be organized in the following manner: Chapter 2 provides

thorough research on political participation among youth in Japan and place it in a historical context. Chapter 3 outlines the applied theoretical framework. Thereafter, the methodological approach is detailed, and the operationalization of the method. The fifth chapter is the key body of research. Here, the analysis is presented. Chapter 6 is the discussion that will address the findings and results of the analysis, as well as conclude the study.

2. Research background and literature review

To contextualize the research and its positioning, existing research and literature are essential. Moreover, it is equally important to understand the context in which the discourses around youth exist. This chapter will proceed as followed; (1) A summary of the political parties that were chosen for the analysis, (2) the background and context of Japan's declining voter turnout and political participation among youth and the academic debates surrounding it, (3) challenges to political participation among youth from a societal and legal perspective.

2.1 Parties

To present what the political parties chosen for this research are and what they stand for, I introduce them to improve comprehension of the analysis.

2.1.1 The Japanese Communist Party

The JCP is the oldest still active political party in Japan, founded in 1922. The party was outlawed through the Peace Preservation Law of 1925 made to suppress socialists, communists and prevented criticism towards different aspects of society during the imperial era. It was legalized in 1945 after Japan was occupied by the U.S as a result of the Pacific War (Linkhoeva 2020:198-199; Kapur 2018:12). At the beginning of the post-war era, it settled for a peaceful position, proudly presenting itself as the party that fought Japanese militarism. However, disagreements within the party, led to its popularity dwindling. Since then, they have rebounded and established themselves as a peaceful party that aims to achieve revolution through democratic means. Their activities have focused on popular contemporary issues (Er 1996:365). Even so, the JCP is facing challenges regarding its image as a communist party that prevents further growth (Er 1996:373). The party is positioned as a left-wing democratic socialist party.

2.1.2 Kōmeitō

Kōmeitō was formed in 1964 by the religious organization *Soka Gakkai*, the largest Buddhist new religious organization in Japan. A separation between Kōmeitō and Soka Gakkai did not formalize until 1970 after a notice filed by the government due to Japan's constitutional separation of religion and state to avoid the risk of employing spiritual authority for political goals, previously done through state Shinto, a catalyst for maintaining imperial Japan's war apparatus. Even so, ties between Kōmeitō and Soka Gakkai remain close (Kabashima & Steel 2010:38; Klein & McLaughlin 2022:207; Naruse 2020:34-35).

Influence from Soka Gakkai is still visible in the party, Kōmeitō politicians are almost exclusively members of the organization, and the bureaucratic structure of the party almost mirrors that of Soka Gakkai. Moreover, their electoral mobilization is dependent on the help of Soka Gakkai. During elections, members are effective campaigners, often convincing fellow members to vote for Kōmeitō candidates, but also the allied LDP (Klein & McLaughlin 2022:203-212).

While originally a progressive party, it has become more aligned with the LDP, but there are still many liberal or even left-leaning propositions that differentiate them (Klein & McLaughlin 2022:204-211). As a result, their ideological positioning is considered moderate, if not slightly right-wing.

2.1.3 The Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan

The CDP is a new party initially founded in 2017 after a split with the former Democratic Party. The party relaunched under the same name in 2020 after a merger with lawmakers from other opposition parties. The CDP is the largest opposition party in the National Diet and is led by Kenta Izumi who took over in November 2021 after a lackluster performance in the election, despite attempts to field unified candidates with other opposition parties (Takiguchi 2021:1-4).

Its predecessor, the Democratic Party of Japan, ruled the country for a short period between 2009 and 2012. Support did however collapse after several policy missteps, including the handling of the 3/11 disaster (Koellner 2014:99-105). Ever since, the Japanese opposition has faced difficulties to recover, thus resuming LDP dominance in politics. The CDP is labeled as a liberal party, positioned near the center (Eunmi 2021:1-3).

2.1.4 The Liberal Democratic Party

The LDP formed in 1955 after a merger between conservative Japan Democratic Party and Liberal Party, to stave off the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) (Kabashima & Steel 2010:11). The merger was the beginning of LDP's dominating position in Japanese politics during the post-war era, referred to as the 1955 system, in which the party held uninterrupted control of the National Diet for decades. Through widespread clientelism and pork-barrel projects to obtain votes in rural areas in an increasingly urbanized society, the party managed to maintain support while also leading the country through its rapidly expanding economy in the post-war era (Kabashima & Steel 2010:40).

After the economic bubble burst and rows of corruption scandals, the LDP was ousted from power for the first time in 1993. Electoral reforms pushed by the new government in 1994 increased the difficulty to obtain a self-governing majority, so the LDP teamed up with Kōmeitō starting in 1999 (Metraux 1999:926). In 2009 the LDP, for the second time found itself out of office after its biggest electoral loss due to unpopular policy decisions and failures by the administration and its predecessors (Bader 2012:41-42). They regained power in 2012 and the LDP is now headed by Fumio Kishida, the current Prime Minister of Japan. The party is labeled as a conservative and nationalist party.

2.2 Voter "Apathy" and political participation

The declining voter turnout and participation in politics have been noted in research, Hirano (2012) points out that since the 70s, political participation and trust among all age groups have plummeted, especially among youth in their 20s who are the least likely to participate in any type of political activity. Meanwhile, people born during the war era and immediate postwar era are instead the most committed to civil movements. Political participation across all age groups was peaked at 75% in the early 70s before beginning its decline down to 56% seen in the latest election (Hirano 2012:144-145; MIC). Youth have not always been passive to politics, MIC's statistics show that voter turnout was almost twice as high among youth in 1969, a period with major student riots leading up to the *anpo*, or Security Treaty protests of 1970 (Hirano 2012:145; MIC).

As political participation has decreased following the treaty protests, people who grew up during the war are proven to be the most politically active. They were the result of growing discontent with the US presence in Japan because of what was considered a humiliating security treaty that formally ended the US-led occupation in 1952 (Miller 2019, 150-153). The treaty gave Japan subordinate independence, which allowed US troops to remain stationed and keep the islands of Okinawa. US forces were also permitted to thwart so-called "internal riots and disturbances". This treaty had no formal end date, and its implications started a growing protest movement (Kapur 2018:11-14).

The period leading up to the 1960 treaty renegotiation were trying times. Multiple incidents shook the nation, including the violent "Sunagawa protests" against an airbase expansion, the "lucky dragon" incident involving a group of Japanese fishermen caught in the aftermath of a US hydrogen bomb test, and multiple cases of recklessness among US servicemen against civilians, all the result of US military activity (Miller 2019:189-190). Then-Prime Minister

Nobusuke Kishi contributed to tensions through a series of missteps. This included the push to revise the Police Duties Law, giving police expanded ability to conduct warrantless search and seizures, to prepare against primarily left-wing protesters seen as a threat to the treaty negotiations. Kishi's past as a convicted war criminal from Japan's militarist rule also resulted in skepticism towards his true intentions (Kelman 2001:93-94; Miller 2019:200-202).

As a result of the 1952 treaty, renegotiation became urgent but was stalled by the opposition. The opposition preferred Japan to build its own path for the future in an escalating cold war environment instead of relying on the US (Kelman 2001:79-80). In 1960, Kishi decided to ram the treaty through the National Diet, which he deceivingly did during a vote to extend the diet session. An extension that faced fierce resistance from socialist lawmakers who tried to physically block the vote. The government ordered police to remove them from the building and proceeded with the vote, suddenly presenting and voting for the new treaty bill without warning. This sparked nationwide uproar not only from anti-treaty supporters but also citizens regardless of political beliefs and prior political engagement. This included other conservatives, dissatisfied with Kishi's undemocratic move to force the treaty through the diet by removing the opposition. Kishi eventually resigned, but protesters ultimately never obtained what they wanted (Kapur 2018:22-24; Miller 2019:207-210).

By 1970 it was time to reconsider the treaty, and protests ensued. While never reaching the heights of 1960, the years leading up to the ratification was embossed in primarily student-led protests. At this point, the continuous violent riots and protests by youth became a nuisance for the general public who started to sympathize with the police suppression. As a result, possibilities for political engagement became increasingly weak. Activists who hoped for the next big moment to push Japan in a progressive direction, saw the tides turn against them (Marotti 2009:134-135). Moreover, people were starting to accept the treaty, with hopes that Okinawa would return, which it did in 1971 (Kelman 2001:111-113).

2.2.1 Solidifying LDP rule

The decades after the security treaty protests became defining for the political status quo. Kishi's handling of the treaty issue led his successors to attempt new approaches to avoid unrest. Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda's strategy was a gentler and more patient approach toward the opposition, hoping to restore order in Japanese politics and the general public. As a result, he shelved key LDP goals such as constitutional revision (Kapur 2018:80-82; Miller 2019:249). Perhaps most importantly, his economic "National income doubling plan" became one of his largest achievements. The years following his premiership were periods of economic growth

and improved well-being for most Japanese, which shifted public interest away from ideological and national issues (Miller 2019:249-252).

The Japanese opposition began its decline during this time, structural reform became less attractive due to Japan's high economic growth, other parties sprung up and the LDP became a safer choice. The JSP which had been the biggest and most influential opposition party for years declined and became another party in a growing scale of opposition parties, all unable to compete with the well-established position of the LDP (Kapur 2018:125-128).

2.2.2 Recent developments

Japanese politics is still dependent on personal support groups for candidates through clientelism. The LDP's stronghold over politics has been maintained through pork-barrel projects for rural constituencies. The electoral system based on single non-transferable votes was beneficial for a big party like the LDP with many local support groups in rural areas. It benefitted rural voters who are disproportionately represented in the diet amid the population shift from rural to urban areas. The 90s opposition rule worked towards reform and added a proportional component in 1994 to alleviate some flaws of the old system that sustained the LDP's firm grip on government (Feldhoff 2017:132-133; Kabashima & Steel:39-43).

The tarnished reputation of politics and politicians is a well-explored topic. The uncovering of major political scandals and the mismanagement of the economic bubble in the 1990s was the first major incidents that led to regime change. Both oppositional governments also eroded the trust in the political system. Inexperience, flawed policy, and mishandling of major crises became their downfall. Political participation and voter turnout then fell to their lowest ever after a spike during the initial DPJ government of 2009 (Krauss et al 2017:21-22; Lukner & Sakaki 2017:9; MIC). A study by Hommerich (2012) showed that at this time, as many as 72% of surveyed Japanese did not trust the government and its institutions as result (Hommerich 2012:52-55).

Watanabe (2020) focused on the low turnout of the 2019 lower house election and reached similar conclusions. The failure of politics and politicians led to a sense of hopelessness among surveyed non-voters, who believed that there was no point in voting or that there were no viable alternatives to vote for (Watanabe 2020:42). Among people who voted, only 22%

believed that their vote would make an impact on politics. Even among the people who vote, trust is low in the current state of politics. Watanabe's study also found that 51% of survey takers did not sympathize with any party (Watanabe 2020:45-48). It was concluded that one of the major reasons for the low turnout was due to people not feeling that they made any significant impact on politics by voting (Watanabe 2020:53-54).

2.3 Youth perceptions of political participation

In 2015, the government revised the Public Offices Election Act, which allowed 18- and 19-year-olds to vote for the first time. There were expectations that this would reinvigorate youth participation, but ultimately, it did not make any considerable difference. Public opinion polls and newspaper articles suggest that there is a general lack of enthusiasm among youth to turn out for elections. Another factor that points to low voter turnout are paternalistic features of Japanese society where individuality is subjugated to different types of figures in society such as parents, schools, companies, and/or the government (Eldridge 2018:23; Sugimoto 2014, 30-31). For example, it was not a large youth movement that pushed for lowering the voting age, it was legislated on behalf of the government (Eldridge 2018:22-23).

2.3.1 Research

In 2015, the NHK polled people in their late teens and found that 74% of surveyed youth were dissatisfied with politics, 88% wanted politics to change and only 22% said that they would vote, with the rest being either hesitant or rejecting it. Interestingly though, 79% recognized that politics influenced their lives. This means that youth are aware of the importance of politics but decide not to participate in changing it (Eldridge 2018:25).

With waning interest to turn out for elections, it provides a domino effect as reflecting the opinions of youth become increasingly difficult, leading to lower turnout. Tsukada (2015) examined volunteering youth's perception of their political citizenship. Their impression of politics was negative or indifferent and participants often pointed to distrust, complexity, no interest, low political efficacy, exclusion, and scandal as the main factors of those feelings (Tsukada 2015). Hopelessness and inability to make any considerable change, concern about politics but lack of knowledge of how to participate and negative connotations associated with certain political activities such as demonstrations were attributed to those impressions (Tsukada 2015). Tsukada also noted that youth felt poorly prepared for politics and highlighted the lack of education curriculum and the grim representations of politics in media as a factor in apathy (Tsukada 2015).

Yoshida (2016) studied the perception of politics from high schoolers and suggested improvements. 90% of participants found themselves lacking education on political parties and how to participate in elections. Students felt that politics were important, but that it was troublesome to vote or that they were uninterested and that they did not comprehend the content of politics. Students wanted more ways to vote to simplify the process, especially through the internet, at school, or even at convenience stores. Students also noted that the process of absentee ballots was too confusing. 80% of students were also positive to have classes on politics, parties, and participation in school, to increase comprehension (Yoshida 2016:1-4).

Yoshida made comparisons to Sweden and noted advantages youth have compared to Japan. Focal points were the low age of eligibility of 18-years, the independent nature of parties' youth organizations with youth in similar age groups, mock elections at schools, and roleplay through debates in class to prepare and educate youth (Yoshida 2016:5).

Matsumoto (2020) examined intentions among students for the 2016, 2017, and 2019 elections. It found that the awareness of parties other than the LDP was low. Even after the 2019 election, only 28% of respondents knew about the main opposition party, the CDP. Other opposition parties were even lower (Matsumoto 2020:23). There are more studies available that reach similar conclusions to all the ones discussed so far, including Maeda & Shiozawa (2019), Takashima (2016) and Kanazawa City Election Commission (2018) to mention a few.

Youth might be aware of the importance of politics and want it to change, but when society, norms, and the political system are working against them, there is no real reason or motivation to engage politically. Next, let us examine specific constraints that prevent youth from engaging in politics.

2.4 Engaging youth

There is no quick solution to improve political participation among youth, the following subsections will look at research and constraints that discuss how the current systems prevent youth from reconnecting with politics.

2.4.1 Societal constraints

Studies by Takao (2009) and Umeda (2020) discuss the power of the so-called *dankai generation* or "baby boomers". They are the statistically most active participants in civil society. With the declining birthrate and the aging society, more than a quarter of the Japanese population are aged above 65. This means that the elderly is a large and still growing portion of voters. As a result, the needs of the vocal elderly generations will mean that the elderly will continue to play a larger role in politics. By 2050, 40% of Japan's population is expected to be above the age of 65 which means that in the long-term, the role of the elderly in civil society will grow. By 2040, half of all votes are estimated to be made by the elderly (Takao 2009:860-862; Umeda 2020:2-3).

The issue surrounding the elderly vote is urgent and is affecting the voices of youth. If politicians would take an approach less favorable to the elderly, they would be punished by the growing voter base, which is why elderly related policy is prioritized (Umeda 2020:19; Takao 2009:870-871). This reflects the opinions of youth in previous studies, who believe that there is no point in voting since politics does not represent them.

2.4.2 Legal constraints

There are several constraints to promoting political participation among youth. For this study, three major legal restrictions will be discussed.

First, the constitution applies age restrictions on eligibility. The minimum age for candidacy is 25 for the lower house and 30 for the upper house. These restrictions decrease the possibility for youth to participate in the diet, which correlates to the hopelessness regarding change and the lack of trust youth feel towards politics (Kamikubo 2019:11-12; Yoshida 2016:5). Furthermore, if a young person runs for office, regulations such as the obligatory 3-million-yen deposit fee make it difficult for young people to campaign (Lin 2017). Incumbent advantage is also problematic, where incumbent politicians tend to have strong local electoral mobilization and are considered more experienced and trustworthy if already held office (Feldhoff 2017:136).

Secondly, is the Public Offices Election Law, which govern Japan's elections (Jain 1995:404-411). Despite the 1994 electoral reforms, some strict rules were left intact. For instance, media advertisements are restricted to only a few public service announcements. Door-to-door campaigning is forbidden. Campaign posters must be set up on specific poster boards starting 12 days before the election, which is the official campaign period. Even before the campaign

period, no candidates are allowed to engage in election activities (Christensen 2014:38). These restrictions severely restrict information to voters and for new candidates. It is a disadvantage to all parties, new and small alike. In other words, youth who could benefit the most from freer and more coherent election campaigning are excluded (Christensen 2014:38-39).

Lastly, is the 1947 Basic Act on Education, which as quoted by Arai (2019) states that "political literacy is necessary for sensible citizenship", but that schools prescribed by law must "refrain from political education in favor of or against any specific political party, and from other political activities". As a result, the curriculum on citizenship and politics tends to be avoided to maintain neutrality in schools. This means that most Japanese youths are not learning about politics. Thus, hindering early access to civil society and political participation (Arai 2019:69-70). The law also mentions that youth are prohibited from participating in political activities in and outside of school. Moreover, young people are not able to join political organizations until the age of 18, which negatively impacts political awareness and participation (Arai 2019:70; Yoshida 2016:1-5).

Conclusively, many factors contribute to the decline in voter turnout and political participation among youth in Japan. This chapter has presented research and literature to understand the problems and their background to them. The context presented here will be key to understanding the themes and messaging of the analytical chapter.

3. Theoretical framework

This chapter gives an overview of the theoretical framework that guides this thesis. The framework is based on discourse theory, the combined theoretical and methodological approach for this study.

3.1 Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method

The key premise of *discourse analysis* (DA) is the analysis of patterns based on the actions people take within the boundaries of social life which language is structured upon. DA allows researchers to analyze the use of language and discourse to grasp larger contextual meanings behind language in texts from a specific actor that help us interpret the world (Hodges et al 2008:570; Gill 2000:173; Jørgensen & Phillips 2002:5).

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze documents published by four political parties to investigate how they address youth, by interpreting meanings in the texts within the context of what youth representation in Japanese politics looks like. As a result, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's DA framework was an obvious choice during the research process. The reason why I decided against using Norman Fairclough's *critical discourse analysis* (CDA) for this study was due to its heavier emphasis on linguistics, which would not be a problem if the corpus was in English. Furthermore, due to the large corpus required to be analyzed, it would not fit within the guidelines of the thesis. Instead, I decided to incorporate certain parts of CDA that the flexibility of Laclau and Mouffe's approach granted me, without contradicting its key foundations. DA is an effective and flexible method that works for any type of document and puts less emphasis on naturally-occurrences as compared to *content analysis* (Bryman 2016:531). This further reaffirmed the suitability of DA in this study. However, while DA contains a wide variety of concepts to tackle the analysis of discourse, this thesis focuses primarily on the approach presented by Laclau and Mouffe, which will henceforth be referred to as *discourse theory* as proposed by Jørgensen and Phillips (2000), to easily distinguish it.

3.1.1 Discourse

The term *discourse* is an essential component for DA. The approaches to DA are, however, based on different interpretations of discourse. For this study, I propose Laclau and Mouffe's definition, because discourse theory is the primary framework for this thesis. They explain the meaning of discourse as "The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice" (Laclau & Mouffe 2001:105). This can essentially be explained as the process of

communicative actions (such as speech, writing, or performance) that define meaning within society.

3.1.2 Key concepts of DA

The approach for this study is primarily discourse theory. However, I also want to detail Norman Fairclough's CDA, from which I will borrow concepts for my integrated approach to DA. Naturally, there are more directions to DA, but the ones applied in this study are the most crucial. While approaches contain different ontological and epistemological grounds, they all share a common view of language as means to create certain sets of patterns.

The reason why I chose discourse theory can be attributed to the affixation to linguistics compared to Michael Foucault's founding approach to DA for instance. Foucault's approach is narrowly focused on rules that create certain knowledge. Furthermore, common denominators are empathized rather than the differences, which is undesirable for this study (Jørgensen & Philips 2002, 13-14). Discourse theory on the other hand, is interested in how certain concepts attain status and how concepts shift about other concepts within a discourse. CDA differs in the sense that it breaks down the language in much further detail and discourse is more connected to ideology and change (Jørgensen & Phillips 2000:68-69).

3.2 Discourse theory

Discourse theory is based on the notion that discourse is constitutive, in other words, that discourse shapes and determines the world around us. All practices are considered discursive, meaning that everything can be used and interpreted in a social context. In discourse theory, the purpose of DA is intended to map processes where we determine the meaning of words or signs. (Laclau & Mouffe 2001:105-109).

This does not mean that discourse theory reduces everything to language, in fact, for Laclau and Mouffe, discourses are material. For example, Japanese youth are not simply linguistically referred to as a politically apathetic group of people with specific needs and wishes different from other groups. They are also constituted as a group in a material sense, with their own library sections, institutions such as universities, youth organizations, and so on. These features are thus part of the discourse surrounding youth in modern societies. (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002:32; Laclau & Mouffe 2001:108).

Contingency is one of the key pillars of discourse theory and implies that articulation, or everything social is contingent. This drives both the analytical and theoretical motors of the theory. By constantly looking at excluded contingencies, it is possible to pinpoint social

consequences of the socially discursive constructions. The fact that all social formations could be different does not mean that everything is constantly changing, or that the social sphere is shaped freely. The social sphere is always structured in a certain manner and both people and society are socially shaped (Laclau & Mouffe 2001:110-114).

3.2.1 Antagonism and hegemony

D*iscursive struggle* refers to the *antagonism* between discourses, because of the constant struggle over the creation of meaning. The struggle for meaning concludes once one discourse attains *hegemony*, thus reconstituting ambiguity (Laclau 1990:17; Laclau 1993:282). However, the hegemonic status is never permanent, as one single discourse cannot constitute a social sphere, new discourses are bound to eventually collide again because of the antagonistic relationship (Laclau 1993:281). It is important to note, that even though the struggle never ceases, there are temporary interruptions, otherwise, communication would be impossible since no common framework of interpretation or fixations of meaning would be in place (Laclau & Mouffe 2001:112).

Laclau and Mouffe interpret discourse as a fixation of the meaning of signs within a certain area, where the discourse is struggling to create meaning by removing any other meaning a sign contains. The signs are thoughts that a specific term is always under contestation due to discourse. This relationship can be further narrowed down to elements and moments. An *element* is a sign without a fixated meaning, yet to be decided in relation to other signs, in other words, ambiguous signs. A *moment* refers to a sign with meaning that is already designated within a specific discourse, a sign that battles for unambiguity. As a result of constantly changing meaning, there is a continuous shift between moment and element (Laclau & Mouffe 2001:105). Elements that are especially susceptible to meaning in discourses are known as *floating signifiers* (Laclau 1990:28; Laclau 1993:287).

Nodal points are signs that contain significant meaning because other signs are given meaning in relation to a nodal point within any given discourse. For example, within the discourse of Japanese youth's disinterest in politics, gerontocracy could be a nodal point, that gives meaning to other signs such as election turnout and political apathy. Nodal points can have different meanings depending on what discourses they appear in and what signs surround them, the meaning itself comes through the process of *articulation,* a "practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice". The way the nodal points are organized, and thus the discourse, one can ascertain

by identifying *chains of equivalence*, which explains how elements are associated with other characters that give them content (Laclau & Mouffe 2001:105).

3.2.2 Identity and group formation

Discourse theory implies both individual and collective identity are organized according to the same principles in the same discursive processes, just like language (Jørgensen & Phillips 2000, 48). Identities are adopted, assigned to, and negotiated through discursive processes; thus, identity is perceived as something social. The individual, as well as the group, are created by the discourses (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002:51; Smith 1998:56). Group formation constitutes a reduction of possibilities in which people are identified as both what they are and are not. The positivity of being dominates the totality of the discourse (Laclau & Mouffe 2001:128).

Identity, just like language and actions, is constituted discursively through *chains of equivalence* where a subject's identity is defined partly by what one is and partly by exclusion from what you are not. The chain can consist of positive as well as negative signs and elements, it functions as a tool for organizing and interpreting various means to express identity, both collectively and individually (Hall 1997:18-19; Silverman 1985:66-68; Jørgensen & Phillips 2000:52).

The equivalence chains gather around a nodal point or *master significant*, which is when one allows oneself to be *represented* by the nodal point and its surrounding meanings as one acquires an identity. Groups do not exist in the social sphere until they have been expressed in language, which is implied through representation (Jørgensen & Phillips 2000:52-53; Hall 1996:4-5).

Identity is a constantly shifting object because so is the relationship between discourses. There is an infinite number of *subject positions* that form identity. Subject positions are the social roles within discourses that individuals are assigned to or adopt. Subject positions are not fixated nor contested, but multiple social roles can be possessed simultaneously. An individual such as a student can also occupy the role of a sibling, club member, and politically active person. All these subject positions are all structured in position to each other, which establishes identity. Subjects are decided by discourse and can be featured in multiple discourses at once in different quantities. Students can also be voters in a general election for example (Laclau & Mouffe 2000:115; Jørgensen & Phillips 2000:48-52).

4. Methodological approach

This chapter presents the methodology employed to answer my research questions. I first briefly discuss my research design before clarifying my ontological and epistemological positioning. The methodological approach is then discussed before I introduce and elaborate on my process of data collection. Lastly, I finish the chapter looking critically at the method process while discussing limitations, ethical considerations, and reflexivity.

4.1 Research design

The foundation of the study is based on qualitative research and features an inductive approach. The framework of DA is qualitative in nature and is the combined theoretical and methodological approach for the research. Naturally, other means of analysis were considered, mainly content analysis. However, since the goal of my research is to analyze the texts provided by the websites of the main political parties in Japan, content analysis is less suitable due to its deeper orientation and emphasis on quantification (Bryman 2016:284). Thus, by selecting DA, my research is allowed greater freedom surrounding the interpretation of the corpus (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002:76). Moreover, the language and discourse-oriented nature of this study would be difficult to replicate through other means. Therefore, the choice of methodology was based on careful deliberation by putting different methodological frameworks against each other.

4.2 Ontological and epistemological positioning

The ontological and epistemological positioning of qualitative and quantitative research play a significant role in determining the path of research. First, qualitative research often embodies a view of social reality as a constantly shifting emergent property of individuals' creation. Meanwhile, quantitative research usually embodies a view of social reality as an external, objective reality. (Bryman 2016:33).

In this study, qualitative research was deemed most appropriate for these reasons. The interpretivist and constructivist epistemological and respectively ontological positionalities embedded within qualitative research are optimal. Constructivism implies that the reality around us is shaped by social properties, or in this study's case, the social properties of texts addressing youth, but it also suits the language and discourse-based reality of the thesis. An objectivist standpoint often employed in quantitative research would imply the opposite, that realities are pre-determined, which is why I argue that a constructivist standpoint is better. Finally, the interpretivist epistemological positioning that I embrace for this research value the

understanding of our social reality by examining and interpreting reality through texts and documents from the different political parties (Bryman 2016:375). Considering that the primary goal of the thesis is to explore, interpret and understand political texts, an inductive approach is employed since the data guide me to unravel discourses, behavioral patterns, realities, and themes that help me form a conclusion.

4.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

The following section briefly summarize key points of CDA as described by Norman Fairclough, with emphasis on what will be employed in the study.

CDA is another tool to look at language and discourse. Its main concern is to study the relationship between the use of language and social practice. Fairclough's approach is especially interested in studying *change*, which he does through *intertextuality*. As a result, his method is largely based on text analysis of language use in social interactions (Fairclough 2003:39-41).

Fairclough's CDA is built on a three-dimensional model to analyze the use of language in communicative events. The analysis first focuses on the linguistic features of the text, referred to as *text*¸secondly, on processes relating to the production and consumption of the text called, *discursive practice*; and finally, the wider social practice to which the communicative event belongs, known as *social practice* (Fairclough 1992:73). Consequently, to conduct CDA, all these dimensions must be analyzed.

The term *order of discourse* was coined by Fairclough. He believes that DA oscillates between a focus on texts and order of discourse. Order of discourse is a network of social practices in its language aspect. The elements of an order of discourse consisting of discourses, genres, and styles. To clarify, genre refers to the language associated with a particular social practice (Fairclough 2003:24-25). Furthermore, the elements contribute to the selection of possibilities defined by languages and exclude others so that they can determine linguistic variability for different areas of social life. Orders of discourse can be seen as the social organization and control of linguistic variation. It controls what can be said and cannot be said, which determines the discourse. This also implies the reproduction of subject positions (Fairclough 2003:24). Order of discourse thus essentially implies situations where multiple discourses are trying to establish themselves within one terrain. For this study, the order of discourse would constitute the field of youth in politics.

4.4 Operationalization of DA

Laclau and Mouffe offer no concrete method for how DA is conducted and is primarily a theoretical concept. They are open-ended as how to conduct DA, which means that DA is a flexible theoretical as well as a methodological approach.

For this study, I drew inspiration from the approach that Marianne Winther Jørgensen and Louise Phillips propose in their book *Discourse analysis as theory and method*. They propose an integrated perspective that borrows concepts from multiple branches of DA. Their insight gave me ideas to make both CDA and DA become effective tools for this study (Jørgensen & Phillips 2000:57).

The definition of discourse is based on discourse theory, in which discourses are exclusively constitutive. Furthermore, its concept of hegemony will also be applied, where antagonistic discursive relationships will be recognized throughout the data analysis. Subject positions identified throughout the data will contribute to chains of equivalence that construct the discourses. From Fairclough, I will borrow his concept of order of discourse to analyze how discourses attempt to establish hegemony surrounding youth.

For the analysis, I first performed close reading of the data. I looked for elements or definitions that constitute "youth", the nodal point, and floating signifier. To construct and understand the discourses, I must understand the meanings embedded within the text, but also meanings that are indirectly connected to the text. This allowed me to create categories, or new nodal points based on frequency and related topics. For instance, the category "politics" was created as a result of the frequency of youth mentioned in relation to politics and topics that gave meaning to youth in politics. This enabled me to look closer at specific examples that formed each party's approach to addressing youth within a set category. Moreover, it also revealed specific subject positions that helped build equivalence chains, which gave meaning to and constructed discourses. By comparing different meanings that constructed the discourses across the parties, antagonistic relationships were highlighted to further understand how youth were addressed by each party in relation to one another.

4.5 Data collection

The data for this research are documents sourced from the websites of four political with seats in both chambers of the National Diet, the legislative body of Japan. The "documents" I refer to are defined as material that can be read, while not specifically meant for research (Bryman

2016:546). In this case, they are a variety of articles, transcripts, manifestos, pamphlets, and press statements, published by the political parties and publicly available on their websites. The documents were both downloaded to a hard drive and saved to the internet archive to preserve them.

The choice of documents was based on mentions of certain keywords that determined their relevancy. This study primarily focuses on how youth are addressed by political parties, which meant that I searched for documents that mentioned youth or issues related to youth through the available archives featured on each of the websites. The keywords were different synonyms of "youth" such as *wakamono*, *jakunensou*, *seinen*, *wakate*, and *wakai sedai*.

Initially, the documents amounted a few hundred. The focus narrowed to look in detail at a limited number of documents spread over a specific period. Therefore, selected documents were published no sooner than one month before and after the most recent election on October 31, 2021, amounting to 25 documents for each party. There are three factors for this decision. One is Japan's short election campaigning cycles, officially starting no sooner than 12 days before the election (Christensen 2014:38). The second factor is due to the election for the House of Councillors set for July 2022. I believe this could mean that documents will be just as interesting both pre-and post-election. Finally, the appointment of Fumio Kishida as Prime Minister on October 4th, approximately one month before the election, shifting the focus of the opposition. There are admittedly exceptions, primarily those of manifestos and pamphlets that are usually published further in advance. They are relevant since they summarize valuable political positions and messaging to the entire population, including youth. Furthermore, certain parties did not offer enough valuable data within the set timeframe, which required me to sample some newer and older data. In those instances, I guaranteed that documents were published close to the election. Ultimately, this did not make any impact on the analysis.

The choice of political parties was also based on specific conditions. I decided to choose four with seats in both chambers of the National Diet. The selection of parties is based on a few factors. First, to delimitate the topic, including all of them would be unrealistic. Secondly, data on websites of some parties was scarce, where updates were only most frequent right before the election. Finally, the ideological aspect. I chose a variation of parties that are somewhat ideologically different from each other, as I believed it would provide varied data to compare. In the diet, some parties are quite close both ideologically and politically. Rather

than reiterating identical points, I believed that it was more valuable to look at different perspectives.

By placing parties on a political spectrum, I chose parties that are different from each other, to create a valuable corpus. In the figure below, I have illustrated an ideological spectrum inspired by Hans Eysenck's work on political attitudes in *Sense and Nonsense in Psychology* (1957), to approximately position the chosen parties (Eysenck 1957:281). The diagram is altered to suit the topic by switching the parameters for more suitable alternatives. In this spectrum, the x-axis represents progressiveness on the left and conservatism on the right. Meanwhile, the y-axis represents authoritarianism from the top and libertarianism at the bottom.
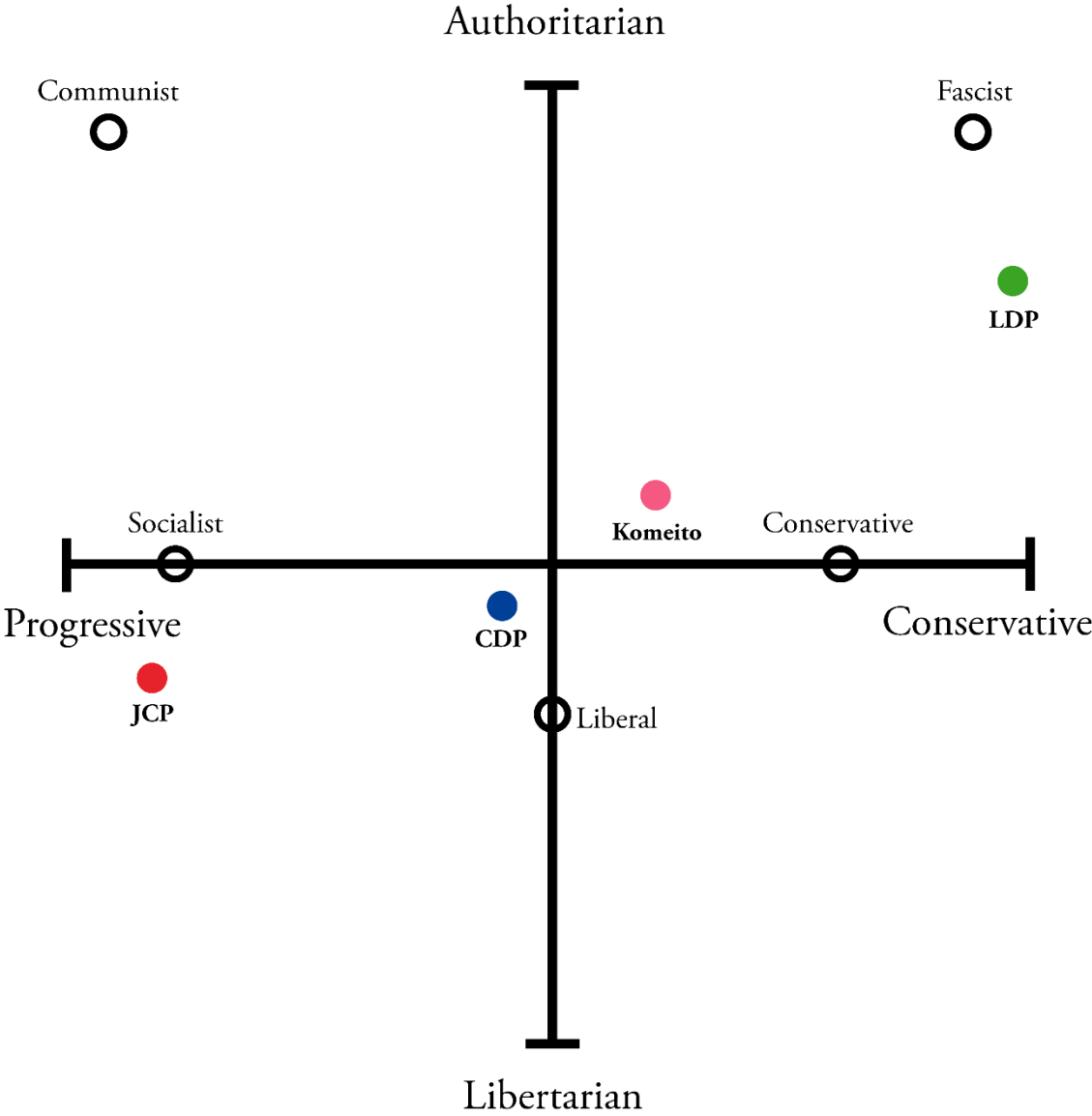
Eysenck's reworked ideological spectrum

My investigation ended with four candidates, the right-wing conservative and nationalist LDP, the center liberal CDP, the left-wing democratic socialist JCP, and the moderate right-wing Kōmeitō.

4.6 Limitations, ethical considerations, and reflexivity

This section discusses considerations throughout the process of conducting and preparing this research. Primarily, I will focus on noting flaws and risks of the study, as well as present solutions. General limitations will be outlined, followed by ethical considerations and finally reflexivity in the production of knowledge.

One frequent limitation of this type of study is language. I am a non-native speaker of Japanese. As a result, this can influence the quality of translations and ability to understand the documents and their contents accurately. Due to the limited data provided in English, alternatives were few. As a response to this concern, links to the internet archive are featured in the appendix for each document when applicable, for transparency with the material and allow readers to examine if needed.

Documents that I use as references are publicly accessible. Therefore, ethical considerations are more relevant in relation to the integrity and quality of the material, since if the production of knowledge is lacking in terms of quality, it cannot be considered ethical research (Bryman 2016:134-136).

For reflexivity, I reflect on values and personal biases tied to the generation of knowledge. Researchers must display sensitivity to their political, cultural, and social backgrounds and their potential to generate knowledge. Throughout the thesis, I interpret the language used by political parties to address youth, which I reflect upon to understand their perspectives. Personal biases and values based on my Swedish background can impact research as well as the data that I interpret. By acknowledging my background and biases, I avoid critical distortions throughout my work. Since I am investigating politics and language concerning youth, personal politics and western normativity as a result of my background must not negatively influence my choices and arguments, which I am aware of.

5. Analysis

This chapter details data and analyzes its contents. To understand how youth are addressed, discourses must be identified by finding topics associated with youth as attributes and elements that formalize the subject positions that guide the chains of equivalence. With youth as a nodal point and floating significant, it is given meaning through certain words, topics, and attributes. This has provided categories that are given meaning through what is written about them. These are the relations this chapter aims to clarify to make critical discussion and conclusions surrounding how political parties address youth in Japan.

5.1 LDP

Among the 25 documents analyzed from the LDP, the majority were shorter press statement and announcements published primarily by the party's youth organization, presumably targeted toward youth. The rest consisted of reports and transcribed speeches and summaries from the diet with a few exceptions that mentioned or talked about youth in different contexts. The dataset also includes pamphlets and manifesto that focus primarily on policies for the election but also comics targeted toward youth. Due to the nature of press releases and press statements, it was challenging to salvage valuable data from those documents. Various political issues were connected to youth, these primarily consisted of child-rearing and declining birthrate, wages, job, and job security, safety, innovation, phone bills, and education. Not all of these were equally common, which is why I emphasize the most recurring by organizing them into categories.

5.1.1 Social-economic issues

In many documents, discussions around youth were directly associated with social-economic issues such as the birthrate. Family is one aspect of LDP's speech that is recurring, whether it is policy related to child-rearing, the birthrate, or children. For the 2021 election, the LDP pushed their new capitalism policy as one of their most important economic reforms, and its focus on wealth distribution also seeped into the issue of child-rearing in order to improve the birthrate.

> Regarding the expansion of the middle class and the declining birthrate, we will strengthen the distribution function by the government to increase the income of the middle class (LDP 1).

> As we face an era with 100-year life expectancy, we will promote social security measures that include all generations, from children to the child-rearing generation and the elderly (LDP 2).

Above quotes come from speeches made by Prime Minister Kishida, in which he detailed plans surrounding the new capitalism plan. In these speeches, youth were interestingly not addressed as youth, but rather as the "child-rearing generation" and emphasis was placed on policy that would enhance youths' possibilities to raise children. This gave the impression that youth are expected to raise children while acknowledging the economic burdens that youth are facing that prevent them raising kids. Following quote is from an unnamed representative of the youth wing.

> Japan is facing an aging society and declining birthrate, but it is the people in their 10s and 20s who will be responsible for shouldering that future. Through your rights to vote earlier, I hope that you will be conscious of your responsibilities towards society while young so that you can become invested in politics (LDP 20).

Youth are not only expected to take responsibility for the declining birthrate and the aging society, but to be active participants in civil society to do so. Youth are portrayed as inactive, but still important and are expected to take matters into their own hands, pressured by the LDP and their goals. The theme of birthrate is given meaning through the elements of responsibility, child-rearing, income, middle class, and social security in relation to youth. For Japan to sustain the lives of all generations, youth are expected to bear and nurse children for the sake of the nation. What is interesting to note, is that among the 11 documents identified as specifically targeted toward youth, issues surrounding child-rearing and birthrate were only mentioned in two of the documents, meaning that the LDP rather spoke about the issue of the birthrate when talking about youth, rather than to them. This could indicate that the LDP does not think that talking about the birthrate is an effective method of addressing youth, despite being an important issue for the party.

The LDP's "new capitalism" policy, which was recurringly reflected in the material did not only point to the birthrate but also income, jobs, and distribution. Prime Minister Kishida put it like this:

> My goal is to realize new capitalism. I would like to aim toward a new economic and social vision to clear a path for the future of our nation. In addition, we aim to create a

society in which everyone, young people, elderly people, people with disabilities, and women, can feel motivated and where diversity is respected (LDP 1).

Youth are considered an essential part of this policy shift and an integral part of the economy since contents are closely related to issues that affect youth. The LDP knows that the people most affected by economic inequality are youth who often work in low-wage irregular job types. However, youth alone are rarely addressed in relation to these issues, rather it is the collective problem of "all generations". The focus was placed on the difficulty among job-seeking youth and their responsibility to contribute to the economy and the nation, which is especially clear through a comment by Sanae Takaichi, an LDP lawmaker.

> [youth] will fulfill their responsibilities through creating a strong economy and beautiful nation for the future (LDP 11).

Chapter 7 of the youth wing's political manga *Kuni ni todoke* "Delivery to the country", economic issues are relegated to an almost comical level and were one of few documents targeted specifically towards youth concerning the economy. The manga is about students who experience politics in their everyday lives. In this chapter, one of the students, Asuka, complained about mobile data fees because, during the pandemic, she mostly does video calls to meet her friends. The LDP has seemingly very specific methods to attract the attention of youth by pointing at niche policy closely correlated to youth's modern SNS and internet-connected lifestyles and does it through a medium targeted towards youth. It gives an impression of youth as childish and uninterested in larger economic issues. The manga also makes youth look uneducated and inexperienced when Asuka referred to former Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide as "the Reiwa-man" (Suga announced the new imperial "Reiwa" era in 2019). It highlights the lack of political education that was also reiterated in the research material. Below I cite the manga example.

> We don't have Wi-Fi at home and because the mobile data fee is high, mom told me to use less.
> Asuka, your troubles might soon come to an end!
> Eh, why?
> The Prime Minister said he would make phone bills cheaper.
>
> The Reiwa-man right?
>
> (LDP 18)

While the LDP does point to youth in economic terms, they are often collectively grouped with all of society. Child-rearing was brought up as a related topic where the economic situation of youth hinders them from raising children. Takaichi's comment was also interesting, as it built a similar narrative as the documents on birthrate. The burden and responsibility placed on youth in other to improve the economy and create a great nation (in which childbirth is implied). This narrative was never mentioned when speaking directly to youth in documents, instead, documents like the manga was an example of how youth were addressed regarding economic issues.

Students are interchangeable with youth are often active students and perceived as such. While the LDP does not provide much deeper discussions about students. They did interestingly emphasize what type of education to be provided to them. Here, the LDP was noticeably biased towards research and data science and reiterated the need to support youth interested in these areas. IT has even been used as an example when speaking about youth seeking a low-wage job right out of university (LDP 4).

> In other to break the blockage within the field of science and technology that Japan is facing, we will implement a 10 trillion-yen university fund. Research and administration will be assigned nearby to create an environment where excellent young researchers can concentrate (LDP 7).

> Nevertheless, it is very important for you to study hard for the future of Japan. 28 Nobel Prize winners were born in Japan. We will create an environment where curious children can study and do research. We even hope that some of you will win the Nobel Prize. The LDP will firmly protect your school life and make you want to learn more at school for the sake of your wonderful futures (LDP 9).

The focus on students was lacking, even in the youth organization's documents. The LDP has rather emphasized the type of education preferred by the party for the sake of the future. Motivating youth to become the next Nobel Prize winner and seeking education in research. While issues surrounding students were present in the short-term, they were outweighed by the focus on more positive connotations. This gave off an impression that the LDP has once again high expectations of youth because they prefer youth to seek specific jobs, education

and placed faith in them as leaders for the future who will make the country greater. Youth's choice in education determines the well-being of the nation.

These documents also gave the impression of youth as a vulnerable group in need of support to create a prosperous nation. Simultaneously, an uneven relationship with the older generation is noticed, because youth, or the "child-rearing generation" are expected to enter the workforce and be provided better wages to not only raise children but also improve social safety nets for "every generation". Moreover, youth are expected to take responsibility for the economy and lead the nation into the future by educating themselves in specific areas such as IT and science. Narratives that were practically unaccounted for in material targeted specifically towards youth. Recurring elements within this category included "new capitalism", "job-hunting" "income" "birthrate" "research", "science", "technology", "growth", "society" and "nation".

5.1.2 Politics

Politics was frequently brought up in combination with youth and was frequent among the documents published by the youth wing. In this category, I look closely at how youth are perceived in terms of politics, this includes political participation which has been a key point throughout this thesis. First, lets us examine how Kishida talked about political representation:

> Like I have promised many times, I will hold polite talks to reflect your voice in policy. For that reason, we will continue to hold dialogues. Going forward, we will continue to visit and listen to people around the country to think about and realize policy. Based on this dialogue, we will create a society where youth, elderly, disabled, men and women can feel motivated (LDP 9).

Kishida implied that there is a lack of trust in politics among people, including youth. It reaffirms the issue of declining political participation and lack of trust in politics brought up in research. This position is further reinforced in relation to youth when analyzing the articles published by the youth organization, in which political participation among youth was a focal point. The following quotes represent a sample of what the youth wing had to say about political participation.

> Youth bureau President Ogura strongly said, 'I want to strengthen the bonds with the student department. What does each one of you want to improve with your lives? I

want youth to raise their voices regarding what they expect from the future of Japan'
(LDP 15).

[Suga] You may feel politics is frustrating and sluggish, I want to respond to the
thoughts of youth and solve problems swiftly (LDP 17).

The youth organization regularly speaks to youth about the importance of political
participation and points somewhat to the lack of trust. They are addressed as hopeful figures
with the ability to change the future but confirm their lack of enthusiasm for politics. There is
also a notion of expectation placed on youth to participate for the future of the country. Here
we can tie back into the earlier conclusions, in which youth are expected to be involved in
politics for the sake of the future of a nation with a declining birthrate. The other manga
targeted towards youth further reinforces youth disinterest in politics. Let us look at an
example from it.

Election huh? Well, I am busy and where would I even go?

Afterward, an old man from the future shows up who pleads that she should vote to make sure
that the "cat ear party" who got into power and forced everyone to wear cat ears does not win.

Something like that would never happen in the future. How would it even become like
that?

Because you didn't vote!

Wait, it is my fault?

The difference of one vote can change the outcome!

After the worst has happened it is too late to look back and say it was better before.

The comic proceeds to illustrate how to vote and later how to do absentee ballots because the
youth had not changed their official residence and in the other example, she had other plans
on election day. The youth was portrayed as nonchalant and uninterested concerning politics,
a bit stupid even throughout the entire comic. In the final scenario, it turns out the youth even
failed to cast her ballot, thus not changing the future for the old man.

Hmm... Strange. You voted, so the cat ears should be gone now because history
should have changed

Oops, I forgot to verify my identity (LDP 16).

While the comic does give a sense of empowerment to the youth who eventually believes she has the power to change the future, it must be noted that the absurdity of the comic, the simple 4-koma format and its basic art style gives off an impression of the youth as inexperienced, childish, stupid and lazy. Moreover, it is interesting to point out the gender aspect of the comic, because statistically, Japanese women are less likely to vote than men, which implies inexperience and lack of knowledge in politics among women (MIC).

For this category, it was possible to see how political apathy played a role in the messaging. The LDP was aware of this and did not hesitate to talk about the importance of the "voices of youth" in politics. They addressed the lack of trust in politics that most youths feel and promised to correct it. Meanwhile, the party used unconventional ways to address youth in their manga. For example, while likely supposed to be educational, they came off as rude in relation to how youth were portrayed. Recurring elements included "election", "participation", "trust", "hope", "future", "inexperience", "childish", and "uneducated".

5.2 CDP

The 25 documents from the CDP primarily consist of speech transcripts and interviews from their campaigning, with only a few news briefings and policy summaries. The corpus included few articles published by the youth wing, because most did not match the criteria for the data collection. The manifesto is also included in the analysis. For the CDP the most prevalent topics related to youth were political participation, climate, work issues, LGBTQ, gender, and education. The material was also focused on direct solutions to different problems regarding youth and pointing out issues at multiple levels of society. Let us examine the categories based on the most recurring talking points concerning youth.

5.2.1 Social-economic status

This category is broad because it includes everything from work-related issues, education, equality, and so on. This is because, in CDPs messaging, all these issues were strongly correlated and frequently appeared together when addressing youth. The following document spoke about youth in relation to climate as a result of policy recommendations from the "Japan Climate Youth Conference", a conference where different youth organizations discuss climate.

> We received a recommendation from the Japan Climate Youth Conference that holds
> policy discussions with each party to reflect the voices of youth in politics [...] 'We

cannot go on like this', 'We cannot have it like this' when people have this sense of impending crisis, they act. When young people stand up, older people who do not are embarrassed. The mobilization of youth is extremely important' (CDP 1).

This document pointed out the importance of youth in addressing climate change and implied the lack of political participation among youth. Youth are addressed as people with the power to deal with climate if they make themselves heard.

The issue around the economic status and declining birthrate is also important for the CDP, who speak about youth as hope, but address youth as disadvantaged from the outset. They point out the lack of systems that support youth, and the low wages that hold them back. They also take jabs at the LDP's "new capitalism". Let us look at an example of how the CDP address this issue.

> It may be too late already to do anything about it, but the declining birthrate is still one of the most serious problems. We need a society where young people can raise children even without having to fall in love or marry. If we can do that, Japan's low wages, unstimulated regional economies, and national power that has declined to the point of almost becoming a third-class country will be able to recover. The CDP wants an economic policy that makes everyone happy. It should not be 'no distribution without growth', rather 'no growth without distribution' (CDP 4).

Youth were also addressed in relation to education when speaking about economic issues, providing a better picture of how everything is involved.

> It is becoming more expensive with private and national schools. "Without student loans, it is difficult to go on to higher education. Once you graduate, you will be millions in debt" "We want to change this. If given the chance, we want to create a society where people can learn without worrying about money." To meet those goals, candidate Okamoto Akiko said she would half the tuition fees of private and public universities and increase the number of scholarships given to those going on to higher education (CDP 13).

There are certainly many different issues brought up and connected to youth, the most recurring ones are related to child-rearing, wages, education, climate change, and equality. All these issues are pointed to as intersectional and affect each other in different ways. Furthermore, youth are addressed as a powerful voice, but also an exposed group of people held back from the very beginning. They are addressed as a group who lack supportive systems and who lack the finances to follow their hopes and dreams (including having children) as a result of the lacking focus on youth. Meanwhile, they also point fingers at the government and the LDP as a core cause of these issues. Prevalent elements in this section were "work", "wage", "inequality", "birthrate", "loan", and "climate".

5.2.2 Politics

The topic of politics concerning youth was interesting to look at in the sense that it accurately reflected much of the problems that were addressed in the background section for this thesis. It was frequently discussed not only in articles from the youth-wing but across the documents from the entire website.

> [Arai Atsushi] He pointed out that young people "have no expectations from politics, which I want to change. [...] Sugiyama surveyed the younger generation's interest in politics. The survey concluded that "youth believe that there is a strong connection between life and politics". On the other hand, "Young people have little experience in politics, so I would like to increase opportunities for political participation" (CDP 2).

Above, exemplifies a situation where the CDP talks about youth and discusses a survey with similar results discussed in research, namely the lack of trust and expectations in politics, but also the importance of politics. Furthermore, the youth organization, often published documents of this nature, addressing the lack of trust among youth. Legal constraints surrounding political participation among youth were also a common discussion in that data. Here is one example.

> Yuki Murohashi, the representative director of the Japan Youth Conference, announced the "Request for "Basic Law for Promotion of Youth Political Participation" Since the voting age was lowered to 18 years in 2015, the voter turnout of young people is still low despite various efforts such as the implementation of sovereign education, and community activities. Political participation other than voting, such as social movements, is also low compared to other countries. As a result,

discussions around issues such as education and social security that will greatly affect future generations are few. The voices of young people are not reflected in the political arena. Since the Ministry of Education issued a notice in 1969 that it is not desirable for high school students to be involved in political activities as individuals, "depoliticization" has continued for many years, and many issues have been left behind. They explained that it is necessary to formulate the "Basic Law for Promotion of Youth Political Participation" that clarifies the promotion system along with the responsibilities of the national and local governments regarding the political participation of young people (CDP 7).

The CDP is vocal about youth's rights to participate in politics. Not only do they address general opinions on youth and politics such as the lack of trust and hopelessness that have been a contributor to the lack of political participation, but they also mentioned the perceived importance of politics among youth. They addressed youth issues directly but did also refer to solutions to these problems and law proposals that would improve youth participation in politics, such as political education, support for youth who run for office, lowered age of eligibility, and deposit removals. Proposals and issues reflected in earlier research.

The CDP's approach to youth is interesting, being an opposition party, they are keen to point out problems of the current government. Youth are addressed as a group with the potential and power to make a difference for themselves and all of society by being more politically active and removing the LDP government. The CDP acknowledges that youth participation is low, to some extent reasons why and presents concrete proposals to solve those issues in an easy-to-understand manner.

Meanwhile, CDP tries to gain sympathy from youth by centralizing focus around topics that they believe youth are supporting, such as LGBTQ rights, gender equality, climate change, economic inequality, and welfare, highlighting the negative consequences of not improving these areas in relation youth and their-wellbeing. The means of addressing youth were also important, by using interviews and speeches as the main source of communicating their message, gave the impression of the party as candid and direct. The youth wing often posted interviews and speeches held at youth meetings with youth, making them seem interested in younger generations.

As a result, their material showed how youth are addressed as a "vulnerable" group of people with a variety of urgent needs that are institutionally "disadvantaged" in politics.

Simultaneously, youth are defined as "hope" through defeating the LDP, developing politics and participation while improving all of society as a result.

5.3 Kōmeitō

The documents from Kōmeitō consisted to a large extent of press statements, but also shorter news articles and some policy documents. Kōmeitō recently started their youth organization, which published documents on the website that were quite different from the rest, with a larger focus on articles that discussed issues related to youth. This is also where I found the only interviews in the Kōmeitō corpus. Regarding youth, Kōmeitō focused primarily on issues such as mental health, political participation, income, tuition fees, welfare, and child-rearing.

5.3.1 Social-economic status

Kōmeitō's message regarding young is heavily focused on social-economic issues. Low wages and different welfare support systems are strong focal points in documents about and targeting youth.

> [Kōmeitō] announced their aim for a symbiotic society where young people, students, and women shine, by increasing the minimum wage among other things. Regrading youth and women support measures, Yamaguchi said 'It is Kōmeitō's unique role to address the weak points in the efforts of the government and the ruling party' (Kōmeitō 1).

Kōmeitō regularly implies that they are the party in government that addresses the faults of its senior coalition party, the LDP. They position themselves as the party that listens and works in favor of the smaller voices in society, such as youth. Compared to the LDP, Kōmeitō emphasizes that more needs to be done to support youth, especially in economic terms where youth are considered vulnerable. This includes education, which Kōmeitō spoke a sizeable amount about.

> For higher education such as universities, free of charge grants, student loans, tuition reductions, and exemptions currently targeted for households with an annual income of less than 3.8 million yen will be gradually expanded to households with an annual income of less than 5.9 million yen" (Kōmeitō 8).

Youth in education are addressed as an exposed group of people, who sometimes lack the finances to fulfill or enter higher education. Although, measures were only targeted to a few

select youths of specific income levels. In fact, by reading various documents from Kōmeitō, I discovered that while they talk about youth as vulnerable financially, their narrative implies that because they are in the government, most people have it well, but that they want to increase support for specific groups of working-class and middle-class people, such as youth. One unique trait of Kōmeitō was the strong focus on mental health when addressing youth. Following is an exert from an interview with the president of Kōmeitō's youth organization, Miura Shinsuke.

> We must take the increased suicides of young people seriously, especially working women, due to corona. Debating whether it is an economic issue or a communication issue, it must be dealt with when something goes wrong. It is important to have a society where people can notice and support these people. Through the mental health self-check program "KOKOROBO" and the training of "spirit supporters" to support those who are troubled, we will fulfill our responsibility to protect the lives of people (Komeito 21).

Considering Kōmeitō's religious origins in the Buddhist organization Soka Gakkai, the focus on mental well-being is an expected one that is reiterated in Soka Gakkai's principles (Soka Gakkai 2022). This focus makes Kōmeitō different compared to the other parties. It also reinforces their image and messaging to youth, implying that they are a fragile group of people who suffer more than just economically, but also in spirit.

Youth are also portrayed as a group important for the future in terms of childbirth, as family policy is a common theme. The dignity and well-being of youth in all circumstances are considered important. Moreover, the party proudly boasts about its achievements in multiple areas related to youth, for example, the cut costs for phone bills, expanded support for higher education and high school students and even support for families that raise kids in the early stages of their lives to display their reliability. Key elements here surrounding youth pointed to "suffering", "hope", "inequality" and "unfairness".

5.3.2 Politics

Kōmeitō is translated into "clean government party", as a result, it is no surprise that many documents emphasize trust and corruption in politics. This mindset is also reflected in their messaging toward youth. Kōmeitō regularly posted related documents on political participation among youth leading up to the election. An issue they promoted as very important to regain trust and reliability in politics.

It has been pointed out that the voices of young people and women are difficult to reach politics, the announced measures reflect the true value of Kōmeitō as a party with 'the ability to listen to small voices' (Kōmeitō 3).

Politics cannot be established without the trust of the people. In particular, the issue of politics and money is an act of betraying the people and is unforgivable (Kōmeitō 22).

Kōmeitō is actively trying to promote itself as clean party that listens to the small voices in society, including youth. They believe it is effective to point out the party's accomplishments when addressing youth, whether it is the lowering of the voting age, lowered mobile fees, expanded childcare, while also taking credit to gain trust, knowing the track record of politicians is not great. Furthermore, by relying on prevalent youth topics such as mental health, believed to be overlooked, they present themselves as "the" party for young people that steers the LDP from bad decisions. They had a strong selection of documents titled toward youth, which included appeals that further reinforced the picture of the party's image for small voices. They see hope in youth and value their importance in the future of society, which means that their well-being must be prioritized. Political participation among youth was addressed, but more as a problem that is partially fixed or on the way to being solved due to the workings of Kōmeitō. Youth were addressed as beacons of hope for the future, but also very fragile and exposed members of society in need of support economically and mentally. Elements observed in their documents included "representation" "fragility" "importance" "support" "income" and "child-rearing".

5.4 JCP

The JCP was the only party that lacked an integrated youth organization on its website. The JCP does have a youth wing, the Democratic Youth League of Japan, which was ruled out due to the lack of data on their site. Both referred to Twitter accounts that posts short news and event information, thus it was difficult to integrate documents specifically targeting youth. Therefore, the JCP data is concentrated on documents that talk about youth. It does show that the JCP is much more social media savvy in their process to address youth. However, JCP's website was in no shortage of data. Their documents primarily centered around policy documents, rather than news, interviews, and speeches. As a result, the JCP gives off an impression of a pragmatic party focused on issues and how to solve them. This could also be an indication of their status as a smaller opposition party that is trying to appeal to voters

through concrete measures. It could also point to their limited resources because of restrictions placed on their party, since they are designated as a security threat by Japan's National Police Agency stemming from their revolutionary activities in the 50s (National Police Agency 2020:43). Moreover, they refuse public subsidies and donations from businesses because they believe it is immoral. Instead, they depend on funds from their newspaper, party memberships, and small individual donations (Japan Press Weekly 2020).

5.4.1 Social-economic status

Most of the JCP's main policy goals are related to social solidarity. They focus on the injustices in society stemming from the current political system, norms, and political rule of the past few decades. In their material, they present a wide variety of policy that they point to as fundamental rights, policy that targets to solve injustices ingrained within society, or general inadequacies. This includes social solidarity for youth as we can see below.

> The National Alliance is working on various activities to meet the wishes of the younger generation, including student support, disparity issues, tuition and scholarship issues, climate crisis issues, gender issues, etc. In the meantime, we are increasing the number of comrades and making a vigorous new step forward (JCP 5).

The JCP's proposals tackle a variety of areas that they believe relate to the interests of youth. They address youth by pointing out systematic problems in society that disproportionately affects the hopes and wishes of youth. They talk about everything from the disposability of youth workers that prevents them from finding stable jobs, the negligence of legalizing same-sex marriage as well as other sexual minority discriminatory practices. They often compare to social security systems seen and Europe that protect workers in terms of wages, working hours, paid leave, and salary increases to protect youth. They highlight various measures to alleviate financial woes education and child-rearing, but also promote education on various societal issues, and harden laws to protect the youth that are extra vulnerable in society, especially young women, sexual minorities, and other groups facing discrimination that contributes to the worsening mental well-being of youth. Following is an example of how youth are addressed in terms of social-economic issues.

> The difficulties faced as a result of covid is not the fault of youth. The root of the problem stems from the Liberal Democratic Party's politics which has forced youth to "self-reliance" by having to deal with tuition fees, student loans, and other educational burdens by pushing them into low wage, non-regular and disposable types of work.

> Let us overcome neoliberalism and work together to create a society where everyone can learn, work and live with a peace of mind. [...] Like the "guaranteed minimum wages and set working hours" systems in Europe, it is necessary to expand regulations to protect shift workers and provide paid leave. Raising salaries and creating rules for stable employment are the foundations that protect the lives of young people and support society, industry, and the economy (JCP 13).

There is another major theme that most of the JCP's documents have in common, it is the strong criticism of the current status-quo under the LDP, believed to contribute to the diminishing rights and possibilities of youth in society. They address youth as a socially and institutionally disadvantaged group of people who deserve a system that works for them rather than against them. The JCP prioritizes solidarity and collective efforts to highlight and deal with the injustices that youth experience in their everyday lives. Identified labels surrounding youth include "inequality" "solidarity" "injustice" and "human rights".

5.4.2 Politics

JCP's emphasis on solidarity and close collaboration with others in society to tackle issues in people's everyday lives also applies to politics in which the JCP believes youth are also considerably disadvantaged both institutionally and socially. The following exerts specifically display how prevalent political participation is in the JCP's discussions about youth in their campaigning material.

> Suffrage does not only include the right to vote for candidates, but also the right to become a candidate and participate in politics. The right to vote and election eligibility should be considered as the same to ensure that youth can participate in politics. We will work hard to reduce the eligibility to be elected. [...] It is neither permissible to prohibit or restrict political activities just because you are a high school student. Protect the freedom of political activity, which is the right of a sovereign country (JCP 18).

> Freedom of political activity is one of the basic human rights guaranteed to all people by the Constitution. Of course, high school students also have the freedom to talk and speak out about politics. The government says that human rights can be restricted for "educational purposes". [...] As a leading democratic society, it is a given that the

purpose of education includes self-awareness, growth as individuals who think for themselves, that exchanges opinions with others, and mobilizes. The Japanese Communist Party will withdraw the government's 'notice' and clarify that high school students also have freedom of political activity and support their awareness and growth as individuals (JCP 13).

The JCP firmly believes that the issue of lacking political participation among youth stems from systematic and institutional premises, that prevents youth from gaining political awareness at an early age. Moreover, the exerts strongly mentioned some of the legal constraints that I mentioned in the research chapter, that hold back the potential of youth to contribute and be active in politics. In their messaging, they also often reiterate the importance of generational inheritance of the party due to the aging population. For youth to become involved, systems need to be in place to give them a chance to participate.

The individual growth and self-awareness of youth are considered critical, and the party regularly points to human and democratic rights to highlight the injustices that target youth whether it is the lack of social security or the legislation that prevents them from participating in civil society. Youth are in the political sphere, addressed as people who are excluded in politics through legal and social systems that restrain their rights as individuals. Individual learning and growth are respected and the JCP shows solidarity in its dedication to provide support for youth. Youth injustice is described in a very bleak manner throughout their messaging. Youth are addressed as a systematically oppressed group in dire need of support socially and mentally. Despite the negative connotations, they see hope for the future through the support of youth to oust the LDP to create a society based on solidarity and individuality. Recurring elements for this category included "democracy" "human rights", "solidarity", "inequality", "exclusion", "education" and "eligibility".

6. Discussion

This chapter discuss the findings of the analysis by connecting it to the theoretical foundations, to answer the questions this study poses to answer. In the analysis, I displayed that there is a wide spectrum of ways that youth are addressed among the political parties, these debates centered around social, economic, and political issues and how those issues affect youth. Every party applied different approaches to talk about youth and different areas that they believed concerned youth. This thesis aims to understand how parties address youth, by analyzing their published material on these issues. In the following discussions, I will clarify the answers to the questions asked for this study, starting by identifying discourses surrounding youth to see how they have been constructed, but also how parties individually address youth, while pointing to the contextual foundations of the thesis.

6.1 Constructing discourse

It is important to understand that discourses are not floating objective facts, they are constructed through the eyes of the researcher based on data. Discourses can be placed on different levels with different variations of detail. A broader contextual background and a longer span of time for the data would make discourses more detailed and specific. As a result, the decision was made to focus on select discourses. I also want to highlight that the discourses largely overlap in many ways, because they point out similar topics and shared elements. The discussion on discourse applies the definitions of discourse theory explored previously. Constructing discourse was based on the chains of equivalence and their subject positions subject positions. Furthermore, Fairclough's order of discourse has been implemented to understand how youth-related discourses battle for hegemonic status.

6.1.1 Discourse of the politically apathetic youth

Political apathy was one of the most reiterated statements throughout the entire corpus. There was no strong antagonistic relationship between how parties spoke about political apathy among youth. There was rather a strong sense of unanimousness in their messaging that political apathy was not only a serious issue for society and the state of politics, but also the future of the country. Political apathy is considered a negative trait that every party wanted to tackle. What differed was the method to do so, and how the gravity of the issue was addressed. Different elements were more significant depending on the party. The antagonistic tendencies rather appeared in the methods they used to address youth.

The LDP portrayed the issue as one based on a lack of trust and sluggishness in politics. Solutions were not apparent, but the LDP were adamant that they were "listening" to the voices of the people, but simultaneously implying that it is the youth who must take initiative themselves to bring change. This is further reflected in their manga that attempts to appeal to youth in a quite degrading way by trivializing urgent issues with absurd and unrealistic scenarios (LDP 7). It gives off a tone of unseriousness that puts blame and pressure on youth for not engaging. In a sense, it also exemplifies the lack of public education in politics that research often pointed to, by making the youth look inexperienced and uneducated (Tsukada 2020; Yoshida 2016:1-4). Kōmeitō addressed their voters by promoting themselves as "the" party for "small voices", in other words, youth and child rearing-households, which implies the less significant role that youth play in politics. Kōmeitō did not shy away from addressing the deficiencies of the LDP on multiple occasions and promoted themselves as the party that keeps an eye on the big LDP to reinforce their identity as a clean and responsible party for the minority (Kōmeitō 1). Kōmeitō presented the perceived faults of corruption and money in politics as indicators that worsened the trust in politics among youth while pointing out their achievements to prove their reliability. Compared to the LDP, they emphasize what they believe to be overlooked issues that would help gain support from youth, such as mental health, and portrayed youth as a suffering and overlooked group of people.

The oppositional CDP and JCP addressed youth in a quite different manner, they agree on the fundamentals that political apathy among youth has grown as a result of unreliability in politics, and they especially indicate the long-ruling LDP as a culprit that has contributed to the problem. Moreover, they discuss ideas and solutions to tackle the problem of political participation, implying more than lacking trust. They specify what they believe to be broader societal issues that have contributed to the current situation, including the lack of education on politics and the inability of youth to engage politically at younger ages. These issues were also apparent in research on political participation, in which youth often pointed to the lack of political education affecting their standpoint (Arai 2019:70; Tsukada 2020).

Furthermore, the opposition point to the lack of proposals and policy to tackle the precarious situation of youth, that adheres to their needs and wishes, such as dealing with gender inequality, income disparities, and social security. This also reinforced the image of youth as a compromised and unjustly treated group. Both parties wanted concrete solutions to simplify voting, a complicated process they believed to contribute to the difficult situation of engaging youth politically. This was prevalent in the JCP's material that was vocal in granting youth

more opportunities to vote and participate in policy to improve the lacking democratic process, which was also a concern among youth in research (JCP 13, 18; Yoshida 2016;1-4). The CDP often used speech and interview transcripts to address youth which contributed to a friendlier and more sincere approach as opposed to the governing coalition. The JCP's strategy to reach youth relied on SNS, seemingly more suitable for directly addressing and engaging youth. They were the only actor that emphasized solidarity with the youth and pointed to deep systematic and institutional problems that disadvantage youth to participate in politics from the outset. They portrayed the current system as one that prevents fundamental democratic and human rights that should be a given to every young person (JCP 13, 18).

My analysis of the oppositional parties and the government parties also indicates antagonistic claims, that both fight for meaning within the discourse of political apathy. All parties agree on the base fact of political apathy among youth in society. However, they all portray the causes, urgency, and solutions differently, as well as addressing youth in often separate ways. The opposition in particular builds a discourse that is critical of the ruling coalition and portrays youth as vulnerable groups and individuals. This contributes to an antagonistic relationship between youth and the government as a result. The JCP especially spoke of the legal foundations of Japan that lack certain democratic principles. Thus, attempting to illegitimatize the LDP rule.

6.1.2 Discourse of the disadvantaged and fragile youth

Precarity of youth in society was a frequently debated among all parties. To an extent, all parties agree and address youth as a disadvantaged group of people in one way or another. It is an overlapping discourse that I relate to the discourse of political apathy in which youth were portrayed as unheard, thus lacking trust. Simultaneously, by the opposition, they were addressed as institutionally and socially disadvantaged. Meanwhile, the LDP addressed youth as fragile in a quite humiliating sense. This all contributes to the perception of youth as fragile. The discourse of disadvantaged youth is built on the debates addressing youth in relation to all social-economic issues. Youth are addressed by all parties as disadvantaged and as a group of people that often face injustices and setbacks in society to varying degrees. However, even here there are fundamental differences between parties in terms of issues connected to youth, their consequences, and the solutions to them. The LDP talk to youth as an experienced party that happily boasts about their achievements and plans surrounding youth, as does Kōmeitō that as a result makes them look effective and reliable (Kōmeitō 1; LDP 18).

The LDP addresses youth primarily in an economic sense, where low wages, irregular work, and the competitive job market makes youth vulnerable. They are especially adamant about their "new capitalism" policy, almost mentioned in every document to address this problem. They provide smaller packages of support for youth but place high expectations on them so that they can provide for the "future of the nation" rather than their well-being for instance (LDP 2). These nation-building and collective nationalistic tendencies are reflected in their core messaging about rather than to youth. The LDP's perceived vision of well-being should be accomplished through increased wages and improved social systems as a result of a growing economy. The LDP thus paints the picture of youth as disadvantaged but promising long-term improvements. On the other hand, judging from how they speak about youth, there is a larger sense of fragility and expectations placed on them.

Kōmeitō's sentiments are similar, but they address youth as a group that is fragile and disadvantaged in more ways. They sometimes discreetly point out their position as a party that keeps an eye on LDP and addresses their weak points (Kōmeitō 1). Kōmeitō applies an extra emphasis on the social suffering of youth beyond exclusively economic issues. Youth is thus portrayed as a group that is both physically but also spiritually fragile and disadvantaged, reflecting the Kōmeitō's Buddhist background in the process.

The opposition addressed a combination of points both from the LDP and Kōmeitō when speaking about and to youth. The major difference is that they believe that youth are disadvantaged in society from the outset, which contributes to their fragility as a group. The opposition have different approaches and solutions to problems in society, but they again establish a more compromised reality for youth. They seem to think that issues with actual support among youth are ignored and that youth enter society with burdens of student debt, lack of full-time employment, etc., preventing them from becoming active citizens. The dreams of youth are crushed from the very beginning, and they lack the support to do anything about it. The JCP especially reiterates the systematic issues in society and proposes much more direct and impactful solutions that are anchored to completely change the status-quo of society. The current status quo disproportionately influences the most vulnerable in society, where youth are included. The JCP believes that the current societal structures work against youth rather than for them, and they praise the developed systems in place in other democracies, especially those in Europe, as does the CDP. They highlight countries from which they borrow inspiration and make direct comparisons regarding everything from lower tuition fees to fewer legal working hours, higher minimum wages, and so on (CDP 4; JCP

20). Japan is implied to be a backwards country in need of a systematic overhaul and achieved by pointing out the disparities in comparison to other developed nations to create a sense of urgency, solidarity, and understanding among youth. Otherwise, the current structures that hold youth back will remain under LDP rule.

Once again, the opposition is contributing to an antagonistic relationship between youth and the government in which youth are portrayed as institutionally disadvantaged by the opposition making the issue look bigger than what the government coalition makes it out to be. Moreover, there is also a slightly antagonistic relationship between the parties in government in which Kōmeitō portray themselves as the reasonable and sane voice in the coalition that balances and keeps the LDP in check, implying that the LDP is an unreliable partner less concerned about youth. Just to name an example, Kōmeitō took credit and portrayed themselves as the party that accomplished decreased mobile fees and expanded child support (Kōmeitō 1, 2, 8). This reinforces and unreliable relationship between the LDP and youth.

6.1.3 Discourse of youth as hope for the future

This discourse is interdiscursive with other discourses that have been constructed throughout the analysis. First, in each of the other discourses, youth are in some way addressed as a disadvantaged group, but that contain great potential and work as a driving force for the future of the country. Their voices and opinions are considered important not only because they are the people who will lead the country to the next era, but also in terms of the demographic issues of Japan. Every party agrees that the declining birthrate and aging society is a problem, which is why the political participation of youth is important, but their contributions to society as well.

The LDP strongly associates youth with the birthrate and often talks about the importance of youth to secure the future of Japan as a nation-state and people. Their approach implies a burden and pressure that is placed on youth as a result of the urgency to bear more children, this is especially visible through the various policy aimed to support youth so that they can start families (LDP 2; 11). The well-being of youth is considered essential for the survival and well-being of the nation, rather than the individual that the opposition values more, especially the JCP. The LDP also emphasized youth working in specific industries to preserve Japan's technological competitiveness globally. The LDP states a strong wish for youth to study and become key figures in IT and research. It contributes to youth being addressed as a tool to serve the interests of the economy and the survival of Japan as a state (LDP 4, 7). This

sentiment is largely mirrored by Kōmeitō. However, Kōmeitō considers youth "beacons of hope" that carry the key to not only improving the birthrate but society. Kōmeitō is a family-oriented party, which as a result prioritizes the well-being of the family and young people mentally and spiritually with the potential to create families.

The CDP and the JCP present their case similarly to Kōmeitō in this regard. Both parties take the birthrate issue seriously for the futures of both youth and society. The major differences come down to certain positions. The opposition discusses the importance of political participation and the lack of policy that instills hope for the future. Youth are explained as constricted through different societal challenges, including low incomes, and lack of social security with high barriers to entering adult society. If youth are prevented from being involved in the democratic process, how are they supposed to follow their hopes and dreams? If the older generations are the larger voices of society, what is the point? The JCP and the CDP to a certain extent again reiterates the systematic and institutional challenges that prevent youth from fulfilling their potential and individuality.

There is no doubt that every party believes youths' futures is crucial. It is the path towards that future that differs, the more conservative parties use a more hands-off approach, believing that increased growth will contribute to increased well-being and hope. The opposition provides more concrete answers and believes more in more intervention and direct support. The opposition is fighting against the governing parties for hegemony, and both use their tactics they believe are more familiar and relatable to youth to gain their support.

6.2 Conclusion

Judging from these discussions, there is a noticeable difference between how the major parties in Japan address youth. Each party has its own historical background, political goals, and ideological standpoints concerning society that form their approach to youth. The past 7 decades have been defining in shaping narratives and realities within society. Objectively speaking, there are a series of factors that have contributed to the state of Japanese youths' participation in civil society. On one hand, we have a party such as the LDP that has held almost uninterrupted power since 1955, dominating the flow of politics and holding on to power by a comfortable margin. On the other hand, there is a fragile opposition that has for decades struggled to keep together to pose a real challenge to the status quo.

The few occasions in the past almost 80-years where the voice of youth has been big in civil society have been thwarted time and time again, making youth hopeless and dissatisfied with

the current state of politics, which has solidified the decline in their engagement and discouraged participation despite perceived importance of politics. Now decades later, society is standing in front of challenges that are threatening the very survival of Japan and its people, with a graying and more politically powerful elderly generation. Some parties are also more willing to push for life-long agendas, forcing all parties to find strategies to reengage youth and address them in ways to hopefully bring them back into the political arena. Whether it has been through lowering the voting age, pursuing welfare policy, engaging in SNS, pointing out injustices, and so on, it has all so far been met with average success. Many hurdles remain that could be addressed to simplify political participation among youth reiterated in a plethora of the presented research, but it is up to the people in power to decide when they want to do it and how they want to do it. The institutional issues with Japanese politics will not solve themselves. Improving the trust and reliability of politics require actions, by addressing youth in a way that makes them feel hope and meaning.

There are no concrete answers that precisely define how youth are addressed, but this study and the context that builds its foundations have hopefully clarified and created an understanding of how discourses are constructed through the speech of political parties. Hopefully, future studies can also contribute with further insight in how parties address youth in a society with declining citizenship among youth, metaphorically and figuratively.

7. Appendix

LDP

1. 内閣発足等についての岸田内閣総理大臣記者会見

https://web.archive.org/web/20220221114516/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jimin.jp%2Fnews%2Fpress%2F202083.html

2. 第 205 回臨時国会における岸田内閣総理大臣所信表明演説

https://web.archive.org/web/20220221113402/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jimin.jp%2Fnews%2Fpolicy%2F202103.html

3. 第 205 回臨時国会における世耕弘成参議院自民党幹事長代表質問

https://web.archive.org/web/20220221112225/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jimin.jp%2Fnews%2Fpolicy%2F202109.html

4. 第 205 回臨時国会における片山さつき総務会長代理代表質問

https://web.archive.org/web/20220221112141/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jimin.jp%2Fnews%2Fpolicy%2F202121.html

5. 岸田総理 就任後初の対面外交で存在感

https://web.archive.org/web/20220221125818/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jimin.jp%2Fnews%2Fpaper_2957%2F

6. 岸田内閣　基本方針

https://archive.org/details/6._20220517

7. 衆議院解散等についての岸田内閣総理大臣記者会見

https://web.archive.org/web/20220221111722/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jimin.jp%2Fnews%2Fpress%2F202127.html

8. 岸田総裁 「聞く力」で全国を疾走

https://web.archive.org/web/20220221105839/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jimin.jp%2Fnews%2Fpaper_2955%2F

9. 第 2 次岸田内閣発足等についての岸田内閣総理大臣記者会見

https://web.archive.org/web/20220221105517/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jimin.jp%2Fnews%2Fpress%2F202278.html

10. 党執行部に衆院比例 73 歳定年制や総裁選に関し緊急の申し入れ

https://web.archive.org/web/20220517232921/https://youth.jimin.jp/news/201915.html

11. 青年局・女性局主催 総裁選挙公開討論会を開催。コロナ禍の学生支援、少子化対策、憲法改正、拉致問題など各分野の政策について全国のメンバーが総裁候補者に直接質問

https://web.archive.org/web/20220517232203/https://youth.jimin.jp/news/202047.html

12. 第52代青年局長に小倉將信衆議院議員が就任

https://web.archive.org/web/20211216163557/https%3A%2F%2Fyouth.jimin.jp%2Fnews%2F202100.html

13. 小倉青年局長が早稲田祭で講演

https://web.archive.org/web/20220221225222/https%3A%2F%2Fyouth.jimin.jp%2Fnews%2F202261.html

14. 麻生副総裁のもとを小倉局長・牧島前局長らが訪問

https://web.archive.org/web/20220221224745/https%3A%2F%2Fyouth.jimin.jp%2Fnews%2F202336.html

15. 大阪府連学生部が小倉將信青年局長と面会し意見交換

https://web.archive.org/web/20220221224056/https%3A%2F%2Fyouth.jimin.jp%2Fnews%2F202329.html

16. "投票知っ得!"

https://jimin.jp-east-2.storage.api.nifcloud.com/pdf/youth/election_voting.pdf

17. 菅義偉総理インタビュー！！

https://web.archive.org/web/20220517233057/https://jimin.jp-east-2.storage.api.nifcloud.com/18voice/vol07/kuninitodoke_all.pdf

18. "国に届け"

https://web.archive.org/web/20220517233057/https://jimin.jp-east-2.storage.api.nifcloud.com/18voice/vol07/kuninitodoke_all.pdf

19. みんなへの約束

https://jimin.jp-east-2.storage.api.nifcloud.com/pdf/pamphlet/jimin_kids_panfu_2110.pdf

20. 若年層交流事業 Real Youth Project

https://web.archive.org/web/20220517232508/https://youth.jimin.jp/activity/real_youth/

21. 自民党令和3年政権公約

https://jimin.jp-east-2.storage.api.nifcloud.com/pdf/pamphlet/20211011_pamphlet.pdf

22. 台湾をはじめとする国際交流

https://web.archive.org/web/20220517232343/https://youth.jimin.jp/activity/taiwan/

23. 自民党衆院選２０２１

https://web.archive.org/web/20220517233416/https://www.jimin.jp/election/results/sen_shu49/

24.「新しい資本主義」で 分厚い中間層を再構築する。「全世代の安心感」が 日本の活力に。
https://web.archive.org/web/20220221125843/.jp%2Felection%2Fresults%2Fsen_shu49%2Fpolitical_promise%2Fsearch%2F

25.「教育」は国家の基本。 人材力の強化、 安全で安心な国、 健康で豊かな地域社会を 目指す。
https://web.archive.org/web/20220221125843/.jp%2Felection%2Fresults%2Fsen_shu49%2Fpolitical_promise%2Fsearch%2F

CDP

1. 日本若者協議会から日本版気候若者会議の提言を手交

https://web.archive.org/web/20220217015518/https%3A%2F%2Fcdp-japan.jp%2Fnews%2F20210804_1883

2. 【りっけんチャンネル】「#20 代で政治家になってみた地方と 日本の未来を語る」５人の 20 代総支部長と塩村議員が語り合 いました

https://web.archive.org/web/20220217012738/https%3A%2F%2Fcdp-japan.jp%2Fnews%2F20211005_2260

3. 【政策解説】雇用におけるジェンダー平等をすすめます

https://web.archive.org/web/20220518001542/https://cdp-japan.jp/news/20211009_2301

4. 【Interview】自分はできるだけのことはやったのか　森ゆうこ参院幹事長

https://web.archive.org/web/20220216214317/https%3A%2F%2Fcdp-japan.jp%2Farticle%2F20211013_2339

5. 【参院予算委】宮沢由佳議員、子どもの命を守る取り組みを 問う

https://web.archive.org/web/20220215170151/https%3A%2F%2Fcdp-japan.jp%2Fnews%2F20211216_2739

6.「『当たり前』にしないことを皆さんに期待していきたい」高 校生未来会議で泉代表

https://web.archive.org/web/20220518001741/https://cdp-japan.jp/news/20211223_2791

7. 落合貴之議員「若者の声がより届く仕組みを作っていく」若者の政治参加推進基本法を求める院内集会

https://web.archive.org/web/20220216231203/https%3A%2F%2Fcdp-japan.jp%2Fnews%2F20210601_1458

8. 【青年局】オンラインイベント「Z 世代 Café―政治家と語ろう ―」に参加　道下大樹、松尾明弘、石川大我各議員

https://web.archive.org/web/20211216020520/https%3A%2F%2Fcdp-japan.jp%2Fnews%2F20210807_1898

9. 【青年局】「いまこそ！？おしゃべり大学 1DAYCAMPUS Vol.2」をオンラインで開催

https://web.archive.org/web/20220216220838/https%3A%2F%2Fcdp-japan.jp%2Fnews%2F20210824_1962

10. 【代表選挙】若者政策について青年局と 4 候補者が政策討論

https://web.archive.org/web/20220215193056/https%3A%2F%2Fcdp-japan.jp%2Fnews%2F20211124_2614

11. 枝野代表が「若者の未来を創る政策プラン」を発表#政権取ってこれをやる Vol.9

https://web.archive.org/web/20220217012234/https%3A%2F%2Fcdp-japan.jp%2Fnews%2F20211007_2279

12. 【宮城】枝野代表、岡本あき子候補（1 区）、鎌田さゆり候補（2

区）、大野そのこ候補（3 区）、安住淳候補（5 区）らと訴え#立

憲大作戦 2021 in みやぎ

https://web.archive.org/web/20220216215454/https%3A%2F%2Fcdp-japan.jp%2Fnews%2F20211020_2419

13. 【静岡】枝野代表、日吉雄太候補（7 区）、げんまけんたろう候補（8 区）とともに浜松駅で訴え

https://web.archive.org/web/20220518001901/https://cdp-japan.jp/news/20211022_2432

14. 【長野】泉政調会長が神津たけし候補（長野 3 区）と佐久市で訴え

https://web.archive.org/web/20220216201611/https%3A%2F%2Fcdp-japan.jp%2Fnews%2F20211023_2438

15. 【東京】枝野代表、菅直人候補（18 区）、山花郁夫候補（22 区）らと訴え #立憲大作戦 in 吉祥寺

https://web.archive.org/web/20220216200900/https%3A%2F%2Fcdp-japan.jp%2Fnews%2F20211023_2444

16. 【岐阜】「若い世代で政治を変えようと、この地域を支えようと頑張っている若手がいるよと声をかけてください」今井るる（5区）

https://web.archive.org/web/20220518002009/https://cdp-japan.jp/news/20211027_2484

17. 【東京】枝野幸男代表が三鷹駅で東京22区・山花郁夫候補を応援

https://web.archive.org/web/20220518002120/https://cdp-japan.jp/news/20211029_2501

18. 【北海道】枝野代表が札幌市白石区内で荒井ゆたか候補（3区）と訴え

https://web.archive.org/web/20220216142802/https%3A%2F%2Fcdp-japan.jp%2Fnews%2F20211029_2511

19. 【神奈川】「親子が幸せになる社会は日本の幸せ」早稲田ゆき候補（4区）が、真山参院議員と鎌倉市で訴え

https://web.archive.org/web/20220518002227/https://cdp-japan.jp/news/20211029_2515

20. 【東京】「明日はゴールではなくスタートです。この9年間を直しましょう」蓮舫代表代行と吉田はるみ候補（東京8区）が街頭演説

https://web.archive.org/web/20220216114045/https%3A%2F%2Fcdp-japan.jp%2Fnews%2F20211030_2525

21. 【代表選挙】代表選候補者が福岡市で記者会見

https://web.archive.org/web/20220215192754/https%3A%2F%2Fcdp-japan.jp%2Fnews%2F20211123_2612

22. 【代表選挙】福岡市で経済政策、安全保障政策をテーマに討論会

https://web.archive.org/web/20220216105533/https%3A%2F%2Fcdp-japan.jp%2Fnews%2F20211123_2611

23. 【代表選挙】横浜市で会保障政策、政治改革・党改革をテーマに討論会

https://web.archive.org/web/20220215192818/https%3A%2F%2Fcdp-japan.jp%2Fnews%2F20211125_2630

24. 【代表選挙】4候補が横浜桜木町駅前街頭で目指す社会像、党のあるべき姿について訴え

https://web.archive.org/web/20220215192929/https%3A%2F%2Fcdp-japan.jp%2Fnews%2F20211125_2627

25. 政権政策２０２１立憲民主党

https://web.archive.org/web/20220518002539/https://cdp-japan.jp/assets/pdf/visions/2021/change7things.pdf

Kōmeitō

1. 若者・女性輝く社会へ

https://web.archive.org/web/20220218011617/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.komei.or.jp%2Fkomeinews%2Fp192729%2F

2. "声が届く政治" めざす

https://web.archive.org/web/20220218192536/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.komei.or.jp%2Fkomeinews%2Fp193831%2F

3. 【主張】公明の若者・女性政策　賃金アップ、大学無償化など推進

https://web.archive.org/web/20220218010546/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.komei.or.jp%2Fkomeinews%2Fp192926%2F

4. 若者と日本の未来築く

https://web.archive.org/web/20220218012104/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.komei.or.jp%2Fkomeinews%2Fp194073%2F

5. 希望持てる社会を構築

https://web.archive.org/web/20220218193200/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.komei.or.jp%2Fkomeinews%2Fp195061%2F

6. 「公明が若者の声を一番聞く」

https://web.archive.org/web/20220218011106/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.komei.or.jp%2Fkomeinews%2Fp195611%2F

7. 若者の味方　公明党の政策・実績

https://web.archive.org/web/20220218010650/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.komei.or.jp%2Fkomeinews%2Fp196346%2F

8. 【主張】若者の味方　公明、政治に声届け政策実現

https://web.archive.org/web/20220218010408/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.komei.or.jp%2Fkomeinews%2Fp196446%2F

9. 青年委員会が新体制に

https://web.archive.org/web/20220218012420/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.komei.or.jp%2Fkomeinews%2Fp41507%2F

10. 日本再生へ新たな挑戦

https://web.archive.org/web/20220218012246/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.komei.or.jp%2Fkomeinews%2Fp197145%2F

11. 党勢拡大は青年の力で／道府県青年局長の活動手記

https://web.archive.org/web/20220218235818/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.komei.or.jp%2Fyouth_site%2F2021%2F07%2F22%2F4176%2F

12. 奨学金　企業の「肩代わり」進む

https://web.archive.org/web/20220218201615/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.komei.or.jp%2Fkomeinews%2Fp180323%2F

13. 若者支援の充実を／党宮城県青年局が知事に提言／奨学金返還や新婚世帯応援など／VA とユーストークから策定

https://web.archive.org/web/20220518005234/https://www.komei.or.jp/komeinews/p182196/

14. 開始から 15 年　若者サポステ／「働きたい」を後押し／利用件数、累計で 600 万超に

https://web.archive.org/web/20220218010516/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.komei.or.jp%2Fkomeinews%2Fp184638%2F

15. 講演要旨　起業と子育ての経験から若者活躍に必要な支援／高橋祥子・株式会社ジーンクエスト代表取締役社長／党青年・女性委合同勉強会

https://web.archive.org/web/20220218235234/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.komei.or.jp%2Fyouth_site%2F2021%2F08%2F26%2F4265%2F

16. 次の時代をつくる公明党「＃ツギコメ」スタート／重点政策 6 テーマを発表／公式アカウント発信中　ツイッターで共感広げる／国産ワクチン、賃上げなど推進／都本部青年局

https://web.archive.org/web/20211216165307/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.komei.or.jp%2Fkomeinews%2Fp186962%2F

17. こちら南元町支局「何でも調査班」

https://web.archive.org/web/20220218234836/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.komei.or.jp%2Fyouth_site%2F2021%2F09%2F16%2F4207%2F

18. こちら南元町支局「何でも調査班」／携帯電話といえば公明党／SIM ロック、原則禁止／乗り換え促し料金引き下げに期待

https://web.archive.org/web/20220518005425/https://www.komei.or.jp/komeinews/p218125/

19. 衆院選勝利へ　旬な話題で支持拡大

https://web.archive.org/web/20220218234554/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.komei.or.jp%2Fyouth_site%2F2021%2F10%2F07%2F4240%2F

20. 若者の味方　公明党の政策・実績

https://web.archive.org/web/20220218233839/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.komei.or.jp%2Fyouth_site%2F2021%2F10%2F21%2F4313%2F

21. 若者の声　実現へ全力／三浦青年局長に聞く

https://web.archive.org/web/20220218233601/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.komei.or.jp%2Fyouth_site%2F2021%2F11%2F11%2F4317%2F

22. ２０２１衆院選重点政策

https://web.archive.org/web/20220518013508/https://www.komei.or.jp/komeipolicy/

23. 公明党は、「原発に依存しない社会・原発ゼロ社会」をめざします

https://web.archive.org/web/20220518005538/https://www.komei.or.jp/content/nuclear/

24. 2021 政策パンフレット

https://web.archive.org/web/20220518010121/https://www.komei.or.jp/wp-content/uploads/2021policy.pdf

25. 「大衆福祉」の推進力

https://web.archive.org/web/20220518005754/https://www.komei.or.jp/content/fukushi2018/

JCP

1. パンデミックと日本共産党の真価

https://web.archive.org/web/20220214164659/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jcp.or.jp%2Fweb_jcp%2F2021%2F08%2Fpost-114.html

2. 日本共産党第２回中央委員会総会 新しい日本をつくる五つの提案

https://web.archive.org/web/20220518013050/https://www.jcp.or.jp/web_policy/2020/12/post-856.html

3. ジェンダー平等の日本へ　いまこそ政治の転換を

https://web.archive.org/web/20220213123530/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jcp.or.jp%2Fweb_policy%2F2021%2F10%2Fpost-888.html

4. 第４回中央委員会総会 志位委員長の幹部会報告

https://web.archive.org/web/20220214142219/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jcp.or.jp%2Fweb_jcp%2F2021%2F11%2F4chuso-houkoku.html

5. 第４回中央委員会総会 志位委員長の結語

https://web.archive.org/web/20220518012910/https://www.jcp.or.jp/web_jcp/2021/11/4chuso-ketsugo.html

6. 労働・雇用

https://web.archive.org/web/20220123005203/https://www.jcp.or.jp/web_policy/2021/10/2021s-bunya-002.html

7. 年金

https://web.archive.org/web/20220215000730/https://www.jcp.or.jp/web_policy/2021/10/2021s-bunya-003.html

8. 介護

https://web.archive.org/web/20220214235153/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jcp.or.jp%2Fweb_policy%2F2021%2F10%2F2021s-bunya-005.html

9. 女性とジェンダー

https://web.archive.org/web/20220210232259/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jcp.or.jp%2Fweb_policy%2F2021%2F10%2F2021s-bunya-007.html

10. リプロダクティブ・ヘルス＆ライツ

https://web.archive.org/web/20211020113904/https://www.jcp.or.jp/web_policy/2021/10/2021s-bunya-008.html

11. 女性に対する暴力をなくす

https://web.archive.org/web/20220211144816/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jcp.or.jp%2Fweb_policy%2F2021%2F10%2F2021s-bunya-010.html

12. 性的マイノリティー・LGBT/SOGI

https://web.archive.org/web/20220211150826/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jcp.or.jp%2Fweb_policy%2F2021%2F10%2F2021s-bunya-012.html

13. 若者／青年・学生

https://web.archive.org/web/20211216190848/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jcp.or.jp%2Fweb_policy%2F2021%2F10%2F2021s-bunya-017.html

14. 少子化問題

https://web.archive.org/web/20220211214108/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jcp.or.jp%2Fweb_policy%2F2021%2F10%2F2021s-bunya-018.html

15. 貧困

https://web.archive.org/web/20220211220718/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jcp.or.jp%2Fweb_policy%2F2021%2F10%2F2021s-bunya-019.html

16. 中小企業

https://web.archive.org/web/20220212181329/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jcp.or.jp%2Fweb_policy%2F2021%2F10%2F2021s-bunya-030.html

17. 住宅・マンション

https://web.archive.org/web/20220212201056/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jcp.or.jp%2Fweb_policy%2F2021%2F10%2F2021s-bunya-045.html

18. 「民意の届く」選挙制度改革・「政治とカネ」

https://web.archive.org/web/20220519223806/https://www.jcp.or.jp/web_policy/2021/10/2021s-bunya-051.html

19. 高等教育、大学改革

https://web.archive.org/web/20220210222809/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jcp.or.jp%2Fweb_policy%2F2021%2F10%2F2021s-bunya-059.html

20. 文化

https://web.archive.org/web/20220209162221/https://www.jcp.or.jp/web_policy/2021/10/2021s-bunya-060.html

21. 少年法

https://web.archive.org/web/20220214182559/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jcp.or.jp%2Fweb_policy%2F2021%2F10%2F2021s-bunya-067.html

22. 自殺対策

https://web.archive.org/web/20220214182919/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jcp.or.jp%2Fweb_policy%2F2021%2F10%2F2021s-bunya-072.html

23. 気候危機を打開する日本共産党の２０３０戦略

https://web.archive.org/web/20220518012652/https://www.jcp.or.jp/web_policy/2021/09/post-882.html

24. 日本共産党総選挙政策

https://web.archive.org/web/20220209162046/https://www.jcp.or.jp/web_policy/2021/10/2021-sosenkyo-pamphlet.pdf

25. 党員になってみた結果

https://web.archive.org/web/20220212225237/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jcp.or.jp%2Fwm%2Ftouin1%2F

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