P81 / Policy Analysis and Policy Dynamics in Japan

Topic : Policy Change/Continuity/Dynamics

Chair : Sarah Tanke (Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Rennes)

Second Chair : Hiromi Takahashi-Romanelli (Rennes 2 University (France))

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

In October 2025, in a historical moment, Sanae Takaichi became the first female prime minister of Japan. Since then, her leadership has raised questions about the relationship between political change and policy continuity in Japan. In this panel, we aim at examining policy developments under her administration and contributing to a broader understanding of Japanese public policymaking, building on existing research on policy analysis in Japan (Adachi, Hosono and Iio, 2015).

This panel pursues two main objectives: to assess whether and where policy has changed, and to explain what accounts for change or continuity. First, regarding change, this can be of first order (adjust policy instruments and targets), second order (alter policy instruments but not the hierarchy of policy goals), or third order (change policy settings, hierarchy of goals and set of instruments) (Hall 1993). In this sense and in the Japanese context, is there anything special to Takaichi's governing style, in terms of prime ministerial leadership, decision-making processes, relations with the Diet and public opinion, discourse and narratives on public policy, or the definition and framing of policy problems? Can we compare her to influential former prime minister Shinzo Abe (Minohara 2025)?

This panel is interested in a variety of policy domains, both domestically and internationally, such as, but not limited to, environmental policy, nuclear policy, economic policy, education policy, culture policy, social policy, employment policy, migration policy, security policy, foreign policy, development policy, etc. In particular, we encourage studies for this panel concerning gender, diversity and inclusion during Takaichi's administration, for instance on the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation. Demographic changes are a major issue for Japanese politics. In this context, who is included (foreign workers, employment of women…) and under what conditions (policies of care…)?

Secondly, we also wonder about the causes of policy dynamics in Japan. In this context, we can distinguish different types of main actors of public policy (Muller 2009), such as the first circle (prime minister and close collaborators), second circle (administration in charge of specific sectors), third circle (non state actors, interest groups), and possibly a fourth circle (political organs). Policy change can be linked here for instance to change in actors' cognitive and normative structures and beliefs (Muller 2005). Advocacy coalitions can be an interesting framework to explain important changes (Sabatier 1998) and impact (deep) core beliefs of secondary beliefs. In the Japanese case, if there are major changes, where do they come from, who are the central actors, who takes the lead in the policy process? We are interested in explanations linked to relations between interest groups, citizens and the bureaucracy, to multilevel governance and local policy, among others. If there is very little evolution in public policy and policy processes, despite major changes in the political landscape, why is that?

Overall, we could imagine at least three different hypotheses: substantial change across policy domains since Takaichi's access to power, selective change confined to specific areas, and considerable continuity in policies and policymaking processes. By investigating these patterns and the mechanisms underlying them, the panel aims to advance understanding of contemporary Japanese public policy.

CALL FOR PAPERS

We invite paper proposals for our panel called "Policy Analysis and Policy Dynamics in Japan", to be held during the 8th International Conference on Public Policy (ICPP8), organized by the International Public Policy Association (IPPA) at Sciences Po Rennes, France, in July 2027. The panel will take place on site, but also in a hybrid format. Thus, presentations of papers will be possible both in person, but also online. While we have a preference for presentations of advanced research projects, it is also possible to present work in progress. Authors can be specialized in political science / social science working on Japan, but can also be specialized in Japanese studies working on politics and societal dynamics. While presentations have to be held in English, paper proposals can base their research both / either on Japanese language and / or on English language sources. We encourage particularly PhD students and scholars in the beginning of their career to submit proposals for a paper.

Regarding the content of the paper proposals, we welcome a broad range of papers that examine whether

and in which ways/policy domains change has occurred under Sanae Takaichi's administration, as well as those that seek to explain the factors underlying policy change or continuity. In particular, we encourage studies concerning gender, diversity and inclusion during Sanae Takaichi's administration. However, beyond this, the panel is interested in a variety of policy domains, such as environmental policy, nuclear policy, economic policy, education policy, culture policy, social policy, employment policy, migration policy, security policy, foreign policy, development policy, and others. We also invite authors to investigate different patterns of policy change: substantial changes across policy domains, limited changes confined to specific areas, or considerable continuity despite changes in the political landscape. Additionally, we also welcome contributions that explore the political, institutional and social factors that help explain these patterns. Comparisons between Japan and another case / other cases are also possible.