

## **Explaining third party success: Analysing the Japanese Innovation Party in the context of greater regionalism**

*Sean P. Vincent\**

As this author has argued in previous work, Japan has returned to one-party electoral dominance (Vincent, 2021). As such, the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) success in the November 2021 lower house election proved to be no great surprise. The result strengthened the position of new Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and condemned the Constitutional Democratic Party to defeat, leading to the resignation of its leader, Yukio Edano. While the LDP were the undoubted winners of election night, the performance of the Japan Innovation Party (JIP) proved to be a pleasant surprise for its supporters. The party was able to increase its seats from 11 to 41 and win seats in 10 separate regions on the proportional representation list. However, it is the party's remarkable success in Osaka, where it won 15 out of its 16 single member constituencies which is of particular interest to this article. Such a dominant victory in a defined regional area puts one in mind of the Scottish National Party (SNP) in Scotland, the Christian Social Union (CSU) in Germany, The Quebec National Party (Bloc Québécois) in Canada and Catalanian independence parties in Spain. Therefore, this article aims to put the recent gains of the JIP in the context of wider development in regional party success, first by attempting to define the JIP's regional nature, then by examining the similarities the party has with other regional parties around the world, in particular the SNP, and attempting to explain its success in the context of being a regional party. Finally, this article will discuss potential steps the JIP could take next to ensure its success in national elections extends beyond one election cycle and becomes embedded as the dominant regional party, as the SNP, CSU and other "regional" parties have done.

### **What is the Japanese Innovation Party?**

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of studying the JIP is defining whether it is a regional or national party. There has been a great deal of research

\* Lecturer, Meiji Gakuin University, and College of Law, Nihon University

which has attempted to define parties which operate, or are successful, on a regional basis. The key distinction is drawn between *regional* and *regionalist* parties. Regional parties are those which compete in only one defined region. Most often have a presence in both regional and statewide elections. Their core aim is focused on the region they represent, but this does not exclude them from having a statewide agenda or having an organisational presence in other areas of a state (Mazzoleni & Mueller, 2016). Nevertheless, it is likely that all, or the majority of, their support is going to be drawn from a particular geographic area (Ziegfeld, 2012). It also implies an acceptance of working constructively within a national level government (Brancati, 2007). The core definition of “region” exists in a geographical sense, although there can also be a clear ethnic distinction included in the area under question (Dandoy, 2010). The Samajwadi Party in India contests elections in a number of regions, but its power base is located in Uttar Pradesh, India’s largest state. It has at various times acted as coalition partner and member of the opposition in national government (Misra, 2016).

Regionalist parties on the other hand, are devoted to increasing regional sovereignty or some form of self-government, or even complete sovereignty within a territorial area (DeWinter 2006; Hepburn & Hough, 2012). This is often, but not always driven by cultural, religious, ethnic and linguistic identities (Strmiska, 2002). The case of the United Kingdom is particularly relevant here, where both Scotland and Wales exist as separate countries in what has become and almost quasi-federal state. In Wales, Plaid Cymru utilize the Welsh language to promote regionalism. All press releases and social media output from the party, and the majority of its lawmakers are bilingual, and the party’s manifesto in the 2021 Senedd elections vowed to give all children access to Welsh language education and increase Welsh speakers to 1 million by 2050. Scotland has been a country with a strong national identity ever since the Act of Union in 1707. Like Wales, it retains a national anthem, recognized language, a flag – all symbols of an independent nation, and advocates in no uncertain terms its desire for Scottish independence. Both Wales and Scotland have been described as “Stateless-Nationalist-Regionalist” parties, primarily focused on the cultural protection of their regional, or in this case national identity (McAngus, n.d.). A brief visit to the website of Bloc Québécois would confuse any non-French speaker – there is no English language option. The party’s 2021 manifesto pledged to support the French language, proposing a law which would make “sufficient” knowledge of French a prerequisite of Canadian citizenship in Quebec, and supporting reform which would give the region the power to make international treaties (CBC News, 2021). Both the Democratic Con-

vergence of Catalonia and the Northern League in Italy have campaigned for greater autonomy along ethno-regionalist lines (Chrusciel, 2016). Regional parties can also be utilized as personal vehicles for established political actors, especially in countries where the electoral system allows new parties to enter and succeed in national elections. In India, regional parties had little success during the era of Congress one party rule. But dealignment, which took support from the previously dominant Congress and other national parties such as Janata Dai, led to coalition governments, which opened the door to regional parties having national level success. These new regional parties were most often led by former members of national level parties, who voters recognized and had existing local support networks (Ziegfeld, 2012). In Japan, the JIP itself is a relevant example of this. The JIP is an offshoot of the Japanese Restoration Party (JRP), which itself was an offshoot of the Osaka Restoration Association, a party founded with the (ongoing) aim to merge Osaka prefecture, Osaka city and other nearby administrative areas. One thing all of these parties have in common is their first President, former governor and mayor of Osaka, Toru Hashimoto. A popular and ever-present fixture on national television in the early to mid-2010's, Hashimoto used these parties to push his stated aim of greater autonomy for the Osaka region. While the JIP and its forerunners have campaigned in statewide elections, and not just in the Osaka region, the core goal of Hashimoto's politics has always been focused on the Osaka region. Indeed, in previous elections, while candidates for the JIP in the Osaka area had a clear goal for their national campaigns, candidates in other regions often felt cut off from the party and even though the party had a national manifesto, were not clear on what core policies they were campaigning on (Vincent, 2020). The short-lived presence of the Party of Hope at the national level existed as an offshoot of Governor Yuriko Koike's Tokyo based Tomin First and had little success outside of the Kanto region.

Taking definitions into account, how then can we describe the JIP? In a comparative context, it cannot be described as a *regionalist* party, although it does share similar characteristics with regional parties. As the article will discuss in the next section, other regionalist parties remain a useful comparison when explaining and predicting the JIP's success. *Osaka-ben*, along with other regional dialects, provides the region with a regional linguistic identity, although certainly not to the degree one would find in Wales or Catalonia for example. Osaka, during the reign of Hideyoshi Toyotomi, was seen as the center of the country and the region's rich history can still be seen in places such as Osaka castle today. Japan owes a great cultural debt to the region of Osaka; Cup Noodles were invented there after all. Outside

of the Kanto area, some of Japan's biggest companies, such as Panasonic and Itochu have their headquarters located in Osaka. However, there is no imminent threat of the region demanding independence, or greater protection for its linguistic or cultural heritage, as there is no distinct ethnic group. The JIP is a political party which runs candidates in multiple areas of Japan and has a national manifesto. Indeed, the JIP supports a more aggressive *Japanese* foreign policy, including constitutional revision and increased defence spending. As such, the JIP is very much a party of Japan. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the fact that the party's support, at least support significant enough to allow to win seats at the national level, is concentrated in a specific geographical area. As such, the JIP can be described as a *regional* party. Perhaps the term used by Mazzoleni & Mueller (2016, pg. 10) "region specific catch all party", is the one which best sums up the JIP. In the next section, the article will examine general models of success for regional (and regionalist) parties and examine the JIP in the context of other regional parties.

### **Regional parties – measures of success**

There is a general consensus on the growing rise of the importance of regional parties and their effect on national politics. One only has to look at the turmoil in Catalonia, the consistent strength of the SNP in the UK or the difficulty in forming governments in regionally distinct places such as Belgium, to see how important regional politics are. But just as there a wide variety of "regional" parties, ranging from those seeking greater recognition to those seeking full blown independence, there is more than one way to measure their success.

The most common measure of success is of course *electoral*. Can a party with a limited geographical appeal become a force large enough to win seats in the national parliament? Table 1 shows party seat share from the previous 4 elections for regionally focused parties in both regional and national elections in Japan, Scotland and Germany. What is evident from the data is that all three regionally focused parties have been remarkably consistent in the level of support they have attracted. All three parties have been the largest party in regional elections for the past four (in the JRA's case three) The JIP (and its predecessors) are the newest party to have been founded, but very quickly established themselves as the 3<sup>rd</sup> force in Japanese politics. The party has won a majority of seats on 2 out of the last 3 elections and with the exception of the 2017 election, they have arguably maximized their support in the Osaka region to win a consistent share of seats. A similar pattern has

emerged with the SNP, a party which was founded 1934, but only found real electoral success with devolution and the creation of the Scottish Assembly in 1999. The SNP has been able to run a majority or minority government, often with the support of the Greens in the last four administrations and this has translated into continued success in national elections, with the SNP winning a majority of Scottish seats in the last three elections. The CDU, historically the most successful of these parties, has had a command of the Bavarian *Lantag* since 1958 and been a vital partner to the CDU in federal elections. Although it is interesting to note that in the most recent state and national elections, the CDU faced challenges from the Alternative for Germany (AfD) on its ideological right and the Green party on its left. Only a coalition with the Free Voters party allowed it to retain state control.

<i>Regional / State level assembly elections</i>			
	Osaka JRA / JIP	SNP	CDU
Most recent election	57.95	49.61	41.46
Previous election 2	47.72	48.83	56.11
Previous election 3	52.29	53.4	49.19
Previous election 4	N/A	36.43	68.88
<i>National / Federal elections</i>			
Most recent election	8.81	7.38	6.11
Previous election 2	2.36	5.38	6.48
Previous election 3	8.63	8.61	8.87
Previous election 4	11.25	0.92	7.23

Table 1: Percentage of seats won in both regional/state and national parliaments/assemblies in the 4 most recent elections.

As well as *electoral* success, regional parties, in fact all political parties, are also judged on their *office* and *policy* success. Mazzolini and Mueller (2016) identify two aspects of *office* success: external support and coalition inclusion. If we were to take the CSU as an example, they have had considerable success in terms of *office*. In the 2018 Federal cabinet, CSU members held three cabinet positions, chief amongst them Horst Seehofer, who became Minister for the Interior. Much of the CSU’s continued success comes from its ability to take part in national government, an opportunity which has not occurred for either the JIP or SNP. *Policy* success refers to the realization of a party’s political goals. This can mean either the partial or total achievement of these goals. In the case of regional parties this could mean anything from greater decentralization of political power to complete independence. Recent trends in Germany have seen a greater degree of decentralization, which has benefitted the CSU in the prosperous Bavaria

region. For example, the CSU led Bavarian *Länder* (region) has been able to increase public sector pay and adopt new regulations in healthcare and justice reforms more quickly and efficiently than other areas in Germany (Turner & Rowe, 2015). This paper is chiefly concerned with explaining electoral success, and will do so in the next section. This will be followed by a brief discussion on office and policy success, the two areas parties need to focus on in order to continue electoral success

### **Explaining electoral success: Examining parallels with other regional parties**

Despite a respectable 2<sup>nd</sup> place finish, with 28% of constituency votes and 27% of list votes for the SNP in the first ever Scottish Assembly elections in 1999, Scotland was a nation of Labour party dominance in the post war period. In 2001, Labour won 56 out of 72 Westminster seats in Scotland, with the SNP in 3<sup>rd</sup> place with just 5. Fast forward to 2021, the SNP has been in either majority or minority government in the Scottish Assembly for the past 14 years and hold 48 out of 59 Westminster seats. This remarkable transformation, where a regional (indeed regionalist) party has taken control of one region in the UK provides a fascinating insight into how regional parties can maximize national influence. The subject of this section is to document the reasons behind the success of regional parties, with a particular focus on the SNP in Scotland, although other regional parties will be discussed, and what parallels can be drawn with the JIP both historically and going forward.

There are growing calls for decentralization in many democratic countries. Massetti and Schakel (2017) identify two distinct results of greater devolution: accommodation and empowerment. According to the accommodation thesis, when governments accede, at least partially, to the demands of regional actors and give a greater level of devolved power, be it a regional assembly, greater power over law making or taxation etc., this hypothetically eliminates the main reasons for regional parties' existence and curtails their electoral appeal (Meguid, 2015). Under the empowerment thesis, strengthening local institutions, such as regional assemblies or parliaments, will give regional parties more opportunity to take part in the political process and open up access to public funding, which in turn allows them to build more effective organizations. When looking at the SNP, the case for the empowerment thesis becomes overwhelming. Results from both Scottish Assembly and national elections (Table 1) show that in the period following devolution, with the creation of the Scottish Assembly, the SNP has become

the dominant force in Scottish politics. With a clear goal, the administration of Scotland, at the local level, the SNP have increased grassroots support, becoming the overwhelming choice of younger and metropolitan voters. Success breeds success, the SNP are now seen as winners and have a front-bench in the Assembly with experience of running an administration. In the case of the UK, the Labour government's attempt at accommodation, if that is what the plan was, backfired and raised a continuing threat to the Union under the auspices of Scottish nationalism. Prior to the emergence of the original Osaka party, and its national party the JRP, the Kinki region had been a battleground fought between the national parties. In 2009, the DPJ and LDP shared the majority of the seats the region. But the success of the original JRA in the Osaka prefectural election in 2011, where they won a majority of seats for the first time led to a breakthrough at the national level in 2012. Research suggests that greater decentralization of power leads to better representation for regional parties (Brancati, 2007). Continued steps towards decentralization may have additional benefits for both the SNP and JIP. There is a question about how much further decentralization can go. In Scotland, the question of referendum has not gone away since the 2014 vote, where Scots voted by 55% to 45% to stay as part of the UK. In Osaka, plans to merge Osaka's 24 wards, the *raison d'être* of the party since its inception, have twice been rejected by the electorate. However, this disappointment may offer electoral opportunity. Under the accommodation thesis, if referendums in Osaka and Scotland were successful, both the JIP and SNP would need to answer existential questions about their very purpose. Conversely, there is evidence to suggest that defeat has hardened the support of their voters. Polling throughout 2021 has put support for Scottish independence at between 50% and 45%.<sup>1)</sup> In Osaka, the result of the 2020 referendum (a 1.2% margin) mirrored that of the 2015 defeat (a 0.76) margin. The implication is voters in both regions have hardened their stance along Yes/No lines and the success of both parties in recent national elections could be connected to this newly emerged regional cleavage. As long as further decentralization is denied by the national government, there is the possibility that both parties' regional dominance could continue.

Support for regional parties can also be connected to the center-periphery cleavage first described by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) as the "centralizing, standardizing and rationalizing ... of the nation state" onto culturally distinct regions. While many of the social cleavages identified by Lipsett

1) Based on author's interpretation of polls from multiple sources.

and Rokkan have been replaced or become irrelevant, the center-periphery cleavage is increasing in importance with the growing rise of political regionalism. Along with populist and green parties, regionalist parties have been the ones to benefit from growing voter discontent with traditional parties (Hepburn & Hough, 2012). Dalton (2020) documents the increasing strains of the center-periphery relationship in Catalonia and Scotland. In Catalonia, regional identity, including linguistic identity, was brutally suppressed by the Franco regime. The idea of Spanish identity, and what it entailed, was forced upon the people of Catalonia. As we have seen in recent years, with the unofficial referendum which took place in Catalonia in 2017, and the resulting persecution of members of the Catalanian government, regional identity is reasserting itself. This is evident in continued success for parties supporting independence, the Republican Left and Together for Catalonia, in the 2021 Catalan parliamentary election. While Scottish identity has never been expressly persecuted by the national government, there is a long-held image of the Westminster parliament, and Britain as a whole, as being run by the English. This has certainly been reinforced by successive Conservative Prime Ministers, born and raised in English heartlands. The center-periphery cleavage can also be exacerbated by what regional parties see as the economic negatives of remaining too closely controlled by a central government. Economic disparity is one of the key drivers of regional movements (Kyriacou & Morral-Palacín, 2015). This is certainly true in Catalonia, where the region made up approximately 20% of Spain's total GDP in 2020, growing with importance while the Spanish economy has been hit hard by the effects of COVID-19 on its tourist industry (Romero, 2021). The SNP have long made the case that too much of its revenue from North Sea oil goes to Westminster and that total control over its natural resources would provide Scotland with the basis for economic independence. However, this argument looks on increasingly shaky ground. Data from the Scottish government shows receipts from North Sea oil fell almost 50% in the fiscal year 2019-2020, and the Scottish government running a fiscal deficit of 8.6%. There would also be the question of access to EU markets both regions would have to face in the event of complete independence from the central government. The SNP and independence movements represent an extreme version of greater regional autonomy and there is no suggestion this would be the model for the JIP. However, reasons given by supporters of the referendum in Osaka have primarily made a case based on economics. They argue the merger would give local wards more fiscal independence and be in a better position to offer tax breaks to both domestic and foreign companies setting up in the region. The transfer of power from the center to the periphery is a goal all regional parties, left and



right, have in common, even those who cannot appeal to ethnic or cultural feelings of voters.

Another factor explaining the growing success of regional parties is dealignment of voters and the evolution of multi-party systems in many democracies. In single or two-party systems, voters are given at most a binary choice between two national, catch-all parties. Regional concerns can only be expressed at the regional level, in local elections. In multi-party systems however, there is space for regional voice to be heard at the national level and even to influence national policy. Once they have entered national politics, regional parties have the opportunity to access public funding, be involved in national debates and build a more professional political operation which in turn attracts higher caliber of candidates (Ziegfeld, 2012). In the immediate post-colonial era, India was dominated by the Congress Party, led by the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. It was at the regional level, in the 1970's and 1980's that opposition parties were first able to wrest some power away from Congress, followed by a period of coalition government which lasted from 1984 to 2014 (Vaishnav & Hinton, 2019). Even though the BJP currently holds a majority in the *Lok Sabha*, it has a number of regional party coalition partners, Janata Dal and Apna Dal Sonelal which are based in north-eastern India and Uttar Pradesh respectively. In Germany, the Christian Social Union (CSU) has been a *defacto* part of the national Christian Democratic Union, which has led government since 2005. Much like the SNP in recent years, the CSU returns a remarkably consistent number of members to the Bundestag, ranging from between 43 and 58 in elections since 1953, acting as a quasi-state level party, the CSU has been a part of formulating government policy. While starting out as a party devoted to protecting the ethnic and territorial interests of Bavaria, based on conservative Christian values, the CSU adapted into a catch-all regional party with a national reach. The CSU also fits into the ethno-cultural model of regional party as they seek to have Bavaria recognized as a special region, with its own recognized identity. Its ability to access national state level decision making allowed it to create a "stronghold" over regional politics in Bavaria (Hepburn, 2012). This is not unlike the dual benefit enjoyed by the SNP in Scotland. Success at the local level bred success at the national level, with the breakdown of the traditional two-party system in the 2015 election, which saw Britain's first post-war coalition government and a breakthrough for the SNP, winning 56 out of 59 seats in Scotland. There was a genuine belief at the time that the SNP could enter either a formal or informal alliance with the Labour Party which, along with the First Past the Post voting system which has undoubtedly aided the success of the SNP, encouraged

voters that voting SNP could make a real difference to government. Even with the UK's return to one party predominance, the SNP has continued to enjoy electoral dominance at both the regional and national level. While it has not been able to enter government, its success has ensured the question of Scottish independence has not disappeared and that further devolution is still being considered by the Conservative government. The JIP occupies a similar right of center ideological position, even further to the right than the LDP, and, as stated earlier, supports similar reforms in foreign, defence and constitutional policies (Arai & Nakajo, 2018). Perhaps a question remains as to how well the JIP would perform as a third party in a genuinely competitive two-party system. Indeed, it could be argued that with LDP victory assured, the success of the JIP may be attributed to a regional protest vote. However, it is just as likely that voters in Osaka voted according to a rational choice model, realizing that the political space has opened up and that the JIP offer them a chance to have the largest regional voice in the Japanese Diet (outside of the Kanto region). Note should also be made of the organizational efforts made by the Osaka branch of the JIP to train and develop young political talent. Opened in 2012, the Seijijuku academy has acted as a finishing school for prospective young politicians and has been able to attract candidates such as Hitoshi Aoyagi, who previously worked for the United Nations and was able to win the Osaka 14 constituency as a political newcomer in 2021 (Mainichi Shimbun, 2021).

Finally, this section examines the influence of party leadership in the rise of regional parties. As noted above, India is one country where regional parties have flourished due to leaders leaving statewide parties and building their own personalistic, regional operations. There is a growing trend of personalisation amongst political candidates at the national regional level, aided by the diffusion of social media (McAllister, 2015; Zittel, 2015). As the breakdown of single and two-party politics has occurred across many democracies, opening up a multi-party space, so to have technological developments given a greater number of political actors a platform to reach voters. Whereas regional parties, especially those founded relatively close to an election, may have struggled to find supporters, donors and activists before, new media has given them the ability to build a party organisation capable of being competitive in a national election (Vincent, 2020). For example, SNP membership grew from around 20,000 in 2012 to over 100,000 by 2015 (Gordon, 2015). As noted above, much of this can be attributed to the 2014 referendum and the hardened support the SNP gained from being the sole party of independence – support which continues until this day. At the same time, the importance of party leadership, or in particular

the leadership of Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon cannot be overlooked. Unlike her predecessor as SNP leader, Alex Salmond, who was a highly divisive and combative figure, Sturgeon has been seen as a strong and dependable leader. She currently ranks as the most popular politician in the UK and has an appeal which stretches beyond the borders of Scotland (YouGov, 2021). Under Sturgeon's leadership, the SNP has moved to the left on social issues and committed to a generous, "big state" welfare system which includes free tuition fees for university students. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, she was seen as the most trusted leader in the UK. Sturgeon's skill as SNP leader and consistent commitment to seeking independence has allowed the SNP to make the most of the chances offered by the weakening of the multi-party system in the UK and the legacies of the failed referendum bid on 2014. As noted, the original incarnation of the JIP relied heavily on the personal popularity of its founder and leader, Toru Hashimoto. However, Hashimoto did not lead the JRP or JIP into national elections in 2014 and 2017. By the time of the 2017 elections, Hashimoto had already stepped back from frontline politics. So, while the JIP retained its stronghold over the Osaka region, it lacked a popular national figure to lead it into parliamentary elections. Around the same time though, a new actor emerged, not as the party's leader, but as a figurehead that could extend their popularity far beyond the Osaka region. In 2015 Hirofumi Yoshimura burst onto the scene as the underdog victor of the Osaka mayoral election. Until that point Yoshimura limited experience in local politics and a short stint in the Lower House until he decided to run for mayor at age 40. In 2019, Yoshimura effectively swapped position with Governor Ichiro Matsui to win a landslide victory in the gubernatorial race and he also currently serves as deputy leader of the JIP. Yoshimura has yet to lead the JIP in a national capacity and of course cannot take all of the credit for the party's 2021 electoral success. However, it would be remiss to dismiss the personal popularity he has accrued. As mayor and governor, Yoshimura was a leading figure in bringing about the second referendum. He has spoken out in support of allowing casinos to be legalized and built in Osaka and against plans in San Francisco to build a statue of "comfort women" in 2017, which led to Osaka ending its "sister-city" relationship. But it was during the COVID-19 pandemic when Yoshimura made himself a national level figure. While the LDP government was hesitating and encouraging people to travel between prefectures, Yoshimura was asking them not to travel and developing an "Osaka" model for dealing with the pandemic (Nippon.com, 2020). In stark contrast to the 71-year-old Prime Minister, Yoshihide Suga, Yoshimura was utilizing social media to portray his youthful energy and hard work. His popularity has been compared to that of a

pop star. Although unsuccessful with the 2020 referendum, Yoshimura has become a regional politician well known and liked at the national level. Unlike Nicola Sturgeon, he has the potential to develop into a national level politician, although doing so would mean either a defection to the LDP or a seismic change in Japan's electoral landscape. For regional parties, it is important that they feel as though their representatives, even if they are focused on regional issues, have a reach into national politics. Without this there is little hope of the significant reform regional parties often promise.

### **Discussion: Does *electol* success lead to *office* and *policy* success?**

This paper has documented and attempted to explain the reasons behind the recent electoral success of regional parties, in particular the JIP and SNP. This final section will examine both parties' achievements and potential goals in office and policy areas, and posit how electoral success may be translated into office and policy success in the future.

As noted earlier, the SNP have been a formidable vote winning machine, and at the local level, very successful in maintaining power in Scotland. However, in Westminster, the SNP is very much a party of opposition and opposes the vast majority of governmental bills. However, the SNP is an active member in Westminster politics. SNP MPs currently hold 2 chairs of House of Commons Select Committees, for International Trade and Scottish Affairs, and as such are in a position to scrutinize the formulation and implementation of government policy. Looking towards the future, it is not inconceivable that the SNP could even enter government, or at least play *enabler* to a prospective Labour government. With the UK still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and recent controversy over Conservative MPs taking well-paid second jobs, (as of autumn 2021) the Conservative and Labour parties are almost tied in opinion polls. Were an election held under these circumstances, a single party majority would be unlikely and there would be a significant opportunity for the SNP to extract office-based concessions, not to mention a possible second referendum, from Labour.

Upon entering the 49<sup>th</sup> elected House of Representatives, the JIP entered into an agreement with the Democratic Party for the People which gives them the numbers to propose budget legislation. This new alliance may put them in conflict with the LDP however as they have already agreed to propose legislation which would cut lawmaker's salaries by 20%. In the Diet, the JIP holds only one chair of lower house committees, for Science, Technology and Innovation and any legislation introduced by the JIP would

need support from the LDP in order to pass. However, while the JIP has little *de jure* office power, its role as potential ally to the LDP in the area of military spending and constitutional revision open up the possibility of more access to *de facto* power, as will be discussed in the next section.

	SNP	JIP
Economic	<i>Control over employment rights in Scotland for the Scottish Assembly</i>	<i>Reduction of consumption tax to 5% (for a 2-year period)</i>
Constitutional	<i>Seek a referendum on Scottish independence</i>	<i>Reduction of Diet members by 30% and stricter donation rules</i>
Immigration	<i>Devolved powers to allow higher levels of immigration to Scotland</i>	<i>N/A</i>
Climate	<i>Set a target for net-zero carbon emissions by 2045</i>	<i>To phase out nuclear energy and aim for carbon neutral by 2050</i>
Security	<i>Eliminating or removing “Trident” nuclear missiles from Scotland</i>	<i>Eliminating 1% of GDP spending cap on defence</i>
Decentralization	<i>(1) Devolution of employment law. (2) Power to raise minimum wage.</i>	<i>(1) Commitment for administrative reform in Osaka. (2) Regional control over consumption tax.</i>

Table 2: A selection of manifesto pledges by the SNP (2019) and JIP (2021). Pledges chosen highlight regional/decentralization themed policies parties are pursuing.

To examine *policy*, manifesto pledges are a good indicator of what parties aim to achieve. Pre-election, they can give us an idea of what believe, even if they are not in government, as is the case with many regional parties. Post-election, they allow for an appraisal of party success in influencing national government policy. While both parties promote policies, which are applicable to state units as a whole, both are also localized in focus.

*“We believe people in Scotland have the right to choose their own future - a choice between Westminster control and becoming an independent country” – SNP 2019 Manifesto*

Naturally, a large part of the SNP 2019 manifesto was the push for a second referendum in Scottish independence, breaking Scotland away from the “cruel” Conservative led UK government and the “mess” of Brexit. The selection of manifesto policies highlighted in Table 2 show how the SNP has taken a dual track philosophy to greater devolution. On the one hand, the SNP advocates a second referendum and details what it could do as an independent nation, such as scrapping the Trident nuclear defence system and rejoining the EU. However, there is also a recognition that Scotland, at least in the short term, will remain a part of the UK. As such, there are also calls for greater devolution of powers from Westminster, such as im-

migration policy and the power to change employment law. As an opposition party, with a hostile relationship with the Conservative government in London, the SNP has been unable to achieve any of these goals thus far. However, there are 2 ways in which policy “progress” has been made. Firstly, the Scottish government has done what it can to put its own mark on policies. While immigration rules have been drastically altered in the wake of Britain’s withdrawal from the EU, the Scottish government has taken great trouble to highlight the continued need for immigrant labor and that Scotland is “just as welcoming as it has always been” (Scottish Government, 2021). The Scottish government has also worked with independent bodies to highlight the need for greater flexibility in immigration rules. For example, the Law Society of Scotland (2017) has written of the need for a “bespoke” immigration policy, which would address Scotland’s need for greater population growth and shortfall of labour in some sectors. Secondly, the idea of devolution across the whole of the UK is currently under discussion. Under the policy of “Levelling Up” Britain, the government’s plan to rejuvenate economically deprived areas and bring about a recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the UK parliamentary Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee has recommended more devolution to England. While this does not pertain to Scotland, or Wales or Northern Ireland, the decentralization of power in the UK surely owes much to the political pressure the SNP has placed on the UK government since 1999.

*Decision making to be done “at the smallest unit possible...the role of government should be clarified and all other responsibilities lay with local government” – JIP manifesto 2021*

In comparison to the SNP 2019 manifesto, the JIP set out a more nationally focused set of policy priorities. And also, unlike the SNP, the JIP is much more closely aligned with the governing LDP ideologically. At the regional level, the Osaka JIP had considerable policy success, passing laws to privatize the city subway system and free education measures (Adelstein, 2021). While not in any kind of position to make laws itself on national level, the JIP could prove an invaluable ally to the government should it wish to make any constitutional change. With recent developments in the rest of East Asia, specifically heightened tensions between China and Taiwan and the signing of the AUKUS pact seeming to put the Pacific at the top of America and Australia’s security priorities, there has been renewed discussion about Japan’s own security capabilities. With the current make-up of the Lower House, the LDP would need help from friendly parties, which would place the JIP in an advantageous position were it to use its support

as a negotiation tactic in relation to other policy making. The long-held aim of reducing the number of Diet members and devolving more power to the regions act as a dual strategy to strengthen local administrations, at the expense of national government power. While the JIP presents this an ideological pledge which should apply to the entire country, it is not difficult to connect this to the desire for greater autonomy for Osaka. The manifesto also restates the party's desire for further devolving power to the Osaka region, having local control over income tax as a way to make regional economies more efficient and competitive and to continue to seek reform of Osaka's city and prefectural administration. This last pledge, while designed to keep the support of the considerable number of people who voted in favor of reform in 2015 and 2020, has the danger of causing voter apathy, or even resentment towards continued local referendums. The JIP will need to carefully consider whether its 2021 election success gives it the mandate to hold another referendum, or whether holding off on another vote would allow it to achieve its goals in the long-term while maintaining its electoral support at the national level.

Democratic countries have been seeing a greater push towards further decentralization of power in recent years. The UK and Japan are no exceptions to this. The push has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, where central governments have had to rely on regional authorities to administer lifesaving vaccines and take responsibility for public safety through region specific rules and guidance. As the world looks towards a life after COVID-19, it is unlikely that regional authorities will wish to give back this power. Therefore, regional parties, acting as vehicles for regional interests, have the opportunity to consolidate and extend their influence on politics at the national level. We can certainly expect to see continued pushes for the devolution of power to regional areas in the UK and Japan.

## References

- Adelstein, J. (2021, November). *Japan's new right marching in a muscular direction*. Retrieved from Asia Times: <https://asiatimes.com/2021/11/japans-new-right-marching-in-a-muscular-direction/>
- Arai, K., & Nakajo, M. (2018). Survey of candidate's policy preferences. In R. Pekkanen, S. Reed, E. Scheiner, & D. Smith, *Japan Decides 2017: The Japanese general election* (pp. 149-164). Palgrave MacMillan.
- Brancati, D. (2007). The Origins and Strengths of Regional Parties. *British Journal of Political Science*, 38, 135-159.
- CBC News. (2021, August). *The Bloc Québécois unveils its electoral platform, stressing Quebec identity, environment*. Retrieved from CBC News: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/bloc-qu%C3%A9b%C3%A9cois-election-platform-1.6149655>

- Chrusciel, M. (2016). Today's stance of ethno-regionalist parties on European integration in the prism of the migrant crisis. *Dans L' Europe En Formation*, 77-94.
- Dalton, Y. (2020). *Catalonia & Scotland: Centre-Periphery Cleavage*. Retrieved from Researchgate: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342242048\\_Catalonia\\_Scotland\\_Centre-Periphery\\_Cleavage](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342242048_Catalonia_Scotland_Centre-Periphery_Cleavage)
- Dandoy, R. (2010). Ethno-regionalist parties in Europe: a typology. *Perspectives on Federalism*, Vol. 2, issue 2, 194-220.
- DeWinter. (2006). Introduction: Autonomist Parties in European Politics. In L. De Winter, M. Gomez, & P. Lynch, *Autonomist Parties in European Politics* (pp. 11-30). ICPS.
- Gordon, T. (2015). *SNP boost as membership soars past 100k mark*. Retrieved from The Herald: <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/13206844.snp-boost-membership-soars-past-100k-mark/>
- Hepburn, E. & Houge, D. (2012). Regionalist Parties and the Mobilization of Territorial Difference in Germany. *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 47, No. 1., 74-96.
- Japanese Innovation Party. (2021). *身を切る改革, 実行中 - 2021 JIP Manifesto*. Retrieved from [https://o-ishin.jp/shuin2021/ishin\\_manifesto.pdf](https://o-ishin.jp/shuin2021/ishin_manifesto.pdf)
- Kyriacou, P., & Morral-Palacin, N. (2015). Regional Inequalities and the Electoral Success of Regional Parties: Evidence from the OECD. *Publius*, Vol. 45, No. 1, 3-23.
- Law Society of Scotland (2017). *Immigration and Scotland Inquiry: Consultation response*. <https://www.lawscot.org.uk/media/359420/imm-immigration-and-scotland-inquiry.pdf>.
- Lipset, S. & Rokkan, S. (1967). Cleavage Structures, Party Systems and Voter Alignments: An Introduction. In S. M. (Eds.), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*. New York: Free Press.
- Mainichi Shimbun. (2021, November). *What's behind Japan Innovation Party's major breakthrough in general election?* Retrieved from Mainichi Shimbun: <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20211101/p2a/00m/0na/043000c>
- Masseti, E. (2017). Decentralization Reforms and Regionalist Parties' Strength: Accommodation, Empowerment or Both? Political Studies, 65(2). *Political Studies*, 65(2): 432-451., 432-451.
- Mazzoleni, O. &. (2016). Explaining the policy success of regionalist. In O. &. Mazzoleni, *Regionalist parties in Western Europe* (pp. 1-21). Routledge.
- McAllister, I. (2015). The personalization of politics in Australia. *Party Politics*, 21(3), 337-345.
- McAngus, C. (n.d.). *How do nationalist parties reform their organisational profiles? The cases of Plaid Cymru and the SNP compared*. Retrieved from Democratic Audit: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/63113/1>
- Meguid, B. (2015). Multi-Level Elections and Party Fortunes: The Electoral Impact of Decentralization in Western Europe. *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 47, No. 4, 397-398.
- Misra, S. (2016, October). *Regional parties and Indian politics*. Retrieved from Observer Research Foundation: <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/regional-parties-indian-politics/>
- Nippon.com. (2020). *Two Young Japanese Governors Rise to Prominence in COVID-19 Crisis*. Retrieved from Nippon.com: <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-data/h00718/>
- Scottish Government. (2021). *Visa and Immigration*. Retrieved from Scotland.org: <https://www.scotland.org/about-scotland/visa-and-immigration>
- Scottish National Party. (2019). *Stronger for Scotland - 2019 SNP Manifesto*. Retrieved from [https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/www.snp.org/uploads/2019/11/11\\_27-SNP-Manifesto-2019-for-download.pdf](https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/www.snp.org/uploads/2019/11/11_27-SNP-Manifesto-2019-for-download.pdf)
- Romero, T. (2021). *Gross domestic product (GDP) in Catalonia and the whole of Spain between 2003 and 2020*. Retrieved from Statista: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/327063/gross-domestic-product-in-catalonia-and-spain/>
- Strmiska, M. (2002). A study on conceptualisation of (ethno)regionalist parties. *Central European Political Studies Review*, Volume 4.
- Turner, E., & Rowe, C. (2015). *A race to the top, middle or bottom? The consequences of decentralisation in Germany*. Institute for Public Policy Research.
- Vaishnav, M., & Hinson, J. (2019). *The Dawn of India's Fourth Party System*. Retrieved from Carnegie: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/09/05/dawn-of-india-s-fourth-party->



system-pub-79759

- Vincent, S. (2020). #Personal vs #Party: A comparative study of candidates' new media campaigning in Japan and the United Kingdom. *Open Political Science*; 4, 1-14.
- Vincent, S. (2021). The return to one-party dominance: The challenges of opposition party institutionalization in Japan and the United Kingdom. In M. Iwasaki, 議会制民主主義の揺らぎ (pp. 61-84). Keiso Shobo.
- YouGov. (2021). *The Most Popular Other Uk Public Figures (Q3 2021)*. Retrieved from YouGov: <https://yougov.co.uk/ratings/politics/popularity/other-uk-public-figures/all>
- Ziegfeld, A. (2012). Coalition Government and Party System Change: Explaining the Rise of Regional Political. *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 45, No. 1, 69-87.
- Zittel, T. (2015). Do candidates seek personal votes on the Internet? Constituency Candidates in the 2009 German Federal Elections. *German Politics* 24:4, 435-450.