Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus (2026), **24**, e6, 1–8
doi:10.1017/apj.2025.10033

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Analysis

2024 Tokyo Gubernatorial Election

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Abstract

This paper discusses the 2024 Tokyo gubernatorial election in the context of past contests. It shows how this election manifested the trends since the 1990s: an increasing distrust of the existing political parties, including those created in that decade and the growing support for independent candidates. Such candidates follow their own line of thinking, free from party ties, and appeal to voters in ways that resonate with public skepticism toward party politics. The analysis highlights both continuity and change in Tokyo elections and underscores broader patterns in Japanese political development.

Keywords: Tokyo Gubernatorial Election; Tokyo Metropolitan Governor; Tokyo Metropolitan Government; Postwar Japanese Politics; Japan's Party Politics

Introduction

The incumbent Yuriko Koike won the Tokyo gubernatorial election of July 2024. This article discusses how we can best understand the 2024 election through a historical perspective. The characterization of the Tokyo gubernatorial election as a proxy war for national parties has been stated in previous studies of the Metropolitan Government and in major newspapers (Bando 1991: 168–170; Toki 1995a: 466–467). The major newspapers initially reported on the 2024 election as a confrontation between the national-level ruling and opposition parties. This article argues that that is a mischaracterization of the election and, instead, emphasizes the impact of Tokyo voters' aversion to national political party interests influencing local elections on their candidate choice. In fact, a deep dive into Tokyo gubernatorial elections from the 1950s through today reveals a long-standing dislike among the Tokyo electorate of interference by national parties, and, instead, support for those candidates who stand up against the national leadership. It also highlights that candidates who appealed to voters in a way that is consistent with voters' feelings against party politics are positively evaluated by voters; candidates who are seen as selected in the interest of political parties only suffered severe defeat. Beyond Tokyo, the findings of this study suggest broader implications for understanding voter distrust of established political parties in subnational elections, a dynamic increasingly observed in contemporary democracies.

In the 2024 election, Koike was supported by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and *Komeito*,[1] while her opponent Renho was supported by the largest opposition party, the *Rikken Minshuto,* or Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, (hereafter *Ritsumin*), the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), and the Social Democratic Party (SDP)[2] (*Asahi Shinbun* 2024a; *Mainichi Shinbun* 2024a, 2024b; *Nihonkeizai Shinbun* 2024a). The matchup between these two female candidates added interest to the confrontation between the national-level ruling and opposition parties, from the viewpoint of national coverage. Both were news anchors for major television stations before becoming Diet members and served as ministers: Koike in LDP administrations and Renho in Democratic Party (*Minshuto*, the main forerunner of *Ritsumin*) administrations. They were high-profile politicians within their respective parties (Graph 1).

In keeping with this view of national-level party competition, the Renho camp brought criticism of the national LDP's illicit slush fund scandal (Prusa 2025) to the forefront in her campaign for governor of Tokyo. However, she was unable to match even the purely independent, social media-driven Shinji Ishimaru, who criticized conventional politicians relying on national political parties, in the number of votes she received, coming in third with 1.28 million votes, behind

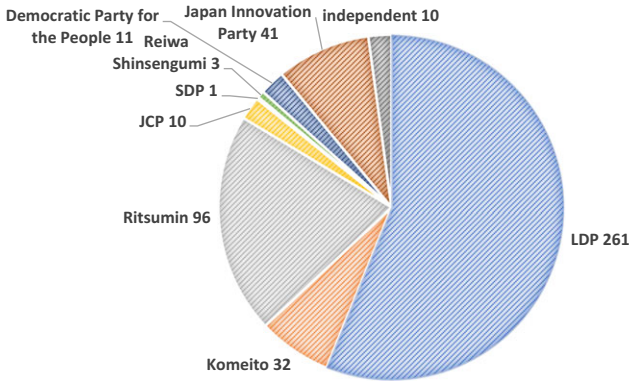
[1] Koike was also supported by the Tokyo metropolitan federation of the Democratic Party for the People and *Tomin First no Kai* (Tokyoites First), a regional party founded by Koike, for which she is a special advisor. The opposition Japan Innovation Party and Reiwa Shinsengumi were neutral.

[2] In 1996, the Japan Socialist Party (JSP), the largest opposition party, renamed itself *Shaminto*, or Social Democratic Party (SDP), but many SDP members moved to *Minshuto*, Democratic Party of Japan, and laid part of the foundation for the current *Ritsumin*. However, *Ritsumin* also includes many conservatives, including Ichiro Ozawa, who was once secretary-general of the LDP.

Email: junihasegawa@keio.jp
Cite this article: Hasegawa J. 2024 Tokyo Gubernatorial Election. *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* https://doi.org/10.1017/apj.2025.10033

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https://doi.org/10.1017/apj.2025.10033 Published online by Cambridge University Press



Graph 1: Number of seats taken by political parties in the House of Representatives election held on October 31, 2021.
Source: NHK 2021.

Koike's 2.91 million and Ishimaru's 1.65 million (Table 1). This article highlights that historically, when national political parties have forwarded gubernatorial candidates to solely promote their own interests or have used the race as a means of confronting rival parties, these candidates have often faced backlash from Tokyo voters. The opposition parties' candidate fell into that trap during the 2024 election, drawing the ire of voters who distrusted the intrusion of national politics into the Tokyo gubernatorial election.

Tokyo gubernatorial elections and national party politics in history

In this section, we will trace how the governing LDP or opposition parties such as the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) historically have failed to influence the outcome of Tokyo gubernatorial elections when they have insisted on conducting candidate selection and election campaigns under the leadership of party headquarters.

Historically, the relationship between Tokyo gubernatorial elections and party leadership has been complicated, as illustrated by the 1967 election. In that case, there was disagreement between the LDP's headquarters and the party's Tokyo metropolitan federation over the selection of a candidate for governor. The metropolitan federation is a local organization of each party consisting of members of the Diet with constituencies in Tokyo, members of the Metropolitan Assembly, and members of ward, city, town, and village assemblies in Tokyo. The LDP frontrunner was former civil servant Shunichi Suzuki, who had been Governor Ryotaro Azuma's deputy governor for 8 years and was considered by the party's metropolitan federation the likeliest to succeed him. However, Prime Minister Eisaku Sato feared that Suzuki could not win the election because "the title of 'Deputy Governor' inevitably gives the impression of someone in a secondary position" (*Asahi Shinbun* 1967a). Despite strong opposition from Metropolitan Assembly members of the LDP who supported Suzuki, Prime Minister Sato, as the leader of the LDP, forced his policy of supporting Masatoshi Matsushita, the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) candidate who was the president of Rikkyo University, even though there was no policy common ground between the LDP and DSP. Sato's action failed to produce unity in the Matsushita camp, where there continued to be mutual distrust between the LDP and DSP and consequent lackluster support for the candidate. In the end, Matsushita lost to progressive Ryokichi Minobe, a Marxist economics professor at the Tokyo University of Education, who had run under the JSP and JCP banner (*Asahi Shinbun* 1967b).

It was true that Minobe had a new type of appeal to voters consisting of two elements when he was first elected in 1967. One was friendliness and the other was a confrontational stance toward the LDP national government. He was a regular on a Sunday night NHK program called Easy Economics Classroom, broadcast in the early 1960s. It was a program portraying a fictitious "Minobe family," including Minobe as the father, who explained economic topics in an easy-to-understand manner as a topic of family discussion. He gained popularity through this program (NHK n.d.).

At the same time, Minobe kept his confrontational stance toward the LDP government of Prime Minister Sato. In the late 1960s, a worsening of urban problems in Japan's major cities—most notably in Tokyo—such as housing shortages, urban sprawl, waste disposal, traffic congestion, and pollution fueled growing criticism of the LDP. This was particularly evident among voters with no party allegiance, as reflected in national election results. In the January 1967 general election, held just before the Tokyo gubernatorial race, the LDP recorded its lowest vote share both nationally and in Tokyo. The LDP government was perceived as neglecting urban issues, and its conservative gubernatorial candidate was dismissed as ineffective. These perceptions, reinforced by Governor Minobe's emphasis on welfare and antipollution measures, also proved decisive in the 1971 election. He won the 1971 gubernatorial election by a large margin of 3.61 million votes to 1.93 million, after criticizing the LDP government as advancing militarism and claiming that the LDP gubernatorial candidate was Sato's proxy (Bando 1991: 209–219; Toki 1995a: 432–442).

When the financial restructuring of the Metropolitan Government in a low-growth economy following the 1973 oil crisis became the imperative, Minobe's continued emphasis on high-level welfare and insistence on an ideological confrontation with the LDP government came to be questioned. In the following election in 1975, Minobe argued that the LDP nominee, right-wing Shintaro Ishihara, would make the Metropolitan Government fascist. In response, Ishihara criticized the high level of welfare, a selling point of the progressive Minobe administration, as the cause of Tokyo's ballooning budget deficit. Minobe was elected, but by a narrow margin of 2.68 million votes to 2.33 million (Bando 1991: 219–236; Toki 1995a: 442–447). A 1978 poll indicated that the public disliked ideological confrontation in metropolitan politics and wanted instead a pragmatic governor (Toki 1995b: 112). Thus, after the oil crisis of 1973, when the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's finances fell into deficit under low economic growth, a metropolitan governor was increasingly expected to demonstrate administrative ability capable of overcoming such economic hardship.

Conditions emerged that allowed Suzuki (Deputy Governor, 1959-1967) to re-establish himself as a strong

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Table 1 Tokyo metropolitan gubernatorial elections

Date	Number of voters	Number of votes	Voter turnout (%)	Successful candidate (political party [parties] that approved, endorsed, supported, voluntarily supported, etc. the candidate) and number of votes obtained	Other major candidate(s) (political party [parties] that approved, endorsed, supported, etc. the candidate) and number of votes obtained
April 5, 1947	2,601,796	1,601,724	61.6	Seiichiro Yasui (*Jiyuto*[a] and *Nihonshinpoto*[a]) 703,738	Daikichiro Tagawa (JSP and JCP) 615,444
April 30, 1951	3,674,332	2,340,784	65.1	Seiichiro Yasui (*Jiyuto* and *Kokuminminshuto*[a]) 1,433,246	Kanju Kato (JSP and JCP) 811,616
April 23, 1955	4,476,170	2,669,124	59.6	Seiichiro Yasui (*Nihonminshuto*[a] and *Jiyuto*) 1,309,481	Hachiro Arita (JSP and JCP) 1,191,608
April 23, 1959	5,151,415	3,518,452	70.1	Ryotaro Azuma (LDP) 1,821,346	Hachiro Arita (JSP) 1,652,189
April 17, 1963	6,111,660	4,027,006	67.7	Ryotaro Azuma (LDP and *Komei Seiji Renmei*[b]) 2,298,616	Masaru Sakamoto (JSP, JCP and Democratic Socialist Party (DSP)[c]) 1,634,634
April 15, 1967	7,433,007	5,016,522	67.5	Ryokichi Minobe (JSP and JCP) 2,200,389	Masatoshi Matsushita (LDP and DSP) 2,063,752 Kenichi Abe (*Komeito*) 601,527
April 11, 1971	7,823,325	5,660,903	72.4	Ryokichi Minobe (JSP and JCP) 3,615,299	Akira Hatano (LDP) 1,935,694
April 13, 1975	7,959,009	5,355,971	67.3	Ryokichi Minobe (JSP, JCP and *Komeito*) 2,688,566	Shintaro Ishihara (LDP) 2,336,359 Masatoshi Matsushita (DSP) 273,574
April 8, 1979	8,014,842	4,420,867	55.2	Shunichi Suzuki (LDP, *Komeito*, and DSP) 1,900,210	Kaoru Ota (JSP, JCP and *Kakushin Jiyu Rengo*) 1,541,594 Yoshikata Aso 911,825
April 10, 1983	8,240,389	3,952,007	48.0	Shunichi Suzuki (LDP, *Komeito*, DSP, and *Shin Jiyu Club*) 2,355,348	Hideo Matsuoka (JSP and JCP) 1,482,169
April 12, 1987	8,659,442	3,740,181	43.19	Shunichi Suzuki (LDP, *Komeito*, and DSP) 2,128,479	Shizuo Wada (JSP) 749,659 Shigeo Hatada (JCP) 698,919
April 7, 1991	8,972,295	4,625,727	51.56	Shunichi Suzuki (Tokyo Metropolitan Federations of LDP and DSP) 2,292,846	Hisanori Isomura (LDP, *Komeito* and DSP) 1,437,233 Shigeo Hatada (JCP) 421,775 Mitsunori Ohara (JSP) 290,435
April 9, 1995	9,240,502	4,681,993	50.67	Yukio Aoshima 1,700,993	Nobuo Ishihara (LDP, JSP, *Sakigake* and *Komeito*) 1,235,498 Tetsundo Iwakuni 824,385 Kenichi Omae 422,609 Saburo Kuroki (JCP) 284,387
April 11, 1999	9,521,120	5,510,042	57.87	Shintaro Ishihara 1,664,558	Kunio Hatoyama (*Minshuto*) 851,130 Yoichi Masuzoe 836,104 Yasushi Akashi (LDP and *Komeito*) 690,308. Mitsuru Mikami (JCP) 661,881 Koji Kakizawa 632,054
April 13, 2003	9,884,071	4,442,195	44.94	Shintaro Ishihawa (LDP and *Komeito*) 3,087,190	Keiko Higuchi (*Minshuto* and SDP and others) 817,146 Yoshiharu Wakabayashi (JCP) 364,007
April 8, 2007	10,238,704	5,565,127	54.35	Shintaro Ishihara (LDP and *Komeito*) 2,811,486	Shiro Asano (*Minshuto* and SDP) 1,693,323 Manzo Yoshida (JCP) 629,549 Kisho Kurokawa 159,126
April 10, 2011	10,505,848	6,072,604	57.80	Shintaro Ishihara (LDP of Metropolitan Assembly and *Komeito* of Metropolitan Assembly) 2,615,120	Hideo Higashikokubaru 1,690,669 Miki Watanabe 1,013,132 (*Minshuto* of the Metropolitan Assembly) Akira Koike 623,913 (JCP)

(*Continued*)

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Table 1 (*Continued*)

Date	Number of voters	Number of votes	Voter turnout (%)	Successful candidate (political party [parties] that approved, endorsed, supported, voluntarily supported, etc. the candidate) and number of votes obtained	Other major candidate(s) (political party [parties] that approved, endorsed, supported, etc. the candidate) and number of votes obtained
December 16, 2012	10,619,652	6,647,744	62.60	Naoki Inose (*Komeito*, Japan Innovation Party and LDP) 4,338,936	Kenji Utsunomiya (JCP, SDP, and others) 968,960 Shigefumi Matsuzawa 621,278
February 9, 2014	10,685,343	4,930,251	46.14	Yoichi Masuzoe (Metropolitan Federations of *Komeito* and LDP, and others) 2,112,979	Kenji Utsunomiya (JCP, SDP, and others) 982,594 Morihiro Hosokawa (*Minshuto* and others) 956,063 Toshio Tamogami (Japan Innovation Party) 610,865
July 31, 2016	11,083,306	6,620,407	59.73	Yuriko Koike 2,912,628	Hiroya Masuda (LDP, *Komeito*, and others) 1,793,453 Shuntaro Torigoe (*Minshinto*, JCP, SDP, and others) 1,346,103
July 5, 2020	11,290,229	6,209,940	55.00	Yuriko Koike (*Komeito*, Tokyoites First, some of the LDP, and others) 3,661,371	Kenji Utsunomiya (*Ritsumin*, JCP, SDP, and others) 844,151 Taro Yamamoto (*Reiwa Shinsengumi*) 657,277
July 7, 2024	11,349,278	6,879,502	60.62	Yuriko Koike (LDP, *Komeito*, and Metropolitan Federation of Democratic Party for the People) 2,918,015	Shinji Ishimaru 1,658,363 Renho (*Ritsumin*, JCP, and SDP) 1,283,262 Toshio Tamogami 267,699

Note: [a] Forerunner of the LDP; [b] forerunner of the *Komeito*; [c] formed in 1960 by the right-wingers of the JSP and dissolved in 1994, regarded as the main forerunner of the current *Kokumin Minshuto*, Democratic Party for the People.
Sources: *Asahi Shinbun* (1947); *Asahi Shinbun* (1951); *Mainichi Shinbun* (1959); *Mainichi Shinbun* (1963). Secretariat to Tokyo Metropolitan Government Election Administration Commission. Toki 1995a: 416–419, 421, 423, 424–425, 426–427, 429–430, 431, 433–434, 436, 439, 441–442, 443–444, 446, 448–449, 450, 453–454, 455, 458, 459–460, 462–463, 464. Tokyo Metropolitan Government Election Administration Commission. Tokyo Metropolitan Government Statistical Data Archive. *Tokyo Statistical Yearbook* for 1955: 326; for 1963: 403; for 1985: 477; for 1995: 489. Yamazaki 2002: 596 and 686. *Yomiuri Shinbun Online*, *n.d.*.

candidate. After the 1967 Tokyo gubernatorial election, Suzuki continued to hold such important positions as secretary general of the Japan World Exposition Association and chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Expressway Public Corporation. In the 1979 Tokyo gubernatorial election, Suzuki was supported by the LDP, *Komeito*, and DSP, and faced Kaoru Ota, the former chairperson of the General Council of Trade Unions in Japan. Here, the progressive side was affected by difficulty in unifying their will. In 1978, Ota announced that he would run for governor of Tokyo, hoping to be supported by the JSP and JCP as the retiring governor Minobe had been. However, Ichio Asukata, the chairperson of the JSP, was reluctant to endorse Ota, considering him too much of a leftist and too connected with labor unions. Retiring Minobe also distrusted Ota, who had often bad-mouthed him, so he declared himself neutral, refusing to support Ota. This infighting is believed to have favored Suzuki, who defeated Ota by 1.9 million votes to 1.5 million (Bando 1991: 238–39; 245–46; Table 1).

The end of national political parties leading the Tokyo gubernatorial election

The conservative LDP and centrist *Komeito*/DSP support system worked through Suzuki's third victory in 1987; the 1991 gubernatorial election disturbed this equilibrium, ushering in a period in which the ability of national political parties to lead a gubernatorial election and decisively influence its outcome became increasingly limited. In the 1991 election, the LDP national headquarters believed that Suzuki could not win again and opposed his bid. He was criticized for his multiple terms, his advanced age of 80 years, and the exclusivity of his administrative technocracy. Moreover, the 240 m new Metropolitan Government Building at Shinjuku (Photo 1), completed in December 1990, was criticized as luxurious and extravagant (Nakano 1992: 261–296). There were also financial concerns with waterfront subcenter development in the Tokyo Bay area. In the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly, *Komeito* also expressed dissatisfaction with the inadequate supply of public housing (Mitsunobu 2011).

Accordingly, the LDP's Secretary-General Ichiro Ozawa suggested the main newscaster of NHK's evening news, Hisanori Isomura, who was in his early 60s and gave a suave impression. The headquarters of the LDP, the DSP, and *Komeito* endorsed Isomura, but the metropolitan federations of the LDP and the DSP supported Suzuki. It was a rare case in which the party headquarters and the party's metropolitan federation endorsed different candidates, and the two were at odds with each other; even in the 1967 election, the LDP metropolitan federation, which wished to endorse Suzuki, ultimately followed the policy of Prime Minister Sato to

https://doi.org/10.1017/apj.2025.10033 Published online by Cambridge University Press



Photo 1: The new Tokyo Metropolitan Government building at Shinjuku. [Caption: This building was designed by Kenzo Tange, one of the most famous Japanese architects. Taken by Sanshiro Hasegawa in 2024].

endorse Matsushita. In 1991, Suzuki attracted sympathy for the cold treatment he received from the LDP headquarters and defeated Isomura by 2.29 million votes to 1.43 million, with criticisms of his multiple terms and advanced age being overshadowed. Newspapers reported that voters were dismayed by the performance of his opponent, the suave Isomura, who was instructed by the LDP's headquarters to pretend to be a commoner, including taking a bath in a public bathhouse (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 1991). Following the election, Ozawa resigned as the LDP's secretary-general owing to this electoral outcome (Toki 1992: 249–256; Toki 1995a: 461–466). Newspapers at the time noted that the resignation of Ozawa, the LDP's powerful secretary general, was seen as an upheaval for national politics, while the results of the Tokyo gubernatorial election were described as an expression of Tokyo residents' dissatisfaction with the existing political parties (*Asahi Shinbun* 1991).

After the 1991 election, the Metropolitan Government was again taken up by the pragmatic and competent bureaucrat Suzuki, supported by all parties except the JCP. Suzuki had a strong sense of pride as a bureaucrat who specialized in local autonomy, and he was full of confidence in his administrative abilities. He sought to be a solemn administrative guru and did not inform the people of Tokyo of the substance of his administration or his governance vision and philosophy. Although Suzuki received temporary sympathy from voters owing to his cold treatment by the LDP in the 1991 election, toward the end of his fourth term he was regarded as a dictatorial administrator as he pushed ahead with the financially burdensome and much doubted waterfront subcenter development project even after the burst of the bubble economy (Sasaki 2011: 47–48). The people of Tokyo were no longer content with the Suzuki administration's attitude that the citizens, who were laypeople, should leave matters of metropolitan governance to them, the experts. Political scientist, Hiroshi Toki, citing a 1995 newspaper article, pointed out that some senior officials in the Tokyo Metropolitan Government considered that any post-Suzuki governor should not be a professional administrator (Toki 1995b: 2, 100).

Nevertheless, the LDP's headquarters made the same mistake three times in the five gubernatorial elections between 1995 and 2016 by selecting a candidate from the bureaucracy. For the 1995 Tokyo gubernatorial election, the LDP nominated Nobuo Ishihara, who had long served as deputy chief cabinet secretary, to succeed retiring Suzuki, and many parties, including the JSP and *Komeito*, supported Ishihara. However, the Independent Yukio Aoshima, an actor/comedian/writer and an independent member of the House of Councilors, was elected. Ishihara was a veteran bureaucrat similar to the retiring Suzuki. During the election campaign, Aoshima did not make outdoor speeches or use campaign vehicles, relying only on TV political broadcasts and posters (Yamazaki 2002: 601–602). Aoshima's individualistic campaign tactics were considered a "challenge to the bureaucratic candidate and bureaucratic politics" and appealed particularly to swing voters. The image of the governor thus changed from a competent bureaucrat to one who was approachable and nonpartisan—one who challenged the existing system (Toki 2003: 111–112).

Unlike Suzuki who seemed aloof from the public, Governor Aoshima had friendliness as his selling point but was later seen as a pushover, leading to a decline in his appeal as governor. He implemented his promise to cancel the World Urban Exposition but then ignored other key promises, appearing to be swallowed up by the Metropolitan Government bureaucracy (Sasaki 2011: 48–50; Toki 2003: 109–118). He abruptly announced shortly before the 1999 election that he would not

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run. Someone who was close to the voters but who could demonstrate leadership and execution without being taken in by political parties or officials was desired.

In the 1999 election, the LDP again nominated a bureaucrat candidate, Yasushi Akashi, under secretary-general of the United Nations, to succeed retiring Aoshima, but Shintaro Ishihara, a writer and right-wing LDP member of the National Diet, was elected as an independent thanks to his strong leadership qualities. The race was crowded, with six leading candidates. Because Aoshima was buried by the bureaucracy and had failed to demonstrate leadership, this trait became an election issue, and "character and style came to the fore rather than policy" (Toki 2003: 119). Ishihara, with his slogan of saying no to the state, was considered to deliver a clear and powerful message, and he gained broad support. According to an exit poll, Ishihara received the highest shares of votes among voters who supported no party and among LDP supporters, as well as the second-highest share among supporters of the largest opposition party (Yamazaki 2002: 686–690).

After his first electoral win, the LDP supported Ishihara in metropolitan governance. Although Ishihara declined formal endorsement from the party in all three subsequent gubernatorial elections, the LDP's metropolitan federation actively mobilized organizational support for his reelection campaigns. After his fourth election in 2011, Ishihara resigned as governor of Tokyo to return to national politics, and appointed writer Naoki Inose, whom he had recruited as deputy governor from outside party politics, as his successor. Inose, supported by the LDP and *Komeito*, won the 2012 election by a landslide but resigned owing to violations related to election campaign finance. He was succeeded in the 2014 election by Yoichi Masuzoe, an international political scientist and member of the Diet who had once belonged to the LDP. In the 2014 election, he was supported by the metropolitan federations of the LDP and *Komeito*. Masuzoe also resigned owing to allegations about political funds and other matters. In the 2016 election to determine his successor, the candidates promoted by the existing political parties were again defeated. The LDP and *Komeito* nominated Hiroya Masuda, a former bureaucrat in the Ministry of Construction who had served three terms as governor of Iwate Prefecture and was a cabinet minister in charge of local government matters in the LDP administrations of Shinzo Abe and Yasuo Fukuda. The largest opposition party, the Democratic Party, with the JCP, the SDP, and others, endorsed Shuntaro Torigoe, a journalist and television news presenter. However, it was Yuriko Koike that won the election as an independent. A *Yomiuri Shimbun* exit poll found that 49% of independents voted for Koike, 19% for Masuda, and 18% for Torigoe. Among LDP supporters, 55% voted for Koike and only 36% for Masuda (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 2016a).

In 2016, Koike announced her candidacy for the Tokyo gubernatorial election but did so without prior consultation with the LDP to which she belonged. She soon sought the endorsement of the LDP, but the LDP was displeased with her candidacy announcement, which was made without the party's permission, and decided that any member who supported her would be expelled (Koizumi et al. 2016). Koike withdrew her endorsement request and declared that she would run for office as an independent against the LDP candidate, creating a confrontation between Koike, cast as a reformist challenger, and the LDP (*Asahi Shinbun* 2016b; *Yomiuri Shinbun* 2016b). Moreover, while the LDP candidate Masuda, former governor of Iwate Prefecture, was not familiar to LDP supporters, Koike, a Diet member with a Tokyo constituency, was seen by supporters as the genuine LDP candidate (Miyashita 2016). As for the opposition parties' candidate, television news presenter Shuntaro Torigoe's name recognition was second only to Koike's, but he lacked political experience. Moreover, he lost support when two weekly magazines published articles during the election campaign with allegations that he had forced a former female university student into a sexual relationship with him years earlier (*Asahi Shinbun* 2016a). Furthermore, although he spent much of his campaign time criticizing the LDP government and defending the Constitution, he himself admitted that he was not well prepared regarding various issues confronting the Metropolitan Government (*Asahi Shinbun* 2016c).

Thus, examining Tokyo gubernatorial elections over time, we have seen that when the national party intervened against a candidate that was supported by the local party members, it was unlikely to see a victory. If the local party capitulated and supported the national party's candidate, the opposition was likely to win, but if the local party fielded their own candidate, in opposition to the national party candidate, the local party candidate was likely to win. Of course, perceptions of basic competency of the candidate also played a role.

Despite Koike's challenging relationship with the national party over the years, as part of its campaign in the 2024 Tokyo gubernatorial election, the opposing Renho camp harshly criticized Koike for having the backing of the national LDP government. The LDP could not support Koike prominently because the party faced strong criticism related to misuse of political funds that had come to light late the previous year, and it feared public outrage hurting its candidates. Therefore, LDP politicians refrained from holding street rallies so as not to provoke voters, and instead focused their efforts on securing votes from party and business organizations. There was a sense of crisis within the party that a loss in the Tokyo gubernatorial election could trigger a change of national government, as the LDP had lost all three lower house by-elections in April, and the Cabinet's approval rating remained sluggish (Ueda 2024; Takeuchi et al. 2024). The opposition parties that supported Renho aimed to increase criticism among the public of the LDP-supported Metropolitan Government by tying it to national politics, particularly the irregularities related to political funding. Public opinion on the issue was harsh but the opposing camp's attempts to link the issue to the gubernatorial election were successfully dodged by Koike, who emphasized her accomplishments during her two terms as governor of Tokyo. The opposition camp's strategy did not work to their benefit, as Renho came in third, which was seen as particularly damaging for *Ritsumin* (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 2024). What resonated more with voters was criticism of conventional party politics itself, rather than criticism of specific parties.

https://doi.org/10.1017/apj.2025.10033 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Conclusions

The 2024 Tokyo gubernatorial election exposed voters' distrust of the main political parties in general. Renho and the *Ritsumin* failed to make the LDP political fund issue a point of contention and failed to cause a confrontation between the ruling and opposition parties. *Ritsumin* collaborated with the Japanese Communist Party, but this, in turn, was seen as provoking a backlash from voters distrustful of existing political parties, leading many unaffiliated voters to cast their ballots for the independent Ishimaru (*Asahi Shinbun* 2024b; *Mainichi Shinbun* 2024c; *Nihonkeizai Shinbun* 2024b; *Yomiuri Shinbun* 2024). Ishimaru, who came in second, denounced party politicians as "self-serving politics-mongers." Using social media and making numerous soapbox speeches, he attracted a segment of the population that had little interest in politics hitherto, gaining a large following among young people and apolitical individuals. Renho, who had long been a leading member of the *Ritsumin*, was considered to be only another party politician (Nakamura 2024).

Meanwhile, the LDP's efforts to maintain a low profile in the 2024 Tokyo gubernatorial election proved futile. Public resentment toward the party—sparked by allegations over political funding and other issues—erupted in the subsequent 2024 House of Representatives election, the 2025 Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly election, and the House of Councillors election. The ruling coalition of the LDP and *Komeito* failed to secure a majority in either House of the Diet, forcing them into difficult governance, while the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly's LDP group suffered its worst-ever seat count, falling to the position of the second-largest party. In the House of Councillors election, most opposition parties, including *Ritsimin*, also failed to achieve favorable results. Meanwhile, the new party formed by Ishimaru struggled to make gains in both the metropolitan assembly and upper house elections. However, as was particularly evident in the House of Councillors race, the two emerging parties established in 2020, both led by figures skilled at direct outreach through social media—the centrist Democratic Party for the People and the far-right populist *Sanseito*—succeeded in winning more votes and seats. This suggests that, as in the Tokyo gubernatorial contests, distrust of established parties has become deeply entrenched and is consistently fostering alternative forms of political mobilization. *Sanseito*'s rise, in particular, may indicate the entrenchment of populist styles of politics and a potential shift in Japan's political norms (Schäfer 2025).

An exploration of the history of the Tokyo gubernatorial elections, as found in this article, reveals that many elements of critique of the 2024 election are not new. Developments since the 1990s indicate that political parties are unlikely to play a significant positive role in Tokyo's gubernatorial elections. This is because such attempts provoke a backlash from voters who distrust national party politics intruding in metropolitan governance. Other serious issues were also rampant in the past, as violent discourse and behavior and illegal acts were once common in elections. In addition, relatively recent precedent continues to allow incumbents to appeal to voters with their public service, avoiding debate with other candidates. Thus, although the 2024 gubernatorial contest brought a mixture of hope for increased interest in politics and concern regarding the state of elections, we must not forget the history of such elections and not only be more cognizant of what has changed but also about how much has remained the same. What is particularly regrettable is that the major political parties and mainstream media have not changed their stance of viewing the Tokyo gubernatorial election as a stage for national politics. The history of the Tokyo gubernatorial election suggests that the involvement of the parties and national politics only serves to further alienate Tokyo voters who instead seek candidates who can demonstrate what they can bring to the governance of Tokyo itself. However, at the same time, it seems to have anticipated Japan's current political situation, particularly since the 1990s, in that it has been marked by a negative stance toward established parties and the media, while fostering the rise of novel political styles and claims.

Acknowledgements. The author thanks the anonymous referees for their insightful reviews. He is also deeply grateful to Dr. Keegan Cothern for his valuable comments and advice during the preparation of this manuscript. The author further expresses his special gratitude to Professor Mary McCarthy, whose repeated feedback and suggestions were especially helpful.

Financial support. This research received no external funding.

Competing interests. The author declares no conflict of interest.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/apj.2025.10033 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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https://doi.org/10.1017/apj.2025.10033 Published online by Cambridge University Press