
The Rise and Fall of Populist Mobilization: A Case Study of Nagoya, Japan

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1. Introduction

Populism is one of the most important current topics in global politics. Cities in Japan are no exception to the rise of populist politics. In Japan, populist politicians, such as Shintaro Ishihara (Tokyo), Toru Hashimoto (Osaka), and Takashi Kawamura (Nagoya), emerged in large cities with the start of the 2000s¹. Although their political ideologies are different, they all attack the establishment and make appeals to the people through the media.

However, there have been few major cross-disciplinary studies on populism and urban politics. On the one hand, with the exception of some studies by Clark and Ferguson (1983), Swanstrom (1985), and DeLeon (1993), urban studies scholars have not focused on populism. On the other hand, although there are many studies on radical right populism in not only political science but also sociology (e.g., Betz 1994; Rydgren 2004; Norris 2005; Mudde 2007; Berezin 2009), this field of research does not overlap much with urban politics².

In this study, I focused on political mobilization in order to study populism in cities. Political mobilization is a difficult task in the age of “post-democracy” (Crouch 2003), and populist mobilization is now a keyword (Jansen 2011, Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). According to Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), three types of populist mobilization can be identified: personalist leadership, social movement, and political party. These types are important factors in the study of urban populist movements.

This study analyzes a populist movement in the city of Nagoya to understand how such movements mobilize people to challenge urban regimes (Stone 1989). Nagoya is the third largest city in Japan, and Takashi Kawamura, a populist mayor, has governed it since 2009. This case study indicates the difficulty of organizing and mobilizing political parties because, in contemporary cities, mobilization through personalist leadership and social movements is often temporary.

2. Case Background

The Context of the Populist Movement in Nagoya

Post-war Nagoya witnessed a conflict between economic development and social welfare policies (see table 1). The conservatives (“*Hosyu*”) valued economic liberalism and Japanese tradition, while the progressives (“*Kakushin*”) oriented themselves toward economic redistribution and socialist democracy. However, the split in the progressive groups in the 1980s brought about a collaborative regime that balanced development and welfare through the coordination of the city assembly (Kida 2016).

In Nagoya, voters’ participation declined over a long period of time (see Figure 1). This condition generated an urban populist movement. In 2009, Takashi Kawamura, who skillfully appealed to the electorate with populist rhetoric, was elected mayor. He preferred to use populist expressions such as “ordinary people’s revolution” *Syomin-Kakumei*. One of his principal policies is tax cuts for “ordinary people,” and he established a local party

Table 1 The Political Regime in Nagoya

Regime type	Mayor	Political goal
Developmental	Zou Tsukamoto (1947–1952)	Post-war reconstruction and high economic growth
	Kissen Kobayashi (1952–1961)	
	Kiyoshi Sugito (1961–1973)	
Progressive	Masao Motoyama (1973–1985)	Civic welfare and growth management
Collaborative	Takeyoshi Nishio (1985–1997)	Coexistence of development and welfare (early)
	Takehisa Matsubara (1997–2009)	Administrative reform (later)
Populist	Takashi Kawamura (2009–present)	Political reform and tax cuts

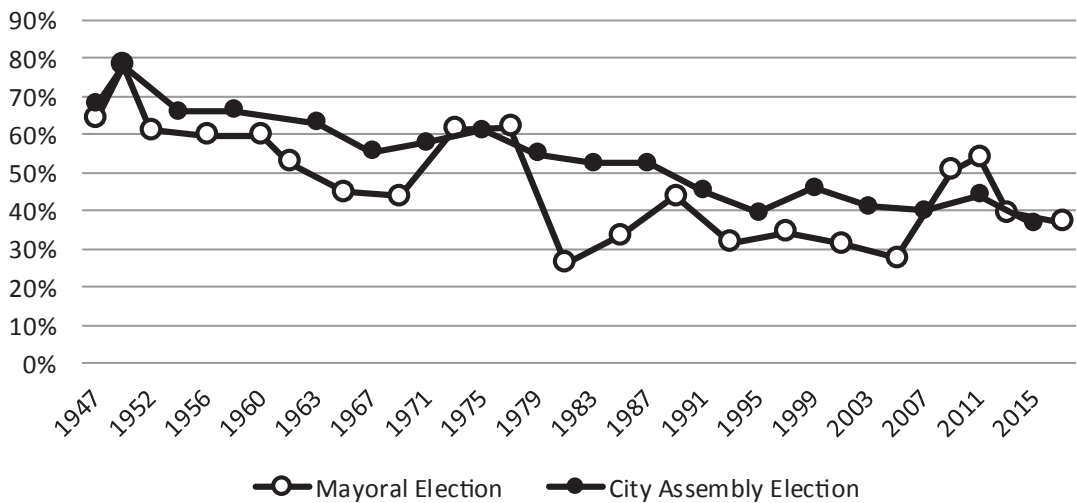


Figure 1 The Decline of Voters’ Participation

Table 2 Parties and Seats in the City Assembly of Nagoya

Party name	1999	2003	2007	2011	2015
Democratic Party	28	24	27	12	16
Liberal Democratic Party	24	25	22	19	22
Komeito	13	14	14	11	12
Japanese Communist Party	10	9	9	5	12
Tax Cuts Japan				28	12
Others	3	3	3	0	1
Total	78	75	75	75	75

Note: This table of calculations is simplified because some of the groups were split up or merged within a short period.

Source: City of Nagoya (<http://www.city.nagoya.jp/en/index.html>)

called “Tax Cuts Japan” (*Genzei Nippon*, TCJ). Some foreign media such as Reuters labeled him “Tea Party” mayor³.

One remarkable event was the success of a recall referendum movement against the city assembly. Mayor Kawamura organized a campaign to demand the recall of the city assembly in the summer of 2010 because the assembly had rejected the reduction of rewards for the city council members. The campaign grew in popularity, and a network of supporters grew within the electorate. The total number of signatures gathered was about 369,000, and the campaign succeeded. In the recall referendum held on February 6, 2011, 73.35% voted “Yes” for the recall. On the same day, Kawamura was elected mayor for the second time.

However, Mayor Kawamura’s party was not successful. Although TCJ was the leading parliamentary group in the March 2011 election, its members faced severe criticism because of their political scandals. As TCJ’s seats in the city assembly decreased gradually (Table 2), they failed to gain power. Kawamura’s influence on city politics was now restricted because the city assembly tends to check the influence of populist power on decision-making.

The Social Base of the Populist Movement

Who supported the populist movement? Kawamura mobilized people who usually did not participate actively in local politics. Younger voters and those who were not members of any political organization tended to vote for Kawamura in 2011 (Table 3). Some social and political attitudes have correlations with support for Mayor Kawamura (Table 4). According to this table, the populist movement in Nagoya has not been radical right and neoliberal in nature, but it has been based on strong discontent with the old style of governance and politics.

Table 3 Sociological Factors and Voting Behavior in the 2011 Mayoral Election

Item		Number of the voters	Proportion who voted for Kawamura	Chi-square test
Gender	Men	214	71.50%	n.s.
	Women	234	73.50%	
Age	Young (20s–40s)	190	78.40%	*
	Senior (50s–80s)	258	68.20%	
Education	Not a university graduate	314	71.30%	n.s.
	University graduate or holds a higher qualification	130	73.80%	
Income	Low (lower than 300M Yen)	90	74.40%	n.s.
	Middle (300Myen–900Myen)	233	70.40%	
	High (more than 900Myen)	110	74.50%	
Political Organization	Not a member	399	75.70%	***
	Member	48	47.90%	

Note: Significant at † $p < .1$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, and *** $p < .001$.

Source: 2011 Nagoya Survey

Table 4 Attitudes and Support for Mayor Kawamura

Item	N	Correlation
Negative toward immigrants	571	–.064 n.s.
Positive toward economic competition	568	–.022 n.s.
Positive toward consensus politics	571	–.096 *
Have trust to government professionals	562	–.126 **
Positive toward high tax rates	560	–.170 ***
Reformist identity (vs. conservative)	563	.222 ***

Note: Significant at † $p < .1$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, and *** $p < .001$.

Supportive attitudes were measured on a five-point Likert scale.

Source: 2011 Nagoya Survey

3. Research Design

Three Types of Populist Mobilization

Following Mudde and Kalswasser (2017), there are three types of populist mobilization: personalist leadership (top-down), social movement (bottom-up), and political party (both). The three types are as follows.

The first type is personalist leadership (ibid: 43–44). Populist movements often have a leader based on his or her personal appeal. Leaders connect directly to his or her supporters, largely unmediated through a strong party or social organization. Their supporters, who are mobilized top-down, feel a personalized connection to the leader. By developing a personal electoral vehicle, populist leaders can portray himself or herself as a clean

actor without being tied to a strong political organization.

The second type is social movement (ibid: 46–48). Social movements are informal networks that bring together people with a shared identity and a common opponent. Populist social movements speak about “the people” although general social movements tend to develop a common identity for a specific group of individuals. However, the mobilization of a populist social movement is bottom-up as well as the mobilization of a general social movement is.

The last type is political party (ibid: 50–53). Political parties (1) seek to aggregate the interests of different sectors of society, (2) elaborate policy programs, and (3) invest time and resources to train personnel for public offices. Populists want to have their representatives in power, and populist political parties challenge the establishment. Populist parties have the ability to win votes and seats, as a result, populist parties are often more effective than populist social movements. Political parties are often not only top-down but also bottom-up. In other words, a populist political party needs both leadership and popular support network.

Hypotheses

I analyzed the social base of the populist movement in Nagoya and tested two hypotheses about the rise and fall of the populist movement. The case of Nagoya is unique in that the three types of populist mobilization, which are Mayor Kawamura’s personalist leadership, the recall campaign as a social movement, and TCJ as a populist party, are all observable. The populist mayor encouraged people’s participation in the populist movement. He succeeded in the recall of the city assembly. However, building a support base for the populist party was not successful in this case. In other words, the populist party that Mayor Kawamura made was not a brilliant accomplishment. As Mudde and Kalwasser (2017: 55) note, top-down mobilization by populist leaders is either unsuccessful or it falls apart shortly after achieving electoral breakthrough. Thus, the hypotheses for this study were as follows:

H1: Voters’ participation in the signature campaign during the recall movement raised the amount of “Yes” votes for the recall.

H2: The recall campaign failed or only slightly managed to increase the support base of the populist party.

Data and Methods

I used the data of the “2011 Nagoya Survey,” which I had conducted in the summer of 2011. The sampling method was stratified based on a three-stage random sampling procedure. I sampled 1,333 electorates, and the number of respondents was 577 (the response rate was 43.3%). The response variables were voting “Yes” or not “Yes” (i.e. “No” and abstention) in the recall referendum (H1) and being a supporter or non-supporter of TCJ (H2). The explanatory variables were gender (female dummy), age (six-ordinal scale), education level (five-ordinal scale), household income (six-ordinal scale), participation in the signature campaign during the recall movement (dummy), and support for Kawamura (five-ordinal scale). I used the logistic regression model with these data and variables.

4. Analysis

Table 3 reports the regression results of the “Yes” votes for the recall and the support for TCJ. First, we will examine the regression results of the “Yes” votes. Both support for the leader ($p < .001$) and the signature participation rate ($p < .001$) were statistically significant. High education levels tended to raise the probability of “Yes” votes for the recall in the model. Second, with regard to the support for TCJ, the participation and the support for the leader were significant ($p < .001$). Additionally, low income might have increased the probability of support for TCJ.

Figure 2 shows the effects on the response variables through the odds ratios with 95% intervals which was estimated based on the logistic regression analyses. According to this figure, the odds ratio to the “Yes” votes for the recall was 4.768, and the odds ratio to the support for TCJ was 1.705. The ratio to the “Yes” votes was thus larger than that to the support for TCJ. With regard to support for Kawamura, the odds ratio to the “Yes” votes for the recall was 2.28, and the odds ratio to the support for TCJ was 3.90. While the participation strongly raised the probability of “Yes” votes for the recall, it did not raise the probability of support for TCJ much.

Table 5 Logistic Regression Analyses of the Recall Election and Support for TCJ

	Vote for the recall	Support for TCJ
Intercept	− 3.758 *** (.713)	− 5.855 *** (.880)
Gender	− .189 (.213)	− .275 (.231)
Age	.013 (.079)	.010 (.083)
Education	.256 * (.113)	− .035 (.118)
Income	− .009 (.085)	− .174 † (.093)
Participation	1.562 *** (.233)	.533 * (.230)
Support for populist leader	.825 *** (.103)	1.360 *** (.153)
Chi-Square	172.096 ***	156.583 ***
Nagelkerke R ²	.374	.370
N. of Obs.	527	529

Note: Logistic regression coefficients are presented with standard errors.

Results are significant at † $p < .1$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, and *** $p < .001$.

Source: 2011 Nagoya Survey

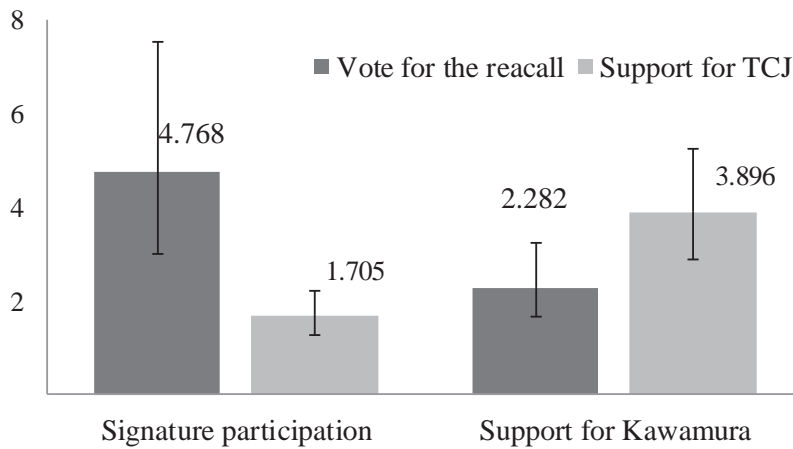


Figure 2 Effects of Signature Participation and Support Attitude

Note: Odds ratios are presented with the 95% intervals.

5. Discussion and conclusion

In sum, the participation in the signature campaign during the recall movement strongly accelerated the movement. The support for Kawamura increased the probability of the “Yes” votes by a small degree; thus, the recall movement was dependent on social movement rather than personalist leadership. On the other hand, the signature participation increased the probability of creating support for TCJ by a small degree but the support for Kawamura strongly increased the probability of creating support for TCJ; thus, TCJ failed at organizing signature participants and they were dependent on the mayor’s personalist leadership.

The case of Nagoya is a local movement. However, it is unique because a populist politician organized a social movement. Kawamura succeeded in his personalist leadership and the recall movement but failed to increase his party’s support base. The populist challenge in Nagoya was unsuccessful in the long term because the populist party failed to gain actual power. In contrast to European populist radical right parties, populist groups and parties in Japan fail at establishing electoral persistence because of the difficulty of continuously organizing city dwellers⁴. This case study suggests that establishing electoral persistence is a critical issue for populist movements.

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Notes

- 1 Kobori summarizes populist politics in Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya in English (Kobori 2013).
- 2 In Japan, political sociologists have studied urban populist politics. Some papers, such as those of Higuchi and Matsutani (2016) and Ito (2017), are available in English.
- 3 See “Nagoya ‘Tea Party’ mayor brews trouble for Japan PM” by Linda Sieg.
(<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-politics-tea-party/nagoya-tea-party-mayor-brews-trouble-for-japan-pm-idUSTRE7221SK20110303>)
- 4 In the prefecture and the city of Osaka, a charismatic politician Toru Hashimoto created a local populist party “One Osaka” (*Osaka Ishin no Kai*), which made an electoral breakthrough in and around the city of Osaka. In 2015 Hashimoto, the mayor of the city of Osaka, proposed the Osaka Metropolis Plan referendum, but the electorate rejected it. Hashimoto retired from politics after the referendum. The future of One Osaka is unclear because of the retirement of the charismatic leader.

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