

# Manifesto to Establish Political Governance

## — Prepare manifestos with a broad framework —

### Executive Summary

Three years have passed since manifestos were fully adopted in Japan. The time has now come when we need to accurately assess the changes this has brought. Manifestos are not simply “words written on a piece of paper” put out during an election. They are a means by which the people can make a choice in a democracy.

The role of election-based democracy is nothing more than the people choosing their government through an election. In the single-seat constituency system, voter choice is strong, and politics is based on an adversarial relationship between the government and opposition parties. At elections where the parties compete for the right to govern, voters need information by which they can make a judgment on their voting choice. We can say with certainty that this is what the manifesto does. That is, it presents to the voters the position the government will take and the kinds of policies it will implement over the next four years or until the next election in a verifiable form. Various manifesto formats are possible, but basically, rationale for the policies presented in it is essential. It is important that the manifesto indicates the rationale behind budgetary expenditure, what will be implemented and by when, and what effect given policies will achieve, and is prepared in a way that enables verification before and after.

The manifesto, though, is a political message. It is not an administrative document, nor is it a technical manual. It should be designed so that it can give full play to the dynamism of politics. It must be “simple, easy-to-understand, and sincere” so that it can convey its message clearly to voters.

If what has been included in a manifesto is implemented sincerely, a range of reforms will be essential. First, the key issue of who will prepare the manifesto and where will lead to party reform. But preparing a manifesto in itself does not drive politics. The traditional party conference format is unlikely to be responsive enough for the party to reach an official decision on its manifesto. And implementing the manifesto will require

not just a change in the bureaucratic mentality, but the bureaucracy itself will probably need to rework its systems.

Only after all this should the party be able to face the choice of the voters. In a democracy, though, the people are neither “onlookers” nor “clients”. They are “sovereign members” of the nation. With this sovereignty comes obligation. Their minimum obligation is to make their own choice about the government in an election. In seeking information upon which this decision can be based, the manifesto is probably the most readily accessible.

However, not everyone is able to read through manifestos from the first to last pages. For this, we have the media, and think tanks. It is important to convey expert discussion in an way that is easily understood, and pass on the broad aspects when policy details are brought together. A political party with an eye on victory at an election may avoid certain issues or seek to manipulate points of contention. It is the duty of the media to give an accurate account of the background to these issues.

The manifesto is merely one tool. But what makes politics dynamic and gives life to or takes the life out of democracy is the political parties, politicians and voters that make full use of this tool. The proposals here are in response to the question of how politics and elections can be made more dynamic through analysis of politics and government policy centering on the manifesto. We can say that the manifesto is both a tool to drive politics, and a tool to give people the chance to think.

Calls for higher quality politics must not end up as merely empty slogans. Certainly, political parties and politicians have a responsibility, but it also depends greatly on the choice of voters as “sovereign members”. The basis of democracy makes sense and political governance is established only when political parties and voters make full use of manifestos. And at this point, policy-oriented elections are a substantial reality. These proposals summarize how manifestos should be used effectively.

## **Proposals**

### **1) Prepare manifestos with a broad framework**

Manifestos must be designed so that readers will understand the kind of politics and society the government is aiming for. Indicating the broad policy direction should not be inconsistent with the build up of detailed policy. Understanding the broad policy framework makes it easier to understand detailed figures and the basis of calculations.

### **2) Manifestos that can stand up to corporate management evaluation methods**

In corporate management, the cycle of “plan – do – check – action” based on the business plan works to maintain transparency and soundness. It is hoped that politics can develop a framework for the PDCA cycle through the effective use of manifestos, and be subject to and be able to stand up to stringent scrutiny of not just formulation and determination, but implementation and evaluation as well.

### **3) Prepare the manifesto at the leadership ballot, and have this as the draft party manifesto**

Considered in the context of realistic politics, the most practical course would be for candidates for party leadership to prepare and compete on the basis of their respective manifestos, and the manifesto that emerged victorious would be adopted as the party manifesto. At a party leadership ballot who is elected and how are important, but what should be questioned are who is advocating what, what are the issues, and what is the policy direction. And it is important to draw up the party manifesto based on the manifesto of the successful leader.

### **4) Hold the party conference and endorse the manifesto as a party**

The manifesto is a party’s pledge to the people. That so, parliamentarians belonging to that political party should therefore have fought the election based on that manifesto. There are many cases, however, where members express their disagreement with their own party’s manifesto. Therefore, manifestos should be openly and extensively debated when they are drawn up, and once a manifesto

has been officially decided on at the party conference and the like, all members should abide by that decision. The party conference is the most orthodox way of reaching an official decision on the manifesto.

**5) Coalition manifesto**

In Japan to form government a political party must gain a majority of seats in the House of Representatives, either singly or in coalition. What stance will that government take? In the case of a coalition government, the form of the coalition is important, and a coalition manifesto is necessary to spell out the common policies that it will adopt. In the past two general elections, the ruling coalition parties drew up manifesto-like policy statements (see *Common Commitment and Priority Policies of the Ruling Coalition Parties* for reference), but this is still not thought to be sufficient. And there is no reason that manifestos put out by each of the parties cannot coexist with a coalition manifesto.

**6) Have the manifesto that was taken to the general election approved by Cabinet and established as government policy**

A manifesto is not simply words written by a party aimed at voters during an election. The policies will take concrete form and be realized only when this is put into practice by the government (or more specifically, the Cabinet). For this reason, first, the manifesto should be approved by Cabinet, then ministries and agencies should set up implementation structures based on it, and policy performance evaluations should also be shifted to a manifesto-type format.

**7) Pursue manifesto-based Diet reform and redefine the roles of the government and opposition parties**

In manifesto-type politics, the manifesto that won voter support at an election would be easily passed in a Cabinet bill. In the parliamentary system of government, it is normal for the ruling party to hold a majority and pass bills, and natural that initiatives supported by voters are implemented. If so, this raises questions about the role of the Diet, or that backbench members of the government party and the opposition party will no longer have a role to play. In a parliament when party discipline is imposed on debate, the members of the ruling party vote in the affirmative, and while the opposition parties may criticize

government bills, bills of the ruling party are carried by a majority decision. Therefore, rather than the Diet having a mere resolution function, the Diet should be reformed by strengthening its deliberative function, and should consider the effective use of questions and debate.

**8) Rework the opposition party manifesto while maintaining policy continuity**

The manifestos of the opposition parties are those that were rejected by voters at the general election. However, considering policy continuity, they should not be discarded at that point. Past commitments should be maintained at least until the next manifesto is drawn up. There is no inconsistency in injecting political dynamism by changing leader while maintaining policy continuity. In this sense as well, a distinction between policies at the platform level, manifesto level, and routine activity level is essential, and a manifesto should always be ready in preparation for an election at any time.

**9) Amend the Public Office Election Law, ease restrictions on distribution, and lift the ban on Internet elections**

Easing current distribution restrictions, expanding manifestos to the election of local government heads, and lifting the bans on the political use of the Internet during election periods are realistic demands for amendment of the Public Office Election Law.

**10) Heighten the quality of policies through manifesto evaluation**

Manifestos heighten the quality not just of those who prepare them, but also of those who evaluate them. If policy analysis and policy evaluation by bureaucrats, politicians, and also the media, think tanks and NPOs progress, the policy expert base will expand, leading to a qualitative improvement in policies and manifestos.