

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)
DIJ Social Science Study Group



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The Impact of 3-11 on Japanese Public Opinion toward Energy

This presentation examines how the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami, and especially the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Dai-Ichi nuclear plant of March 2011, have affected public opinion, and how this in turn has impacted Japan's energy policy. It traces how Japanese public opinion emerged as being perhaps the most pro-nuclear public in the world in the 1970s, and how public support gradually eroded from the end of the 1970s as concerns about safety grew. Growing public concern after the 1986 Chernobyl accident and especially the 1999 Tokaimura accident, corresponded with significant reverses, and eventual stagnation, in Japan's policy of promoting nuclear power. In the years leading up to 3-11 Japanese public opinion continued to support nuclear power, but support was accompanied by growing concerns about the safety of nuclear power. Cover ups of accidents especially undermined trust in the industry. In the wake of the 3-11 quake public support for nuclear power, which was still evenly divided as late as April 2011, gradually declined while support for replacing nuclear power with renewable forms of energy, especially solar and wind, grew. This reflected a change in underlying attitudes about the safety and effectiveness of nuclear power. Consequently, an overwhelming majority has come to support replacing nuclear power with renewable energy. Yet, the public is more ambivalent about restarting some nuclear reactors in the short-run, with a significant minority that verges on a plurality in some polls supporting some nuclear restarts under stringent conditions. This suggests that the Abe administration has some scope to restart some nuclear reactors, but not to build new reactors or expand nuclear power.

Paul Midford is Professor, and Director of the Japan Program, at the Norwegian University for Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim. He received his doctorate in Political Science from Columbia University. Midford is the author of *Rethinking Japanese Public Opinion and Security: From Pacifism to Realism?* (Stanford University Press, 2011).

The DIJ Social Science Study Group is organized by P. Holdgrün and C. Hommerich.
All are welcome to attend, but registration (holdgruen@dijtokyo.org) is appreciated.

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