

German Institute for Japanese Studies Tokyo (DIJ)
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**Politicians and Bureaucrats in Contemporary Japan:
New Twists on a Tumultuous Relationship**

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In a state's political system, the bureaucracy plays a pivotal role, as the efficiency of the government's policies and the realization of the democratic principle are at stake. Since the 1990s, Japanese bureaucracy has been the target of growing criticism blaming it for administrative failures and an excess of autonomy from elected political power. In response to this criticism, a number of reforms inspired by the New Public Management movement were implemented at the beginning of the 21st century, such as the reorganisation of the ministries and the introduction of new recruitment and promotion methods. These changes, among other things, aimed at reinforcing political leadership and control over senior civil servants to shift the power balance in the decision-making process.

After a brief review of these reforms, we will analyse how decision-making processes have changed in practice and how political-administrative relations during the last fifteen years have evolved. It will be shown that the common depiction of the bureaucracy as being in a semi-permanent opposition to elected politicians is an oversimplification that does not pay justice to the various facets of political-administrative collaboration. To analyse the direction and impact of recent changes, neo-institutionalist approaches, which emphasise the importance of institutional legacies and the role of shared ideas, will be applied. The comparison of two case studies, one concerning the government of Koizumi (2001-2006) and the other the governments under leadership of the Democratic Party of Japan (2009-2012), will demonstrate that other factors apart from institutional change need to be considered as well.

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Talk is open to the public. Prior registration is appreciated (heinrich@dijtokyo.org)

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