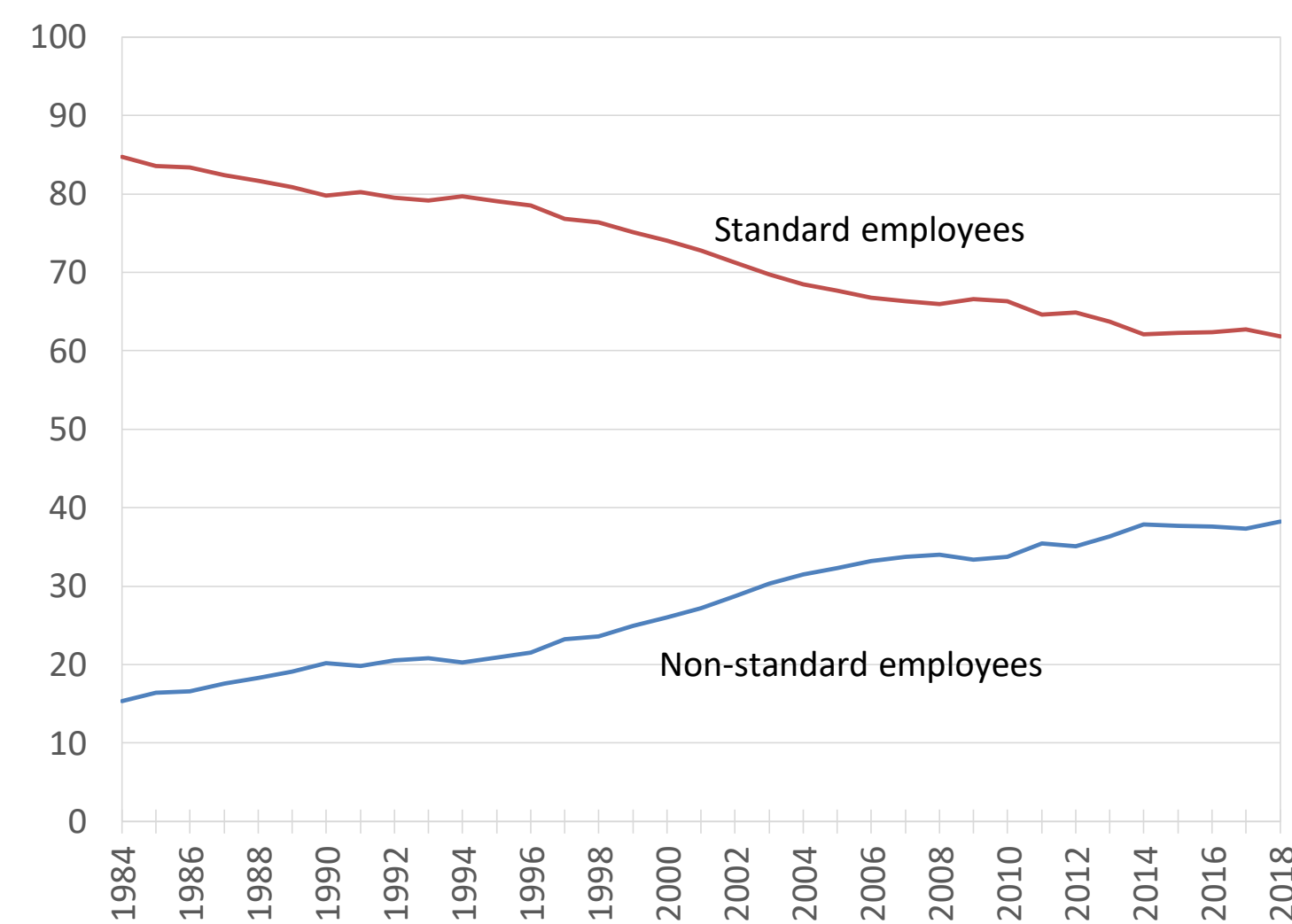


# Diversification of Employment Forms and its Implications for Japanese Politics

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## Diversified and Polarised?

The rapid growth in non-standard employment (e.g. temporary agency work, part-time and fixed-term contracts) is often discussed as a major social problem for Japanese society. So called non-regular workers face very limited career prospects, are considerably less likely to participate in core public and corporate welfare schemes and earn considerably less than regular workers even when working on comparable tasks. With the group of non-standard employees now bordering on the 40 per cent mark, this project asks how the heightened sensibility for social inequality in Japan in recent years and the deep gap between worker groups of different status affect Japanese politics. Studies of European countries have linked dual labour market structures to populism, democratic disconnect as well as to a policy shift from labour market deregulation towards better protection of workers. This project examines the political implications in Japan.



**Left: A demonstration in Tokyo's Hibiya Park in 2009**

**Right: Diversification of employment forms in Japan since 1984**  
(MHLW (2018): 労働力調査)

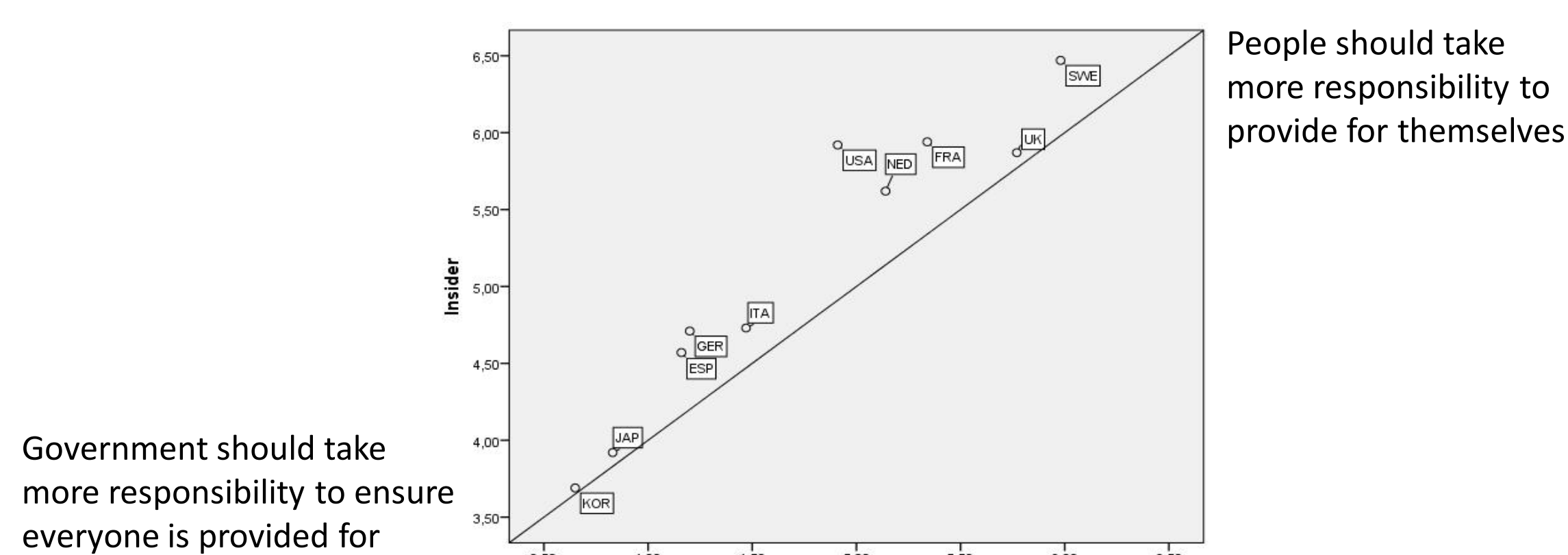
## Research Questions

- How do labour market inequalities shape contemporary Japanese politics with regard to voters' attitudes, party politics and labour market policy?
- Are the implications similar to those found in European countries? If not, what explains the differences?

## Electoral Dynamics

Several studies have argued that the policy preferences of different worker groups (insiders: standard employees; outsiders: non-standard employees) increasingly diverge causing political polarization. In contrast, analyses for Japan indicate

- Consensus on many key issues
- Comparatively stronger concern over growing inequalities



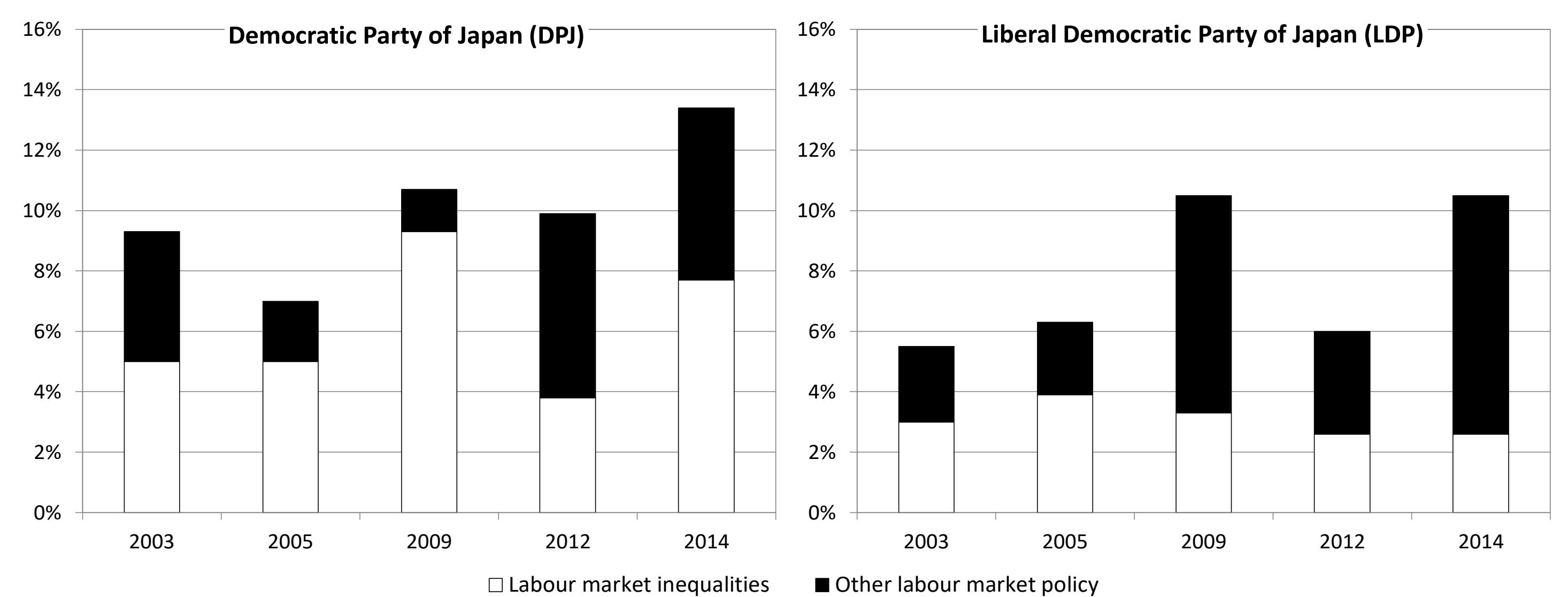
**World Value Survey: Should the government do more about inequality?**

(Heinrich (2016): 80)

## Partisan Politics

Evidence for political polarisation is stronger with regard to party politics. A look at the election manifestos of the two largest parties, LDP and DPJ, for the Lower House elections indicates

- Growing relevance of labour market inequalities for Japanese politics for all parties
- A clear left-right divide (until 2016) when it comes to policy (e.g. regarding non-standard employment, DPJ emphasises risk of precarity, LDP freedom of choice)



**Percentage of election manifestos devoted to employment-related issues**

(Heinrich (2016): 82)

## Policy Change?



Since the Lehman shock the gist of policy debate has shifted from enhancing flexibility to improving protection and inclusion

- After 2007 several plans for deregulation have been abandoned; instead new limits on non-standard work have been introduced
- In 2016, LDP-led government announce a policy plan to „eradicate“ all inequalities between standard and non-standard workers (働き方改革)
- But fundamental problems of differentiation remain unresolved

## Conclusions

- Labour market inequalities are now firmly part of the political mainstream
- In contrast to Europe, much less evidence for polarisation on the level of voters; instead consensus on key issues
- All mainstream parties feel need to respond to public sentiment
- This partially explains why the LDP embraces work-style reform contrary to previous positions
- A closer look at the actual policy changes indicates that the dual structure of the Japanese labour market is challenged less by policy but by growing labour shortages

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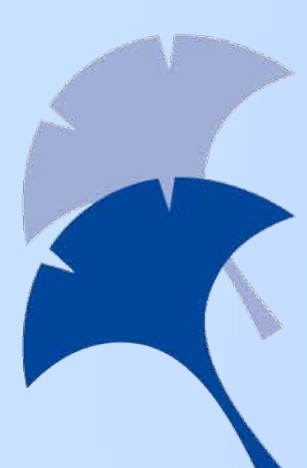
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