

# The Development of Political Parties in Post-war Japan

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## Abstract

The Japanese party system is a classic example of the predominant party system, wherein the Liberal Democratic Party was the predominant party and the Social Democratic Party of Japan constituted the opposition, after the establishment of the Liberal Democratic Party in 1955 (the so-called “1955 System”). However, electoral reforms in the 1990s triggered the separation and dispersal of political parties and affected the party system. This paper summarizes the trajectories of the main political parties in Japan between August 1945 and December 2018. It starts from their establishment and covers aspects such as name changes, mergers, and splits, among other things. This summary is presented in the form of a figure. As a general rule, the political parties that were examined were organizations that submitted notifications on their establishment based on the Political Funds Control Act (Act No. 194 of 1948) and included at least one Diet member each. Changes in the qualifying criteria for political parties under the Political Funds Control Act and other relevant laws in force are summarized, defined, and explained.

## Introduction

This paper summarizes the trajectories of the main political parties in Japan between August 1945 and December 2018, starting from their establishment and covering aspects such as name changes, mergers, and splits, among other things.<sup>1</sup> First, the criteria for a

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\* All information sourced from the Internet in this paper was as of February 21, 2019.

<sup>1</sup> This paper includes recent trends after partially revising sections on the Post-war development of political parties as discussed by 間柴泰治・柳瀬晶子「主要政党の変遷と国会内勢力の推移 (資料)」『レファレンス』651号, 2005.4, pp.70-81 (MASHIBA Yasuharu and YANASE Akiko, “The Development of the Political Parties in Japan,” *Reference*, 651, 2005.4, pp.70-81); and 神田広樹「戦後主要政党の変遷と国会内勢力の推移 (資料)」『レファレンス』761号, 2014.6,

“political party” to be included in this paper are presented. Next, the main items described in this paper are explained. Finally, the changes in the main political parties are presented.

## I The Criteria for “Political Parties” to Be Included in This Paper

As a general rule, “political parties” included in this paper were set up as organizations that submitted a notification on their establishment as political parties<sup>2</sup> based on the Political Funds Control Act (Act No. 194 of 1948). They each included at least one Diet member. Some political organizations (other than political parties) under this Act were also published wherever applicable. However, it was difficult to determine the status of notifications pertaining to organizations that satisfied the requirements to qualify as a political party under this Act before 1975.<sup>3</sup> Thus, a source that provided written descriptions on the changes in political parties<sup>4</sup> was used. As Table 1 shows, the provisions

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pp.41-64 (KANDA Hiroki, “Development of Political Parties in Post-War Japan,” *Reference*, 761, 2014.6, pp.41-64).

<sup>2</sup> The term “establishment of a political party” refers to cases in which an organization that has met the requirements for a political party under the Political Funds Control Act was newly established, and in which a political organization (other than a political party) met the requirements to qualify thus under the Act.

<sup>3</sup> Under the current Political Funds Control Act, in cases where there is an establishment, transfer (change in name, etc.), etc., of a political party, the organization in question must submit a notification on those items to the Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications (Minister of Home Affairs until Central Government Reform in 2001. The same applies in the following footnotes) (Article 6, Paragraph 1; and Article 7, Paragraph 1). When this notification is submitted, the Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications must publish the main contents of the notification in an official bulletin as soon as possible (Article 7-2, Paragraphs 1 and 3). However, before the Political Funds Control Act was amended by Act No. 64 of 1975 (enacted January 1, 1976), there were provisions pertaining to the notification of political parties. However, none of them addressed the publication of notifications. Thus, there was no publication of the content in question. Therefore, it is difficult to comprehensively determine the establishment, transfer, etc., of political parties under the Act before 1975.

<sup>4</sup> 「付録 35 政党系統図」京都大学文学部国史研究室日本近代史辞典編集委員会編『日本近代史辞典』東洋経済新報社, 1958, 別折付表 (“Appendix 35: Political Party System Diagram,” Kyoto University Faculty of Letters National History Laboratory Modern Japanese History Dictionary Editorial Committee ed., *Modern Japanese History Dictionary*, Toyo Keizai, 1958, separate table); 「11 政党の変遷 (2) 政党の系譜」自治庁選挙局『選挙年鑑 昭和 28～32 年』1960, 巻末 (“11: Changes in Political Parties: (2) Genealogy of Political Parties,” Ministry of Home Affairs Election Bureau, *Election Yearbook: 1953–1957*, 1960, back of book); 三省堂編修所編『日本史年表—地図対照—』三省堂, 1962, p.204 (Sanseido Editing Center ed., *Chronology of Japanese History: Map Comparison*, Sanseido, 1962, p.204); 三沢潤生「政党主要系統図」国史大辞典編集委員会編『国史大辞典 第 8 巻』吉川弘文館, 1987, 巻末 (MISAWA Shigeo, “Diagram of Main Political Party System,” *Kokushi Daijiten* Editorial Board ed., *Kokushi Daijiten*, Vol. 8, Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 1987, end of book); 「系統図」村川一郎編著『日本政党史辞典 1868 年—1989 年 下』国書刊行会, 1998, pp.(207)-(221) (“System Diagram,” MURAKAWA Ichiro ed., *Japanese Political Party History Dictionary, 1868–1989*,

establishing the requirements for a political party under this Act were amended twice as of the time of writing.<sup>5</sup>

As Table 2 shows, present-day Japanese law stipulates requirements for political parties under the Political Funds Control Act, the Political Party Subsidies Act (Act No. 5 of 1994), Act on Granting of Juridical Personality to Political Party Receiving Political Party Grants (Act No. 106 of 1994), and the Public Offices Election Act (Act No. 100 of 1950).

**Table 1 Changes in the qualifying criteria for political parties under the Political Funds Control Act**

|  | When enacted in 1948<br>(enacted on July 29, 1948)  | When amended in 1975<br>(enacted on January 1, 1976)  | When amended in 1994<br>(enacted on December 25, 1994)   |
|--|---|---|--|
| Definition of political organization, etc. | <p>“Political party”<sup>*1</sup><br/>Article 3, Paragraph 1<br/>A political party is defined as follows;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. An organization whose original purpose is to promote, support, or object to a political principle or policy, or</li> <li>2. An organization whose original purpose is to recommend, support, or object to a candidate</li> </ol> <p>“Associations and other organizations”<sup>*1</sup><br/>Article 3, Paragraph 2<br/>An organization other than a political party is defined as follows;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. An organization that supports or objects to a political principle or policy, or</li> <li>2. An organization that recommends, supports or objects to a candidate</li> </ol> | <p>“Political organization”<br/>Article 3, Paragraph 1<br/>1. A political organization is defined as follows;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) An organization whose original purpose is to promote, support or object to a political principle or policy,</li> <li>(2) An organization whose original purpose is to recommend, support, or object to a certain candidate, or</li> <li>(3) An organization whose main activities conducted organizationally and continually are either of the abovementioned</li> </ol> | <p>“Political organization”<br/>Article 3, Paragraph 1<br/><br/>*Same as when amended in 1975.</p> |

*Vol. 2, Kokusho Kankokai, 1998, pp.(207)-(221).*

<sup>5</sup> The Acts at the time of the two amendments were *op.cit.*(3), Act No. 64 of 1975 and Act No. 4 of 1994 (the amended provision of Article 3, Paragraph 2, which stipulated the qualifying criteria for political parties, was partially amended by Act No. 12 of 1994, and enacted on December 25, 1994).

|   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| Qualifying criteria for political parties | *See abovementioned “Political party.” | <p>Article 3, Paragraph 2</p> <p>A political party is defined as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Confirmed organization*<sup>2</sup> in previous general election for the House of Representatives,</li> <li>2. Confirmed organization*<sup>3</sup> in the previous regular election for the House of Councillors, or</li> <li>3. A political organization that has at least 5 Diet members</li> </ol> | <p>Article 3, Paragraph 2</p> <p>A political party is defined as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A political organization that has at least 5 Diet members</li> <li>2. A political organization that obtained at least 2% of votes nationwide in one of the following six elections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The last general election for the House of Representatives on the single-member constituency system,</li> <li>- The last general election for the House of Representatives on the proportional representation system,</li> <li>- Either of the last two regular elections for the House of Councillors on the local constituency system, or</li> <li>- Either of the last two regular elections for the House of Councillors on the proportional representation system</li> </ul> </li> </ol> |
|---|--|---|--|

(Note 1) In the Political Funds Control Act before the 1975 amendment, the scope of political organizations was identified as including “political parties, associations, and other organizations,” where “political parties” referred to organizations whose original purpose was political activity, and “associations and other organizations” referred to organizations whose secondary or tertiary purpose was to conduct political activity. According to these definitions, all organizations whose original purpose is political activity (e.g., sponsoring organizations) are included under the ambit of “political parties.” This deviates from the common understanding of the term among Japanese people. All economic, labor, cultural organizations, etc., would be classified as “associations and other organizations” as long as their secondary purpose involves conducting political activity. This broadened the scope and made it unclear. With this amendment, the scope of the terms “political party” and “associations and other organizations” was limited, whereas organizations with a temporary or subordinate form of political activity were included within the scope of “political organizations” [自治省選挙部編『改正政治資金規正法解説』地方財務協会, 1976, pp.13-18. (Ministry of Home Affairs Election Department ed., *Commentary on the Amended Political Funds Control Act*, Institute of Local Finance, 1976, pp.13-18.)].

(Note 2) A confirmed organization refers to a political organization that has both met certain requirements in various elections and has received a confirmation letter from the Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications (Minister of Home Affairs until Central Government Reform in 2001) or relevant election management committees. The conduct of political organizations in their election campaigns and misleading political activity during elections are regulated. However, a confirmed organization can conduct both a majority of political activities under certain conditions and certain election campaigns as part of these activities. The qualifying criteria for a political party in the general elections for the House of Representatives in 1975 when the Political Funds Control Act was amended was that it had to be a political organization with at least 25 candidates in the applicable elections. With the amendment of the Public Offices Election Act in 1994, the system for confirmed organization in the elections to the House of Representatives was abolished.

(Note 3) The qualifying criteria for a recognized party in the regular election for the House of Councillors in 1975 when the Political Funds Control Act was amended was that it had to be a political organization with at least 10 candidates in the applicable elections. With the 1982 amendment to the Public Offices Election Act, this requirement was amended. Under the new regime, one of the following must be

satisfied, wherein it had to be: (1) a political party on the proportional representation system, or (2) a political organization with at least 10 candidates in the applicable elections. The “political party on the proportional representation system” refers to a political organization that submits a notification of the list of candidates based on the provisions of the Public Offices Election Act in the proportional representative election to the House of Councillors. Until the above Act was amended in 1994, one of the following had to apply: (1) a political organization that had at least 5 Diet members, (2) a national vote rate of at least 4% in the previous general elections for the House of Representatives or previous regular elections for the House of Councillors on either the local constituency or proportional representation systems, or (3) at least 10 candidates in the applicable elections.

(Source) Created by the author based on 神田広樹「戦後主要政党の変遷と国会内勢力の推移（資料）」『レファレンス』761号, 2014.6, p.48 (KANDA Hiroki, “Development of Political Parties in Post-War Japan,” *Reference*, 761, 2014.6, p.48).

**Table 2 Qualifying criteria for “political parties” under the current laws**

| Name of “political party,” etc. | Act (year enacted or when the current requirements came into effect)  | Qualifying criteria  |
|---------------------------------|---|--|
| Political party                 | Political Funds Control Act<br>Article 3, Paragraph 2<br>(1994)   | A political party under the Political Funds Control Act is defined as follows;<br>1. A political organization that has at least 5 Diet members<br>2. A political organization that obtained at least 2% of votes nationwide in one of the following six elections:<br>- The last general election for the House of Representatives on the single-member constituency system,<br>- The last general election for the House of Representatives on the proportional representation system,<br>- Either of the last two regular elections for the House of Councillors on the local constituency system, or<br>- Either of the last two regular elections for the House of Councillors on the proportional representation system                             |
|                                 | Political Party Subsidies Act<br>Article 2, Paragraph 1<br>Act on Granting of Juridical Personality to Political Party Receiving Political Party Grants<br>Article 3, Paragraph 1<br>(1994) | A political party under the Political Funds Control Act is defined as follows;<br>1. A political organization that has at least 5 Diet members<br>2. A political organization that has a Diet member, and that obtained at least 2% of votes nationwide in one of the following six elections:<br>- The last general election for the House of Representatives on the single-member constituency system,<br>- The last general election for the House of Representatives on the proportional representation system,<br>- Either of the last two regular elections for the House of Councillors on the local constituency system, or<br>- Either of the last two regular elections for the House of Councillors on the proportional representation system |

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|--|---|---|
| Political party fielding candidates* <sup>1</sup><br>(House of Representatives)  | Public Offices Election Act<br>Article 86, Paragraph 1<br>(1994)                        | A political party fielding candidates is defined as follows:<br>1. A political organization that has at least 5 Diet members<br>2. A political organization that obtained at least 2% of votes nationwide in one of the following four elections:<br>- The last general election for the House of Representatives on the single-member constituency system,<br>- The last general election for the House of Representatives on the proportional representation system,<br>- The last regular election for the House of Councillors on the local constituency system, or<br>- The last regular election for the House of Councillors on the proportional representation system   |
| Political party on the proportional representation system* <sup>2</sup><br>(House of Representatives / House of Councillors) | Public Offices Election Act<br>Articles 86-2, Paragraph 1 / 86-3, Paragraph 1<br>(1994) | A political party on the proportional representation system is defined as follows:<br>1. A political organization that has at least 5 Diet members<br>2. A political organization that obtained at least 2% of votes nationwide in one of the following four elections:<br>- The last general election for the House of Representatives on the single-member constituency system,<br>- The last general election for the House of Representatives on the proportional representation system,<br>- The last regular election for the House of Councillors on the local constituency system, or<br>- The last regular election for the House of Councillors on the proportional representation system<br>3. (*Regarding elections for the House of Representatives)<br>The number of listed candidates in the applicable election is at least 20% of the fixed number in the regional constituency on the proportional representation system<br>4. (*Regarding elections for the House of Councillors)<br>At least 10 candidates in the applicable election |
| (Reference)<br>Confirmed organization* <sup>3</sup><br>(*In the case of a regular election for the House of Councillors)     | Public Offices Election Act<br>Article 201-6<br>(1982)                                  | A confirmed organization is defined as follows:<br>1. Political party on the proportional representation system in the House of Councillors, or<br>2. At least 10 candidates in the applicable constituency election  |

(Note 1) Refers to a political organization that has met the qualifying criteria listed in this table and has submitted a notification of the list of candidates in the election for the House of Representatives on the single-member constituency system. Any political party fielding candidates can conduct an election campaign to some extent during the campaign period for the applicable election based on the provisions of the Public Offices Election Act.

(Note 2) Refers to a political organization that has met the requirements listed in this table and has submitted a notification of the list of candidates in the election for the House of Representatives or Councillors on the proportional representation system (in the case of the former, “a political party on the proportional representation system in the House of Representatives;” in the case of the latter, “a political party on the proportional representation system in the House of Councillors”). A political party on the proportional representation system can conduct an election campaign to some extent during the campaign period for the applicable election based on the provisions of the Public Offices Election Act.

(Note 3) Refers to political organizations that have both met certain requirements in various elections and have received confirmation letters from the Minister of Internal Affairs and Communication (Minister of Home Affairs until Central Government Reform in 2001), or each election management committee. The conduct of political organizations in the course of election campaigns and misleading political

activity in the course of elections are regulated. However, confirmed organizations can conduct both a majority of political activities under certain conditions and certain election campaigns as part of these activities.

(Source) Created by the author based on 神田広樹「戦後主要政党の変遷と国会内勢力の推移（資料）」『レファレンス』761号, 2014.6, p.48 (KANDA Hiroki, “Development of Political Parties in Post-War Japan,” *Reference*, 761, 2014.6, p.48).

## II Main Description Items

The reference in footnote 4 and newspaper articles were used to describe aspects from before 1975. The main items from 1976 onwards and their definitions are as follows:

### 1 *Name of the Political Party*

The name of the political party is based on the “name of the political organization” in the notification pertaining to the establishment or transfer of a political party.<sup>6</sup>

### 2 *Establishment, Name Change, etc., of a Political Party*

The date of establishment or name change of a political party is set as the date of notification pertaining to the establishment or name change of such a political party. Newspaper reports were referenced for cases in which Diet members belonged to political parties that did not have any Diet members previously.

### 3 *Merger of, Split in, etc., of a Political Party*

The Political Party Subsidies Act, which was enacted on January 1, 1995, governs the merger of and split in political parties. The following items were included after 1995, as shown in Figure:<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Under the Political Funds Control Act, the Liberal Democratic Party and Japanese Communist Party each submitted notifications as the “Liberal Democratic Party Headquarters” and “The Central Committee of the Japanese Communist Party,” respectively. In this article, they are each called the “Liberal Democratic Party” and “Japanese Communist Party,” respectively.

<sup>7</sup> However, the mergers or splits that took place after July 23, 1989 (enactment date of the 15<sup>th</sup> regular election for the House of Councillors) where notifications pertaining to a merger or split were retroactively presented based on Article 4 of the Supplementary Provisions of the Political Party Subsidies Act, and before December 31, 1994, are described.

- (1) “New merger:” When at least two political parties submit a notification<sup>8</sup> of their dissolution based on the Political Funds Control Act (merging dissolution political parties) and of the establishment of a new political party (new political party).
- (2) “Surviving merger:” When one political party survives (surviving political party), and other political parties submit notifications of their dissolution based on the Political Funds Control Act (merging dissolution political parties) and merge with the surviving political party.
- (3) “Split:” When a political party submits a notification of their dissolution based on the Political Funds Control Act (split dissolution political party) and at least two new political parties (split political parties) or organizations submitted a notification on their establishment.
- (4) “Splinter:”<sup>9</sup> When some Diet members belonging to the political party leave without dissolving the party under the Political Funds Control Act, and establish a new political party according to the same Act. However, this is limited to cases where all Diet members who participate in the newly established political party (under the same Act) belonged to the old political party (under the same Act).

The date of transfer for the case of a “surviving merger” is set as the “dissolution date” in the notification of the dissolution of the political party under the Political Funds Control Act (relating to the merger). For political parties, etc., that are newly established as a result of a “new merger,” “split,” or “splinter,” it was set as the date of notification pertaining to establishment under the Act.

#### **4 Dissolution, Loss of Requirements, etc., of a Political Party**

- (1) “Dissolution”: When a notification pertaining to the dissolution of a political party is submitted.
- (2) “Loss of requirements”: When the requirements for a political party under the Political Funds Control Act are no longer met.
- (3) “Absent Diet member”: When an organization no longer has a Diet member, but meets

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<sup>8</sup> If a political party under the Political Funds Control Act was dissolved, such a party must submit a notification relating to the act and date of dissolution to the Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications (Article 17, Paragraph 1). When a notification is submitted (similar to the submission of a notification pertaining to the establishment, transfer, etc., of a political party), the Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications must publish it on the official bulletin as soon as possible (Article 17, Paragraph 3).

<sup>9</sup> Although not stipulated by law, to distinguish a splinter from a split, in this paper, those that meet the criteria in items 3(4) are called “splinter” and are described alongside “merger” and “split.” For more details on splinters, please see 「政党助成制度のあらまし」 pp.16-17. 総務省ウェブサイト (“Overview of Subsidies for Political Parties System,” pp.16-17. Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications website)



the requirements for a political party under the Political Funds Control Act.

The date of transfer for the case of “dissolution” was set as the “dissolution date” in the notification pertaining to the dissolution of the political party; the date of “loss of requirements,” was based on the official notification that it was no longer a political party.<sup>10</sup> For “absent Diet member,” newspaper reports were referenced.

## 5 *Transfer of Diet Members between Political Parties*

Arrows depict the transfer of Diet members following the establishment, dissolution, loss of requirements, etc., of a political party. Those that were not related to the establishment, etc., of a political party are not described here, even if there was a transfer of Diet members between political parties.

## References

- ・自治省選挙部政党助成室編『逐条解説政党助成法・法人格付与法』ぎょうせい, 1997 (Ministry of Home Affairs Election Department Subsidies for Political Parties Office ed., *Article-by-Article Commentary on the Political Party Subsidies Act and the Act on Granting of Juridical Personality to Political Party Receiving Political Party Grants*, Gyosei, 1997.).
- ・政治資金制度研究会編『逐条解説政治資金規正法 第2次改訂版』ぎょうせい, 2002 (Political Funds System Study Group ed., *Article-by-Article Commentary on the Political Funds Control Act, Second Revised Edition*, Gyosei, 2002.).
- ・選挙制度研究会編『実務と研修のためのわかりやすい公職選挙法 第15次改訂版』ぎょうせい, 2014 (Election System Study Group ed., *Public Offices Election Act Simplified for Practice and Training, 15<sup>th</sup> Revised Edition*, Gyosei, 2014.).
- ・安田充・荒川敦編著『逐条解説公職選挙法 上・下』ぎょうせい, 2009 (YASUDA Mitsuru, ARAKAWA Atsushi eds., *Article-by-Article Commentary on the Public Offices Election Act, Volumes 1 and 2*, Gyosei, 2009.).

SATO Ryo, *The Development of Political Parties in Post-war Japan* (Research Materials), 2022e-3, Tokyo: Research and Legislative Reference Bureau, National Diet Library, 2022.

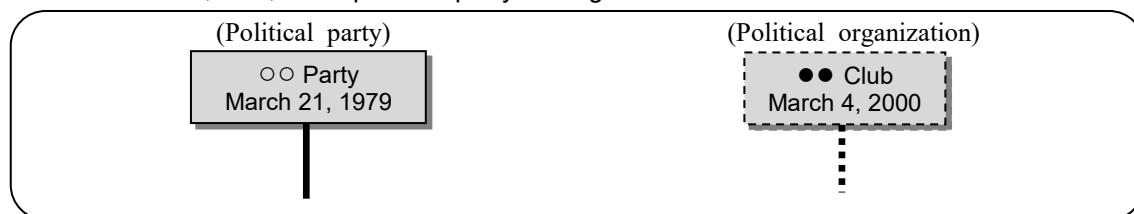
ISBN: 978-4-87582-896-9

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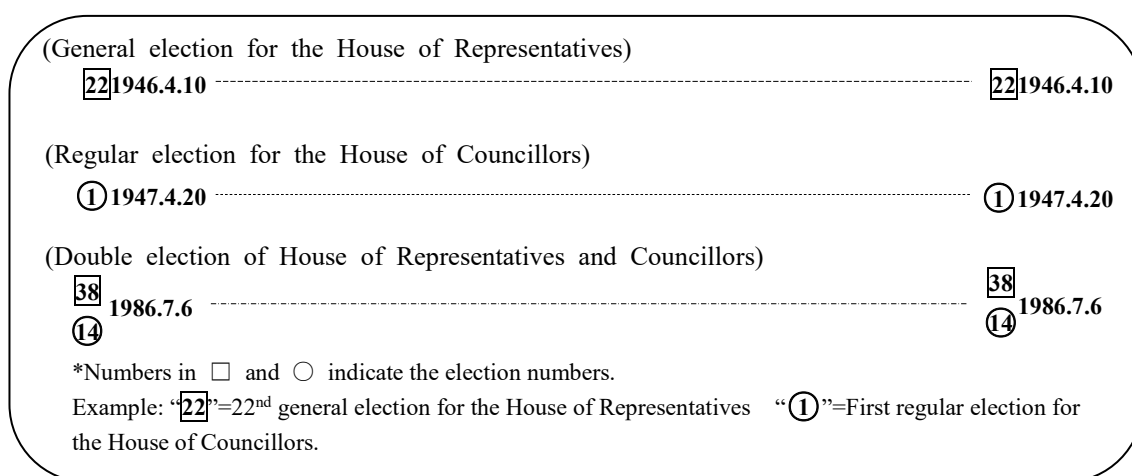
<sup>10</sup> When a political party no longer meets the requirements under Article 3, Paragraph 2 of the Political Funds Control Act, the Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications must publish this on the official bulletin as soon as possible (Article 7-2, Paragraph 3).

## Material Legend

<Establishment, etc., of a political party or organization>



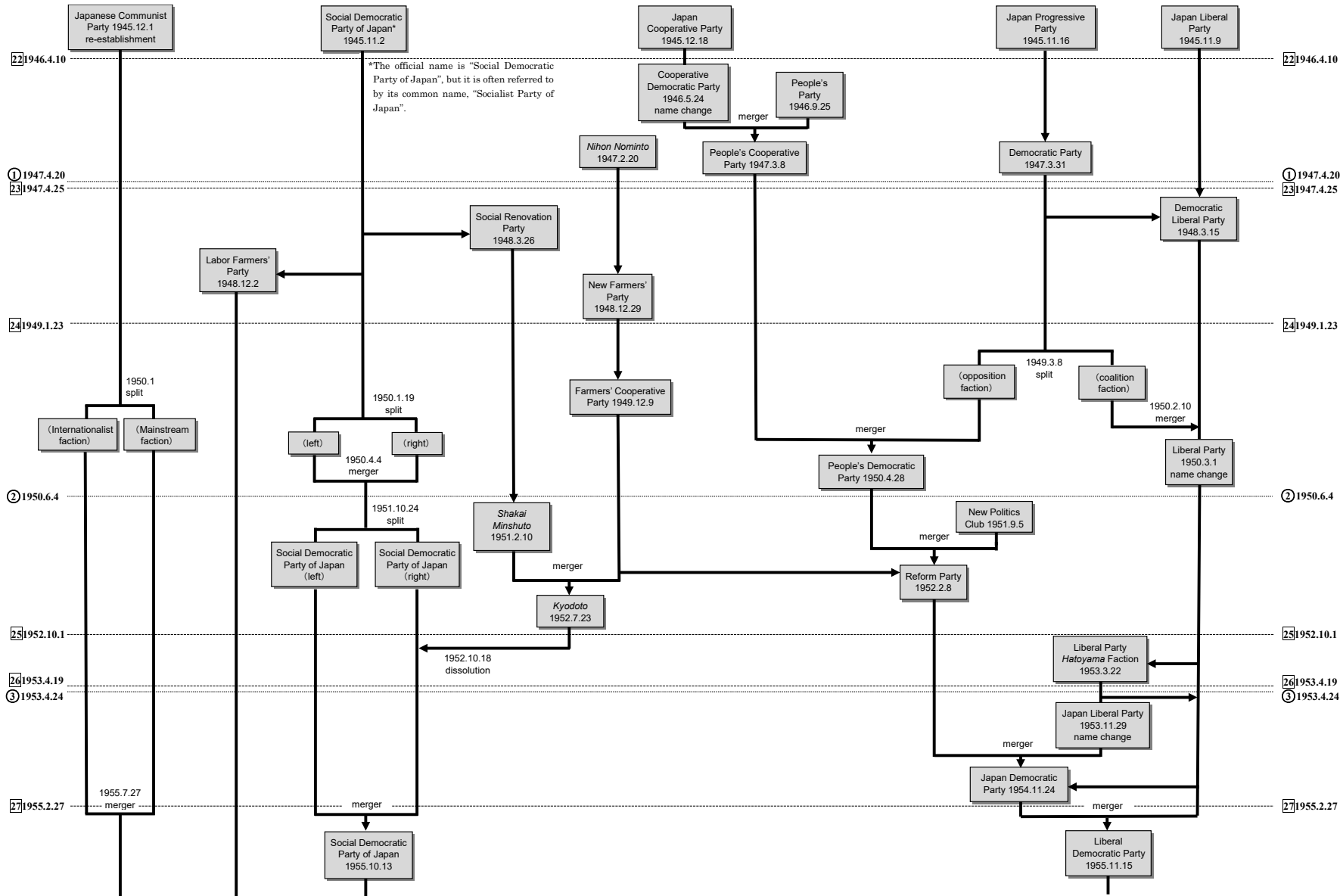
<General election for the House of Representatives or regular election for the House of Councillors>



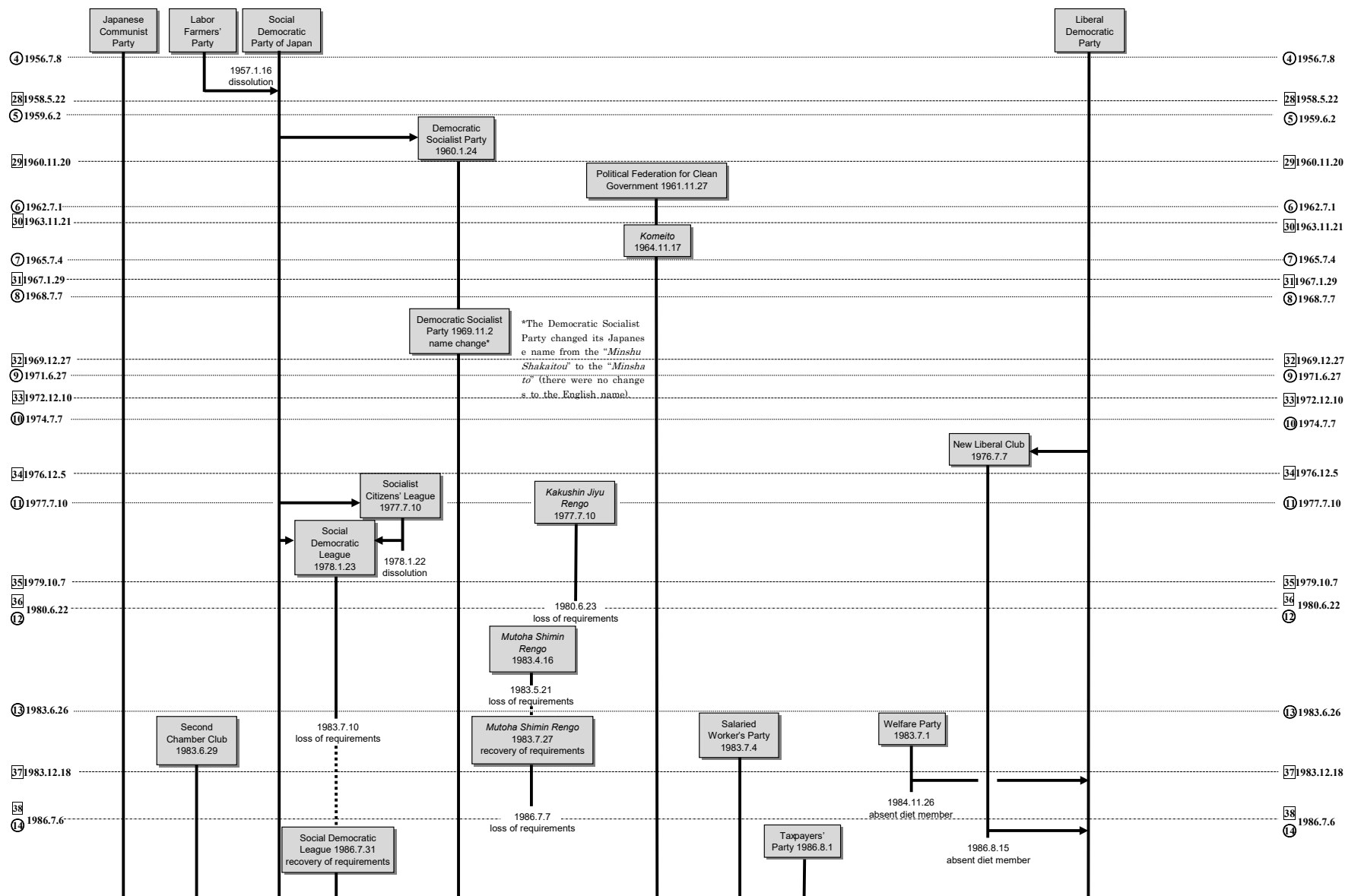
The following material was used as a reference for the English names of political parties. Where English names of political parties were not found, their Japanese names were transliterated into English and presented in italics.

- Website of own political party or successor party.
- J.A.A. Stockwin, *Dictionary of the modern politics of Japan*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.
- Masaru Kohno, *Japan's postwar party politics*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c1997.
- Masumi Junnosuke, *Contemporary politics in Japan*, Berkeley: University of California Press, c1995.
- *The Japan year book 1949-1952*, Tokyo: Foreign Affairs Association of Japan, 1952, pp.215-231.
- *Political Handbook of the World*, Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press/Sage Publications. (Each year edition)
- Alan J. Day ed, *Political Parties of the World 5th edition*, London: John Harper Publishing, 2002.

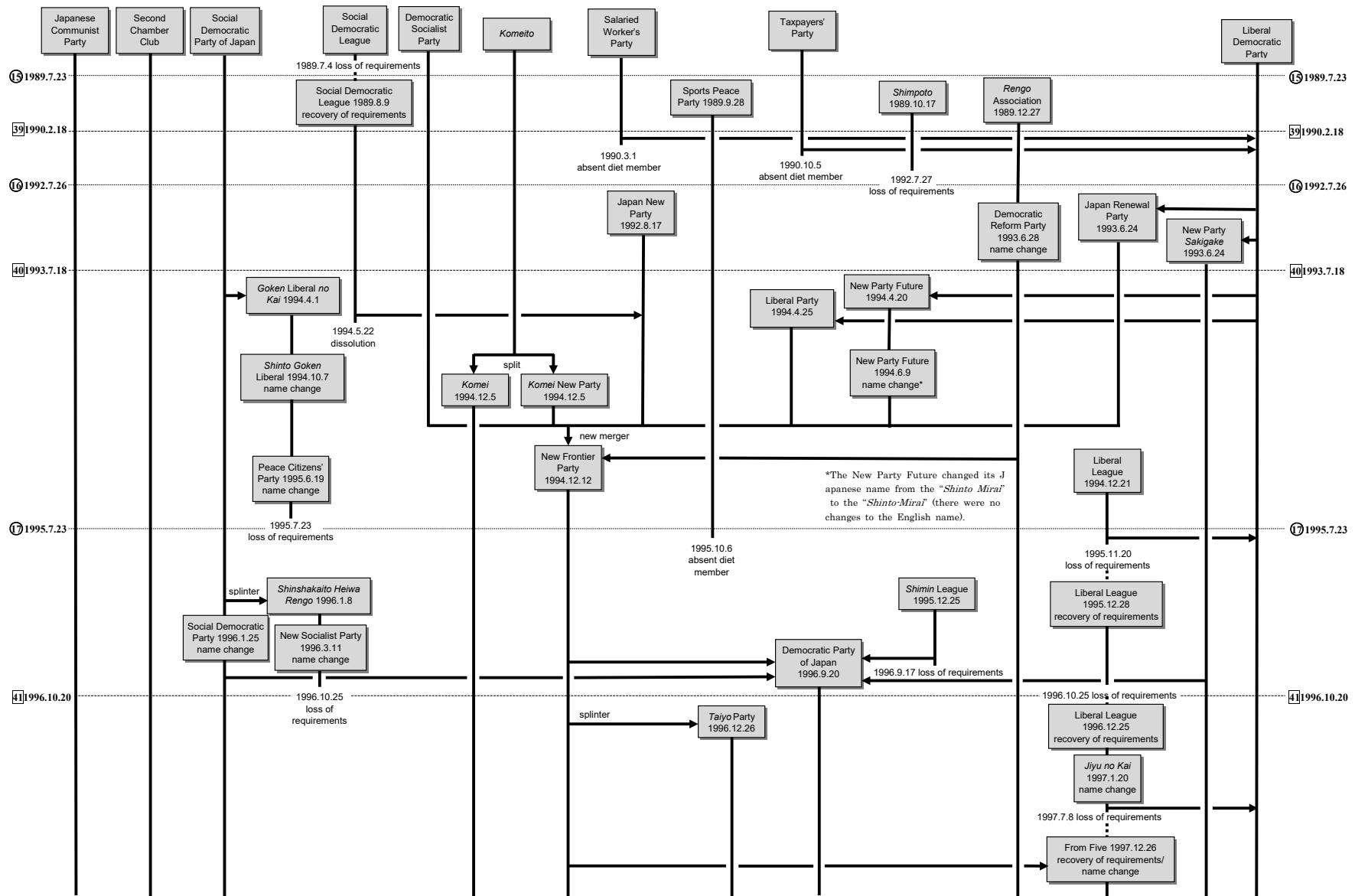
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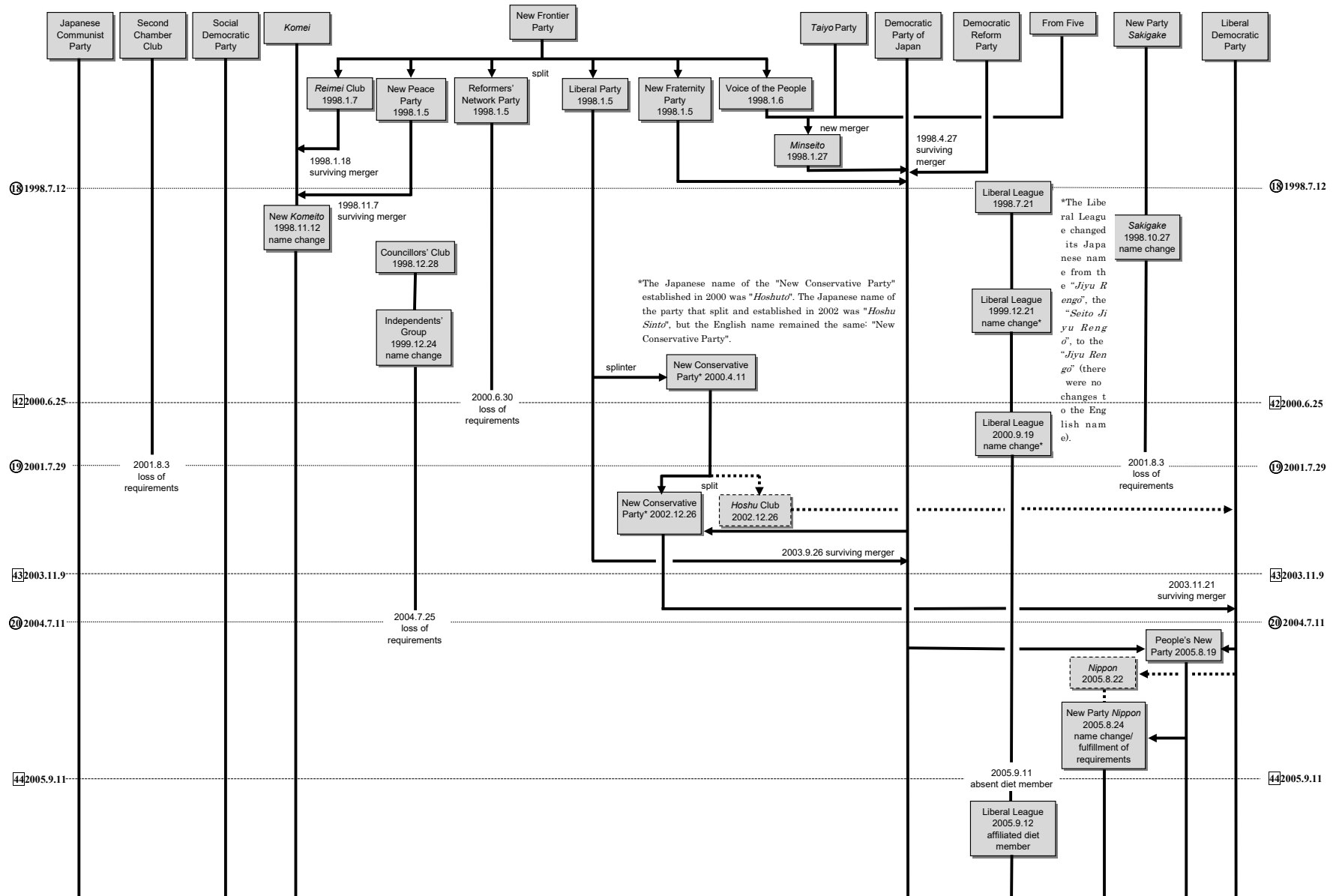
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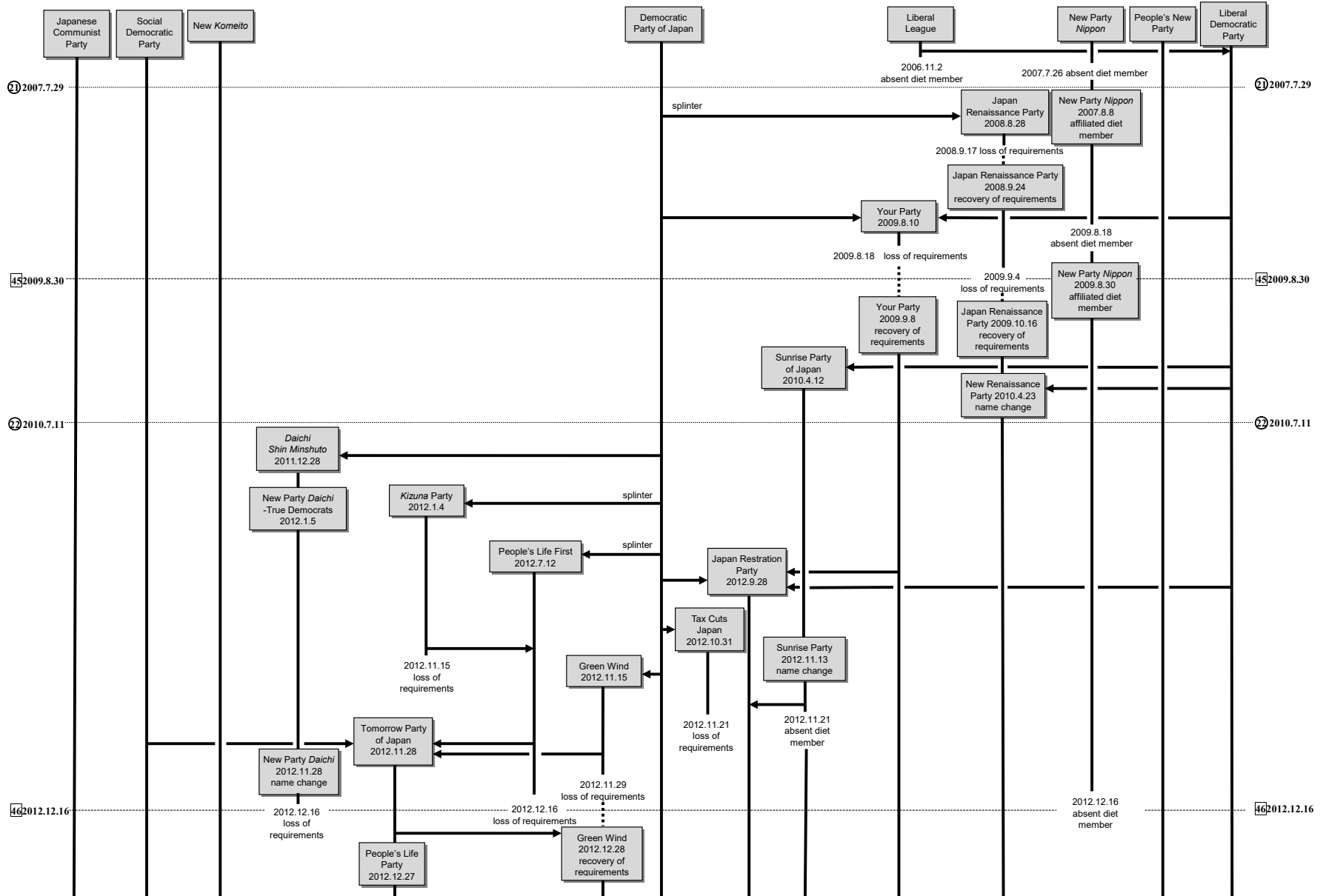
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