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Politicization of Immigration in Japan: On the Intersection of Conservative and Right-wing Politics

A hybrid *u:japan* lecture by Higuchi Naoto

Thursday
2026-04-30
18⁰⁰~19³⁰



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Japan's immigration policy has undergone a rapid transformation since the late 2010s. Facing severe labor shortages driven by demographic decline, the government introduced the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) visa in 2019, initiating a series of reforms completed in 2024 that expanded pathways for blue-collar migrants and introduced a more merit-based system for settlement and advancement. However, following the 2025 Upper House election, immigration became highly politicized as far-right actors framed it as a “foreigner problem,” prompting the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to adopt more restrictive rhetoric.

How have such changes occurred over a relatively short period? This

study examines the politicization of immigration by focusing on shifts within the policy mainstream. While the 2018 revision of the Immigration Law was driven by clientelistic ties between the business community and the LDP, it can also be interpreted as a leftward shift in immigration policy. This shift, however, generated a backlash: from 2023 onward, a growing faction within the LDP began to prioritize law and order over rights. Although far-right actors such as Sanseito contributed to the politicization of immigration, the ruling LDP had already undergone a process of internal radicalization, as its right-wing faction became increasingly mainstream.



Naoto Higuchi is Professor of sociology at Waseda University, Japan. His underlying research interest lies in xenophobia and migration politics. Among his works in English are *Japan's Ultra-Right* (Trans Pacific Press, 2016) and *The Digital Rise of the Far Right in Japan* (Manchester University Press, forthcoming in 2026). His recent publication includes “Far Right Movements in Asia: The Case of Japan” (*The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements of the Far Right*, Oxford University Press, forthcoming in 2026), “Immigration and Nationalism in Japan,” (*Migration and Nationalism*, Edward Elgar, 2024). “What Is New about Japan’s New Migration Policy?” *Social Science Japan Journal*, 28(1), 2025.

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