

# Protesting to whom?

The post-Fukushima protests in a society without effective political opposition

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After the Fukushima disaster in 2011, a large mass protest movement formed in order to oppose nuclear power. Whilst the traditional anti-nuclear protest movements played a role in this, many protestors were first-timers and often protested due to issues linked to the disaster, not about the disaster itself. From this the SEALDs movement sprang, pushing forward a vision of a more democratic Japan. Both of these movements however failed to enact any changes on the policy level.

This has coincided with a collapse in the opposition party in Japan since their removal from power in 2012. Various scholars have commented on this but focus on elements such as political analysis (Oguma, 2016), institutionalism (Rosenbluth & Thies, 2010), or the rise of the precariat (Ogawa, 2013). Whilst all these elements have much explanatory power, they fail to take a wider sociological view as to explain the way protest works in modern society and how the political system observes such protest.

It is my aim to apply Niklas Luhmann's Social Systems Theory to this issue, in particular his theory of protest and politics (Luhmann & Barrett, 2013), to try and understand the post-Fukushima protest movements and their consequences. I shall start by discussing other protest movement theories, such as New Social Movements and resource mobilisation theory (West, 2004). I shall then show how Luhmann's theory can give a more nuanced understanding of their effect. This will also allow the political system to be considered as an external of the protests rather than by considering protest as in itself political.

From these findings I will conclude that the rise of the protest movement post-Fukushima is a sign of a modern society questioning itself. The lack of political resonance that this created however has implications for the operation of the political system, especially the government/opposition coding which Luhmann believes is vital for efficient system operation. It is my suggestion that more must be done to restore this government/opposition coding so that Japanese politics can better observe and act to manage society.

## References

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