



JRI news release

**A Comparison of the Liberal Democratic Party and
Democratic Party Manifestos
— Evaluation and Analysis According to the SMART Criteria —**

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Overview

The Japan Research Institute (JRI) recently compared the manifestos published by the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP) and the Democratic Party of Japan (DP), and attempted an evaluation of their content. The assessment criteria adopted for this purpose were the “SMART” criteria, widely used in policy target evaluation in the United Kingdom.

The SMART criteria are that targets should be (i) Specific, (ii) Measurable, (iii) Achievable, (iv) Relevant, and (v) Timed. To assess in quantitative terms the extent to which the manifestos of the two parties satisfy these criteria, JRI compared the number of election promises made in each manifesto in respect of which (i) legislation is to be created/revised, (ii) new organizations are to be created for the purpose of reform, (iii) numerical targets are set, (iv) costs and sources of funding for policy measures are specified, and (v) schedules and deadlines for policy implementation are indicated.

This examination found 81 election promises satisfying these five criteria in the LDP manifesto as against 141 in the DP manifesto, so that

the DP manifesto apparently surpasses the LDP manifesto in terms of specific, measurable and timed election promises. However, in this kind of comparison, allowance must be made for the fact that the LDP is constrained by its responsibilities as the party in power and the need to ensure that its election promises are compatible with its policies to date, whereas the DP enjoys a considerable degree of freedom as one of the parties in opposition, and it would be sensible not to place excessive importance on superficial numbers.

A more essential and important point in comparing the strengths and weaknesses of the two manifestos is to evaluate their achievability and relevance. To some extent, it is possible to evaluate certain elements of the manifestos, such as those in respect of which methods, costs and sources of funding of policy measures are specified, in quantitative terms but, for the most part, one is forced to rely on qualitative judgments in each field.

JRI therefore decided to make a comparative evaluation of the manifestos on the basis of seven major policy areas: (i) the revitalization of the Japanese economy and employment, (ii) the revitalization of the financial sector and industry, (iii) the restoration of soundness to public finance and the *sanmi-ittai kaikaku* ["three-in-one reforms"], (iv) the reform of the expressway corporations, (v) the

reform of the three postal businesses, (vi) the reform of the public pension system, and (vii) the reform of the political decision-making process.

The results of this evaluation suggest that the two manifestos are fairly evenly matched: in areas (i), (ii) and (iii), the LDP, which has actual experience of wielding political power and pursuing policies, has come up with a more effective set of election promises, while in areas (iv), (v) and (vi), the DP has used the advantages of its opposition party status to come up with bolder proposals for reform.

At the end of the day, it is likely that the electorate will be divided on whether to stake its hopes on the “reform from within” advocated by the LDP achieving significant progress under the Koizumi Administration, or on the sweeping reforms of the political decision-making process advocated by the DP making significant changes to the future of Japan.