



A U.S. Presidential Election Simulation

by Charles Kowalski (Tokai University, Japan)



In Japan (as in much of the world), many people take a keen interest in American presidential elections. One aspect of the process that Japanese people (and the rest of the world) find mystifying is the Electoral College, the “winner-take-all” system of allocating a certain number of electoral votes to each state, with the entire number going to whichever party wins a majority of the popular vote in that state. This activity was designed to help Japanese learners understand the system better, by simulating how an election in Japan might work if it were run along the same lines.

The Simulation: Electoral Votes in Japan

Each of Japan’s 47 prefectures was allotted a number of electoral votes in the same way as American states, according to an estimate of representation in Congress: an automatic 2 for the two Senators plus a number of House representatives proportional to its population (calculated according to the U.S. national average of 713,000 people per Congressional district). Thus, electoral votes per prefecture would range from a minimum of 3 all the way up to 25 for the most populous (Tokyo). Allocation of electoral votes per prefecture is shown in Table 1 and in map form in Figure 1.

The total comes to 303 electoral votes, so a party needs 152 to win. This illustrates how the

Electoral College system gives disproportional weight to smaller rural states that might otherwise be ignored in favor of metropolitan areas. In terms of popular vote, a party that won landslide victories in the urban prefectures of Tokyo, Kanagawa, Osaka, Aichi, Saitama, Chiba, Hyogo, and Fukuoka would have the election practically in hand. In terms of the electoral vote, however, this would add up to only 107, leaving 196 still up for grabs and requiring intensive campaigning in the countryside by both parties.

Procedure

The class divides into two parties. Each chooses a name, a leader, and a party platform, and gives a brief introduction. Once the simulation begins, in each round, party members decide which prefecture to campaign in, and write the name on either the blackboard or a small portable whiteboard. If the two parties choose different prefectures, each one claims all the electoral votes for its chosen prefecture with no contest. If they choose the same prefecture, the party leaders play *janken* (rock, scissors, paper) to determine which party will win it. This is intended to demonstrate how some states are regarded as traditionally “blue” or “red” and are expected to fall into one party’s column with a minimum of effort, while other states are hotly contested “swing” states.

Tokyo	25	Hiroshima, Ibaraki	7
Osaka	19	Kyoto, Miyagi, Niigata	6
Kanagawa	18	Fukushima, Gifu, Gunma, Kagoshima, Kumamoto, Mie, Nagano,	5
Aichi, Saitama	15	Okayama, Tochigi, Yamaguchi	
Chiba	13	Aomori, Ehime, Iwate, Nagasaki, Nara, Okinawa, Shiga	4
Hokkaido, Hyogo	12	Akita, Fukui, Ishikawa, Kagawa, Kochi, Miyazaki, Oita, Saga,	3
Fukuoka	11	Shimane, Tokushima, Tottori, Toyama, Wakayama, Yamagata,	
Shizuoka	8	Yamanashi	

Table 1: Electoral votes per prefecture

Example Simulation

The class divided into two parties, which chose the names “Happy Party” and “Sun Party”. Once they had elected their leaders, the two parties briefly explained their platforms. The *Happy Party* seemed to be aiming more at older people, concerning itself mainly with issues like lower taxes, clean energy, and generous pensions. The *Sun Party*, by contrast, focused on providing more opportunities for young people, by boosting the economy and promoting education.

Table 2 shows how the simulated election

played out. In the unshaded rounds, each party chose to campaign in a different prefecture. In the shaded rounds, both parties chose the same prefecture, resulting in a decision by *janken*.

The *Sun Party* started out strong. They swept the major urban areas of Tokyo, Osaka and Chiba straight out of the gate, and when they lost the swing prefecture of Aichi, they quickly recouped their loss with a victory in Saitama. By the fifth round, they enjoyed a comfortable lead of 15 electoral votes. However, the *Happy Party* staged an upset by winning the battleground prefectures



Figure 1: Electoral votes by prefecture (Outline map courtesy of Daniel Dalet, d-maps.com)

Round	<i>Happy Party</i>			<i>Sun Party</i>		
	Prefecture	Electoral votes	Running total	Prefecture	Electoral votes	Running total
1.	Hyogo	12	12	Tokyo	25	25
2.	Kanagawa	18	30	Osaka	19	44
3.	Aichi	15	45	Aichi	0	44
4.	Saitama	0	45	Saitama	15	59
5.	Hokkaido	12	57	Chiba	13	72
6.	Fukuoka	11	68	Fukuoka	0	72
7.	Shizuoka	8	76	Shizuoka	0	72
8.	Hiroshima	7	83	Miyagi	6	78
9.	Ibaraki	7	90	Ibaraki	0	78
10.	Kyoto	6	96	Niigata	6	84
11.	Fukuushima	5	101	Kumamoto	5	89
12.	Okayama	5	106	Okayama	0	89
13.	Tochigi	5	111	Kagoshima	5	94
14.	Gifu	5	116	Gunma	5	99
15.	Mie	5	121	Nagano	5	104
16.	Iwate	4	125	Aomori	4	108
17.	Shiga	4	129	Yamaguchi	4	112
18.	Nagasaki	4	133	Nagasaki	0	112
19.	Nara	4	137	Ehime	4	116
20.	Toyama	3	140	Akita	3	119
21.	Yamagata	3	143	Wakayama	3	122
22.	Ishikawa	3	146	Miyazaki	3	125
23.	Kochi	3	149	Saga	3	128
24.	Yamanashi	3	152	Fukui	3	131

Table 2: Outcome of example simulation

of Fukuoka, Shizuoka, and Ibaraki. In a stunning reversal of fortune, by round 10, they'd taken the lead by a margin of 12 electoral votes, which only widened with a later victory in Okayama. In the latter half of the campaign, each party played to its base, plodding along towards the finish line at an evenly matched pace, with one more showdown in Nagasaki. The *Sun Party* had the option of conceding at any time, but chose to fight until the end. This came in round 24 when Yamanashi brought the *Happy Party's* total up to 152.

The campaign strategies of the two parties, and the election results, played out just as a real-life election likely would. The *Sun Party*, in keeping with its youth-oriented message, campaigned first and hardest in the urban centers where young people are concentrated. The *Happy Party* was content to let those go without contest, choosing instead to focus more on suburban and rural areas,

home to families and elderly people. The election was decided mainly in mid-sized, industrial prefectures like Aichi, Shizuoka, Saitama, and Fukuoka, which would most likely be evenly split between the two parties, just like the American "swing states" of Ohio and Pennsylvania.

A discussion could follow, to examine how the parties' campaign strategy was different from what it might have been if they had been seeking only popular votes. Students could then exchange their opinions about the relative merits of both systems. By the end of the simulation, students may still find the Electoral College system somewhat puzzling, but they should at least have a better understanding of why it exists and how it works.

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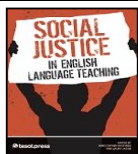
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