

Chapter

Japan's 2025 Populist Turn from Outside: Multi-Dimensional Well-Being and Value Depletion in Integrative Political Psychology

Masaya Kobayashi, Hikari Ishido and Jiro Mizushima

Abstract

Japan's 2025 House of Councillors election provides a rare empirical window into how declines in subjective well-being (WB) and value-based resources align with contemporary populist realignment. Using national survey data linked to party support and seat-change patterns, this chapter shows that multi-dimensional WBs—spanning evaluative, affective, relational, and eudaimonic domains—together with value-related indicators (meaning, mattering, intrinsic versus material orientation, and sacralization) form a coherent psychological architecture behind Japan's "populist turn from outside." Lower WB and depleted meaning and mattering are consistently associated with stronger populist attitudes, outperforming ideology, socioeconomic grievance, and basic demographics. Three configurations are identified: (1) resentment-based populism, marked by elevated negative affect and collapsed meaning and mattering; (2) sacralized far-right populism, in which resentment is intensified by pseudo-religious purity and national-cultural sacralization; and (3) reform-oriented populism, where relatively high WB and future-oriented capability (hope, optimism, and agency) support efficacy-driven, market-focused dissatisfaction. These patterns indicate a generalizable mechanism linking WB and value erosion to democratic fragility in an advanced democracy. The chapter situates these findings within integrative positive political psychology, treating negative political phenomena as diagnostic signals of deficits in well-being and values—such as meaning and recognition—thereby clarifying targets for democratic resilience and flourishing-oriented renewal.

Keywords: right-wing populism, well-being depletion, value depletion, meaning depletion, subjective well-being, existential erosion

1. Introduction

This chapter analyzes Japan's 2025 House of Councillors (Japan's upper house) election as a theoretically clarifying case for the study of populism through multi-dimensional well-being (WB) and value-related psychological resources. Rather than

treating populism primarily as an ideological endpoint, a reaction to economic grievance, or a product of institutional distrust, the analysis examines how affective strain and existential vulnerability—especially the erosion of meaning and mattering—cohere into a psychological architecture associated with outsider-oriented populist realignment.

Early evidence from the 2016 US presidential election [1] and parallel European work [2] suggested that declines in subjective WB may be linked to populist support. Yet election-focused models that treat WB depletion and value erosion as central explanatory dimensions remain limited, and evidence from non-Western advanced democracies is especially scarce. Japan therefore offers a valuable empirical setting: While ideological polarization is present, the 2025 realignment renders the underlying affective–existential structure unusually transparent, allowing the WB-populism relationship to be examined with particular conceptual clarity.

Consistent with positive psychology conventions, the chapter centers on subjective WB indicators, while extending the analysis to multi-dimensional WB and value-orientation measures—including meaning, mattering, intrinsic versus material orientation, and identity-related sacralization. This broader set of indicators enables an integrative political-psychological account of why distinct populist formations can emerge within a party system, and why some far-right mobilization takes a pseudo-religious, sacralized form despite low levels of substantive spirituality in the population. In this way, Japan is not treated as a deviant case but as a revealing one: a context in which the psychological infrastructure beneath contemporary populism becomes empirically visible and comparably interpretable across democracies.

2. The National Emergence of Populism from below: Philosophical and measurement foundations

2.1 Historical background

As discussed in Chapter 1 “Populism Typology across Europe, the United States, and Japan: Still the Century of Hybrid Fascism?,” the 2025 electoral rupture should be understood not as the origin of Japan’s populist crisis but as its crystallization. The legitimacy architecture of post-2012 Japan had already eroded prior to 2025, as programmatic alternatives narrowed, ethical horizons receded from mainstream party discourse, and prolonged emotional depletion accumulated without institutional representation.

Thus, after the earlier phases of populism from above and local populism, populism from below finally emerged at the national level. In this context, populism emerged as an endogenous successor once the democratic meaning of elite political language could no longer be sustained. The escalation of populism did not reflect sudden ideological polarization or acute economic collapse, but rather the saturation points of long-term well-being and value depletion—when meaning, mattering, and existential security fell below a threshold that ordinary democratic competition could absorb.

The 2025 election rendered this long-term erosion electorally visible. To account for this shift, the analysis must move beyond institutional description toward psychological causal architecture. The following section, therefore, turns to the normative and theoretical foundations for treating well-being and value depletion as enabling conditions of populist realignment.

2.2 Normative foundations: Political philosophy and political science

Political science has long separated political legitimacy (normative theory) from political behavior (positive empirical analysis). This separation is historically understandable but analytically catastrophic. It obscures the fact that legitimacy is not merely a procedural attribute of institutions, but a lived psychological condition grounded in well-being and value-based experience, including meaning, recognition, and dignity.

Communitarian philosophers such as Michael Sandel and Charles Taylor made this structure explicit at the normative level. In parallel, communitarian sociologists and political scientists—including Amitai Etzioni and Robert Putnam—demonstrated empirically how community norms, trust, and associational life shape democratic performance, even though they did not directly operationalize well-being.

Positive political psychology, developed by one of the authors [3], provides this missing operational bridge by translating normative concepts of legitimacy into empirically measurable psychological constructs. It conceptualizes well-being and value-related resources—such as meaning, mattering, recognition, and relational functioning—as the experiential substrate through which political order is perceived, evaluated, and sustained.

2.3 Measurement framework: From philosophical intuition to psychometric operationalization

To empirically connect the philosophical arguments mentioned in the previous section to measurable political behavior, we introduce the measurement framework for our survey. This framework allows us to translate normative concepts into psychometrically defined constructs amenable to empirical testing.

2.3.1 The populism scale: Genealogy and structure

Our analysis employs a nine-item Japanese populism battery developed through the following intellectual lineage (Appendix A):

1. Akkerman et al. [4] – foundational two-dimensional conceptualization

- Anti-elitism
- People's sovereignty

2. Schulz et al. [5] – refined psychometric structure and added

- homogeneity as a distinct right-populist component

3. Hieda et al. (Japan) – culturally adapted and used Japanese scale [6]

- Produced the validated 9-item version by Zenkyo [7]
- Our study uses this scale directly

This genealogy matters because it shows that the structure of populism is not ad hoc but grounded in a cumulative international research tradition, enabling comparison across democracies.

2.3.2 Dimensionality in our analysis

Our dataset allows both three-factor and two-factor analyses. Psychometrically, two findings stand out:

- Anti-elitism and people's sovereignty are strongly correlated ($r = .71$), forming the core evaluative dimension of "Akkerman-type populism."
- By contrast, homogeneity exhibits only modest associations with these dimensions ($r = .39$ with people's sovereignty; $r = .25$ with anti-elitism), indicating that it constitutes a partially distinct component rather than a unified populist core.

Homogeneity was originally introduced as an indicator of the general will in populist theory. In the Japanese context, however, it also captures an anti-pluralist mode of recognition and the normatively exclusionary component of typical populist ideology.

For interpretive clarity and cross-party mapping, we adopt a two-dimensional representation:

- *X-axis*: Anti-elitism + Popular sovereignty (the combined "core populism" dimension)
- *Y-axis*: Homogeneity (anti-pluralistic recognition; basis of right-wing populism)

This 2D structure allows clear visual differentiation of party types:

- Right-/left-wing populists (e.g., Sanseitō, Reiwa Shinsengumi [Reiwa]) → high X, high Y
- Civic or center-left democrats associated with popular sovereignty (Constitutional Democratic Party [CDP]) → high X, low Y
- Non-populist governmental parties (Liberal Democratic Party [LDP], Komeito) → low X, low Y

These examples are illustrative rather than inferential; however, the empirical analysis supports this structure. Nevertheless, we do not attempt to revalidate the entire populism scale. The purpose here is typological visualization, consistent with international convention.

The following figure visualizes the two-dimensional structure of populist attitudes using the Japanese adaptation of the Akkerman–Schulz scale [6, 7]. The horizontal axis represents the combined "core populism" dimension (anti-elitism and popular sovereignty), while the vertical axis captures homogeneity.

Importantly, Hieda and Zenkyo's original validation highlighted a key divergence from Western findings: The homogeneity dimension was only weakly correlated with the other components of populism in Japan, raising questions about the assumption of a single higher-order populist attitude. On this basis, prior studies concluded that populist attitude scales do not consistently translate into electoral support or seat gains in the Japanese context.

At the same time, these earlier findings were derived primarily from local and subnational electoral settings, where populist mobilization was often embedded in region-specific issues, candidate-centered dynamics, and non-programmatic appeals. Such contexts may have constrained the observable linkage between attitudinal populism and aggregate electoral outcomes.

Building on these insights, the present analysis extends the scope from local contexts to national-level party competition. Rather than treating homogeneity as a constitutive component of a unified populist attitude, we explicitly separate core populism from homogeneity. This two-dimensional configuration provides an analytically transparent framework for distinguishing non-populist, hybrid, and right-populist parties without presupposing their aggregation into a single latent dimension (**Figure 1**).

By shifting the analytical focus to nationwide party support and seat-change patterns, this study reassesses the political relevance of populist orientations, thereby moving beyond attitudinal populism toward well-being and value-based resources as upstream psychological conditions associated with populist alignment.

It should be emphasized that this two-dimensional representation does not imply that populism in Japan cannot be meaningfully summarized along a single dimension. In fact, when the two- and three-dimensional components of populist attitudes are aggregated, the resulting composite score closely corresponds to what is conventionally understood as “typical populism,” including left-wing populist formations such as Reiwa.

The analytical value of distinguishing homogeneity as a separate dimension lies not in measuring the overall intensity of populism, but in differentiating populist parties from the established democratic opposition parties, such as the CDP, which may share elements of anti-elitism or popular sovereignty

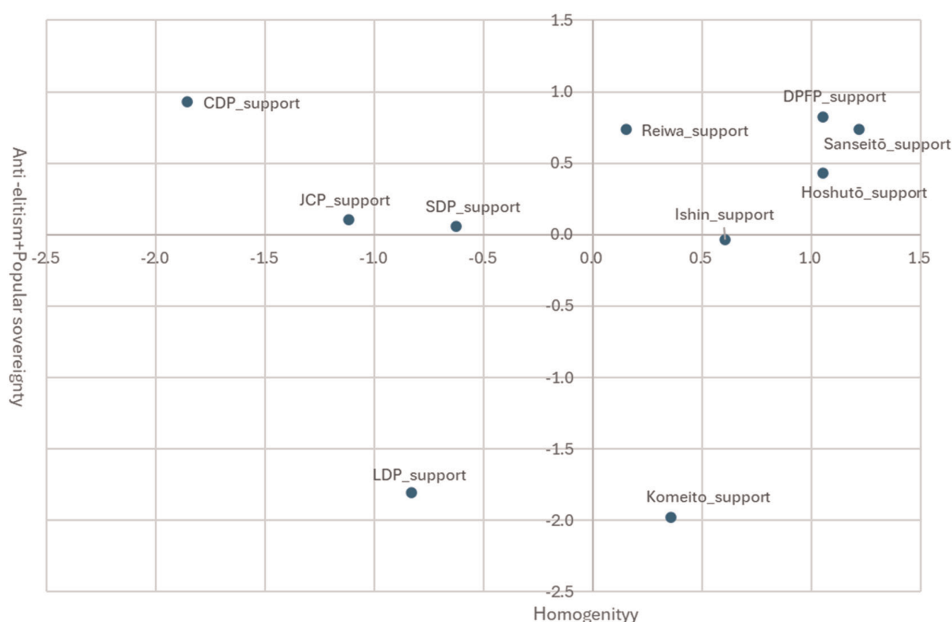


Figure 1.
 Two-dimensional structure of populist attitudes in Japan. Note. Party abbreviations are as follows: Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP), Democratic Party for the People (DPFP), Komeito, Ishin, Sanseitō, Hoshutō, Japanese Communist Party (JCP), Japan Socialist Party (JPS), and Reiwa Shinsengumi (Reiwa).

without endorsing exclusionary or homogenizing conceptions of “the people.” In this sense, the two-dimensional configuration is particularly well suited for visualizing qualitative differences among non-mainstream political actors, while the aggregated one-dimensional measure captures the general strength of populist orientation.

2.4 Why WB and populism must be integrated

Finally, this measurement foundation enables empirical analyses in Section 5–7.

Populism cannot be understood solely as ideology, and WB cannot be treated as a mere background variable. The Japanese case demonstrates:

- WB and value depletion are the enabling conditions
- Populism is the mobilizing mechanism
- Together, they form the psychological political dynamism of the 2025 realignment.

Thus:

WB and values are not private matters—they are constitutional public goods.

The normative reconstruction that follows (Concluding Chapter, “Beyond Populism”) expands this insight into a theory of democratic sustainability grounded in ethical-communitarian flourishing.

3. Psychological mechanism: WB and value depletion as the transmission belt

Well-being (WB) and values constitute the empirically observable experiential structure through which political conditions are interpreted and emotionally processed. They are not merely downstream consequences of political outcomes, but upstream determinants of how citizens evaluate politics and locate themselves within a moral horizon. When WB and value-based resources deteriorate, individuals do not simply become dissatisfied; they lose the experiential capacity to render the political world coherent, intelligible, and worth participating in. This deterioration spans hedonic, eudaimonic, and existential dimensions.

Consistent with findings in political psychology, depletion of meaning and mattering disrupts cognitive coherence and increases susceptibility to simplified, threat-oriented interpretive frames [8, 9]. Under such conditions, resentment and anger emerge as readily available affective substitutes. Resentment provides a simplified causal schema that attributes blame to elites or out-groups and moralizes political antagonism, thereby functioning as the emotional infrastructure of populist cognition.

Previous research in political psychology has shown that threat-related emotions, particularly anxiety and anger, can influence political attitudes and patterns of political participation under conditions of perceived insecurity [10, 11]. These studies demonstrate that emotions matter for political behavior, especially in moments of heightened uncertainty or electoral competition. However, such emotion-centered accounts leave open the question of why particular emotional responses become chronically salient and politically mobilizing in some social groups but not in others.

Building on her ethnographic analysis of rural support for Donald Trump, Cramer [12] provides an important conceptual advance by showing that resentment should not be understood as a transient emotional reaction. Rather, resentment operates as a socially embedded interpretive framework through which diffuse dissatisfaction is moralized and attributed to elites or out-groups, crystallizing into a durable narrative of elite—people antagonism that persists beyond the episodic affect. While Cramer's analysis is grounded in the US context, the interpretive logic of resentment she identifies is not specific to American politics and can be observed across diverse democratic settings.

This study extends and reconfigures this line of research by demonstrating that such affective and interpretive responses are themselves downstream manifestations of deeper depletion in well-being, meaning, and mattering. In this framework, emotions such as anxiety or anger do not function as primary causal drivers of populism, but rather as experiential symptoms of structural deficits in value-based resources that shape populist orientations at both the individual and collective levels.

This mechanism can be summarized directionally:

1. Depletion of WB and value-based resources (including meaning, mattering, recognition) undermines democratic trust.
2. Emotions such as resentment emerge as a compensatory affective orientation, and
3. The emotion is politicized through anti-elite mobilization, producing populist alignment and electoral behavior.

The Japanese case demonstrates this mechanism with unusual clarity. Populist escalation in the 2025 House of Councillors election did not depend primarily on programmatic repositioning or heightened ideological polarization. Instead, it reflected the availability of emotions, including resentment, as a compensatory affective response under the conditions of long-term erosion of WB and value-based resources.

The Japanese case does not represent a deviation from established Western accounts of populism; rather, it clarifies how long-term erosion of well-being and value-based resources renders democratic exhaustion politically legible through affective-existential pathways. This yields the central empirical proposition guiding the following analyses: If WB and value depletion constitute the enabling conditions of populism, then patterns of WB and values should structure party support, vote choice, and electoral outcomes. The subsequent chapters test this proposition using original national survey data, demonstrating that multi-dimensional WB and value orientations form the primary latent axis organizing political alignment and electoral transformation in Japan's contemporary populist era.

4. Data and method

4.1 Data collection

The empirical analysis uses an original nationwide online survey conducted during the final 3 days of the 2025 House of Councilors election (main fielding: 2–3 days

before election day; additional responses: election day and the day after). This narrow fieldwork window captures political preferences, emotions, multi-dimensional well-being (WB) states, and value orientations under live electoral conditions, minimizing retrospective bias.

A total of 4555 respondents participated. The sample was quota-balanced to mirror Japan's demographic composition by gender and age (Appendix B).

Respondents reported:

- demographic attributes
- policy preferences
- populist attitudes
- WB and value orientation indicators
- party support and vote intentions (district and PR ballots)

The dataset integrates three domains rarely combined in international electoral research:

1. Positive political psychology
2. Populism research
3. Dual-ballot electoral behavior

Because both ballots were measured under identical affective conditions, the survey provides a strong test of whether WB and depletion functioned as upstream causal mechanisms in Japan's 2025 populist realignment.

4.2 Core measures of well-being (WB)

WB is conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct encompassing evaluative, experiential, and existential components (Appendix C).

1. SWLS – Satisfaction With Life Scale [13]

Measures global evaluative WB; used as the core indicator in regression models.

2. PERMA – All dimensions [14, 15]

Six experiential WB components:

- Positive emotion
- Negative emotion
- Engagement
- Relationships

- Meaning (PERMA-M)

- Accomplishment

These capture emotional tone and experiential WB.

3.3DM – Three-dimensional meaning [16]

Existential meaning across:

- Coherence
- Purpose
- Significance

4.Mattering—Mattering in domains of life scale [17]

Assesses perceived social recognition and visibility:

Feeling valued and adding value across the personal, interpersonal, occupational, and community domains.

4.3 Cultural, eudaimonic/relational, and future-oriented value indicators

These indicators capture culturally grounded meaning-making and a eudaimonic/relational orientation—central to understanding WB depletion in late-modern Japan (Appendix C).

1.*Ikigai* (Original items, Japanese cultural psychology)

2.Culturally embedded sense of life purpose and contribution.

3.*Inner-richness Orientation* (Original items)

Measures value orientations emphasizing psychological depth and inner wealth.

4.*HEMA-R – Eudaimonic Orientation* [18]

Captures the pursuit of eudaimonic well-being, such as authenticity, excellence, growth, and meaning/contribution.

5.*Virtue Scale* (Original scale)

A measure of moral virtues reflecting ethical self-cultivation.

6.*Hope* (Original items)

A future-directed WB indicator reflecting perceived agency and pathways toward desirable outcomes.

7.*Optimism* (Original items)

Generalized positive expectancies about the future; conceptually distinct from Hope.

Hope and optimism jointly serve as the reverse indicators of future-oriented negative well-being, allowing the depletion of this domain to be operationalized as a key component of populist susceptibility.

4.4 Transcendent and religious value indicators

1. *VIA Spirituality* [19]

A character strength capturing spiritual orientation.

2. *Materialism/Post-materialism* [20]

Assesses value-shift orientation toward material values for security and income vs. post-material orientation toward self-expression.

3. *Religiosity* [21]

General importance of religion in life.

4. *Sanctity* [22]

Sacredness/purity dimension in Moral Foundations; relevant for cultural-moral aspects of right-populist support.

4.5 Populism measurement

Populist attitudes were measured using the nine-item populism scale, adapted for Japan and based on the established international framework. As noted in Section 2.3, we follow the scale's standard three-factor logic while also using a two-dimensional representation for visualization. A standardized Populism Index (z-scored) was constructed and employed in all regression models and party-level comparisons.

4.6 Electoral preferences

Political preferences were measured through:

- party support
- district vote intention
- PR vote intention

Japan's dual-ballot system allows testing whether WB and values indicators shape both:

- political identity (support)
- behavioral choice (votes)

under identical emotional conditions.

4.7 Demographic controls

Controls included:

- age
- gender
- education
- income and assets

Regional indicators were not included.

Highly educated respondents displayed the following pattern against *Low-WB populism* (Reiwa, Sansei, Hoshu):

- High-WB libertarian populism (Ishin)
- High-WB progressive bloc (CDP, JSP)
- Moderate or Relatively High governmental bloc (LDP, Koumei).

This pattern supports the interpretation that WB—not ideology alone—structures Japan's 2025 alignment.

4.8 Analytical strategy

The analysis proceeds in three stages, combining correlational assessment, behavioral replication, and structural interpretation.

Stage 1—Zero-order associations

Correlation analysis between well-being (WB) and value-based indicators and party support or vote intention.

Stage 2—Behavioral replication

Testing the robustness of associations across multiple behavioral indicators, including:

- party support,
- district vote intention, and
- proportional representation (PR) vote intention,

in order to distinguish attitudinal alignment from actual voting behavior.

Stage 3—Structural interpretation.

A structural mapping and typological interpretation of the Japanese party system, identifying four broad configurations:

1. resentment-based outsider populism,
2. libertarian or high-WB populism,
3. a mainstream progressive block, and
4. a stagnating governing parties' bloc.

Across these stages, analytical scaling is applied selectively depending on purpose. Visualizations intended for typological or structural interpretation (e.g., multi-dimensional maps of populist orientations) employ standardized or rescaled scores to highlight relative positioning, whereas analyses linking attitudes to electoral outcomes retain unstandardized values to preserve substantive differences in magnitude. Consistency across multiple WB and value indicators—including SWLS, PERMA, the 3-Dimensional Meaning Scale (3DM), mattering, Ikigai, HEMA-R, inner richness, and virtue measures—supports the inference that WB and value depletion constitute a core component of the causal architecture underlying Japan’s 2025 political realignment.

4.9 Policy orientation measures (PCA-based two-dimensional ideology framework)

Policy orientations were measured using a set of multi-item issue questions covering economic redistribution, welfare provision, market regulation, sociocultural values, national security, energy policy, and ethical issues (see Appendix D for item wording). These items were designed to capture respondents’ general ideological positioning as well as their evaluative stance toward existing policy arrangements.

A principal component analysis (PCA) extracted two stable and interpretable factors (**Figure 2**). The first factor corresponds to a conventional general left-right ideological dimension, encompassing preferences over redistribution, state intervention, and sociocultural regulation. The second factor captures an orientation toward practical or contextual evaluations of government responses, reflecting whether

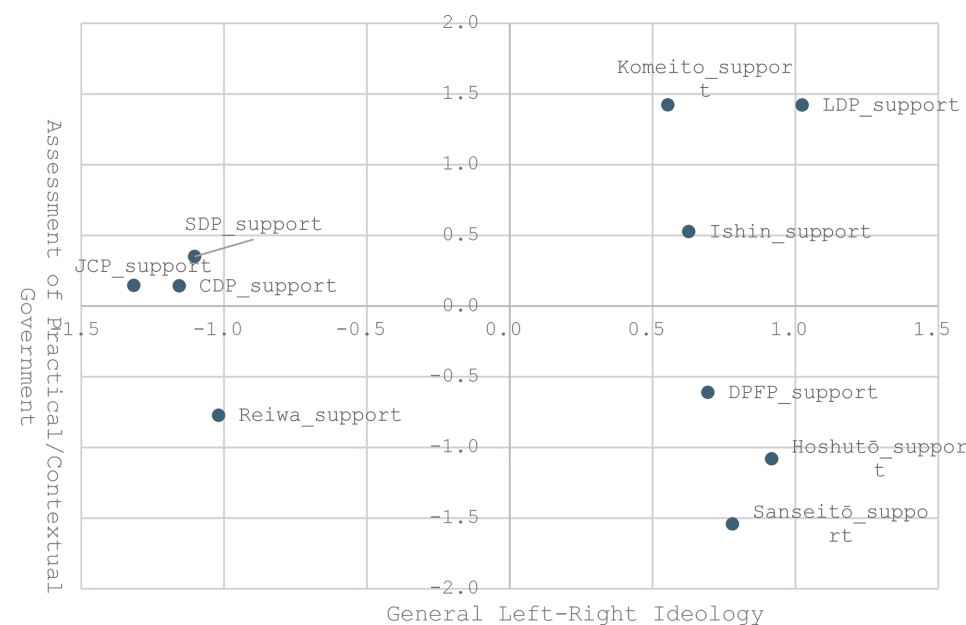


Figure 2.
Two-dimensional policy orientation of party support.

respondents prioritize maintaining existing institutional arrangements or demand more fundamental policy or political change. Importantly, this second dimension is not reducible to left-right ideology and instead reflects attitudes toward governance performance and contextual adaptability.

This two-dimensional policy framework captures the key features of contemporary Japanese political competition and is useful for situating party support patterns in ideological space. Based on party-level averages, the framework distinguishes three broad constellations:

1. a left-oriented and negatively evaluative block (JCP, CDP, JPS, Reiwa),
2. a right-oriented and positively evaluative block (LDP, Komeito), and
3. a right-oriented but negatively evaluative block (Sanseito, DPFP, Hoshutō, Ishin).

The purpose of introducing this policy-orientation framework is not to explain populist alignment directly, but to clarify the analytical distinction between policy ideology and the affective and value-based mechanisms examined in the main analyses. By explicitly modeling ideological positioning separately, the study avoids conflating populist orientations with conventional left-right policy preferences.

Figure 2 situates party support within a conventional policy-ideological space and serves as a baseline against which the well-being-based structuring of populist alignment is evaluated in subsequent sections.

Party-level positioning in a two-dimensional policy space based on PCA of issue preferences. The horizontal axis represents general left-right ideology, and the vertical axis captures the assessment of practical or contextual government responses. This figure serves as a reference map and is analytically distinct from the populist typology examined in subsequent sections.

4.10 Robustness checks

Because party support and vote intention in both ballots and multiple WB operationalizations were collected, robust tests include the following:

- replication across support and vote intention in district/PR ballots
- consistency across evaluative/experiential/existential WB
- stability of effects controlling for demographic covariates
- analytical separation from ideological positioning (PCA-based factors)
- comparison of full vs. reduced models.

The persistence of WB/values-populism-support/vote links across all tests strengthens the conclusion that WB/values depletion is part of Japan's 2025 causal architecture.

5. Results Part I: Depletion-based foundations of populism (WB and values)

5.1 Well-being depletion and the emergence of resentment-based populism

Research on populism directly shows that resentment, status threat, and recognition-related grievances form core psychological antecedents of populist attitudes [9, 12, 23].

Complementing this, a broader body of political psychology demonstrates that perceived unfairness, threat, and negative affect—especially anger and anxiety—shape punitive or anti-elite judgments and thus provide the emotional micro-foundations through which such grievances become politically actionable [8].

Together, these two strands indicate that anger becomes politically consequential only when embedded in perceived injustice, loss of status, or threats to recognition and belonging.

This shift aligns with a broader theoretical development: Political discontent is increasingly understood to emerge from the erosion of well-being (WB) and existential orientation, rather than from changes in economic preferences alone. Recent cross-national evidence shows that declines in life satisfaction, meaning, purpose, mattering, and future-oriented WB, such as hope and optimism, predict anti-establishment orientations more robustly than income, inflation, or standard economic risk indicators [24].

Japan provides a crucial empirical test of this mechanism. Longitudinal trend evidence from the World Happiness Report indicates that Japan's national WB declined almost continuously from 2012 to 2020. According to our data, during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2021), WB dropped sharply due to social isolation and uncertainty. Although partial recovery followed social reopening (2022–2024), levels remained below pre-pandemic benchmarks, signaling a sustained erosion of evaluative and experiential WB.

This fragile plateau broke again in 2024. A rapid yen depreciation-driven inflation shock heightened living-cost anxieties, while a major political corruption scandal undermined institutional legitimacy. The synchronization of these shocks intensified WB and values depletion, probably associated with distrust, moral outrage, and diminished hope and optimism.

Importantly, populism did not surge during the COVID trough, when WB was the lowest, but legitimacy remained relatively stable. Instead, populism escalated when long-term WB deterioration aligned with legitimacy collapse, making negative affect and future pessimism politically mobilizable. This clarifies why Japan's 2025 House of Councillors election constitutes a structural tipping point: reduced life satisfaction, diminished values such as meaning and mattering, and diminished hope/optimism formed the conditions that allowed outsider parties to convert personal grievances into political action.

This pattern aligns with comparative theories suggesting that long-term declines in experiential and value-based WB predispose citizens to interpret politics through simplified moral boundaries and to adopt elite-blame narratives. Related research on well-being and political judgment further indicates that deteriorating WB heightens sensitivity to moralized or dualistic interpretations of public affairs. Resentment supplies a simplified interpretive schema through which diffuse dissatisfaction becomes politically vectorized.

Our analysis proceeds across three interconnected layers:

1. Party-support level:

Parties whose supporters exhibit lower WB and values—including meaning, mattering, and hope/optimism—display higher populism and gained more seats in 2025.

2. Electoral behavior:

WB depletion predicts outsider populist voting more strongly than ideology, demographics, or economic dissatisfaction.

In Japan, WB depletion encompasses both evaluative WB (SWLS) and affective WB (negative emotions, including greater anger, anxiety, and sadness), as captured by PERMA emotion items. Hope and optimism depletion likely amplifies emotional vulnerability by weakening expectations of improvement and reinforcing perceptions of stagnation. Although this mechanism is not directly tested here, it aligns with broader theories in political psychology linking future-oriented WB to political discontent.

Accordingly, the 2025 populist shift can be interpreted as the political expression of a decade-long erosion in subjective and existential well-being, rendered salient by acute legitimacy shocks and articulated through resentment-oriented narratives.

In this interpretation, hope and optimism operate as forward-looking lenses that shape when and for how long-term depletion becomes politically meaningful.

5.2 Individual-level mechanisms: WB depletion and resentment-based populist attitudes

At the individual level, well-being (WB) depletion functions as a core psychological pathway that heightens susceptibility to resentment and predisposes individuals toward populist cognition. This inference is grounded in the convergence between individual-level associations and party-level compositional patterns. Although the magnitude of these associations varies depending on levels of aggregation, the underlying directional relationship remains substantively consistent.

This interpretation aligns with international research demonstrating that erosion of subjective well-being increases vulnerability to resentment-based political judgments and simplified elite-people antagonism [9]. Rather than treating resentment as a primary emotional cause, the present framework conceptualizes it as an affective manifestation of deeper deficits in evaluative and existential well-being.

5.2.1 WB depletion → higher populist attitudes

Empirical analyses confirm that lower evaluative well-being (SWLS), together with reduced positive emotion and meaning (PERMA-P and PERMA-M), is systematically associated with stronger populist attitudes in Japan. These associations persist across partisan compositions, even though their apparent magnitude shifts when aggregation effects are taken into account.

Importantly, the empirical structure of the data indicates that SWLS and Meaning do not function as the independent predictors. Rather, additional components of well-being—including relational well-being (PERMA-R) and perceived accomplishment

(PERMA-A)—show strong, systematic correlations with both evaluative and existential well-being (see Appendix E). Together, these dimensions constitute an integrated multi-dimensional well-being system.

Similarly, value-based well-being indicators, such as mattering/recognition and future-oriented expectations (hope and optimism), show robust interrelations with SWLS and Meaning (Appendix E). A supplementary regression analysis further confirms that Meaning is strongly associated with SWLS even after controlling for basic demographics, supporting the interpretation that evaluative and existential well-being are structurally intertwined rather than independent psychological domains (Appendix J).

Taken together, these findings provide coherent empirical support for a structural well-being depletion model, in which evaluative, affective, existential, relational, and capability-based dimensions of well-being function as a tightly coupled psychological architecture. Declines across this architecture jointly heighten susceptibility to populist cognition, without requiring each component to be specified as a separate micro-level causal pathway.

Consistent with this individual-level structure, descriptive patterns observed at the aggregate party level also suggest that electoral gains tend to concentrate among parties whose supporter bases exhibit lower overall well-being. Although such aggregate-level analyses are necessarily exploratory due to limited observations, the convergence between individual-level psychological mechanisms and party-level electoral patterns supports the interpretation that well-being depletion operates as an upstream condition shaping populist mobilization rather than a downstream consequence of political alignment.

5.2.2 Why aggregate correlations are misleading: Simpson's paradox

At the individual level, zero-order correlations between well-being (WB) indicators and populist attitudes are the modest and slightly positive. Taken at face value, this pattern appears to contradict the study's central claim.

However, this apparent inconsistency represents a textbook case of Simpson's paradox. Large mainstream parties—such as the LDP, CDP (the Constitutional Democratic Party), and Komeito—tend to attract support from individuals with relatively higher average well-being, while simultaneously exhibiting the moderate levels of populist orientation. When such parties dominate the sample, their compositional weight mechanically inflates the aggregate individual-level correlation.

Once this compositional heterogeneity is taken into account by examining patterns at the party-support level, a markedly different structure emerges. Parties characterized by lower average well-being among their supporters consistently display higher levels of populist orientation. This aggregate pattern reverses the individual-level association and aligns with recent findings from Western democracies, which similarly document a negative relationship between collective well-being and populist mobilization [24].

Figure 3 visualizes this structural reversal by plotting party-level well-being against populist orientation, while **Figure 4** extends the analysis to electoral outcomes, illustrating how well-being depletion at the supporter-base level is associated with subsequent seat gains in the 2025 election.

This figure plots party-level mean well-being (SWLS) against the mean level of populist orientation. While individual-level correlations between well-being and populist attitudes appear modestly positive due to compositional heterogeneity, the party-level pattern reveals a clear negative gradient. Parties whose supporter bases exhibit lower average well-being tend to display higher levels of populist orientation, illustrating a structural reversal consistent with Simpson's paradox.

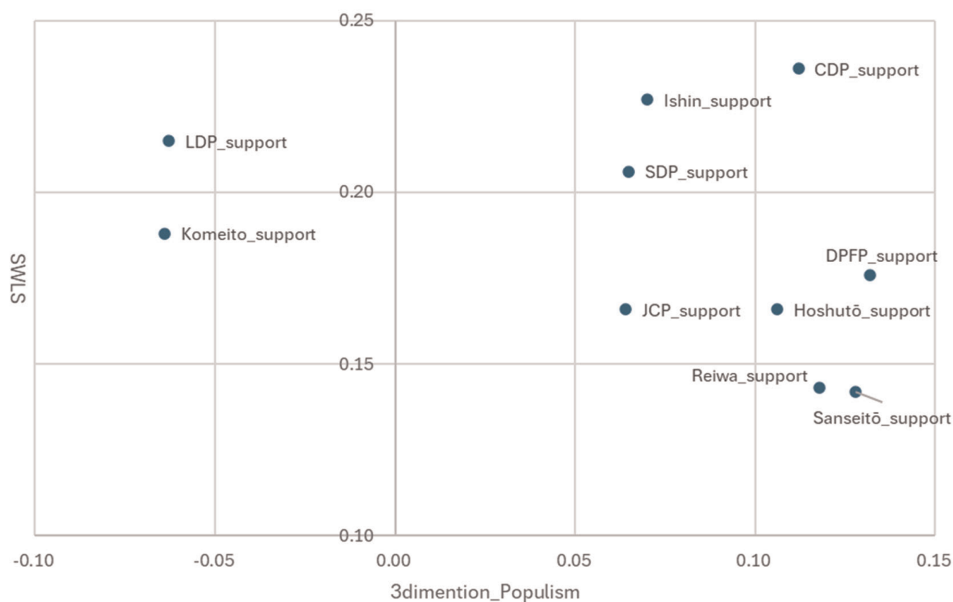


Figure 3. Party-level correlations between well-being and populist attitudes. Note. Each point represents a political party, plotted using supporter-base means. Well-being is measured using the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS), and populist orientation is measured using the three-dimensional composite populism index. Values shown next to party labels indicate mean SWLS scores. This figure is presented for descriptive and illustrative purposes, highlighting cross-party compositional patterns rather than individual-level associations.

5.3 Well-being and value depletion as the predictors of electoral outcomes

Party-level analyses reveal a coherent and robust pattern across Japan's 2025 House of Councillors election: parties supported by citizens with lower levels of well-being (WB) systematically gained seats, whereas parties with higher-WB supporter bases tended to lose seats.

This relationship holds across both proportional-representation (PR) and district ballots and remains robust when demographic composition and ideological positioning are taken into account.

Supplementary analyses further corroborate this pattern. In particular, core WB components—most notably evaluative well-being (SWLS) and meaning (PERMA-M)—exhibit consistent party-level associations with both populist orientation and electoral seat change (see Appendix L for correlation tables and auxiliary analyses).

Taken together, these findings integrate:

- cross-party well-being profiles,
- patterns of seat gain and loss,
- consistency across PR and district ballots, and
- models controlling for demographic factors.

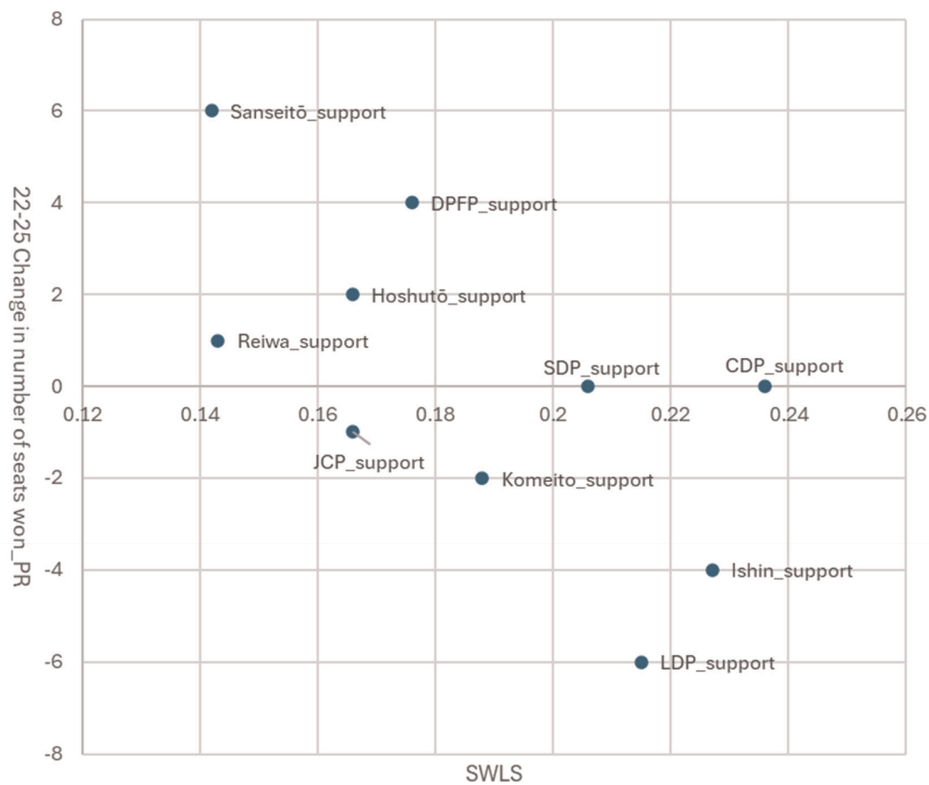


Figure 4. Well-being depletion and seat gains in the 2025 Japanese House of Councilors Election (Proportional Representation). Note. This figure plots party-level mean SWLS against PR seat change in the 2025 House of Councilors election. The distribution reveals a negative gradient, with lower supporter well-being associated with seat gains. Similar patterns in single-member districts (not shown) indicate that this relationship is not confined to the PR tier.

5.3.1 Well-being depletion and electoral expansion

Across the Japanese party system, electoral outcomes follow a clear well-being gradient.

Parties whose supporter bases score lower on key WB indicators show greater electoral expansion, while those supported by higher WB constituencies exhibit stagnation or seat loss.

Specifically, three WB indicators demonstrate empirically confirmed negative associations with party-level seat change:

- Lower evaluative well-being (SWLS) → greater seat gain
- Lower positive emotion (PERMA-P) → greater seat gain
- Lower meaning (PERMA-M) → greater seat gain

These associations are observed most clearly in PR results (**Figure 4**), with district-level outcomes exhibiting substantively similar patterns (not shown). The

convergence across electoral systems indicates that well-being depletion—rather than institutional mechanics—drives electoral volatility among outsider populist parties.

5.3.1.1 Extensions to other well-being and values dimensions

The core electoral analyses in this section focus on evaluative well-being (SWLS) as the primary indicator of well-being depletion, given its conceptual clarity and established use in political psychology.

Meaning-related indicators (PERMA-M) are examined as the supplementary analyses, confirming that existential meaning follows patterns parallel to SWLS in relation to populist orientation and seat change (see Appendix J).

Beyond these focal indicators, the additional components of well-being and value orientation—including mattering/recognition, hope, optimism, inner richness, material orientation, and sacralization—are examined through correlational analyses. These variables exhibit strong, theoretically coherent interrelations with SWLS and Meaning, suggesting that they form part of a broader multidimensional well-being and value ecology.

While these dimensions are not introduced as the independent predictors of electoral outcomes in the present models, their systematic correlations provide convergent support for the broader WB-values depletion framework advanced in this chapter. Full correlation matrices are reported in Appendix E.

5.3.1.2 Clarifying cases

Two parties help illustrate the general WB gradient:

- *DPFP* aligns with the WB depletion → seat-gain model despite its moderate ideological profile.
- *Ishin* shows “high WB → seat loss,” indicating that stylistic populism does not override underlying psychological structure.

At the aggregate party level, a complementary pattern further reinforces this interpretation.

Appendix M further illustrates that parties with stronger populist orientations tended to achieve greater proportional-representation seat gains, a pattern that is descriptively consistent with the well-being-based structural pathway identified in the main analyses.

Thus:

WB depletion—evaluative, affective, and experiential—is the most consistent psychological predictor of electoral expansion in the 2025 election.

Figure 4 visualizes this gradient, showing that seat gains rise systematically as WB declines. **Table 1** presents an interpretive summary of the Figure.

This pattern demonstrates that well-being functions as a primary latent axis structuring the Japanese party system in 2025.

The figure below presents the relationship between parties' average well-being profile (SWLS) and their seat gains in the 2025 election. It visually demonstrates that WB depletion is the most consistent predictor of electoral expansion. While **Figure 3** reports proportional-representation outcomes for clarity and comparability, equivalent analyses using district-level seat changes yield substantively similar well-being gradients, indicating that the observed pattern is not specific to the electoral tier.

WB Level	Parties	2025 seat outcome
Lowest WB	Sanseitō, Reiwa	Large or moderate gains
Low-Mid WB	Hoshutō,DPFP	Moderate or Large gains
Low-Mid WB	JCP	Losses
Mid WB	LDP, Komeito	Losses
High WB	CDP, Ishin	Stagnation or losses

Table 1.
WB-seat gain gradient (interpretive summary).

5.3.2 Meaning, mattering, and Eudaimonic/relational depletion: Structural Elaboration of the WB-Seat Gain Gradient

While the preceding section established a robust association between evaluative well-being (SWLS) and electoral outcomes, it is important to clarify what this depletion represents at a deeper psychological level.

Party-level descriptive profiles (see Appendix L and Appendix M) suggest that seat-gaining parties are not characterized by low life satisfaction alone. Rather, they tend to exhibit lower levels of:

- multi-dimensional well-being (PERMA),
- coherence, purpose, and significance (3DM),
- perceived mattering and social recognition,
- inner richness and virtue orientation,
- hope and optimism.

These patterns, taken together, are consistent with the interpretation that electoral volatility in the 2025 election reflects a broader erosion of existential and future-oriented psychological resources, rather than fluctuations in affect or satisfaction alone.

In this sense, evaluative well-being functions as a summary indicator of deeper value-based and eudaimonic/relational depletion. The detailed structure of these values and meaning dimensions is examined more systematically in the following sections.

5.3.3 District vs. PR voting

Both district and PR ballots exhibit the same WB-based alignment: Parties whose supporters show lower well-being receive higher levels of outsider populist support in both tiers.

Although the present study does not conduct a formal comparative analysis of electoral-system differences, the observed patterns are substantively similar across district and PR results.

5.3.4 The DPFP puzzle revisited: Reframing it as a theoretical probe

DPFP displays:

- moderate well-being (WB) depletion
- moderate negative affect
- moderately low optimism
- relatively high populist orientation

→ producing significant seat gains in 2025.

At first glance, DPFP appears anomalous. Unlike resentment-driven or sacralized populist parties, it lacks strong negative emotional intensity, symbolic antagonism, or overt moral polarization. However, this apparent moderation is precisely what makes DPFP analytically important.

DPFP functions as a theoretical probe rather than an exception. Its electoral expansion occurred not despite its relatively subdued affective profile, but because its supporter base occupies a vulnerable intermediate position within the broader well-being depletion gradient. Moderate depletion of evaluative well-being, combined with weakened future-oriented resources—particularly optimism—was sufficient to render dissatisfaction electorally mobilizable, even in the absence of highly charged resentment or sacralized narratives.

This interpretation is consistent with DPFP's campaign strategy, which emphasized concrete income-related proposals—such as raising take-home pay and addressing income thresholds—rather than symbolic or moralized appeals. These policy signals can be understood as attempts to restore future-oriented capability by offering credible pathways for economic predictability, thereby mobilizing voters experiencing moderate well-being depletion without triggering resentment-based or sacralized populist dynamics.

In this sense, DPFP illustrates a distinct pathway of populist alignment driven by instrumental economic reassurance rather than emotional polarization or identity-based mobilization. DPFP thus confirms—rather than challenges—the central proposition of this chapter: well-being and value depletion, not ideological extremity or populist style alone, structured Japan's 2025 electoral realignment.

This finding also anticipates the multi-dimensional typology developed in Part II. DPFP occupies an intermediate configuration between vulnerability-based populism and reform-oriented dissatisfaction, illustrating how distinct populist pathways can emerge from different combinations of affective strain and value-based resources, even in the absence of strong sacralization, as conceptualized in the three-axis framework developed in Part II.

5.3.5 Summary

Well-being and values depletion—evaluative, experiential, existential, and future-oriented—is a consistent and powerful predictor of support for outsider populist parties in Japan's 2025 election.

Thus:

Populist voting in Japan appears to be structured more by emotional-existential--future-oriented vulnerability than by conventional ideological alignment.

6. Results Part II: Psychological differentiation - Emotional and value-based structures

While Part I demonstrated that well-being (WB) and value depletion constitute the structural basis of populist expansion in 2025, these mechanisms alone do not fully account for the heterogeneity of Japanese populism. Populist parties differ not only in the degree of WB decline but also in the internal composition of their emotional and psychological profiles.

In particular, WB should not be understood as a single undifferentiated condition. Evaluative and affective components of WB display partially distinct party-level patterns, and these differences interact with value-based resources in shaping political behavior. This section, therefore, examines the emotional structure of WB before turning to value-based and future-oriented psychological configurations.

For conceptual clarity, the psychological architecture developed in this part is organized along three analytically distinct axes.

Axis A captures affective well-being, focusing on emotional balance versus depletion.

Axis B represents value-based resources, encompassing intrinsic meaning, recognition, ethical-spiritual orientation, future-oriented capability, and their inverse materialist-hedonic orientations.

Axis C refers to sacralization, capturing moralized and pseudo-religious orientations toward sanctity, purity, and national-cultural symbolism.

In sum, Axis A reflects affective conditions, Axis B captures value-based and future-oriented resources, and Axis C specifies whether these psychological resources are translated into politics through secular or sacralized symbolic orders.

While these axes are empirically interrelated, they are treated as conceptually distinct dimensions in order to clarify the multiple psychological pathways through which populist formations emerge. These axes provide an organizing framework for the analysis that follows.

6.1 Axis A: Affective well-being and emotional structure

The PERMA framework reveals a layered emotional architecture underlying populist support. While overall well-being shows a clear depletion gradient across parties, specific components—such as relational well-being—show more differentiated distributions. The analysis in this section focuses on affective patterns that function as a shared emotional substrate across different populist formations.

These emotional configurations correspond closely to the well-being gradients visualized in **Figure 3** and the seat-gain gradients depicted in **Figure 4**, underscoring the integrated relationship between affective depletion and populist mobilization across the Japanese party system.

As **Table 2** indicates, Axis A captures affective resources and emotional strain, distinguishing overall emotional valence from threat-related negative affect.

6.1.1 The P/N axis (positive vs. negative affect)

A clear affective gradient distinguishes populist clusters. Negative affect is not uniformly elevated across populist parties; rather, distinct negative-emotion profiles emerge. Sanseitō ranks high primarily on anger (second highest), whereas its anxiety and sadness levels fall in the mid-to-lower range (around fifth to sixth). By contrast,

Sub-dimension (Axis A)	Core indicators	Interpretive meaning
A1. Positive vs. Negative Affect	Positive affect / Negative affect	Overall emotional valence and affective resources
A2. Anxiety-Anger-Sadness	Anxiety, anger, sadness	Emotional strain and threat-oriented affect

Table 2.
Axis A: Affective resources and emotional strain.

Hoshutō shows broadly elevated negative affect, including higher anxiety and sadness alongside anger.

On the positive side, positive affect is low among Sanseitō and Hoshutō (ranking eighth and seventh, respectively), while it is highest among CDP and Ishin, indicating that reform-oriented or mainstream opposition support can coexist with comparatively higher positive affect (Appendix G).

Taken together, these affective profiles clarify that the divide is not reducible to a simple “populist = high negative affect” pattern. Instead, parties cluster through (i) low positive affect combined with (ii) selectively elevated negative emotions, with anger playing a particularly salient role for Sanseitō, and a broader negative-affect elevation characterizing Hoshutō.

6.1.2 Triadic structure of negative emotion: Anxiety, anger, and sadness

The three components of negative emotion relate to populist attitudes at varying intensities (Appendix K) and exhibit party-specific profiles rather than moving in lockstep. Anxiety exhibits the strongest association, followed by anger, while sadness remains statistically significant but comparatively weaker.

These findings indicate that Japanese resentment cannot be reduced to anger alone. Instead, it takes the form of a *triadic but asymmetrically weighted emotional syndrome*—in which anxiety functions as the central activating condition, anger as a mobilizing and expressive response, and sadness as a diffuse background of affective depletion. As shown in **Figure 5**, parties characterized by low overall affective well-being cluster at the high-populism end of this emotional spectrum, providing a shared emotional background for the divergent populist pathways analyzed in subsequent sections.

6.2 Axis B: Value-based resources and future orientation

Beyond affective differences, parties are sharply differentiated by a broad cluster of value-based and future-oriented psychological resources. These include intrinsic and eudaimonic values, social recognition and life anchoring, ethical-spiritual orientation, and future-oriented capability, as well as their inverse—hedonic and materialist orientations.

Empirically, these indicators are strongly interrelated (see Appendix H) and can be conceptualized as sub-dimensions of a single integrated axis of value-based resources (Axis B), rather than as independent or competing value orientations. This axis captures the extent to which political supporters experience their lives as meaningful, socially recognized, ethically grounded, and future-oriented, in contrast to orientations centered on immediate pleasure or material accumulation. Importantly, Axis B is

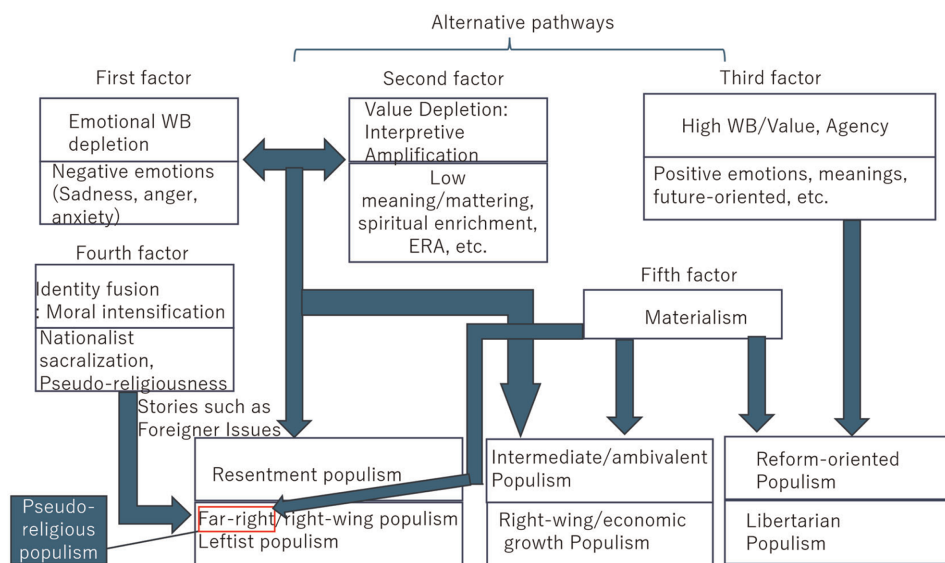


Figure 5.
Psychological factors associated with populist configurations in Japan.

analytically distinct from Axis C (sacralization), which captures a qualitatively different mode of moralized political orientation.

Although this study conceptually draws on the PERMA framework, its analytical axes do not map mechanically onto the full PERMA model. As shown in Appendix E, all PERMA components (P, E, R, M, A), SWLS, General Well-Being, hope, optimism, mattering, and 3DM are highly and consistently intercorrelated, confirming that they jointly constitute a multi-dimensional well-being (WB) structure.

For analytical clarity, however, the present framework disaggregates the integrated WB structure into its political-psychological *functions* (Appendix F). Positive and negative emotions (PERMA-P, together with anxiety, anger, and sadness) are incorporated into Axis A as affective resources, whereas meaning in life (PERMA-M) constitutes the core of Axis B as a value-based, future-orienting resource. Engagement, relationships, and accomplishment (PERMA-E, R, A), despite their strong correlations with other WB indicators, are treated as background life-functioning variables that support overall well-being but do not directly structure political interpretation.

Table 3 indicates party-level differences in these value-based profiles, revealing a clear gradient across the Japanese party system. In general, parties associated with resentment-based populism occupy the lowest positions on Axis B, whereas stable or reform-oriented parties exhibit higher levels of value-based resources.

6.2.1 Sub-dimensions of Axis B: Value-based resources

Although Axis B can be treated as a single integrated dimension, the empirical results indicate several analytically meaningful sub-dimensions. These sub-dimensions help explain variation among parties that otherwise appear similar in overall well-being profiles.

Sub-dimension (Axis B)	Core indicators	Highest parties	Lowest parties	Interpretive meaning
B1. Eudaimonic Values	Meaning, 3DM, inner richness, virtue, post-materialism, eudaimonia	CDP	Sanseitō, Hoshutō	Normative core of value-based resources
B2. Recognition & Life Anchoring	Mattering, <i>ikigai</i>	Ishin, CDP, Komeito	Sanseitō, Hoshutō	Relational–Existential Anchoring
B3. Ethical-Spiritual Orientation (Non-Sacralized)	Spirituality	Komeito, CDP	Sanseitō, Hoshutō	Ethical depth without sacralization
B4. Future-Oriented Capability	Hope, optimism	Ishin, LDP, CDP	Sanseitō, Hoshutō	Forward-looking efficacy and agency
B5. Materialist-Hedonic Orientation (Inverse Pole)	Hedonia, materialism, material richness	DPFP, Sanseitō	CDP, JCP	Instrumental and material focus

Note. Political sacralization (Axis C) is not included as a sub-dimension in this table, as it functions as a moral-symbolic modifier rather than a value-based psychological resource. Axis C is analyzed separately in Section 5.6.

Table 3.
 Axis B: Integrated value-based resources and future orientation.

(B1) *Eudaimonic Values*

This sub-dimension captures intrinsic orientations toward meaning, purpose, ethical self-cultivation, and inner richness, emphasizing intrinsic goods rather than instrumental or material rewards. Although relational well-being is conceptually adjacent to the affective dimension examined in Axis A, it is not treated here as a core value-based resource, as its party-level distribution differs from that of eudaimonic values.

Across these indicators, supporters of CDP score highest, while resentment-based populist parties—particularly Sanseitō and Hoshutō—occupy the lowest end of the distribution. B1 thus serves as the normative anchor for Axis B.

(B2) *Recognition and Life Anchoring*

A second sub-dimension centers on perceived social recognition and concrete life anchoring, operationalized through mattering and *ikigai*. These indicators display more heterogeneous party-level patterns, reflecting practical embeddedness in social roles and everyday life rather than abstract value orientation alone.

(B3) *Ethical–Spiritual Orientation (Non-Sacralized)*

This sub-dimension captures ethical and spiritual depth that is not fused with exclusionary or national sacralization. It is most clearly expressed in spirituality measures, where Komeito and CDP supporters score relatively highly. This form of ethical-spiritual orientation remains analytically distinct from the sacralized moralization examined under Axis C.

(B4) Future-Oriented Capability

Future-Oriented Capability combines hope, optimism, and perceived agency, capturing a forward-looking sense of efficacy and possibility. This sub-dimension plays a key role in differentiating reform-oriented populism (Type 3), where high well-being is coupled with strong agency, from vulnerability-based populist configurations.

(B5) Materialist–Hedonic Orientation (Inverse Pole of Axis B)

Finally, materialist and hedonic orientations form the inverse pole of Axis B. These orientations contrast sharply with eudaimonic values and help explain why parties with stronger materialist-hedonic profiles align more closely with vulnerability-based or resentment-driven populist pathways.

6.2.2 Integrated interpretation of Axis B

Taken together, these sub-dimensions confirm that Axis B represents a composite structure of value-based psychological resources, rather than a single narrow trait. Parties differ not only in their overall level of value-based resources but also in the internal configuration of these resources. This internal differentiation explains why parties such as CDP, Ishin, Komeito, and LDP can occupy relatively high positions on Axis B while nonetheless exhibiting distinct political styles, institutional roles, and relationships to populism.

Table 3 summarizes these configurations by mapping populist types onto Axis B and its sub-dimensions (B1–B5). Their typical relationship to political sacralization (Axis C) is indicated analytically but examined in detail in the following section, where sacralization is treated as a modifying dimension rather than a value-based resource.

Having established Axis B and its sub-dimensions, the following subsections translate this integrated value-based structure into party-level profiles, clarifying how different parties occupy distinct positions within the same psychological resource architecture.

6.2.3 Lowest value-based resources: Deep existential depletion

Sanseitō and Hoshutō occupy the extreme low end of Axis B, showing severe depletion across B1–B4 combined with a strong inverse orientation on B5. This configuration corresponds to deep existential depletion and explains why these parties appear at the lowest end of overall well-being in **Figure 3** and drive the strongest seat gains in **Figure 4**.

6.2.4 Moderate value-based resources: Vulnerable but not collapsed (DPFP)

DPFP occupies an intermediate position on Axis B, characterized by partial depletion of B1 and B2, selectively preserved capability on B4, and a relatively strong orientation toward B5. This profile aligns with its position in **Figure 3**—moderately low Axis A combined with high populism—and helps explain its seat gains in **Figure 4**: not extreme resentment, but sufficient resource depletion to translate dissatisfaction into electoral volatility.

6.2.5 Highest value-based resources: Meaning, capability, and stability

Supporters of Ishin, CDP, and JCP occupy the upper range of Axis B, with strong positioning on B1–B4 and weak alignment with the inverse materialist–hedonic pole (B5). These parties cluster in the high-resource region of **Figure 3**, and their relatively weak seat performance in **Figure 4** reflects the psychological stability of their supporter bases.

Ishin is especially notable: High Axis B combined with strong B4 (future-oriented capability) corresponds to reform-oriented populism rather than resentment-based mobilization.

6.2.6 Comparative interpretation

The value-based resource gradient identified in this section divides the Japanese party system into coherent psychological blocs. Parties differ not only in their overall level of resources, but in how affective conditions (Axis A), value-based resources (Axis B), and sacralization (Axis C) combine to generate distinct populist configurations.

DPFP occupies an intermediate position on this gradient, reflecting vulnerability without full collapse. Ishin, by contrast, combines high Axis B—especially B4—with affective stability, producing an agency-driven, reform-oriented populist pathway. Center-left parties such as CDP and JCP exhibit high Axis B combined with affective balance, corresponding to relative stability rather than vulnerability-driven mobilization.

Resentment-based populist formations occupy the opposite end of the gradient. Far-right parties such as Sanseitō and Hoshutō combine severe depletion on Axis A and Axis B with elevated Axis C, producing a moralized and identity-laden form of populism distinct from both non-sacralized resentment (Type 1A) and intermediate populism (Type 2).

These configurations are formalized in the multi-dimensional typology presented in Part III, where populist formations are classified along Axis A (affective well-being), Axis B (value-based resources), and Axis C (sacralization). The resulting typology closely matches the spatial distributions observed in **Figure 3** and explains why the seat-gain pattern in **Figure 4** follows a clear gradient of psychological resource depletion.

6.3 Axis C: Political sacralization (pseudo-sacred moralization) without intrinsic meaning

Building on the typology summarized in **Table 4**, this section examines Axis C—Political Sacralization—as a critical modifier that differentiates otherwise similar low-well-being populist formations. Axis C consists of two analytically distinct sub-dimensions:

Sub-dimension (Axis C)	Core indicators	Interpretive meaning
C1. Religiosity	Religious commitment, practice	Institutionalized sacred orientation
C2. (Pseudo-)Sacredness	Sacred values, moral absolutism	Sacralization of political boundaries

Table 4.
Axis C: Political pseudo-sacralization.

- C1: Conventional Religiosity, referring to religious commitment and institutional practice;
- C2: Political (Pseudo-)Sacralization, referring to the moral absolutization and sacral framing of political identity, cultural boundaries, and national symbols.

While both dimensions relate to sacred orientation, they operate differently in the Japanese case.

Empirically, variation across parties is driven primarily by C2 rather than C1. Conventional religiosity (C1) does not systematically distinguish far-right populist formations from other parties. Instead, it is the degree of political pseudo-sacralization (C2)—the framing of political claims as sacred, pure, and non-negotiable—that differentiates them.

Axis C therefore captures not religiosity per se, but a symbolic intensification of political identity. Political pseudo-sacralization mimics religious sacrality while remaining weakly grounded in intrinsic meaning, ethical self-cultivation, or lived spirituality.

Sanseitō and Hoshutō score the highest on Axis C, particularly on C2. Yet these same parties occupy the lowest positions on Axis B (value-based resources) and align strongly with its inverse pole (B5). This configuration indicates that their sacralization does not reflect a coherent spiritual or ethical worldview grounded in meaning, inner richness, or virtue. Rather, it functions as a compensatory mechanism: pseudo-sacred moralization often observed under conditions of depleted value-based resources.

In this configuration, sacred language and purity narratives operate as identity-intensifying devices. National, cultural, or moral symbols are elevated to sacred status precisely where other sources of meaning and recognition are weak or absent. Axis C thus acts as a moral amplifier of resentment-based populism, transforming diffuse dissatisfaction into absolutist claims resistant to compromise and pluralism.

By contrast, parties such as CDP and JPS combine relatively high positioning on Axis B—especially B1 (eudaimonic values) and B3 (ethical-spiritual orientation)—with consistently low scores on Axis C. This contrast underscores a critical analytical distinction: Ethical-spiritual depth (Axis B3) is not equivalent to political sacralization (Axis C). In these parties, spirituality is embedded within broader value-based resources rather than mobilized as a boundary-defining political instrument.

Komeito occupies an intermediate configuration. Although its supporters exhibit relatively high ethical-spiritual orientation on Axis B3, their Axis C scores—particularly on C2—remain substantially lower than those observed among far-right populist parties. This pattern suggests a form of socially embedded and ethically grounded religiosity (C1 and B3) that does not translate into exclusionary or absolutist political sacralization (C2).

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that political sacralization (Axis C) must not be conflated with religion or spirituality. Elevated C2 among far-right parties reflects political pseudo-sacralization rather than intrinsic religiosity. The distinction between C1 (religiosity) and C2 (pseudo-sacralization) clarifies how sacralized populism can coexist with shallow value structures, and why parties with stronger ethical-spiritual resources do not necessarily engage in sacralized political mobilization.

6.4 Integrated conclusion for part II

The emotional, value-based, and future-oriented profiles analyzed in Part II correspond closely to the empirical patterns shown in **Figure 3** (WB × Populism) and 4

(WB × Seat Gain). Together, they demonstrate that Japanese populism is structured less by ideological position than by distinct psychological ecologies combining affective conditions (Axis A), value-based resources (Axis B), and—crucially—the presence or absence of Political Sacralization (Political Sacralization/Pseudo-Sacred Moralization) (Axis C).

Three overarching conclusions emerge. First, populist formations differ not only in the severity of affective and value-based depletion but also in how vulnerability is interpreted through symbolic and moral frameworks. Second, resentment-based populism becomes most electorally potent when low positioning on Axis B is coupled with high Axis C, producing political pseudo-sacralization that intensifies moral boundaries and reduces tolerance for compromise. Third, parties characterized by higher value-based resources—especially strong eudaimonic values (B1), ethical-spiritual orientation (B3), and future-oriented capability (B4)—tend to exhibit more stable or reform-oriented political profiles, even when they employ populist rhetoric.

This integrated psychological architecture provides the foundation for the multi-dimensional typology developed in Part III, in which populist pathways are systematically classified along Axis A (affective well-being), Axis B (value-based resources), and Axis C (Political Sacralization/Pseudo-Sacred Moralization). It also clarifies why sacralization functions as a decisive modifier of populist intensity in some cases while remaining largely absent in others, despite the comparable levels of ethical or spiritual orientation.

7. Results Part III: Typology of Japanese populism - A multi-dimensional psychological architecture

7.1 Typology of Japanese populism: A multi-dimensional psychological classification of the 2025 landscape

A central contribution of this section is the development of a unified typology of Japanese populism grounded not in ideology, social cleavages, or policy platforms, but in underlying psychological architecture.

Section 5 identified a common empirical mechanism linking psychological conditions to political behavior: Multi-dimensional depletion of affective well-being and value-based resources is systematically associated with populist attitudes, outsider-party support, and subsequent seat gains. Yet this shared mechanism does not imply uniform psychological foundations across populist formations.

Sections 5–6 demonstrated substantial heterogeneity across three dimensions: affective profiles (Axis A), value-based resources and future orientation (Axis B), and political sacralization (Axis C). Taken together, these dimensions reveal that Japanese populism in 2025 cannot be reduced to a single grievance model. Rather, it reflects multiple psychological pathways structured by distinct combinations of affective strain, value depletion, and sacral intensification.

Building on these distinctions, contemporary political psychology suggests that political discontent is structured less by ideological positioning than by a continuum ranging from vulnerability to agency. Vulnerability is characterized by depleted affective well-being, diminished meaning and recognition, weak future-oriented capability, and heightened susceptibility to resentment. Agency, by contrast, reflects affective stability, perceived efficacy, optimism, and future-oriented confidence.

This vulnerability-agency continuum provides the interpretive backbone for situating Japanese parties within a unified psychological landscape. Populist formations may be located along this axis as follows:

Vulnerability → Intermediate/Ambivalence → Agency

This continuum resolves two empirical puzzles observed in the Japanese case. First, DPFP's intermediate configuration reflects psychological ambivalence rather than ideological incoherence: Its supporters exhibit partial depletion without full affective collapse. Second, Ishin's disruptive reformism is sustained by comparatively high agency and future-oriented capability, producing a mobilization pathway distinct from resentment-based vulnerability.

When integrated with the three-axis structure, the typology yields four broad configurations:

1. *Vulnerability-based sacralized populism* (high Axis A strain, low Axis B resources, high Axis C sacralization) → exemplified by Sanseitō and Hoshutō.
2. *Vulnerability-based non-sacral populism* (high Axis A strain, low Axis B resources, low Axis C) → elements observable within segments of Reiwa.
3. *Ambivalent reform populism* (moderate Axis A strain, mixed Axis B resources, low-to-moderate Axis C) → represented by DPFP.
4. *Agency-oriented reformism without sacralization* (low Axis A strain, higher Axis B resources, low Axis C) → exemplified by Ishin.

Mainstream parties such as CDP and Komeito occupy positions outside vulnerability-based populism, characterized by stronger value-based resources and comparatively low sacralization, though differing in affective profiles and institutional orientation.

Taken together, this typology demonstrates that Japanese populism in 2025 is best understood not as a singular ideological movement, but as a multi-dimensional psychological field structured by vulnerability, value ecology, and sacral intensification. Populist mobilization emerges where affective depletion converges with weakened value-based anchoring and, in some cases, amplified political sacralization. By contrast, agency-oriented configurations sustain reformist energy without reliance on resentment or pseudo-sacred boundary construction.

This framework provides a unified account of how psychological architecture—rather than ideological alignment alone—structures the Japanese party system in 2025.

7.2 Type 1: Resentment populism (super-category)

7.2.1 The emotional: Existential core of Japan's populist realignment

Type 1 constitutes a broad super-category defined by severe depletion on Axis A and Axis B. Across parties, this configuration is characterized by affective exhaustion, collapsed value-based resources (B1–B4), and heightened vulnerability. Importantly, this structure cuts across ideological lines, indicating that Japan's populist polarization is psychological rather than ideological.

Within this super-category, two distinct variants emerge depending on the presence or absence of Political Sacralization (Axis C).

7.2.2 Type 1A: Non-sacralized resentment populism

7.2.2.1 Representative formations: Reiwa; segments of JCP; low-WB wing of DPFP

Type 1A is defined by low positioning on Axis A and Axis B, combined with minimal Axis C. Supporters experience affective depletion and loss of meaning and recognition, but resentment is expressed primarily through socioeconomic and anti-establishment narratives rather than sacralized identity.

This configuration confirms that resentment-based populism can emerge independently of ideological content and without symbolic moral absolutization.

Axis placement:

- Axis A: low (affective depletion)
- Axis B: depleted (B1–B4)
- Axis C: low or absent

7.3 Type 1B: Sacralized resentment populism

7.3.1 Representative parties: Sanseitō; Hoshutō

Type 1B represents the fusion of extreme vulnerability with high Political Sacralization (Axis C). These parties occupy the lowest positions on Axis A and Axis B, combined with exceptionally high Axis C. Emotional and existential depletion is reframed through pseudo-sacred moral narratives centered on purity, spirituality, or national sanctity.

This configuration produces pseudo-sacred moralization: Resentment is intensified through sacralized symbolism and identity fusion, generating absolutist claims resistant to compromise and pluralism.

Axis placement:

- Axis A: extreme low (affective depletion)
- Axis B: collapsed (B1–B4)
- Axis C: extremely high (Political Sacralization)

7.4 Synthesis of type 1 variants

Together, Types 1A and 1B demonstrate that resentment is the primary psychological engine of Japan's populist realignment. The critical differentiator is Axis C: While Type 1A reflects non-sacralized vulnerability, Type 1B represents sacralized and identity-laden resentment.

7.5 Type 2: Intermediate/ambivalent populism

Representative party: Democratic Party for the People (DPFP).

Type 2 occupies an intermediate position across all three axes. DPFP supporters exhibit moderate affective depletion (Axis A), partial erosion of value-based resources

(Axis B), and low Political Sacralization (Axis C). This configuration produces ambivalence: Vulnerability is present, but not fully collapsed, and agency is selectively preserved.

This profile explains DPFP's electoral volatility without extreme resentment or moralized mobilization.

Axis placement:

- Axis A: mid-low (affective depletion)
- Axis B: moderate
- Axis C: low (Political Sacralization)

7.6 Type 3: Reform-oriented populism

7.6.1 Representative party: Ishin

Type 3 represents an agency-oriented reformist variant of populist mobilization. Ishin supporters occupy high positions on Axis A and Axis B, particularly B4 (future-oriented capability), while remaining low on Axis C. Dissatisfaction is expressed through reform ambition and modernization rather than resentment or identity politics.

This configuration distinguishes reform-oriented populism from vulnerability-driven pathways.

Axis placement:

- Axis A: high (affective depletion)
- Axis B: high (especially B4: future-oriented capability)
- Axis C: low (Political Sacralization)

7.7 Summary: Three psychological pathways to populism

1. Resentment-Based Populism (Type 1A/1B)

Low Axis A and Axis B; Type 1B distinguished by high Axis C → largest seat gains.

Intermediate/Ambivalent Populism (Type 2)

2. Moderate depletion with partial agency → electoral volatility

Reform-Oriented Populism (Type 3)

3. High Axis A and Axis B, low Axis C → limited or negative seat gains

Figure 6 situates political parties within a three-axis psychological space defined by Axis A (Affective Well-Being), Axis B (Value-Based Resources and Future-Oriented Capability), and Axis C (Political Sacralization), visualizing the relative positioning of populist formations across these dimensions (**Table 5**).

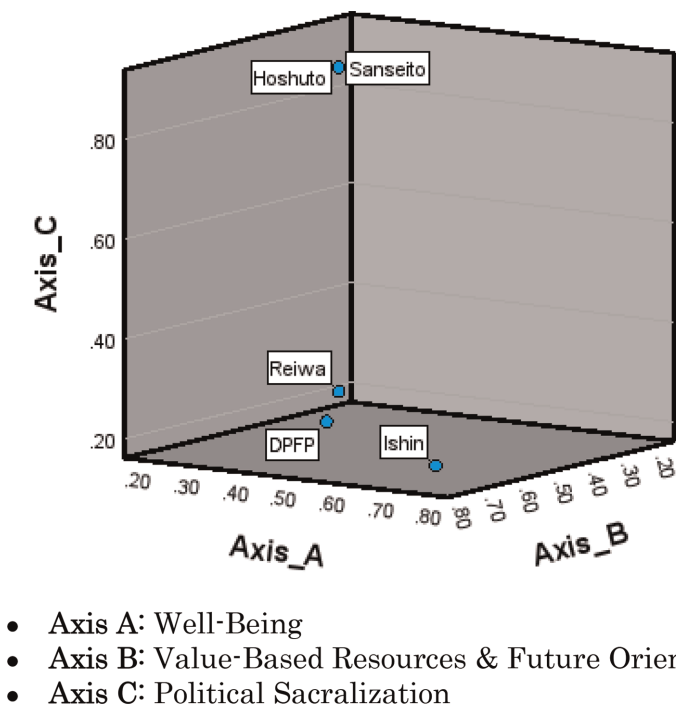


Figure 6.
A Three-Axis Psychological Map of Japanese Populism. This figure maps Japanese political parties within a three-axis psychological space defined by Axis A (Affective Well-Being), Axis B (Value-Based Resources and Future-Oriented Capability), and Axis C (Political Sacralization). Axis scores represent standardized party-level means based on supporters’ responses and are rescaled to a 0–1 range for visualization. The figure illustrates relative psychological positioning across parties rather than absolute measurement. Note. Axis scores represent standardized party-level means derived from supporters’ responses and are rescaled to 0–1 for visualization. The figure illustrates relative psychological positioning across parties rather than precise or absolute measurement. Accordingly, the categorical labels (e.g., low, middle, high) indicate relative positioning within the observed party system.

Party	Axis A	Axis B	Axis C
Reiwa	Low	Low	Low
Sanseito	Low	Low	High
Hoshutō	Low	Low	High
DPFP	Low or middle	Middle	Low
Ishin	High	High	Low

Note. The table summarizes the typical configurations of parties across the three analytical axes developed in this chapter: affective well-being (Axis A), value-based resources and future orientation (Axis B), and political sacralization (Axis C). The entries provide an interpretive synthesis of the empirical patterns discussed in the text rather than results of a separate statistical estimation.

Table 5.
Typological Summary of Populist Configurations Across Psychological Axes.

Reiwa, Sanseito, and Hoshutō are similarly low on both Axis A and Axis B, reflecting shared depletion of well-being and value-based resources. They are analytically distinguished only by Axis C, which captures the presence or absence of political sacralization. DPFP occupies an intermediate position, characterized by relatively low well-being but partially retained value-based and future-oriented resources, whereas

Populism type	Emotional well-being (Axis A)	Axis B: Value-based resources and future orientation (B1–B4)	Axis C: Political sacralization (pseudo-sacred moralization)	Psychological core
Resentment Populism (Type 1A) (Reiwa, low-WB DPFP segment)	Severe affective depletion (elevated sadness–anxiety–anger)	Very low intrinsic meaning and mattering; weak ethical–spiritual orientation; collapsed future-oriented capability	Low	Emotional and existential depletion without sacralization
Far-Right Sacralized Resentment (Type 1B) (Sanseitō, Hoshutō)	Extremely affective depletion (anger-dominant with broader anxiety-sadness elevation)	Severely depleted intrinsic meaning and mattering; strong materialist orientation; collapse of future-oriented capability	Very high	Pseudo-sacred moralization of resentment and identity fusion
Intermediate / Ambivalent Populism (Type 2) (DPFP)	Moderate affective strain	Moderate value-based resources; mixed orientations; partially weakened future-oriented capability	Low	Vulnerability with partial coherence and selective agency
Reform-Oriented Populism (Type 3) (Ishin)	Affective stability (Low negative/ High positive affect)	High intrinsic meaning and inner richness; strong future-oriented capability (hope, optimism, agency)	Low	Efficacy-driven, reform-oriented populism
Center-Left Stability (Reference) (CDP, JCP)	Stable affective balance	High intrinsic meaning and mattering; stable ethical–spiritual orientation; moderate future-oriented capability	Low	Stable intrinsic meaning and institutional orientation

Note: Although Axis B and Axis C are psychologically adjacent, they are analytically distinct. Axis B captures intrinsic value-based resources and future-oriented capability, whereas Axis C reflects political pseudo-sacralization—a moral-symbolic intensification that can emerge independently of intrinsic spiritual or ethical depth.

Table 6.
Multi-dimensional psychological typology of Japanese populism in the 2025 Election.

Ishin is located at the high end of Axes A and B, indicating a reform-oriented populist configuration grounded in agency and future-oriented capability.

Table 6 provides a categorical summary of the typology by specifying the psychological profiles and party alignments associated with each populist pathway identified in **Figure 6**.

8. Discussion: Affective-existential foundations of Japan’s 2025 populist realignment

8.1 Context of international research on populism

International research on populism has developed along three major explanatory trajectories.

8.1.1 The emotional activation model

A substantial body of political psychology emphasizes negative emotions, particularly anger, fear, and anxiety, as key triggers for political mobilization and anti-elite sentiment. Foundational work on affective intelligence conceptualizes emotions as mechanisms that activate political judgment under conditions of threat or uncertainty [25]. Subsequent research has shown that anger, in particular, facilitates blame attribution, out-group hostility, and confrontational forms of political participation [11]. Building on these insights, recent studies link negative emotions such as anger, fear, and anxiety more directly to populist attitudes, highlighting the emotional foundations of anti-elitism and exclusionary conceptions of 'the people' [23, 26]. Together, this literature frames populism as an affect-driven response to perceived injustice or threat, primarily emphasizing short-term emotional activation rather than longer-term experiential or value-based conditions.

8.1.2 The well-being (WB) decline model

A more recent line of research argues that subjective well-being deterioration—declines in life satisfaction, purpose, trust, and psychosocial stability—creates fertile conditions for populist demand [1, 2, 24, 27, 28]. This approach reframes populism as the political crystallization of deeper experiential distress.

8.1.3 The identity-value-meaning model

Other scholars emphasize value orientations and identity-based mechanisms, arguing that emotions and well-being must be situated within broader moral and meaning frameworks that structure political interpretation. A foundational contribution in this tradition is Ronald Inglehart's theory of value change, which links material and post-material values to perceptions of security, self-expression, and existential orientation [20, 29]. From this perspective, political attitudes—including susceptibility to populist appeals—are shaped not only by episodic emotions or short-term dissatisfaction, but by deeper value configurations and identity narratives that provide meaning and coherence.

Despite its wide influence, this value-based approach has rarely been integrated with psychological measures of well-being, meaning, and recognition at the individual level, particularly in non-Western democracies. As a result, the mechanisms through which value orientations translate into affective and electoral alignment remain insufficiently specified. The present study builds on this tradition by explicitly integrating value orientations with multi-dimensional well-being and meaning-based resources, thereby extending the identity-value-meaning framework into an empirically grounded model of populist alignment in contemporary Japan.

8.1.4 Contributions of the Japanese case

Japan's 2025 election provides clear non-Western evidence that affective and existential conditions precede resentment and predict support for outsider populist parties, demonstrating that the well-being-populism linkage is not confined to polarized Western democracies.

More importantly, the Japanese case advances international populism research by empirically integrating three major explanatory strands—emotional activation,

well-being decline, and value-based meaning—within a single psychological architecture. Rather than treating emotions, well-being, and values as parallel or competing explanations, the present analysis shows that negative affect becomes politically consequential, especially through depleted meaning, mattering, and future-oriented capability.

This contribution directly extends and refines structural theories of value change, most notably those associated with Inglehart. His work compellingly demonstrated that long-term shifts in existential security and material conditions shape generational value orientations and political preferences. However, the psychological mechanisms through which objective or macro-level conditions are translated into lived political meaning have remained comparatively under-specified.

The Japanese case provides a psychological micro-foundation for this tradition by showing that well-being, meaning, recognition, and perceived future agency mediate the relationship between structural conditions and political alignment. In this sense, the analysis moves beyond a direct link between objective security and value change, highlighting the role of psychological factors instead—captured through affective balance, meaning, and mattering—in shaping political interpretation and mobilization.

This distinction is particularly significant in the Japanese context. Despite relatively high education and physical security, substantial segments of the electorate exhibit erosion of meaning, recognition, and future-oriented capability. The findings thus demonstrate that objective conditions do not automatically translate into existential security and that deficits in subjective well-being can foster fertile ground for resentment-based, sacralized populist mobilization even in relatively stable democracies.

This interpretation is consistent with emerging international research showing that resentment operates not as a stable ideological trait, but as a dynamic reaction to perceived violations of fairness, dignity, and recognition. Recent US evidence similarly suggests that anger loses much of its predictive power once broader psychosocial malaise is accounted for; the Japanese case independently corroborates this integrated mechanism in a non-Western democratic setting.

Because the Japanese dataset captures affective states, value-based resources, future-oriented capability, and political sacralization simultaneously, it enables a rare specification of populism as a multi-axis psychological architecture rather than a single attitudinal dimension. Japan, therefore, functions not merely as an additional regional case but as a conceptual bridge that links and empirically grounds competing global models of populism.

In this sense, the Japanese case contributes to international research not by replicating Western findings, but by re-specifying the psychological foundations through which value change, emotional activation, and political meaning converge in contemporary populism.

8.2 Integrated structural interpretation: A multi-dimensional psychological architecture of Japanese populism

Bringing together the empirical patterns identified in Sections 5–7, this section articulates an integrated structural interpretation of contemporary Japanese populism. The 2025 realignment cannot be reduced to ideology, economic grievance, or demographic differentiation alone. Rather, it emerges from a shared psychological space structured by affective conditions, value-based resources, future-oriented capability, and symbolic moralization.

In the terms developed in Part II and formalized in Part III, the typology is generated by the interaction of three analytically distinct axes:

Axis A (Affective Well-Being): affective balance versus depletion, centering on negative affect and emotional exhaustion.

Axis B (Value-Based Resources and Future Orientation): the availability of value-based resources (B1–B4) and their inverse pole (B5), including meaning, recognition, ethical-spiritual orientation (non-sacralized), and future-oriented capability.

Axis C (Political Sacralization/Pseudo-Sacred Moralization): political pseudo-sacralization, capturing moral absolutization and identity fusion that mimic religious sacralization without intrinsic spirituality.

These axes do not constitute a linear causal sequence. Instead, they define a configurational psychological architecture within which distinct populist formations emerge. As shown in **Figure 5**, resentment-based mobilization (Types 1A and 1B), intermediate or ambivalent populism (Type 2), and agency-driven reform populism (Type 3) represent differentiated configurations within a common psychological space.

8.2.1 Axis A: Affective depletion as a background condition of vulnerability

Axis A represents a shared background condition of vulnerability underlying resentment-based populism. Elevated sadness, anxiety, and anger create an affective environment in which political dissatisfaction becomes more salient, a pattern most evident in Type 1 formations.

However, affective depletion alone does not determine the form populism takes. Its political direction depends on how affective strain is interpreted through value-based resources (Axis B) and intensified through symbolic moralization (Axis C). Axis A thus explains the *emergence of vulnerability*, but not its political crystallization.

8.2.2 Axis B: Value-based resources as the interpretive structure of dissatisfaction

Axis B captures the interpretive structure through which affective strain is translated into political meaning. Positions low on Axis B—reflecting depleted value-based resources across B1–B4 and, in many cases, alignment toward the inverse pole (B5)—are associated with vulnerability-driven populist pathways. High Axis B, by contrast, supports normatively constrained or reform-oriented responses to dissatisfaction.

Axis B, therefore, explains why actors sharing similar affective conditions on Axis A can diverge politically: It shapes whether dissatisfaction is interpreted through resentment, symbolic moralization, or constructive reform.

8.2.3 Axis B4: Future-oriented capability as the basis of reform-oriented populism

Within Axis B, future-oriented capability (B4) most clearly differentiates reform-oriented populism from resentment-based variants. High levels of hope, optimism, and perceived agency—most prominently observed among Ishin supporters—redirect dissatisfaction away from rupture and toward reformist ambition, efficacy, and institutional engagement.

This dimension explains how relatively high well-being can coexist with populist mobilization, producing an agency-driven rather than resentment-driven pathway.

8.2.4 Axis C: Political sacralization as a moral amplifier of resentment

Axis C functions as a modifier rather than a base condition. Elevated political sacralization intensifies resentment by transforming symbolic boundaries into moral absolutes. In Type 1B formations, political pseudo-sacralization amplifies affective and existential depletion into identity fusion and absolutist political framings.

This interaction clarifies why multiple forms of populism coexisted in Japan's 2025 election despite shared macro-level conditions: While Axis A generates vulnerability and Axis B structures interpretation, Axis C magnifies resentment into its most moralized and polarized form.

8.2.5 Psychological factors underlying affective-existential-moral configurations

Rather than positing a temporal causal pathway, this section organizes empirically observed psychological factors associated with distinct populist formations in Japan's 2025 realignment. Drawing on Sections 5–7, **Figure 5** summarizes these factors as a configurational architecture.

Factor 1—Affective Depletion (Axis A).

Elevated sadness, anxiety, and anger constitute a shared background condition of psychological vulnerability associated with stronger populist orientations.

Factor 2—Meaning and Recognition Depletion (Axis B1–B2).

Low meaning and mattering increase interpretive vulnerability, making political experience more susceptible to moralized blame and binary antagonism.

Factor 3—Political Sacralization (Axis C).

Among far-right populist supporters, political pseudo-sacralization intensifies moral absolutism and identity fusion without indicating intrinsic religiosity.

Factor 4—Agency and Future-Oriented Capability (Axis B4).

Some populist formations combine dissatisfaction with preserved agency and future-oriented capability, producing reform-oriented rather than resentment-driven mobilization.

Factor 5—Integrated Architecture. Together, these factors explain the coexistence of multiple populisms, the psychological—rather than ideological—structure of polarization, and the differentiated electoral trajectories of outsider parties in Japan.

Figure 5 summarizes key psychological factors associated with distinct populist formations in Japan's 2025 political realignment. The figure organizes affective depletion (Axis A), value-based resources and future-oriented capability (Axis B), and political sacralization (Axis C) as a configurational psychological architecture. Different combinations of these factors characterize resentment-based populism, intermediate or ambivalent populism, and reform-oriented populism, highlighting the psychological heterogeneity underlying Japan's contemporary populist landscape.

8.3 Pseudo-religious populism beyond monotheism

Among supporters of Sanseitō and Hoshutō, the data reveal a distinctive pattern of political pseudo-sacralization that should not be interpreted as substantive religious commitment. Rather, it represents a symbolic and moralized sacralization of political identity that emerges under conditions of vulnerability and value depletion.

This profile is characterized by heightened concerns about sanctity and purity, moral absolutism, and a quasi-religious fusion of identity with idealized national or

cultural symbols. Importantly, these dynamics occur in the context of low formal religiosity and outside any monotheistic tradition.

The Japanese case, therefore, extends comparative research on sacralized populism in two crucial respects. First, it demonstrates that sacralized populism does not require an institutional church or a monotheistic religious framework; national-cultural symbols themselves can become sacralized political objects. Second, it shows how affective and existential vulnerability can be transformed into pseudo-religious moralization, allowing far-right formations to convert diffuse frustration into an identity-centered political mission.

In this sense, Japan broadens the comparative scope of research on sacralized populism beyond its usual Western and monotheistic settings, highlighting the psychological—rather than theological—foundations of pseudo-religious political mobilization.

8.4 Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings.

First, a cross-sectional design: The data captures a single electoral moment and therefore does not permit strong causal or temporal claims. Although the interpretation of affective depletion (Axis A), erosion of value-based resources (Axis B), and political sacralization (Axis C) as antecedent conditions is theoretically grounded and consistent with international research, causal ordering remains inferential rather than longitudinally or experimentally established.

Second, sample size constraints for some outsider parties: For several far-right and newly emerging parties—most notably Sanseitō and Hoshutō—sample sizes are the modest. This limits statistical power and constrains the estimation of interaction effects or fine-grained subgroup heterogeneity. Accordingly, the typological claims regarding these parties should be understood as pattern-level configurations within the broader psychological architecture.

Third, cultural and institutional specificity: Japan represents a non-Western, relatively secular, yet symbolically dense political context characterized by long-term LDP dominance, coalition politics, and regionally rooted challengers such as Ishin. While the three-axis psychological architecture (Axis A–C) is likely generalizable in structure, its cultural expressions—especially political sacralization—may differ across national and institutional settings. Cross-national replication is therefore required.

Fourth, long-term erosion versus short-term shocks: The analysis spans a period in which long-term declines in well-being interacted with shorter-term shocks (COVID-19, inflation, political scandals, geopolitical anxiety). The present design cannot disentangle their relative contributions; instead, it captures their combined imprint on affective, existential, and value-based conditions.

Fifth, measurement constraints: All psychological indicators rely on self-report measures. Although validated instruments are used, they remain subject to social desirability and context effects. More complex mediational structures suggested by correlations (e.g., Axis A → Axis B → populism) are not fully estimated and remain a task for future research.

These limitations underscore the need for longitudinal, experimental, and comparative designs. At the same time, they do not undermine the central contribution of the Japanese case: It provides one of the clearest non-Western demonstrations that affective well-being, value-based meaning, future-oriented capability, and political sacralization jointly structure populist alignment and electoral outcomes.

8.5 Broader implications for democratic stability

Taken together, the Japanese findings have broader implications for democratic stability. They suggest that democracies are sustained not only by institutional design, but by the affective and existential conditions under which citizens interpret political life.

The analysis points to several general tendencies. When affective well-being collapses (Axis A), citizens become more susceptible to antagonistic and anti-elite narratives. When meaning and mattering erode (Axis B1–B2), emotional discomfort is more readily moralized into resentment and binary political interpretation. In some cases, such resentment is further intensified through political pseudo-sacralization (Axis C), transforming politics into a symbolic and moralized arena. Conversely, when dissatisfaction arises under the conditions of preserved future-oriented capability and agency (Axis B4), it can take the form of reform-oriented rather than resentment-driven populism.

These findings refine structural theories of value change by demonstrating that objective security and long-term modernization are insufficient to account for contemporary populist dynamics unless mediated through subjective well-being, meaning, recognition, and perceived future agency. In this sense, populism appears not merely as a reaction to material or cultural change, but as a political expression of affective-existential fragility.

These implications do not yet constitute a normative prescription, but they establish the diagnostic foundation for the normative reconstruction developed in Chapter “Beyond Populism.” The concept of *Flourishing Democracy* (Everlasting Multi-dimensional Flourishing Democracy: EMDD) builds directly on this analysis by asking how democratic systems might be reoriented to support the affective, existential, and value-based conditions identified here as crucial to democratic resilience.

9. Conclusion

Frontier of Populism Studies in Integrative Positive Political Psychology: Using a Negative Phenomenon to Envision Positive Politics.

9.1 Methodological foundation: Toward integrative positive political psychology

This conclusion begins by clarifying the study’s methodological foundations. Rather than interpreting populism through conventional lenses—economic grievance, ideological extremity, or institutional distrust—this research approaches it through the conceptual framework of positive psychology. In doing so, this chapter advances what may be termed Integrative Positive Political Psychology—a framework grounded in the developments of Second Wave (PP2.0) and Third Wave (PP3.0) Positive Psychology.

Second-Wave Positive Psychology (PP2.0) argues that flourishing cannot be understood by isolating positive emotions from negative experiences. Its core proposition is that suffering, adversity, and negative emotional or existential states can constitute essential raw materials for flourishing [30]. Accordingly, negative psychological conditions should be examined not merely as failures, but as diagnostic signals that illuminate the deeper architecture of flourishing. This perspective directly informs the present study, which treats populism as a politically negative phenomenon whose analysis nevertheless reveals underlying affective-existential deficits and thus points toward the conditions of democratic renewal.

Third-Wave Positive Psychology further extends this framework to collective and political well-being, non-Western cultural contexts, and the structural and ecological determinants of flourishing. The proposal of Positive Political Philosophy [3] aligns with this trajectory by explicitly applying positive psychological insights to political and societal domains. In this study, that extension is operationalized through the analysis of collective emotional climates, political meaning-making, relational and communal well-being, and cultural forms of political sacralization. Japan's populist transformation is thus examined as a case of collective democratic well-being rather than as an anomaly of institutional failure.

Building on this theoretical lineage, the present study makes two core contributions. First, as a contribution to political psychology, it applies central constructs of positive psychology—multi-dimensional subjective well-being, meaning and mattering, relational and eudaimonic functioning, and future-oriented capability—to the analysis of political behavior. These variables allow the identification of structural affective-existential conditions that shape susceptibility to populism, factors that are largely invisible in grievance-centered models. Second, as a theoretical contribution, the study advances Integrative Positive Political Psychology by extending PP2.0 to collective political behavior. From this perspective, negative political phenomena—resentment, anti-system anger, anxiety, and sorrow—are interpreted not only as threats but as diagnostic signals of moral-existential erosion within democratic societies.

To clarify this methodological stance, **Figure 7** situates the present study within a dual-integrative framework defined by two orthogonal axes: positive versus negative psychological processes and individual versus collective levels of analysis. Within this quadrantal structure, Integrative Positive Political Psychology emerges as the conceptual bridge that enables the unified analysis of resentment, meaning-making, well-being, and democratic legitimacy developed throughout this book. This dual-integrative framework constitutes the methodological architecture upon which the empirical findings (This chapter) and the normative reconstruction toward what is later conceptualized as Flourishing Democracy are built (Chapter “Beyond Populism”).

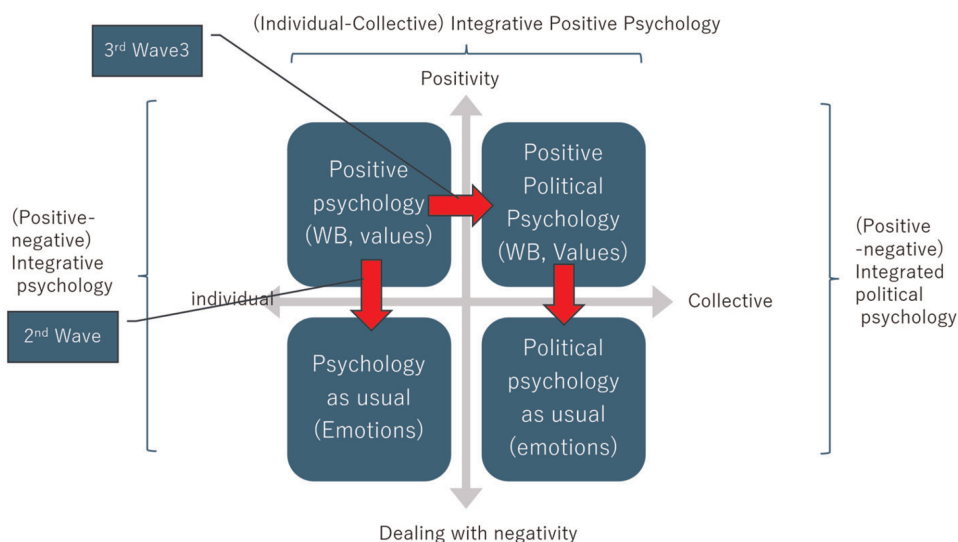


Figure 7.
Dual-integrative positive political psychology framework (positive-negative × individual-collective).

The framework maps political psychological processes across two orthogonal axes: positive versus negative processes and individual versus collective levels of analysis. It illustrates how traditional political psychology (focused on threat and negative affect) and positive psychology (focused on flourishing, meaning, and values) can be integrated within a unified analytical structure.

Within this quadrantal structure, Integrative Positive Political Psychology emerges as a bridging approach in which negative political phenomena—such as resentment, anxiety, anger, and anti-system affect—are treated not merely as threats, but as diagnostic signals of underlying deficits in well-being, meaning, mattering, recognition, and future-oriented capability. At the same time, positive psychological resources—intrinsic meaning, agency, hope, optimism, and relational functioning—specify the conditions under which dissatisfaction is redirected toward constructive and reform-oriented political engagement.

Conceptually, the framework clarifies a consistent structural ordering across Sections 5–8: affective conditions shape susceptibility; meaning and mattering shape interpretation; value orientation and political sacralization shape direction and intensity; and future-oriented capability (agency) shapes political expression. The framework thus provides the methodological architecture underpinning both the empirical analyses (Sections 4–8) and the normative reconstruction toward Flourishing Democracy.

9.2 Political resilience: From individual to collective

Resilience research traditionally focuses on individuals, but this study suggests a parallel concept: collective democratic resilience—a society's capacity to absorb affective shocks, restore WB, meaning, and recognition, and rebuild democracy.

Understanding populism as a *stress signal* provides insight into how democratic systems may cultivate such resilience.

9.2.1 Affective-existential-value architecture

This study operates on an integrative three-layer model—affective, existential, and value-based foundations of judgment—domains where positive psychology offers unique analytic tools.

- Affective layer → emotional strain, sadness-anxiety-anger triads
- Existential layer → meaning, mattering
- Value layer → value orientation, eudaimonic/relational WB, sacralization

Populism emerges where these layers collapse simultaneously.

9.2.2 Normative horizon: Flourishing democracy

The methodological stance adopted here ultimately points toward an expanded normative horizon: Flourishing Democracy—a democratic order that institutionally sustains well-being and intrinsic value-based resources, including meaning, mattering, recognition, dignity, and eudaimonic-relational flourishing, thereby enabling both individual and communal agency.

From this perspective, populism is not merely a political disruption but a societal signal that the affective-existential foundations of democratic life require renewal.

With this integrative framework in place, we now turn to the central empirical proposition demonstrated in this study.

9.3 The central empirical proposition

This study establishes one core empirical proposition:

Multi-dimensional well-being and values depletion → populist attitudes → outsider-party support → electoral transformation.

Across individual psychology, party support composition, and seat change patterns, declines in multi-dimensional well-being and value-based resources were systematically associated with increased support for outsider populist parties. Those same low-resource parties gained seats in the 2025 House of Councillors election. This constitutes one of the clearest demonstrations in a non-Western advanced democracy that subjective and multi-dimensional well-being is structurally linked to contemporary populist realignment.

The causality implied here is structural rather than micro-mechanistic. The claim is not that each component forms a fully specified causal chain, but that depletion of affective well-being and value-based resources constitutes a structurally prior condition for populist alignment and aggregated electoral outcomes. Reverse causal interpretations—such as seat gains producing prior levels of well-being—are implausible given the temporal logic of psychological states and electoral aggregation. More fine-grained mediational processes remain open to future causal testing.

The Japanese case further demonstrates that this structurally prior condition does not yield a single populist outcome. Instead, it is filtered through distinct configurations of value orientations, including meaning, political sacralization, and future-oriented capability. Sections 9.4–9.5, therefore, specifies three psychological pathways through which comparable vulnerability can produce divergent forms of populism.

9.4 Reframing populism through integrative positive political psychology

Building on Section 9.1, the empirical findings call for a reframing of populism within an integrative positive political psychology framework.

A. Populism as a negatively valenced psychological signal rather than a fixed ideological position

Populism does not originate from left-right ideology; it emerges from affective-existential strain. Elevated negative affect, diminished meaning and mattering, weakened eudaimonic functioning, and depleted future-oriented capability constitute negative psychological substrates that precede political expression. In this sense, populism expresses collective suffering before it is articulated in ideological language.

B. Meaning and mattering as interpretive converters of affect

Negative affect alone rarely produces political extremity. The Japanese 2025 data show that meaning and mattering are tightly associated with both well-being and populist attitudes, indicating an interpretive conversion mechanism: Affective strain becomes politically consequential when existential resources

erode. Under such conditions, dissatisfaction is more likely to be expressed through moralized blame, elite-people dichotomies, simplified narratives of decline, and receptivity to sacralized rhetoric.

C. Value orientation and political sacralization as directional modifiers

Value-related orientations differentiate how comparable strain is channeled. Intrinsic and eudaimonic orientations tend to moderate the conversion of negative affect into hostile populism, whereas materialist orientations align more closely with grievance-driven pathways under depletion. Political sacralization (Axis C) operates as a distinct intensifier, converting frustration into pseudo-sacred moralization and identity fusion rather than reflecting intrinsic spirituality or ethical depth.

These interpretations extend the observed associations theoretically. While they do not claim demonstrated mediation, they support a coherent directional reading: value orientation, sacralization, and future-oriented capability shape whether discontent is expressed as resentment, sacralized identity, or constructive reform.

9.5 Three psychological pathways reinterpreted through the integrative framework

Building on sections 5–8, the three pathways of Japanese populism can be reinterpreted within a unified psychological architecture defined by Axes A (affective well-being), B (value-based resources and future-oriented capability), and C (political sacralization).

In line with Positive Psychology 2.0, negative and positive processes are not opposites but dynamically interacting dimensions of psychological regulation.

1. *Resentment-Based Populism (Type 1A/1B): Negative → Negative*

This pathway is characterized by low Axis A and low Axis B: affective depletion combined with erosion of meaning and mattering and depleted future-oriented capability. In Type 1B, the same vulnerability is exacerbated by high Axis C, resulting in pseudo-sacred moralization and identity fusion. Interpreted within the integrative framework, this constitutes a negative-to-negative trajectory in which suffering is converted into resentment and antagonistic political expression.

2. *Mixed-Motivation Populism (Type 2): Negative → Ambivalent*

DPFP occupies an intermediate configuration across axes, combining moderate affective depletion with partial value-based resources and low sacralization. Psychologically, this corresponds to a zone in which vulnerability is present but not fully moralized, and agency exists but is insufficiently consolidated to support a stable reform trajectory. The result is an ambivalent pathway marked by volatility rather than intensified resentment.

3. *Reform-Oriented Populism (Type 3): Positive Resources → Libertarian Reform Orientation*

A distinctive pathway, most clearly observed among Ishin supporters, combines high affective well-being and strong value-based resources—especially future-

oriented capability—with low sacralization. Here, dissatisfaction is generated not by deprivation but by capability and aspiration: the belief that improvement is both possible and achievable. Psychologically, positive resources are mobilized toward reform orientation rather than resentment or identity antagonism.

Across pathways, negatively valenced affect (anger, anxiety, sadness) is widely present; however, its political meaning depends on the surrounding existential and value-based layers. Meaning and mattering function as interpretive switches; value orientation and political sacralization redirect or amplify expression; and future-oriented capability differentiates resentment from reform. These pathways should therefore be understood as the interpretive trajectories structured by the interaction between negatively valenced affect and positive psychological resources, rather than as fixed causal sequences.

The trajectories may be schematically summarized as follows:

1. Negatively valenced affect → Reinforced negativity (resentment-based populism),
2. Negatively valenced affect → Ambivalent redirection,
3. Positive psychological resources → Reform-oriented mobilization.

9.6 Populism as a multi-level phenomenon: Integrating individual and collective political psychology

Taken together, the findings indicate that populism is neither reducible to individual psychological dispositions nor explainable solely by institutions or ideology. Rather, it emerges as a multi-level process in which affective and existential experiences are translated into political meaning across individual, group, and societal contexts. This perspective aligns with Third-Wave Positive Psychology, which extends the study of well-being from individuals to collective and institutional environments, and contributes to integrative positive political psychology.

- A. *Individual level*: When affective strain co-occurs with depleted meaning and mattering and weak future-oriented capability, dissatisfaction is more likely to be interpreted through resentment-based and antagonistic frames. By contrast, when meaning and future-oriented capability are preserved, dissatisfaction tends to manifest as reform-oriented and constructive political engagement.
- B. *Group level*: Political parties function as collective meaning-making environments that selectively attract and reinforce distinct affective-existential profiles. Resentment-based populist parties cluster psychologically vulnerable supporters, reform-oriented parties attract higher-agency profiles, and sacralized far-right formations further intensify identity fusion and moral absolutism.
- C. *Societal level*: At the macro-level, populism operates as a psychological indicator of democratic fragility. Its rise signals systemic failures to sustain meaning, recognition, dignity, and relational belonging. In this sense, populism is both a disruptive force and a diagnostic marker, pointing to the direction democratic renewal must take.

9.7 Populism in a dual-integration framework: Ideology as carrier, not cause

As summarized in **Figure 8**, this study integrates positive and negative psychological processes with individual and collective levels of analysis into a unified explanatory framework. Across sections 5–8, the findings support a consistent structural ordering: affective conditions shape susceptibility; meaning and mattering shape interpretation; value orientation and political sacralization shape direction and intensity; and future-oriented capability (agency) shapes political expression.

Within this framework, ideology functions primarily as a narrative carrier rather than a causal origin. It provides linguistic form to deeper affective-existential dynamics. This helps explain why ideologically divergent formations can exhibit structurally similar psychological profiles. In short, ideology explains how populism speaks; psychology explains why it resonates.

9.8 Reversing the causal chain: Toward a model of flourishing democracy

The negative political pathway identified in this study can be summarized as:

Axis A/B depletion → resentment → populism → democratic fragility.

A natural expectation is that recovery of national well-being would reverse this chain. Yet Japan's persistent stagnation in subjective well-being suggests that waiting for recovery alone is unlikely to resolve the structural psychological roots of populist susceptibility. This raises a practical question: *what can democratic societies do when recovery is slow, uneven, or uncertain?*

Here, positive psychology, especially resilience research, becomes relevant. PP2.0 suggests that meaning and constructive motivation can be regenerated under

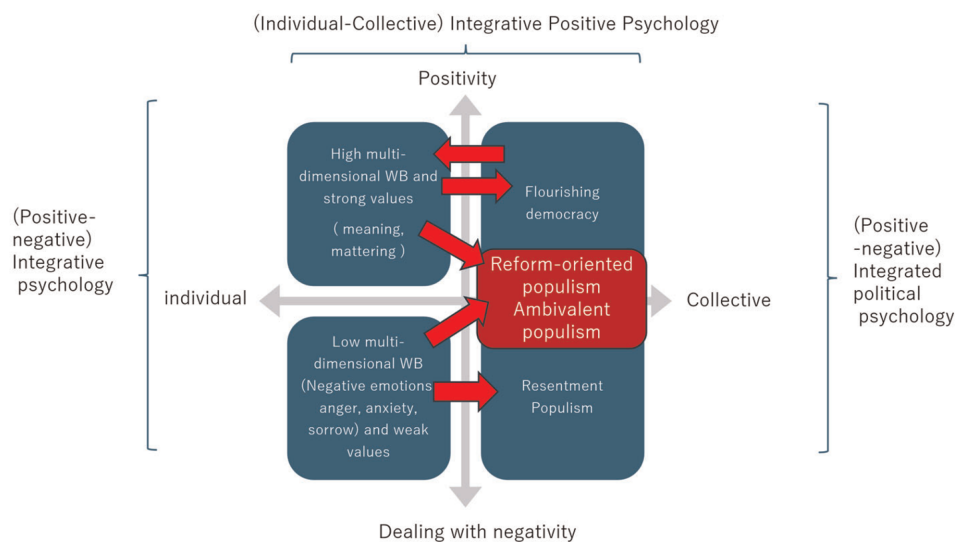


Figure 8. *Populism in a dual-integration framework (positive-negative × individual-collective). The figure applies the dual-integration framework to the three Japanese populist pathways, illustrating how combinations of affective conditions, meaning and mattering, value orientation, political sacralization, and future-oriented capability generate resentment-based, ambivalent, and reform-oriented forms of populism.*

adversity when appropriate psychological and institutional support is in place. Democratic renewal can therefore begin before aggregate well-being fully improves.

Within this framework, pathways to resilience can be developed across three levels:

1. Micro (individual): emotional and value resilience

Interventions can strengthen emotion regulation, meaning-centered coping, sense of mattering, and community-based support that restore dignity and belonging. These do not replace structural reform but can reduce susceptibility to resentment narratives.

2. Meso (institutions/policy): restoring recognition, fairness, and agency

Because meaning and mattering deficits are central drivers, democratic renewal requires institutional strategies to restore recognition, justice, and fairness; participation and empowerment; and inclusive belonging.

3. Macro (normative): Flourishing Democracy

At the societal level, populism signals a failure to sustain multi-dimensional well-being and values. Reversing this requires a normative reconstruction of democracy—*Flourishing Democracy*.

From this perspective, well-being and value-based resources are not merely private outcomes or policy by-products, but constitutional public goods: foundational conditions that democratic systems must actively sustain in order to remain legitimate, resilient, and future-oriented.

Thus, democratic renewal need not wait for spontaneous recovery. Through coordinated micro-, meso-, and macro-level strategies—culminating in *Flourishing Democracy*—societies can transform the negative signal of populism into pathways for psycho-political regeneration. From this perspective, populism functions as a *stress signal* of democratic systems' capacity—or incapacity—to sustain collective meaning, recognition, and future-oriented agency.

However, this chapter has confined itself to diagnosing the affective-existential architecture underlying Japan's populist realignment. While these findings carry clear normative implications for democratic resilience, the systematic reconstruction of democracy as a meaning-generating and well-being-sustaining order is reserved for the final chapter, "Beyond Populism."

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Supplementary materials

Supplementary materials can be accessed and downloaded through the Zenodo repository: Kobayashi M, Ishido H, Mizushima J. Supplementary Materials for: Japan's 2025 Populist Turn from Outside. Zenodo; 2026. Additional supplementary material may be found in the supplementary material tab for this chapter: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18787303>

Author details

Masaya Kobayashi^{1*}, Hikari Ishido² and Jiro Mizushima¹

1 Graduate School of Social Sciences, Chiba University, Japan

2 Graduate School of Global and Transdisciplinary Studies, Chiba University, Japan

*Address all correspondence to: masaya_kobayashi@nifty.com

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