



## For Immediate Release

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## P.O.V.'s "Campaign" Is Fascinating Look Inside 'J-Democracy' — The Japanese Way of Elections, Tuesday, July 29 on PBS

Acclaimed Film Reveals Peculiar Blend of Tammany Hall Patronage, Japanese Ritualism  
And Samurai Ethics Propelling an Unlikely Candidate

*A Co-presentation with the Center for Asian American Media (CAAM)*

*"Appreciation of this film hardly depends on an intimate knowledge of or interest in Japanese politics.  
. . . 'Campaign' may invite a certain skepticism about democracy, but it will surely restore your faith  
in cinéma vérité." — A.O. Scott, The New York Times*

The new documentary **Campaign** came about by chance. Kazuhiro Soda was preparing to make another film when he learned that an old Tokyo University schoolmate, Kazuhiko Yamauchi, had been selected by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to run for a key city council seat. Sensing an opportunity, Soda quickly got agreement from Yamauchi and the LDP — perhaps surprisingly, given the candor with which LDP local operations are shown — to film the campaign. Equipping himself as a one-man film crew, Soda embarked on an experiment in "observational film" as he followed Yamauchi on the Japanese campaign trail for 12 hectic days in October 2005.

What tipped Soda off that there was more to the story than met the eye was that his friend was a less-than-ideal candidate. The 40-year-old, self-employed Kazuhiko "Yama-san" Yamauchi (who had failed his college entrance exams five times) had no previous political experience or public recognition. He had no supporters, no program and no time to prepare. Earnest, likeable and modest, he had little if any charisma and no pronounced political views of his own. And yet he had been plucked out of obscurity by the LDP to be its standard-bearer in a tough race that would determine whether the party held onto its dominance of the politically important Kawasaki city council. As **Campaign** reveals, however, the LDP knew its man — and the Japanese way of electoral politics.

Kazuhiro Soda's **Campaign** has its broadcast premiere on **Tuesday, July 29, 2008** at 10 p.m. on PBS, part of the 21st season of P.O.V. (Check local listings.) American television's longest-running independent documentary series, P.O.V. is public television's premier showcase for point-of-view, nonfiction films, and is a 2007 recipient of a Special News & Documentary Emmy Award for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking.

The LDP has remained the country's ruling party for 50 years almost without any interruptions — an electoral run that may surprise Americans used to periodically deposing "the rascals" in power. At a time when U.S. political parties are often in disarray, Americans may also be surprised at the discipline of political parties in Japan. The LDP, for instance, chooses new candidates each election cycle from the top down, and those chosen are both trained and tested by the party as a generational "class" as they move up the ranks. What these disciplined party operations reveal

about Japanese democracy is a tantalizing and complex question — and a judgment left entirely to the viewer. True to his form, filmmaker Soda follows Yamauchi's efforts — on the stump, at party meetings, and during the little time Yama-san manages to spend with his wife in their tiny, cluttered apartment — without comment or analysis.

What is clear in **Campaign** from the start is that the qualities prized in LDP candidates, certainly “first year” ones, are willingness to conform to party norms, including a strict adherence to party hierarchy, and the ability to project an appealing humility to voters — a far cry from the rough-and-tumble independence and boldness usually expected of American candidates.

In these ways, Yama-san may be the LDP's ideal candidate. He is thoroughly, even painfully, obsequious to party elders, who are ever on hand to instruct, admonish and take the measure of a new politician. While they parse the way he stands, bows, dresses, talks, even the particular word he employs for “wife” — *Kanai* (“housewife”), not to be confused with *Okkanai* (“scary wife”) — Yamauchi is unfailingly repentant and enthusiastic about improving his performance. His wife, Sayuri, a professional who works for an American corporation, is moved to question and complain about party dictates. (“Why do we have to wear white gloves and then take them off when we shake hands?”) Yet she, too, dutifully fulfills the role expected of a candidate's wife, joining Yama-san and his entourage on the campaign trail. Sayuri is also the one who wonders how the couple will manage if Yama-san loses, since a novice candidate is expected to pay for his own campaign, without seeking donations.

So what makes Yama-san run? What has made him so willing to turn his life on its head at the behest of an unknown party leadership? What makes him pursue a goal for which he previously revealed no ambition or talent? And can Yama-san win? The answers to the first three questions are never entirely explained by Yamauchi. He admits to the element of opportunism and personal ambition (“My plan was to become famous first, then run for office”), but also evinces a peculiarly Japanese sense of duty, simply to do what is asked by one's elders. To answer the final question, the LDP goes all out, surrounding Yamauchi with a heavyweight campaign team. As the campaign nears its climax, the party's biggest names, including Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi himself, turn up for rallies — something almost unheard of for a suburban council seat.

But that's not really the story **Campaign** tells. Rather it follows Yamauchi as he pursues the time-honored Japanese campaign practice of “bowing to everybody” (“even to telephone poles!” an advisor demands). This takes him on a dizzying round of local schools, sporting events, social gatherings, senior centers and train and bus stations where he first profusely apologizes for being a nuisance, then tries to shake every hand in sight, and, per his instructions, repeat his name and party affiliation as often as possible. Few in the passing crowds appear to give Yama-san much heed, though occasionally he is told, “You sound sincere.” This, in Japanese politics, is electoral gold.

What seems to be oddly missing from the campaigning is discussion of issues. Other than parroting slogans of the national party — in this case, Koizumi's call for “reform,” though what this means, Yamauchi never even attempts to explain — the candidate's job is to stick close to the script of name and party affiliation. Yamauchi is a pawn in a game where the power issues that make a suburban city council seat politically critical are being thrashed out at a level above his understanding. Yamauchi himself realizes this, and goes at his assigned task with a sincerity and infectious enthusiasm that seem at once, naïve, idealistic, and just a little loony.

“**Campaign** asks viewers to observe and think about what they see on screen,” says director Soda. “In this sense, reality is not painted in black and white. Instead it is gray and complicated, the way we experience it every day. I hope that viewers will be left with unanswered questions, ones they will continue to think about for days, weeks, even years to come.”

**Campaign** is a production of Laboratory X, Inc.

## About the filmmaker:

### Kazuhiro Soda

#### Director/cinematographer/editor

Kazuhiro Soda was born and raised in Japan and has lived in New York since 1993. He has directed numerous fictional films and television documentaries; **Campaign** (*Senkyo*) is his first feature documentary. While he was a student, his short fiction film "The Flicker" (1997) competed for a Silver Lion Award at the Venice International Film Festival in Italy. "Freezing Sunlight" (1996) was nominated for a New Filmmaker's Award at the Sao Paulo International Film Festival in Brazil. "A Flower and a Woman" (1995) won a Special Commendation in the Canadian Annual International Film Festival. Among the many television documentaries Soda has directed, "Landscape Without Mother" (NHK) won a Telly Award in 2001. He holds bachelor of fine arts degree in filmmaking from the School of Visual Arts in New York and bachelor of arts in religious studies from Tokyo University. He and his wife, Kiyoko Kashiwagi, a choreographer, live in Astoria, Queens. Soda is currently finishing "Mental" (working title), his new documentary about mental illness.

## Credits:

Director/cinematographer/editor: Kazuhiro Soda

Running Time: 56:46

## Festivals:

- Official Selection, World Premiere, Berlin International Film Festival (Forum), 2007
- Official Selection, SXSW (Competition), 2007
- Official Selection, Cinema du Reel in Paris (Competition) , 2007
- Official Selection, Fribourg Film Festival, 2007
- Official Selection, Hong Kong International Film Festival, 2007
- Official Selection, Buenos Aires Independent Film Festival
- Official Selection, Barcelona Asian Film Festival, 2007
- Official Selection, Sydney Film Festival, 2007
- Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) ContemporAsian Film Series, 2008

## Co-presenters:



The Center for Asian American Media (CAAM) is a non-profit organization dedicated to presenting stories that convey the richness and diversity of Asian American experiences to the broadest audience possible. We do this by funding, producing, distributing and exhibiting works in film, television and digital media. For more information, visit [www.asianamericanmedia.org](http://www.asianamericanmedia.org).



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and celebrating its 21st season on PBS in 2008, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running showcase on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through October, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought more than 250 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and has a Webby Award-winning online series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V is available online at [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov).

### ***P.O.V. Interactive*** ([www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov))

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces special features for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of our films through filmmaker interviews, story updates, podcasts, streaming video, and community-based and educational content that involves viewers in activities and feedback. P.O.V. Interactive also produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. In addition, [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov) has launched the *P.O.V. Blog*, a gathering place for documentary fans and

