

Political Pin-Ups

Text and photos by Tony McNicol



These photos of political posters were taken on the streets near my home. I live in Kita Ward, an area just below Saitama Prefecture, with Ikebukuro and Shinjuku to its south. In the last general election the local constituency was won by Akihiro Ohta, who has since become the leader of Komeito.

This is a lively shitamachi area, with crowded covered arcades, tatty but busy bars, small theaters and several sento (tattoos allowed). The population boomed in the 1950s as workers moved up to Tokyo from the countryside, but now the area is suffering from the so-called “donut effect.” The young and upwardly mobile are relocating to the center of Tokyo, while families move out to the suburbs. Kita Ward has one of the highest numbers of single-person households in Tokyo.

One of the reasons I started photographing political posters was bemusement at the unlikely places they can be found. Evidently no location is too shabby: backstreets, decrepit snack bars, and rubbish collection points included. These pictures were all taken with a battered old Yashicamat 124, a Japanese camera designed in the mid-1950s and sold with only minor modifications for decades. It somehow seemed appropriate for a photo story on Japan’s politics.

