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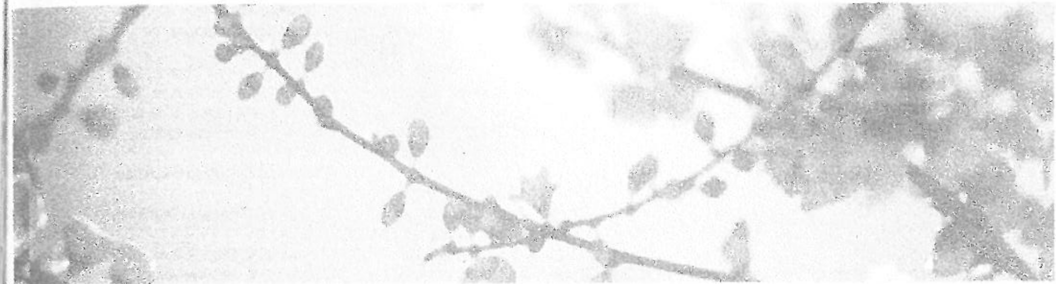
# The SAGE Handbook of Modern Japanese Studies



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20

# Parties and Elections in Japan

Kenneth Mori McElwain

## INTRODUCTION

The central meme of postwar Japanese politics is the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) electoral dominance. Following its formation in 1955, the LDP held a majority in the House of Representatives for 38 consecutive years. Every prime minister came from its ranks, and through its control of the government policy apparatus, the LDP established deep formal and informal networks with other elite actors, particularly the bureaucracy and major business conglomerates. However, this '1955 system' came crashing down in the watershed 1993 election, when the LDP lost its majority and was replaced by an eight-party coalition of opposition parties. The new coalition government fulfilled its popular mandate to change the electoral system, but fell apart shortly thereafter due to disagreements on most other issues. The LDP returned to power in 1994, albeit in a partnership with its long-time rival, the Japan Socialist Party (JSP). The LDP once again held the reins of Japanese politics, although it had to rely on coalitions with a variety of conservative and centrist minor parties to do so. Its second stint was shorter than its first: the LDP was soundly defeated in 2009 by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which became the first non-LDP party with a parliamentary majority since 1955. But Japanese politics had been in turmoil even before that election, as evinced by the near-annual rotation of prime ministers. In fact, even the DPJ's victory was short-lived: it replaced its leader three times in 3 years, before falling once again to the LDP in the 2012 Lower House election.

What factors explain the LDP's dominance, given much higher rates of government turnover in other democracies? Existing accounts point to conservative voter attitudes, the success of the postwar economy, and institutional factors that produced entrenched incumbents. If these accepted wisdoms are true, then we should observe alternations in power – or at least a substantially weakened LDP – when these underlying factors change. This chapter describes a number of important shifts since the 1990s: voter partisanship has been declining, the economy has been mired in a prolonged slump, and the electoral system was altered to encourage more robust two-party competition. Do these changes explain the LDP's ouster by the DPJ in 2009? How does the LDP's quick rebound to electoral success in 2012 fit into this picture? More generally, has there actually been a paradigm shift in Japanese democracy since the 1990s?

This essay explores these issues by reviewing the trajectory of postwar electoral politics and examining the core explanations for LDP

dominance. The literature is broken down into analyses of three time periods, which correspond to variations in the level of LDP power: single-party dominance (1955–1993), LDP defeat and electoral reform (1993–1994), and coalitional politics (1994–present). In addition to explaining the causes of LDP dominance and its eventual fall, I will also discuss some of the *effects* of the party's tenure, such as the redistributive nature of public policy and the relative salience of ideology versus clientelism in voter–politician relationships. I will conclude with some thoughts about the future prospects of government stability in Japan, focusing on the growing salience of independent voters in the last two decades.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: BEFORE AND AFTER WORLD WAR II

### Prewar Party Politics

Party politics in Japan dates back to the early twentieth century. The Meiji Constitution of 1889 established a political framework with an elected Lower House (House of Representatives) and a peerage-based Upper House (House of Peers). However, the Meiji oligarchs, who held the extra-constitutional status of *genro* or elder statesmen, jealously guarded their power over cabinet appointments and major policy issues (Duus, 1998). While all Prime Ministers until 1901 were oligarchs, popular criticism of clique or factional governments increased confrontations between the Cabinet and the elected Lower House. Faced with intractable political conflicts, the Meiji oligarchs eventually conceded the utility of electoral participation and established parties of their own. The most prominent, *Rikken Seiyukai* (or Seiyukai for short), formed in 1900 under the leadership of Ito Hirobumi, one of the main architects of the Meiji Constitution. Because the right to vote was restricted by tax qualifications, the Seiyukai served as an electoral coalition of large landlords, prosperous farmers, and business leaders. A number of alternative elite parties, such as the *Kenseikai* and *Doshikai* (each led by other Meiji oligarchs), challenged the Seiyukai's rule, but the party retained its pre-eminent status until the 1920s.

In 1925, suffrage was expanded to all males over the age of 25. As Duus (1998) notes, calls for greater popular participation in democracy had been growing for over a decade, catalyzed by the rice riots of 1918 and labor unrests in the 1920s. In 1927, the Kenseikai merged with splinter factions of the Seiyukai to form the second major party of prewar Japan, the *Rikken Minseito* (or Minseito for short). The Seiyukai and Minseito had roughly even parliamentary representation, and their alternations in power ushered in a period of party government that is frequently referred to as 'Taisho Democracy' (McElwain, 2014).[1]

As the country descended into militarism in the 1930s, however, the power and independence of political parties began to wane (Yamanouchi, Koschmann & Narita, 1998). A series of political assassinations by military cliques robbed parties of their leaders, and by the 1930s, both the Minseito and Seiyukai began to splinter internally over whether to confront or accommodate the military. Under Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro's initiative to establish a single-party totalitarian state, both parties disbanded in 1940 and joined the *Taisei Yokusankai*, or Imperial Rule Assistance Association. For the remainder of the Pacific War, competitive multi-party elections were abolished and the prime ministership came under the control of the military.

### The Postwar Decade

The end of World War II and the enactment of the 1947 Constitution brought about fundamental changes in democratic competition. The Diet, not the Emperor or Meiji *genro*, would select the Prime Minister, and members of both houses of parliament – the House of Representatives, or Lower House, and House of Councillors, or Upper House – would be directly elected by voters.[2] In addition, the establishment of universal suffrage and freedom of assembly gave voice to new socio-economic groups and progressive ideologies.[3] Amidst postwar food shortages and escalating unemployment, labor unions mobilized against the formerly privileged *zaibatsus* (business conglomerates) and major landowners. Socialists and communists – many of who were imprisoned during the war – quickly established political parties with deep organizational ties to public and private sector unions.

By the late 1940s, there was a three-way split in the Diet between the conservative Liberal Party, the centrist Democratic Party, and the left-leaning Socialist Party. The Liberals and Democrats were natural allies, as both espoused a strong security alliance with the United States – one of the main ideological issues of the day – despite disagreements about the wisdom of demilitarization. The two parties were comprised largely of conservative politicians from the prewar *Seiyukai* and *Minseito*, but rivalry between the two party leaders, Yoshida Shigeru (Liberals) and Hatoyama Ichiro (Democrats), made a permanent partnership elusive. The left-wing also experienced intra-party disputes over accepting the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the continued presence of US military bases. The Socialist Party temporarily split into the 'Left Socialists' and 'Right Socialists' – each with its own headquarters and electoral strategy – over confrontational versus accommodationist stances vis-à-vis the United States–Japan alliance.

A number of factors led to the 1955 consolidation of the conservatives into the LDP and the progressives into the unified JSP. In the 1953 and 1955 elections, the Democrats – the political centrists – won a plurality (but not a majority) of the votes. They had the option of forming a coalition with either the Right Socialists or the Liberals, but chose to rule as a minority government. This came with legislative consequences: without majority support in the Diet, the Hatoyama Cabinet faced significant hurdles to passing the fiscal budget. Labor union leaders, fearing a disorganized progressive camp and seeing the opportunity for greater political influence, urged the two wings of the JSP to reunite. The Left Socialists had its own concerns: should the Right Socialists be enticed to form a coalition with the Democrats, they could be locked out of power altogether (Kohno, 1997). Instead, it proposed a joint party, which the Right Socialists accepted in October 1955.

On the conservative end of the spectrum, business leaders were pressuring the Liberals and Democrats to form a joint party in opposition to the reunified JSP (Masumi, 1985). Competing campaign donation demands from the conservative parties were straining the coffers of business associations and led to a number of embarrassing bribery scandals. The Democrats, with a plurality in the Diet, were in a stronger bargaining position, and their leader, Hatoyama, refused to amalgamate with the Liberals unless he could be the new party's president. Personal rivalry between Hatoyama and the Liberals' senior politician, Yoshida Shigeru, made compromise difficult. However, when the JSP reunited, the Liberals and Democrats agreed to put aside their differences and form a joint front against the Socialists. In November 1955, the Liberals and Democrats formally created the Liberal Democratic Party, with Hatoyama as the leader.

## THE 1955 SYSTEM

With the consolidation of the conservative and progressive camps into two distinct parties, the political landscape was poised for the classic 'Left versus Right' partisan divide that one finds in other advanced industrialized democracies. Despite the early size advantage of the LDP, there were no *ex ante* reasons to expect the Socialists to be in permanent opposition. Given the enmity between Hatoyama (Democrats) and Yoshida (Liberals), the LDP 'marriage of convenience' could have collapsed had the party failed to win decisive majorities, returning the electoral landscape to three-party competition. Some of this conflict dissipated with the untimely death of Hatoyama, but more puzzling was the inability of the Socialists to win over the electorate. Instead of robust competition between the two ideological poles, electoral margins widened and the LDP continued to win parliamentary majorities. Indeed, the JSP became even weaker as the progressive base splintered with the founding of the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) in 1960 and the Komeito (also known as the Clean Government Party, or CGP) in 1964.

Figure 20.1 displays the vote share of the five principal parties between 1955 and 1993. One notable factor is that new political parties were durable: once formed, they survived over the entire time period. The exception is the New Liberal Club (not listed in Figure 20.1), a small splinter party of the LDP that later rejoined its co-partisans. This issue of durability is important to understanding divisions within the Japanese electorate because it signifies that parties represented deep-rooted socioeconomic cleavages, regional interests, or personalistic allegiances to specific politicians, not flash-in-the-pan ideologies.

A second interesting factor is the relative vote ratio between the LDP and the JSP. Although their vote shares converged at certain points, there was a longstanding 2:1 split between the two principal parties, prompting Japan's description as a '1.5 party system'. As Figure 20.2 demonstrates, this ratio is much larger than one finds in almost any other advanced democracy. Both Norway and Sweden come close, but in neither country does one party routinely win a majority of the seats. This gap is puzzling, insofar as opposition parties should have incentives to merge to become a viable competitor to the dominant party (Cox, 1997). The question here, therefore, is why the LDP was so successful and why the opposition remained fractured.

The following subsections will explore two issues. First, I will describe the party system between 1955 and 1993, focusing on the emergence and salience of new political parties. Importantly, I will analyze institutional and structural explanations for *why* Japan had multiple opposition parties. Second, I will look at the determinants of LDP electoral success, focusing on voter attitudes, the relative salience of ideological versus clientelistic competition, and institutional hurdles to the opposition.

### The Party System: Ideology and Institutions

Political scientists distinguish between individual political parties and collective party *systems*

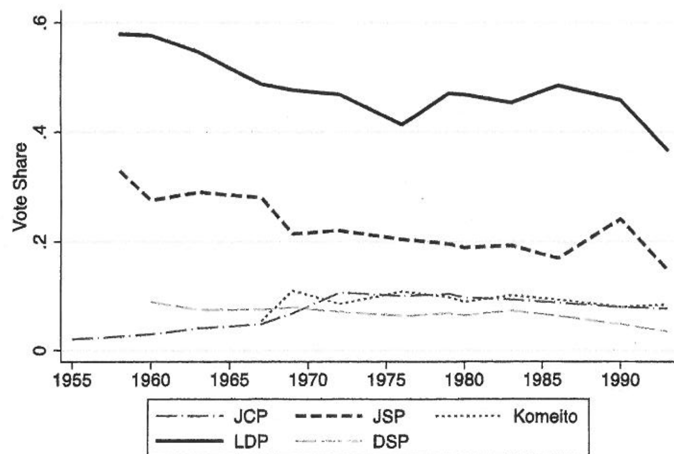


**Figure 20.1 Vote shares of political parties (1955–1993)**

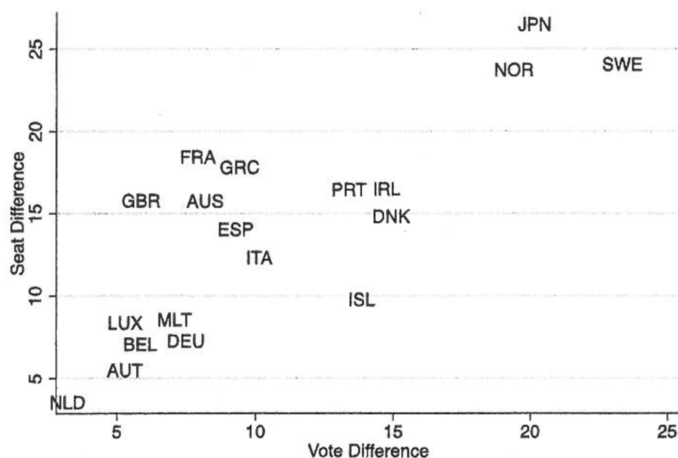


**Figure 20.2 Average size difference between 1st and 2nd largest parties (1945–2005)**

(Mair, 1997). Over the course of history, different political parties may form, merge, or dissolve, even though many descend from related ideological and structural lineages. In the immediate postwar period, for example, the Democratic Party succeeded the Progressive Party, which in turn was formed out of the remnants of the prewar *Minseito*. These parties shared members and ideological trajectories, although one would be accurate in calling them distinct political parties. However, the party *system* over the postwar decade was fairly constant. The Liberal Party was more conservative, the Progressives/Democrats tended to be centrist, while the Socialists and Communists held the left flank. In other words, Japan in the late 1940s–early 1950s could be described as a three-party or three-bloc system, even though the electoral salience of individual parties fluctuated.

In a similar way, we can examine the *party system* after the formation of the LDP. The defining characteristics of a party system are (1) the number of parties, which is strongly influenced by the electoral system, and (2) the social or ideological cleavages, which determine the types of policy



disagreements that divide parties. In other words, the dimensions are: how many parties compete, and what issues do they compete over?

## Domestic and International Cleavages

Let me begin with ideological differentiation. Political ideology is a consistent set of ideas and attitudes that reflect how we prioritize and evaluate social, economic, and political affairs. The typical differentiation in advanced democracies is on economic policies, ranging from greater government activism and redistribution on the Left to smaller governments with strict adherence to market principles on the Right. Of course, most societies are divided on more than one issue. In Japan, we can identify three prominent cleavages: *class conflict*, *regional divisions* between urban and rural areas, and *foreign policy* vis-à-vis the United States. As Kabashima (1999) points out, however, political parties' policy differences on these dimensions can be arrayed along a single spectrum from progressive (*kakushin*) to conservative (*hoshu*).[4] In Japan, conservatives tend to be pro-business and rural and pro-US alliance, while progressives tend to be pro-worker and urban and pro-international neutrality (if not anti-US alliance). Here, I will explore the three core issue areas in greater detail.

As discussed earlier, various socioeconomic actors mobilized on different fronts after the end of World War II. In one corner, the conservatives – dating back to the prewar *Seiyukai* and *Minseito* – received strong support from major business conglomerates, small business owners, and farmers. In the other corner, the progressives represented labor unions and Marxist intellectuals.

Following the formation of the LDP, the 'Yoshida School' of politics, advocating neo-mercantilism and export-driven economic growth, seized the party's reins. Yoshida Shigeru brought in many economic and foreign policy technocrats into the LDP, and ex-bureaucrats monopolized the premiership (Pempel, 1998). Much like its prewar counterparts, the LDP received significant backing from business conglomerates. The party advocated private property, low taxes, weaker unions, and market competition, albeit under the direction and coordination of the government (Johnson, 1982).[5] Prime Minister Ikeda Hayato's 'income-doubling plan' in the 1960s called for the rationalization of heavy industry, investment in education and science research, and infrastructural expenditures.

The pursuit of economic growth is not inherently confrontational, in that few politicians or voters are *anti*-growth. However, economic goals create political cleavages when the fruits of prosperity are distributed unequally. For example, business owners may generate capital gains from corporate profits by keeping workers' wages low, or urban regions may benefit from industrialization while farming in rural areas decline. The relative strength of political parties, therefore, is a reflection of the size of these economic constituencies and the ability of parties to capture their support.

Bradley Richardson (1997) attributes LDP dominance to the inability of progressives to corner labor union support in the way that the LDP encapsulated farmers and small business owners. While 70–80 percent of farmers and 55–65 percent of small-business owners supported the LDP over time, the JSP could only corral about 15–30 percent of manual workers and salaried employees (Richardson, 1997, Table 2.2). Blue-collar ambivalence to the JSP was due in part to the economic system's co-optation of labor interests. In a movement called *shunto*, or 'spring wage offensive,' unions would annually renegotiate wages with employers. This produced a continuous and incremental adjustment of compensation, which redistributed economic growth to workers and contributed to socioeconomic stability (Fukatsu, 1995).

More important, however, was fracture within the progressive ranks. In the 1960s, the unions split between *Sohyo* (General Council of Trade Unions) and *Domei* (Japan Federation of Labor). Sohyo represented public sector employees, such as teachers and hospital workers, while Domei was comprised of private sector workers (Pempel, 1998). Because public sector workers were restricted from industrial action (strikes, sit-ins, etc.), they advocated confrontational politics against the LDP; private sector unions, who enjoyed greater rights over collective bargaining, favored accommodationist tactics (Kohno, 1997).[6] Making matters worse, union membership began to fall in the 1960s. Given that most labor activism occurred at the firm level, the collective impact of coordinated union-wide bargaining diminished.

The second cleavage, between rural and urban voters, also maps onto the conservative versus progressive spectrum. In many countries, left-wing movements and socialist parties tend to cluster around urban centers, while right-wing movements are located in rural areas. This is a reflection of each side's electoral base: cities often emerge out of industrialization and the development of factories, while farmers and large landowners tend to be based outside population centers. This differentiation can be seen in Figure 20.3, which shows election-by-election differences in the relative performance of LDP and JSP candidates.

To create this graph, I first estimated the proportion of each party's candidates that were victorious by election (WIN=# winning candidates / # total candidates), and then took the difference in those ratios between the LDP and JSP ($WIN_{LDP} - WIN_{JSP}$). The vertical axis denotes this difference: a positive value indicates that a greater share of

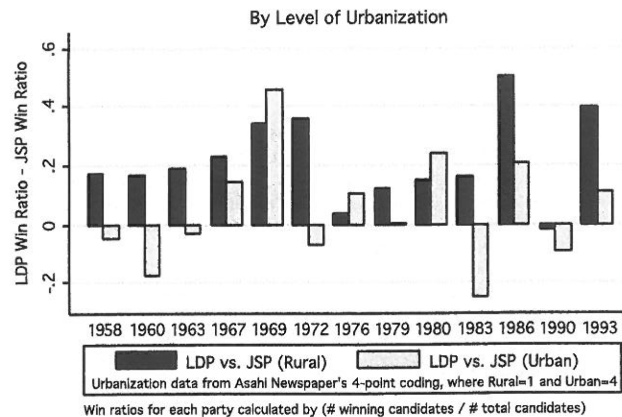


**Figure 20.3 LDP vs. JSP candidate victory ratios**

LDP candidates won, while a negative value indicates that more JSP candidates were successful. I calculated these values separately for urban and rural regions: the dark bars denote the most rural districts, as calculated by the Asahi Newspaper's four-point scale, and the light bar denotes the most urban districts.[7] While there is year-on-year difference in the performance of the LDP and JSP, we can see that the LDP almost always did better than the JSP in rural regions, while there were greater swings in urban regions.

One reason for strong rural support of the LDP is the government's redistribution of income from the richer (urban) regions to the poorer (rural) regions. Economic development narrowed inequality in the long run, but the initial concentration of industrialization in urban areas worsened regional income stratification. As Kabashima (1984) argues, however, higher levels of political participation in rural regions encouraged the LDP to solidify their support among farmers by equalizing income through budgetary redistribution. I will save a lengthier discussion of the LDP's redistributive policies to later sections on the determinants of LDP dominance.

In addition to these distributive cleavages based on urbanization and class conflict, the Japanese party system was also divided by non-structural, *ideational* cleavages. The most salient dimension was foreign policy, specifically over the United States–Japan Security Treaty and Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. For most of the postwar period, the Yoshida School, which espoused low military spending and a close alliance with the United States, dominated LDP politics (Pyle, 1996; Samuels, 2007).[8] Although the US Occupation had originally pushed for the Article 9 'Peace Clause' to limit future remilitarization, the Korean and Vietnam Wars prompted a *volte-face* as the United States increased pressures on Japan to strengthen its defense capacity. The LDP gradually warmed to overturning Article 9, although its ability to do so was limited because of the high hurdles to constitutional amendments.[9]

Progressives, on the other hand, defended the importance of Article 9 as a national commitment to pacifism. Domestically, left-wing supporters, particularly the teachers' union, drew a hard line on constitutional reform. Pacifist sentiment among the electorate made increased military spending unpopular, and opinion surveys consistently showed support for preserving Article 9 and opposition to remilitarization (Katzenstein, 1996; Samuels, 2007).

In terms of votes and seats, however, Japanese remilitarization and Article 9 were low-salience electoral issues, especially after the 1960 reaffirmation of the United States–Japan Security Treaty. The Socialist and Communist parties managed to corner some popular support for their firm defense of the status quo, and these positions paid off as electoral gains when exogenous shocks – Nixon's visit to China, China joining the United Nations, and the Vietnam War – created popular backlash against the United States. However, Miyake, Nishizawa, and Kohno's (2001) analysis of public opinion data demonstrates that most voters retained stable and warm sentiments towards the United States, favoring alignment with the US/liberal coalition over an alliance with the USSR/communist sphere. Although foreign policy attitudes developed into a consistent ideological cleavage between supporters of the LDP and the JSP, the disparity in numbers meant that foreign policy was a losing electoral basket for the JSP's eggs.



## *Electoral Institutions and the Number of Political Parties*

This analysis of ideological differentiation helps us understand what issues political parties *could* compete over; however, they do not necessarily explain which issues *will* become electorally salient. For example, while there are measurable differences in the electorate over rural versus urban, employer versus worker, or pro- and anti-US issues, these do not necessarily translate into distinct political parties. This leaves us with the question, 'Why were there *five* stable parties in Japan, with the LDP on the right, the JSP and the JCP on the left, and the DSP and Komeito in the center?' Why didn't Japan have a two-party system resembling the United States or the United Kingdom, or even *more* parties as in the Netherlands or Sweden? And given the proliferation of parties, how did the LDP manage to maintain a single-party majority instead of fragmenting, as did the progressives?

There is an extensive political science literature on the relationship between electoral institutions and the party system.[10] The underlying logic is strategic behavior by voters and politicians: rational actors will not invest resources (votes, time, money) on lost causes. If there is only one seat per district, then a winning candidate needs 50 percent of the votes to guarantee a victory. Fringe candidates should opt out of elections they cannot win, but even if they decide to compete, strategic voters should choose to support candidates with greater viability, resulting in a decline in the number of competitive candidates to two. In electoral systems with multiple seats per district, by contrast, pressures to converge around a few candidates is weakened.

Although a number of eminent scholars have examined electoral and party systems, some of the most innovative work has been done by Japan scholars. In his seminal study, Steven Reed (1991) posits the 'M+1' rule: where the number of seats in a given district equals M, we should expect to see M+1 competitive candidates. The logic is straightforward: a candidate needs to win 1/(M+1) share of the total electorate to guarantee a victory. In a one-seat district, 50 percent of the votes will win a seat, while in a two-seat district, 33 percent of the votes will do the job. To the extent that strategic behavior or simple market forces will weed weaker parties, we should see a convergence towards M+1 'competitive candidates'.[11]

From 1947 to 1994, Japan used a multi-member district, single non-transferable vote system (MMD-SNTV), where the country was divided into approximately 130 electoral districts with three to five seats each.[12] This system impacted a variety of political outcomes, such as factionalism within the LDP and the nature of electoral campaigning, but its most salient effect was on the number of political parties in the Diet. Because the average district magnitude (M) in Japan under MMD-SNTV was four, it was theoretically possible for an average of five candidates or parties (M+1=5) to be competitive in each electoral district. Prior to 1955, these five parties were the Liberals, Democrats, the left- and right-wing Socialists, and the Communists. Indeed, we can postulate that had Japan employed a single-member plurality (SMP) system, the LDP would have formed earlier and the JSP would never have split. The flipside, however, is that the two-party landscape of 1955 – the LDP representing the conservatives and the JSP representing the progressives – was unsustainable.

This institutional perspective allows us to better understand opposition fragmentation from 1955 to 1993. The first party to emerge after 1955 was the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), which formed in 1960 as an offshoot of the JSP's right-wing faction. The DSP was backed by *Domei*, the private sector workers union, and advocated greater political compromise with conservative parties and labor moderation with corporations. The second new party was the Komeito, which formed in 1964. The Komeito (which remains in operation today) is unique in Japan because its primary support group is a lay Buddhist organization, the *Soka Gakkai*. Komeito is a largely urban party with a centrist policy platform, drawing support from nonunionized workers and small business owners. The final new actor, the New Liberal Club, was established in 1976 when an LDP faction split off to protest Prime Minister Tanaka's corruption scandals, although it later rejoined the LDP in 1986. For the most part, the NLC maintained a strong partnership with the LDP and joined forces in the Diet when the latter fell short of a parliamentary majority.

The question here is why these particular parties emerged after 1955, and what effect it had on parliamentary competition. Kohno (1997) argues that the success of new political parties is a function of the MMD-SNTV system. As evidence, he demonstrates that new parties did better in districts where M=5, because the vote share needed to win a seat is smaller [(1/(M+1)=16.7 percent]. In other words, the quasi-two party system in 1955 was unsustainable because there were insufficient centripetal pressures to overcome ideological disagreements or personal rivalries within the LDP or JSP.

While the institutional backdrop is crucial, socioeconomic and structural transformations underlay the emergence of these particular parties. To put it differently, a larger district magnitude will support more candidates, but it is not clear whether we should see more conservative, centrist, or socialist parties. In the Japanese context, most

of the 'new' votes up for grabs were in metropolitan areas, where urbanization and industrialization unmoored voters from traditional allegiances in their home districts. Scheiner (1999) makes these points in critiquing Kohno's finding, arguing that although institutional structure mattered, new parties cared about electoral viability more than institutional benefits. He demonstrates that parties tended to run candidates in urban districts where voters had weaker identification with the larger parties, not where district magnitude equaled five (although the two factors overlap). This did not greatly harm the LDP, whose support base was in rural areas, the proliferation of floating voters diluted the JSP's urban support base, leading to the emergence of new parties like the DSP that fragmented the progressive vote.

## Explaining LDP Single-party Dominance: Voter Assessments and Institutional Advantages

Although the preceding section reviewed the literature on the Japanese party system, focusing on the number and type of political parties, these arguments cannot explain the overriding phenomenon of postwar Japan: *how* did the LDP dominate parliamentary politics for so long? There are three principal arguments for the LDP's longevity. First, the LDP kept on winning because most voters approved of the LDP's performance and/or its ideological platform. Second, the LDP won not because voters liked them, but because the opposition failed to provide an effective alternative to the LDP. Third, the institutional environment had built-in advantages for the LDP that allowed it to create an 'artificial majority.' The first two arguments hinge on voter attitudes, while the third focuses on the electoral system.

### Voter Attitudes and LDP Success

A commonsensical observation about elections is that candidates and parties who are more popular tend to win. However, it is not so obvious *which* factors affect voter preferences because popularity is a joint function of party identification and performance assessment. Party identification is a durable psychological attachment that voters develop towards a party, based on culture, social environment, or agreement with a party platform. Some voters will always support the LDP or the JSP because they like the overall ideological goals of the party, regardless of short-term disagreements over policy priority. Performance assessment, on the other hand, is an empirical judgment that voters form about a party or candidate at a given point in time. Voters without partisan allegiances may cast their ballot based on their approval of a government's recent performance or an opposition party's alternative policy pledges.

The party identification argument hinges on structural factors – demographic or socioeconomic identities, such as income distribution, region, or occupation – which determine (or proxy for) electoral preference. As Richardson (1997) argues, however, there is weak correlation between economic class and party attachment in Japan, especially among salaried middle-class workers. Regional divisions are somewhat stickier, especially in rural areas where the LDP has dominated the vote (see Figure 20.3). However, rapid urbanization inhibited the development of durable party attachments because voters faced different policy appeals or candidate choices as they moved to different parts of the country. Moreover, given the steady decline in the agricultural sector and the rural population, regional voter biases are insufficient to explain the continuing electoral success of the LDP.

If anything, more voters are becoming *non-partisan*, which Richardson (1997) attributes to disillusionment with repeated bribery and corruption scandals. Figure 20.4 plots data from the *Jiji Tsushin*'s monthly opinion polls, which asks respondents which political party they support. I focus on three primary options: LDP, JSP, and Independents.[13] We can see that the JSP's support has been declining since the early 1960s. By the mid-1970s, only 10 percent of voters claim to support the party. Although the LDP has remained stagnant, it has routinely outpaced the JSP by about 20 percent. By contrast, the fastest growing segment of voters is political independents.

In some ways, this is a rational response to the fickle policy stances of Japanese political parties. Kobayashi (1997) reviews the pre-election policy promises of political parties and finds that campaign platforms lack consistency and tend to be very malleable. In other words, there is very little substance or permanent ideological anchor for voters to hold on to. This raises a crucial question about political preference: if voters are not motivated by deep-rooted party identification, based on adherence to a particular party's policy platform, then what determines how they vote?

Here, we can turn to the second factor influencing voter preference: performance assessment. If voters have no allegiance to a political party, then they are more likely to make electoral choices based on perceptions about *policy competence*.[14] For example, if economic growth is strong and unemployment is low, then voters are more likely to support the incumbent government; should the economy collapse, however, then voters may prefer to turn over the reins to the opposition. Miyake and colleagues (2001) present one of the most thoroughly tested arguments about performance-based voting (sometimes called retrospective voting). Relying on monthly opinion polls of party identification, cabinet approval, and sentiments towards foreign nations, they argue that LDP dominance was built upon overwhelming *relative* support for the LDP. 'Relative' is the key term here: although LDP support fluctuated over time, opposition parties suffered even greater drop-offs.

An illustrative turning point came in the 1970s. The LDP had benefited from double-digit GDP growth in the 1960s, when 35–40 percent of voters expressed strong preference for the party (Miyake et al., 2001). However, three events jolted voter sentiment. First, the two oil shocks in the 1970s slowed the rate of economic growth. Second, the Vietnam War and Nixon Shocks[15] raised anti-US sentiment in the country and decreased voter identification with the LDP. Third, voters came face-to-face with the negative externalities of the growth-at-all-cost policies of the LDP. New issues, such as urban overcrowding and environmental degradation, prompted questions about the tradeoff between money and quality of life. This general trend is not unique to Japan, as evinced by similar changes in voter priority in Western Europe (Inglehart, 1987).

These transformations in the social, economic, and international environment should have provided the opposition parties with ample opportunity to bring new voters into their fold. Miyake and colleagues' (2001) surprising finding, however, is that the greatest growth was in the ranks of *independent* voters, that is the opposition failed to capture dissatisfied voters. They go so far as to argue that the 1.5 party system, with dueling LDP versus JSP competition, really only existed until the late 1960s and since then, the LDP's main competitor has been independent voters, whose allegiance was up for grabs. This finding is bolstered by Figure 20.4, which shows an inverse relationship between LDP support and independents. In fact, the correlation between the two variables (1960–94) is –0.74. By contrast, LDP and JSP support is *positively* correlated at 0.43 (JSP and independents are correlated at –0.65), indicating that both parties are primarily losing votes to independents, not to one another.

### The LDP'S Co-optation of Opposition Issues

The greatest failure of the opposition was the inability to attract voters who were increasingly concerned with the negative externalities of industrialization, such as rising real estate prices and environmental hazards in the major cities. Instead, the JSP continued to define themselves by foreign policy and the United States–Japan security alliance, which had low electoral salience (Miyake et al., 2001).

The flipside of the argument is that the opposition was out-maneuvered by the LDP, which co-opted emergent issues and redistributed income to protect sectors that were falling behind. Dan Okimoto (1989) argues that the LDP's laissez-faire attitude towards industrial and financial policy was in stark contrast to its activist intervention in fiscal programs that benefited their core constituents. One notable beneficiary was agriculture. In return for votes, the LDP granted subsidies for production and placed price controls – particularly on rice – to insulate farmers from international competition (Pempel, 1998; Mulgan, 2000). The main industrial group, *Nokyo* (Japan Agricultural Cooperatives), worked closely with the LDP and developed individual ties to rural legislators through campaign donations and

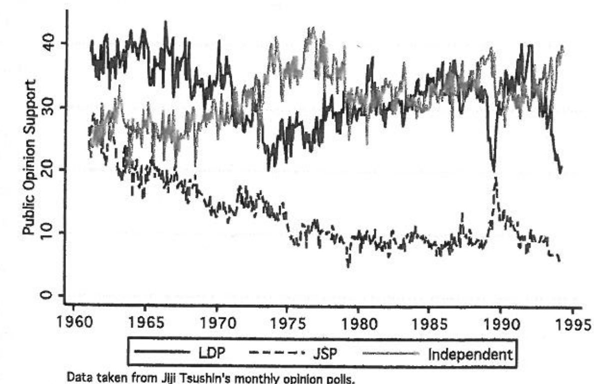


**Figure 20.4 Public support of political parties (1960–1994)**

votes. Similarly, when the LDP was pressured by foreign governments to reduce trade barriers in the 1980s, the Japanese government fought to keep quotas that protected small and medium-sized enterprises (Calder, 1988). Looking at election data, Anderson and Ishii (1997) found that increased exposure to international trade hurt the LDP's vote share because its core base in farming and construction tended to be less efficient than foreign competitors.

Indeed, research on LDP pork-barrel politics abound. Brian Woodall's (1996) definitive book on the LDP-construction industry nexus shows that the party doled out expensive public works projects and trade protectionism in exchange for votes and financial contributions. This strategy was part of the LDP's exploitation of the urban–rural cleavage, seen most effectively under Tanaka Kakuei, who served as prime minister between 1972 and 1974. Tanaka made his original fortune as a construction magnate, and as a native son of Niigata prefecture, he appealed to voters in the poorer, Northeastern regions (*Tohoku, Hokuriku*) along the Sea of Japan. Although farming had been the largest sector in these regions, urban migration had decimated local industry. Arguing that Japan needed to help those who had been left behind, Tanaka penned *Rebuilding a New Japan* (1972), an action plan calling for infrastructural developments to physically connect rural areas to urban centers, reverse migration flows, and industrialize the rural economy. Tanaka's strident rhetoric was a big hit with the public, although his manuscript caused a huge spike in real estate prices, particularly in areas he had identified for redevelopment. During and after his tenure, the LDP used the disbursement of rail and road construction as political pork. Kohno and Nishizawa (1990) employed statistical tests to demonstrate that the LDP increased construction projects immediately prior to elections to fill the coffers of construction companies, which in turn donated campaign funds and mobilized votes for the party.

Due to the government's redistributive policies, income stratification was fairly limited in postwar Japan. One common measure is the Gini coefficient, which calculates the distribution of income inequality across households. Figure 20.5 plots the Gini coefficient in Japan between 1960 and 2000 in two ways: first, using household income directly, and second, using household income adjusted for social insurance benefits and costs. Keeping in mind that high values of the Gini coefficient denote more unequal income distribution, Japan has had relatively mild income disparities despite a rapid growth in per capita GDP.[16] This is particularly apparent when examining the adjusted Gini coefficient, which incorporates the value of the government's income redistribution policies. Historically, Japan has had one of the lowest Gini coefficients around the world, on par with Denmark and Sweden and significantly lower than the United States or Great Britain.

### Institutional Advantages to the LDP

Even if we stipulate that the LDP enjoyed greater popular support than the opposition parties due to positive performance assessment of its economic management and the co-optation of opposition issues, we still need to explain the *degree* of LDP electoral dominance. Foremost is the disjuncture between the LDP's popularity ratings and its seat share in parliament. Even during its heyday in the 1960s, most surveys indicate that popular support for the LDP averaged 40 percent, while Cabinet approval ratings – a proxy for LDP leadership – was about 5 percent higher. As Figure 20.4 shows, LDP popularity has been in the low-30s to high-20s since the 1970s. Although these are sizable numbers, they are far from clear-cut majorities. How did the LDP muster a parliamentary majority in the Diet despite lower public approval ratings?

The key factor here is the postwar electoral system, which gave a seat boost to the largest political party. The magnitude of this boost is a function of the district magnitude (M), or the number of seats per district (Taagepera & Shugart, 1989; Gallagher, 1991). If there is only one seat per district, a candidate or party can win 100 percent of the seats (in this case, one) with 50 percent+1 votes, generating a seat:vote ratio of 1/0.5 or 2:1. If M=2, then a candidate/party can win both seats with 66.7 percent of the votes, generating a seat:vote ratio of 1/0.67 or 3:2. As M increases, the proportionality between votes and seats approaches 1:1. In effect, this means that a plurality party can win a majority of the seats without a majority of the votes *if* the electoral system is sufficient disproportionate.

How proportional was the MMD-SNTV system? Given an average district magnitude of four, a candidate needs to win 20 percent+1 votes to *guarantee* himself a victory; in practice, a candidate can win with less if a sufficiently large number of candidates split the vote. Empirically, the average winning vote share between 1952 and 1993 was 23.7 percent in three-member districts, 18.3 percent in four-member districts, and 15.2 percent in five-member districts. This means that the LDP could theoretically win two out of four seats (50 percent) with less than 40 percent of the district's votes, yielding a seat:vote ratio (the 'bonus ratio') of 0.5:0.4, or 1.25. This prediction is in line with the party's *actual* bonus ratio between 1955 and 1993, which ranged between 1.25 and 1.06, with a mean of 1.15.

To achieve this seat bump from disproportionality, the party needed to avoid the over-concentration of votes in one candidate. To do so, the LDP divvied up conservative support in the district by nominating candidates from different geographical hometowns (Hirano, 2006) and with varying policy expertise (Ramseyer & Rosenbluth, 1993). At the same time, the LDP tried to reduce electoral uncertainty by pressuring conservative independent candidates to stay out of the election (Baker & Scheiner, 2004).[17]

Strategic nomination coordination is only one factor that affects the translation of votes to seats. Another element is the degree of *malapportionment*, or cross-district differences in the number of voters per seat. In a perfectly apportioned world, the electorate-to-M ratio would be constant across districts. For example, each district would have exactly 100,000 voters. In Japan, however, gradual urbanization led to distorted malapportionment favoring rural districts (Ohmiya, 1992). The implication of malapportionment is that the electoral cost of a rural seat is smaller than an urban one because 40 percent in a given rural district is a smaller absolute number of votes than 40 percent in urban areas. In the 1986 election, for example, the population ratio between the most sparsely populated district (Hyogo 5) and the most crowded one (Chiba 4) was 1:5 (*Shuugiin Chousa-kyoku* 2002). In effect, the LDP could continue to win a majority by catering to a pro-LDP electoral minority in rural areas because each rural vote was more valuable than an urban vote.

An important point here is that the LDP purposely fostered and took advantage of malapportionment. While Japanese law mandates redistricting every five years, the LDP ignored this stipulation except when the Supreme Court threatened to void election results. The informal standard of the Supreme Court has been to accept population disparities of less than three, i.e., the most populous district could have up to three times more voters than the least populous one (Ohmiya, 1992; McElwain, 2008). This is still a sizable boon to the LDP because urban regions – where the opposition parties are more competitive – are serially undercounted in elections.

In addition to its effects on proportionality, malapportionment produced second-order effects on the clientelistic nature of voter–politician relations. The fiscal structure of the Japanese government is highly centralized: local governments collect one-third of all taxes but spend two-thirds of it. In other words, local governments are dependent on central transfers to fund most social and infrastructural projects. This fiscal centralization produced two effects. First, it helped the LDP redistribute income from urban areas (where it was less popular) to its rural bailiwicks (DeWit & Steinmo, 2002). Thies (1998) finds that despite gradual urbanization, agricultural spending increased as the percentage of rural electoral districts increased. Similarly, Horiuchi and Saito (2003) demonstrate that the level of fiscal transfers from central to local governments increased with the level of malapportionment in votes. The postwar economic boom made this redistributive, pork-barrel oriented strategy more effective, as urbanization left rural areas impoverished and dependent on LDP largesse to survive.

Second, fiscal centralization put pressure on local government officials to affiliate with the LDP in order to gain access to the central

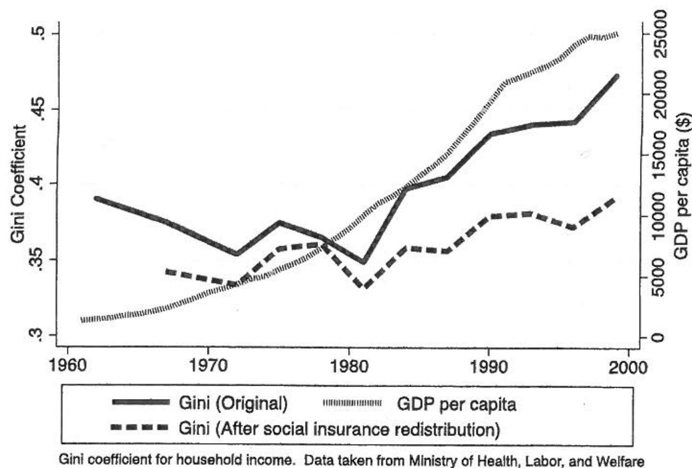


**Figure 20.5 Gini coefficient in Japan (1960–2000)**

government budget. Scheiner (2006) argues that this significantly strengthened the LDP's competitiveness in *national* elections because ex-local politicians tend to make the best candidates for the Diet. Indeed, Scheiner suggests that this was the long-term factor reinforcing LDP dominance in the Diet: candidate quality matters, especially in systems where voters care more about individual candidates than parties, and the LDP could stay in power as long as it continued to dominate candidate recruitment.

A final institutional cause of LDP dominance is Japan's restrictive framework of *campaign regulations*. *Ceteris paribus*, incumbent candidates tend to have greater name recognition than challengers. As such, challengers need more time and resources to sell their image and ideas to voters. Japan's 'Public Office Election Law,' however, is extremely proscriptive: it prohibits door-to-door campaigning, limits the amount of money that candidates can spend, and regulates the number and type of newspaper ads, posters, and flyers that can be posted during the campaign period. Of note is the limitation on the number of days that candidates are permitted to campaign. In 1950, electioneering was allowed from 30 days prior to the election date, but by the early 1990s, this window was reduced to 12 days. Crucially, the LDP made these regulations more restrictive as its popularity waned. The party's strategy was to go 'defensive': the LDP insulated itself from declining popularity by making it difficult for voters to identify viable alternative candidates (McElwain, 2008). This is consistent with Scheiner's argument that ex-local politicians make the best national candidates. Local politicians with established support bases can tap their electoral networks quickly, even in an abbreviated campaign period. The end result of this strategic electoral rule manipulation was the extension of LDP single-party majorities beyond what their overall popularity warranted.

## LDP DEFEAT AND ELECTORAL REFORM

To reiterate, the LDP's parliamentary majority from 1955 to 1993 rested on three factors. First, it was more popular relative to opposition parties due to positive performance assessments during the high-growth era and the successful cooptation of opposition issues after the economy cooled off. Second, the electoral system magnified LDP popularity by promoting opposition fragmentation and overvaluing rural votes. Third, the LDP could draw from a pool of better candidates and, once elected, these incumbents were protected by restrictive electioneering rules.

Nonetheless, the LDP *did* fall from grace in 1993 when the party lost its Lower House majority for the first time since its founding in 1955. There had been early warning signs of the LDP's demise. In 1976, 1979, and 1983, the LDP fell short of a single-party majority and had to entice conservative independents and the New Liberal Club to join the party *after* the election. In 1989 and 1992, the LDP lost its Upper House majority outright, conceding some parliamentary control to the opposition parties. However, its moment of reckoning was ultimately caused by intra-party fissures as key factions chose to defect from the LDP. In other words, the story of the LDP's first defeat hinges on percolating voter dissatisfaction *and* the short-term strategic behavior of LDP politicians.

### *Voter Dissatisfaction and Intra-LDP Fissures*

A number of factors contributed to the LDP's growing unpopularity. Beginning with long-term trends, gradual economic slowdown soured voter perceptions about LDP competence. As Miyake and colleagues (2001) discuss, a hefty portion of the LDP's popularity hinged on positive performance assessment, based on the rapid economic growth of the 1950s and 1960s. The inverse, of course, is that when the economy plateaued – compounded by the Oil Shocks of the 1970s – voter enthusiasm also faded. Postwar industrialization diminished the labor market share of agriculture, shrinking the LDP's support base. The gradual reduction of trade barriers, forced under foreign criticism of Japan's huge trade surpluses, also disproportionately harmed the LDP's core constituency.

At the same time, earlier policy choices came back to haunt the LDP. Reckless spending on pork-barrel politics had ballooned government deficits, and the LDP was compelled to institute a 3 percent consumption tax in 1989. The opposition parties, especially the JSP and JCP, heavily opposed the regressive tax, and the LDP was soundly defeated in the 1989 Upper House election. At the same time, the bursting of the asset bubble in the 1990s led to conspicuous drops in business investment and household consumption, which slowed GDP growth and raised unemployment.

Although the eventual magnitude of the ensuing economic 'Lost Decade' was not known in 1993, the illumination of high profile scandals illustrated the level of cronyism, corruption, and clientelism that underlay the 1955 system. Two salient cases include the Recruit Cosmos Scandal (1988–1989), which forced Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita and other senior cabinet members to resign, and the Sagawa Kyuubin Scandal (1993) that implicated LDP Deputy President Shin Kanemaru. In both examples, LDP bosses – mainly from the pork-barrel oriented Tanaka faction – accepted bribes or kickbacks in return for preferential government regulation (Schlesinger, 1997). Anger at corruption was evident even among allied interest groups: Keidanren (Japan Business Federation) halted automatic campaign donations to the LDP in 1993 to protest the high business costs of bribes and corruption. Although voters and interest groups may have tolerated the inefficiencies of pork-barrel politics as long as the economic pie was growing, their willingness to countenance LDP clientelism disappeared once the pie began to shrink.

Although voter disenchantment was a significant problem, a more proximate concern was the effect of corruption scandals on internal fissures within the LDP. The LDP had faced temporary spikes in unpopularity in the past, but given greater voter emphasis on individual candidates and high levels of electoral incumbency, the party had managed to hold onto its parliamentary majority. Under MMD-SNTV, voters emphasized the personal qualities of the candidates over their party affiliation. Because each district had 3–4 seats but voters could only pick one candidate, co-partisans from major parties were forced to compete against one another, as well as against the opposition party. Same-party candidates have a harder time distinguishing themselves based on ideology because they must appeal to the same pool of conservative or liberal voters. As such, candidates from the LDP, and to some extent the JSP, campaigned based on their personal competence at extracting pork-barrel projects or patronage from the central government's coffers (Curtis, 1971; Ramseyer &, Rosenbluth 1993; Kohno, 1997).

To incorporate voters into a stable base, politicians built up *koenkai*, or personal support networks, in their districts. Koenkai linked Diet members to local political elites and community organizations, and different LDP candidates wooed distinct geographical and socioeconomic segments of the district (Iwai, 1990; Krauss & Pekkanen, 2011). In exchange for votes and campaign contributions, politicians would subsidize local baseball teams, cooking classes, and chorus groups, and attend numerous funerals and weddings in their district. By contrast, LDP politicians had weaker incentives to encourage supporters to become dues-paying members of the party organization itself because those voters could end up supporting a different LDP candidate in their district. In sum, the LDP was structured as a collection of individual legislators with overlapping but not identical support bases, rather than a coalition of like-minded individuals united by ideological goals.

Theoretically, political parties are viable insofar as the benefits to legislators of membership outweigh its costs. In Japan, belonging to a majority party – the LDP – conferred (1) the ability to control fiscal redistribution and generate bribes and kickbacks, and (2) the brand reputation of the party as an effective economic manager. These benefits became less salient, however, with the emergence of high profile scandals and the bursting of the economic bubble. Given stronger voter allegiance to the candidate over the party, LDP politicians could reasonably gamble that their *koenkai* would continue to support them even if they left the party, at least in the short-run. For the LDP to remain united, therefore, it had to maintain a positive brand; it could not afford to be seen as defending political clientelism and corruption.

### *Electoral Reform as Political Reform*

Reforming the status quo could be achieved in a number of ways. The LDP, under pressure from voters and opposition parties over its scandals, had been increasing penalties for electoral corruption for over 30 years (McElwain, 2008). At the same time, the party went through a parade of prime ministers as successive leaders were accused of various misdeeds.

By the early 1990s, however, political reform had become synonymous with electoral system change. Many reformists advocated a switch from MMD-SNTV to a Westminster-style, single-member district (SMD) system. Their logic was that MMD-SNTV necessitated intra-party competition in elections, which prioritized pork-barrel politics and raised campaigning costs, which in turn created incentives and opportunities for corruption. Much of this is borne by empirical studies: greater intra-party competition is correlated with higher campaign expenditures (Cox & Thies, 1998) and corruption cases (Nyblade & Reed 2008). Prime Minister Kaifu Toshiki, who had been selected in 1989 because of his 'clean' image, linked the survival of his administration to successful electoral reform (Woodall, 1999). Ozawa Ichiro, a top lieutenant in the dominant Tanaka faction, also pushed for electoral reform, arguing that an SMD system would promote two-party competition, which would (1) increase government accountability because small swings in vote share can produce large swings in seat shares,[18] and (2) foster ideological competition because voters would have an easier time differentiating the political views of two parties than of five.

Opposition to electoral reform came from a number of fronts. The non-LDP parties supported electoral system change but were opposed to SMD, which tends to benefit larger parties over smaller ones because they require successful candidates to win close to 50 percent of the vote.

Instead, they pushed for a mixed-electoral system that would combine some single-member districts with a proportional representation tier, wherein seats would be distributed across a broader geographical region (Christensen, 1994; Reed & Thies, 2001a).

The strongest opposition came, however, from *within* the LDP. Many incumbent LDP members, especially those with established koenkai, did not want their geographical bases of support uprooted by major electoral reform (Christensen, 1994). Indeed, electoral reform had been suggested by LDP leaders in the past, dating back to the Hatoyama Cabinet in 1955, but these bills were blocked due to intra-party pushback against anything that would harm the re-election prospects of incumbents (McElwain, 2008). Ultimately, Kaifu's proposal for electoral reform was shelved because of defection threats from within the party.

Recalcitrance to reform began to melt away, however, with the Sagawa Kyuubin Scandal of 1993. As voter dissatisfaction mounted, the immediate costs of opposing electoral reform began to dwarf longer-term concerns about how those votes would be translated into LDP seats. Reed and Thies (2001a) reference a number of polls of Diet members, showing that support for keeping SNTV versus switching to a mixed electoral system flipped from 51 percent versus 20 percent, respectively, in 1984 to 12 percent versus 55 percent in April 1993. The LDP proposed a 500-seat single-member district system in March 1993, but this was rejected not only by the opposition party, but also by the Hata faction (which included Ozawa Ichiro) for being heavy-handed and unrealistic. Miyazawa, capitulating to pressure from other LDP bosses, announced that he would postpone electoral reform to future Diet sessions.

Given the weakening ties binding the LDP, however, this recalcitrance towards reform led to a series of factional defections. When the Socialist Party filed a no confidence motion against the Miyazawa Cabinet in June, the Hata–Ozawa faction of the LDP broke ranks and sided with the opposition, forcing Miyazawa to resign. The Takemura faction soon split off and created a new political party, *Sakigake*, or 'New Party Harbinger,' and the Hata–Ozawa faction followed suit and established *Shinseito*, or 'Renewal Party.' Reed and Scheiner (2003) found that these defectors shared a common profile: they were either junior LDP politicians who did not have strong koenkai and therefore needed to reach out to skeptical independents, or senior LDP politicians who were ideologically committed to reform and were sufficiently well-known that they could afford to run in a new district.[19]

The 1993 election was a watershed moment in Japanese politics because it led to the first ouster of the LDP from majority status in the Lower House. While the remaining LDP candidates did fairly well – the party actually increased its seats from 222 to 223 – the defections of the Takemura and Hata–Ozawa factions meant that the party was starting from a losing position. In some ways, the 1993 election was a transformational moment for all established parties. Kabashima and Reed (2001) found that both the LDP and JSP lost votes in districts where they had to compete against the new reformist parties, such as Sakigake, Shinseito, and Nihon Shinto (Japan New Party).

Despite the LDP's losses, however, no opposition party had enough seats to form a majority government unilaterally. Instead, all non-LDP parties (except for the Communists) joined together to form an eight-party coalition government, headed by Hosokawa Morihiro of the Japan New Party. The clear – and perhaps only – mandate of this coalition was to legislate electoral reform, but there was still internal disagreement over what system to adopt.[20] Following compromise with the LDP, the coalition government adopted a 'mixed-member majoritarian' (MMM) electoral system. Under this new rule, the country was divided into 300 single-member districts and 11 regional blocks, which would select 200 proportional representation candidates (soon reduced to 180). Voters would have two ballots: one to pick a candidate for their smaller single-member district, and another to pick a party in the larger regional block. While the plurality winner would obtain the SMD seat, the PR seats would be divided within the regional block among parties based on their vote share.[21]

This coalition government quickly collapsed after electoral reform was adopted. The JSP and Sakigake left the coalition first, and from April to June 1994, Hata and his Renewal Party formed a minority cabinet purely to pass the annual government budget. On June 30, the LDP and JSP passed a no confidence motion, ushering an end to the 9-month rule of the first non-LDP government since 1955.

The new Cabinet was a surprising coalition of the two major parties of postwar Japan: the LDP and JSP. Between June 1994 and January 1996, these two parties and the smaller Sakigake partnered to form a coalition government under Murayama Tomiichi, the first Socialist prime minister since 1948. The remaining opposition struggled to come up with a viable competitor to the LDP. For the 1996 election, the centrist groups – Renewal, Democratic Socialists, Japan New Party, and Komeito – coalesced into the New Frontier Party (NFP or *Shinshinto*) under Ozawa Ichiro's leadership. Some center-left opposition parties, including JSP and Sakigake dissidents, formed the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). The 1996 election, which was the first under the new MMM electoral system, strengthened the LDP's hold on power. It increased its seats from 223 to 239, while the JSP fell from 70 to 15. The NFP and the DPJ fared better, but they were unable to overcome the combined majority of the LDP–JSP–Sakigake partnership.



The failure of Ozawa's New Frontier Party to oust the LDP led to a new round of party formation. Komeito split off in 1998 to compete in that year's Upper House election independently, and many of the remaining progressive parties decided to join the DPJ. Ozawa himself created a smaller Liberal Party and joined the LDP's coalition with Komeito between 1998 and 2000. The LDP–Komeito–Liberal coalition remained intact until 2003, when Ozawa once against switched affiliations, joining the opposition DPJ.

As a result of significant party switching (much of it by Ozawa), the party system landscape had realigned significantly over 10 years. The JSP – now rebranded as the Social Democratic Party (SDP) – had become a minor opposition party. The NFP, once seen as the main opposition challenger to the LDP, folded after 2 years. Left standing are the LDP and DPJ – the two major players in Japanese electoral politics today.

## POLITICS AFTER ELECTORAL REFORM

The stated purpose of electoral reform was to create a two-party system that would strengthen ideological competition, party-centric politics, and government accountability. For the most part, the proximate goal – two-party competition – has been realized. However, it is unclear whether two-party politics has produced the other desired-for outcomes of electoral reform. The most obvious sign of business-as-usual is that the LDP remained in power again from 1994 to 2009, albeit in a series of coalition governments.

In analyzing the current, post-1994 state of Japanese politics, there are two pressing questions. First, is the emergent two-party system between the LDP and DPJ stable? Second, has the nature of political transactions shifted from clientelism to ideological competition?

### *Two-party Competition in Japan*

Figure 20.6 depicts the combined Lower House vote and seat shares of the two largest political parties since 1955, that is, the LDP for the entire period plus the JSP (to 1993), NFP (1996), or DPJ (2000 to present). The seat and vote sizes of the two main parties began to fall in the 1960s, as the progressive camp was split by the emergence of minor centrist parties. However, the seat ratio in particular recovered after electoral reform in 1994 as the smaller parties gradually withdrew from competition in the single-member districts. In 2009, the LDP and DPJ combined controlled approximately 90 percent of the Lower House seats, a ratio not seen since the mid-1960s, although the ratio fell to 73 percent in 2012 (more on the 2012 election later.)

The flipside, of course, is the remarkable fall in the representation of minor parties. The Social Democratic Party – comprised of remnants of the

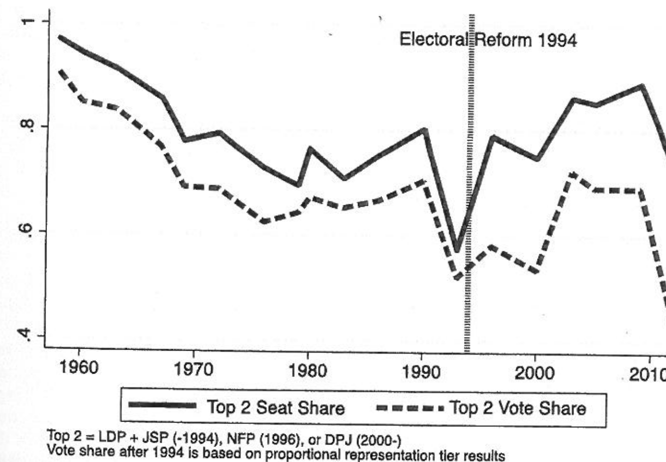


**Figure 20.6 The resurgence of the Top 2 parties**

JSP – is now a tertiary player in the Diet. Over the six elections between 1993 and 2012, they have captured, on average, 5.4 percent of the vote and 1.9 percent of the seats. The Communist Party is in a similar situation, with 8.6 percent of the vote and 2.8 percent of the seats. The lone exception is the Komeito, which has been in coalition with the LDP since 1999. Komeito is in a unique position because its primary support base is the *Soka Gakkai*, a religious organization whose membership has risen over the last two decades. The Komeito's vote share has stayed stable at about 12.8 percent, making it the fourth largest party today.

These smaller parties survive as independent entities because of the proportional representation (PR) tier of the new electoral system. One hundred and eighty seats (200 in the 1996 election) are allocated across 11 regional blocks, which means that on average, each block contains slightly more than 16 seats. Mathematically, a party would need to capture 1/(16+1)=5.9 percent of the regional votes to win one seat. This is a fairly low threshold for even minor parties insofar as they are willing to compete without any real hope of capturing a parliamentary majority.

An important caveat is that the *stability* of two-party competition depends on the frequency of party switching by legislators, which was rampant in the mid-1990s. It is difficult for elections to revolve around two ideologically coherent parties if there are frequent changes to the identity and membership of those parties. Since 1993, there have been over 100 party-switches involving LDP members, whereby a politician leaves, is kicked out, and/or later rejoins the LDP (often *en masse* with his faction). The reasons for party switching vary by case and includes generational conflicts within the LDP hierarchy (Kato, 1998), ideological disagreements about electoral reform (Reed & Scheiner, 2003), and the need to tap government funds for pork-barrel projects (Saito, 2009). Whole-scale party dissolutions and mergers have been even more pronounced within the opposition camp as the NFP briefly took up the opposition leader's mantle in 1996, only to give way to the Democratic Party after one election. In fact, none of the new parties that emerged in the 1993 election – Shinseito, Nihon Shinto, or Sakigake – currently exist. Of the pre-1993 parties, Komeito agreed to join the NFP in 1996, only to break off in 1998 and ultimately join a coalition with the LDP. The Democratic Socialists no longer exist, while the JSP has become a rump party.

A common theme of these party switches and mergers is that they involve strategic realignment by parliamentarians, rather than the bottom–up emergence of new grassroots organizations. This top–down pattern of party system change suggests that the impetus for realignment is not clear-cut ideological differentiation between the LDP and DPJ, but rather elite-level bargaining and positioning. On the one hand, electoral reform created the strongest pressure for realignment because the new mixed-member electoral system penalizes smaller parties that cannot win a plurality of seats in the SMDs. On the other, party switching continued for over a decade because of uncertainty about voter priorities and ideological cleavages. Given voter dissatisfaction with the LDP and the inability of new opposition parties to capture an electoral majority, office-seeking politicians lacked clarity about which camp to align with. This, in turn, has produced lurches towards two-party competition rather than a smooth pattern of realignment.

The ¥64,000 question, of course, is what this augers for the future. Importantly, the stability of the party system is not the same as a stable *electoral* arena. As Scheiner (2006) demonstrates, Japanese elections have traditionally hinged on the quality of candidates. Until recently, the strongest predictor of individual electoral races was candidate-level characteristics, not which party that candidate belonged to. However, Reed, Scheiner, and Thies (2009) found that in the 2005 and 2009 elections, the calculus had flipped, with weak candidates from a popular party capable of defeating strong candidates from unpopular ones. McElwain (2012) similarly noted the 'nationalization' of Japanese elections: constituency-level election outcomes are increasingly correlated, suggesting that voters are responding to similar national cues rather than focusing on idiosyncratic local factors. One manifestation of this is a rapid decline in incumbency advantage. Figure 20.7 depicts diachronic changes in the proportion of incumbent candidates who were successfully re-elected. The solid line shows this rate for all incumbents, while the hashed line does so for the LDP and the dotted line for the main opposition (JSP until 1994, NFP in 1996, DPJ after 2000). We can observe a stable 80 percent rate during the earlier SNTV system, and a temporary drop after electoral reform as voters and parties alike adjusted to new institutional incentives. In 2009, however, 45 percent of seats turned over, with 158 freshmen legislators (143 from the DPJ) entering the Lower House. By contrast, only 75 of 133 'hereditary' candidates, typically the strongest in postwar elections, won. This pattern was repeated in the 2012 election, when 174 DPJ legislators lost their seats and the LDP gained 176. In fact, the DPJ picked up only one new seat that year, demonstrating the devastating effect of swings in national public opinion.

This type of electoral uncertainty may strengthen incentives for party switching because incumbents, no longer invincible, will think twice about staying on a sinking ship. One of the effects of party switching is that neither the LDP nor the DPJ has internally coherent ideological principles.



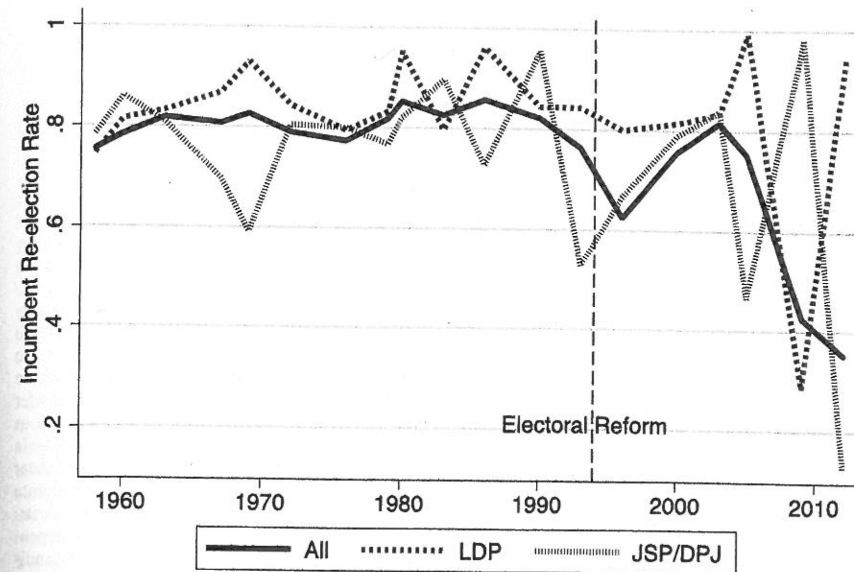


**Figure 20.7 Incumbent re-election rates fall after reform**

Overall, the DPJ can be characterized as center-left and the LDP as center-right, but each party contains members who, based on policy preferences, would be a natural fit in the other party. No one epitomizes this phenomenon as much as Ozawa Ichiro, who was considered hawkish within the LDP when he left in 1993, and after a series of transfers, ended up as leader of the progressive DPJ between 2006 and 2009. At the same time, many new parties act as temporary homes for candidates who want to leave their old homes but are not yet committed to joining the main opposition party. Not coincidentally, such new parties typically start with about five legislators, which is the threshold at which parties can qualify for state subsidies.

But this party system instability poses a new puzzle. If candidate quality no longer matters *and* parties do not offer consistent party platforms, then what has been driving electoral volatility since 2005? I shall now argue that the key culprit is the increasing salience of *party leaders*.

## The Nature of Party Competition: Leaders Trump Parties

Reformers in the early 1990s pursued a two-party system in order to emphasize ideological, policy-based competition over clientelistic, pork-barrel politics. While these concepts are intrinsically difficult to operationalize or interpret using existing data, there are mixed signs that the old artifices of clientelism are on the decline.

First, the *koenkai*, or personal support network, of individual politicians have become less salient. While koenkai played a prominent role in the first MMM election in 1996 (Christensen, 1998), electoral reform – which involved massive redistricting to transform 130 multi-member districts into 300 single-member districts – severed geographical linkages between the pre-reform koenkai and the post-reform SMD boundaries. Taniguchi (2004) reports weaker ties between candidates and other interest groups – firms, unions, neighborhood associations – in 1996 than in 1993. At the same time, Reed and Thies (2001b) argue that public financing for political parties has enhanced the resources controlled by the party organizations versus individual candidates. The decline in koenkai appears to be particularly pronounced for new, younger politicians (Carlson, 2007).

On the other hand, it is still too early to ring the koenkai's death knell. The new MMM system includes a provision for dual candidacy, wherein a candidate can be nominated in both the SMD *and* the PR list. If the candidate wins his SMD seat, then he is taken out of the PR pool. Should the candidate lose, he can be 'resurrected' based on his *sekihairitsu*, or losing ratio, which is that candidate's ratio of votes relative to the SMD winner. While PR candidates should theoretically have

incentives to appeal to their broader regional bloc, their electoral focus is actually much narrower because victory is tied to their performance in the smaller SMDs (McKean & Scheiner, 2000). The value of securing 'core votes' has also increased with the recent rise in electoral uncertainty due to the unpredictability of how swing voters will cast their ballots (Krauss & Pekkanen, 2011). At the same time, because each party only nominates one candidate per district, a party's district headquarters no longer has to divide its allegiance across multiple candidates. This allows politicians to colonize the party's headquarters, transforming it into his koenkai in all but name.

Second, factions are no longer the predominant players or cleavages within the LDP. Prior to electoral reform, each faction boss would give his supporters campaign funds and election endorsements in exchange for their support in LDP presidential elections. Single-member districts simplify candidate endorsements, however, because there is only one party slot per district. The introduction of public campaign funds also shifted the locus of money from factions to the party boss (Cox, Rosenbluth, & Thies, 1999). Factions are still important for managing career advancement in the party and allocating Cabinet positions, but their organizational cohesion has weakened (Krauss & Pekkanen, 2004, 2011).

Perhaps the most consequential change in the nature of party competition is the growing importance of party leaders. Traditionally, LDP leaders were selected based on their proficiency at factional bargaining and negotiations. This flowed from the LDP's method of selecting its president by a vote of all parliamentarians from the Upper and Lower Houses of the Diet. This system produced a straightforward incentive structure for presidential aspirants: craft majority coalitions among factions by doling out cabinet or party portfolio and allocating pork-barrel projects to key allies. At the same time, because election outcomes depended on the popularity of individual candidates, not the party label, the identity of party leaders was downplayed in election campaigns.

Two changes since the 1980s have transformed the influence of party leaders. First, media coverage of parliamentary leaders has grown rapidly, not just in Japan but also around the world. Globally, party leaders receive more news coverage, especially on television, and it has become commonplace to see telegenic leaders featured prominently in campaign advertisements (Poguntke & Webb, 2005). In Japan, Krauss and Nyblade (2005) note steady increases in the number of newspaper articles on the prime minister and the proportion of votes that rely on TV news.

Second, the LDP's leader selection rule has switched from a parliamentary vote to an electoral primary framework. Following Mori Yoshiro's resignation in 2001, the LDP decided to give more voice to grassroots members, hoping to drum up voter enthusiasm in the wake of Mori's highly unpopular tenure. Under the new format, LDP legislators kept their votes, but the party's prefectural branches were also given three votes each. This mix of elite and grassroots influence had a real effect in the 2001 LDP presidential election. While Hashimoto Ryutaro was the heavy favorite among legislators, the prefectural branches overwhelmingly voted for Koizumi Junichiro, who went on to become the next prime minister (Lin, 2009).

When voters pay greater attention to party leaders, the *electoral* value of leader popularity also increases. A leader elected in a primary is more likely to be popular among voters, simply because he *has* to be popular to win a primary. A leader selected by his peers, on the other hand, does not *need* the electorate's backing as long as he is supported by other legislators. A popular leader is valuable to his party because he can generate electoral coattails: his speeches, campaign visits, and other public actions may convince independent voters to cast a ballot for the party's candidate, even if they are indifferent to that candidate personally (Kabashima & Imai 2002; McElwain, 2009). McElwain and Umeda (2011) show that media coverage of party leader selection rises significantly when it involves an electoral primary, thereby conferring greater brand recognition to the party overall.

Importantly, party leaders can leverage their electoral coattails to obtain policy concessions from co-partisans with conflicting preferences. A leader who is selected in a primary is similar to a national president: his constituency spans all electoral districts, regardless of whether that district has an LDP incumbent. A leader selected by other legislators, on the other hand, only has to cater to the interests of that party's incumbents (McElwain & Umeda, 2011). Given the LDP's rural base, the traditional goal of LDP leader–aspirants has been to keep rural voters happy. Under the new system, however, party leaders need national appeal because his selection is contingent on votes from LDP members in urban regions as well. Accordingly, we can expect a shift in the distributive focus of LDP policies away from clientelistic quid pro quos towards programmatic public goods. Noble (2010) notes, for example, a rapid decline in the budgetary share of construction and agriculture since the late 1990s, offset by commensurate increases in social welfare and education.

One example of this reversal in policy priorities is Prime Minister Koizumi's attempts to privatize the postal system in 2005. Since postal savings have been used to fund infrastructural projects, Koizumi's proposal generated backlash from within the party.[22] Unpredictably, Koizumi fought back: he kicked out LDP members who had voted against postal privatization and called for snap elections. Despite widespread dissatisfaction with Koizumi's threats, many LDP politicians who opposed postal privatization decided to support his reform bill nonetheless. Koizumi's leverage derived from his electoral coattails: while postal privatization would weaken the government's pork-barreling powers, many politicians gambled that the reflected glory of Koizumi's popularity would make up for that loss. Indeed, campaign stops by Koizumi during the 2005 election yielded an additional 2–3 percent of the vote to LDP legislators who were running in those districts (McElwain, 2009).

There are good reasons to believe that both the LDP and DPJ are committed to running presidential primaries. First, presidential elections provide an effective campaigning venue and capture the attention of the media. When Abe Shinzo resigned abruptly in 2007, the LDP could have chosen the next leader through a parliamentary vote, but instead held a primary, ultimately electing Fukuda Yasuo.[23] The party similarly used primaries to select Fukuda's successor, Aso Taro. Second, neither party can afford to look less democratic than the other. When the DPJ went against form and used a parliamentary vote to select Ozawa Ichiro's replacement in May 2009, media and intra-party criticism over the 'anti-democratic process' was swift. Given that party leaders are increasingly visible in the media, the value of leaders who look and sound good on the evening news can be a huge electoral asset. As voter criticism of pork-barrel politics and (perceived) corruption mounts, the electoral coattails of leaders may become the most valuable asset of political parties.

The shift in leader selection method should produce a greater electoral emphasis of party labels than candidate qualities as confirmed by Reed and colleagues (2009). However, this is not synonymous with the growing salience of ideology over clientelism because the increased visibility of charismatic leaders is not identical to the emergence of ideologically coherent parties. As mentioned earlier, we can link party switching among legislators to the fickleness of voters. Politicians will leave their current home only if they think that they can win under a different label. This logic holds if party affiliation matters more (otherwise candidates wouldn't bother changing teams) *and* most voters are independents or have weak partisan attachments (otherwise they would punish defecting legislators for abandoning core ideological beliefs). McElwain (2012) confirms that elections are 'nationalizing': vote trends in one region are increasingly correlated with swings in other areas, suggesting that more voters are willing to switch their ballot to a different party from election to election. This is a relatively new phenomenon, given that vote swings themselves used to be small and regional factors (including candidate quality) trumped national issues.

If the relative attraction and qualifications of party leaders are driving this nationalization, then the key task for each party is to cultivate and market popular leaders. As of now, this doesn't seem to have been achieved, as shown by two trends. First, Figure 20.8 displays the relative proportion of the electorate that claims no attachment to a party (solid line) or Cabinet (hashed line); the

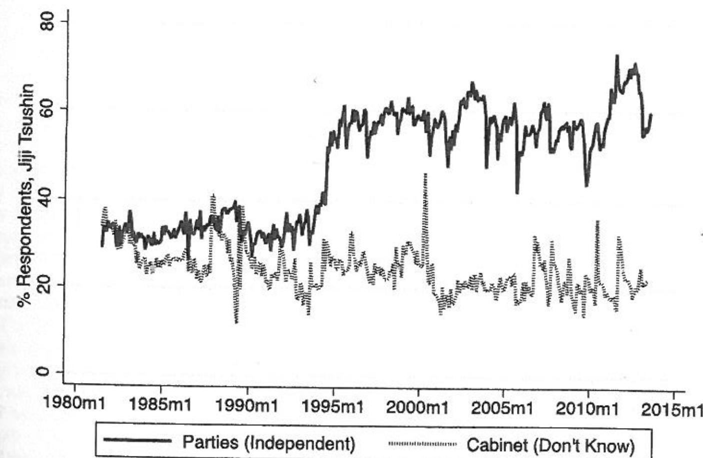


**Figure 20.8 Voters care about more than parties**

latter is a rough proxy of the popularity of the leader of the government party. Since electoral reform, an average of 50 percent of voters have no partisan attachments, while only 20 percent have no opinion on the Cabinet. This suggests that most voters do care about the identity and performance of the head of government, even if they do not necessarily care for a particular party.

Figure 20.9 depicts the shifting popularity of actual Cabinets since 2005. Here, the solid line shows the proportion of voters saying they approve of the Cabinet, while the hashed line displays the proportion that disapproves. While Prime Minister Koizumi managed to retain a 50 percent approval rating, successive leaders have experienced boom-and-bust cycles. The prime minister's approval generally spikes right after his selection, reflecting either faith in a new administration or utter disillusionment with the preceding one. However, this popularity does not last: within the space of one year, approval falls to around 20 percent with a corresponding increase in disapproval. To a large extent, this precipitous fall explains the high rate of Cabinet turnover. Because voters increasingly cast their ballots based on the image of the party leader, Diet members cannot afford to run for re-election under an unpopular leader's banner. This is a worrisome long-term trend because rapid Cabinet turnover can, itself, produce ineffectual governments and progressively lower party support. It can also reduce incentives for the Cabinet to propose structural reforms that produce long-term gains but require short-term sacrifices because there is no guarantee that the Cabinet will survive long enough to reap the electoral benefits.

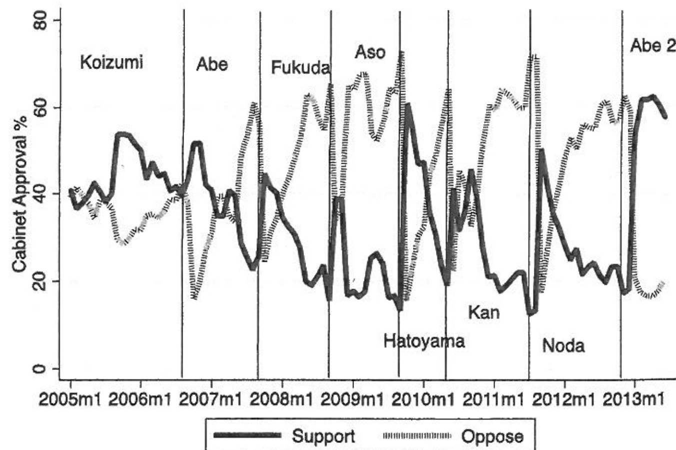


**Figure 20.9 New PM gets boost, but not for long**

## DISCUSSION: PROSPECTS FOR POLITICAL STABILITY

Over the last two decades, we have observed numerous changes to Japanese party politics. The postwar multi-party system is consolidating into two-party competition, although the DPJ's setback in the December 2012 election casts doubts as to if and when it can rebound as the chief center-left counterpart to the LDP. Although some of the artifices of the 1955 system such as factionalism and koenkai persist, their salience has diminished. Instead, the importance of party leaders has skyrocketed, which in turn has shifted electoral attention from candidates to parties (but not necessarily ideologies).

Despite these changes in Japanese politics – some superficial and some substantial – the most intriguing question of all is whether a return to single-party dominance by the LDP is likely. For parties to consistently win elections, their popularity must be anchored by deep-rooted, affective factors that insulate their candidates from adverse shocks caused by unforeseen scandals, foreign crises, and the like. Historically, LDP dominance depended on high degrees of personalism, which reduced volatility by making individual re-election independent of broader national trends. I do not believe that a return to candidate-centered elections is likely, but it is uncertain whether a replacement anchor exists today. As news consumption habits have changed, more voters now care about party leaders than candidates, but these attachments are far from stable, as seen in Figures 20.8 and 20.9. This fickleness suggests that government turnover is more likely than not because large groups of voters appear willing to change their ballot from one election to the next. Put differently, there is a good chance that uncompetitive districts today will become competitive districts tomorrow. Nothing signifies this trend as does the DPJ's enormous success in 2009 and its quick collapse in 2012. Indeed, the emergence of new local parties, such as Hashimoto Toru's Japan Restoration Party (JRP), suggests that voters are dissatisfied with *all* established parties. In Asahi's 2012 exit poll, more independents supported the JRP (28 percent) in the proportional representation tier (where voters pick preferred parties, not candidates) than they did the LDP (19 percent) or the DPJ (14 percent).[24]

With more independent votes up for grabs, party leaders have strong incentives to advocate policies that attract a broad cross-section of the electorate. Indeed, all parties now publish campaign 'manifestos,' which outline their policy goals and legislative priorities. Over time, this trend may manifest as stable partisan attachments and coherent ideological competition, but these remain elusive today. One important manifestation is the renewal of legislative party switching before the 2012 Lower House election. Ozawa Ichiro, who led the DPJ in 2007–2009, left the party in 2012, criticizing the leadership's handling of the 3/11 Great East Japan Earthquake and the Cabinet's proposal to raise the consumption tax. In the span of 6 months, he created or joined three parties – the People's Life First Party (July), Tomorrow Party of Japan (November), and People's Life Party (December).

The common thread tying recent political instability is the behavior of independents, whose ballot choices are swayed by perceptions of leader competence as much as (if not more than) the content of policy programs. One obvious sign of political competence is a party's ability to control its own caucus, but frequent party splits connote significant internal disagreement about policy and divided support for the leadership. What we are seeing, therefore, is a downward spiral of leaders stepping down when the party's popularity sinks, which makes voters mistrust the party even more, which spurs legislators to leave the party altogether, which fosters even more mistrust. According to the Jiji Tsushin, the proportion of independents climbed to 70 percent before the 2012 election, prompting 12 political parties and over 1500 candidates to try their luck. While the LDP's seat haul of 61 percent could be seen as a sign of resurgent conservatism, it is worthwhile to note that the party lost 2 million absolute votes compared to 2009, when its vote share was a paltry 25 percent. The LDP nevertheless emerged victorious because the DPJ lost *20 million* absolute votes from 2009 to 2012. Many of these former-DPJ voters decided to stay at home – turnout was a postwar-low 59 percent – or voted for one of the new political parties. According to the Asahi's exit poll for the SMD ballot (where voters pick a specific candidate), 58 percent of independents voted for the DPJ in 2009, but only 23 percent did so in 2012.

There is no reason to believe that the party system is stable now, especially after the DPJ's spectacular loss in 2012. The electoral system creates strong incentives for parties to consolidate, but it is not clear if the DPJ has the right mix of policy platforms and strong leadership to build a stable core of partisan voters. Indeed, the fickleness of leadership approval makes it difficult for *any* party – including the LDP – to hold on to the support of independents long-term. The next decade of Japanese politics is most likely to be one of continuing instability as we wait to see if a new party system equilibrium can take hold.



## NOTES

1 'Taisho' refers to the period between 1912 and 1926 – the reign of the Taisho Emperor.
2 The hereditary House of Peers was replaced with the elected House of Councillors.
3 More specifically, the 1947 Constitution expanded suffrage to women and lowered the voting age from 25 to 20. Univeral male suffrage had been granted in 1925.
4 The collapsing of multidimensional cleavages into one dimension is not unique in Japan. Kabashima argues that it is a reflection of a broader worldwide conflict between capitalism and communism.
5 A detailed examination of the government's role in the postwar economic miracle is beyond the scope of this paper, but for more detail, see Johnson (1982), Okimoto (1989), Katz (1998), Pempel (1998).
6 Because private sector unions had more bargaining leverage in the economic sphere, they did not need to resort to confrontation in the Diet. Public sector unions, by contrast, fought harder for legislative concessions in the political sphere because their power in the marketplace was less.
7 Thanks to Steve Reed for the Asahi's urbanization data.
8 This is not to say that the LDP was united internally on foreign policy. A sizable minority, tied to Hatoyama and the pre-merger Democratic Party, wanted a more muscular defense posture with greater foreign policy autonomy.
9 The Japanese Constitution requires amendments to be approved by a 2/3 supermajority in the Diet and a majority in a national referendum.
10 One of the most cited works in political science is Maurice Duverger's (1954) argument that

single-member districts (one seat per district) tend to have two effective or competitive candidates, while multi-member districts (more than one seat per district) result in multi-candidate competition. Other prominent scholars who have examined the relationship between electoral and party systems include Cox (1997), Rae (1967), Sartori (1976), and Taagepera and Shugart (1989).

11 What made the Reed study innovative was his usage of district-by-district data in a country with a distinctive electoral system. Most countries have electoral systems with very little internal variation in 'M' (e.g. every district has one seat, as in the United States or United Kingdom) or votes are aggregated at the national level, instead of by district (as in the Netherlands). Japan, however, used a multi-member district system where the number of seats varied between three to five per district.

12 The SNTV system had been used – with some brief exceptions – since 1900, although district sizes varied over time. For example, following universal male suffrage in 1925, each district had between one and thirteen seats.

13 Independent voters are comprised of survey respondents who reported that they do not have an affinity towards any party.

14 For more on economic voting generally, see Hibbs (1977), Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier (2000), and Powell and Whitten (1993).

15 Nixon Shock refers to two events in the early 1970s: (1) President Richard Nixon's decision to pull the United States out of the Bretton Woods gold standard system, and (2) Nixon's surprising visit and subsequent official recognition of the People's Republic of China.

16 Data on Gini coefficients taken from the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare. Retrieved from http://www.e-stat.go.jp/SG1/estat/NewList.do?tid=000001024668

17 There is an expansive, technical literature on candidate nomination strategy. In a hypothetical four-seat district, the LDP can win two seats with 40 percent of the vote if each LDP candidate splits the vote equally at 20 percent. This is easier said than done, however, because some politicians may be more popular than others, and voters cannot be coerced (legally) to follow voting orders from the party. At the same time, the LDP must avoid *over*-nominations (e.g. nominate three candidates who win 13.3 percent each) or *under*-nominations (e.g. nominate one candidate who wins all 40 percent) to win more seats with the same share of votes.The technical difficulty in judging nomination errors is that neither the LDP nor the opposition is making choices in a vacuum. They have to deal with some uncertainty about how voters will cast their ballots, rendering *ex post* judgments about strategic error problematic. At the same time, one side will be penalized for nomination errors only if the other side makes fewer mistakes; in essence, this is a strategic game based not only on one's own decision, but how the opposition counters its moves. Baker and Scheiner (2004) make the most nuanced analysis, based on the ability of parties to coordinate beforehand and minimize uncertainty. When the LDP pressured conservative independents to stay out of the election, it tended to have fewer nomination errors. In districts where the opposition parties made informal pacts to avoid nominating too many candidates, on the other hand, the LDP tended to do worse. For some differing perspectives about nomination errors and their causes, see Christensen and Johnson (1995), Cox (1996), and Browne and Patterson (1999).

18 Hypothetically, Party A could win 100 percent of the seats if it won 51 percent of the votes in every district. In the next contest, should Party A's vote share drop to 49 percent versus Party B's 51 percent, it could lose all of its seats.

19 For more analysis of the politics behind LDP defection, see Christensen (1994), Kato (1998), Woodall (1999), Kawato (2000), and McElwain (2008).

20 For more on the partisan debate regarding electoral reform, see Christensen (1994), Narita (1996), Hrebenar (2000), Reed and Thies (2001a), and McElwain (2008).

21 Parties must also rank-order candidates on their PR lists in order to determine *which* candidates would be allocated seats from each party.

22 In Japan, the postal system provides banking and insurance services, as well as mail delivery. Due to favorable interest rates and an explicit government deposit guarantee, postal savings is a popular financial instrument for consumers. Postal deposits are managed by the Ministry of Finance, which invests this money in a variety of public projects, under the Fiscal Investment and Loans Program (FILP). While the government is nominally tasked with allocating deposits to underprovided but profitable services, LDP politicians effectively colonized this program to fund pet infrastructure projects for electoral gain (Park, 2011). Koizumi argued that postal privatization would force the Ministry of Finance to pay greater attention to the profitability of their investments, rather than the priorities of LDP politicians (Maclachlan, 2006).

23 Although the LDP's party constitution requires electoral primaries after each presidential term, it also permits parliamentarians to pick the party president when the leader resigns mid-term. Faction bosses can also negotiate around the primary process by strong-arming challengers from running against a consensus candidate. The same can be said for the DPJ, which also only mandates party primaries after a leader's term in office expires.

24 http://www.asahi.com/senkyo/sousenkyo46/news/TKY201212160215.html



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