



Asia Program

SPECIAL REPORT

No. 139

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Japan's Political Mess: Abe Failed, Can Fukuda Do Better?

EDITED BY MARK MOHR

ABSTRACT This Special Report examines the reasons behind the dramatic political demise of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, as well as what his failure means for the future of Japan's two major political parties. **Robert Pekkanen** of the University of Washington points to electoral reforms since the 1990s as having fundamentally changed Japan's political landscape and put more emphasis on the prime minister and cabinet as the face of the ruling party. **Shinju Fujihira** of Harvard University analyzes Abe's failures as due mainly to a perceived incompetence in appointing cabinet officials and a disconnect with the electorate regarding reform priorities. **Jun Saito** of Franklin and Marshall College notes that the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), because of its stunning victory in the July 2007 upper house elections, is poised on the threshold of power. **Sherry L. Martin** of Cornell University focuses on the role of the undecided voter, especially women, in Japanese elections, underscoring that political leaders would do well to heed the voting preferences of this portion of the electorate.

INTRODUCTION

MARK MOHR

The overwhelming defeat in the July 2007 House of Councilors (upper house) elections of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was a considerable shock to the Japanese political system. After all, the LDP, since its inception in 1955, had never lost control of the upper house. In addition, Abe was following as prime minister the extremely popular Junichiro Koizumi. Abe himself, when he took office in the fall of 2006, had a popularity rating of over 70 percent, yet a little over a year after he took office, he resigned, his administration in shambles. What went wrong? How did Abe lose his popularity so quickly? What lessons can the LDP learn from this defeat so as to avoid a similar

fate in the next, House of Representatives (lower house) election, which determines who will control the government? Is the opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the victor in the upper house election, now in the ascendant? These and other questions were discussed at an October 31, 2007, symposium at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. The four essays that follow examine Koizumi's legacy, the reasons for Abe's failure, the current status of the DPJ, and the nature of the changing Japanese electorate, in which the undecided vote is growing. Together, they provide analytical depth to the results of the upper house election, pointing to reforms that began over a decade ago and which continue to impact the body politic today.

In the first essay, **Robert Pekkanen**, chair of the Japan studies program and assistant professor at

the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington, evaluates the political legacy of former (and extremely successful) prime minister Junichiro Koizumi. He notes that most reforms of the Koizumi era grew out of the political changes of the 1990s in the lower house of Japan's Diet, or parliament, rather than originating from Koizumi himself. Pekkanen explains that from the inception of the LDP in 1955 until the 1993 election, Japan was under what is commonly called the '55 System. Under this system, districts elected multiple representatives, and voters marked their ballots for only a single candidate. Parties were not permitted to transfer the votes cast from a more successful candidate to a less successful one in order to win more seats—circumstances which placed a premium on name recognition of the candidate over value of the party's label. The new hybrid mixed-member electoral system in place since 1993 gives more value to the importance of the party label.

Pekkanen argues that the changes apparent in Koizumi's leadership, in dealing with factions, the importance of the cabinet, and the central role of the prime minister, all had their origins in the political reforms of the 1990s, and all continued under prime ministers Abe and Fukuda. He notes that under the '55 System, factions were the determining factor in selecting the LDP party president, but points out that, despite media and public perceptions to the contrary, current Prime Minister Fukuda's campaign for the party presidency showed a different character than the earlier horse-trading, particularly in the fact that factions split their votes and transfactional alliances won the day. Fukuda, he asserts, like Koizumi and every other recent LDP party president, was not chosen in the way that earlier leaders were.

Koizumi also famously exercised his independence in choosing his cabinet, disdaining the faction-

al formulas that had served as the basis for cabinets in the past. Factional balancing, the trait of making sure factions were represented in the cabinet in roughly the same strengths they held in the legislature, was a game Koizumi said he would not play. However, here again Pekkanen notes that none of the LDP prime ministers after 1993 have played that game as their predecessors did. Comparing the Abe and Fukuda cabinets, Pekkanen sees that both continued the basic trends of not balancing factions and appointing a greater percentage of non-legislators and women to cabinet posts.

While the cabinet is increasingly important to the LDP's electoral success, Pekkanen asserts that the position and personality of the prime minister is even more important. Other factors involved in Japan's changing political landscape include electoral reform, which raised the value of the party label in voting, and the increasing ability of the media to affect voters' perceptions. Koizumi dominated media attention throughout his tenure, but again, states Pekkanen, Koizumi merely symbolized a deeper trend. Increasingly, and in no small amount because of television, voters see the prime minister as becoming an independent factor influencing their view of the party, and thus their ballot decision. Pekkanen concludes that these aspects of the LDP—weaker factions, more important cabinets, and a larger prime ministerial role in elections—that were characteristic of Koizumi's tenure are actually part of a fundamental transformation growing out of the political reforms of the early 1990s. Both Abe and Fukuda continued these basic trends. But these trends above all emphasize party and personality. Therefore, the LDP has a lot riding on Fukuda's success. He will either be able to sustain his initial popularity for many years, predicts Pekkanen, or flame out quickly.

In the second essay, **Shinju Fujihira**, associate director of the program on U.S.-Japan relations at

THE ASIA PROGRAM

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the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs of Harvard University, explores the reasons for the failure of the Abe administration. It all started very well, notes Fujihira: Abe's first cabinet, formed in September 2006, had an initial approval rating of 71 percent. At age 52, Abe was the youngest prime minister and the first to have been born after World War II. His distinguished family lineage—he was the grandson of former Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi and the son of former Foreign Minister Shintaro Abe—added a sense of grandeur to his image. Yet, by the time of his resignation in September 2007, Abe had been prime minister for only 366 days, the seventh shortest tenure among the 28 prime ministers in postwar Japan. What went wrong?

One obvious problem, echoing Pekkanen's point about the importance of choosing a cabinet, was that Abe's track record in this area was disastrous. Five ministers resigned over various scandals, and one committed suicide. Another, the minister of health, labor and welfare, who did not resign, nonetheless referred to women as "child-bearing machines." Finally, there was the devastating revelation in the spring of 2007 that the Social Insurance Agency lost track of over 50 million public pension records. What especially alienated voters most was Abe's lackluster response to opposition questioning in the Diet over this issue. Abe said that he wanted to avoid inciting fear among the public rather than immediately getting to the bottom of the record-keeping problems. As he prepared his party for the House of Councilors' election in July, Abe could not escape the criticism that he often chose incompetent officials to serve in his government.

Adding to Abe's woes brought on by the competency issue was the fact, according to Fujihira, that Abe's vision for the country reflected a basic disconnect with the priorities of the electorate. Abe's priorities were education, defense, and constitutional reform. In these areas, Fujihira points out, he made significant progress. Four education-related bills were passed during Abe's tenure. The Japan Defense Agency was upgraded to the Ministry of Defense. And the national voting law, passed in May 2007, specified the legal provisions for conducting a national referendum for constitutional revision for the first time in postwar Japan.

The problem for Abe, however, was that public opinion polls throughout this period clearly and

consistently indicated that a majority of voters identified welfare (such as social security reform) and economic issues (e.g., job creation) as their top priorities. They ranked Abe's ideological priorities such as constitutional reform at or near the bottom. At the end of the day, Abe was simply unable to convince voters that his priorities were more important than their concerns over "bread and butter" issues. On economic and welfare issues, asserts Fujihira, Abe lacked the kind of passion that he exhibited over constitutional and defense-related issues. It was this disconnect with the voters, coupled with the perception of incompetence in choosing cabinet officials, Fujihira concludes, which led to the LDP defeat in the House of Councilors' election and Abe's subsequent resignation.

Jun Saito, assistant professor in the department of government at Franklin and Marshall College, examines in the third essay the growing influence of Japan's main opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). The DPJ, as has been previously noted, secured a stunning victory in the Japanese upper house elections this past summer. Saito attributes the upper house result due at least as much to LDP weaknesses as DPJ strengths.

He notes, echoing Fujihira, that Abe and his cabinet were extremely incompetent in containing scandals. In addition, Saito asserts that the LDP's electioneering team performed much more poorly than the DPJ's. The LDP's policy slogan, for example, was to "Make Growth Real." The LDP's economic platform, according to Saito, looked as if it were written by the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund. For rural voters who had provided stable support for the LDP for decades, this slogan did not make much sense, as real income had ceased to grow for almost a decade. The DPJ's policy platform, on the other hand, was oriented more toward distributive policy packages. Consequently, in the July upper house election, the DPJ performed disproportionately well in the LDP's former rural strongholds.

Whatever the reasons for its victory, Saito asserts that the DPJ is now well situated to affect Japanese politics. It can decide the fate of bills in the Diet; although the LDP (along with its junior coalition partner, the Komei party) can theoretically override the upper house's decision with a two-thirds majority vote in the lower house, this would not meet with the approval of the electorate, resulting in

plummeting approval rates. Moreover, the next upper house election is not until 2010. Upper house incumbency will bring a significant amount of political resources to local DPJ organizations, which were previously weak. These DPJ upper house members will also serve as an important resource for the day-to-day activities of DPJ candidates for the lower house.

Saito further argues that since the lower house electoral reforms of the 1990s (mentioned prominently by both Pekkanen and Fujihira), Japan has been gradually moving toward a two-party system, and the DPJ has been the main beneficiary of this trend. Turning to an examination of the DPJ itself, he concludes that it is basically a centrist party characterized by political pragmatism, noting that even if the DPJ were to seize control of the government, a radical change in diplomatic as well as domestic policy is unlikely to take place.

In the final essay, **Sherry L. Martin**, assistant professor at Cornell University, jointly appointed in the government department and the program in feminist, gender, and sexuality studies, looks specifically at the impact on the political system of the important category of nonpartisan voters, those unaffiliated with any party. She points out that, depending on when voters are polled (i.e. how proximate to an election), between one-quarter and two-fifths of the Japanese electorate has claimed not to support any particular party in the system. And women constitute a majority of unaffiliated voters—research has shown that this was true even in the 1960s and 1970s.

Looking first at the 2005 lower house elections, she observes that a gender gap in voting had opened up among nonpartisan women and men. Nonpartisan women, despite Koizumi's seeming appeal, overwhelmingly supported the DPJ, while nonpartisan men supported the LDP. Differences in attitudes about security and defense increased the odds that women and men would vote for different parties. In 1976, approximately 30 percent of men and 14 percent of women agreed with the statement, "Japan's defense force should be strengthened." By 2005, the approximately 30 point gap between men and women on this issue was at its largest in thirty years. Also in 2005, social welfare was an important factor for women choosing between the LDP and the DPJ. Women who felt strongly that social welfare provisions should not be

limited to the elderly and disabled were more likely to support the DPJ

Thus for Martin, given the gender-based patterns in issue preferences and party support in 2005, the outcome of the 2007 upper house election could have been predicted. Despite concerns expressed in the media that nonpartisan women would be reluctant to vote for the DPJ in 2007, these voters had already demonstrated their willingness to vote for the DPJ in 2005. The goal for the DPJ now, after its victory in last summer's upper house elections, states Martin, should be to maintain this support and build stronger affective ties with this important segment of the electorate.

Unfortunately, according to Martin, neither party has articulated a substantive policy agenda that proposes accessible and effective solutions to the pressing social concerns that Japan now faces, such as a declining population and shrinking labor force. In 2005, the DPJ won the support of women without having to establish a substantive position. After exposing the missing pension records in 2007, the party only had to position itself as an alternative to the LDP. In the future, the DPJ can hold the support of nonpartisan women, and further its strength among women more generally, only if it is able to frame strong policy alternatives that are a substantive contrast to the LDP.

In conclusion, the four essays that follow are in agreement that while former Prime Minister Koizumi was brilliant in taking advantage of the Japanese political and electoral system, it was the political and institutional reforms of the 1990s which gave him that opportunity. Koizumi's successor, Shinzo Abe, proved not as astute as his predecessor. Furthermore, he was beset by scandals which he mismanaged. There was also a severe disconnect between Abe's priorities (constitutional, defense and education issues) and those of the electorate (social welfare and job creation) which Abe was never able to overcome.

Adding to this mix, the electorate itself is restless, with the percentage of undecided voters remaining large. Women make up a majority of these undecided voters. They seem to place a greater priority on the same social and economic issues which Abe did not address well. To succeed, current Prime Minister Fukuda would do well to heed the lessons that Abe seemed not to have learned. The same message is equally applicable to Ichiro Ozawa, leader of Japan's main opposition party.

WHAT IS KOIZUMI'S LEGACY? EVALUATING CHANGE IN FUKUDA'S LDP

ROBERT PEKKANEN



Talk about a tough act to follow! Former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi radiated style and personality, sustained implausibly high public approval ratings, and led the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to its greatest ever electoral triumph in 2005. His suc-

cessor would almost inevitably suffer by comparison. Nevertheless, few expected Shinzo Abe's reign to be so disastrous. It certainly started well, with record approval ratings. However, it ended in tears. Under Abe's leadership, the LDP was thoroughly routed in the House of Councilors (the upper house in Japan's bicameral legislature) election in July 2007. For some weeks, he resisted pressure to resign, but then unexpectedly quit in September 2007, just days after announcing to the legislature his intention to stay and push through a renewal of refueling legislation. Koizumi and Abe seem polar opposites, at least in terms of their success. Yasuo Fukuda's subsequent election as party president of the LDP raised the specter in the press of the return of factional politics. This all begs two questions. First, how much did Koizumi change the LDP? Second, how will Fukuda do?

THE KOIZUMI EFFECT

After his famous threat to destroy the party, the LDP under Koizumi behaved differently than it had under the '55 System, when the LDP maintained electoral dominance over the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) from 1955-1993 under the peculiar Single Non-Transferable Vote Multi-Member District (SNTV MMD) electoral system. (Under this system, districts elected multiple representatives, and voters marked their ballots for only a single candidate. Parties were not permitted to transfer the votes from

a more successful candidate to a less successful one in order to win more seats—circumstances which placed a premium on name recognition of the candidate over value of the party's label.) Surprisingly, however, following Koizumi both Abe and Fukuda continued many important reform trends that had been in place since the mid-1990s. Looking beyond headlines, we can trace how today's LDP fundamentally differs from earlier incarnations. In many ways, Koizumi simply exemplified these changes most clearly, but no post-'55 System prime minister is immune from them. In fact, the sharp contrast between Koizumi and Abe is itself driven by underlying transformations in Japanese politics: the increased importance of the media, and the greater significance of the prime minister. Below I will focus on these underlying changes in three areas, each of which was a signature area for Koizumi: factions, cabinets, and elections.

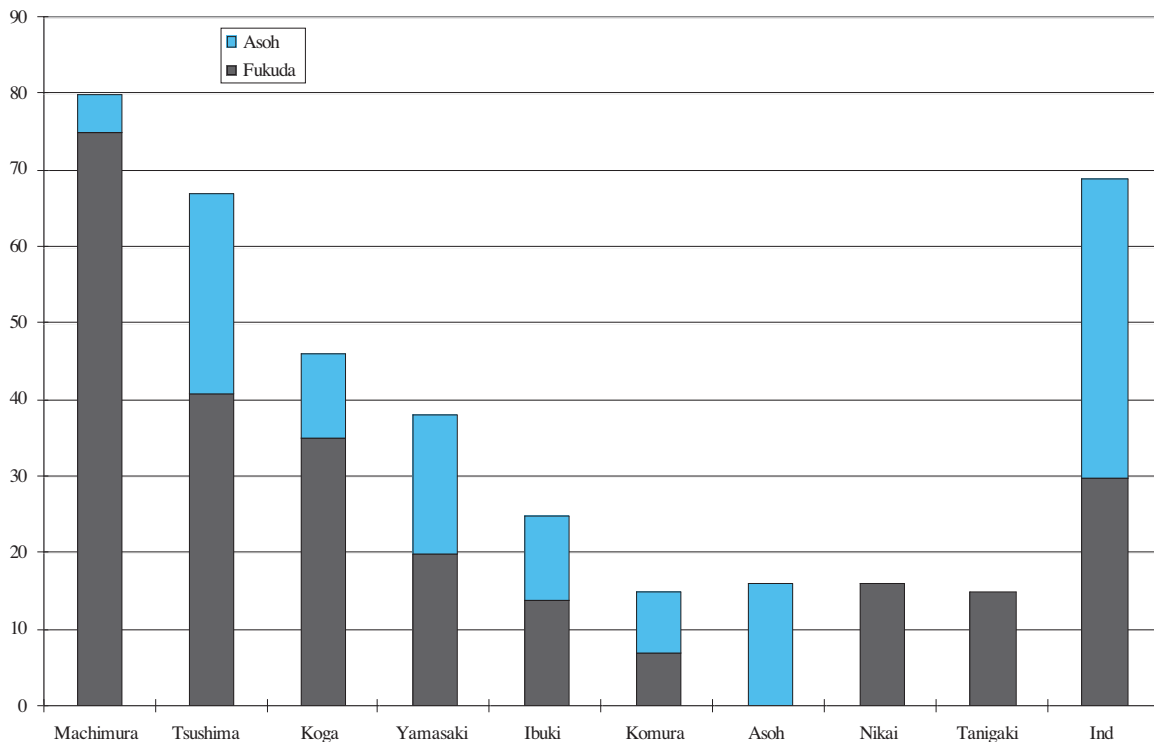
FACTIONS AND FINDING FUKUDA

Like Abe, Fukuda became prime minister thanks to a majority generated by Koizumi. Opposition leaders such as Yukio Hatoyama of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) labeled Fukuda a product of the smoke-filled room dealings of the LDP's past. Press reports touted the revival of factions as a driving force in choosing the party president. However, there is much less to this than meets the eye; there has been no return to faction leaders as king-makers.

Under the '55 System factions were the determining factor in selecting the LDP party president, who always became the prime minister. Rival faction leaders stacked up their votes like blocks, trying to reach the minimum winning coalition of 50 percent+1 votes. The competition was usually personal and sometimes very personal, and fairly close to naked power grabs. What mattered was how the faction bosses could line up the votes: they decided everything.

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CHART 1: VOTES FOR LDP PARTY PRESIDENT 2007 BY FACTION



Source: Author analysis based on multiple media reports in Japanese press, September 2007.

That all changed when the LDP changed the rules for selecting the party president in the 1990s, giving non-legislators a much larger voice in the process.

Fukuda's campaign for the party presidency showed a different character than the earlier horse-trading. There were no blood oaths.

Fukuda's campaign for the party presidency showed a different character than the earlier horse-trading. There were no blood oaths. Instead, faction leaders discussed the choices with their members, sometimes even asking for their permission to take a certain course of action. More importantly, factions split their votes. This was not factional bloc voting. Far from it, transactional alliances won the day and members decided this election as much as their leaders. Chart 1 above shows how factions split their votes between candidates Fukuda and Taro Asoh.

Koizumi was another beneficiary of the new way LDP party presidents and thus prime ministers are chosen. The mistaken charges of factional revival for Fukuda cloud the fact that Fukuda, like Koizumi and every other post-'55 System LDP party president, was not chosen in the way that earlier leaders were.

CABINETS

Koizumi also famously exercised his independence in choosing his cabinet, disdaining the factional formulas that had served as the basis for cabinets in the past. On the other hand, Abe was criticized for forming a cabinet stocked with his friends and ideological fellow travelers. However, a deeper analysis shows that Koizumi and Abe—and indeed Fukuda—have much more in common with each other. There is a distinct pattern to their cabinets shaped by the new electoral realities facing the party. Recent research I have conducted with Ellis Krauss and Benjamin Nyblade shows how this works.¹

Cabinets are crucial for parties. Cabinet ministers are the “face” of the party, and cabinets are often the

locus for decision-making. Not incidentally, most legislators harbor deep ambitions to sit in the cabinet. Any party has to balance these goals in allocating cabinet positions. The electoral system in place in Japan through the 1993 election, the previously mentioned SNTV MMD system, devalued party label and made elections often a contest among LDP candidates. The new hybrid mixed-member electoral system forces the LDP to place a premium on policy-making and generating votes from the popularity of cabinet members.

Many of the most celebrated aspects of Koizumi's cabinet-making were simply expressions of these new realities. While Koizumi might have grasped this more clearly than others, his cabinets were in fundamental ways very similar to those of other post-'55 system prime ministers. For example, factional balancing—the trait of making sure factions are represented in the cabinet in roughly the same strengths they hold in the legislature—was a game Koizumi said he wouldn't play. However, *none* of the LDP prime ministers after 1993 have played that game as their predecessors did. Average proportionality has declined sharply from 1980-1993 (87 percent) to 1996-2005 (74 percent). Seniority is also much less important. Previously, LDP cabinet ministers arrived in lock-step. Seniority determined when one became a minister. From 1980-1993, 96 percent of cabinet appointments were at the predicted time, and none were early. From 1996-2005, however, the on-time ratio declined to 85 percent and 7 percent of appointments came early.

Handing out a cabinet appointment to a non-legislator is a dangerous game. Every legislator save the PM covets these posts, the highest to be had. Career ambitions played a role in tearing the LDP asunder in the past, and doling out these posts to civilians is playing with fire. As policy-making has become a relatively more critical function in the cabinet, though, the benefits of getting an outside expert are more important. Accordingly, we see a huge increase in non-legislators sitting in cabinet. Koizumi's appointment of Takenaka made news, but it was not really that exceptional. By duration, we see non-legislators becoming ministers nearly 15 times more often after electoral reform as before. Electoral reform also dramatically improved the chances of women finding their way into cabinet. Compared to the period from 1955-1993, women are now more than *twenty* times as likely to be in the cabinet.

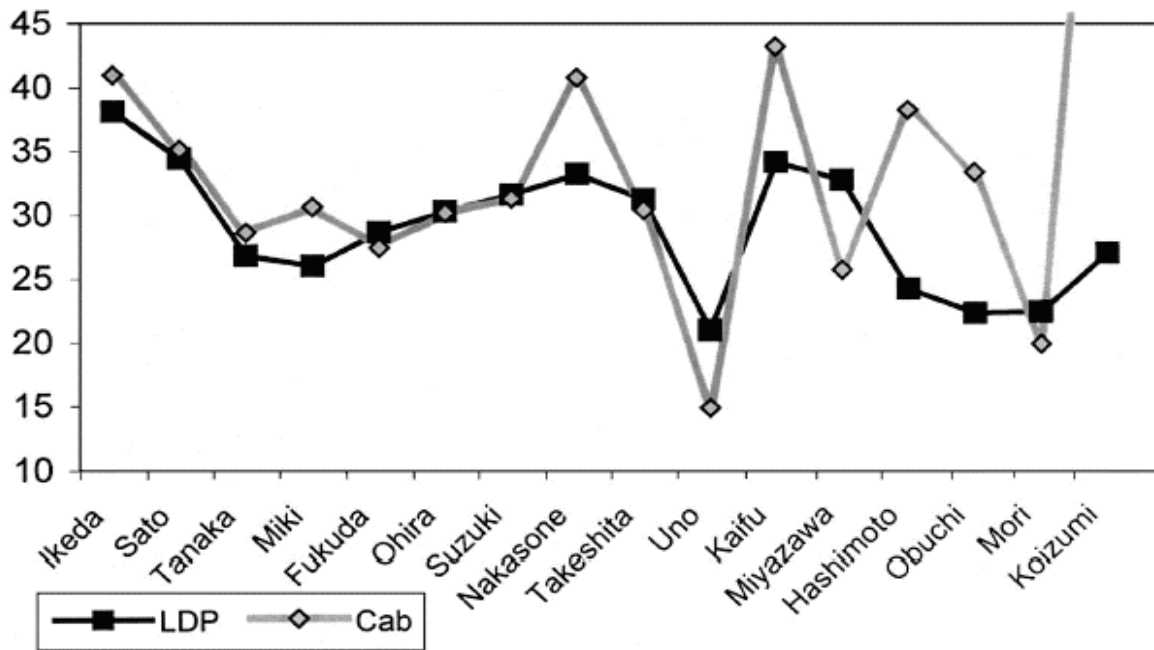
If we compare the Abe and Fukuda cabinets, we see that they both continued these basic trends. However, it is possible to also glimpse some evidence that Fukuda grasped this fundamental transformation more fully than Abe did. Abe's first cabinet had a slightly higher than average proportionality (76.6 percent) while Fukuda's was a bit under the average. Abe made three early appointments while Fukuda made four. Neither made any late appointments and both appointed the same number of women ministers (11.1 percent). Fukuda had more non-legislators (11.1 percent to 5.6 percent). One should not make too much of this, though, as Fukuda and Abe are much closer to each other and to Koizumi than they are to the '55 System prime ministers. It's just that Fukuda is a bit further along the curve than Abe.

The cabinet is increasingly important to the LDP's electoral success. The prime minister is even more important.

ELECTIONS

The cabinet is increasingly important to the LDP's electoral success. The prime minister is even more important. The prime minister's importance has risen because of several factors. Electoral reform raised the value of the party label in voting. This is true not only because there is now a proportional representation vote, where voters mark a ballot for their preferred party. Compared to SNTV MMD, even the single member district (SMD) part of Japan's electoral system places a premium on the party label. After all, choosing among multiple LDP candidates by definition means the LDP label is less important in choosing how to vote. Administrative reform and other restructurings have strengthened the prime minister's policy making powers, too. Even more important is how the media affects voters' perceptions.² Koizumi dominated media attention throughout his tenure. This reached a near fever pitch in the September 2005 election, when Koizumi and "the assassins" (high-profile or celebrity candidates run by the LDP against Koizumi's opponents) saturated the coverage. Again, Koizumi

CHART 2: CABINET AND PARTY SUPPORT BY LDP PRIME MINISTER, 1960–2001



Source: Ellis S. Krauss and Benjamin Nyblade, “‘Presidentialization’ in Japan? The Prime Minister, Media and Elections in Japan.” *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 34 (April 2004): 357–368

just symbolizes a deeper trend. In surveys taken since the 1970s, voters increasingly respond that television plays an important role in their decision making. Krauss and Nyblade have demonstrated how voters’ images of the prime minister (measured by Cabinet approval rating) began to diverge from their baseline assessment of the party in the 1980s (See Chart 2, above). Increasingly, how voters see the prime minister is becoming an independent factor influencing their view of the party, and thus their ballot decision. This means that there will be more higher highs, like Koizumi, and more lower lows, like Abe and Mori. It also implies that we will see more booms and busts.

CONCLUSION

What about the questions raised in the first paragraph? Along the dimensions I have examined, we see that these aspects of the LDP—weak factions, more important cabinets, and larger prime ministe-

rial role in elections—that Koizumi headlined are actually part of a fundamental transformation. Both Abe and Fukuda continued these basic trends. However, we can glimpse at least a smidgen of evidence that Fukuda has been more responsive to these trends. Fans of Fukuda might argue that this is a good omen for his success.

For the LDP, a lot rides on Fukuda’s success. Precisely because of that, we are more likely to find Fukuda riding high for many years as a successful leader or flaming out quickly.

ENDNOTES

1. Robert Pekkanen, Benjamin Nyblade, and Ellis S. Krauss, “The Logic of Ministerial Selection: Electoral Reform and Party Goals in Japan,” unpublished manuscript. The analyses of cabinets throughout this paper are part of this collaborative work.
2. Ellis S. Krauss and Benjamin Nyblade, “‘Presidentialization’ in Japan? The Prime Minister, Media and Elections in Japan.” *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 34 (April 2004): 357–368.

LEGACIES OF THE ABE ADMINISTRATION

SHINJU FUJIHIRA



This paper describes and explains what I consider to be the five core characteristics of the Abe administration. First, it lasted for a relatively short time. Shinzo Abe was prime minister for 366 days, which ranks as the seventh shortest tenure among 28 prime ministers in postwar Japan, less

than one-third the length of his grandfather Nobusuke Kishi (1,241 days), less than one-fifth that of his predecessor Junichiro Koizumi (1,980 days), and shorter than the profoundly unpopular tenure of Yoshiro Mori who preceded Koizumi (387 days). Second, despite his short tenure, the Abe administration was notable for its conservative ideological ambition and its ability to pass laws that reflected Abe's core convictions, especially those relating to education, defense, and constitutional reform. Third, in foreign policy, the Abe administration should take credit for mending Japan's relations with its Northeast Asian neighbors and advocating a "value-based diplomacy" (*kachikan gaiko*), but it also faced unexpected frictions in the U.S.-Japan alliance.

Fourth, in terms of its domestic agenda, the Abe administration was ultimately unable to reconcile its avowed commitment to economic reform with its efforts to rectify the adverse effects of Koizumi's reforms, especially the so-called "stratified society" (*kakusa shakai*). It did not help that Abe was criticized for his slow response in addressing the Social Insurance Agency's mishandling of millions of pension records in the spring of 2007. Fifth, Abe's government was engulfed by an unusually large number—even by Japanese standards—of scandals and verbal gaffes, which severely tarnished its reputation. Five resignations of cabinet ministers and a shocking suicide by a sitting minister within one year were unprecedented in Japan's postwar history. In July 2007, facing voters' anger over scandals and the lost pension records, Abe and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) entered the

House of Councilors (the upper house in Japan's bicameral legislature) election utterly unprepared. While he did not resign until September 12, Abe's ability to govern had largely vanished after the LDP's historic loss in that election.

What explains these five core characteristics of the Abe administration? My paper's central argument is that Japan's new institutional environment fundamentally clashed with Abe's leadership style. On the one hand, the administrative reforms of the Ryutaro Hashimoto cabinet (1996-98) established the new Cabinet Office and strengthened the prime minister's leadership capabilities from his official residence (*kantei*), and have enabled the prime minister to set a strong direction for policymaking in a top-down fashion. Various descriptions of the *kantei* system include "kantei leads" (*kantei shudo*), "kantei diplomacy" (*kantei gaiko*), and "prime minister rules" (*shusho shihai*), the prime minister now has significantly more institutional resources for exercising political leadership in domestic law-making and foreign policy.¹ At the same time, the electoral reform of 1994 has transformed elections into a contest between the party leaders of the incumbent LDP and the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), who must respond to and persuade public opinion in a "bottom-up" fashion. Abe entered this institutional environment, emphasizing that he was a "fighting politician" (*tatakau seijika*), who would fight for his own convictions, even when he was confronted by harsh critics. In adopting this stance, Abe effectively utilized the institutional resources of the Hashimoto reforms to exert his policy preferences in a "top-down" fashion, but he was less adept at persuading the public toward his policy preferences in a "bottom-up" fashion.² The disjuncture between the demands of political leadership in Japan's new institutional environment and Abe's leadership choices explains, on the one hand, his impressive conservative legislative victories, and on the other, his inability to respond effectively to public opinion swings that ultimately led to the LDP's historic loss in the House of Councilors election. The discussion below elaborates

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on the five core characteristics of the Abe administration, and illustrates the interaction between Abe's leadership style and Japan's new institutional environment.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's tenure will certainly be remembered for the way it began and especially the stunning way it ended.

ABE'S POPULARITY AND RESIGNATION

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's tenure will certainly be remembered for the way it began and especially the stunning way it ended. Abe's first cabinet, formed in September 2006, had an initial approval rating of 71 percent (according to the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* poll), second in postwar Japan only to the approval rating of Koizumi's first cabinet in the spring of 2001. At age 52, Abe was the youngest prime minister and the first to have been born after World War II. His distinguished family lineage—of being Nobusuke Kishi's grandson and former Foreign Minister Shintaro Abe's son—added a sense of grandeur to his image. Given Abe's youth, he certainly leapfrogged through the hierarchy of the LDP to become prime minister. Abe compensated for his youth with his nationwide popularity, which derived from his consistently hawkish stance against North Korea and its abduction of Japanese citizens. And that popularity gave legitimacy to Abe's claim that he was a "fighting politician" who would protect and improve Japanese people's lives. Prior to becoming prime minister, Abe elaborated on his conservative convictions in his book, *Toward a Beautiful Country* (*Utsukushii kuni e*), which eventually sold over half a million copies. That book focused mostly on the core concerns of postwar Japanese conservatism, such as constitutional reform, defense, and education, and gave a useful preview of what the Abe administration would look like. In the fall of 2006, the LDP's strategy seemed clear and eminently plausible. Abe may have been relatively young and inexperienced, but he was popular, like his predecessor Koizumi. Abe at the time gave the LDP the best chance to win the House of Councilors election in July 2007, and the next House of Representatives (the lower house) election, to be held presumably in 2008 or 2009.

After the LDP's defeat in the House of Councilors election, however, Abe decided not to resign, even though he had posed the question to voters, "Are you going to choose me or Mr. Ozawa" (leader of the DPJ, the Democratic Party of Japan)? Instead, he invoked his own conception of leadership, saying that he was willing to continue his fight, more so than ever, now that the public had expressed its dissatisfaction with his administration. Abe's health deteriorated in August, especially during his trips to South and Southeast Asia. As Abe later admitted himself, the timing of his resignation could not have been worse, as it came only four days after pledging cooperation on the war on terror with President George W. Bush at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting, three days after saying that the extension of the Antiterrorism Special Measures Law (ATSML) put his job at stake, two days after making his policy speech to the Diet, and on the day when he was scheduled to begin his fight to renew the ATSML on the Diet floor. The public was startled by the dramatic contrast between Abe's youthful image at the start of his administration and his fatigued and thin look at the press conference announcing his resignation on September 12.

IDEOLOGICAL AMBITION AND FOREIGN POLICY

The defining characteristic of the Abe administration was its ideological ambition and its decision to prioritize conservative legislative efforts relating to education, defense, and constitutional reform. Abe's political language—such as "beautiful country" and "breaking away from the postwar regime" (*sengo rejimū kara no dakkyaku*)—emphasized Japan's tradition, history, and culture, and questioned the ideological underpinnings of Japan's political choices after the Second World War. As prime minister, he established the Education Rebuilding Council in October 2006 to pursue his vision of educational reform. In December, the Abe government passed the revised Fundamental Law of Education, which called for nurturing love of one's country and hometowns, and emphasized respect for tradition, culture, and "publicly-oriented spirit" (*kokyo seishin*). The Abe government also passed three more education-related laws in June 2007. The defense-related laws his government passed upgraded the Japan Defense Agency to the Ministry of Defense, and referred to the overseas deployments of the Self-

Defense Forces (such as peacekeeping and recent operations in the Middle East) as a core mission. And the new referendum law (*kokumin tohyo ho*), passed in May 2007, specified the legal provisions for conducting a national referendum for constitutional revision for the first time in postwar Japan. These laws relating to education, defense, and constitutional reform had all been important but unrealized legislative concerns of the conservatives within the LDP. Abe's leadership in the areas of education, defense, and constitutional reform led to expeditious and impressive conservative legislative victories.

Many voters disagreed with Abe's legislative priorities.

Abe's choice to focus on conservative legislation was remarkable for two reasons. First, he was able to pass such laws with the legislative majorities he inherited from Koizumi from the elections of the House of Representatives (in 2005) and the House of Councilors (in 2001 and 2004). Thus, Abe made a deliberate political decision to use Koizumi's majorities in the two houses to advance his conservative agenda. Second, public opinion polls clearly and consistently indicated that a majority of voters identified welfare and economic issues as their top priorities, while they ranked Abe's ideological priorities such as constitutional reform at or near the bottom. In October 2006, in a *Yomiuri Shinbun* poll (in which respondents could list as many of their priorities as they wished), social security reform such as pensions and medical reform came out as the top priority (59.2 percent of the respondents), followed by business conditions and job creation (at 50.6 percent), while constitutional reform was far behind at 5.7 percent.³ In August 2007, immediately after the House of Councilors election, the public similarly responded that it prioritized social security reform (65.1 percent) and business conditions and job creation (51.7 percent) over constitutional reform (7.4 percent).⁴ These numbers suggest that many voters disagreed with Abe's legislative priorities, and he was unable to convince many voters why issues such as constitutional reform and his grand vision of a "beautiful country" should be more important than "bread and butter" issues.⁵

In foreign policy, Abe continued Koizumi's emphasis on the U.S.-Japan alliance, but he also aimed

to repair diplomatic relations with China and South Korea and advocated a "value-based diplomacy" (*kachikan gaiko*) that reached out to Australia and India as well. Abe's visits to Beijing and Seoul in early October 2006 did much to repair Japan's relations with the two countries which had been damaged during Koizumi's time. Abe chose China as the first destination of his overseas trip, which was unprecedented for a postwar Japanese prime minister. While his visit took place on a rainy day in Beijing, the rain reportedly stopped the moment he stepped off his plane. In a joint press statement, Japan-China relations was referred for the first time as a "mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests" (*senryakuteki gokei kankei*), language that departed from the usual (and more mundane) formula of "peace and friendship." And Abe's visit was followed by Premier Wen Jiabao's well-received visit to Tokyo in April 2007. Abe's strategy was to remain ambiguous about his intent to visit the Yasukuni Shrine (thus avoiding Koizumi's mistake of announcing his intent to visit the shrine on the controversial date of August 15). On North Korea, the Abe government supported the February 13 agreement within the Six Party Talks which committed North Korea to shut down its nuclear weapons program. But on Japan's abducted citizens—the issue that he was deeply committed to—he was unable to move beyond the stalemate of the time. Meanwhile, Abe's "value-based diplomacy" saw important developments in Japan-Australia and Japan-India relations. The Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, unveiled during then Prime Minister John Howard's visit to Tokyo in March 2007, affirmed the two countries' commitment to upgrading bilateral strategic cooperation. And in June, the two countries held the Defense and Foreign Ministers' "two-plus-two" meeting for the first time. Abe's visit to India in late August also paved the way for strengthening strategic and economic cooperation between the two countries (and he also paid tribute to the dissenting judge of the Tokyo war tribunal, Radhabinod Pal). Abe's diplomacy made notable progress on Japanese diplomacy in Northeast Asia, and expanded Japan's foreign policy options by reaching out to Australia and India.

Abe's conceptualization of leadership as a "fighting politician," however, inadvertently generated frictions in the U.S.-Japan alliance. While Abe steadfastly remained ambiguous about his intent to visit the Yasukuni Shrine, he reacted strongly against U.S.

House Resolution 121, introduced in January, 2007, which condemned the Japanese government for not acknowledging its responsibility for the “comfort women” during the Second World War. Abe’s personal views had been well-known, as he had opposed the Kono statement of 1993 that accepted the Japanese government’s responsibility on this matter. In March, Abe’s statement that there was “no coercion by the government in the narrow sense of the word” further inflamed controversy in the United States. In the end, Abe expressed his remorse regarding the comfort women to U.S. President George W. Bush at their Camp David meeting in April. This was a striking instance in which a Japanese prime minister specifically addressed Japan’s “history problem” in Asia in a meeting with a U.S. president. Furthermore, after the LDP’s historic loss in the House of Councilors, Abe insisted that he would fight for renewing the ATSMML and staked his political survival on it, even though it was clear that DPJ chief Ozawa was going to capitalize on this issue and scuttle the passage of the ATSMML. On these two instances of U.S.-Japan relations, Abe chose to fight battles which he probably could not win.

DOMESTIC AGENDA AND SCANDALS

In contrast to his conservative legislative agenda and foreign policy, the Abe government did not propose bold initiatives to tackle Japan’s economic, budgetary, and welfare-related problems. While Abe vowed to continue economic reform, he correctly sensed the electorate’s “reform fatigue” from the Koizumi era. And he often expressed his concerns about the concept of a “stratified society” (*kakusa shakai*) that divided winners and losers in the course of economic reform. The Abe government did not lack for proposals—most notably the “Challenge Again Assistance Measures,” the “Asian Gateway,” and “Innovation 25”—but he was ultimately unable to persuade the public how such programs would directly raise ordinary citizens’ living standards. Furthermore, in December 2006, Abe welcomed back the 11 postal rebels (expelled prior to the September 2005 House of Representatives election) to the party who shared Abe’s conservative convictions. For many voters, this exposed the fundamental contradiction between Abe’s commitment to reform and his willingness to rehabilitate the LDP’s anti-reformist elements. With regard to Japan’s large public debt, the Abe government delayed the decision over raising the consumption tax until the

fall of 2007. And Abe’s budget for fiscal year 2007 was constrained due to large public debt, and contained mostly piecemeal measures. Finally, most devastating was the revelation in the spring that the Social Insurance Agency mishandled over 50 million public pension records. What alienated voters most was Abe’s lackluster response to DPJ questioning in the Diet. At one point, Abe stated that he wanted to avoid inciting fear among the public rather than immediately getting to the bottom of the record-keeping problems. The Abe government did pass reform-related laws right before the House of Councilors election (on the dissolution of the Social Insurance Agency and revision of the national civil service law). But these last-ditch legislative efforts failed to impress the electorate. On economic and welfare issues, Abe simply lacked the kind of passion that he exhibited in conservative and defense-related agendas.

On economic and welfare issues, Abe simply lacked the kind of passion that he exhibited in conservative and defense-related agendas.

Finally, in his first cabinet, Abe appointed many of his loyalists and friends to major cabinet and party posts, thereby bypassing an older and more experienced generation of LDP politicians.⁶ That decision, in turn, made Abe’s cabinet vulnerable to attacks by critics, who castigated it as a “cabinet of buddies” (*otomodachi naikaku*) and “honoring past services” (*ronkokoshō*). Of the 17 cabinet ministers, 11 entered the Abe cabinet for the first time. Four cabinet ministers—Hakuo Yanagisawa (Health, Labour, and Welfare), Akira Amari (Economy, Trade and Industry), Toshikatsu Matsuoka (Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries), and Yuzo Yamamoto (Financial Services)—were directly involved in and vigorously supported Abe’s election in the LDP presidential race. From the so-called “NAIS society” (*NAIS no kai*) (which combined the first letter of their four last names, including Abe’s), Takumi Nemoto (special advisor to the prime minister), Nobuteru Ishihara (acting secretary-general of the Liberal Democratic Party), and Yasuhisa Shiozaki (chief cabinet secretary) all occupied influential government and party posts. Yoshihide Suga (Minister of

Internal Affairs and Communications), Sanae Takaichi (Minister of State for Okinawa, Northern Territories, and Gender Equality), and Shoichi Nakagawa (LDP policy chief) had also been Abe's long-time allies. These choices antagonized the older generation within the LDP, who feared that Abe was accelerating generational change within the party.⁷ Abe also formed "Team Abe" within the prime minister's official residence (*kantei*) by appointing a maximum of five special advisors to the prime minister, and calling on government ministries to second bureaucrats who were eager to work directly with the prime minister. All in all, Abe's cabinet appointments and formation of "Team Abe" indicated that he intended to realize his vision of his "beautiful country" with his loyalists, and to "presidentialize" the *kantei* to make it function as a Japanese-style White House.

Given the preexisting criticism over his cabinet appointments, the Abe cabinet became particularly vulnerable to attacks once a series of scandals involving "politics and money" (*seiji to kane*) and inappropriate statements by cabinet ministers surfaced starting in late 2006.⁸ In December, Masaaki Honma (chief of the government's Tax Commission appointed by Abe) resigned after a magazine reported that he lived in public housing with his mistress, even though he had called for privatization of such housing for government employees. A few days later, Genichiro Sata, State Minister for Administrative and Regulatory Reforms, resigned due to accounting irregularities and large expenses at his office. In January, Minister of Health, Labour, and Welfare Yanagisawa referred to women as "child-bearing machines" (*kodomo wo umu kikai*), but Abe did not actively seek his resignation and replaced him only after the cabinet reshuffle in August. Most shocking was the suicide of Agricultural Minister Toshikatsu Matsuoka—a prominent figure in the LDP's agricultural policy tribe—in May, after he was pilloried for months by the media and in the Diet over questionable funds and expenses in his office. Two agricultural ministers who followed, Norihiko Akagi and Takehiko Endo, also resigned due to their own political funding irregularities. And in July 2007, Defense Minister Akio Kyuma—already under fire for his remarks critical of President George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq—resigned after another controversial remark that the U.S. atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki "could not be helped" (*shiyō ga nai*). For a prime minister who prided himself of being a "fighting politician" who would lead Japan toward his vision of a "beautiful country," these scandals were severe blows. As he prepared the LDP for

the House of Councilors' election in July, he could not escape the criticism that he often chose incompetent officials to serve in his government.

CONCLUSION

The 366 days of the Abe administration offer a fascinating case study of the possibilities and limits of conservative leadership in contemporary Japanese politics. On the one hand, given the centralization of power in the *kantei* and the Cabinet Office, the prime minister has the ability use his institutional resources to steer his country in a decidedly conservative direction. However, the incumbent Japanese prime minister must also serve as his party's "face of the election" (*senkyo no kao*) and build a significant legislative resume prior to the House of Representatives and Councilors elections. Given Japanese voters' enduring concerns over welfare and economic issues, a single-minded legislative focus on ideologically divisive issues will tend to hurt the LDP's electoral chances in the foreseeable future. Future prime ministers would do well to heed the lessons learned from the Abe administration. Without the scandals and the Social Insurance Agency's missing records, the Abe administration might have survived longer. But Abe's core problem was the fundamental gap between its ideological ambition and the modesty of its economic and welfare policy record.

Recent developments in the Fukuda government also offer a stark contrast with his predecessor. Fukuda does not share Abe's conservatism, and has shut down Abe's project to build a "beautiful country." During the early weeks of Fukuda's tenure, the so-called "twisted Diet" (*nejire kokkai*) provided political momentum for the DPJ to block the ATSM's extension in the House of Councilors, even though a plurality of Japanese support such an extension. In mid-October, the partisan debate over the ATSM's extension expanded into various controversies over the possibility that Japan's fuel might have been diverted to the Iraq War; the problem of civilian control over the military (as the latter hid its understated reporting of the amount of fuel until recently); and the problems created by former Administrative Vice Minister for Defense, Takemasa Moriya's ethics violations and arrest. However, in a dramatic turnaround, Fukuda and Ozawa had closed meetings in which they discussed the possibility of a grand coalition. When Ozawa did not immediately reject the idea of a grand coalition, he was criticized by his own party and submitted his letter of resignation. The DPJ

begged him to stay as the party leader, which led Ozawa to withdraw his resignation. The drama over Ozawa's retracted resignation took place less than two months after Abe's resignation as prime minister, and Ozawa's actions seemed to put a halt to the DPJ's momentum. More generally, the Fukuda government appears to be veering away from the blatantly top-down *kantei* policymaking style, and to devoting itself instead to vexing distributive issues such as welfare, taxation, and fiscal deficit.⁹ Fukuda's choices so far demonstrate that the Japanese prime minister has a significant range of alternatives in how and how much to utilize his markedly enhanced institutional resources for political leadership.¹⁰ And it will certainly be worth following how he will manage the complex "top-down" resources and "bottom-up" imperatives of contemporary Japanese political institutions.

ENDNOTES

1. See the very important contributions by Masato Shimizu, *Kantei Shudo (Kantei Leads)* (Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Shimbunsha, 2005); Tomohito Shinoda, *Kantei Gaiko (Kantei Diplomacy)* (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbunsha, 2004); and Hakutaka Takenaka, *Shusho Shihai (Prime Minister Rules)* (Tokyo: Chuko Shinsho, 2006).
2. On the importance of persuasion in political leadership after the Abe administration, see Gerald Curtis, "'Settokugata seiji' e tenkan dekiruka (Can Japan Transition to 'Persuasion-Style' Politics?)," *Asahi Shimbun*, September 17, 2007.
3. These figures are cited by Atsushi Kusano in *Shokun!*, Vol. 39, No. 8 (August 2007): 43.
4. *Yomiuri Shimbun*, August 7, 2007.
5. See the insightful analysis by Takashi Mikuriya in *Bungei Shunju*, Vol. 84, No. 16 (November 2006): 149, and Tase Yasuhiro in *Shokun!*, Vol. 39, No. 8 (August 2007): 26.
6. The following borrows heavily from Tetsuya Miyazaki, "'Senshu boei, otomodachi naikaku' no zento (Prospects for 'Defensive Defense and the Cabinet of Buddies')," *Bungei Shunju*, Vol. 84, No. 16 (November 2006): 158-9; and Takashi Uesugi, *Kantei Hokai (Collapse of the Kantei)* (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 2007): 44-56.
7. Interview with a former LDP Diet member (October 26, 2007).
8. On Abe's cabinet scandals and the LDP's defeat in the House of Councilors election, see the very interesting discussion by Takeshige Kunisada, Yasuhiro Tase, and Atsuo Ito in "Abe Seiken Tsuirakusu! (The Abe Cabinet Crashes!)" in *Shokun!*, Vol. 39, No. 8 (August 2007): 24-55.
9. Interview with an LDP official (October 29, 2007).
10. Interview with a Japanese government official (October 28, 2007).

THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF JAPAN AND JAPAN'S FUTURE

JUN SAITO



Japanese politics is experiencing an unprecedented phase of institutional adjustment and adaptation. Since the ruling coalition, which consists of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the Komei Party, lost majority control of the House of Councilors (the upper house) of the Diet (Japan's legislature) in the July 2007 election, not a single bill has been passed by the legislature. Yasuo Fukuda, Japan's new prime minister as of late September, 2007, is facing a serious legislative stalemate. Having expected this situation, former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe stepped down from the top government leadership position, less than two months after his party's historic defeat in the upper house election.

It is the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) which now decides the fate of bills in the Diet. Although the LDP-Komei coalition can theoretically override the upper house's decision with a two-thirds super majority votes in the House of Representatives (the lower house), doing so would entail the significant cost of plummeting approval rates. In one opinion poll that followed the resignation of Prime Minister Abe, published in the *Asahi Shimbun*, September 14, 2007, 41 percent of the respondents answered that they would favor a DPJ-led government as opposed to 31 percent who would prefer an LDP-led coalition. More than half of the respondents were in favor of calling a lower house election in the immediate future.

Extrapolating from the upper house election results, many projected that the DPJ would win majority control of the lower house in the upcoming general election without major difficulty. Regardless, the DPJ is not free from problems. Shortly after Ichiro Ozawa, the president of the DPJ, was negotiating a grand coalition deal with Prime Minister Fukuda, the executive board members of the DPJ unanimously opposed Ozawa's

proposal. In early November, Ozawa abruptly announced his intention to resign his post as the party president, but only two days later he withdrew his previous announcement. Apparently, the DPJ's senior members persuaded Ozawa to retain his position as party leader, but the turmoil that surrounded Ozawa's resignation announcement damaged the party's reputation as a credible alternative to the LDP.

This essay reviews recent developments in Japanese politics and provides projections for the future by analyzing the upper house election results in July. Although Japanese politics is encountering a brief period of turbulence, the political system of the country is in fact in the process of transitioning to that of a Westminster style majoritarian regime. This change can be understood as a slow-but-steady adjustment process that reflects the changes first brought on by the electoral incentives of the 1994 electoral reform. In the next section, I will contrast several hypotheses that are intended to explain the LDP's defeat in the upper house election in July, by considering both short-term shocks and long-term institutional and behavioral changes. The section after that clarifies the nature of the DPJ as a centrist party. The final section concludes this essay by providing a set of projections.

IS THE LDP LOSING GROUND?

When we review the development of Japanese politics in the last decade, it once appeared that the alliance of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the Komei Party would be insuperable. While most rural prefectures belonged to the LDP's stronghold, the Komei provided pivotal support to the LDP, especially in urban competitive districts. Prime Minister Koizumi's popularity added to the electoral strength of the ruling coalition. When Shinzo Abe assumed his term as prime minister, he was no less popular than his predecessor and very few observers expected that his term would end within a year. In trying to make

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sense of the increasing volatility of the election outcomes in Japan in the recent past, we need to consider the change in electoral incentives associated with the 1994 electoral reform.

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Under the old Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) system (*Chū Senkyoku Sei*), incumbents from the LDP faced a very strong incentive to deliver targeted services to their core supporters. This is because the LDP typically fielded multiple candidates in the same district and these incumbents needed to compete against their co-partisan peers without harming the collective partisan label. Instead of engaging themselves in public policy debate, incumbents worked hard to solidify their support base by providing pork barrel projects. The opposition parties espoused leftist ideologies and failed to function as viable alternatives to the governing LDP, partly because the SNTV system had an incentive for parties to distance themselves in terms of policy positions, and partly because they did not have access to pork barrel projects.¹

The alliance of reform-oriented politicians and opinion leaders in the early 1990s led to the abolition of the SNTV rule in the lower house. In June 1993, a significant minority of LDP incumbents defected from the party, which resulted in the passage of a non-confidence motion against Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa. As a result of the ensuing general election, the LDP fell from power for the first time in the 38 years of the party's history. An electoral reform bill was enacted in the following year, and the first election for the lower house under this new system was implemented in 1996, combining 300 Single-Member Districts (SMD) and 200 Proportional Representation (PR).

Since winning a majority in the lower house is a prerequisite for any party to gain control of the government, political parties transformed their electoral strategies accordingly. The change in the LDP's strategy had at least the following three consequences. First,

since electoral reform entailed massive reapportionment, the political influence of formerly underrepresented urban voters was magnified. Thus, subsidies going to formerly overrepresented rural areas were curtailed.² Second, the governing coalition faced an incentive to reallocate resources from its stronghold to marginal districts. Under the old SNTV system, as long as the LDP was able to garner more than 75 percent of the votes, the party could secure all 3 seats in districts where the district magnitude was three.³ After the electoral reform, this was no longer the case. Third, because the SMD system pulls political parties toward the center of the ideological spectrum, policy platforms of opposition parties became more centrist. In a nutshell, the DPJ ascended to the position of a viable alternative to the LDP. As electoral competition became stiffer than before, the LDP hedged the risk of losing control of the government by forging a coalition with the Komei Party, which has a solid electoral support base, especially in urban districts, and is backed by the Buddhist sect of Sōka Gakkai.

The DPJ's victory in the July upper house election was part of this long-term adjustment process, but instead of asking why the DPJ won the last upper house election, we could reformulate the question by asking why the LDP suffered a defeat. There are a few competing as well as complementary explanations. The first explanation is that the 2007 upper house election results reflected poor performance by the prime minister's government and his party. In particular, Abe's cabinet was extremely incompetent in containing scandals. In addition, the LDP's electioneering team performed much more poorly than the DPJ's or the LDP's predecessors. The second factor is more institutional and will have irreversible effects on the LDP's electoral fortune. Voters are gradually observing the adverse effects of former Prime Minister Koizumi's reforms and are also becoming skeptical about whether these reforms produced any positive results. Ironically, it was not Koizumi but his successor who paid the price. The third factor is changing voter behavior. Previously, voters dissatisfied with the current government performance split their support between centrist opposition parties and the more leftist Japan Communist Party. Recently, these anti-government voters are aligning themselves with the DPJ.

The first explanation concerns Abe's inability to cope with short-run political crises. The Abe administration was plagued by a series of money scandals,

and Abe handled these incidents very maladroitly. Instead of firing cabinet ministers immediately after the eruption of scandals, Abe protected these ministers until the last minute. Notorious examples include three consecutive ministers of agriculture: Toshikatsu Matuoka, who committed suicide, Norihiko Akagi, whose poor showing in a press conference during the campaign period severely damaged the LDP's morale, and Takehiko Endo, who resigned only eight days after appointment.

Previously, the Japanese public had tolerated the government party's mishandling of political finances based on its overall trust in the party's competency. This time, the LDP was not effectively able to make an appeal to the voters based on its relative competency compared to the other parties. Since the Social Insurance Agency recognized in February that it lost track of more than 50 million pension records, public resentment of the government mounted. In contrast, the DPJ claimed credit for making the government recognize the problem. Obviously, this was not Abe's fault at all. However, now that voters learned that the government had lost the pension records, trust in the LDP's competency rapidly declined. It is in a period of political crisis that the true competency of an administration is tested and is revealed to the public. Although Abe's initial approval rate was as high as 70 percent, the figure plummeted sharply over time. When Abe resigned in September this year, his approval rating was generally as low as 30 percent, although there were some variations among polling companies.

In addition, the LDP's electioneering team simply did a poor job in setting the election agenda. For instance, the mass media widely reported the power struggle within the party as well as the contestation between the anti-reform former LDP members and pro-reform "assassins" (high-profile or celebrity candidates run by the LDP against Koizumi's opponents) during the 2005 lower house election campaign period. Consequently, amidst this LDP strife, the DPJ disappeared from the public eye. Additionally, Abe pursued a strategy of defeating the DPJ by means of serious bipartisan policy debates. Regardless of whether the DPJ's policy platform was perceived as good or bad, the mass media compared the platforms of the LDP and the DPJ in roughly equal amounts of coverage. In the 2005 lower house elections, both pro-reform and anti-reform voters cast their ballots for the LDP, but this time the DPJ successfully managed to collect anti-government protest votes.

The way the LDP and the DPJ framed the agenda also led to a significant difference in both parties' performance. The LDP's policy slogan was to "Make Growth Real" (*Seichō wo Jikkann ni*). The LDP's economic platform looked as if it were written by the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, which reflected orthodox recipes for macroeconomic growth in neoclassical economics. For rural voters who had provided stable support for the LDP for decades, this slogan did not make much sense, as real income had ceased to grow for almost a decade. The fruit of the recent macroeconomic recovery is often exemplified by the construction rush in downtown Tokyo, which has little to do with the trickle down effects to the countryside. In addition, the Japanese public was increasingly aware of income disparity in terms of both social class and geographic region. The DPJ's policy platform, on the other hand, was oriented more toward distributive policy packages. Consequently, in the July upper house election, the DPJ performed disproportionately well in the LDP's former strongholds.

It was this network of clientelism that boosted the LDP's electoral success throughout the past several decades.

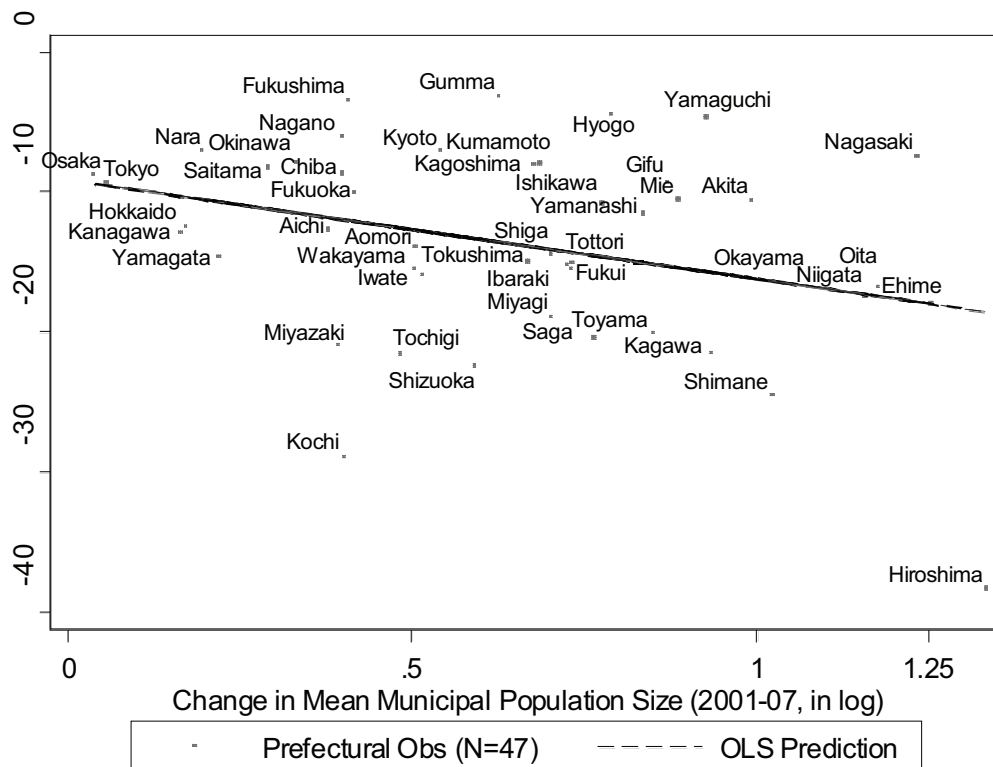
The second explanation is based on recent institutional changes in Japanese politics. The Triad Reform of local government finance (*Sanmi Ittai Kaikaku*) reduced the size of intergovernmental transfers that go to municipal governments. In addition, during the Koizumi period, the number of municipalities decreased from 3,249 to 1,842, a reduction by about 43 percent. What this implies is a weakening of the LDP's local party organization. Article 91 of the Local Autonomy Law (*Chihō Jichi Hō*) stipulates the standard size of municipal legislatures roughly as a logarithmic function of municipal population sizes. For instance, while small villages and towns with populations between 5,000 and 10,000 typically elect 18 council members, large cities with populations of 250,000 elect 38 council members. Thus, small municipalities have a higher ratio of legislator-per-voter representation. When small municipalities are annexed into nearby cities, this automatically

requires that a large number of these municipal legislators somehow need to give up their elective office. The important point is that a vast majority of these municipal legislators were effectively serving as paid activists for the LDP. Although very few candidates run for municipal council elections as official LDP affiliates, most of them retain informal ties with the party. It was this network of clientelism that boosted the LDP's electoral success throughout the past several decades.⁴ In addition, the LDP perhaps over-adjusted its fiscal policy to win a majority of the seats in lower house elections, where urban voters are better represented. In contrast, upper house seats are seriously malapportioned in favor of rural prefectures, and it is in these over-represented rural prefectures that LDP incumbents were hard hit and defeated by DPJ challengers in the July election.

As an illustration of the LDP's weakening electoral support base, Figure 1 (see below) plots the change in the LDP's vote share in upper house district races (2001-07) as opposed to the change in the average municipal population sizes. Given the fact that popu-

lation growth in most prefectures in Japan was stagnant in the recent decade, the increase in the average municipal population size reflects the reduction in the number of municipalities within the prefecture. Also note that Junichiro Koizumi was selected as the LDP's party president and assumed his term as prime minister shortly before the 2001 upper house election. Because of carefully elaborated electoral and media exposure strategies, the LDP and the Komei Party enjoyed a landslide victory in that election. As we can see, there is a moderately negative correlation between municipal mergers and the LDP's electoral performance. But since the government promoted municipal mergers by using short-term financial incentives, these municipalities with recent mergers received favorable treatment in terms of increased subsidies and clearing of outstanding debt. As the remaining benefits of these short-term incentives disappear, these mergers may have a more substantively negative impact on the LDP's future electoral performance. Apparently, the reason the LDP has pursued this local government reform is to finance social

FIGURE 1: MUNICIPAL MERGER AND THE LDP'S ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE



Source: Yomiuri Shimibun. 2004, 2007. *Saninsen Deta CD-ROM [Data CD-ROM for the House of Councilor Election]*. Tokyo: Yomiuri Shimibun.

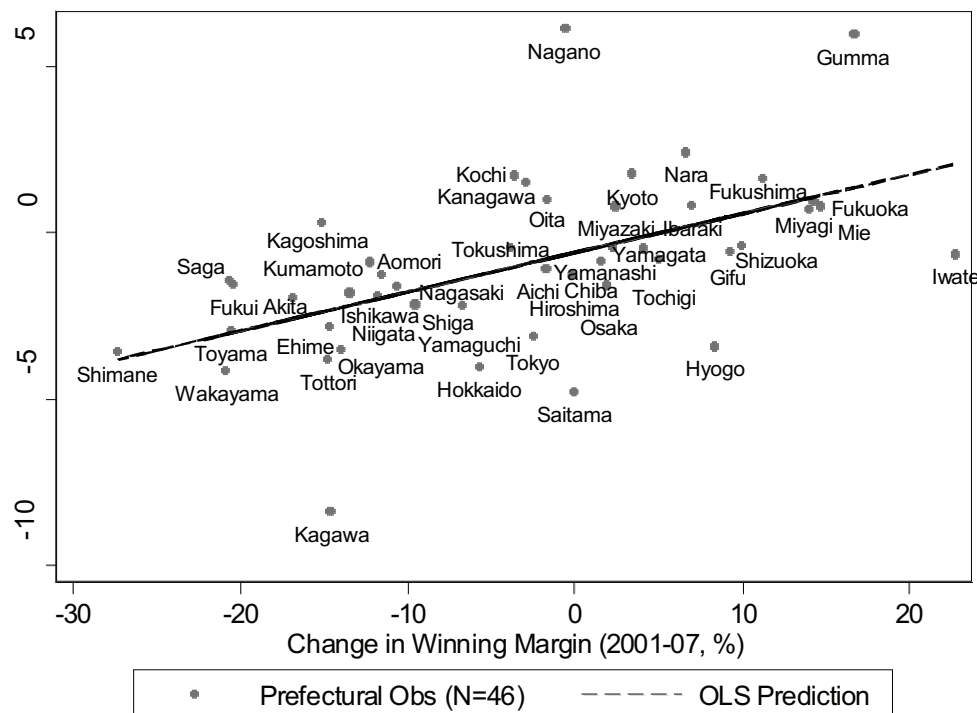
security programs, given that the population is aging at an unprecedented rate. While failure to cope with social security issues would negatively influence the party's electoral performance, as it did in the 2004 upper house election, financial reform of this sort also entails electoral costs.

The third explanation for the LDP's defeat concerns the behavior of the voters. Given the fact that there existed several major political parties in Japan during the SNTV period, realignment into a two-party system was a slow process. Even though the lower house district races constitute the basic framework of electoral contestation in Japan, prefectural assembly members are still elected from the SNTV rule, where the number of seats ranges from one to 18. Even though most lower house incumbents elected from SMD belong to either the LDP or DPJ, there are still a significant number of prefectural assembly incumbents who are affiliated with the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Japan Communist Party (JCP). Although the SDP and its electoral support base, in particular public sector

labor unions, usually cooperate electorally with the DPJ whenever the SDP fails to field a candidate, there have been no such formal cooperative relations between the DPJ and JCP. During election campaign periods, the JCP headquarters criticizes the DPJ's policy stance no less harshly than it criticizes that of the LDP. Protest votes were thus divided between the more centrist DPJ and the leftist JCP. It was also widely believed that communist voters were ideologically oriented and were less likely to vote strategically.

Empirical evidence, however, suggests that protest voters are discarding the communists when the races become more competitive. Figure 2 (see below) plots the change in the JCP's vote share between the 2001 and the 2007 election as opposed to the change in the winning margin in the corresponding elections. For prefectures where the district magnitude is 1, the winning margin is calculated as the difference in vote share between the winning candidate and the top-losing candidate divided by the total number of eligible voters. Wherever the district magnitude is equal to

FIGURE 2: CHANGE IN ELECTORAL COMPETITIVENESS AND THE JCP'S VOTE SHARE



Source: *ibid.*

or larger than 2, the vote share of the barely winning candidate and the top losing candidates are considered in a similar manner. The reduction in the winning margin implies that races became more competitive, whereas an increase in the winning margin means the opposite. Also note that the JCP's district candidates are almost always non-competitive. Except for a few prefectures, most of the JCP's seats are generated in the proportional representation portion. As we can see, when the races become more competitive, JCP voters are more likely to cast their ballots for other parties' candidates, whereas JCP voters stick to their own party when elections are not competitive. The data suggests that the voters ordinarily leaning toward the JCP avoid "wasting" their ballots and give their protest votes to their second best alternative candidate, since that candidate is more likely to win. Although further scrutiny is necessary to estimate the full impact of this type of strategic voting, exit polls conducted by mass media suggest that these communist supporters are less likely to cast their ballots for the LDP-Komei coalition candidates than for the DPJ candidates.

Because the current lower house term will end before the next upper house election in 2010, the bicameral split will continue until the next lower house election.

In addition to citizens' spontaneous coordination of protest votes, the JCP headquarters recently announced its strategy for the next lower house election. In order to avoid wasting financial and human resources, the JCP will cease to field candidates in many of the lower house district races. The JCP had fielded candidates in all 300 SMDs until the 2003 election. However in 2005, the party withdrew candidates from about 30 districts. In the next election, party headquarters announced that the number of candidates would be reduced to 130 and instead shifted its resources to PR races. Although the JCP still bashes the DPJ as a second LDP and argues that there needs to be a viable opposition party, the JCP's strategic transition will facilitate coordination of protest

votes and eventually help the DPJ's electoral chances.

Whatever the reasons for the LDP's defeat and hence the DPJ's victory, the loss of the majority in the upper house will bring about two significant long-run political consequences. One is electoral and the other is legislative. Because the current lower house term will end before the next upper house election in 2010, the bicameral split will continue until the next lower house election. Looking at the current situation from an electoral aspect, we can see that incumbency will bring a significant amount of political resources to local DPJ organizations, which were previously weak. Unlike lower house members who can be up for election at any time during their maximum 4-year term, an upper house member's term is fixed and lasts as long as 6 years. Thus, once elected, upper house members can provide a stable resource base for local party organizations. These DPJ upper house members will serve as an important resource for the day-to-day activities of DPJ candidates for the lower house. Unless the LDP makes a significant concession to the DPJ, non-budgetary legislation can be blocked, resulting in the possibility of a prolonged stalemate. Then, the natural question is to what extent the policy preferences of the LDP-led coalition and those of the DPJ differ. In order to understand this point, we need to clarify who make up the DPJ.

DPJ: WHO ARE THEY?

The majority of DPJ Diet members are new entrants to politics who did not have direct experience in running for office during the SNTV period. Nevertheless, the party's leadership positions are occupied by descendants of pre-reform opposition parties as well as defectors from the LDP. Descendants of former opposition parties who later joined the DPJ were from several centrist parties as well as the centrist faction from the Japan Socialist Party. New entrants are office-seeking political entrepreneurs who do not exhibit strong ideological policy stances. The remaining question is to what extent defectors from the LDP differ from incumbents who remained in the party.

There is in fact an established empirical literature that statistically analyzes the determinants of legislators' party switch in Japan in the 1990s. Cox and Rosenbluth as well as Kato argue that junior members who were electorally more vulnerable opted to leave the party.⁵ In contrast, Reed and Scheiner demonstrate

that legislators' preferences for electoral reform significantly explain who left the party and who stayed.⁶ In addition, Saito shows that, in addition to legislators' preferences for reform, the status of projects in incumbents' electoral districts affected the likelihood of defection.⁷ Legislators who left the LDP in 1993 were elected from districts where key infrastructure projects were finished. For instance, bullet train projects were either finished or committed in the districts of Ichiro Ozawa, Tsutomu Hata, and Kozo Watanabe. Among Ozawa's protégés who also initially defected from the LDP, incumbents whose districts were in need of infrastructure projects ended up returning to the LDP, their "old nest": Toshiro Nikai of Wakayama and Shigeru Ishiba of Tottori, to name a few. In sum, the benefit of belonging to the party in power, i.e., to gain access to pork barrel projects, is larger when incumbents are elected from poorer districts. All other things being equal, incumbents acted more sincerely to pursue their policy preferences. Thus, Japan's partisan realignment reflected institutional preferences and the legacy of pork barrel politics in the past, rather than any ideological schism that might seriously divide the nation over important policy issues.

THE DPJ AND JAPAN'S FUTURE

This brief description of the DPJ suggests that the party is centrist, that is, characterized by political pragmatism. The current legislative stalemate can persist into the future, as the initiative for the grand coalition between the LDP and DPJ has failed. In terms of foreign policy, although there may be a short-run phase of adjustment in U.S.-Japan diplomatic relations, the basic framework of the security alliance will remain intact. The DPJ would be willing to make practical compromises from time to time, unless the party's electoral survival is threatened.

The party is centrist, that is, characterized by political pragmatism.

Even if the DPJ were to seize control of the government, a radical change in diplomatic as well as domestic policy is unlikely to take place. In addition, it is worth pointing out that the DPJ added so much competitive pressure to the LDP-led coalition in the

past that the government eventually pursued reform agendas that the DPJ and its leaders had previously advocated. For instance, Junichiro Koizumi was opposed to electoral reform until the last minute. Yet ironically, it was Koizumi who took advantage of the partisan swing under the SMD system to record a landslide victory. Many of the reform agendas he pursued were in fact already explicated in Ichiro Ozawa's book, which was one of the best-selling books in 1994.⁸ The LDP has been able to stay in power for the past decade, in my opinion, by copying from the reform agenda of the DPJ. This is one typical example of what is called median voter equilibrium in political science theory.⁹ In this sense, although the DPJ was not in control of the cabinet, its presence nonetheless had a direct effect on the LDP's political as well as policy program.

Ozawa is a pragmatist, who adapted to a narrow niche in the political marketplace. While he was heading the former Liberal Party, he was largely regarded as a market-oriented libertarian. Analysts of the time regarded Ozawa's Liberal Party as situated to the right of the LDP's ideological spectrum. After the Liberal Party was merged into the Democratic Party, the libertarian platform was virtually abandoned. In the last upper house election, the DPJ won a landslide victory mainly by forging a redistributive policy package. On the other hand, Ozawa is a fundamentalist in the sense that he has consistently advocated introduction of the Single Member District electoral system ever since he ran for office for the first time in 1969. As long as Ozawa serves as the DPJ's leader, his party will be committed to preserving the existing electoral institution in the lower house, which has generated the forces for political change in Japan over the last fifteen years.

As political actors adapt to the rules of the game, the SMD electoral system is likely to produce a viable bipartisan system and a majoritarian government, which is nothing other than the Westminster model. This model of majoritarian government is a mechanism of accountability, rather than mere representation, and Japan is in the process of emulating this prototype. Although it is still uncertain whether the DPJ will be able to control the majority of seats in the lower house in the near future, public policies of the LDP-led coalition are already reflecting the influence of majoritarian government. The country will gradually transform itself to a "normal country" that seeks to play a more active role in the international system, but this is more

an indication of Japan's pragmatic response to the changing international environment than its ideological commitment to its self-congratulatory history.¹⁰ This trend of electoral pragmatism will continue to dominate the political arena in Japan, unless electoral incentives are overturned, for example, by returning to the old SNTV rule.

ENDNOTES

1. Using a unidimensional spatial model, Gary Cox makes this point. See Gary W. Cox, "Centripetal and Centrifugal Incentives in Electoral Systems," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (1990): 903-35.
2. Yusaka Horiuchi and Jun Saito, "Reapportionment and Redistribution: Consequences of Electoral Reform in Japan," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (2003): 669-82.
3. The district magnitude is the number of elected representatives in an electoral district. Under the old SNTV rule, district magnitude typically ranged between 3 and 5.
4. Ethan Scheiner, *Democracy without Competition in Japan: Opposition Failure in a One-party Dominant State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
5. Gary W. Cox and Frances M. Rosenbluth, "Anatomy of a Split: the Liberal Democrats of Japan," *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (1995): 355-76; Junko Kato, "When the Party Breaks Up: Exit and Voice among Japanese Legislators," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 92, No. 4 (1998): 857-70.
6. Steven R. Reed and Ethan Scheiner, "Electoral Incentives and Policy Preferences: Mixed Motives behind Party Defections in Japan," *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (2003): 469-90.
7. Jun Saito, "When Preferences are not Behavior." Paper presented at the Stanford Conference on Electoral and Legislative Politics in Japan, Stanford University, June 11-12, 2007.
8. Ichiro Ozawa, *Blueprint for a New Japan* (New York: Kodansha International, 1994).
9. Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1957).
10. Frances M. Rosenbluth, Jun Saito, and Annalisa Zinn, "America's Policy Towards East Asia: How it Looks from Japan," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (2007): 584-600.

JAPANESE POLITICAL ATTITUDES AGAINST AN EVOLVING POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

SHERRY L. MARTIN



Japan's political landscape is evolving as decades-long, interlocking socio-demographic changes unfold alongside institutional reforms. A rapidly aging society and below-replacement birthrates co-produce a declining population and shrinking labor force. Economic disparities

between urban and rural areas are widening at the same time that concerns about the future of the welfare state are escalating. Socio-demographic changes are occurring in tandem with institutional changes—electoral and administrative reforms—that shift channels of interest articulation through which Japanese voters express their mounting insecurity, anger, and discontent to political elites.

This essay uses gender as a lens to examine the evolution of issue-based cleavages that can structure two-party dominant electoral competition around salient policy debates in contemporary Japanese politics. Prior to the July 2007 House of Councilors (Japan's upper house) election, political observers asked if women voters would make a difference and how. These questions remain unanswered after the election. An analysis of the 2005 House of Representatives election (the lower house) results, the last election prior to the House of Councilors election this past July, offers insights to the 2007 electoral outcome and provides a basis for predictions for the next House of Representatives election.

THE BATTLE FOR WOMEN'S VOTES IN THE 2007 UPPER HOUSE ELECTION

Prior to the upper house election this past July, journalist David Pilling was among political observers who expected women's votes to be decisive in determining the extent of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)'s impending loss. "The female vote was a big

part of the LDP's sometimes stunning electoral success under Mr. Koizumi....It was supposed to work for Shinzo Abe too."¹ While women had been integral to Koizumi's support base, Abe lacked the charisma and the popular support base that allowed him to act independently of the LDP.² The first post-Koizumi election would reveal whether positive voter affect for the popular ex-premier was transferable to his successor and would translate into an abiding support for the LDP in the wake of his departure. This transition period was significant because it would reveal the extent and limits of prime ministerial leadership in re-engaging a pool of disaffected, nonpartisan and primarily female voters that had been expanding for decades.³ The outcome of the 2007 Upper House Election would be contingent, Pilling projected, on the votes of disaffected women who may have supported Koizumi in previous elections, but did not identify with any party in the system. While the LDP support base had been shrinking for decades, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) had yet to forge strong affective ties with voters. Given a less optimal choice between an LDP headed by Abe and the DPJ, which party would nonpartisan women support?

Despite the projected importance of women voters during the period prior to the 2007 upper house elections, women's votes were not reported as decisive in the aftermath. All voters had penalized the LDP and awarded the DPJ control of the upper house. Even so, an absence of gender-based differences in the aggregate does not mean that men and women followed the same paths in arriving at the decision to support the DPJ.⁴ The question of how gender did or did not matter remains largely unaddressed. Below, I take up this matter by looking at gender differences in issue positions over time, and the impact of these differences on vote choice in the 2005 election, as a means of providing some insight into the role of gender in July's upper house elections, and to offer some predictions in advance of the next

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lower house election. But first, I briefly address why women's votes have attained a new significance in a polity that has not traditionally had a gender gap in voting, and very few differences in attitudes among men and women.

Nonpartisan Women

While the proportion of nonpartisans, or voters unaffiliated with any party, in the Japanese system has always been quite large, this segment of the electorate began to increase rapidly immediately prior to and following electoral reform. Depending on when voters are polled (i.e. how proximate they are to an election), between one-quarter and two-fifths of the Japanese electorate has claimed not to support any particular party in the system. A large proportion of unaffiliated voters introduces electoral uncertainty and volatility. When the proportion of unaffiliated voters is large, it encroaches upon the proportion of voters that any given party needs to secure its optimal number of seats in the Diet (Japan's legislature). Small shifts in the vote can have a large impact on the fate of parties with shrinking support bases. Since women constitute a majority of unaffiliated voters, they have the potential to inflate their voice in electoral politics as a group. Parties should have an incentive to appeal to and incorporate more of these voters into their support base; doing so would allow them to approach subsequent elections with a greater sense of security.

A large proportion of unaffiliated voters introduces electoral uncertainty and volatility.

Research in the 1960s and 1970s found that even then the majority of unaffiliated voters were women. At that time, it was presumed that these voters were apathetic. Over time, however, the profile of these voters has undergone a substantial change given the increase in socio-economic resources among women born and socialized during the post-war period and the high-growth era.⁵ Nonpartisan women are alienated rather than apathetic. They see themselves as outsiders within a political system that, over time, has offered fewer viable electoral choices. Usually less likely to turn out to vote, when nonpartisans vote, they usually vote against the LDP.

The emergence of new parties since the early 1990s, however, has underscored the point that partisanship is "softer" among women. Women are less likely than men to be self-proclaimed party identifiers and, when they do express party identification, their support tends to be weaker. The gender gap in Japan is a gap in affective orientation, or psychological attachment, toward parties that is not immediately evident in vote choice or issue positions. Issues, however, are attaining increasing salience in Japanese politics. Old, latent issue cleavages are activated by changing domestic and international conditions, and the new electoral system aims to incite issue-based competition between two moderate parties offering clear alternatives to voters.

Women on the Issues

There is a large extant literature on the relationship between the electoral system and the "issueless" character of Japanese politics under the 1955 System, and the anticipated ascendance of issues in structuring electoral competition in the aftermath of the 1994 electoral reforms.⁶ For most of the postwar era, conventional wisdom held that cultural politics issues and views on money-power politics were the strongest predictors of vote choice. Even so, their influence was "weakened by the fact that many voters [had] no positions on the issues and a majority [were] unable to identify the party ... closest to their views on virtually any given issue."⁷ Through the late 1970s, more women than men failed to express a position on many issue items posed by survey researchers and, when they did express a position, their views tended to differ little from those held by male voters.

Under the 1955 System, gender-based differences that emerged tended to be small differences on low salience issues.⁸ Unlike in other advanced, industrialized democracies, there have been no enduring gender-based differences in attitudes about social welfare policy because Japanese voters were not forced to make difficult choices about the trade-off between social welfare and higher taxes during the extended period of high economic growth. Similarly, the LDP successfully refocused public attention on economic growth following the U.S.-Japan Security Crisis of 1960; under the U.S. security umbrella, active debates around security and defense were diffused until the first Gulf War. Reflecting their roles in the peace and anti-nuclear movements, Japanese women have tended to be less supportive than men of efforts to strengthen Japan's military and defense capabilities.

Even so, this difference has not produced a decisive gender gap in voting.

We can think of the high-growth period as an incubator for emerging gender-based differences on those exact issues that economic growth held in abeyance. The status of women changed over this period; women gained resources that fostered deeper cognitive, if not affective, engagement with politics. More women articulated positions on issues posed by survey researchers.⁹ By the 1990s, domestic and international economic and security environment conditions re-ignited old debates, and sparked new ones. Below, I suggest that gender-based differences in issue positions have surfaced that structure an emerging gender gap in voting behavior.¹⁰

KOIZUMI: PLAYING THE GENDER CARD IN 2005?

During the 2005 lower house elections, there was much to suggest that gender played an important role in then Prime Minister Koizumi's landslide victory against the postal rebels, LDP veterans who opposed his postal privatization package. The issues framing the 2005 lower house election—postal reform and pension scandal—fit under broader themes of corruption and social welfare that have, over time, resonated with increasing strength among women voters. Further, Koizumi had effectively signaled support for gender equality issues. The Bureau for Gender Equality was elevated to cabinet status under his administration and Koizumi appointed a record number of women to the cabinet. During the 2005 election cycle, Koizumi ran female “assassin” candidates against the postal rebels. With LDP party support, a record number of women candidates were elected to the Diet. Given the presumed popularity that Koizumi enjoyed with women voters during this election period, the outcome of the 2007 elections was difficult to predict; Koizumi's personal popularity did not transfer to the LDP at large. Once again, parties were very concerned by how nonpartisan women would vote in July 2007. Here, an analysis of the 2005 pre- and post-election surveys provides instructive and surprising insight into the nonpartisan vote.

A Gender Gap in Nonpartisan Voting

By 2005, a gender gap in voting had opened up among nonpartisan women and men. Nonpartisan women overwhelmingly supported the DPJ and nonpartisan men supported the LDP. Among men who expressed no party support prior to the election, the

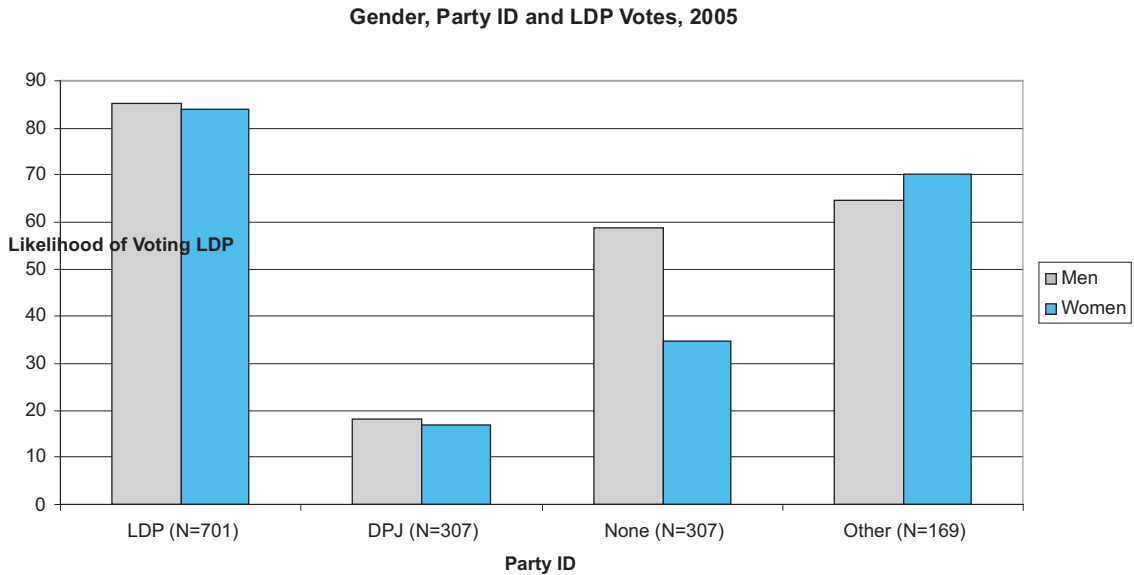
predicted probability of voting for the LDP was 60 percent; it was approximately 35 percent for women who supported no party prior to the election (see the second series from the right reported in Figure 1, next page). Conversely, there was a 65 percent chance of a nonpartisan woman voting for the DPJ; for male nonpartisans this likelihood fell to just over 40 percent (see the second series from the right reported in Figure 2, next page). This difference is significant because the media reported higher rates of DPJ support among male voters. This is true. Men in general were more likely to report that they identify with the DPJ; in this sample 24.2 percent of all men compared to 16.8 percent of all women expressed DPJ support prior to the election. In the aggregate, this difference disappears when it comes to voting; 31.1 percent of men and 29.8 percent of women sampled here voted for the DPJ. The behavior of nonpartisan women narrows the gap between expressed party support prior to the election and reported vote choice afterwards. Despite his popularity, Koizumi was unable to win the votes of nonpartisan women.

By 2005, a gender gap in voting had opened up among nonpartisan women and men.

Men and Women on the Issues

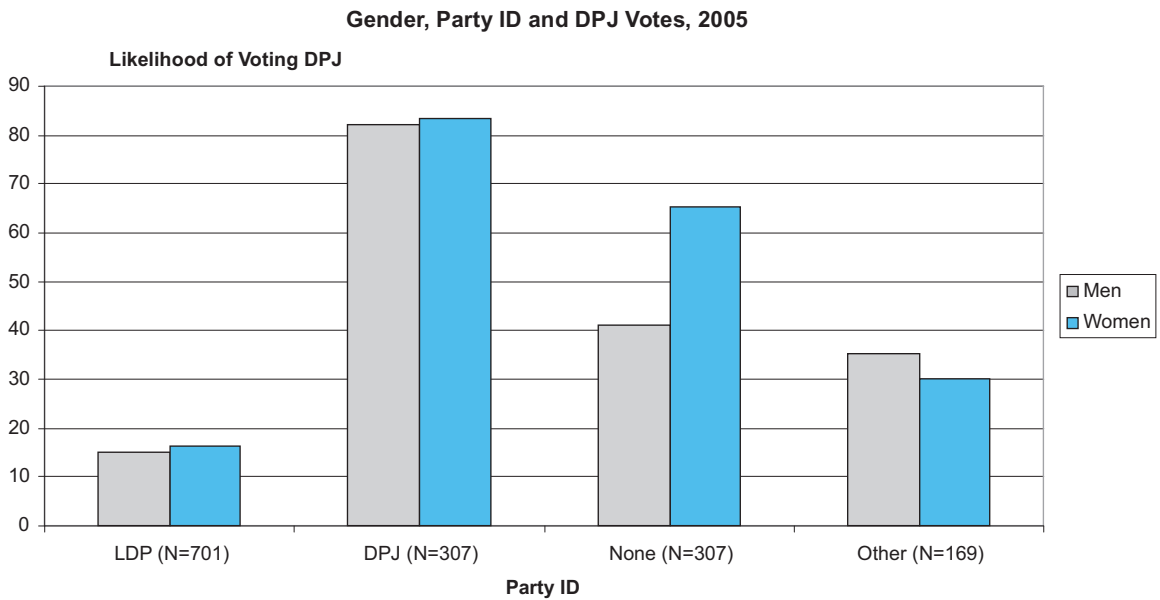
Attitudes about security and defense, followed by social welfare, were decisive.¹¹ Differences in attitudes about security and defense increased the odds that women and men would vote for different parties. Differences in attitudes about social welfare distinguished women who voted for the LDP and women who voted for the DPJ. Even though postal privatization and pension reform were the major issues framing the 2005 election, neither proved to be strong predictors of vote choice because a public consensus existed on these issues. Most voters supported Koizumi's postal privatization because it was successfully framed as a part of a broader strategy to reform Japanese politics. Similarly, most voters were incensed by the failure of many prominent politicians to pay into the pension system, and saw reform as vital to off-setting similar scandals in the future. Both issues were subsumed under the popular reform banner. All things equal, when voters looked for more substantive

FIGURE 1: LIKELIHOOD OF VOTING LDP, MEN AND WOMEN, IN 2005



Notes: Graphs were generated using the pre- and post-election surveys administered during the 2005 election cycle. Source Data: Ken'ichi Ikeda, Yoshiaki Kobayashi, and Hiroshi Hirano. *Japan Election Study III (JES3), 2001-2005*. The bars represent predicted probabilities generated using a multinomial logistic regression model with gender and party ID (reported prior to the election) as independent variables and vote choice (reported after the election) as the dependent variable. The dependent variable is dichotomous, reporting votes for either the LDP or the DPJ, the two parties that captured the vast majority of all votes, regardless of party identification. "None" represents non-partisan voters, those who did not support any particular party prior to the election. "Other" refers to voters who identified themselves as supporters one of the following minor parties: Komeito, Social Democratic Party, Japan Communist Party, The People's New Party, and New Party Nippon.

FIGURE 2: LIKELIHOOD OF VOTING DPJ, MEN AND WOMEN, IN 2005



distinctions between the LDP and the largest opposition party, less salient issues such as security and defense and social welfare came to the fore. These issues are also among the few that have traditionally produced gender gaps in attitudes in Japan.

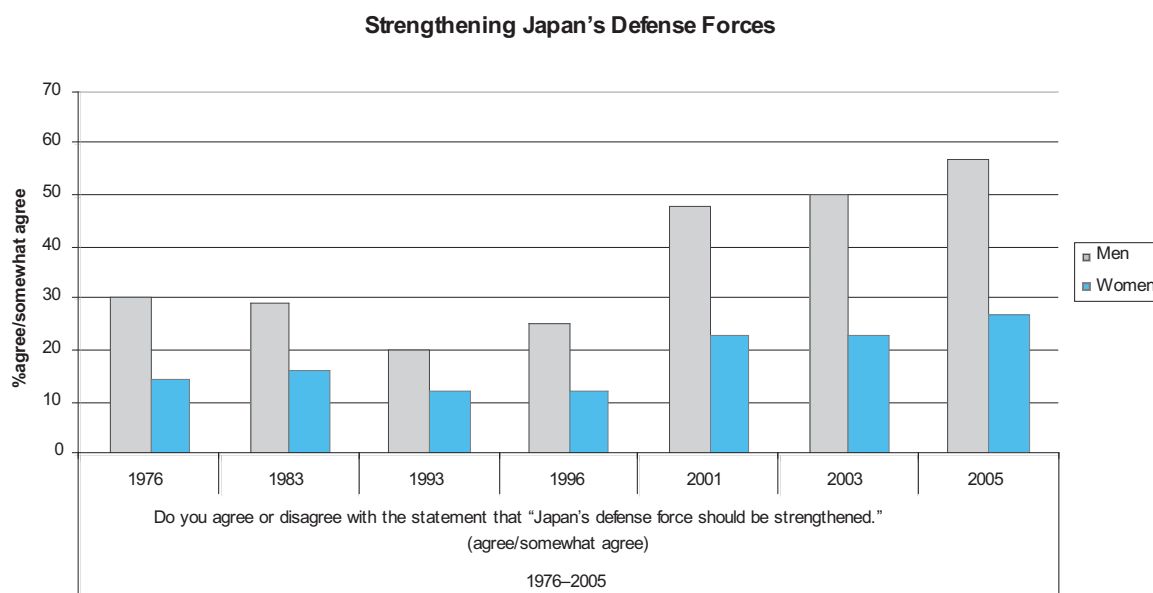
Recent events in Iraq and the feared closing of the U.S. security umbrella have returned defense and security to center stage in Japanese politics. Within the current decade, support for strengthening Japan's defense forces has witnessed a dramatic increase in comparison with the twenty year period between 1976 and 1996. Significantly, the gap separating men and women on this issue has also widened dramatically. In 1976, approximately 30 percent of men and 14 percent of women agreed with the statement, "Japan's defense force should be strengthened." In 1993, even fewer people agreed with this statement, and the difference between men and women was at its smallest. By 2001, however, close to a majority of men (48 percent) and more but significantly fewer women (23 percent) were in favor of strengthening defense forces. By 2005, the gap between men and women on this issue was its largest in thirty years (see Figure 3, below).

In 1976, 73 percent of voters surveyed expressed support for state provision of high quality social welfare even at the expense of higher taxes. A similarly high

percentage (69 percent) of 2005 respondents supported ongoing provision of social welfare even when public finance suffers. There is no gender gap on this issue; men and women express similarly high levels of support. In stark contrast to 1976, however, by 2005 attention had turned to how the state can and should help women balance work and family over the life course as a measure to counteract the falling birth rate while shoring up gaps in caring for an aging population. Consequently, in 2005 social welfare was an important factor for women choosing between the LDP and the DPJ. Women who felt strongly that social welfare provisions should not be limited to the elderly and disabled were more likely to support the DPJ whereas women who agreed that everyone else should live without relying on welfare were more likely to support the LDP. This issue was not a determining factor in vote choice for men; views on welfare did not increase or decrease the likelihood of a man voting for either of these two parties (see Figure 4, next page).

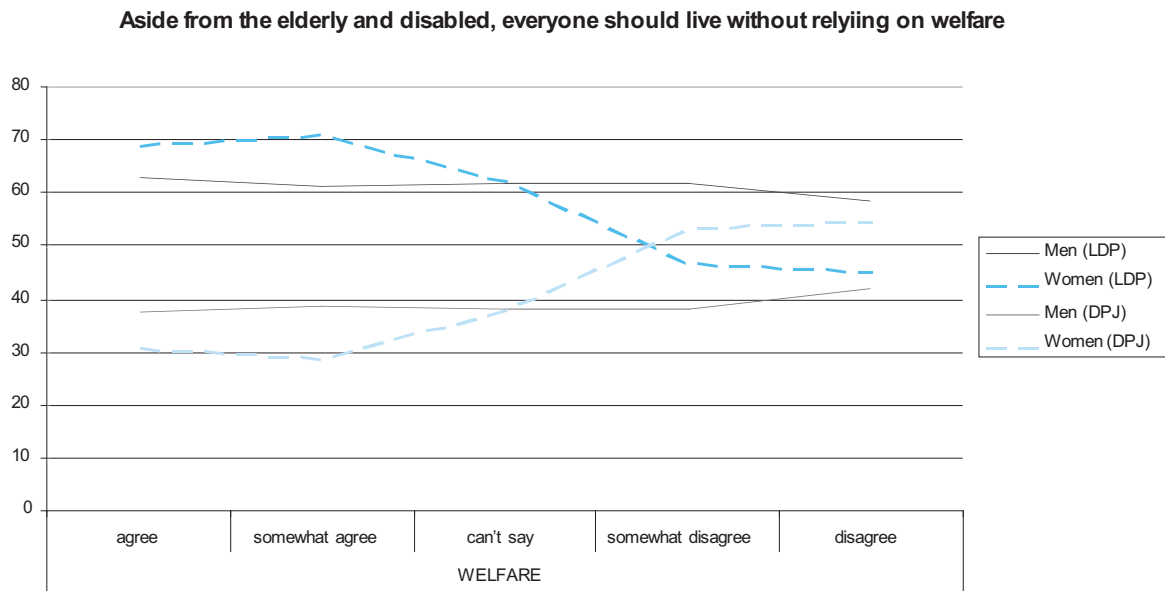
In 2005, attitudes on defense and security were the strongest issue predictors of vote choice, and produced a gender gap in voting. Generally, respondents in disagreement with strengthening Japan's military capabilities were less likely to vote for the LDP and more likely to vote for the DPJ. But a female respondent

FIGURE 3: STRENGTHENING JAPAN'S DEFENSE FORCES



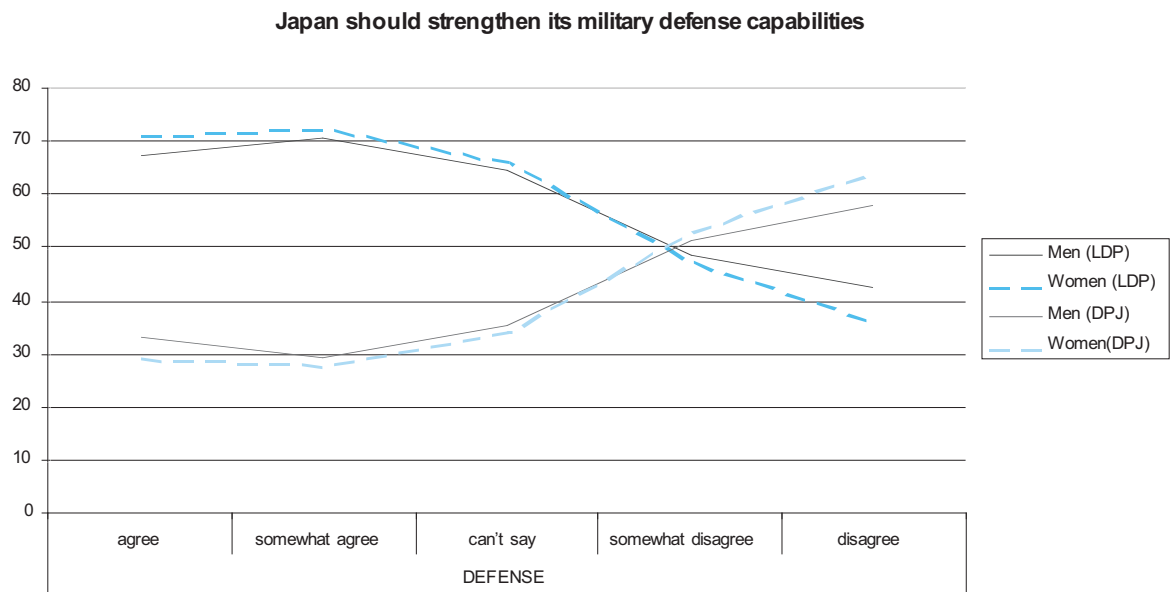
Notes: Figure 3 was generated using the following data sources: Watanuki et al., *Japanese Political Consciousness and Behavior Study (JABISS)*, 1976.; Watanuki et al., *Japan Election Study (JES1)*, 1983.; Kabashima et al., *Japan Election Study II (JES2)*, 1993-96.; Ikeda et al., *Japan Election Study III (JES3)*, 2001-2005.

FIGURE 4: VIEWS ON WELFARE (Lines represent predicted probabilities that women and men will vote for the LDP or DPJ given their position on the issue.)



Notes: Figures 4 and 5 were generated using post-election survey administered during the 2005 election cycle. Source Data: Ken'ichi Ikeda, Yoshiaki Kobayashi, and Hiroshi Hirano. *Japan Election Study III (JES3)*, 2001-2005.

FIGURE 5: ATTITUDES ON DEFENSE AND SECURITY (Lines represent predicted probabilities that women and men will vote for the LDP or DPJ given their position on the issue.)



who disagreed with strengthening military capabilities was more likely to support the DPJ than a man holding similar views. In contrast, there was no difference in the likelihood of voting for the LDP among men and women who supported efforts to strengthen military capabilities (see Figure 5, previous page).

LESSONS FROM 2005

Given what we know now about the distribution of gender-based patterns in issue preferences, party support, and vote choice in 2005, the outcome of the 2007 upper house election could have been forecast. Despite worries that nonpartisan women would be reluctant to vote for the DPJ in 2007, these voters had already demonstrated their willingness to vote for the DPJ in 2005 when circumstances favored the LDP. The goal for the DPJ is to maintain their support and build stronger affective ties with this important segment of the electorate.

The DPJ can hold the support of nonpartisan women, and further its support among women more generally, if it is able to frame strong policy alternatives that are a substantive contrast to the LDP.

The DPJ can hold the support of nonpartisan women, and further its support among women more generally, if it is able to frame strong policy alternatives that are a substantive contrast to the LDP. Doing so would allow the party to make inroads among the substantial number of voters that currently hold no opinion on the issues and those who are in slight disagreement with the LDP's policy position (see Figures 4 & 5, previous page). Social welfare could potentially develop into a strong position issue that structures vote choice among women voters but, tainted by corruption, it continues to operate as a valence issue. Men and women were upset by corrupt social welfare administration practices, but women were more likely to make vote choices on the basis of perceived substantive differences in social welfare policy between the LDP and

the DPJ. Unfortunately, neither party has articulated a substantive policy agenda that proposes accessible and effective solutions to the pressing social welfare concerns that Japan now faces. In 2005, the DPJ won the support of women without having to establish a substantive position. After exposing the missing pension records in 2007, the party only had to position itself as an alternative to the LDP.

While political and economic reform and social welfare headed the agenda in both 2005 and 2007, security and defense issues attained greater importance among unaffiliated voters who might have prioritized these issues more than the public at large, and those voters in search of substantive ways to differentiate between the two parties. In 2005, voters strongly opposed to strengthening Japan's military defense capabilities and who held reservations about the future of the alliance with the United States supported the DPJ. In 2007, the DPJ used the Anti-Terrorism Law to differentiate itself from the LDP on security and defense. At the time, DPJ threats to obstruct renewal of this legislation should it gain a majority of seats in the upper house seemed misguided given the public's greater concern with socio-economic issues much closer to home. The above analysis of voters polled during the 2005 election cycles suggests that this was a savvy strategy. All other things held equal, a significant number of voters will seek additional information about the parties on lower salience issues. Though the differences between the LDP and the DPJ on security and defense rest upon fine points that many argue do not constitute opposite positions, the higher propensity for women opposed to the strengthening of Japan's military capabilities to vote for the DPJ suggests that the party enjoys early success in framing itself as the alternative to the LDP on this issue.

While an emergent gender gap in politics can be negatively viewed as a symptom of chronic inequality, the expression of gender based differences where none previously existed can suggest that the Japanese system is successfully providing an outlet for the Japanese system is successfully providing an outlet for the expression and debate of alternative viewpoints.

ENDNOTES

1. David Pilling, "The Women Who Rule Japan," *Financial Times Online*, June 24, 2007.
2. See Ellis S. Krauss and Benjamin Nyblade, "'Presidentialization' in Japan? The Prime Minister, Media and Elections in Japan," *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol.

- 35, No. 2 (2005), for a discussion of how institutional changes within and outside the LDP allowed former prime minister Koizumi to enjoy a new level of independence from the party and authority in the policy-making process, while also making the prime minister vital as the public face of the party.
3. See Sherry L. Martin, "Alienated, Independent, and Female: Lessons for the Japanese Electorate," *Social Science Japan Journal*, Vol.7 (2004):1-19.
 4. Robin LeBlanc, *Bicycle Citizens: The Political World of the Japanese Housewife* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
 5. See Dennis Patterson and Misa Nishikawa, "Political Interest or Interest in Politics? Gender and Party Support in Postwar Japan," *Women & Politics*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2002).
 6. See the Scott C. Flanagan et al., *The Japanese Voter* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991). Chapter Seven, "Issues and Voting Behavior," by Shinsaku Kohei, Ichiro Miyake and Joji Watanuki provides a particularly helpful framework that structures this essay.
 7. *Ibid.*, Kohei et al.: 295.
 8. Patterson and Nishikawa.
 9. *Ibid.*
 10. Patterson and Nishikawa found evidence that, depending on party support, men and women prioritized issues differently. Even though there might be no difference in the proportions of men and women agreeing that social welfare administration should be maintained even in difficult economic times, women prioritize this issue as more important than men and tend to support parties that they see as also placing a higher priority on social welfare. Even so, there is a difference in party support and vote choice. Supporters of minor parties are more likely to defect, voting for a major party candidate; LDP and DPJ supporters are less likely to defect to a minor party candidate at election time (unless that candidate is a member of a party in coalition with the primary party that the voter supports). The focus of the current essay is on vote choice. While differences in issue position make a difference in party support, gender-based differences in issue positions have typically not been decisive in vote choice.
 11. The choice to focus on security/defense and social welfare issues is both theoretically and empirically informed. Here I summarize significant findings generated by an in-depth analysis of the relationship between voter attitudes on several issue clusters and vote choice. In the 2005 post-election survey, respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with statements offering positions on multiple issues in Japanese politics. I ran a principal components analysis to determine whether certain issues tend to cluster together in the minds of voters. Though the factors I named "reform" and "foreign relations" emerged as the issues that cohered with greatest consistency among voters, these factors were insignificant predictors of vote choice when included in a multinomial regression model because both were valence issues— all voters are outraged by political scandal and most favor good relations with neighbors. Instead, defense emerged as significant in predicting vote choice ($p < .005$), and within gender defense and welfare were significant predictors of vote choice among women (only defense mattered for men).

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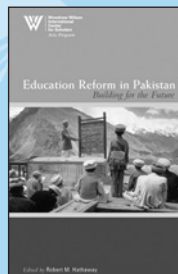
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