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Undercurrents in Japanese Politics

ABSTRACT: Far from being a “lost decade,” the 1990s were a time of critical political change in Japan. The essays in this report analyze some long-term trends that are altering irreversibly the relationship between government and governed. Ellis Krauss examines the role of the media and maintains that new shows have dramatized politics and contributed to the “presidentialization” of the prime minister. Patricia Maclachlan discusses how consumer advocates are challenging the government and contributing to a new awareness of individual rights. Aiji Tanaka describes how independent (non-partisan) voters have become a powerful political force, and Steven Reed looks at the future of the party system, predicting the demise of the one-party state. Ofer Feldman offers insight into the Koizumi boom by investigating shifting concepts of “leadership,” and Ikuko Toyonaga analyzes the prime minister’s successful political strategy of pitting ordinary citizens against the “establishment.” All six essays illustrate how the supposedly rigid Japanese political system is responding over time to the demands and desires of the public.

Introduction

Amy McCreedy

“It seems the earth is shaking,” said Junichiro Koizumi, as support for him poured in from the rank-and-file members of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Even he seemed astounded by his 2001 landslide victory and his subsequent rise to superstar status among ordinary Japanese people.

Ten months later, Koizumi’s popularity has declined markedly. Does the Koizumi phenomenon expose a sea change in Japanese politics, or is it merely an aberration from “business as usual”? Is Koizumi the last hope for change, the latest obstacle to change, or the forerunner to a whole new way of governing in Japan? In other words, how does he and his administration fit into the larger picture of what Japan will become in the 21st century?

By publishing this Special Report (a follow-up to a November 13 half-day conference at the

Wilson Center), the Asia Program aims to look beyond personalities and economic prescriptions to deeper movements in Japanese society. This necessitates a long-term perspective. As the six experts who contributed to this report suggest, shifts in public perceptions that began during the so-called “lost decade” of the 1990s (or before) continue to powerfully influence the current political situation. Changes in voting behavior, new attitudes toward leadership and authority, the increasing influence of television, and the development of civil society are among the long-term “undercurrents” discussed. The earth shook in April 2001—but society’s tectonic plates had been moving for a while.

This report highlights the importance of bottom-up change in Japan, of examining “leaders as followers.” While all of the essayists are careful Nagatacho observers, they also maintain a wider perspective, examining how leaders are responding to the needs and desires of ordinary people from Hokkaido to Okinawa. They

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do not all agree that the government is becoming more flexible and responsive (at least permanently so). But at least in this time of economic distress, the ins and outs of the Nagatacho power game seem to be becoming less relevant to election outcomes (as Koizumi's victory suggests) and to the changing relationship between government and public.

Ellis Krauss of the University of California of San Diego examines the importance of the media in changing the nature of Japanese politics. He maintains that the Koizumi "boom" is largely the culmination of the increasing impact of television—a trend that has been gradually and quietly transforming Japanese society from below. Until the mid-1980s, Japanese television tended to be neutral to the point of dullness, featuring "impersonal bureaucrats working collectively on the public's behalf" rather than the drama of political competition. In fact, NHK, the public broadcasting company, avoided showing candidates' faces. According to Krauss, new shows like Hiroshi Kume's "News Station" changed all that. These shows portrayed politicians as individuals, and were peppered with cynical opinions and frank commentary. In effect, they prepared the way for Koizumi's colorful, media-savvy style.

But the influence goes beyond style. Krauss suggests that television helped bring about the "presidentialization" of the prime minister. For example, ever since Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone struck a striking and powerful figure on television in the 1980s, the premier's image has become distinct from

that of his party—the electorate has come to see him as an individual. The Koizumi phenomenon is not an aberration but the culmination of a 15-year trend. If not for this quiet shift in public perception, Koizumi would not be able to wield his personal popularity as a powerful political tool. Ensuing administrative and electoral reforms have proceeded to enhance further his leadership role.

Krauss points out that, in spite of this increasing power of television in Japan, it will probably never have the level of influence that it has in the United States. There are, after all, still restrictions on campaigning and on candidates' purchasing of television time. But he predicts that TV's power will continue to grow and will sharpen scrutiny of the prime minister's actions, even while it gives him or her more influence on policy making and elections.

The electorate is also changing through a rise in consumer advocacy. According to **Patricia Maclachlan** of the University of Texas in Austin, the "consumer as citizen" is beginning to have an impact not only on policy but on governance more generally. Progress is still modest, but consumer-related groups have pressured the Diet for access to information and to the courts, and have shouldered into bureaucratic decision-making as never before. Experience in exercising their new rights will further strengthen the citizen (*shimin*) identities of Japanese people. Thus, consumer consciousness is entwined with the rise of civil society generally, and with movements for environmental protection, human rights and good governance.

Maclachlan explains that today's consumer activists differ markedly from their predecessors, who (strange though it may seem) were often allied with producers and retailers. Giving an overview of the consumer movement since the occupation period, Maclachlan discusses how activists and cooperatives, as they worked to expand their visibility and their membership, avoided offending small retailers, labor unions, and agricultural groups. After all, "consumers" were also human beings struggling hard to survive and prosper under difficult economic conditions; most early activists were wives of workers or small businessmen. This helps explain why consumer advocates engaged in such seemingly irrational behavior as allying with local merchants' associations against the loosening of the Large Scale Retail Store Law.

THE ASIA PROGRAM

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According to Maclachlan, Japan has entered “a new era of consumer politics in which politicians of all persuasions must pay more than mere lip service to the interests of consumers.” The producer has declined in the public’s esteem. In today’s advanced industrial economy, it is deregulation, low prices and choice that are the goals of consumer advocates (although agricultural protectionism shows little sign of abating).

Focusing more strictly on electoral behavior is **Aiji Tanaka** of Waseda University, who examines the rise of the independent (non-partisan) voter. As Tanaka points out, this is no overnight phenomenon; the proportion of such voters started to grow noticeably in the 1970s. The percentage jumped to 50% by 1995, before more or less leveling off. While some of the independent voters fit the stereotype of being uninterested or ignorant of politics, most do not. They tend to young, urban, active in their communities, knowledgeable about international affairs, and better educated than their partisan counterparts. They are, however, left cold by such discussions as who will be the next secretary-general of the LDP or what parties are likely to form a coalition.

According to Tanaka, many Japanese leaders have been slow to appreciate the importance of this new type of voter: “Predictions by older politicians or LDP leaders are betrayed every time the new independent voters go out to vote.” In fact, the independents’ impact on governance has been substantial. First, they tend to support candidates who address issues—such as international affairs, recycling, and community planning—rather than consummate political insiders who are good at maneuvering in Nagatacho. Second, such voters turn out in great numbers for only two reasons: 1) to punish the incumbent party for mismanagement, or b) to lend allegiance to a fresh candidate who proposes new policies.

Tanaka maintains that dissatisfaction with leaders is nothing new in Japan. What *is* new is that trust of the very institutions that make up Japanese democracy—the elections, the political parties and the Diet—has plunged since 1996. In 2000, over half of voters still maintained confidence in the electoral process, but this percentage fell to 32.3 percent in 2001. At the peak of dissatisfaction with Yoshiro Mori’s government, Japanese citizens seemed to be questioning whether “throwing the rascals out” would solve their problems. Hadn’t they seen a long

stream of prime ministers, new parties, and new coalitions—with no perceivable change in the economy or in the decision-making process? It is in this context that the intensity of the Koizumi phenomenon can best be appreciated. The voters expect drastic change, and will be bitterly disappointed if their prime minister cannot deliver it.

Steven Reed of Chuo University brings many of the above themes into his discussion of Japan’s party system. However, his view of the electorate is a bit different from those of the other essayists. While the other contributors discern, in one way or another, a “new type” of electorate, Reed emphasizes continuity in this respect. Voters are voters, and voters want change. This desire for change is a powerful force, and has been for decades—but, according to Reed, the Koizumi boom is not an unprecedented phenomenon. In fact, it is a “bounce of approximately the same magnitude as the New Liberal Club received in 1976, as Doi’s Socialist Party received in 1989, and as the three new parties received in 1993.” As for the growing urban/rural cleavage that is cited by many analysts, Reed does not see it. Such a hypothesis “makes wonderful sense but does not fit the facts.”

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Reed focuses on structural change. His controversial thesis is that Japan is shifting to a two-party system as a consequence of electoral reform. In the new situation, the LDP (the “natural party of government”) and the Democratic Party (the “alternative”) will rotate in and out of power. According to Reed, such a bipolar pattern is already visible at the district level. Because the new electoral system includes single-member (“first past the post”) districts, it will encourage cooperation among all who oppose the ruling party, until gradually a two-bloc structure emerges. As evidence of this, Reed points out that the Komei Party is feverishly trying to return to the old electoral system—as the third party, it foresees all too well its eventual demise.



As for the “reform project,” of which Koizumi is only the latest representative, it is not a sudden flow-
 ering of a changed Japanese society, but an ongoing
 trend that dates back decades. Not that the latest
 manifestations of this trend are not exciting. Reed
 maintains that—again, the result of electoral
 reform—pork barrel politics are on the way out, in
 urban and rural districts alike. This does not mean
 the end of the LDP, which (according to Reed) is
 quite capable of abandoning its “essence” as it has
 twice in the past in order to survive and continue
 winning elections.

Ofer Feldman, an expert in political psychology
 from the Naruto University of Education, empha-
 sizes Koizumi’s individuality more than do the other
 essayists in this report. He gives more credit to
 Koizumi for his own boom, portraying the prime
 minister less as a repository for society’s desires and
 more as a visionary politician of extraordinary skill.
 Feldman cites Koizumi’s strength, determination
 and superb public communications skills. He points
 out that the prime minister has made critical and
 innovative decisions (such as choosing a cabinet
 without regard for factional balance) that have
 altered Japanese politics, perhaps forever. Thus, “as

on several of his own studies from the 1990s to show
 how this image has shifted to a “performance”
 image that places highest value on task accomplish-
 ment. Single-mindedness, courage, persuasiveness,
 consistency, efficiency and, above all, the power to
 get things done—these are valued more than ever
 before by an electorate (and politicians themselves)
 frustrated by economic stagnation, record unem-
 ployment and social problems. Thus, Koizumi’s daz-
 zling popularity came from a combination of per-
 sonal skills and timing.

Ikuko Toyonaga of Kyushu University gives
 another angle as to how Koizumi and his “virtual
 running mate,” Makiko Tanaka, managed to vault to
 astonishing heights of popularity. According to
 Toyonaga, Koizumi and Tanaka followed trends in
 Great Britain and the United States by exploiting
 the gap between elites and ordinary citizens in order
 to bring politics to the world of mass culture and
 win support for their policies. Such a stratagem was
 pursued with particular effectiveness by Margaret
 Thatcher, who managed to seize the populist banner
 from the Labour Party and succeed for more than
 11 years as a “natural outsider to the men’s club.”
 Toyonaga points out that Thatcher was so utterly
 despised in academic and journalistic circles that
 “hating her in itself became almost a sign of intellec-
 tuality.” At least in this respect, Makiko Tanaka’s
 position is certainly similar. Though Tanaka has been
 replaced as foreign minister since Toyonaga’s essay
 was written, we should not write off the still-popu-
 lar politician too soon, Toyonaga’s assessment would
 imply.

Both Koizumi and Tanaka have managed to
 strike a deep rapport with ordinary people by suc-
 cessfully portraying themselves as “ordinary.” In this
 sense of the word, to be “ordinary” is to be outside
 the circle of elites who have led Japan into econom-
 ic and political stagnation. (As Toyonaga points out,
 Koizumi’s key role in Mori’s faction has somehow
 been forgotten.) Toyonaga pays particular attention
 to the attitudes of female voters, who are the con-
 summate outsiders in this sense. She describes
 Japanese women as deeply critical, even cynical, of
 the leaders who have squandered Japan’s fortunes.
 Thus, any politician who aims for an overly “tough”
 or masculine image—like the Democratic Party’s
 Yukio Hatoyama—is missing the chance to appeal
 to this important segment of the electorate.

*All the essayists agree that the 1990s
 were not a “lost decade,” but a time of
 critical change under the surface of
 Japanese politics.*

disapproval of the [Mori] administration and politi-
 cians reached its peak by late 2000, there was proba-
 bly only one politician—Junichiro Koizumi—who
 could combine traits such as integrity, decisiveness,
 and competence at this time in history.”

But in spite of his skills, Koizumi could not have
 made it to the top without a transformation of the
 electorate, Feldman suggests. As a political psycholo-
 gist, Feldman looks at how the Japanese people’s
 ideas of leadership have changed. Traditionally, a
 “leader” in Japan was thought to be paternalistic,
 friendly, and involved in the personal and emotional
 lives of his subordinates. His function was to resolve
 disputes harmoniously and to make sure minority
 opinions were taken into account. Feldman draws



In general, all the essayists agree that the 1990s were not a “lost decade,” but a time of critical change under the surface of Japanese politics. The political system may be more rigid—“conservative” in the most literal sense of the word—than in the United States and other Western democracies, but it is proceeding to remake itself in a variety of ways. Even if Koizumi does not last long, many of the trends described in this Special Report seem irreversible.

While this report deals mainly with national politics, it is important to remember that local and prefectural governments are also rocked by “undercurrents” and may be even more indicative of Japan’s future than what goes on in Nagatacho. For example, following the first local referendum in 1995 (in Maki-machi, Niigata Prefecture), citizens increasingly support referendums on everything from dams to garbage dumps, and are more assertive in general. Moreover, while over half of Japanese governors are still ex-bureaucrats, a new breed of confrontational governor has paved the way for Koizumi’s maverick style. For example, Masayasu Kitagawa of Mie Prefecture now discloses the cost-effectiveness of government projects on the Internet. The political system of the future is likely to be less secretive and centralized than in the past.

Japanese people say they are losing faith in their democratic institutions. However, as the days of one-party rule, backroom deals, machine politics, and bureaucratic supremacy come to a close, they will have a greater role than ever before. Increasingly, they will have only themselves to blame—and then, perhaps, we will enter an even more critical era of change in Japanese politics.

The Media's Role in a Changing Japanese Electorate

ELLIS S. KRAUSS

The “Koizumi phenomenon” of the spring and summer of 2001 seemed to take many foreign observers of Japan by surprise. The popularity among the public of this wavy-haired, rock and opera aficionado and maverick of Japanese politics, who gained his party’s nomination via a rebellion on his behalf among LDP rank-and-file, led his party to victory in the subsequent Upper House election in the summer, attracted viewers to watch his parliamentary speeches, and got his personnel and policy preferences through his party and the Diet, was unprecedented. It was all the more surprising because it seemed such a stunning departure from the past. Japanese leaders for four decades had seemed colorless, ineffectual products of the consensual LDP factional politics that produced them, mostly neither beholden nor appealing to public opinion and the average voter. In the predictable world of election campaigns, individual Diet members competed with one other for votes by distributing pork barrel benefits and forming their own local support organizations (*kouenkai*). No one voted for a party based on who its leader was, and the LDP won all the time.

Clearly, a cultural explanation is untenable—Japanese culture did not suddenly cause people to switch their preferences from bland and consensual leaders to charismatic individualists overnight (and anyway, “cultural” explanations emphasize continuities!). Either Koizumi is a flash-in-the-pan occurrence with “politics as usual” to return soon, or the reforms of 1993–94 that changed the Japanese electoral system to a combination of single-member district (SMD) and proportional representation (PR) systems has made more of an immediate impact than we thought. I will argue that the first is wrong, and the second only partially right. The Koizumi “boom” is not so much a flash-in-the-pan phenomenon as the culmination of a trend that has been occurring under the surface of Japanese politics for fifteen years, and although the new electoral systems



have made a difference, this is primarily because of the increasing impact of television.

TELEVISION AS A POLITICAL AND ELECTORAL FORCE IN JAPAN BEFORE THE 1990S

We all know that Japan is a media-saturated country. Newspaper distribution rates are the highest per capita among the major democracies, and Japanese watch more television per day than any other people in the world except Americans—the influential public broadcaster (NHK) competing against a full range of private commercial stations. Japanese elites (except for media elites themselves) have named the media as the most influential force on society.¹ We would certainly expect the media, and especially television—once it became the prime source of information for the Japanese in the late 1960s, as in other countries—to have a major influence on elections and the electorate’s choices. Yet for most of the post-war period there has been surprisingly little evidence of such an impact on politics, compared to other countries.

The nature of Japanese political and media institutions are partly responsible for this lack of influence. The multi-member district system of Japanese elections meant that candidates of the LDP competed against one other on a district level as much as

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against rivals from other parties. To differentiate themselves, candidates could not use issues, policies, or values, but relied instead on distributing individual and collective (often pork barrel) benefits. In particular, these benefits went to members of the politicians' own personal support organizations, maintained throughout the year but mobilized at election time. Thus, party label and leadership little influenced the votes of LDP supporters (the largest single partisan group in the electorate).

Combined with this was the draconian nature of Japanese electoral campaigning laws. Almost nothing we take for granted in the United States has been allowed. There has been no door-to-door campaigning, restricted and regulated posters and advertising, a short (usually 30 days or less) legal campaign period, and most importantly, no buying of media time by individual candidates. A limited number of television and radio spots were allowed each candidate (after 1969) and all candidates' spots followed the same format; thus no candidate could gain any advantage over rivals through buying, or even using the provided, media time. Political parties were allowed to buy an unlimited number of media spots, but as district campaigns were not so much about party competition as competition among individual candidates using pork and constituency services to mobilize their supporters, these advertisements were somewhat divorced from the real electoral battles.

The media as an institution also limited their impact during elections. Journalistic norms in Japan make newspaper articles concise (there is no turning to inside pages to continue articles in Japanese newspapers), and strictly factual and neutral. Few opinions of sources (except of government officials) are included, in contrast to the American reporters' reliance on citing the views of at least two or more opposing sources, thus providing more interpretation but a different form of "balance" to the news. Sources themselves tend to control the agenda of news through the "reporters' club," in which all the major newspapers and television networks station reporters in all the important institutions of society. This often leads to dependence on sources, conformity, and lack of investigative reporting.²

All these characteristics of the large national newspapers were shared by NHK television news, which was the main news source for Japanese from the 1960s to the 1980s. NHK's dry, scrupulously

non-interpretive, and visually staid coverage even tended to cover the officials in the national bureaucracy and their role in policymaking more than it did the prime minister, cabinet, or other elected politicians. This "neutrality" of the news even extended to TV news segments about elections: standard practice was not to show the face of any particular candidate in a specific race so as not to give an untoward advantage to a particular candidate (although party leaders were shown). So much for "photo ops" of candidates during races.

Such strictly non-interpretive, non-dramatic, factual and neutral presentation of news did mean that Japanese trusted their media a lot more than Americans trusted theirs. In surveys from the 1970s to the late 1990s, the overwhelming majority of Japanese were found to perceive their newspapers as accurate, trustworthy and balanced. In a major study of Japanese voters in 1976, only one-fifth of those respondents exposed to the media said that they could detect any partisan biases. Television scored less well but still with a majority (or nearly a majority) of the public on those dimensions.³ Several surveys earlier in the postwar period showed NHK to be the most trusted institution of Japanese society.⁴ Indeed, the media was seen as far more trustworthy than the politicians they reported about—Japanese have always been notoriously cynical about politicians and political parties.

Nakasone did the unprecedented: he reached beyond the other party elders for a public support base using television.

It is not surprising, then, that television did not seem to influence politics or elections that much. The most comprehensive survey-based study of Japanese elections, for example, found that heavy exposure to television did not seem to weaken partisanship, increase voter volatility, or lessen interest in politics. Nor was there much evidence that either the print or broadcast media played a direct role in determining partisan preferences or candidate choice. Only less than eight percent of voters might have changed their evaluations of candidates as a result of exposure to one or other medium, and the

changes balanced out so as to have little net effect on the outcome of the election. The only impact of the media seemed to be indirect. The much publicized Lockheed scandal in the 1970s raised the salience of the corruption issue and increased the tendency of some voters to vote against the ruling party.⁵

It is little wonder that, despite the importance and ubiquity of the mass media, Japanese politics even by the mid-1980s seemed stuck in a pre-television age compared to other democracies where its advent had already transformed political life.

WHAT CHANGED? THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

Two trends have changed media's role in elections and politics. First, types of alternative television coverage have increased. Second, use of the medium by some prime ministers has transformed the premier's role in the eyes of voters and the requirements of being a successful political leader.

Under the surface, television had wrought a quiet political change that went almost unnoticed.

New Types of News Programs

Beginning in 1985, a new type of program, Hiroshi Kume's "News Station," appeared on a commercial station in Japan. Instead of dry, neutral, factual news mostly about the bureaucracy, this prime-time program had a totally different format and style. Kume, the "host" among a panel of "newscasters," was not even a journalist but rather a radio and television personality who had hosted entertainment and interview shows previously. In addition to the main news of the day, there were several human-interest stories and interviews. Most importantly, the news presented a much more interpretive flavor. Kume would often make indicate skepticism about some aspect of a news story, especially about the efficacy or veracity of officialdom, and occasionally even insert a personal cynical viewpoint.⁶ This type of program, including personal commentary, was a first for Japan and had no counterpart in any other country. It was as if Geraldo Rivera was combined

with nightly news and morning shows like "Today" or "Good Morning America." Politicians were portrayed as individual personalities involved in competitive dramas, in contrast to NHK's 7:00 pm focus on impersonal bureaucrats working collectively on the public's behalf.

"News Station" gradually became very popular and successful, especially among the 20-30 year olds who were its original target audience. By the 1990s, it attained equivalent or better ratings than NHK's 7:00 pm news, which had previously dominated. Other stations also introduced even more interpretive news programs in emulation. Both the political elite and the public began to attribute (often overblown) influence to Kume and other such commentators in swaying elections. In 1996 surveys, virtually all politicians and almost three quarters of the public thought that television news programs and newscasters' opinions had some influence on voting behavior. Fully two thirds of politicians thought they had "a great deal" of influence. Hiroshi Kume was thought to hold such influence by 85 percent of politicians and 54 percent of the public; Tetsuya Chikushi (another news anchor, even more straightforwardly assertive than Kume) by 74 percent of politicians and 46 percent of the public.⁷

Simultaneously, new shows featuring interviews, panel discussions, and debates among politicians and officials, as well as skeptical questioning, began attracting viewers on weekends and late evenings. In 1993, in fact, one of these programs precipitated a prime minister's resignation and a general election. The host-interviewer pressed Prime Minister Miyazawa until he promised to resign if he did not get the pending electoral reform legislation through the Diet. He didn't, and the television clip was played and replayed, helping to bring down his government. During the campaign that followed, so many of such programs proved salient to the campaign, that the 1993 election became known as "Japan's first television election."⁸

New Types of Prime Ministers

While television coverage of politics was being transformed, some canny politicians were learning to use the medium to enhance their and their parties' fortunes—despite campaign restrictions, "News Station's" rather cynical and negative portrayal of politicians, and NHK's continued emphasis on the



bureaucracy. In fact, a new criterion was established for political popularity, as television news began catering to independent voters and members of the postwar generations who were accustomed to television. Faceless, behind-the-scenes manipulators of factional balances could stay in power and receive grudging public approval if they were capable of producing effective economic and foreign policies—but they could not elicit stronger, more personal support. The latter required a personal media image and the ability to manage it.

The first Japanese prime minister to recognize television's political potential was Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone (1982–1987). He was the leader of one of the LDP's smaller factions. He was supported by two of the largest factions, but only reluctantly; their own leaders were either ineligible because of scandal (Tanaka faction) or had just served in the post (Ohira faction). In a thus relatively weak position within his party, Nakasone did the unprecedented: he reached beyond the other party elders for a public support base using television. He cultivated his television news image by striking a tall and dignified figure at G-7 meetings and through his “Ron-Yasu” relationship with Ronald Reagan, and connected with the Japanese public in exclusive interview programs. He also pushed “administrative reform,” especially the privatization of Japan's giant public corporations. In this way, he boosted the “positive” public-support rating of his cabinet. Nakasone then used this support as a resource with other party leaders to maintain his power despite his weak factional base.⁹

The other politician to utilize television effectively was Morihiro Hosokawa (1993–1994). After the LDP split in 1993, he managed to cobble together a pastiche of almost all the “opposition” parties—ranging from former disaffected conservatives like himself to socialists—to become prime minister. Young, dashing (he affected white silk aviator scarves), a former popular governor and scion of an ancient aristocratic family, Hosokawa used televised press conferences to enhance his leadership image, altering their previous innocuous and ritualized format. He soon became a media darling and was seen as “the JFK of Japan.” In terms of policy, Hosokawa made electoral reform the keystone of his coalition cabinet—knowing that was probably the only issue upon which most of the disparate parties could agree. By the summer of 1996, he suc-

ceeded in pushing through the Diet a major electoral reform and campaign finance package, which changed the electoral system for the House of Representatives and tightened up restrictions on donations to politicians by channeling them through political parties rather than individual politicians or factions.¹⁰ A former Asahi newspaper reporter himself, he and his advisors thoroughly understood the nature of the Japanese media and how to skillfully manage it.¹¹ Hosokawa had to resign because of media challenges regarding some of his own past improprieties, and the reform coalition government collapsed not long afterwards, bringing a different form of coalition government with a socialist prime minister and LDP cabinet dominance.

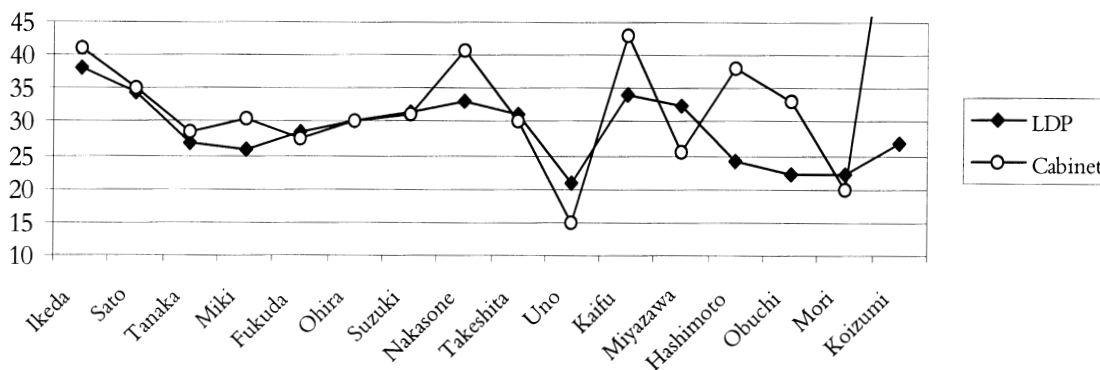
“Presidentialization” of the Prime Minister's Role

Both Nakasone and Hosokawa tended to be seen in Japan and abroad as aberrations to the typical mold of Japanese prime ministers. Yet under the surface, television had wrought a quiet political change that went almost unnoticed. After Nakasone, the electorate's support for individual prime ministers and cabinets became independent of support for a particular political party (see graph next page).¹²

One way to interpret these trends is to see Japan as witnessing the beginnings of the “presidentialization” of the prime minister's role.

As the graph shows, after Nakasone we see two phenomena occurring. First, the prime minister's (cabinet's) image deviates from that of the party (although the two move in similar directions). Second, prime ministers with good media images and who identify themselves with clean politics and/or reform (Nakasone, Kaifu, Hashimoto, Obuchi) attain far higher cabinet ratings than prime ministers in the more traditional mold of traditional, faceless faction leaders (Takeshita, Uno, Miyazawa, Mori). This is true even though the less popular prime ministers are often also faction leaders and sometimes from the same faction as more popular ones (Takeshita and Obuchi/Hashimoto).

Cabinet and Party Support, by LDP Prime Minister 1960–2001



Source: Ellis S. Krauss and Benjamin Nyblade, “The Changing Role of Japan’s Prime Minister,”¹³ manuscript article currently under review by a political science journal.

One way to interpret these trends is to see Japan as witnessing the beginnings of the “presidentialization” of the prime minister’s role that has been noted in other industrialized parliamentary democracies.¹⁴ That is, the personalization of the role is increasingly important to voters. In this sense, the Koizumi phenomenon is not a singular aberration but the culmination and an extreme variant of a trend that has been occurring in Japanese politics since the mid-1980s—even before institutional reforms—and is the product of the changing leader/electorate relationship as mediated by the media.

WHAT CHANGED? INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS

The second major change that has reinforced and expanded the media’s role in elections is institutional (electoral and administrative) reform since 1994.

Electoral Reform: From Candidate to Party

As all Japan observers know, the old multi-member district system encouraged rivalry among candidates of the same party (particularly within the LDP). This put the focus of elections on individual candidates trying to mobilize votes through pork barrel and other policy benefits (through their service on the party’s policy organ) and constituency services (through their own personal support organizations, or *kouenkai*). To help them compete with their fellow LDP rivals, individual politicians looked to their faction leaders both for funds and for party posi-

tions. The new electoral system since 1994 of a combined single-member district (SMD; now 300 seats) and proportional representation (PR; now 180 seats) should change this over time. The SMD and especially PR electoral systems will gradually encourage voting more on the basis of party image than on personal characteristics or services of individual LDP candidates. Even before the electoral reform, such a shift had begun, probably because only parties could purchase television advertising time and thus convey information to influence voter perceptions.¹⁵ Because the party leader (the prime minister, in the case of the LDP) is central to party image, this trend should further reinforce the personalization of the role and its influence on voting behavior.

Second, because this hybrid electoral system includes a public relations component, no party is likely to gain a majority of seats, and coalition governments will become the norm—as has increasingly been the case since the reform. Coalition governments put party leadership at center stage in negotiating policy, further reinforcing the centrality of the prime minister in the government and party.

Administrative Reform: From Bureaucracy to Prime Minister and Cabinet

The Diet in 1999 passed an administrative reform that took effect January 6, 2001. The reform, in addition to reorganizing the central ministries of government, had an explicit goal of strengthening the cabinet and the prime minister’s leadership



capabilities. It does so in several ways:

For example, the reform explicitly gives the prime minister a role in initiating policies at cabinet meetings and the right to create special task forces and committees for policy areas in which he has a particular interest. It also expands the cabinet secretariat's authority to plan, initiate, and draft bills, as well as have jurisdiction (along with the new Financial Advisory Council) over the all-important budget process. A Cabinet Office has been established and the prime minister may use it to direct other ministers and bureaucrats in policy areas requiring coordination among multiple ministries. Finally, the number of junior ministers—now called “state secretaries” (22 of them) and parliamentary secretaries (26) instead of “parliamentary vice-ministers”—has increased, creating more junior politicians beholden to the prime minister and party leadership for their first important governmental posts.

Clearly, both the powers and resources available to the prime minister have grown. Being more central (along with his cabinet) to policymaking will reinforce his centrality to the media and electorate.

THE FUTURE

Such are the “undercurrents” and waves of changing Japanese politics with respect to the media and elections. The new incentives, institutions, and relationships will not have a neat impact on voters, who will adjust rationally but also learn gradually.¹⁶ Clearly, however, these trends will enhance the prime minister's opportunities to influence policymaking and elections. He (or she) will be much more central to party fortunes at the polls, but also subject to increased scrutiny from media and voters—leading to greater accountability but not necessarily more political stability. Skillful and attractive prime ministers will gain popularity and better results for their party; unskillful and unattractive ones will find their terms quite short (ask former Prime Minister Mori). Welcome, Japan, to the world of 21st century democracy!

As the institutions of media and politics have changed, and as television journalists and politicians have figured out how to get around, use, or reform those institutions in their own interests, the conditions surrounding elections and the electorate have

changed as well. In Japan, television does not, nor may ever, influence elections as much as in the United States, with its presidential system and lack of restrictions on buying of time for candidates. In this regard, Japanese television is even behind Britain and other “presidentialized” parliamentary systems. Candidates still face restrictions on campaigning and on purchasing of television time. Personal leadership factions in the LDP persist, influencing recruitment to top positions in the party, Diet, and cabinet. NHK and the printed press remain important, with their pre-TV norms of emphasizing the bureaucracy and factions. Reporters' clubs, and their effect on journalist-source relationships, have not gone away. For better or worse, however, Japanese politics and elections have entered the television age—belatedly and perhaps more unevenly than other industrialized democracies, but most surely.

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6. Krauss, *NHK: Broadcasting Politics in Japan*, chapter 8.
7. *Yomiuri Shimbun*, April 10, 1996, 1, 2-3; June 12, 1996, 1, 14.
8. Kristin Kyoko Altman, "TV and Political Turmoil: Japan's Summer of 1993," in Susan J. Pharr and Ellis S. Krauss, eds., *Media and Politics in Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996).
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11. Personal interview, 1994.
12. Ellis S. Krauss and Benjamin Nyblade, "The Changing Role of Japan's Prime Minister," unpublished manuscript.
13. All polling data is from monthly polls done by Jiji Press. The data was collected from *Sengo nihon no seitou to naikaku* (1981, ed. and published by Jiji Press, Tokyo); *Nihon no seitou to naikaku 1981-91* (1992, ed. by Jiji Press and Central Research Services [*Chouou chousa sha*], published by Jiji Press, Tokyo); *Seron chousa nenkan* (published through 1999 by the Prime Minister's Office and starting in 2000 by the Cabinet Office); and Jiji Press's website (www.jiji.co.jp). We end the series with Koizumi's second month in office (June 2001). We are grateful to Ken Karube of Jiji Press for supplying us with four months of missing data.
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Consumer as Citizen

PATRICIA L. MACLACHLAN

Japanese consumer advocates, according to many Japan watchers, are a strange lot. During the early postwar period, they cooperated closely with the government in order to eradicate inflation and restore the supply of goods and services to the marketplace. Since the 1960s, they have allied with rice farmers in support of agricultural protectionism that resulted in higher prices for consumers. Advocates also joined forces with small- and medium-sized retailers in opposition to the loosening of the Large Scale Retail Store Law, even though abolition of the law stood to lower prices and expand the range of product choice available to consumers. Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, consumer organizations either voiced their opposition to privatization and “pro-consumer” deregulation or failed to take a stand on these issues. If, like many Western economists, we are to equate the “consumer interest” with low prices and a wide range of consumer choice, it would appear that Japanese consumer advocates and the citizens they represent do not know what is good for them.

The purpose of this essay is, first, to explain this seemingly idiosyncratic behavior of Japanese consumers with reference to history, culture, and the nature of relations between consumers and the government. Second, I will illustrate how Japanese consumer behavior is changing in response to recent political and legislative developments.¹

THE EARLY POSTWAR CONTEXT

In contrast to the American consumer movement, which experienced its most formative years in response to the economic affluence of the 1960s, the contemporary Japanese movement was shaped by the economic and political circumstances of the Occupation (1945–52) period. As others have documented,² this was a period of economic chaos, widespread poverty, and unprecedented opportunities for citizen participation in politics.



As the movement’s leading organizations sprung up against this backdrop, consumer advocates fashioned a loose consensus about what it meant to be a consumer in society—a consensus that has had a major impact on the movement’s goals and political alliances throughout most of the postwar period. At the heart of that consensus was a profound distrust of the purely economic conceptualizations of “consumption” (*shouhi*) and “consumer” (*shouhisha*).³ The origins of these attitudes can be found in prewar history. Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as Japan embarked on an ambitious program of industrialization and modernization, the primary role of consumers was not so much to “consume” as to save—to contribute, in other words, to the expansion of industry in accordance with the state’s long-term vision for the economy.⁴ Thus, it was not surprising that consumer cooperativists encountered negative public reactions toward such seemingly innocuous terms as “buyers’ cooperative” (*koubai kumiai*) and “consumer cooperative” (*shouhisha kumiai*). Many Japanese seemed to dislike the term “consumption” because of its passive and allegedly anti-producer overtones that were in no small part conveyed by the very linguistic make-up of the term: *shou*, after all, means “to extinguish,” while *hi* connotes “waste.” In a similar vein, many disliked the term “buyers’ cooperative” on the

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grounds that it implied not-for-profit economic activities that were of benefit to self-seeking consumers rather than to the economy as a whole.⁵

During the mid- to late-1940s, the use of the term “consumer” (indicating non-productive capacities) struck many activists as particularly inappropriate in the context of sweeping economic destruction. Recognizing that Japanese citizens were suffering not only as consumers, but also as farmers, laborers, and small businessmen, many activists stood up on behalf of all these groups against the harmful activities of big business and governmental negligence.

Accordingly, the concept of consumer was stretched by many in the movement to reflect the overlap between the consumer and other competing identities, and in a way that took advantage of the new political opportunities of the early postwar period. Thus, consumers were not just the purchasers and users of the fruits of production, they were also human beings struggling to survive in a context of economic scarcity. Consumers were also, in many cases, producers or laborers, or the spouses and dependents of such individuals. This aspect of the emerging consumer identity was particularly significant, since most consumer activists at this time were women married to workers or small businessmen. Finally, consumers were citizens—not only of a particular country (*kokumin*), but also of civil society (*shimin*).

As symbolized by the terminology adopted by many consumer groups, this multi-faceted approach to the consumer’s place in society facilitated efforts to build a social movement in extraordinary political and economic circumstances. As the consumer co-ops regrouped in the wake of defeat, for example, many referred to themselves as “livelihood cooperative society” (*seikatsu kyoudou kumiai*, or *seikyō*)—a title that implied consumption not for its own sake, but rather for the purpose of improving one’s livelihood or lifestyle.⁶ This politically neutral title enabled the co-ops to appeal to consumers without overtly offending small retailers, and to attract members from the labor unions and the agricultural and fisheries cooperatives.

Japan’s postwar consumer identity and the alliances with producers that it both reflects and promotes can be viewed as both source and reflection of some of the priorities and strategic choices

of early consumer advocates. It gives added meaning, for instance, to the movement’s willingness during the Occupation to ally with labor, small business, and government on behalf of common goals. It also explains the movement’s seemingly irrational support for agricultural protectionism over the years and of its willingness to ally with rice farmers on behalf of that goal. Agricultural protectionism has been an integral component of the citizenship (*kokumin*) dimension of the consumer identity, not to mention a reflection of the movement’s determination to promote self-sufficiency in food production. This identity also helps explain aspects of movement behavior at the end of the 20th century: opposition to the imposition of a three percent consumption tax during the late 1980s, which brought advocates into alliance with small businesses; and cooperation with local merchants’ associations against the loosening of the Large Scale Retail Store Law, a development that threatened the culture of local shopping districts and the livelihoods of small retailers.

RELATIONS WITH GOVERNMENT

The consumer movement’s holistic approach to consumption—an approach that stressed co-existence between consumer and producer interests—was reinforced by the underlying values of the political economy more generally. This was a period of “growth at all costs” in which the interests of producers dominated the political system while those of consumers, narrowly defined, were clearly subordinate. This gross imbalance between producer and consumer interests was reflected in the relationship between the state and consumers. In the United States, consumer protection is generally approached as a right of individual consumers; the role of government, meanwhile, is to serve as caretaker or guarantor of those rights, together with the courts. In Japan, by contrast, the task of protecting consumers from the negative side-effects of business activities is approached as an *obligation* of government and, to a lesser extent, business, as evidenced by the 1968 Consumer Protection Basic Law—the so-called “constitution” of Japanese consumer protection. Much to the disappointment of consumer advocates and legal scholars, the Basic Law makes absolutely no mention of consumer rights. Although objectives



like product safety and choice are all noted in the law, they are addressed as *duties* fulfilled by business and government with an eye to the “development of economic society.” The Consumer Protection Basic Law is, quite simply, a legal affirmation of the political and economic supremacy of the producer and, by extension, of the secondary importance of consumer interests in Japanese politics.

The political and legal subordination of consumer rights to the interests of producers is reflected in the institutions of the postwar consumer protection policy-making system and the country’s consumer-oriented regulatory regime. Consumer representatives occupied little more than a symbolic position within the policy process, while consumer regulation tended to be highly solicitous of business interests. The political ramifications of this legal and institutional state of affairs were at least two-fold. First, the situation strengthened the hand of the state in both the agenda-setting and policy-formulation process. Although the state was certainly obligated to fulfill its extant legal obligations vis-à-vis consumers and built up a fairly respectable body of regulations to that effect, in the event of unforeseen consumer problems, the state often refused to take on new consumer-related obligations—particularly when they threatened the profitability of firms. Second, Japan’s producer-oriented polity weakened consumer access to the courts—the most effective arbiter of individual and consumer rights. In virtually all consumer-related legislation, the state took pains to retain ultimate power over the resolution of consumer disputes and, consequently, to prevent the courts from assuming more independent authority in such disputes.⁷

Political institutions and the values that supported them had a decidedly negative impact on the political behavior of consumers. Although encouraged by the postwar democratic constitution to assert their rights as consumers in the political sphere, the presence of a decidedly pro-producer state and the absence of a strong and independent court system left consumers with little choice but to rely on the paternalistic state for protection against business transgressions. Their long-standing opposition to deregulation serves as an illustrative case in point. As the government prepared to shed some of its watchdog functions over the economy during the 1980s, advocates argued that in the absence of a more activist court and stronger civil law protec-

tions for consumers, consumers would be worse off than ever before as they were directly exposed to market forces. From the standpoint of vulnerable consumers, in other words, over-regulation may not have been the optimal method of consumer protection; it was the *only* method.

The upshot of all this was that consumers emphasized the citizenship (*shimin*) dimension of their identity far less than one might expect in a new democracy. By extension, it also meant that consumers and advocates alike had broad political incentives to continue cultivating their producer allies and to pursue goals that in some cases benefited those allies more than consumers. This is not to suggest that consumer advocates did not work to change the political status quo. To the contrary, the movement struggled throughout the postwar period to educate ordinary Japanese about their rights as both citizens and consumers and to pressure the state into officially recognizing those rights. Advocates scored some victories vis-à-vis the first objective, but only recently have they made progress toward the second.

The Consumer Protection Basic Law is, quite simply, a legal affirmation of the political and economic supremacy of the producer.

POLITICAL CHANGE AND THE “CONSUMER AS CITIZEN”

Success in this regard is in part attributable to the gradual erosion of the producer in the public’s esteem. This trend became apparent during the 1960s as the unspoken policy of “growth at all costs” led to the proliferation of unsafe products in the marketplace⁸ and lethal levels of pollution in the environment. It stalled during the bubble years of the 1980s, but picked up speed once again the following decade in response to economic stagnation, a spate of corruption scandals involving businesses and politicians, and the Liberal Democratic Party’s (LDP) 1993 fall from power after nearly four decades of uninterrupted rule.

The end of the so-called “1955 System” was particularly significant for consumers insofar as it reflected and contributed to a decline in business-government relations. Although often criticized by consumer advocates for not doing enough for consumers, the coalition governments of prime ministers Hosokawa and Hata were more solicitous of consumer concerns than their predecessors, and they set the stage for a new era of consumer politics in which politicians of all persuasions must pay more than mere lip service to the interests of consumers.

The country’s lingering economic and financial woes, meanwhile, have elicited something of a sea change in public attitudes toward consumption (*shouhi*). Simply stated, consumption has become a legitimate pursuit as consumers faced with economic uncertainty and the specter of unemployment develop a penchant for bargain shopping, discount shops, and even low-priced imports. Consumers, in other words, are now more willing than ever before to act like “consumers,” narrowly defined.

The country’s lingering economic and financial woes have elicited something of a sea change . . . consumption has become a legitimate pursuit.

They are also more willing to champion policies that benefit consumers at the expense of small producers. Although support for agricultural protectionism shows little sign of abating,⁹ a number of consumer advocates are promoting deregulation for the sake of lower prices and more product choice. This transformation in movement attitudes is in turn a product of changing relations between consumers and the state. More specifically, consumers are growing less dependent on the state, as the latter slowly but surely introduces legislation that increases non-regulatory protections of the consuming public and enhances the leverage of societal interests in the economy. For example, in 1999, in response to intense pressure from citizen groups and the opposition parties, the Diet passed the Information Disclosure Law which gives citizens routinized access to public documents—including those per-

taining to the goods and services they consume.¹⁰ By increasing public access to government information,¹¹ the law enhances governmental accountability to the public. All told, the law marks an important crossroads in postwar consumer politics insofar as it enhances consumer leverage over the paternalistic and arbitrary state.

Other legislative developments that have enhanced the leverage of consumers in the political economy include amendments to laws regulating payment plans based on installments (*Wappu hanbaihou*) and door-to-door sales practices (*Houmon hanbaihou*), and the enactment in 2000 of the Consumer Contract Law. Although these laws have been widely criticized for not doing enough for consumers¹² and for failing to recognize consumer rights, they strengthen civil law protections for consumers and expand their access to the courts during consumer-related disputes.

Mention must also be made of the passage in 1996 of a series of amendments to the 1890 Code of Civil Procedure—the first since 1926. These amendments include streamlined (and less time-consuming) pre-trial procedures, the establishment of a small claims court, looser requirements for group actions,¹³ and expanded discovery procedures. Although these amendments are unlikely to result in a run on the courts any time soon,¹⁴ they mark a small but significant step forward in terms of expanding consumers’ access to the courts and, by extension, reducing their dependence on the state for protection.

In addition, as the government’s paternalistic control over consumer affairs loosens, the potential for more consumer-related citizen groups to appear in the future has increased with the 1998 passage of the Non-Profit Organization Law. A milestone in the postwar development of state-society relations, the NPO law “expands the scope of groups that qualify (for non-profit) legal status and curtails stifling bureaucratic supervision” over those groups.¹⁵

Finally, while consumer representatives were accorded little more than symbolic representation within the consumer-policy process in the past, they now enjoy more meaningful access to that process. Once veiled in a shroud of secrecy, deliberations of *shingikai* (bureaucratic advisory councils) are now open to the public, and their minutes are often publicized. Consumers have also been



empowered by the establishment of the so-called public comment system. Introduced by most national ministries and agencies in 1999, the system enables ordinary citizens to comment on policy proposals over the Internet. Although the system only pertains to a handful of policy proposals at any given time, it has been praised by consumer advocates as representative of a fundamental shift in bureaucratic attitudes toward the opinions of private citizens.¹⁶

Although consumers no doubt face a long wait before the state acknowledges the existence of consumer rights, these and other political, bureaucratic, and legislative developments indicate that consumers are in a stronger position vis-à-vis the state than at any other time in the past. They also lay the groundwork for consumers to strengthen their citizen (*shimin*) identities. Indeed, significant progress has already been made in this direction, as evidenced by the appearance of a new breed of consumer group in cities and towns around the country since the early 1990s. Small and grassroots in orientation, these groups are led by relatively young, well-educated men and women who mix consumer-related issues with environmentalism, human rights concerns and good governance. These groups were active in the movement to enact and monitor the 1994 Product Liability Law,¹⁷ as well as in the information disclosure and nonprofit organization campaigns. Unlike the housewives' organizations and many other organs that have played a leading role in the postwar consumer movement, these groups do not seem to be allied with small producer groups or workers; instead, they have stood up on their own in support of issues that are of concern to consumers in an advanced industrial democracy. It appears, in other words, that the producer-friendly consumer identity which governed consumer movement activism throughout the postwar period is in the process of being subsumed by a new identity characterized by a more politically assertive "consumer as citizen."

ENDNOTES

1. This essay is loosely based on my forthcoming book, *Consumer Politics in Postwar Japan: The Institutional Boundaries of Citizen Advocacy* (New York: Columbia University Press).

2. See, for example, John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War Two* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999) 89-97.

3. From this perspective, consumption refers simply to the act of using the fruits of production to satisfy wants; a consumer, then, is someone who performs this act.

4. For more on the nature of Japanese savings, see Sheldon Garon, "Luxury is the Enemy: Mobilizing Savings and Popularizing Thrift in Wartime," *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 26:1 (winter 2000) 41-78.

5. Akira Yamamoto, *Nihon seikatsu kyoudou kumiai undoushi* [The History of Japan's Lifestyle Cooperative Movement] (Tokyo: Nihon Hyoronka, 1982) 674.

6. Mumeo Oku, *Nobi akaaka to: Oku Mumeo jiden* [Brightly Burning Brush Fires: the Autobiography of Mumeo Oku] (Tokyo: Domesu Shuppan, 1988) 167.

7. The 1994 Product Liability Law is representative of this trend. For more on this issue, see Patricia L. Maclachlan, "Protecting Producers from Consumer Protection: The Politics of Products Liability Reform in Japan," *Social Science Japan Journal* 2:2 (October 1999) 249-66.

8. Among those product-related disasters are a 1955 incident involving arsenic poisoning in a powdered milk formula produced by the Morinaga corporation, which sickened over 12,000 infants; the Thalidomide Incident of 1962, which affected more than 700 babies; the 1968 Kanemi Cooking Oil disaster (*Kanemi yushou jiken*) involving PCB poisoning in cooking oil and over 1,600 casualties; and the SMON Incident of 1970, in which over 11,000 consumers were disfigured by a tainted anti-diarrhea medicine.

9. Safety concerns also drive consumer opposition to the importation of foreign foodstuffs. Many consumers believe—rightly or not—that the postharvest pesticides and preservatives used on American produce pose a greater threat to human health than chemicals used by Japanese farmers during the actual growing process.

10. For an overview of the law and the politics leading up to its enactment, see Patricia L. Maclachlan, "Information Disclosure and the Center-Local Relationship in Japan," in Sheila A. Smith, ed., *Local Voices, National Issues: The Impact of Local Initiative in Japanese Policy-Making* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2000), 9-30.

11. Japan's first disclosure rules were introduced at the local level during the early 1980s. By the time the national law was enacted, all 47 prefectures and many cities and towns had disclosure ordinances in place. The localities are now in the process of revising their ordinances in conformity with the new national norms.

12. Advocates have criticized the Consumer Contract Law, for example, for not doing enough to protect consumers who have been subjected to aggressive door-to-door canvassing and phone sales and for not requiring sellers to provide their customers with full information pertaining to particular contracts. *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, April 12, 2000.

13. Japanese courts do not allow class action suits in which one or a few plaintiffs sue on behalf of a larger group. Instead, all potential plaintiffs must file suit

as a group. The 1996 amendments allow plaintiffs to join such a suit *after* proceedings have begun. Yasuhei Taniguchi, "The 1996 Code of Civil Procedure of Japan: A Procedure for the Coming Century?" *American Journal of Comparative Law* 45 (Fall 1997) 783.

14. For product liability disputes and other conflicts, for example, consumers will continue to resort to the low-cost and much less time-consuming alternative dispute resolution (ADR) facilities administered by business and bureaucrats. For more on this issue, see Maclachlan, "Protecting Producers from Consumer Protection."

15. Robert Pekkanen, "Japan's New Politics: The Case of the NPO Law," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 26:1 (winter 2000) 111.

16. Nobuko Hiwasa, "Shouhisha no jiko sekinin to shouhisha dantai no yakuwari" [The Self-Responsibility of Consumers and the Role of Consumer Organizations], *Kokumin Seikatsu* 29 (1999) 35; *Shufuren Dayori*, July 15, 2000.

17. Leila Madge, "Japan's Emerging Civic Culture: A Product Liability Law Study Group," JPRI Working Paper No. 54 (February 1999).



The Rise of the Independent Voter

AIJI TANAKA

The “Koizumi phenomenon” took analysts by surprise. The abrupt increase in cabinet popularity, from 8.6 percent under Yoshiro Mori to 85.5 percent under Junichiro Koizumi, was unprecedented in Japanese politics (see Figure 1, following this essay). The key to how and why this remarkable shift occurred can be found in the rise of the independent voter.

Since the LDP temporarily but dramatically lost power in 1993, the Japanese party system has been in transition. First, there has been a “partisan realignment”—some parties have split into two or three, while others have merged. At the same time, there has been a “partisan dealignment.” That is, the percentage of voters who identify with no party rose from 35 percent in 1993 to 50 percent in 1995, before more or less leveling off.

Looking back even further in time, we see that the rise of the independent voter has actually been building for decades. As Figure 2 shows, independent voters made up less than 10 percent of the population in the 1960s, but their numbers doubled in the early 1970s. After that, they increased at a slower but steady pace, reaching 35 percent by the early 1990s.

THREE TYPES OF INDEPENDENT VOTER

Independent voters are not homogeneous. I divide them into three types. First, apolitical independents are generally uninterested in politics, in accordance with the conventional stereotype of independent voters. Second, positive independents are interested in politics but refuse to support any particular party. They are positively identified with independence. Third, ex-partisan independents used to have partisanship (typically until about 1993). Some ex-partisan independents came back to support the LDP during the Koizumi boom.

The relative sizes of these three groups of independent voters are shown in Table 1.



NEW INDEPENDENT VOTERS

The political attitudes of independent voters can be seen in Table 2, according to my 1991 survey of Yokohama City residents. Positive and ex-partisan independents tend to be interested in particular issues, though not in national or domestic politics as traditionally defined. Put together, these two groups can be called new independents. They are drawn toward international affairs, e.g., United Nations activity in Cambodia, African conflicts, U.S.-Japan trade friction, and European Union currency unification. They are also interested in local activities that relate directly to their communities or quality of life, such as recycling and day-care center development,

Table 1. Independent Voter Types
(percentage of population)

(1) Apolitical independents	16.1% (1991)
(2) Positive independents	20.7% (1991)
(3) Ex-partisan independents	13.7% (1995)

Source: Association For Promoting Fair Elections, National Survey 1991; Election and Democracy Study Group, National Survey 1995.

Table 2. Interest in Issues: Partisans and Independents

	Partisans	New Independents (Positive + Ex-partisan)	Apolitical Independents
Voting turnout	High	Occasionally high	Low
Interest in issues by type:			
International	Fairly high	Very high	None
Domestic	Very high	Low	None
Community	Low	Very high	None
Demographics:			
Age	More in 50s	More in 20s, 30s	All ages
Education	All levels	More educated	Less educated
City size	Rural/old community	Urban/new community	All communities
Candidate preference:			
Traditional politicians	Yes	No	No
New politicians	No	Yes	No
“Talent” candidates	If party endorses	No	Yes

Source: Aiji Tanaka, 1991 survey of Yokohama City residents.

and in post-material issues such as environmental preservation and community planning. Unlike more traditional (partisan) Japanese voters, new independents are not intrigued by “insider” politics or such questions as who will be the next president of the LDP or which parties are likely to form a coalition. They are also quite different from apolitical independents, who tend to avoid politics altogether.

As Table 2 shows, new independents tend to be better educated than the partisans, and much better educated than the apolitical independents. They also are likely to be younger. Partisans, especially LDP supporters, are the oldest group. The youth of independents in general can be seen in Figure 3.

As for candidate preference, new independents are less attracted to old-style politicians who seek power and can maneuver well in Nagatacho (Japan's version of Capitol Hill). Moreover, their high level of education makes them less likely to vote for famous athletes or movie stars who are ignorant of politics or economics. (It is the apolitical independents, who tend not to vote anyway, who are most attracted to movie-star type candidates.)

Typically, new independents turn out to vote in two types of cases. First, they might move to punish the incumbent party, as in summer 1998 when Prime Minister Hashimoto and the LDP were blamed for prolonging the recession. Second, they tend to respond to new kinds of politicians who are not typical Nagatacho insiders, but who are intelligent enough to propose new policy directions—e.g., governors such as Shintaro Ishihara (Tokyo),

Daijiro Hashimoto (Kochi), Masayasu Kitagawa (Mie), and Yasuo Tanaka (Nagano).

Every time the new independents go out to vote, they betray the predictions of old-style politicians or LDP leaders. Let us look at how and why such election outcomes occur.

THE “TWO-FACED” JAPANESE ELECTORATE

It is useful to point out three dichotomies in the Japanese electorate (summarized in Table 3).

Regular vs. irregular voters: The voting turnout rate for the 1995 upper house election was 44.5 percent, the lowest in the history of Japanese national elections. This suggests that regular voters—those who vote no matter what—make up about 45 percent of the electorate. The remainder refuse to vote at all, or turn out only if the election is particularly interesting or relevant to them.

Partisan vs. independent voters: As we have seen, independent (or non-partisan) voters reached more than 50 percent in January 1995 for the first time, according to Yomiuri newspaper monthly polls. Since then, the share of independent voters has plateaued.

Organized vs. unorganized voters: Many Japanese voters are affiliated with organizations—such as Nokyo for farmers, supporting the LDP, or Rengo for employees, supporting the Democratic Party—which endorse particular candidates and mobilize voters. According to the 1996 Japanese Election and Democracy Study sponsored by the Japanese



National Science Foundation, members of such organizations make up 46.3 percent of respondents. (The figure is close to the 44.5 percent that turned out for the 1995 upper house elections.)

Table 3 illustrates the three divisions of the Japanese electorate described above.

POLITICAL DISSATISFACTION OF THE JAPANESE ELECTORATE

The reason about 15 percent of voters defected from their parties in the early 1990s was probably dissatisfaction with and distrust of politics. However, as Figure 4 shows, the level of political satisfaction was always low, even while “life” (material life) satisfaction was high.

The contrast between low political satisfaction and high life satisfaction is a puzzle. How can Japanese distrust so much the way the government runs politics, while professing such contentment?

Figure 5, which shows Japanese trust in democratic institutions, offers at least a partial solution to this paradox. While reporting a low level of political satisfaction, Japanese people actually reported a high level of confidence in institutions typical of a democratic system (i.e., elections, the political parties, and the Diet) up through the 1980s. However, this assurance plunged after 1996. Note that Figure 5 shows no relation between cabinet support and institutional trust from 1972-1996. After 1996, there does seem to be a relation (cabinet support and institutional trust decline together).

In 2000, over half of the electorate still maintained faith in the electoral process, while more than two-thirds distrusted the political parties and the Diet. In 2001, however, even confidence in elections fell sharply, to 32.3 percent. Meanwhile, belief in the viability of other institutions continued to collapse, to the astonishingly low levels of 21.3 percent (parties) and 15.6 percent (the Diet).

Why this breakdown of trust? Japanese voters witnessed much political change from 1993 to 2001—coalitions rose and fell, political parties merged and split, and prime ministers reshuffled cabinets. But despite all this flux, voters could perceive no major shift in the economy or in how political decisions were made.

The Japanese electorate was extremely discouraged with how politics and the economy were being run in Japan, and distress reached a peak at the end of the Mori cabinet in March 2001. Consequently, as Figure 5 shows, their frustration with the incumbent government turned into distrust of their democratic political system.

FROM FRUSTRATION TO HOPE

The new independents felt that LDP policy was focused on LDP supporters and especially on organized voters. The budget (it seemed) served to subsidi-

Every time the new independents go out to vote, they betray the predictions of old-style politicians or LDP leaders.

dize the LDP and allocate funds to public enterprises—though the exact extent to which this was true was impossible to perceive. If the economy had been healthy, perhaps the independents might have approved the LDP administration. But the LDP performed badly—both economically and politically. The independents perceived little benefit to themselves from the current system and desired drastic change.

Then Junichiro Koizumi emerged. He was an LDP candidate with new ideas for economic and political restructuring and for changing the deci-

Table 3. The two-faced Japanese electorate: Three dimensions

(1) Regular voters (44.5%)	vs.	Irregular (fickle) voters (55.5%)
(2) Partisan voters (45.0%)	vs.	Independent voters (52.0%+ 3.0% "Don't know/No answer")
(3) Organized voters (46.3%)	vs.	Unorganized voters (53.7%)

Source: *Yomiuri Shimbun* monthly polls, 1995; Japanese National Science Foundation, Election and Democracy Study, 1996.



sion-making process. However, Koizumi's popularity has only partially boosted support for his party. As Figure 6 shows, many young and middle-aged Japanese support Koizumi but not the LDP. Only among voters over 60 years of age does a majority support both the prime minister and his party. This trend means that ex-partisans have come back to the LDP (boosting support to 35–38 percent), but the party has not gained any new followers—at least not from the positive independents.

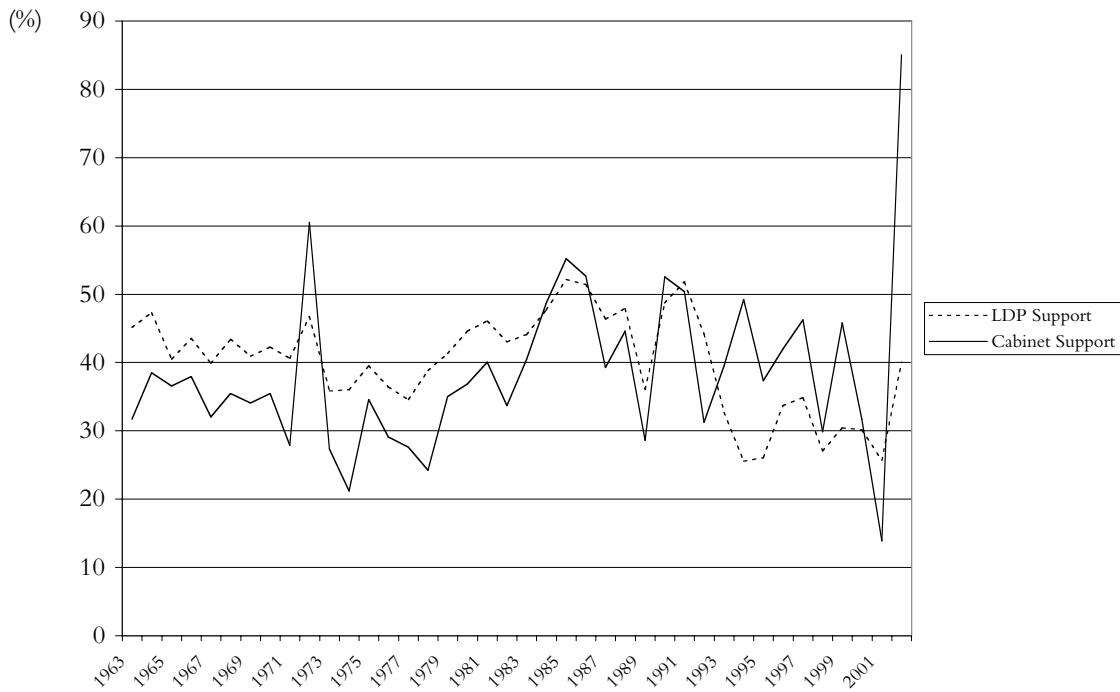
CONCLUSION

These data suggest that Japanese voters, and especially the new independent voters (both positive and ex-partisan), support Koizumi's cabinet simply because they expect a new style of political decision-making and economic structural change. If Koizumi fails, or if the LDP attempts to sabotage his reforms, voters will desert him as well as his party. Then, the electorate will be asking a new question: “Who can replace Koizumi?”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Public opinion survey data were made available by Yomiuri Newspaper Polls. Survey data, drawn from Akarui Senkyo Suishin Kyokai (Association for Promoting Fair Elections), JABISS, and JES, were made available through the Leviathan Data Bank. JEDS96, JEDS2000 and JSS2001 (in which I participated) were also utilized. I thank Takayuki Watanabe for preparation of Figures 3 and 6.

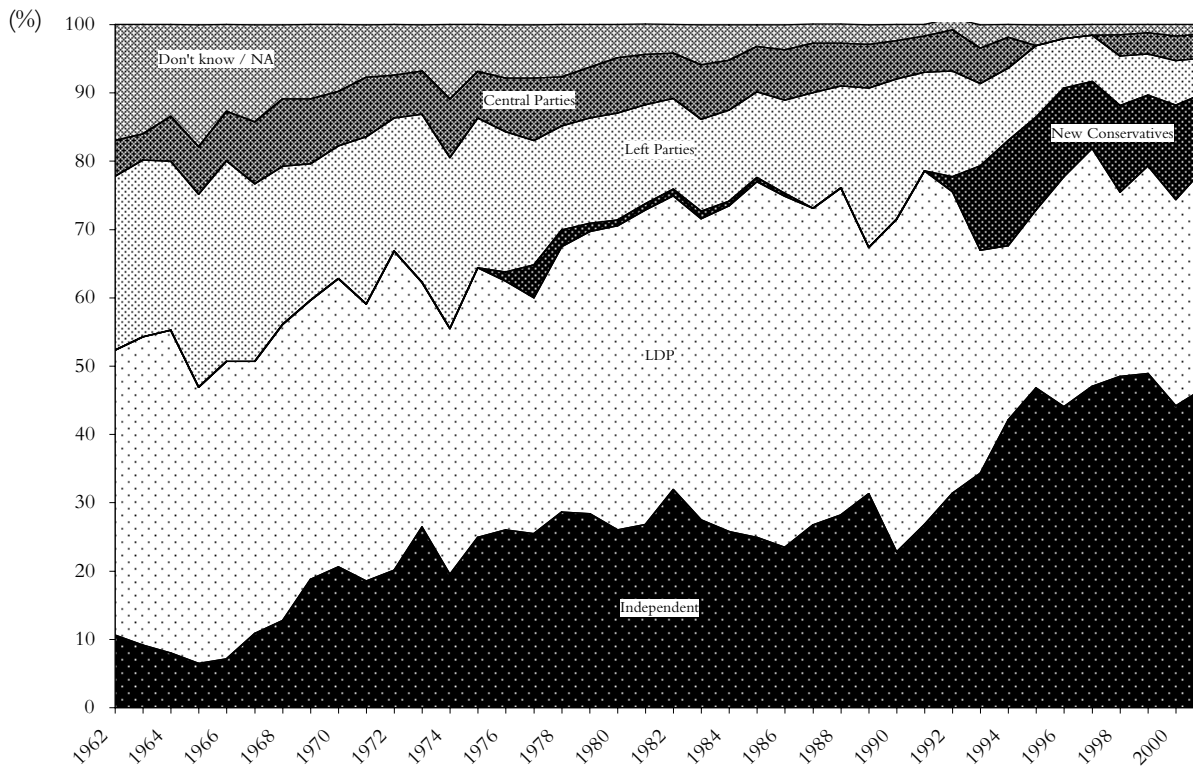


Figure 1. Support for Incumbent Party (LDP) and Cabinet, 1963-2001



Source: Yomiuri Newspaper Polls, 1963-2001.

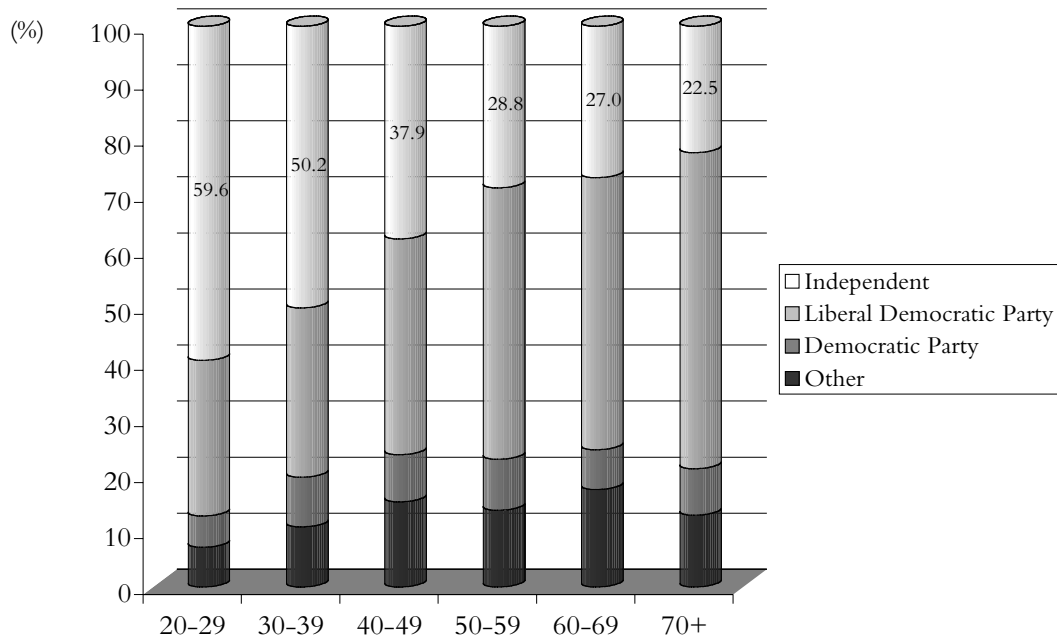
Figure 2. Partisanship and Independents, 1962-2000



Source: Yomiuri Newspaper Polls, 1962-2000.

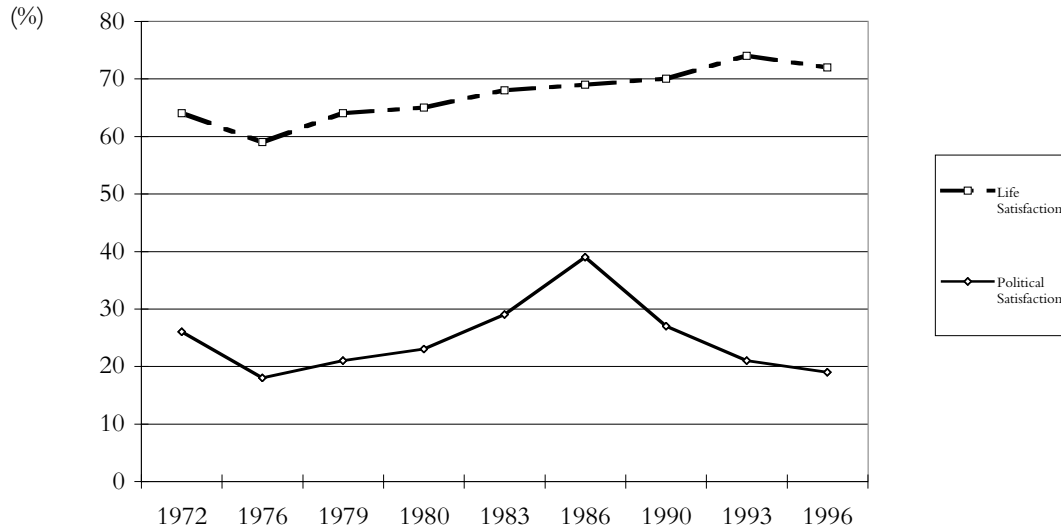


Figure 3. Partisanship by Age



Source: Yomiuri Newspaper Poll, August 2001.

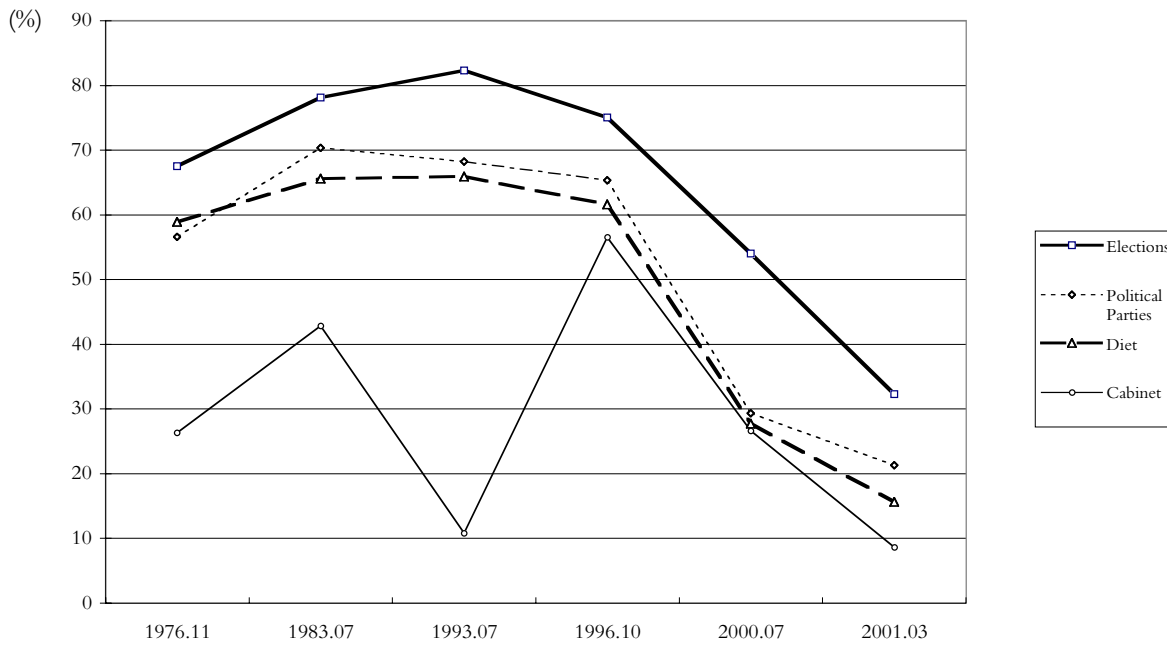
Figure 4. Political vs. Life Satisfaction, 1972-96.



Source: National surveys by Association for Promoting Fair Elections, 1972-96.

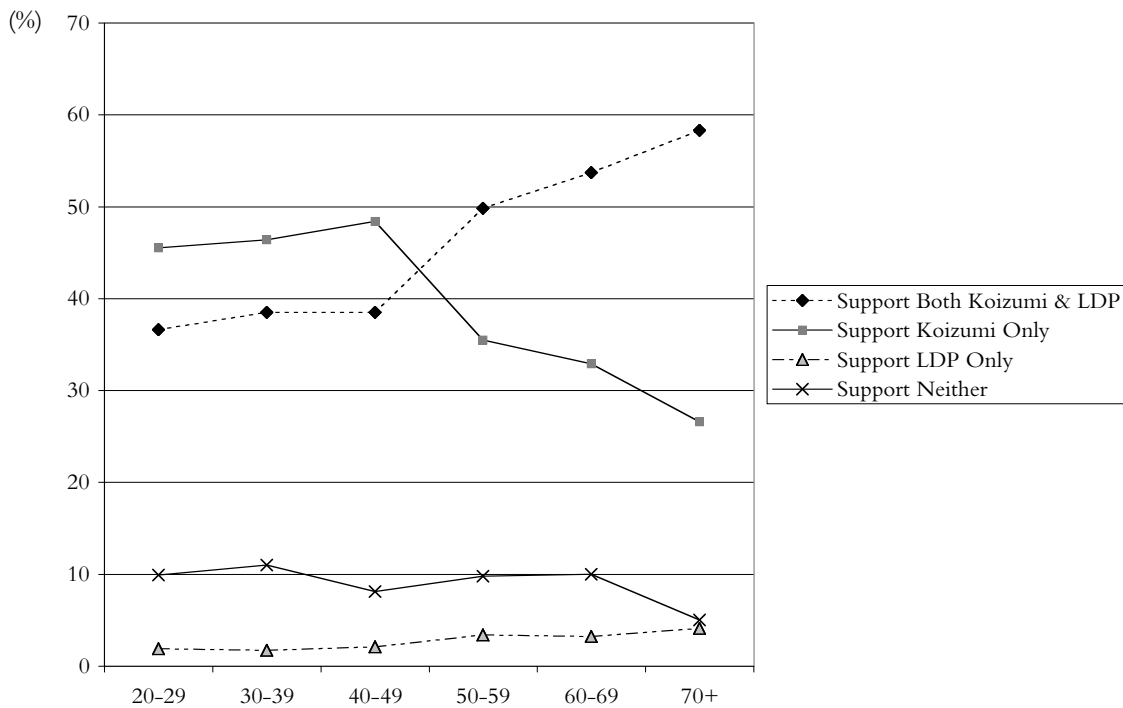


Figure 5. Support for Democratic Institutions and Cabinet, 1976-2001



Source: JABISS 1976, Japan Election Study (JES) 1983, JESII 1993, Japanese Election and Democracy Study (JEDS) 1996, JEDS 2000, JSS 2001.

Figure 6. Support of Prime Minister Koizumi and LDP, by Age



Source: Yomiuri Newspaper Poll, August 2001.

The Next Party System

STEVEN R. REED

Japan's "1955 party system" was destroyed in the 1993 election and by the subsequent enactment of a new electoral system. Japan is heading toward, though is still far from, a two-party system. That system will feature competition between the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) on the right and the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) on the left. Alternation in power will occur but only about as often as in other two-party systems. The LDP will not be able to reestablish its dominance, though it will probably win the next couple of elections.

TOWARD A TWO-PARTY SYSTEM

When evaluating the effects of electoral reform, we need to remember, first, that the results take time to filter through the political system and, second, that change will occur first and most strongly not at the national level but in each electoral district.

The first two elections under a new system are seldom a good indicator of how the system will function in the long run. Only by the third or fourth election do the dynamics become clear to either participants or observers. The single-member districts (SMDs) in the new parallel electoral system produce powerful incentives to reduce competition to no more than two candidates per district, but those two candidates need not represent only two parties. Once most districts have become bipolar, they then tend to organize themselves into two blocs within parliament. Those blocs then try to increase their size in parliament by helping candidates win elections in their districts. SMDs encourage cooperation to win elections but not necessarily to pass legislation—at least not to the extent one might wish. Policy differences that are papered over during elections cause problems once the election is over and some parties are forced to govern together.

My contention that Japan is moving toward a two-party system is controversial. My argument is based on a great deal of data from many different countries, but here I will offer only three pieces of



evidence, all from the Japanese case. First, most districts moved towards more bipolar competition between the first and second elections. The SMDs are functioning as expected to produce bipolar competition at the district level. Second, the DPJ has become "the opposition" to the LDP. In 1996 two parties competed for that role. In 2000 there was only one, albeit a weak one. Even though the DPJ in 2000 was not able to mount as strong a challenge as the New Frontier Party (NFP) had mounted in 1996, it is now the only alternative and is being treated as such by voters. DPJ support in the polls is dismal but it rises right before every election and vote totals are higher yet, as voters who wish to vote against the LDP choose the most effective way of doing so. Until it wins power, all the DPJ has to do is hold together and be the alternative to the LDP. Neither distinctive policy positions nor solid support in the polls will be required.

My third piece of evidence is not the strongest but it is probably the most convincing: the Komei Party is spending huge amounts of political capital to get rid of the new system and return to the old one. If any third party could prosper under the new electoral system, it would be Komei, since the party has a loyal base of support in the Soka Gakkai religious group. Komei supporters form the swing vote



in many SMDs, and Komei currently holds the swing vote in the Diet. The party thus has tremendous bargaining power both in elections and in the legislature. Even so, the party sees little future for itself under the present electoral system and is working feverishly to change it.

Komei entered into the coalition with the LDP primarily to get the electoral system changed. Party policy is relatively close to that of the DPJ, and Komei's electoral campaigns have consistently been anti-LDP. Nevertheless, the party was able to extract an LDP promise to do something about the electoral system and therefore was willing to pay a heavy price in terms of policy and reorienting their supporters. The party had to spend a lot of time and energy convincing voters that its old enemy is now a friend. Komei made its deal with the Obuchi cabinet and has had a long relationship with the Tanaka-Takeshita-Obuchi-Hashimoto faction. When Koizumi defeated Hashimoto for leadership of the LDP, Komei's first demand was that the Hashimoto faction be treated well and that the electoral system be changed. It will bolt the coalition if the system is not changed before the next election. The electoral system is the only issue besides Yasukuni Shrine over which Komei would leave the government, and is a top priority. The SMDs are working against third parties. Even the largest and most stable third party is in trouble.

Komei played a large role in getting this system enacted in the first place. The system favors large parties, and Komei planned to be part of a large party, what turned out to be the NFP. When the NFP fell apart, Komei found that the newly enacted electoral system doomed it to insignificance. Komei can deliver the vote to other candidates and parties but other parties cannot convince their supporters to vote for Komei. Its bargaining power can move the LDP and LDP candidates but cannot move LDP voters. Komei cannot win in the SMDs and cannot win enough seats in proportional representation districts to guarantee holding the swing vote in the Diet. It remains to be seen whether Komei's bargaining power will prove strong enough to get the LDP to change the electoral system, but even the changes now being contemplated do not appear to be sufficient to solve Komei's problem. On the other hand, Komei has few alternatives to a coalition with the LDP.

WILL THE LDP REESTABLISH PREDOMINANCE?

The Koizumi cabinet currently enjoys tremendous popular support, which is translating into growing support for the LDP. Meanwhile, the DPJ has failed to keep even the 10 percent support it had enjoyed before the Koizumi phenomenon. The stage appears set for a return to LDP predominance but those appearances are misleading. There were two keys to the LDP's long-term dominance: lack of cooperation among the opposition parties and clientelist, pork barrel politics. Both factors are waning rapidly.

The SMDs virtually guarantee that the opposition parties will cooperate better in the future than in the past. The DPJ has just passed the first major test of its ability to hang together: only a few Diet members failed to support the party line on the Anti-Terror Law in the lower house. If any issue were to split the party, this would have been the one.

The basic problem for the LDP, however, is that neither pork barrel politics nor the organizational vote guarantee electoral victories. A series of recent elections have emphatically demonstrated this point. Powerful pork barrel regimes have been upset in gubernatorial elections in Nagano, Tochigi and Chiba

All the DPJ has to do is hold together and be the alternative to the LDP. Neither distinctive policy positions nor solid support in the polls will be required.

prefectures. Koizumi's victory in the party presidential primary was a victory of a reformist image over the organizational vote. Over two-thirds of LDP party members joined the party through membership in an organization. Koizumi's reforms directly threaten many of those organizations and most enthusiastically supported Hashimoto. Nevertheless, Koizumi won an overwhelming victory. The organizations could not deliver the votes of their members.

It is tempting to see the development of an urban-rural cleavage in the reform versus pork barrel issue. Though this hypothesis makes wonderful sense, it does not fit the facts. First, there is no corre-

lation between Koizumi's percentage of the vote and the urban-rural dimension. Second, candidates running against pork barrel politics have won gubernatorial and mayoral elections in rural areas. Third, most of the egregious examples of worthless pork barrel projects are found in rural areas. Many rural voters have seen huge amounts of money spent on projects that have not helped the local economy but do continue to drain local finances. Conservative rural politicians continue to depend upon pork barrel politics but such policies draw more support from local construction companies than they do from rural voters. Rural politicians will, like their urban counterparts, learn that the era of pork barrel politics is winding down.

Koizumi's reforms are designed to "change Japan by changing the LDP." His reforms are not designed to curry popularity or to win votes. They are

Koizumi's popularity is not based on support but on hope . . . Whether his promises were sincere or cynical, they must be kept.

designed to wean the LDP from its dependence on the organizational vote. "Privatize the Post Office," "Change the Way Road Construction is Funded," and "Cut Back on Special Corporations" are not the kind of slogans to put on placards to please the public and excite the crowd. They do, however, strike at the heart of the traditional power bases of the LDP and particularly of the Tanaka-Hashimoto faction. Reform generates popularity not because the public supports the particular reforms, but because it demonstrates that Koizumi is serious in his commitment to change.

The LDP reform project, of which Koizumi is the most recent representative, is to change the party from one that wins on the basis of pork barrel politics into one that wins some other, as yet unspecified, way. It is also a battle against the style and power of the Tanaka-Hashimoto faction. The project has gained momentum as the effectiveness of the clientelist strategy has declined. It is essentially the same project that led Yohei Kono to leave the LDP and form the New Liberal Club in 1976, that led

Masayoshi Takemura to leave the LDP and form Sakigake in 1993, and that led Koichi Kato to the brink of leaving the LDP in 2000. Koizumi has chosen to fight the battle from within the party but, if he fails, he and/or others may well leave. The opposition parties argue that the LDP cannot reform itself and reform cannot be accomplished while the LDP is in power. Can Koizumi succeed where his predecessors have failed? There are no guarantees but he does have some advantages that none of them have had.

WILL KOIZUMI SUCCEED?

Koizumi is riding high in the polls, but it is important to distinguish between the "Koizumi miracle" and the "Koizumi boom." The popularity of Koizumi dolls and posters is a political miracle. No other Japanese politician has ever enjoyed this type of superstar treatment. The miracle may also be important for Japanese democracy in the long run. It certainly has generated more interest among young people than we have seen in a long time. Nevertheless, the miracle has not affected voting behavior. When the ballot boxes were opened after the 2001 Upper House election, what we found was a boom, not a miracle.

The LDP received a bounce of approximately the same magnitude as the New Liberal Club received in 1976, as Doi's Socialist Party received in 1989, and as the three new parties received in 1993. All four booms, including the Koizumi boom, were caused by the same phenomenon: independent voters flocking to a leader and a party that seemed capable of producing change. Though Japanese voters are not demanding any particular set of reforms, they are definitely demanding change. Koizumi's popularity is not based on support but on hope. If he is ever seen to have lost to the forces of resistance, his popularity could disappear quickly and without a trace. Independents would either flock to a new hope or stay home and not vote at all. Koizumi has no choice but to enact serious reforms as quickly and thoroughly as he possibly can. Whether his promises were sincere or cynical, they must be kept.

The LDP has twice before accomplished the impossible. In 1960 the LDP abandoned what many at the time saw as the essence of the party platform: constitutional revision and rearmament. In 1970 the



LDP gave up the “essence” that had replaced rearmament—economic growth at any cost. In both cases the logic was simple: if we continue down this path, we will lose elections. The LDP faces the same choice today. The current “essence” of LDP politics is clientelism. But if they continue down this path, they will lose elections.

In a move reminiscent of Prime Minister Ikeda’s 1960 campaign, Koizumi jerked the rug out from under the opposition. Koizumi simply stole most of the opposition platform, leaving the DPJ with little to say. The 2001 Upper House election clearly demonstrated that the LDP can win elections with a popular prime minister implementing a popular platform. It also demonstrated further weakening of the organizational vote. The LDP’s top vote-getter was a reformer committed to supporting Koizumi. However, the LDP had just reformed the Upper House election system in order to maximize the effectiveness of the organizational vote, and many opponents of reform were elected. The second highest vote-getter represented the postal officials group that, naturally, opposes privatization. He was soon forced to resign, however, due to the large number of election law viola-

tions emanating from his campaign organization. His resignation neatly summarized the costs associated with the LDP’s traditional political style. The Upper House election framed the choices clearly: continue clientelist politics and lose, or reform and follow Koizumi to victory.

Even if the LDP chooses to follow Koizumi down the path of reform, the party still cannot reestablish predominance. Whereas pork barrel politics favors the party in power, the politics of popularity do not. Whereas the old electoral system hindered opposition attempts at cooperation, the new system promotes cooperation. The most the LDP can hope for is to become “the natural party of government,” winning under “normal” circumstances but losing periodically whenever the electorate chooses to “kick the rascals out.” If the LDP chooses not to follow Koizumi, they cannot continue winning elections for long. The LDP could easily split again. Komei could switch sides again and join the DPJ. The DPJ could develop a strong reformist image and defeat the LDP in one or more likely two elections. Or the DPJ could continue to flounder along and be given the chance to govern only after the LDP fails or is caught up in another major scandal.

Personality and Leadership

OFER FELDMAN

This paper examines the current social environment in which Japan's leaders, especially Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, find themselves. It aims to detail first some of the reasons behind Koizumi's astonishing popularity, and then how shifts in public attitudes emanating from the so-called "lost decade" in Japanese politics have affected some of the decisions of his administration. Finally, the paper offers a few conclusions on the consequences of Koizumi's working style for Japanese political leadership in general.

LEADERS AND LEADERSHIP IN JAPAN

Traditionally, political leaders and leadership in Japan were perceived as, what the Japanese will say, "*tsumaranakute, omoshirokunai*" (boring and tedious). The leadership style of Japanese politicians has varied little during the postwar period. Prime ministers, cabinet ministers, leaders of political parties and party factions have all tended to share the same characteristics and leadership patterns. Rarely expressing original ideas and personal opinions, they have been perceived as lacking vision, clear policy goals, and agendas. Rather than being strong, visible, articulate, and assertive, Japanese prime ministers, in particular, were remarkably weak, reactive, and seldom advocated reform.

Since the selection of current prime minister Junichiro Koizumi, many stereotypes of Japanese leadership are being challenged. By example, Koizumi has been establishing new standards for leadership with respect to policy and how national politicians should deal with colleagues, rivals, and the news media.

Koizumi currently enjoys tremendous popular support. Arguably Japan's most well-liked prime minister ever, public opinion surveys in October 2001 showed that his support favorable ratings are still between 70 and 80 percent (though down from nearly 90 percent when he took office). During the



recent Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) presidential campaign and the upper house election that followed it, Koizumi was welcomed by huge crowds of people of all ages and both sexes in his public appearances. Many of them cheered him as if he were a rock star (calling him loudly by his nickname, "Jun-chaan!"). His picture appeared on posters, T-shirts, ties, and accessories that were attached to the strap of a cell phone. Seeking to use Koizumi's image to bolster the party's fortunes in the upper house elections, the LDP placed, in late June 2001, a giant of 16 meters by 12.5 meters of him, covering about quarter of the building wall in the headquarters of the LDP. This kind of boom is unprecedented in the history of Japanese politics.

Koizumi's astonishing popularity results from two factors. First, it stems from his personality—his ambition, self-perception, attitude toward interpersonal relationships, views on social and political issues, and media savvy—the effect of which cannot be understood without attending to the relationship between personality and politics. Second, the Japanese public currently seems to be demanding a strong and determined leader who can reform the nation's economy and compensate for the era of missed opportunities, the so-called "lost decade."

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KOIZUMI AS PRIME MINISTER: PERSONALITY TRAITS

To explain Koizumi's popularity, I will first focus on important personal characteristics, including his media savvy, communication skills, political competence, and policy visions.

Koizumi is skinny, appears young, and produces a fresh image. His mane of silver hair provides a strong personal presence; to some he looks like an artist, to others an English gentleman. He is energetic, and like President J.F. Kennedy, generates the image of a "brother" (in comparison to more fatherlike leaders). Like Kennedy, who projected the icon of a "New America," Koizumi symbolizes to some the "New Japan."

Koizumi projects an image that he is capable, competent and in control of any situation. His inaugural policy speech in May 2001, for example, reiterated his determination to carry out structural reforms "without being constrained by sacred cows" in the nation's political, administrative, financial, and social systems.

In addition, Koizumi projects the image that he has surrounded himself with the right people. He himself chose his team—cabinet members and three key officials within the LDP (*san yaku*). The selection of his administration was based not on the relative strength of the factions within the party (which has traditionally been the case, in the LDP), but on their expertise to fit the goals of his administration. Most notable in this regard was Koizumi's choice of an economics professor to handle economic policy and fiscal reforms. Koizumi's cabinet includes also friends whom he can rely on to support his work, including Foreign Minister Makiko Tanaka, and the jolly-looking Masajuro Shiokawa, the finance minister. Shiokawa, the oldest (79) of Koizumi's 17 cabinet ministers, is also riding a wave of popularity among young people, who refer to him affectionately as "Shio-jii" (Grandpa Shio).

Public Communicator

More than any of his predecessors, Koizumi makes himself visible through a constant dialogue with the public. In May 2001, in a rare move by a prime minister, he began making daily press briefings. Eventually, he became the hottest topic on television with his snappy remarks and dapper style. Television

audience ratings of live broadcasts of Diet sessions at which Koizumi appears have gone up. In addition, Koizumi's weekly e-mail, called "Lion Heart" after his tousled mane of hair, has more than two million subscribers.

Moreover, Koizumi is an outstanding speaker and public communicator. Often he starts his political speech by introducing easy, attention-grabbing topics, before gradually easing into difficult subjects. Occasionally, at the beginning of his speeches he mixes topics from his private life, which invoke ease with his audience. He also uses humor. For example, he once turned to the audience of youngsters that cheered him during a mass gathering and said, "Though it seems there are a quite a few people out there not yet eligible to vote, I'd like to ask you to kindly support the LDP when you come of age." Koizumi often illustrates his speeches with jokes about his rivals and even members of his own political party.

Although the traditional Japanese speaking style of politicians and government officials is indirect and obscure, Koizumi uses a more direct and

Like Kennedy, who projected the icon of a "New America," Koizumi symbolizes to some the "New Japan."

Western style. As a strategy of involvement, he frequently placed strong emphasis on *watashi* or *boku* ("I"), making them sound very personal. By emphasizing the personal aspect of his statements, he seeks to come across as a sincere and trustworthy politician. This strategy also aims to create and maintain a positive self-image while building camaraderie and diminishing the psychological distance between him and his audience.

In another break with tradition, Koizumi personally decided on the content of his first policy speech in the Diet. The speech was drafted by a group of high-ranking government officials, based on a list of key items Koizumi himself had prepared in line with election pledges made during the LDP's presidential race in April 2001. During the Golden Week holiday period from late April to early May, Koizumi put the finishing touches on the draft with the help

of aides and senior officials from major ministries and agencies. Later, Koizumi held additional meetings in his residence with key cabinet members to modify the speech before presenting it in the Diet. Moreover, in his determination to make his speech understandable to a broad audience, Koizumi limited the speech's length to about 6,500 words, almost half the length of the speech former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori delivered in January 2001.

To keep channels of communication open with the public, Koizumi proposed in his policy speech to hold town meetings in the nation's 47 prefectures within the next six months (as he proceeded to do in fact). At these meetings, he promised that cabinet ministers would clarify the policymaking process to the public, with the broader goals of increasing public understanding and awareness. This further illustrates Koizumi's realization that strong leadership and a public dialogue are critical in securing support.

Political Skill

Koizumi also appears capable of skillfully challenging the Nagatacho *joushiki* ("common sense") or *ronri* ("logic" or "conventional wisdom") of Japanese politics, both in public policy and within his own political party. By making several important and quick decisions, Koizumi has demonstrated a different attitude from those of previous prime ministers.

He does not resemble former Prime Minister Eisaku Sato (1964-1972). Sato was called "the waiting politician" (*machi no seijika*), "Human Affairs Sato" (*jinji no satou*), and "Quick-Ears Sato" (*haya mimi no satou*), in tribute to his extraordinary talent for collecting information and being sensitive to other people's feelings. He would studiously go over information, analyze it and carefully prepare his move, doing and saying nothing that might affect the outcome or hurt others until a consensus was achieved within his party and the nation. Only then would he act.

Koizumi, on the other hand, did not delay his decision in regard to the leprosy patients, for example. He surprised the public and other decision-makers by boldly choosing not to appeal to a district court a lawsuit filed by a group of former leprosy patients. Many officials believed that the government should have appealed the case. Koizumi's fast decision convinced many people that politicians

should not hesitate to take daring action, even if it appears unpopular with other public officials. Koizumi proved his determination and integrity in making this decision.

Koizumi is also different from Former Prime Minister (1980-1982) Zenko Suzuki, who likened himself to an "orchestra conductor" (*shikisha*) whose role is to achieve harmony among the players of his administration. Koizumi dislikes conspiring with others and is not *happo bijin* (someone who tries to be liked by everyone), a trait that characterized former Prime Minister (1989-1991) Toshiki Kaifu, who used such an approach in his relations with other leaders of LDP factions or of opposition parties.

Koizumi, conversely, made critical and innovative decisions regarding his political party. He has pledged to disband the LDP factions that have long dominated the dynamics of modern Japanese politics. Koizumi planned to encourage LDP Diet members who wanted to run in the recent upper house election to quit their factions. Furthermore, he publicly considered eliminating financial support given from party headquarters to each faction to help cover policy research costs.

When he chose his team, including the key three officials of the party, as noted, Koizumi broke with LDP "common sense" and tradition by not selecting members based on the relative strength of their faction. Moreover, Koizumi did not appoint anyone from the Hashimoto faction, the largest and the most influential faction, to an executive post within the LDP.

In addition, Koizumi made a major change in the decision-making of the LDP. Traditionally, a handful of party members have been able to exert their influence over virtually every decision made in the name of the party. In contrast, in May 2001 Koizumi adopted a new approach, emphasizing the intra-party divisions rather than the unofficial, but powerful, party factions. As a result of Koizumi's supra-factional decision-making style, the boundary between mainstream and non-mainstream factions has blurred.

Policy Vision

Koizumi proved himself capable of possessing clearly defined policy stances that set the terms of policy discourse. He won the LDP presidential race over the party old guard with promises of reform. In this



presidential campaign, there was a tug-of-war between Koizumi and the Hashimoto faction, the largest within the party. While Koizumi's reform platform amounted to a self-described "dissolution of the party" through the disbanding of LDP factions, the Hashimoto faction openly intended to adhere to the traditional policies and party management.

Koizumi pet project, however, is to privatize three services previously provided by the now-defunct Posts and Telecommunications Ministry—mail delivery, postal savings, and life insurance. When he was named Posts and Telecommunications Minister, Koizumi antagonized bureaucrats in his own ministry by insisting that the private sector be allowed to enter the postal services business.

Another proposal that has long been on Koizumi's agenda is electoral reform. He favors the election of the prime minister through a direct popular vote. In addition, his agenda includes reining in Japan's massive public debt, cleaning up a banking system crippled by bad loans, and shrinking the role of the government in the long stagnant economy. Koizumi, however, has spent much of his time since July 2001 on non-economic matters, while facing heavy headwinds on reforms.

I will turn now to the second factor related to Koizumi's popularity—the public perception that a strong and determined leader is needed.

TWO IMAGES OF LEADERSHIP IN JAPAN

During the last decade or so, I did several studies on political leadership in Japan. One research project focused on the way Japanese construct their images of leaders of different political parties and of candidates for prime minister, as well as the factors that affect these images. The other type of research focused on the political personality of Japan, on the motives that drive individuals to seek political office—their psychological make-up, social and political attitudes and beliefs, and behavioral patterns.¹

These studies have found that leader images are constructed along clear lines. Leadership has two major aspects. The first centers on achieving the group's common targets by resolving pending problems through efficiency, integrity, reliability, competence, determination, decisiveness, posi-

tivism, and strength. This pragmatic profile parallels the "performance" function of leadership referred to by Jyuji Misumi, the Japanese social psychologist.² Leadership activities in this regard emphasize and encourage members to achieve the group's aims above all else. The parameters in which the leadership's "performance" function is examined are quite distinct:³ (1) the ability to offer a specific solution to any potential obstacle confronted; (2) the power to persuade in a reasonable manner; (3) the ability to remain single-minded in pursuit of the desired goals, in order to complete them successfully and on time; (4) the ability to bring any matter to a conclusion or to settle disputes while bridging conflicting ideas or opinions; (5) the ability to keep promises at any price under any circumstances; and (6) the ability to achieve successfully what is considered to be best, even if there are opposing opinions.

The distrust and cynicism has raised awareness that pragmatic, decisive, and strong leadership is necessary to handle the many issues the country faces.

The second image impels leaders to stress the importance of relationships among group members while focusing attention on harmony, trust, sincerity, relaxation of tension, and keeping good contact with everyone. These characteristics describe the "maintenance" role of leadership, which focuses on human relations within the group itself. The characteristics of the "maintenance" function include calming stress, resolving conflicts and differences of opinion in a peaceful manner, encouraging and supporting the group's members, affording rights for free expression of opinion even to the minority and stimulating the latter's independence, and increasing the dependency of all members on one another.⁴ The dimensions in which the "maintenance" role is observed are : (1) arguing in a friendly manner; (2) advising on personal problems; (3) supporting others' opinions; (4) adhering to the leader's opinion when conflicts of opinion arise; (5) softening or cooling down emotional conflicts; and (6) taking care of other people.⁵

Traditionally, in the Japanese social (and political) context, the second image, or process, appears to be the most important. A good leader must be paternalistic, involved in the emotional and personal lives of the other members around him, pay attention to their emotional needs, and enhance friendly and harmonious feelings among everyone. This is linked to the strong dependency feelings that are part of the Japanese personality structure in which the affectionate function of leadership appears significantly important.

Yet during the 1990s, my study revealed, a transformation occurred in the emphases allocated by voters, the media, and even Diet members to leadership images and functions. Instead of approving a group-oriented leadership and process, there was a shift toward a task-oriented leadership, one that places the highest value on task accomplishment.

These changes were related to the emergence of growing number of economic, social, administrative, and political problems during the “lost decade.” Because the country’s leadership often changed, these problems were not appropriately addressed. Prime ministers’ tenure in office decreased in length. Eight prime ministers served during the

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decade from the administration of Prime Minister Kaifu Toshiki (1989-1991). As if rotating through a revolving door, prime ministers replaced one another without accomplishing significant reform. Moreover, most of these prime ministers were primarily concerned with the balance of power within the coalitions of parties or their own political groups. In addition, growing social insecurity (especially among the younger generations), political corruption, and scandal has increased dissatisfaction, cynicism and public distrust of politicians and political parties (especially the LDP). In 2000, during the administration of Prime Minister Mori, public distrust of politicians and political parties reached unprecedented levels in modern Japan, with nearly

90 percent of voters expressing dissatisfaction with the administration.

The distrust and cynicism has raised awareness that pragmatic, decisive, and strong leadership is necessary to handle the many issues the country faces. The prevalent mood, expressed often by the news media and by many Diet members, is that a leader must exhibit courage, initiative and intelligence rather than simply manage interpersonal relations. And as disapproval of the administration and politicians reached its peak by late 2000, there was probably only one politician—Junichiro Koizumi—who could combine traits such as integrity, decisiveness, and competence at this time in history.

Koizumi’s emergence as prime minister illustrates that both individual characteristics *and* the environment in which a group (i.e., the country) finds itself affect the selection of leaders. In today’s Japan, he is probably the politician most capable of responding to the public’s need for a task-oriented leader.

CONCLUSIONS

Koizumi understands that the needs of the Japanese public are not limited to economic issues—important as these are. Herein lies the significance of his popularity. He recognizes that the public seeks a variety of qualities in a political leader. Leaders must be capable of maintaining a public dialogue and informing voters on their deeds and plans, while being friendly and possessing a sense of humor. At the same time, leaders must be determined and decisive when dealing with bureaucrats and political party members in matters ranging from policy to personnel.

Whether Koizumi will realize these expectations is not clear. There are complex issues on the national agenda, including increasing unemployment, the banking crisis, the value of the yen and the stock market, and bureaucratic issues. Koizumi, with his working style and media savvy, certainly gives the impression that he is capable and ready to do what a task-oriented leader is expected to do. Using his eloquence and charm, Koizumi is, in my view, breaking many of the existing stereotypes, assumptions, and images related to political leaders and leadership in Japan. And, by doing so, he is changing the national perception of the role of the prime minister.



ENDNOTES

1. Ofer Feldman, *Imeiji de yomu nagatahou: Seijiteki imeji no yakuwari to kouzou ni kansuru jisshouteki kenkyuu* [Perceiving Japanese Politics Through Images: An Empirical Study on the Role and Structure of Political Image] (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1992); Feldman, *The Japanese Political Personality: Analyzing the Motivations and Culture of Freshmen Diet Members* (London: Macmillan, 1999).

2. Jyuji Misumi, *Riidashippu koudou no kagaku* [The Behavioral Science of Leadership] (Tokyo: Yuhikaku, 1984), 61-66.

3. Misumi, 216.

4. Misumi, 66-69.

5. Misumi, 216.

The Rise of Thatcherism? The Koizumi Phenomenon in a Comparative Perspective

IKUKO TOYONAGA

In contrast to the other essayists contributing to this Special Report, I specialize not in Japanese politics but in comparative politics. Therefore, when asked to address political “undercurrents,” my first thought was of a trend that is aligning Japanese politics with those of post-1980 Britain and the United States—the pitting of average citizens against the “establishment” by those leaders who want to steer the government in a new direction. This stratagem was used with particular effectiveness by Britain’s Margaret Thatcher (as described in my book *The Paradigm of Thatcherism*), and in the United States, politicians on both sides of the aisle advance their agenda by referring to rivals as “elitist.” Now Japan’s Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and Foreign Minister Makiko Tanaka¹ have achieved tremendous popularity by similarly exploiting the gulf between ordinary people and political insiders.

Let me start by talking about what it means to be “ordinary” in Japan, where the very concept of “ordinariness” is contested and is in flux. For example, former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori is a perfectly “ordinary” figure: he is a typical middle-aged Japanese male, often rude, unsophisticated and even un-intellectual. People like Mori are everywhere in Japanese society. As a politician, he embodied the traditional populism of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Many LDP members, even savvy, second- or third-generation ones, try to pass themselves off as unrefined, jocular conservatives, accompanied by affable, wise, devoted wives.

In this sense, Koizumi is not ordinary, but extraordinary. He is divorced, living on his own. He aims to be stylish in clothing, hair and manners. He is a far cry from the typical man of his generation. Thus, his image is sufficiently different from that of his abysmally unpopular predecessor, Mori, to assure him of an auspicious beginning. What’s more, his image as a “new kind” of prime minister has struck a chord in Japanese people’s hearts in a surprising



fashion. One of Koizumi’s famous soundbites is that to be eccentric in Nagatacho (Japan’s equivalent of Capitol Hill) is to be “ordinary” in the public eye. This is not strictly true, since Koizumi is eccentric in the public eye, as well. But by distancing himself from other politicians, he has achieved an affinity with average citizens.

In other words, the electorate is weary of run-of-the-mill traditional Japanese “ordinariness”—and this is especially true of women. One middle-aged woman interviewed by a newspaper said that she felt closer to Koizumi than to her own family. This statement might sound exaggerated, but does touch on the secret of Koizumi’s success. Underlying his popularity is a new state of awareness among Japanese women: increasing self-confidence on the one hand and deepening frustration on the other. As the Japanese economy and society gradually disintegrate, women are disappointed by most bread-earning males both inside and outside of the family. Meanwhile, females remain marginalized and exploited in the labor market. Thus, they watch from the periphery with suppressed passion and critical, even cynical, eyes. They know that their daughters and granddaughters will gain opportunities that were never open to them. Thinking grudgingly of their lost chances, and realizing the unreliability of

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those who have run the society in their place, they anticipate a new era when the self-complacency of the dominating male will be overcome.

This female factor has contributed to the unprecedented rally of support for Koizumi. Accordingly, the populism behind Koizumi's image and message is of a particular bent. It criticizes and challenges the status quo and the establishment. Thus, it differs totally from the traditional populism embodied by Mori, for example.

As Koizumi ran for party leader last spring, his unconventional personal profile—including his hobbies, family history, fashion taste, and so on—came to the public's attention for the first time. At the same time, his anti-establishment image was formed through a motion toward dismantling the faction system and through calls for reform. His timing was just about perfect. Koizumi as "outsider" was discovered by the public just after an eruption of scandal in the Foreign Ministry brought home the self-complacent corruption of the Japanese elite. As opposed to those around him, Koizumi seemed to maintain consistent integrity and self-reliance in both his public and private lives. His followers somehow disregarded the fact that he had stayed loyal to Mori during the previous months.

Koizumi's image of being an independent outsider was enhanced by his virtual running mate, Makiko Tanaka, the current gossip-plagued foreign minister. The above-mentioned public/elite dichotomy is even more stark in characterizing her popularity than that of the prime minister. An opinion poll conducted last spring showed that 84 percent of the respondents regarded her highly as a politician. She was ranked by many polls as the most popular prime minister candidate—until Koizumi himself became prime minister. She was (and still is) frequently in the headlines of morning and afternoon TV shows, which usually cover only celebrity gossip and gourmet and housekeeping information. She brought politics into the world of mass culture, especially into the female subculture. With this asset, she campaigned at Koizumi's side when he ran for party leader and premier. Her support helped to bring Koizumi himself to the attention of the female subculture, who adopted him as an idealized object of popular affection.

Tanaka was truly an outsider, having many enemies within her own party. This points to a major

discrepancy between how the elite views her and how ordinary citizens view her. In short, the closer you are to power, the more critical of her you are likely to be. In this, her situation is reminiscent of Margaret Thatcher's. Thatcher, too, was extremely unpopular with the so-called establishment. Elite figures in the intellectual, academic and journalist circles despised her thoroughly, to the extent that hating her in itself became almost a sign of intellectuality. Like Tanaka, Thatcher encountered a great deal of resistance from within her own party and from the civil service that was compelled to be under her command.

In regard to Tanaka, some say that ordinary people are ignorant, that they simply do not understand the kind of person she actually is. Still, we should not exclude another important possibility: that the real gulf between the elite and ordinary citizens is growing wider and may have serious consequences—perhaps even such extreme results as in Britain when Thatcher's rise to power was occasioned by a similar division in society. Politicians and policymakers who do not comprehend this situation may be surprised by the repercussions of their own actions.

The electorate is weary of run-of-the-mill Japanese "ordinariness"—and this is especially true of women.

For example, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the largest opposition party, seems to be suffering from such miscomprehension. Failing to understand the nature of the emerging populism in which female voters play an integral part, the DPJ has been relying on masculine rhetoric and symbolism (actually at odds with its generally women-friendly policies). For one thing, the party has been trying hard to build a masculine image for its leader, Yukio Hatoyama. In a last-minute run-up to the upper house election this past summer, they advertised Hatoyama in a grainy, close-up photograph that exposed even the pores in his face mercilessly—thereby moving away from the neat, clean, even graceful image that would have appealed to female voters. Another example: the DPJ used the word "toru" ("snatch") in heavy, masculine-style calligra-

phy on its poster for the general election last year. The DPJ meant to forcefully declare its determination to deprive the ruling LDP of power. But to female voters, the word and calligraphic style carried connotations of “rape”—or at least of violent plunder. Personally, I was repeatedly puzzled by the DPJ’s actions. The strategy would have been a good one, *if* the election revolved around young, professional male voters (with whom the DPJ was actually quite successful). Similarly, the DPJ’s attempt to adopt a Meiji-era revolutionary image might have made better sense if the audience were limited to males—as it was during the Meiji Restoration, 100 years ago.

However, times have changed since then. Young, professional males—progressive, would-be Meiji-era revolutionaries—are in fact considered established “insiders” from the point of view of women and certain other voters. Thus, the electorate’s anti-establishment sentiment targets the DPJ as well as the LDP. Furthermore, “floating” voters—critical for swaying elections—are reportedly increasingly female. The DPJ distanced itself from these voters by failing to study the nature of the emerging populism.

To be sure, any politician or party focusing exclusively on the circle of professional, predominantly male elites will miss what is going on. We cannot yet tell if Koizumi will impact politics in Japan to the same degree that Thatcher did in Britain. But we can recognize a similar pattern in how he attracts popular support. The parallel is even stronger in Tanaka’s case. Thatcher appealed to Britons who were fed up with the secretive, exclusive culture of the establishment—including the “macho” culture of union leaders, whose collusion was blamed for hastening Great Britain’s decline. Thatcher identified herself with the ordinary public by referring to her

background as the daughter of a grocery-shop owner. She also took full advantage of her image of a perpetual outsider—a female struggling against the cliques and cartels of the “men’s club” that politics was seen to be.

This strategy seems to have been effective. After all, she lasted more than 11 years as prime minister. With this strategy, she changed the image of the Conservative Party, which for a time seized the banner of the “common people’s party” from the Labour Party. Is Japan ready for the kind of drastic change brought about by Thatcherism? Time will tell, but the frustration of the public seems to suggest that it is. The extent of the public/elite gap is shown by the public’s willingness to rally behind the foreign minister even when she is under attack by colleagues on all sides.

Lately, Koizumi’s own party and government are reportedly engaged in “walling him off.” He is under increasing pressure to retreat to a looser fiscal policy, and to raise the limit on issuing government bonds for the next fiscal year beyond the pledged level. He is also under pressure to spare certain vested interests that are targeted by his public corporation reform plan. Meanwhile, a growing chorus tells him to fire Tanaka. She is increasingly marginalized and incapacitated in her policymaking, ever since she carelessly handled classified information following the September 11 attacks in the United States. Will Koizumi be able to retain his appeal as he deals with these pressures? One thing is sure: the public will be observing him closely.

ENDNOTES

1. This essay was completed before the replacement of Makiko Tanaka as foreign minister.



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