state-led reconstruction of telecommunication infrastructures in its new, post-socialist
Eastern states. However, when it comes to reforms in the financial service industries,
Germany sped up in order to attract international capital and investments to the east.
In Japan, on the other hand, the bubble crisis caused some delays in fiscal and
financial reforms. It was not until 2005 that the Japanese government came to terms
with privatizing its postal savings system. During the 1990s the government’s Fiscal
Investment and Loan Program, together with the postal savings system, still served
as an instrument for counter-cyclical economic policy.

The contributions to this volume challenge, in some ways, conventional discussions
about the 1990s as a “lost decade” characterized by political stagnation, blocked
reforms, and administrative rigidity. An alternative view of the 1990s would see the
decade more as a climacteric in politics and administration in both countries.
The following chapters may suggest more support for the latter interpretation. They
emerged from conference papers presented at two international seminars held at the
University of Tokyo in 2005 and at the University of Osnabrück in 2007. We are
grateful to the German Research Foundation (DFG), the Japan Society for the
Promotion of Science (JSPS), the Institute of Social Science (ISS), the University of
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conferences. We would also like to thank all paper-givers and discussants, who, with
the authors included in this volume, contributed to the liveliness and fruitfulness of
the debate.

Kenji Hirashima and Roland Czada,
Tokyo and Osnabrück, November 2008

1 Japan’s New Party System: Characteristics and Future Perspective

Carmen Schmidt

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1990s, Japan’s political system has undergone
fundamental change. When the conservative Liberal Democratic Party of Japan
(LDP) split in 1993, this ended the “old” party system, which had been characterized
by continuous LDP rule since the formation of the system in 1955 and an opposition
dominated by the Social Democratic Party of Japan (SDPJ). The system was
therefore often labelled a “one and one-half party system” or a “one-party-dominant
system”. The LDP splits were followed by the decline of the SDPJ and the
subsequent finding of a number of new parties during the 1990s.
The LDP split in 1993 coincided with the party’s temporary loss of power and
the creation of the first non-LDP government since 1955, which undertook essential
political reforms to improve Japan’s political system. From 1996 onwards, elections
were held under a new electoral system, which was expected to produce a two-party
system. However, the coalition cabinet was in power for only a short period, and one
and a half years later, the LDP was in power again. In the following years, the LDP
was forced to form several coalition governments to secure a majority in the House
of Representatives, but the party was still the most powerful political force within
Japan’s political system. In the late 1990s, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) was
found, replacing the SDPJ as the biggest opposition party. The system was, however,
still characterized by a great fluidity in party labels and the existence of more than
two parties.

This article addresses the questions: What conditions facilitated the party system
change? How did the collapse occur? What are the characteristics and prospects of
Japan’s “new” party system? To answer these questions, we need to first analyze the
connection between social modernization and political behaviour in Japan. This
connection impacts many dimensions of political representation and voting
behaviour, including issues pertaining to electoral behaviour concerning party
competition patterns, the strength of social cleavages and party loyalties, and voter
turnout and party identification levels. A second and alternative theoretical approach
predicts that changes and variations in voting behaviour patterns are partly due to
variations in the political-institutional context; consequently, we also pay attention to
the revision of the election law.

We start off by discussing the most important aspects of modernization and
post-modernization in Japan before identifying the main cleavages that shaped the
2. Social Modernization and Political Behaviour in Japan

A starting point of each analysis of party systems and voter alignments is the social modernization of the relevant nation. Social modernization includes a wide range of transformations in the socio-economic structure of a given society, including economic growth, the society's social structure, the level of education, urbanization, the emergence of media society, migration and value change. In this section, some of the most important aspects will be discussed: socio-economic development, urbanization, level of education and value change.

Immediately after the war, the primary sector in Japan maintained a relatively high share of net domestic product. In 1950, nearly 50 percent of the labour force was still engaged in the primary sector, compared to about only 25 percent in Western Germany. The industrial-agrarian cleavage caused by the industrial revolution thus had a strong impact on party founding and voter alignment in the early post-war years.

Conflict between the classes emerged comparatively late. The share of employed persons engaged in the secondary industry increased from 22 percent in 1950 to 34 percent in 1970, but hit a ceiling during the 1970s with a maximum of 35 percent in 1980. Conversely, in 1882 the first statistics gathered by imperial Germany recorded a 34 percent engagement in the secondary sector, which reached 50 percent in 1960. This rate only began to decline gradually from the 80s onwards (Schmidt 2001: 93f).

Similar to that in other developed countries, the Japanese primary sector currently accounts for only a small fraction of the total economic activities, while its secondary sector began to decline in relative terms during the 80s and the tertiary sector has come to the fore. The late development of the secondary sector meant that the shift to the tertiary sector, which exceeded 60 percent in 1995, was swifter and more drastic than in other industrialized nations, causing massive changes in the labour market structure and in living conditions. Along with the emergence of the media society, this shift can, in general, be regarded as a critical juncture in the development of industrial nations. In Japan, as in Western societies, this led to the disintegration of the party system and voter dealignment.

Urbanization in Japan started in the late 1890s, but until the 1940s the country's urbanization rate was far behind that of Western countries. However, after the war, Japan experienced extremely rapid urbanization. The percentage of persons living in urban areas grew from 35 percent in 1950 to more than 65 percent in 2000, with a further increase expected in the near future (see UN 2007).

One of the most noticeable features of urban growth in Japan has been the extreme population congestion in some urban centres and depopulation in some rural villages. The population in the three major urban areas, Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya now constitute about 50 percent of the total national population. The difference between urban centres and rural peripheries in terms of economic, cultural and social difference and diversity is thus by far greater than it is in, for example, Germany.

Rising levels of education are a core dimension of social modernization and the driving force behind all kinds of changes in political culture and behaviour (Inglehart 1990: 6). After the reorganization during the Occupation Period (1945-52), the 1960s and early 1970s witnessed the rapid growth of the higher education system. The ratio of pupils advancing to high school increased from 58 percent in 1960 to 92 percent in 1975. In recent years, the percentage has levelled off at about 96 percent. The percentage of students continuing on to university has increased steadily from 8 percent in 1960 to around 42 percent in 2004 (Japan Almanac 2003: 228; 2006: 235). When compared to that of other advanced nations, the level of education in Japan is extraordinarily high. In Germany, for example, only 24 percent of pupils graduated from a high school in 2004, and more than 66 percent completed only primary school or a form of lower secondary education (see Statistisches Bundesamt 2007: 143).

The classic literature on political development holds that the process of social modernization starts with the transition from an agrarian to an urban bureaucratized industrial society, and encompasses a shift towards rationalization and secularization with an emphasis on prosperity and materialistic values (Almond and Coleman 1960). Advanced industrial society is also undergoing massive change. Clark and Inglehart (1998) cite three factors that cause this change: (1) Economic factors, such as the decline of agriculture and manufacturing industries and the rise of the service industry, as well as rising incomes and the blurring of class boundaries, (2) social factors such as the increase in nuclear families, rising levels of education and access to mass media, and (3) governmental factors such as welfare state policies that have solved many problems encountered in the past. This process is commonly referred to as “post-modernization”.

According to Inglehart (1990), this change has led to a shift from materialistic to post-materialistic values. The unexpected economic prosperity following World War II and the creation of the modern welfare state have cleared the way for the post-modern shift that affects mainly the younger cohorts who experienced economic prosperity and security during their formative years. Consequently, this leads to a gradual intergenerational shift in the given society's basic values.

Even though there are debates on the measurement of post-materialist values and their applicability to Japan (Flanagan 1982), it is quite evident that a massive value change has taken place in Japan since the late 70s, especially with regard to attitudes towards family life. Japan's birth rate is among the lowest in the world (1.26

Maren Schmidt
in 2005) and is declining extremely fast compared to that of the United States and Europe. Per prefecture, the fertility rate was lowest in metropolitan Tokyo at 1.02 and highest in rural Okinawa at 1.74. In addition, more and more Japanese marry later or choose to remain single (Masaki 2007).

Attitudes towards employment are also changing rapidly. Since the end of the 1980s, more and more young people have deliberately chosen not to work as full-time employees despite a large number of available jobs. These "freeters," as they are called, have been somewhat glamorized as people pursuing their dreams and trying to live life to the fullest. ⁶ In 1982, there were an estimated 0.5 million freeters in Japan, the official number for 2004 is 2.13 million (White Paper on the Labour Economy 2005: Chap. 2, 26f). According to some estimates there will be around ten million freeters in Japan in 2014.

From a political science perspective, the impact of post-modernization is far from clear. One of the main hypotheses indicates an eroding of traditional party loyalties, growing electoral volatility and a decline in the significance of voting, especially among the younger cohorts. This is due to the established parties, most of which were formed during the political and economic modernization process, tending to represent the "old" materialistic value cleavage rather than the "new" post-materialistic one. Consequently, fewer voters are "strongly attached" to the existing political parties. This process could foster the emergence of new groups in the interest intermedation process, leading to a higher fragmentation of the party system and a decrease in its integrative capacity (Fuchs and Klingemann 1995: 18).

As far as the style of post-industrial democracies is concerned, it is assumed that the social and economical changes will lead to a broader range of participatory activities, including a strengthening of direct democracy (Vetter 2000: 43f). While the preference for non-conventional political participation proved true during the late 60s and 70s when students' and new social movements came to the fore, there has been evidence of an overall decline in civic and political activism in post-industrial societies since the mid-80s (Pharr and Putnam 2000). Further, it is assumed that short-term factors, such as candidate characteristics and orientation regarding specific policy issues will become more prominent in determining how people vote.

With respect to the attributes characterizing post-modern societies, such as the rise of the service economy, rising levels of education, and changes in geographical mobility, it is quite evident that Japan belongs to the most advanced nations in the world. Since the change from modern to post-modern society was far more drastic in Japan than in other nations, the far greater and more visible impact of post-modernization on the party system and voter alignments was predictable. Since the beginning of the 1990s, however, Japan, as well as other advanced societies, has been increasingly characterized by a remarkable decline in economic power with the associated severe fiscal constraints, shrinking level of welfare provisions and the privatization of services formally delivered by the nation state, which may affect people's attitudes and values within the next future.

3. “Freezing” and “Unfreezing” of the Party System

3.1 The Development of the 1955 Party System

In 1955 essential political amalgamations took place that would fundamentally shape the Japanese party system until 1993. In October 1955, the Japan Socialist Party (JSP, Nihon shakai tō), which had split due to the San Francisco peace settlement, reunited and one month later the two existing conservative parties formed the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP, Jūtō minshū tō). These mergers ended a period of great fluidity in party labels and factional alignments on the Right and Left.

Strong external pressure had encouraged these amalgamations of the political camps. Without the efforts of the labour federation Sōhyō, which had called for a reunification of the JSP to form a strong socialist party, the JSP would not have been formed. On the other hand, the business community, represented by Keidanren, had required a stable, conservative government to maintain good relationships with the United States in order to thwart the JSP’s growth and cope with the growing labour movement. These mergers resulted in the establishment of the 1955 system, with the conservative LDP as the party in power and the leftist JSP as the biggest opposition party. Following these amalgamations, the only other party left was the Japan Communist Party (JCP, Nihon kyōsōn tō), which gained less than one-half of one percent of the seats at that time (Masumi 1992: 35).

The Conservatives sought to strengthen the alliance with the USA and a reversal of specifically those parts of the new constitution referring to the symbolic status of the emperor, recognition of labour unions, equality of the sexes, and, of course, article 9, which prohibited Japan from having armed forces. The JSP and JCP fiercely opposed the conservatives’ position on all these issues and were supported by Sōhyō, which acted as a political organization at that time and played a leading role in expressing opposing opinions. According to Flanagan and Reed (1996: 334), the main cleavage of this constellation arose from differences in value systems. The shock of the military defeat and the radical reforms of the occupation period, coupled with the changes in the education system were stimulating rapid changes. This value change mainly affected the younger, more educated, urban and unionized sector. This unevenness created a sharp value cleavage between these segments of the population, which backed the Progressives, and the older, less educated, rural and non-unionized part of the society, which mainly supported the Conservatives.

Although this theory identifies a key feature of the Japanese party system, one should note the economical cleavage represented by the camps. As mentioned above, the pressure of the economic interest groups — the labour unions (labour) on the one side and the business community (capital) on the other — had forced both these amalgamations. Thus, the party system and voter alignments in the 50s and 60s were based on two main cleavages: (1) An economic one, which was rooted in the conflict between capital and labour and (2) a cultural one, which was
3.2 The Formation of the New Party System

At the end of the 80s, the bursting of the “bubble economy” plunged the Japanese economy into a severe crisis. In addition, a series of political bribery scandals shook the country and gave rise to new parties calling for political reforms. In May 1992, the New Japan Party (NJP, Nihon shinri) was formed as a new conservative party under the leadership of Hosokawa Morihiro, a former LDP politician and governor of Kumamoto. The 1992 Sagawa Express bribery scandal led to the leader of the largest faction within the LDP being convicted of having accepted, in violation of political contribution regulations, large sums of money from Sagawa. The sentence resulted in an internal factional struggle for leadership, which finally caused the faction to split despite there being no programme or interest differences. This gave rise to several defections from the party in the summer of 1993, which resulted in the LDP’s temporary loss of power.

In the following years, a series of mergers and more party splits occurred (Figure 1). Three different developments were of distinct importance: (1) The dissolving of most of the opposition parties and the founding of the New Frontier Party (NFP) or Shinshin-to in 1994, (2) the split in the Social Democratic Party, the SDPJ (formerly the JSP, which had replaced its Marxist programme, adopted a modernized platform and changed its name to the Social Democratic Party), in 1996 and the founding of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ, Nihon minshu tô), and (3) the dissolving of the Shinshin-to and the new formation of the party system in 1997/98.

After the 1993 House of Representatives (HR) election, two new conservative parties — the Japan Renewal Party (JRP, Shinshin-to) and the New Horbinger Party or Shinji Sakigake —, which had arisen from LDP splinter groups, formed a reformist coalition cabinet along with SDPJ, DSP, Komeitô and the Japanese New Party. Hosokawa Morihiro, the leader of the NJP, became the first non-LDP Prime Minister since 1955. However, the coalition partners did not as much agree on political issues as to try to dislodge the LDP. Consequently, this coalition cabinet was in power for only nine months and lost its majority when the SDPJ withdraw in April 1994. Thereafter, a most unlikely coalition government, composed of the SDPJ, LDP, and Sakigake, emerged and a Socialist, Murayama Tomiichi, became Prime Minister. However, Murayama resigned eighteen months later, and with the appointment of Hashimoto Ryutaro as his successor, the LDP was in power again.

The coalition between the SDPJ and its rival LDP and the abandonment of SDPJ’s traditional policy positions were controversial issues within the party, resulting in the left and right wings announcing that they would defect. In August 1994, almost all the opposition parties formed the second strongest party in the system by merging into another new party, called Shinshin-to. This merger was primarily rooted in the hope of establishing an alternating two-party system and not in the merging groups’ agreement on policy issues.

In March 1996, a part of the left wing Socialists split off from the SDPJ to form the New Socialist Party (Shin shakai tô), which remained insignificant. In September, the right wing defected as well and, together with some minute splinter groups from the Sakigake and the LDP, formed the Democratic Party of Japan. It claimed to be a party of “new conservatism”. The SDPJ split had been forced by the co-operative labour federation Renô, which had replaced the leftist Sôkoyô at the beginning of the 90s. Renô had called for the founding of a moderate Social Democratic Party to establish a two-party system and increasingly refused to raise funds for the SDPJ. After these splits, the remaining SDPJ became insignificant.

At the end of 1996, some former LDP politicians defected from the Shinshin-to and formed a few short-lived parties. Other splits followed until the was dissolved at the end of 1997. This development had been accelerated by the party’s voting for LDP draft bills, a co-operation that was especially criticized by the former Komeitô — which had continued to exist as a party within the Shinshin-to — as well as by the other groups. Following the dissolving of the Shinshin-to, new parties appeared in the course of the following year. In January 1998, the Liberal Party (LP, Jiyû tô) was...
formed, vaguely specified as a party “for the economy”, consisting mainly of former LDP and DSP politicians. After its formation, the party held approximately eight percent of the seats in the House of Representatives (Schmidt 2001: 149ff.).

**Figure 1: The Development of the Japanese Party System 1993-2005**

![Diagram showing the development of the Japanese party system from 1993 to 2005](image)

April 1998 saw the merger of the Democratic Party with some other groups to form the (new) Democratic Party, which soon became the second strongest party by occupying roughly 20 percent of the seats. Nearly 50 percent of the parties’ members were politicians from the former social democratic camp and roughly 50 percent were former conservatives. According to the party, it represents “citizens, taxpayers, and consumers” (Schmidt 2001: 158).

In October 1998, the former Kōmeitō was re-established under the name New Kōmeitō (Shin kōmeitō). One year later, in October 1999, the party joined the LDP-LP coalition and did well in the following parliamentary elections. As the ruling Liberal Democratic Party’s junior coalition partner, it was becoming a major political force in Japan.

In April 2000, a small group defected from the Liberal Party and found the Conservative Party (CP, Hoshu). In December 2002, some minute DPJ splinter groups united with the Conservative Party and formed the New Conservative Party (NCP, Hoshu shิน). However, after the November 2003 general election, the NCP was left with only four members in the House of Representatives, down from nine prior to the election. On 10 November 2003, Prime Minister Koizumi proposed that the NCP merge with the equally conservative LDP. The party has fully merged with the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan, and is defunct (Yomiuri Shimbun 11 Nov. 2003).

In January 2002, the Shintō Sakigake, which had changed its name to “Sakigake” in 1998, again changed its name to Green Assembly (Midori no kaigi). However, the party finally dissolved in summer 2004, mainly due to its failure to win any seats in that year’s Upper House elections (Japan Times 13 July 2004). Owing to the imminent election, the Liberal Party finally merged with the Democratic Party of Japan in October 2003, its members becoming an influential grouping within the party. Thus, the ideological distribution of the DPJ widened even further. The party was profoundly split, specifically concerning national security issues such as the international role of the Self-Defence Forces and conservative values such as the amendment of the Constitution and nationalistic education. Survey data provided evidence of wide-ranging ideological rifts within the DPJ (Uchiyama 2008).

The People’s New Party (PNP, Kokumin shintō) is a Japanese political party formed in 17 August 2005 in the aftermath of the defeat of the then Prime Minister Koizumi’s Japan Post privatisation bills, which led to a snap election. Most of the members of the People’s New Party were formerly members of the Kamei Faction of the LDP. Their strong links to the postal lobby forced them to oppose Koizumi’s plans to privatise the postal system (Asahi Shimbun 18 Aug. 2005). The Nippon New Party (NNP, Shin shintō ‘Nippon’) was founded on 21 August 2005 by the former Nagano governor Tanaka Yasuo (*1956) and included Diet members who left the Liberal Democratic Party in protest against Prime Minister Koizumi’s postal privatisation drive (Yomiuri Shimbun 22 Aug. 2005). The New Party Daichi (NPD, Shin shintō Daichi,
also known as New Party Big Earth) was founded on 18 August 2005 by former Liberal Democratic Party member Suzuki Munet (*1948). Suzuki resigned from the LDP in June 2002 after being arrested on suspicion of accepting bribes. He was convicted of bribery and other charges the following year, and announced the party's creation while released on bail (Yomiuri Shimbun 11 Sep. 2005).

The restructuring of the recent years shows that the party system is still characterized by the ongoing fragmentation of the opposition camp. No prediction is possible on whether further transformation will occur within the following few years.

3.3 Elite Continuity behind Transformation and Change
To understand the continuity behind these changes, it is best to start off by examining the voting districts. A good example is the district Iwate 4 in Iwate prefecture. Until the changes in the party system, this district was long held by a prominent LDP politician. In the 1993 HR election, this seat was captured by the Japan Renewal Party and in 1996 it was won by the Shinshinto. In 2000, the Liberal Party won it, while the DPJ won it in 2003. This seems to indicate the electorate's high volatility. However, the successful candidate in each election indicates otherwise. Before 1993 the successful candidate was Ozawa Ichirō, former Minister of Home Affairs and Secretary General of the LDP as well as prominent member of the largest faction within the LDP, who had inherited this district from his father. By the end of the 1980s, he was said to be the strong man behind the government of the weak Prime Minister Kaifu and designated to become Japan's next LDP Prime Minister. In 1993, Ozawa won the district by running on the Shinsetō ticket. In 1996, he was elected as a member of the Shinshinto. In 2000, he won the seat for the Liberal Party and finally, in 2003, for the Democratic Party. If this personal continuity behind the changes is taken into consideration, a review of the party system development since the early 1990s becomes necessary, requiring an explanation from the perspective of elite continuity.

As mentioned before, in 1992, the Sagawa Express scandal led to the leader of the largest faction within the LDP being convicted of bribery. He had to resign from his post as faction leader, which resulted in an internal factional struggle for leadership between Ozawa and Obuchi Keizō, who later became Prime Minister. Ozawa lost the battle and, together with his followers, split from the LDP, founded the JRP and became the party's president. In 1994, Ozawa was the driving force behind the formation of the Shinshinto, becoming its president in 1995. Following the dissolution of the party in 1997, Ozawa set up the Liberal Party and became its president in 1998. Before the 2003 General Election, the party merged with the Democratic Party and in April 2006, Ozawa became the president of the currently biggest opposition party in Japan, the DPJ (see Figure 2).

After the July 2007 House of Councillors election, the DPJ became the largest party in that house, resulting in the LDP inability to pass laws. In October 2007, Ozawa therefore proposed a grand coalition with the LDP. According to the newspaper Yomiuri Shimbun, Ozawa and LDP Prime Minister Fukuda had agreed that Ozawa would serve as a Minister without Portfolio and the equivalent of the Deputy Prime Minister if the DPJ were to join in a grand coalition with the ruling parties (Yomiuri Shimbun 5 Nov. 2007). The coalition plan was, however, strongly opposed by parts of the DPJ and the plan was dropped, which highlights the ideological rifts.
4. Trends in Political Participation and Party Support

As mentioned above, the Japanese party system in the 50s and 60s was based upon two major cleavages — an economical one, representing the conflict between capital and labour (corresponding variables: occupation), and a cultural one, which was caused by differences in value systems (corresponding variables: age, education and place of residence). The following investigation focuses on the changes in voting behaviour and voter alignment over time and highlights the growing tendency towards the "unfreezing" of the party system that has been occurring since the early 70s.

In investigating long-term voter alignment, two different developments should be taken into consideration: The first is related to social structural changes that cause a modification in supporter group size; the second concerns the shift in partisan social structural composition over time.

With the rapid decline of the farm population from nearly 50 percent of the labour force in the 50s to around five percent today, LDP's supporter groups dwindled markedly. The self-employed, LDP's second principal supporter group, also declined in relative terms. On the other hand, the group of white-collar workers grew considerably. These facts should have favoured the left-tilted parties, but the decrease in unionized workers caused the leftist supporter groups to shrink as well.

The economic development, along with rising incomes, led to a blurring of class boundaries and a weakening of the class cleavage regarding voter alignments. Moreover, the electorate underwent a generational shift. The sharp cultural cleavage that had emerged in the 50s between the post-war generation supporting the progressive parties and the pre-war generation backing the conservative LDP weakened in the 80s when the welfare generation entered the electorate. Consequently, party competition strengthened because the number of unaffiliated voters increased considerably.

The decline of the value cleavage is illustrated by data on progressive vs. conservative attitudes. In 2005, 35 percent of survey research polices classified themselves as conservative or largely conservative. Sixteen percent stated that they had progressive or largely progressive attitudes towards politics, compared to 26 percent in 1972. The vast majority of the surveyed persons or nearly 50 percent claimed to be neither progressive nor conservative (see Table 1). These data clearly show that the cleavage caused by differences in value systems has largely disappeared. Currently there is a polarization between the conservatives and the voters with neither conservative nor progressive attitudes.

Table 1: Conservative vs. Progressive Attitudes towards Politics 1972-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Conservative/ Largely conservative</th>
<th>Neutral/ Other/ DK</th>
<th>Progressive/ Largely progressive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>38,0</td>
<td>35,7</td>
<td>26,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>36,6</td>
<td>39,1</td>
<td>24,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>47,6</td>
<td>34,2</td>
<td>18,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>46,5</td>
<td>37,1</td>
<td>16,5</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>42,3</td>
<td>38,4</td>
<td>19,3</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>40,8</td>
<td>41,6</td>
<td>17,6</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>35,9</td>
<td>49,0</td>
<td>15,1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>35,0</td>
<td>49,2</td>
<td>15,9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Akasai senkyo wakamukyokai, respective years (downloaded: http://www.akasaisenkyo.or.jp).
Note: Answer to the question: "Do you consider yourself conservative or progressive?"
DK= don't know.

This dealignment has resulted in a rapid decline of the voter turnout rate since the 1960s. During the 1990s, the turnout rates further declined and reached a historical low during the 1996 HR elections with a turnout of only 59.6 percent. Although it increased slightly in 2000 and 2005 due to political polarization, this cannot be regarded as a change in the trend.

The number of non-partisans increased considerably from around 16 percent in 1966 to 34 percent in 1972. Their number was more or less stable during the 1970s and 1980s, but the 1990s saw a further dramatic increase from 32 percent in 1990 to 48 percent in 1996 (Schmidt 2001: 194). Today non-partisans make up the largest group of respondents in public opinion polls. The results of the "party support question" employed by the Jiji Press surveys to measure partisanship in Japan show that between 1998 and 2003 around 60 percent of the respondents claimed not to support any party (Table 2). Moreover, Table 3 reveals that dealignment from the established parties has not resulted in an alignment with the new parties. In 2003, only four percent of the polices stated that they support the currently biggest opposition party, the DPJ.

There is not only a distinct tendency for a large portion of the electorate to refrain from commitment to any political party, but also a shift in the composition of the non-supporters. In the 1960s, non-partisanship was rife among the older, less
educated fishery, forestry and agriculture workers as well as among the self-employed. From the 1980s onwards, the non-partisan group was, conversely, chiefly comprised of younger, better-educated employees living in large cities. (Schmidt 2001: 194-96). As in other industrialized nations, we find a distinct shift from “apolitical non-supporters” to “cognitively mobilized non-supporters”, which is typically associated with post-modernism (Inglehart 1990: 363).

These findings suggest that dealignment is an almost entirely leftist phenomenon, while the alignment of the conservative supporter groups with the LDP has remained stable, even if its traditional supporter groups are shrinking too due to changes in the labour force. Political non-supporters are numerous, especially among those social groups who supported the progressives in the 50s and 60s. The Democratic Party, which is currently the second largest party in the system, also seems unable to organize unaffiliated voters.

Public opinion polls on the Japanese public’s attitudes toward key institutions and political leadership indicated a noticeable loss of public faith in Japan’s political leaders and institutions during the 1990s. Only a minority of the public expressed any confidence in their political system, and only a quarter of the polices felt that democracy works well in Japan. The polls furthermore revealed a steadily increasing loss of confidence in Japanese politicians and bureaucrats (Schmidt 2005: 111-118). This appears to have resulted from the combination of political scandals and the opposition parties’ inability to organize the growing number of disaffected voters, especially those who might actually be inclined to support them. Together with the weakening bonds of partisan attachment, this has nurtured the growth of non voters and floating voters.

As can be seen in Figure 3, unaffiliated voters increasingly find expression through candidates who are not affiliated to the established parties of the "old" system, or refrain from voting altogether. The rise in unaffiliated voters thus brought about the instability of the party system and has favoured permanent changes within the opposition camp.

### Table 2: Party Support 1998-2003 (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Month</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
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<td>21.6</td>
<td>22.3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>3.4</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>1.9</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>59.2</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>61.2</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>55.8</td>
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importance of local loyalties is also reflected in the widespread practice of a second-
generation "inheriting" Diet seats — or, rather, the personal supporter groups — from
their fathers or fathers-in-law. This trend is found predominantly, although not
exclusively, in the LDP.

It has also been pointed out that the multi-member-district system fostered
intra-LDP factionalism. Factions represent a type of paternalistic leader-follower
relationship and are not primarily based on policies. In the past, the most important
factor in determining factional membership was the factional affiliation of LDP
members already elected in a district in which new candidates planned to run. Given
the competition between the LDP candidates as fostered by the electoral system,
incumbent LDP members saw the entry of new candidates as a threat to their re-
election and used their faction’s influence to block them. Future candidates therefore
sought the support of factions that did not have incumbents in their districts. In turn,
factions sought candidates in districts where they were underrepresented (Curtis
1988: 85). Factions therefore increased their influence substantially and took over all
the functions usually performed by the party, such as the selection of candidates, the
distribution of funds and — most importantly — the allocation of posts (see below).

The other major complaint of political observers was the malapportionment
of constituencies. Rural areas had more representation in the Diet than their population
justified — sometimes a 4:1 margin compared to that of urban areas. This was
regarded as unfairly helping the LDP, which had its strongholds in these rural areas.
Court decisions on this matter only brought about minor changes in the worst cases.

After several scandals involving important LDP officials, public confidence was
shaken, as mentioned, and a number of LDP members left the party. In the 1993
general election, the LDP lost for the first time to a reformist coalition, composed
mainly of former LDP members. One of the coalition’s main priorities was to change
the electoral system. Ex-LDP member Ozawa Ichirō, the main strategist behind
the coalition government, favoured a majority system as proposed in his 1993 book
Blueprint for a New Japan. In the book he outlines the steps required to foster a two-
party system and to strengthen the authority of the prime minister. The former leftist
opposition favoured a PR system, while the LDP preferred a majority system
(Hrebenar 2000: 49-50). The outcome was a mixture of proportional representation
and majority rule.

According to the new system, 300 members of the Diet are elected in single-seat
constituencies and 200 (now reduced to 180) members by means of proportional
representation in eleven block districts. In this system, each voter votes twice, once
for a candidate in the local constituency, and once for a party, each of which has a
list of candidates for each block district. The local constituencies are decided by
majority vote, and the block seats are then proportionally allocated to the parties (by
the D'Hondt method), reflecting their share of the vote. As with the previous system,
it is a unique mixture of proportional and majority rule and therefore also allows the
representation of more than two parties in the system and definitely does not foster
a two-party system.

The koenkai still play an important role in respect of candidates in single seat
districts. Without the support of their personal supporter groups, it would not have
been so easy for politicians to split-off from the existing parties and to be re-elected
in single seat districts. It could be argued that the koenkai have been an important
precondition for the fluidity in party labels over the past decade and that they have
not lost their importance for re-election.

Observers have long predicted that party politics will gain momentum over
factionalism in Japan (e.g., Farnsworth 1966). However, the factions still play an
important role within the LDP. Despite faction members no longer competing with
one another in election districts, they are still important, especially with regard to
their function of allocating posts. The backing of factions is still indispensable for
any LDP leadership candidate, which was clearly demonstrated in the September
2007 nomination process for the post of LDP Party President after Abe Shinzō
(*1954, PM 2006-2007) had unexpectedly announced his resignation earlier that
month. Fukuda Yasuo was the fourth consecutive party leader and, hence, Prime
Minister from the largest LDP faction, currently led by Foreign Minister Machimura
Nobutaka (*1944). Furthermore, eight of the nine LDP factions had declared support
for Fukuda even before the other candidates for the office had a chance to announce
their campaign programmes (Takenaka 2007).

The unfair apportionment of Diet seats between urban and rural areas has also
remained unchanged. The electoral reform did improve this malapportionment, but
the gap in the value of votes between the most populous and least populous electoral
districts is still 2 to 1, which strongly favours the LDP. Electoral bias in favour of the
LDP has risen considerably since the reform, reaching a high point during the last
election. In 2005, the LDP won nearly 60 percent of the seats with only 43 percent
of the vote, which explains why the party is still in power (Figure 4).
6. Conclusion: Characteristics and Future Perspectives

Since the mid-1990s Japan’s party system has undergone considerable transformations. The “old” party system collapsed at the beginning of the 1990s, and the following years were characterized by a great fluidity in party labels. But what accelerated this collapse? How did it occur? What are the characteristics and further perspectives of the current party system? These questions cannot be answered without taking the process of social modernization and its influence on party formation and political behaviour over time into consideration.

After its formation in 1955, the post-war party system and voter alignments were mainly based on two social cleavages: The first was an economic one, which was rooted in the conflict between the social classes, while the second was a cultural one, which was founded on the conflict between different value orientations. The LDP represented the interests of the old middle class and those of the older, less educated rural population with a tendency to uphold traditional Japanese values. The SDPJ (formerly the JSP) represented the interests of the unionized blue and white-collar workers and of young, well-educated voters living in cities who tended to hold modern values.

Since the shift from the primary to the secondary sector, as well as social modernization emerged comparatively late, the cleavages caused by the industrial revolution did not become politically salient until the early post-war years. Consequently, the value cleavage between the “traditional” and “modern” values also emerged relatively late, not peaking until the 1960s. Social and economical modernization took place primarily in the growing urban centres, which is why the cleavages caused by the modernization process were reflected as a spatial cleavage between the rural and urban population, which grew rapidly from the 1950s onwards. The comparatively low percentage of persons engaged in the secondary industry meant that the Japanese working class never had the power to influence voting results as its counterparts in Europe did. Nor were the labour unions as powerful as those in Europe, and their role within the political system was much weaker than elsewhere in the industrialized world, which explains the Japanese Socialists’ poor performance.

Despite the fact that Japan’s modernization started relatively late compared to that in Europe, the process of post-modernization occurred nearly simultaneously in Japan. The period between modernization and post-modernization was therefore comparatively short and the two periods overlapped to some extent. Consequently, from the end of the 60s, the cleavages, which defined the 55 system, started weakening and electoral volatility grew. Two different developments were of distinct importance: First, changes in the occupational structure had the effect of shrinking the traditional LDP supporter groups. Likewise, the decreasing number of labour union members caused a shrinking of leftist partisans as well. Second, the rapid pace of the socio-economic development weakened the perception of the conflict between capital and labour, while the growing “welfare generation” in the electorate also weakened the cultural cleavage between the pre-war and post-war generation.

As in other industrialized countries, these developments caused an unfreezing of the party system and voter alignment. Neither the LDP nor the SDPJ succeeded in transforming into catch-all parties, which meant that the number of non-party supporters, non-voters and floating voters, who cast their ballots without traditional loyalties, increased dramatically. These non-supporters increasingly refrain from voting altogether. These tendencies towards unfreezing and dealignment affected mainly the Left and caused the decline of the SDPJ. Non-supporters are numerous, especially among those social groups who supported the political Left in the 50s and 60s. Conversely, the LDP is unaffected by such trends, even though its traditional supporter groups are decreasing due to changes in the labour force. The new opposition parties too seem unable to engage unaffiliated voters and still do not have a stable support base. In its present state, the Democratic Party, Japan’s biggest opposition party, is no more than a conservative alternative to the LDP, which has led to a decline in ideological alternatives within the system.

The new voting system that was implemented by the short-lived non-LDP government that followed the LDP split in 1993, combines proportional...
representation and majority rules, which is why it fosters a multiparty system — as the previous system also did — and does not promote a two-party system. The LDP still profits immensely from the voting system and oppositional voters who refrain from voting at all, which explains why it is still dominant.

Informal elements such as personal supporter groups and factions still play and important role within the system, especially within the single-seat districts. It can be argued that without the personal supporter groups, it would not have been so easy for politicians to split off from the established parties and be re-elected without party support.

In Japan as in other advanced nations, the explanatory power of more or less stable structural variables such as social class and political values for electoral behaviour has yielded to more short-term factors. The ongoing political scandals in which the LDP elite had been involved since the late 1980s led to an acute crisis in 1993 that called the ability of the system-sustaining political party to govern into question. This resulted in the party splitting and the restructuring of the party system under the leadership of a political elite who had the desire and personal authority to generate new parties within the system. In contrast to the previous 1955 system, the present system appears to be based on conflicts within the established elite rather than on social cleavages. This points to further dealignment rather than alignment or realignment and suggests that this is a continuing feature of Japanese politics. It seems predictable that the system will undergo further changes within the near future.

Notes
1. According to Rokkan, cleavage structures can be interpreted as a result of discontinuous processes of “freezing” and “opening” during critical junctures in the historical development of a given society (Schmidt 2001: 46).
2. The word “freezer” is thought to be an amalgamation of the English word free (or perhaps freelance) and the German word Arbeiter (“worker”).
4. Those were the Democratic Party (DPJ; Nihon Minshukutō) and the Liberal Party (LP; Jiyūtō)
5. Following the notorious Recruit Cosmos bribery scandal of 1988/89, the Sagawa Kyūbīn bribery scandal shocked the Japanese public anew. In 1992 it was revealed that the president of Japan’s second largest transport company, Sagawa Kyūbīn, had donated between 800 million and 10.8 billion yen to LDP politicians (among them five former prime ministers) as well as to politicians of the opposition camp (with the exception of the JCP). See Schmidt 2001: 149.
6. Second-generation Diet members and hereditary seats are a phenomenon primarily, though not exclusively, of the LDP. See Ichikawa 1990. See also section 6.

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2 Shifting Prime Ministerial Power and its Consequences on Neo-liberal Reforms in Japan

Yu Uchiyama

1. Introduction

No one can deny that the achievements of the Koizumi administration in neo-liberal reforms were remarkable. Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichiro succeeded in implementing many neo-liberal projects—such as expenditure cuts (especially in public works), deregulation, and privatization—many of which had been thought to be unrealistic in the era before Koizumi.

The culmination of Koizumi's reforms resulted in the privatization of postal services. Postal services privatization had been Koizumi's pet idea, but many of the rank-and-file politicians in the governing Liberal Democratic Party objected to it, as the postmasters' union was one of the strongest among the groups that supported the LDP. After furious battles between Koizumi and the "resistance forces," Koizumi finally succeeded in enacting the privatization.

What made it possible for Koizumi to accomplish reforms that prime ministers preceding him had been unable to do? Why was he able to exert enough power to overcome fierce resistance in the LDP? To answer these questions, this chapter examines how Koizumi's leadership was reinforced. It also investigates whether the reinforced prime ministerial leadership is structural and perpetual, or behavioral and contingent.

This chapter is organized as follows. In the first section, I explain what institutional features circumscribed executive leadership in Japan and prevented it from implementing full-blown neo-liberal reforms in the period before Koizumi. In the second section, I describe the process and outcome of postal services privatization as a representative case of Koizumi's neo-liberal reforms. The third section explains what factors provided Koizumi with the power to accomplish such a reform. Institutional reforms in the 1990s contributed to reinforcing executive leadership. However, "reformed institutions" alone is not a sufficient explanation for a "strong" prime minister: that is, one cannot ignore the way in which these institutions were implemented. In the fourth section, I take up policy-making under the Abe administration that took over Koizumi's in 2006. Though neo-liberal reforms have still been high on the agenda, and though Abe has been playing games in the same institutions as Koizumi, Abe has not shown as much success as Koizumi. I argue that this fact proves how the way institutions are implemented is important.