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# The Quality of Democracy and the Japanese Political Map: From One and A Half Political Party System to Two-Party System

## Summary

This paper details selected aspects related to the relationship between the political system, particularly the function of political parties, to the “quality of democracy,” including features such as the accountability of popularly elected leaders to the electorate and the perceived responsiveness of these leaders to the mass citizenry. Focusing on the characteristics of Japanese political system, this paper reviews first the structure and main features of the main political parties in post- World War II. The paper then discusses the concept of “quality of democracy.” It identifies the parameters according to which the "quality of democracy" is examined, the dimensions related to this concept, and the way Japanese citizens evaluate their political surroundings and the function of political parties and institutions. The third section details recent election reforms in reaction to public perception of the "quality of democracy.” The conclusions suggest some broad observation on the changing attitudes of voters in Japan and on the effects of the quality of democracy on the political system in Japan.

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## 1. Introduction

Japan's democratic politics is a messy and controversial business. It involves compromise. It includes struggle between interest groups seeking access to the public purse, between government officials who believe they know what is in the national interest, and politicians who know what is in their reelection interest, between the party or parties in power and the political opposition. Unlike the American or the British political systems which essentially have existed in their current form for centuries, the current Japanese political system is a much more recent construct dating from Japan's defeat in the Second World War and its occupation by the US.

Although of its relatively short history, characterized by regular shifting of party politics where dozens of new political parties born, dissolved and merged, this democratic political system had been known for its stability since 1955. For more than 60 years Japan have regularly held free, fair and competitive elections at all levels of governments, national and local, and have peacefully transferred power to opposition parties. In different from many European countries, most notably France and Germany, Japanese politics features the dominant position of one party--the Liberal Democratic Party--which has held power almost unbroken for more than 50 years and have effected Japanese politics, economy, society, and other aspects of lifestyle in many ways. During this period, a large part of individuals political attitudes and behavior, including

declining levels of voting, growing levels of disapprobation and cynicism toward politicians and government bureaucracy on one hand, and weakening interest and trust in political process and political institutions and their leaders on the other hand, were related to the working of political parties and their perceived function in the public affairs.

Under this background, in this paper I attempt to address the relationship between the political system, particularly the function of political parties, to a specific aspect--the "quality of democracy," including features such as the accountability of popularly elected leaders to the electorate and the perceived responsiveness of these leaders to the mass citizenry. Focusing on selected aspects of Japanese political system, the following discussion reviews first the structure and characteristics of the main political parties. The second section identifies the parameters according to which I will examine the "quality of democracy" and dimensions related to this concept and the function of political parties and institutions in Japan. The third section details recent election reforms in reaction to public perception of the "quality of democracy." In the conclusion I will make some observation on the broad aspects of quality of democracy and the function of the political system in Japan.

## 2. The Political Map of Japan

Currently there are five major political parties represented in the Japanese National Diet [*Kokkai*]: **1** The Liberal Democratic Party [*Jiyu Minshuto* or *Jiminto*] (LDP); the Democratic Party of Japan [*Minshuto*] (DPJ ); New *Komeito* (or New Clean Government Party) [*Komeito*] (NK); the Social Democratic Party [*Shakai Minshuto* or *Shaminto*] (SDP); **2** and the Japanese Communist Party [*Kyosanto*] (JCP ). In addition there are a few minor political parties, all consist of dissidents from the LDP who

formed conservative and centrists political groups in 2005. These include the People's New Party [*Kokumin Shinto*]; New Party Nippon [*Shinto Nippon*]; New Party Daichi [*Shinto Daichi*]; Political group of Okinawa revolution [*Seito Sozo*], and the socialist Okinawa Social Mass Party [Okinawa *Shakai Taishu To*].

The largest political parties lack a clear and cohesive identity, functioning more as loose alliances of interest with few discernible political differences, and they draw support less on ideological bases than through personal networks of patronage built by individual candidates. Support for the parties themselves is weak, and getting weaker, as increasingly sophisticated Japanese voters seek meaningful political choice.

**(1) The 1955 System: "One-and-A-Half Party System"**

Although the initial postwar decades saw fragmentation on both the right and left, unification of the right and left wings of the Socialist Party and the consequent conservative union of the Liberal and Democratic parties in 1955 established the outlines for the party system that endured, with some modification, through 1993.

From the inception of the LDP (characterized as being very conservative on social and foreign matters, supports Japan's alliance with the US, and close links between Japanese business and government) in 1955 until the 1993 election, Japan was under what is commonly called the “55 system.” The pillars of this postwar political system were distinguished by the following four characteristics:

(1) Continued government by the LDP as the party had absolute majorities in both houses of the Diet. Japanese political system was dominated by one party (the LDP has been in power at all times, except for a short-lived coalition government formed from opposition parties in 1993) in a manner unknown in the democracies of Europe and North America. This party has profoundly changed the nature of politics in Japan

compared to other democracies. Farmers and later small business formed the main electoral base of the party, which was able to use the threat of the left parties (the Socialists and the Communists) to enlist the support of big business.

On the other hand, the main opposition force of the postwar period composed of the Japan Socialist Party, formally Marxist, **3** which enjoyed the support of most of organized labor. The Socialist Party opposes changes to Article 9 of the constitution, 4 changing the Preamble, and changing the emperor's title to "head of state." It holds that the Self Defense Force is unconstitutional, and supports the idea of "expanding" the current constitution through realization of its principles and values, and urges clarification of peace, welfare, and human rights, and the need to clarify the separation of religion from state.

The early 1950's saw the Socialist Party reaches its peak of power but increasingly left-wing elements caused internal feuding that continued for almost 30 years. The party split into left and right factions again in 1960, and the right wing, under the new moniker of now disbanded Democratic Socialist Party, took private-sector unions as its support base.

The LDP-JSP setup represented a "one-and-a-half party system," because the LDP monopolized power all those years, with the JSP in permanent opposition.

(2) Under the "55 System," antagonism and conflicts, sometimes very bitter, have been more within the LDP rather than between political parties. As a result, an elaborate and all-pervasive system of factions operates in the LDP. The factions are based on individuals as much as on policies. The number and size of the LDP factions have constantly varied, ranging along the years from five to 13, while membership

(counting those in both houses) has fluctuated from as few as four members to as many as 120

Party Faction evolved because of the electoral system that existed in postwar era (from 1925 to 1993, with the sole exception of the first post-World War Two election, Japanese lower house elections were held under the same electoral system, that is a Multi-Member District, single-entry ballot system. In Western usage, it is usually referred to as a Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV), by which voters cast only one ballot for their most favorite candidate under a Multi-Member District (MMD) system ([*chuusenkyokusei*], or the Medium Constituency System). Under the MMD, where there are plural winners, gaining two or more Diet members from one district is necessary for any party by itself to occupy a majority in the house. In practice, only the LDP was able to field plural candidates in all 129 districts, because there were potentially enough LDP supporters to send all the LDP candidates to the Diet.

However, the candidates had to compete against their co-partisan peers in the same district to win, because under SNTV parties were not permitted to transfer the votes cast from a more successful candidate to a less successful one in order to win more seats. This system placed a premium on name recognition of the candidate over value of party's label, that is, making candidates, rather than parties, the most important determinant of voters' choices, weakening thus voters' party identification. **5** Instead of engaging themselves in public policy debates, incumbents worked hard to solidify their support base by providing pork barrel projects. The opposition parties espoused leftists ideologies and failed to function as viable alternatives to the governing LDP, partly because the SNTV system had an incentive for parties to distance themselves in terms of policy positions, and partly because they did not have access to pork barrel

projects.

As a mean of collecting votes in personal competition with other co-partisan peers, LDP candidates organized a loyal local voter groups called koenkai. Koenkai, sponsoring year-round cultural, social, and "educational" activities, were particularly important in the overrepresented rural areas, where paternalistic-style politics flourished and where the LDP had its strongest support. These groups serve mainly as an electoral organization devices through which funds and other support are conveyed to candidates or Diet members, and through which the Diet members distribute favors in various areas to constituents in return. The fact that the candidates support exclusive interests of specific interest groups or individuals naturally induces pork-barrel legislation and neglect of macro interests shared with larger groups. As a result, the interest of voters in agriculture, construction, and business have been over-protected, while national interests such as diplomacy and security issues, have been deferred.

To increase their elected politicians under the MMD system, different LDP factions support competing candidates for the same party. Once candidates are elected, they will join the faction that supported them in their election bid. Factions were the determining factor in selecting the LDP party president, who always (with one exception) became the prime minister. The competition between rival factions was usually personal and what matters was how the faction bosses and leaders could line up the votes: they decided everything. 6 In terms of leadership, since the 1960s there has been a thread of prime ministers chosen more to maintain harmony in the party's faction system than for their ability, clear policy agenda, or charisma. But the eminently charismatic Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro broke that mould when he became leader in April 2001. Koizumi made style a source of power: he promised to reform the

government and bureaucracy, despite conservative opposition within his own party, declaring he would carry out his reforms or destroy the party if they tried to stop him. He has advanced reforms of the medical insurance, pension and postal systems (but has fallen short of fundamental systemic reform). With his popularity (and the lack of a unified and strong opposition), the LDP showed its strength in the last election to the House of Representatives in 2005 as it won no less than 296 of the 480 seats.

**(3)** The "55 System" was also typified by a close connections, characterized by mutual dependency and support, which the LDP had with interest groups on one hand, and with the government bureaucracy on the other. Such connections affected Japanese domestic and foreign decision-making processes and policy, and determined the stance the Japanese government took on various issues.

As for the government bureaucracy, on one hand the bureaucracy depended on LDP influence to win budget allocations and have legislation passed; on the other hand, LDP leaders had a great deal of confidence in the bureaucracy's competence and were able during the years to coordinate policy making to insure that their political interests would be met. The idea that politicians rather than bureaucrats should make policy is regarded as a truism in contemporary Japan. There are many politicians who pride themselves on being policy experts and knowing more about complex issues than bureaucrats themselves. However, for politicians to make policy they need to have expertise on a wide variety of issues. Limited resources, including their commitments to their consistencies and support groups, and a limited budget that allow them to hire only one policy secretary, make it completely impossible to gather accurate and updated information and based on this to initiate new policies. They have thus to rely on

bureaucrats to provide knowledge through their own resources and to propose policies.

As for the business circles: There is a wide range of organized interest groups that over the years have come to support the LDP, financially or with votes, and in return, applied pressure on the government by making personal appeals to the LDP executives. The relations that the LDP has with these groups are based on a pragmatic exchange relationship as well as on ideological affinity, with members of interest groups which are close to the LDP perceiving their groups as having more potential influence over policy making. In fact, part of the LDP's success in staying in power for so long has been its ability to provide, as a "catch all party," at least minimal satisfaction for all the sectors supporting it.

Several interest groups, most notably the agricultural, construction, or transportation, enjoy exclusive representation within various sub-bodies of the LDP through veteran Diet members, the so-called "tribe Diet members" [*zoku giin*]. By the virtue of their network of relations, the "tribe Diet members" do their best to protect the interests of various interest groups. In the traditional pattern set in the immediate postwar years, each industry came to be associated with a particular LDP faction, and pressure groups' channels of influence were organized along factional lines. Each industry thus contributed political funds to one specific LDP faction leader to manage and strengthen their factions, and with the power of their factions behind them, they would pressure the government bureaucracy and the ruling party executives to adopt the desired policy.

During the 1980s, however, a growing number of interest groups started to channel their demands through the LDP's headquarters, especially through the party's influential Policy Affairs Research Council (PARC). This council consists of divisions

that cover roughly the same administrative issues as the ministries. Diet members who work at these divisions gain wide personal connections and accessibility to bureaucrats in the relevant ministry. Through these personal conventions they monitor developments and influence them through support for legislative proposals by government bureaucrats. Diet members, particularly LDP members who have worked in one of the PARC divisions a long time, and who share an interest in a particular area of public policy related to this division, become "tribe Diet members."

Through years of continuing contact with a relevant ministry or agency and the relevant interest groups, these Diet members became powerful by gaining wide ranging information and in-depth knowledge in a certain policy area, such as construction, transportation or agriculture. This know-how enables them to exert influence on government bureaucrats regarding any important matter that is of interest to a specific pressure group.

**(4)** Last, the “55 System” was characterized by a passive foreign-policy stance under the auspices of the pacifist Article 9 of the Constitution.

Japan has been officially pacifist since the end of World War II. Since its founding the LDP has repeatedly called for revision of the constitution. Over the decades, attempts to carry out this policy faltered, primarily because the pacifist and democratic clauses of the constitution enjoyed broad support among the Japanese people. Unable to mobilize the two-thirds vote of both houses of the Diet required for revising the constitution, LDP efforts never went beyond the discussion stage. In the late 1990s, the prospects for revision began to shift. The centrist DPJ, which is not averse to revision, replaced the strongly anti-revision Socialist Party as the main opposition party,

while continuing tensions with North Korea began to erode public support for pacifism. Sensing that its moment had arrived, the LDP set up research commissions on the constitution in both houses of the Diet in January 2000 to begin the lengthy process of building a consensus in favor of revision.

In 2004, the Self Defense Force (SDF) was dispatched to join the "coalition of the willing" in Iraq. Prime Minister Koizumi had quite passively accommodated US initiatives in transforming the Mutual Security Treaty. While this phenomenon began with LDP administrations prior to Koizumi's, he felt completely into line with the post-9/11 unilateralist US military strategy, and accelerated the transformation of the US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty system. The US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty has changed thus from a framework designed to protect Japan from external threats to a mechanism in which Japan provides back-up to US military actions throughout the world. Koizumi, motivated by the idea that pro-active participation in international politics is a necessity, ignored the constraints of Article 9 of the constitution in sending the SDF as part of the multi-national force to Iraq.

In the wake of dispatch of SDF to Iraq and the Maritime SDF fleet to the Persian Gulf, both the LDP and the DPJ announced that they would each be releasing proposals for revising the constitution during 2005. **7** Both parties had in mind revising the constitution, particularly the no-war clause, Article 9, to make it easier for Japan to participate in America's overseas military adventures. Opinion polls showed that a large majority of Diet members favored changing the constitution, and this was also the trend among the public. Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) pool reported, for example, that 42% of the voters thought the constitution needs to be revised, 19% opposed such a revision, and 32% were undecided. The pacifist constitution faced the possibility of

revision for the first time since its adoption during the postwar occupation sixty years ago. Japan is at a constitutional--and political--crossroads. Also well advanced is a parallel effort to revise the Fundamental Law of Education, which was adopted as a companion to the constitution, in an effort to enshrine the nurturing of patriotism as a goal of the educational system. Combined with the deepening integration of Japan's SDF and the US military in an expanded conception of the alliance, these moves signal the transformation of Japan's posture on the world scene.

**(2) Party Politics since the 1990s**

Over the course of the 1970s support for the LDP eroded, but it rebounded in 1980, and there was no substantial weakening in the party's position until 1989. At that time, the combination of the evaporated of the Cold War world order; a renewed scandal; the introduction of an unpopular consumption tax; and the fading away of Japan's impressive economic expansion as a result of the bursting of the bubble and the emergence of economic stagnation, have created new changes, to which the united front of the LDP and bureaucracy, which in fact held the reigns of power, was unable to respond. The LDP has failed to appropriately redefine new policies, the pillars of the postwar political system started to crumble, and the party has gradually lost the support of the people.

In 1989 the LDP lost its absolute majority in the upper house (conversely, the Socialist Party made substantial gains in this election and in the February 1990 lower house election). In June 1993, a significant majority of LDP incumbents defected from the party, which resulted in the passage of a non-confidence motion against Prime Minister Miyazawa Kiichi. As a result of the ensuing general election, the LDP failed

from power for the first time in 38 years of the party's history. The resulting coalition government under Prime Minister Hosokawa Morihiro united the non-JCP opposition parties including the Socialist Party) to ousted the LDP.

The non-LDP coalition administration lacked however an adequate vision of what to change about LDP politics. The focus was on changing the electoral system, and an election reform bill that abolished the SNTV rule in the lower house was enacted in 1994. The first election for the lower house under the new system was implemented in 1996, combining 300 Single-Member Districts (SMD) and 200 Proportional Representation (PR) (discussed below). But by just changing the electoral system, the non-JCP opposition parties could not close in on the policy and systemic core that supported LDP and bureaucratic power.

A coalition uniting the LDP and the Socialist Party (and *Sakigake*) followed in 1994. The Socialists Chairman Murayama Tomiichi became Japan's first socialist prime minister in 47 years. **8** While this development returned the LDP to power (as the largest party in a coalition), it damaged the credibility of the Socialist Party, and perpetuated the shifting alliances that have characterized Japanese politics since 1993 (for a detailed account on the repeated re-shuffling of the political deck and shifting alliances during this period of time see Feldman, 2004, pp. 187-8).

In 1999 the LDP has incorporated the New *Komeito* in the second coalition; while most rural prefectures belonged to the LDP's stronghold, the NK provided pivotal support to the LDP strength, especially in the urban competitive districts. The NK, a conservative party of the right-wing formed in 1964 as the political arm of *Soka Gakkai*, a lay religious organization affiliated with the *Nichiren Shoshu* sect of Buddhism. It drew its support from *Soka Gakkai* and dislocated migrants to large cities. The party

established to support social welfare, eliminate political corruption, and promote international peace, have during recent years adopted a "strengthening the constitution" position on constitutional revision. It maintains, among other things, that Japan should respect the current constitution, while making changes regarding the environment and privacy. It also retains that the right of collective self-defense should not be included in the revised constitution and that a national referendum to approve or reject a new constitution should be based on approval or rejection of specific articles, not on the draft in its entirety. With these stances the NK moved closer to the more conservative policies of the LDP, helping them to enter government in a coalition from 1999 until this day.

**(3) The Opposition**

Two parties at the center of the opposition are the Communist and the Democratic Parties. The JCP is a moderate communist party of the left-wing, and is considered pacifist. The party moderated its policies during the years since its establishment in 1922 and with a basic policy of a peaceful transition to Socialism, it has adopted an independent and nationalist position. It has eased its opposition to the SDF and the US (yet maintains that following the lead of the US is not always desirable). The party strongly opposes abolishing or changing Article 9 of the constitution to make the SDF a full military force. While it now recognizes the Emperor as a figurehead head-of-state, the party opposes his involvement in official functions. The JCP often functions as the only genuine opposition, hammering prime ministers and others for backsliding on Japan’s during World War II, repeatedly uncovering financial scandals in government, and playing the watchdog role in Japanese politics. The party had a hard-core support group that persisted (and even grew in strength) through the

period of the “55 System,” even as the LDP and the Socialist Party both saw declining support throughout the 1960s and particularly the 1970s.

The main opposition party in Japan today is the DPJ, a moderately social-democratic party consists of both former Socialists and Liberal Democrats, and is the second largest party (and the largest in the upper house). The DPJ was formed in 1998 as a result of the merger of four previously independent parties that were opposed to the LDP. The DPJ has some factions but the party is not as factionalised as the LDP. It proposes structural revision of the Diet and a clear delineation of role and structure of the treasury, and clearer guidelines regarding national defense, among others. DPJ states that the pacifist spirit of Article 9 of the constitution should be preserved, but in order to exercise collective security (as stated in the UN Charter), Japan should clarify its role in the UN's collective security activities; specify a restricted right of self-defense; and maximized restriction on use of arms in the event of revision of Article 9. It objects the war in Iraq and rebuffs the government's efforts to broker a compromise in a row over Japan's main role in the US-led war on terror.

The DPJ used problems with the pension system as an issue to make large gains in the upper house election in 2004,. The party used the same issue in the upper house election of 2007. In the later, voters handed the control of the upper house to the opposition forces, who have now 137 of the 242 seats, led by the DPJ. The DPJ slogan "People's lives come first" pulled at voters' heartstrings while then Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's call for revisions of the constitution and a "departure from the postwar regime" failed to win people over. Japan saw thus a great shift in the political landscape in 2007. Voters showed a greater interest in issues close to their lives such as pensions, medical services and economic gaps, and felt a sense of crisis about the deterioration of the

quality of their lives. Therefore, stabilizing the pension system, maintaining sufficient medical and social security services and narrowing economic gaps became the most important issues for the people since then.

Since the ruling coalition, which consists on the LDP and NK lost majority control in the upper house, the present political situation--with the ruling coalition in solid control of the lower house and the opposition camp holding the reins in the upper house--creates many hurdles as the country tries to make decisions. It is the DPJ which now decides the fate of the bills in the Diet. Although the LDP-NK coalition can override the upper house's decision with a two-third majority votes in the lower house, doing so would entail the significant cost of plummeting approval rate.

Under these circumstances the DPJ and the LDP have had a series of high-profile disputes, which have led to, among other things, a leadership vacuum at the Bank of Japan, and a delay in applying the provisionally higher rates applied to the gasoline and other taxes that are the main sources of revenue for the special road-related account, which also effected local and national budgets. In practice, this tax for road construction has enabled the LDP's road "tribe Diet members" to use public funds to private ends. The DPJ has refused to sign the bill, instead using the opportunity to highlight the wasteful spending. In addition, the DPJ and other opposition parties have persistently opposed the enactment of a new antiterrorism law enabling the resumption of refueling and supplying water missions by Maritime SDF vessels to warships of the US and other countries participating in the antiterrorism campaign in the Indian Ocean. The law has been delayed during 2007-8 to allow the upper house more time to scrutinize the expenditures and cause Japan's temporary withdrawal from the "war against terrorism."

Sensing a crisis in the current political situation, which has crippled the state's ability to make decisions on such issues as the social security system reform and a key overseas military mission, Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo and DPJ leader Ichiro Ozawa held a "summit" meetings in late 2007 and negotiated a grand coalition government. The idea was rejected however by the DPJ leadership.

The current situation reflects an important moment for Japanese democracy. The two big parties are clashing openly on matters of substantial implications for the future of the country. But before going into further details on the possible direction the Japanese political party system (in addition to the effect of the new electoral system) the discussion will turn now to the question of how well Japanese political system perform as a democracy from the viewpoint of average citizens.

## 3. The Concept of Quality of Life: Analyzing the Japanese Case

### (1) Assessing the Quality of Democracy

To determine how well political regimes perform as democracies, researchers have recently tried to discern the distinct qualities of democracy, distinguishing high-quality democracies from low-quality ones. In doing so, scholars have employed a variety of political values, principles, and ethics as criteria for assessing the quality of democracy. The number and characteristics of these criteria varies significantly, as some use a large number of political values and principles, including representation, equality, proximity, satisfaction, accountability, and majority rule (e.g., Lijphart, 1999), while others consider only a handful traits, such as participation, competition, and civil liberty (e.g., Altman & Perez-Linan, 2002).

Following Powell (2000), the discussion hereon focuses on three distinct criteria to assess the performance of Japanese politics, its political authority and institutions, from the perspectives of ordinary citizens: First is the accountability of popularly elected leaders to the electorate (that is, to what extent do the Japanese people think their political leaders are accountable to ordinary voters like themselves through voter awareness of leaders' actions?); Second, representation (that is, to what extent the existing political parties represent the interests of the general public or do they represent the interests of particular groups in society?); Last, responsiveness of political leaders and governmental officials to the mass citizenry (that is, to what extent is the democratically elected government in Japan responsive to its citizens).

In addition, the following review discusses other aspects of citizens' political attitudes and behavior including levels of expressive participation, citizens' satisfaction with the delivery of public goods, and confidence in governmental and political institutions. It is based largely on public opinion surveys frequently conducted during the last 30 years by both news media organizations (such as NHK and Yomiuri), and annual polls on political and social attitudes and consciousness conducted by the Prime Minister Office, which cover a random sample of 10,000 voters. This review draws also on projects I have initiated and took part in, including surveys on political attitude and behavior which employed data collected during 1990s from over 3,000 voters across Japan and studies on psychological aspects of politics in Japan (Feldman, 1993; Feldman, 1998; Feldman, 2004; Feldman, 2006; Feldman & Watts, 1998).

## II. Quality of Democracy in Japan: Criteria for Analysis

Perhaps one of the most prevalent characteristics of the entire post World War

II period in Japan has been the growing political alienation, or negative affect for the existing political institutions and process, low levels of satisfaction and political efficacy on one hand and high levels of cynicism and lack of trust toward political institutions and politicians on the other.

Public opinion surveys of the news media and government institutions have revealed over the years a general increase in the level of dissatisfaction that voters have toward the various cabinets, political leaders and policies. Evidently, since the 1960s, political institutions were consistently ranked low in honesty and efficiency and Diet members and government officials were evaluated low for their ethical and moral practices.

**(1) Accountability**

Generally, Japanese express dissatisfaction with the general political affairs in the country. An increased dissatisfaction has been expressed since the mid-1960s toward the predominant political party, the LDP, and more significantly, toward all of the cabinets this party has formed. In 1971, for example, during the Sato Eisaku administration, an increasing proportion of voters, close to 55%, thought Japan was heading in the wrong direction, whereas only 14.9% opined that the country is on the right path. This trend changed a little in the following years, and the expressed level of dissatisfaction from the different administrations reached its peak of 83% during the Cabinet of Takeshita Noboru, 1987-89, following the exposure of the Recruit shares-for-favor scandal.

The belief that Japan is heading in a specific direction, either right or wrong, is based on several criteria. In the last 20 years, for example, of those who thought Japan

was heading in the right direction, in average, 52% said it was due to Japan's economic power, 27% to its social stability, and 24% to its welfare system. Of those who had the opposite opinion, that Japan was heading in the wrong direction, 61% said it was due to environmental problems (noise and pollution), 43% to the price of land and housing problems, and 30% to deteriorating social values. By comparison, in the most recent public poll conducted in February 2008 by the Japanese Government, the Cabinet Office, of those who thought Japan was heading in the right direction, 21.2% said it was due to its advanced sciences technology, 17.9% for its developed communication and transportation systems, 16.6% for the country’s global attitudes, and 15.1% due to Japan’s high level of medical and welfare services. On the other hand, of those who thought Japan was heading in the wrong direction, 43.4% thought it was due to the worsening economy, 42.3% to the cost of living, 40.9% for the deteriorating food quality, and 37.5 related this to the increasing taxes.

Notably, surveys conducted during the 1990s revealed that 30% of the voters who opined that Japan is on the wrong path thought Japan lacked diplomatic skills in dealing with other countries, and in handling international problems such as participating and contributing in global activities including the UN peacekeeping operations. Opinion polls conducted in the 1990s by the daily newspapers (i.e., Yomiuri) revealed that 80% of the public supported sending Japanese personnel overseas for international peacekeeping operations, and more than 61% supported the idea of establishing a Japanese peacekeeping force. Yet at that time the government could not negotiate related bills with the opposition parties and could not submitted them to the Diet.

An important feature in this regard is related to political trust. Trust in

government is the general approval-disapproval (or satisfaction-dissatisfaction) of the performance of an incumbent administration or an evaluation of public policy outputs. Political trust (or cynicism) serve as the barometer of satisfaction with one's political system, authority and institutions. It refers to one's evaluation and judgment of the government and its functioning as able to produce outputs according with one's normative expectations of how government should function. It is thus a decisive factor of the quality of democracy one senses in a given society.

Trust is also a significant aspect in the democratic process because it is associated with several patterns of political behavior. For example, an individual decline in feelings of trust is directly related to less participation in political activities, particularly to lower turnout in election and less identification with political institutions including political parties. It is also associated with the notion of legitimacy, that means, that government institutions and authorities are morally and legally valid and widely accepted. As long as political leaders enjoy sufficient political trust, they can freely function, appropriately make decisions, and maintain the form of government. I examined thus this dimension of accountability hereon.

In Japan, political trust is not necessarily directed with equal intensity toward political leadership and all the other political institutions. Media and other surveys indicated that Japanese express significantly less trust particularly toward output institutions, such as the Diet (in average, 46.5% of the voters responded with "Somewhat do not trust" and "Do not trust at all"), the government (44%), and the prime minister (34 percent), which represent authority. Voters often reveal that they could hardly understand what is going on in the Diet; that much of the workings of the Diet is unclear to them; that they do not trust the Diet to carry out business properly; and that

the Diet deliberation system is inefficient.

A great deal of distrust of politics is related to the so-called power-of-money politics (kinken-seiji), namely, the large extent to which money is involved in politics. In Japan, money is the crucial factor in political activities and success. Diet members usually spend most of their money on communications, transportation, documentation, and labor related to their daily activities. Because electoral campaigns are highly professional and elaborately structured and in reality go on 365 days a year, they are very expensive. During the mid-1970s, although the government attempted, through the Political Funds Control Laws and its revision to reduce election costs by subsidizing the cost of campaigns and by prohibiting certain types of activities, enormous sums are still spent on campaigning, publicity, entertainment, gifts and other means of garnering votes and support. As huge sums of money are needed by politicians to function, opportunities for corruption have increased during the years and that corruption is so tempting to the extent that a certain amount of corruption may even be unavoidable. Prominent indicators of this are the bribery scandals that have surfaced since the establishment of the postwar political system in a series of scandals such as the Lockheed (1972), the Jarisen and Recruit (1988) and the Kyowa. The fact that top level Diet members-- prime ministers, cabinet ministers, and leaders of political factions--were implicated dealt a heavy blow to government credibility and stability and increased the calls for political reforms, as discussed in the next section.

Conversely, voters tend to express the greatest trust toward those institutions closely identified with the maintenance of social order: the legal system (54%, with "Trust explicitly" and "Somewhat trust"), the police (50%) and the education system (43%). Less confidence was expressed toward the news media (25%). Interestingly, a

great distrust was expressed toward the government bureaucracy (53%, with "Somewhat do not trust" and "Do not trust at all").

**(2) Representation**

To evaluate the way voters perceive politicians as representing the interests of the general public, attention should be given first to the fact that for the reasons mentioned above regarding the election system, Japanese politics, especially the activities of LDP Diet members, have been traditionally characterized by constant involvement in struggle for political power among the various party factions. This activity suggest to the people that to a large extent LDP Diet members have a great deal of interest in gaining political influence (by frequently pushing aside even co-partisan members for personal reasons) and that for these Diet members the strive for political control by way of negotiations is placed above their concern for the public interest and commitment to the public at large.

In my national survey conducted in 1990 with the participation of more than 3,000 votes, respondents were asked to reveal the extent to which they agree with the following statement: "Instead of dealing with policy matters, the Diet members' daily interest is in matters of factional struggles for power and corrupt business." About 31.4% "Agreed completely" with this statement while another 33.9% "Agreed somewhat" with it. In another words, over 65% of the respondents evaluated the daily conduct of Diet members negatively. Only 1.9% and 6.8% "Disagreed completely" or "Disagreed somewhat" with the above statement, respectively.

The key concepts here are pork barrel politics and “tribes Diet members.” As mentioned, there is a close connection, characterized by mutual dependency and support,

between Diet members, particularly of the LDP, and government officials on one hand and and interest groups' members on the other. This connection affects Japanese domestic and foreign decision-making processes and policy, and heavily determine the stance the Japanese government takes on various issues.

The close relations and consensus that characterizes the contacts that exists among the LDP, the bureaucracy and the business community, are the basis for the public perception that government leaders run the government for the benefit of big business and other special interest groups. On one hand the LDP and the bureaucracy share power and formulate policy together, as the LDP influence to have legislation passed, and the officials take special care with measures that may affect the interest of the LDP as a whole. From the viewpoint of the public, perhaps even more significant, however, are the LDP's connections with the business cycles, especially with those groups involved with the construction, transportation or agriculture that over the years supported the LDP and in return appeal to the LDP executives to protect their interests. .

These groups enjoy representation within various sub-bodies of the LDP through "tribe Diet members" who do their best to guard the interests of given interest groups. Through years of continuing contact with officials of a particular ministry and the relevant interest groups, these Diet members became powerful by gaining wide ranging information and in-depth knowledge in a certain policy area, most notably construction, agricultural, and transportation. This know-how enables them to exert pressure on government bureaucrats regarding any important matter handled by the bureaucracy which is of interest to a specific pressure group, to achieve the group better conditions, concessions and favors.

Protecting the interest of the groups within their "territory," seemed thus as the

most dominant incentive for many Diet members. This further contributes to the public belief that Diet members are usually out more for the benefit of narrow and limited groups than for the interests of the general public.

**(3) Responsiveness**

Related to the aspect of representation is the issue of responsiveness, which was examined here in the broad context of political efficacy, describes as an individuals' perception of their power in the political system. It has been conceptualized as the feeling that individual political action does have an impact upon the political process or to one's sense of being capable of acting effectively in the political arena.

Like political trust, efficacy is associated with political behavior. An individual decline in feelings of efficacy is related to less involvement in political activities, notably to lower turnout in election and identification with political institutions. When examining political efficacy, I specifically distinguished in my research on political attitudes between "internal" and "external" political efficacy. "Internal" political efficacy is defined as one's self-perceptions that he or she is capable of understanding politics and is competent enough to participate in political activities such as voting. "External" political efficacy is the sense that the political authorities are responsive to the needs and demands of citizens.

In Japan, there is a general low level of feelings of the ability to impact on the political process, and the cynical view that the government is responsive to the needs of citizens. These feeling exist among adult voters but they are much more expressed by youngsters. Although they have a more cosmopolitan, self-assertive, issue-orientation toward politics, youngsters are cynical regarding the possibly of improving the political

situation. About 93% of young Japanese (between the age 16 and 29), especially university graduates, have a substantially low sense of political efficacy, feel that they are incapable of influencing the course of political events and feel that there are few opportunities or channels of participation available to them. They also have less confidence in the effectiveness of public opinion and pay little attention to political processes.

Pubic opinions polls have frequently shown the cynical view of the majority of the public that their views and expectations are rarely or hardly reflected in politics. In my study, more than 65% of the voters expressed cynicism regarding the extent to which their opinions and expectations are fully reflected in politics on the national level. At the same time a majority of the respondents, 61:5% and 58.6% do not believe the government makes adequate preparations to address problems related to welfare and revision of taxes, respectively. In the most recent public polls conducted in February 2008 by the Japanese Government, the Cabinet Office, 75.2% of the voters opined that the will, thoughts, and opinions of the people are hardly reflected in policy matters, whereas only 21.8% thoughts their thoughts and concerns were reflected in the national level of politics. Of those who thought their opinions and wishes were not reflected in politics expressed the view that in order to correct the situation first and foremost "politicians should carefully listen to the voice of the people" (25.7% of the respondents thought so). This opinion was followed by the idea that "people should have more interest in national policy" (20.3%) and "extending the chances to the public to participate" (17.5%), "more involvement in election" (15.3%), that "the government should listen to public opinion" (14.0%) and that "the mass media should take a more role to transfer the thoughts of the people" (5.2%). In other words, closed to 40% of the

voters thought that both politicians and the government should heed more closely public opinion and views.

The poor evaluation of government responsiveness to the needs of the public was illustrated most recently regarding its failure to address matters related to social security payments. A Mainichi poll in April 12, 2008, revealed that only 24% of respondents approve of Prime Minister Fukuda's Cabinet, down 22 points since October 2007, as a result of the working of the Japan's Social Insurance Agency. In May 2007, the Agency revealed it cannot identify close to 50 million payment records. In April 2008 the government reported the problem has been settled even though it failed to identify 40% of the unidentified pension records. By giving the wrong impression that the pension problem would be completely settled by the end of March, the government proved its inefficiency in responding to urgent public need and thus suffered from declining in public support.

But the problem of responsiveness of political institutions and the authority is much more complicated. This is because Japanese feel that both the government parties and the opposition parties do not respond to their needs and demands. Japanese voters express dissatisfaction not only toward the ruling party, the cabinet, and the way they select to lead the country, but also toward the opposition camp and the main opposition parties. Habitually, voters' dissatisfaction was focused especially on the lack of a strong and effective opposition with a determined leadership, and their inability to show more readiness to acknowledge and respond to the views held by the public.

During the 1970s-1990s, to many Japanese, the opposition, headed by the Socialist Party, did not offer a viable alternative to LDP policies. As a result, the party did not appeal to a growing number of voters. A major problem for the opposition has

been the difficulty in bridging the different stances of the various parties, especially with regard to the Japan-US Security Treaty and the SDF, and forming a coalition of parties that could snatch political leadership away from the LDP. Because the opposition's ability to influence political processes and government officials was limited, and because some of the opposition parties have remained deeply wedded to their traditional ideologies and basic support groups, and therefore resistant to change, to many Japanese they appear less efficient. This is also an important factor contributing to feelings of incompetence, inability to affect political processes, and to growing feelings of distrust toward political parties and politics in general.

The view that the public opinion is not reflected in politics, that political authority--whether the government, the ruling party or the opposition parties--do not put words into action to change or improve according to the needs expressed by the citizens, and that matters concerning lifestyle, ecology and the environment go unheeded by Diet members, instill doubts as to whether change is possible and lead to a general cynical view of politics. In comparison to countries such as the US, UK, Germany, Italy and Mexico, the rate of expectations a Japanese citizen has for government improvement in issues concerning public policy and public affairs in general are the lowest. Central to the cynical view are the scant expectations the public have that "things in government will improved," that "a major political reform will occur" and that "Diet members will stop their wrongdoings," and that leaders of both political camps are inefficient. This cynical attitude was reflected most recently in a public poll conducted in April 12, 2008 by the Mainichi, where about 65% of the respondents thought neither Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda nor largest opposition DPJ leader Ichiro Ozawa are suited to serve as prime minister.

Remarkably, the high level of dissatisfaction with the performance of political parties and leaders and the subsequent alienation from politics have effected significantly party support: Japanese party support pattern have became exceptionally mobile, reflecting movement between party support and nonpartisanship, with the exception of core LDP and JCP supporters and members of the Soka Gakkai (who had traditionally been NK supporters) (Kabashima & Ishio, 1998).

## 3. Constructing New Political Reality: Electoral Reforms

In last few years there has been increasing discussion by politicians, scholars and the mass media to describe what is wrong with Japanese political reality, the crucial source for people's negative feelings toward political institutions and politicians, and the pessimistic views on those aspects that determine the quality of Japanese democracy including politicians' accountability, representation, and responsiveness. The focus of the public debate was in particular on the desirable political party system and on the need to improve the electoral system. Criticism of this system continued for many years and with each succeeding political scandal the belief that this system was responsible for Japan's political problems grew ever deeper. If only Japan could replace the SNTV system with a single member district systems, advocates of reform argued, this would bring the reality of Japanese politics into closer alignment with the ideal model of what party politics should be: there would be no more factionalism, money politics, powerful special interests, and an emphasis on personality rather than policy.

Indeed, a fundamental premise of the desired electoral reforms is that they lead to more issue-oriented elections. Under the SNTV, conservative LDP candidates competed against each other on the grounds of anything but relevant political issues. As a result,

elections turned on personality, networks, identification with regional or occupational electorates, and pork barrel spendings. The hope is that political parties will be well organized and centralized, election campaigns are inexpensive and party controlled. Parties will compete against each other on issues, offer the voters clear alternative policy agendas and highlight policy differences in order to attract voters; they will carry out thus more programmatic campaigns, and produce more policies oriented toward securing public goods; there will be no room for constituency service or for voter loyalty to candidates rather than to party. This will raise the value of the party label in voting, and encourage voters to have a stable party identification. Voters will support parties on the basis of the policies they propose rather than on the basis of the personalities of their candidates. Eventually, this ideal model will effect the quality of democracy by shaping political values, principles, and ethics toward political institutions and politicians: Voters will feel that politicians are more oriented toward issues and agenda which is important to the large public rather than to a given social or economic sector: that politicians and their political groups represent interest and work for the benefits of the public and not of a particular group in society; as there will be more control over the flow of the money the opportunity for corruption will decline; political parties and elected officials will be thus perceived as more accountable, with more trust, people will have more efficacy and the sense that they can effect the system and will tend to take an active role the public sphere.

By the early 1990s this view had become so widespread, and was so relentlessly promoted by the mass media, that it became nearly impossible to debate the merits of the case against the SNTV system. It no longer was possible to claim to be a proponent of political reform without supporting abolition of SNTV. In 1994 the Diet passed four

bills which changed the SNTV-MMD electoral system for the lower house, altered campaign regulations, and created public subsidies for political parties. The new system was a combination of the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) system in the UK, and the party list proportional representation (PR). It was termed *shousenkyoku hireidaiyou heiritsusei*.

The electoral reforms were designed to give parties greater strength and clout vis-à-vis their individual members. Campaign funds from organizations and the government will now be distributed through the party organizations. The party will control nominations as it has in the past, but the value of such party nomination for both the PR list and local district races has increased tremendously with the greater difficulty of running a successful independent campaign under the new system. It was claimed that these new electoral rules will change the way parties are organized, the flow of campaign funds, the scandal-ridden nature of Japanese politics, and the relevance of policies and issues in campaigns. Many have assumed that the new electoral system will cause the emergence and maintenance of two moderate political parties that will alternate in power. Some suggest that Japan's new political leaders will usher in a new era of less bureaucratic and more democratic politics.

This new system divides the electorate in two different ways: 300 Single Member Districts (SMDs or FPTP districts), where a candidate who gains the most votes is declared the winner, and 11 party list PR Districts (PRDs), where political parties can gain seats according to the votes they received. Japan is divided into eleven regional districts and based on population, each district elects from seven to thirty-three representatives. Each voter has two ballots: one is to choose a Representative from an SMD and the other to vote for his/her favorite party from a PRD—voters cannot choose

a candidate in the party list. Parties are awarded seats based on the percent of votes that the party receives in each district. In all, 500 members, including 300 from the SMDs and 200 from the PRDs, constitute the lower house of the Diet.

For the SMDs, one seat is distributed to every prefecture and the other seats are allocated according to the population of each prefecture.

It is said that the PR systems are more democratic because they allow representation to a wider range of parties and political viewpoints.

But in order to prevent party fragmentation and political instability by making it more difficult for small parties to win seats, the new Japanese system also includes legal barriers to the electoral access of small parties. A party must win 3% of the vote nationwide to be eligible to win any PR seat. Another barrier exists for small parties even when they try to register to be on the PR ballot in a district. Parties will be listed on the PR ballots only if they meet at least one of the three following conditions: (1) in the most recent national election, the party received at least 2% of the nationwide vote; (2) the party has at least five sitting members of the lower house and the upper house combined; or, (3) the party lists a sufficient number of candidates on its PR district list equal to at least 20% of the seats up for election in that district. The law also requires a deposit of 6 million yen per candidate that is only refunded depending on the number of victors that the party has (the party lose this money if it does not win an election).

The electoral rules allow candidates to run in the local single-seat districts and to be listed on a party PR list in the same election. In addition, such dual listed candidates can also be given identical numerical rankings on the PR list. If a dual-listed candidate wins in his/her local district, then their name is removed from the party list for the PR district because they have already been elected. "Ties" between identically ranked

candidates on the PR list are broken by giving priority ranking to the candidate who did better in their local single-seat district race.

For example, the Tohoku region in northern Japan PR district has 14 seats, this region is also divided into 25 local single-seats districts (Aomori, 4; Iwate, 4; Miyagi, 6; Akita 3; Yamagata 3; and Fukushima 5). LDP could submit a PR list for the Tohoku district that includes the names of each of the 25 LDP candidates that are running in the 25 single-seat districts of Tohoku. In addition, the LDP could rank all 25 candidates as "1" on its PR list. These 25 candidates might then be followed on the list by additional candidates who are only running on the PR list. These additional candidates would be ranked as "2", "3" "4" etc, respectively. If the LDP won 20 of the 25 local districts on election day, the names of these 20 victors would be crossed off the LDP's PR list. This list would now have 5 local district losers still ranked as "1" followed by candidates that were ranked "2", "3" and "4" etc. If the LDP's share of the PR vote in Tohoku entitled it to only four of the Tohoku's 14 seats, then the four PR winners would be determined by seeing which four of the five candidates ranked as "1" on the LDP list received the highest percent of the vote in their local districts.

The new electoral system was expected to prevent candidates from adopting pork-barrel strategies in elections. The mechanism is simple. Under SMD, candidates from the same party do not need to compete with one another in the same district, because the party would not field plural candidates in a district which only one seat. Under PRD, candidates from the same party also can avoid personal competition during an election campaign, because the party determines the order of the list.

In October 1996, the lower house of the Diet experienced the first election under the new electoral system (the most striking results in the election were that the

JCP greatly increased its seats and that the voting rate was the lowest--59.65%--in Japanese history). This election were followed by election in 2000, 2003, and 2005. The change of the electoral system to a mixed system of single member and proportional representation districts is moving Japan toward a two party system, but it has brought about far less in the way of reform than the proponents of system change anticipated. Elections are still constituency-service oriented and candidate dominated.

Especially in the case of the LDP, the prevalence of the sons of retired Diet members who are successful in winning their fathers' seats is testimony to the power of personal connections in Japanese electoral politics (one recent example is the son of former Prime Minister Koizumi who is expected to run in the coming election in the constituency is father, who is to retire from politics, was elected from until now). There is no longer intraparty competition, but candidates continue to rely on their personal support groups (*koenkai*), the chief organization by which personal vote is gathered, rather than on party organization to run their campaigns. In fact, the personal support groups continue to exist and they have not completely been subsumed into the local LDP party branches. Even in the face of decline in party support, *koenkai* membership has remained strong because the local party branches are still weak and there is little incentive for candidates to rely heavily on the party branch. Some of the *koenkai* are larger than the local LDP organization, and they are more practical especially in districts where the LDP is not particularly popular. Diet members feel thus pressure to develop, not eliminate, these support groups (Krauss & Pekkanen, 2004).

In addition, major political parties continue to be umbrella-type organizations for politicians whose views on important policy issues vary. And the differences between the LDP and the DPJ, and the NK for that matter, are difficult to discern. The

LDP like the DPJ both are multi-tenant parties occupied by a variety of factions with different agendas. As an opposition party, the DPJ also must adopt a clearly defined philosophy that differentiates it from the LDP in its attempt to break down centralized bureaucratic control, to advance political control over policy formation, and to put an end to politicians arbitrating and exerting pressure on bureaucratic decisions.

Yet, The SMD did not perform as expected probably because the SMD system pulls political parties toward the center of the ideological spectrum, policy platforms of opposition parties became more centrist. Indeed, the differences among party policies were too unclear for voters to make it a criterion of choice. Or, from another viewpoint, most parties offered similar goals but presented different ways to achieve them. The differences seemed unclear yet sophisticated.

From this perspective, both the LDP and DPJ appeared as "catch-all parties" which do not identify a particular social group as its core constituency. Both seek the support of all the voters. In a party system characterized by the presence of two catch all parties, the major parties will have much in common in terms of their basic policies. Each will try to appeal to the floating voter, that is the independent voter who is somewhere in the middle and potentially a supporter for either of the catch all parties.

If parties in a two-party system take diametrically opposing positions on fundamental national and international issues then it is safe to assume that they are operating in a deeply divided and polarized society. This was the situation in Japan in the first decade of the "55 system." Japan was divided into antagonistic conservative and progressive camps led respectively by the LDP and the Socialist Party. It was a polarized two-party system. But if the society is not deeply divided, as of todays' Japan, then there is no reason to expect two parties, each of which is seeking majority support,

to take decisively different positions on issues of major importance.

For the long run electoral reform's imperative to woo the median voter also reinforced moderation and modesty in Japan's security policy. According to polls, in Japan, median voters' preferences include support for a more active international role for Japan's SDF; ambivalence toward legitimating that role by amending (rather than interpreting) the constitution's pacifist clause (article 9); accepting the constraints that historical legacies impose on active security roles for Japan; and eschewing the militant nationalism some fear is growing in Japan. The LDP government's positions on constitutional revision have tracked these preferences, as has its approach to Japan's key bilateral relationships. Thus, the Fukuda government has continued its predecessors' emphasis on good relations with Washington; backed off from initiatives toward China that public opinion did not support; sought improved relations with South Korea and warmed toward Taiwan; and has let the media-saturating issue of Japanese abducted to North Korea shape policy toward Pyongyang.

## 4. Conclusions

Modern political parties are teams of individual political entrepreneurs banded together to seek political power. Their candidates are elected by voters from different kinds of constituencies, of different ages, occupations, and so on. When voters go to the polls in a national election they are choosing a team to rule in the best interests of the people who elect them. Many components shape voters' decision as to whom to choose. These include aspects of candidate personality, political party's and party leader's image, the performance of the incumbent government, and the alternative policies offered by other political parties. The ability of a candidate to convince voters that he or she can do

more for the constituency or for the nation than can a candidate of another party is an important method of receiving the support of the electorate. The continuing strength of the LDP in Japan is precisely that so many of its candidates were able to convince voters that their election will bring more benefits to the constituency than could be expected if someone else were elected.

In Japan voters tend to make judgments based on these criteria that effect their surroundings and the quality of their lives. We saw it in the 2007 elections for the upper house. Voters were not only more interested in issues close to their lives such as pensions, medical services and economic gaps but also felt a sense of crisis about the deterioration of the quality of their lives. Therefore, stabilizing the pension system, maintaining sufficient medical and social security services and narrowing economic gaps became the most important issues for the people since then.

The DPJ's victory in the upper house election was part of this long-term adjustment process, but instead of asking why the DPJ won the last upper house election, one could reformulate the question by asking why the LDP suffered a defeat. There are a few competing as well as complementary explanations. The first explanation is that the 2007 upper house election reflected poor performance by the prime minister's government and his party. In particular, Prime Minister Abe's cabinet was extremely incompetent in containing a series of money scandals. Instead of firing Cabinet ministries immediately after the eruption of scandals, Abe protected these ministries until the last minute. Additionally, the Social Insurance Agency lost track of more than 50 million pension records. Previously the Japanese public had tolerated the government party's mishandling of political finances based on its overall trust in the party's competency. This time, the LDP was not effectively able to make an appeal to

the voters based on its relative competency compared to the other parties, particularly because of the lost of data in the Social Insurance Agency.

The third factor is the changing voter behavior. Previously, voters dissatisfied with the current government performance split their support between centrist opposition parties and the more leftist JCP. Recently, these anti-government voters are aligning themselves from the JCP.

It is not only the electoral system but also basic changes in Japanese society and in Japanese people's attitudes and values that are driving changes in voting behavior. The declining importance of factions and the growing importance of the political issues, on one hand, and on the other hand, the quality of life that voters consider now in terms of the government and political parties' responsiveness to political issues, and responsibility and accountability regarding ethical issues and the management of politics that if effect voting behavior as were observable in the 2007 elections.

As Japanese voters have become politically wiser, both the government and the political parties will have to come out with concrete and financially feasible policy measures to improve everyday lives and at the same time elevate the quality of democracy. Just offering promises won't do. The political parties must present their basic philosophy clearly as to what kind of society they want to build, as well as work out feasible policy measures.

**Notes**

1. The lower house in the Japanese political system, the House of Representatives, has 480 seats and members serve a four-year term, although only once since the war has a full term been served (the average is two and a half years). Of the

480 seats, 300 are elected from single-member constituencies and the other 180 are elected from 11 multi-member constituencies by a system of proportional representation. The House of Representatives has preeminence over the House of Councillors and can pass a vote of no confidence in the Cabinet as a whole. The House of Representatives can be dissolved by the Prime Minister or by a Cabinet no confidence vote. The upper house or House of Councillors, has 242 seats and members serve a six-year term. Only half of its membership is re-elected at each election every three years, using a parallel voting system. Of the 121 members subject to election each time, 73 are elected from the 47 prefectural districts by the single transferable vote method and 48 are elected from a nationwide list by proportional representation. This element of proportional representation was introduced in 1982 in an effort to combat the effect of huge sums of money being spent on election campaigns. The House of Councillors cannot be dissolved.

2. The Socialist Party was called in English the Japan Socialist Party [*Nihon Shakaito*] (JSP) until February 1991. The party then changed its name to the Social Democratic Party of Japan. In January 1996 the party changed its name again to the Social Democratic Party.

3. In 1986 the party abandoned its 1955 Marxist-Leninist platform, adopting a policy line like that of the social democratic parties of Western Europe.

4. The party claims a series of laws enacted recently, including the National Emergency Legislations, Anti-terrorism Legislation, and the revision of PKO Legislation are also against the principle of Article 9.

5. This is one reason why Japanese have very weak party identification. Another reason is that Japan does not have a political history of deep social cleavages,

religious, racial or ethnic splits, which often serve as a strong base of support for political parties in many countries.

6. That all changed when the LDP changed the rules for selecting the party president in the 1990s, giving non-legislators a much larger voice in the process. Furthermore, restrictions on donations to individual politicians that were instituted in 1994, and the new electoral system that was introduced in 1996, reduced both the power of LDP factions' bosses and the significance role the factions play in the political process (Feldman, 2004). For example, during the campaigns of former Prime Ministers Koizumi Junichiro and Fukuda Yasuo for the party presidency, in different from earlier races, faction leaders discussed the choices with their members, sometimes even asking for their permission to take a certain course of action. In some cases, factions split their votes. Prime Minister Koizumi in particular famously exercise his independence in choosing his cabinet, disdaining the factional formula that had served at the basis for cabinets in the past. Factional balancing, the trait of making sure factions were represented in the cabinet in roughly the same strength they held in the legislature, was the game Koizumi said he would not play.

7. The LDP drafted an extensive set of revisions, which it announced in October 2005. The proposed revision has sparked considerable debate and citizen activism.

8. When a new administration was formed in April 1994, policy differences with the other coalition parties over the tax system, foreign relations, and other matters caused the Socialist to leave the coalition and return to the opposition. In September 1994 the Socialist Party extensively overhauled its basic platform, deciding on new policies, including acceptance of the constitutionality of the Self-Defense Forces,

support for the Japan-US Security Treaty, and approval of already operating nuclear-power facilities.

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