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Reelection Incentives and Defection:
Party Switching in the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party

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Reelection Incentives and Defection: Party Switching in the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party

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Political defection refers to a legislator switching from his original party to run either under another party or as an independent candidate. Empirically, defection is a common political phenomenon, happening not only in newborn democracies, like Russia, Hungary, Poland and Taiwan, it also occurs in democracies during political transition, such as the Philippines since the mid-1980s, Spain (the 1970s~1980s), and consolidated democracies like Japan, Italy and the United States.¹ Theoretically, defection seriously influences party function and indicates weak and uneven party loyalty and institutionalization of party systems (Ames 1995a, b, 2002; Desposato 1997, 2006a, 2006b; Mainwaring 1998; Owens 2003). When a party fails to control its legislators, the party's platform, policies, and organization might face crises.² For example, in 1993, Ozawa Ichiro defected from the LDP and formed Shinseitō. His defection ended the thirty-eight-year reign of the LDP over Japan.

Among contending theories of party switching, the most popular argument emphasizes the influence of electoral systems on party-legislator relations.³ Scholars argue that frequent party switching results from candidate-centered electoral

¹ See White, Rose, and McAllister 1997 and Duvanova and Zielinski 2005, 1152 for defection in Russia, Ágh 1999 for defection in Hungary, Zielinski, Slomczynski, and Shabad 2005 for defection in Poland, Henderson 2000, 2001 for defection in the Philippines, Sánchez de Dios 1999; Mershon and Heller 2003 for defection in Spain, Kato 1998; Reed and Scheiner 2002; Laver and Kato 2001 for defection in Japan, Heller and Mershon, 2005 for defection in Italy and Nokken 2000; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2001; Nokken and Poole 2004 for defection in the United States.

² Political defection also influences the stability of presidential democracies. A single defector might result in change in political landscapes. For example, in the U.S., Vermont Senator Jim Jeffords defected from the Republican Party in 2001 and became an independent who voted with the Democratic Party. His shift changed the balance of legislative power between the Republican Party and the Democratic Party in the U.S. Senate (Choate 2003). However, in contrast to political defection in parliamentary systems that might directly result in the collapse of cabinets, its influence in presidential systems is not very significant due to the check-and-balance institutional design and the fixed term of both legislative and executive branches.

³ Political scientists also argue that party switching is mainly due to legislators' rational calculation and interparty competition. See Aldrich and Bianco 1992; Desposato 2002, Mershon and Heller 2003, 2005; Zielinski, Slomczynski and Shabad 2005; Laver and Kato 2001; Yoshinaka 2003 and Choate 2003)

campaigns (Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Mainwaring and Shugart 1997; Haggard 1995; Haggard and Kaufman 1992; Ames 1995a, 1995b, 2001). Moreover, the personalization of campaigns is affected by electoral formulas (Carey and Shugart 1995, Shugart 2001, Norris 2004, 134, and 230-237). Institutionalists' studies provide an insightful perspective for studying electoral Japanese politics. In Japan, the single non-transferable vote (henceforth SNTV) system fostered personal reputation and induced intraparty competition (Carey and Shugart 1995, Shugart 2001; Cox, Rosenbluth, and Thies 1998; 1999; 2000). Institutionalists argue that SNTV resulted in widespread political corruption, clientelism, electoral fraud, and money politics (Ramseyer and Rosenbluth 1993, 8-12; Cox and Rosenbluth 1996; Cox and Thies 1998; Reed and Thies 2001; Fukui and Fukai 1999; Grofman et al. 1999, 7; Fournier and Kohno 2000). Hence, despite having dominated Japanese politics for thirty-eight years, the highly fractionalized Liberal Democrat Party (LDP) government remained unstable (Ramseyer and Rosenbluth 1993, 59-63; Cox, Rosenbluth, and Thies 1998; 1999; 2000; Grofman 1999, 379).

[Figure 1 Goes Here]

According to neo-institutionalist studies, the Japanese party system would have become more stable because the new mixed member system fostered party reputation. In contrast with personalistic SNTV, the installation of a mixed-member system did provide better ballot control for party leaders (Cox, Rosenbluth, and Thies 1999). However, Figure 1 presents a different story. In contrast with those in SNTV elections, Japanese LDP MP became more likely to switch their party affiliation in the MMM elections. In other words, the new mixed member electoral system neither constructed a concrete party system nor enabled party leaders to better manage their members (Cox, Rosenbluth, and Thies 1999). The puzzle can thus be stated as follow:

Why did the installation of mixed member electoral system result in more defection in Japan?

To address this question, first, I summarize theories of party switching, including the impacts from electoral institutions and reelection incentives and point out that conventional studies of party switching fail to understand what motivates switchers from an interactive perspective (also see Heller and Mershon 2008, 911). To make up for this shortcoming, I focus on the interactions between party leaders and legislators and assert that party switching occurs when legislators expect that the party label might threaten their reelection chances. The threats to their reelection probability not only come from the voters' discontent over government poor performance, but also come from party leaders' tightening ballot control and rigid party discipline.

To provide empirical evidence for the hypotheses derived from the defection game, I examine the party-legislator relationship of the Japanese LDP, especially comparing the change in defection rates in the SNTV era and that in the mixed member system era. I argue that despite the personalistic SNTV, the LDP could manage their MPs and secure their loyalty by providing legislative posts and career advancement. If LDP MPs perceived that staying in the party might threatens their reelection chances, they would decide to switch their party affiliation. Even though the mixed member system strengthened party leaders' ballot control, it also ignited the conflicts between party leaders and legislators and made party leaders' ballot control became one of the political threats to legislators' reelection. Thus, LDP MPs became more likely to defect under the new mixed member system due to the threats from party leaders' tightening ballot control and rigid discipline.

PAST STUDIES OF PARTY SWITCHING

Comparative studies have increasingly turned to neo-institutionalism in order to

explain why some countries experience more switches than others. Although they assume that defection decisions are driven by legislators' preferences, they also posit that electoral systems may influence choice. Scholars argue that frequent party switching results from candidate-centered electoral campaigns (Ames 1995a, 1995b; Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Mainwaring and Shugart 1997). Moreover, the personalization of campaigns is affected by electoral formulas (Carey and Shugart 1995; Norris 2004, 134, 230-237; Shugart 2001). These studies provide an insightful perspective for political scientists' further research on intraparty politics. Indeed, in Italy and Brazil, open-list proportional representation system (OLPR) encouraged personal voting and constructed a multiple-party system (Ames 1995a; 1995b; 2002; Golden 2003; Katz 1993, 2001).⁴ On the intraparty dimension, the electoral system enhanced candidate reputations, induced clientelism, and caused the fractionalization of party systems (Ames 1995a; 1995b; Chang 2005; Chang and Golden, 2006; Golden 2003; Katz 2001). In Japan, the single non-transferable vote system (henceforth SNTV) fostered personal reputations and induced intraparty competition (Carey and Shugart 1995; Cox, Rosenbluth, and Thies 1998; 1999; 2000; Shugart 2001), resulting in widespread clientelism, money politics, and a fragmented party systems (Cox and Rosenbluth 1996; Cox and Thies 1998; Ramseyer and Rosenbluth 1993, 8-12; Reed and Thies 2001). Hence, despite having dominated Japanese politics for thirty-eight years, the highly fractionalized Liberal Democrat Party (LDP) government remained unstable.

Neo-institutionalism is theoretically precise, but it becomes specious if we investigate it from a comparative perspective. The U.S congressional elections are

⁴ Carey and Shugart (1995) classify Italian OLPR as a party-centered electoral system (Vote=1, Ballot=1, Pool=1, and Rank=c). Nevertheless, according to numerous studies on the Italian electoral system and Shugart (2001, 38), I still classify it as a candidate-centered electoral system.

generally considered highly candidate-centered (Carey and Shugart 1995). Nevertheless, between 1947 and 1997, only twenty congressmen defected from their parties (Nokken 2000, 2005; Nokken and Poole 2004). In Japan, the installation of a mixed-member system did provide better ballot control for party leaders (Cox, Rosenbluth, and Thies 1999). However, in contrast with the average defection rate in SNTV elections, the average defection rate in mixed-member elections rose to 9.8%. Desposato (2006a) compares party switching in the Brazilian Senate and Chamber of Deputies and finds no consistent or significant statistical support for the argument that electoral institutions affect legislators' switching decisions.

Recent studies of switching focus on the calculus of candidacy and highlight legislators' electoral incentives and calculation. They assume that legislators all seek to maximize their reelection probability and argues that the incentives of party switching are logically connected to the consequences of switching (Mershon and Heller 2003, 2; Zielinski, Slomczynski and Shabad 2005). Desposato (2006b) examines party switching in Brazil and finds that Brazilian legislators prefer membership in parties that maximize their chances of reelection and that have more access to pork. Zielinski, Slomczynski, and Shabad (2005) investigate switches in the Polish Sejm between the 1991 and the 2001 elections. They conclude that due to the government's poor economic performance, Polish deputies could foresee voters' punishment and expect declines in their electoral support. Thus, to secure their seats, deputies were more likely to defect from their parties.

The "calculus of candidacy" addresses switchers' motivation and strengthens conventional studies on party switching. According to the logic behind the calculus of candidacy, due to the low transaction cost of switching in a candidate-centered electoral system, legislators should be more likely to switch party affiliation if the

electoral system fosters their individual reputations. Nevertheless, this assertion still does not explain the low switching rates in the highly candidate-centered U.S. elections and Japanese SNTV elections and the increases in the number of switches in the Japanese new mixed-member elections.

AN INTERACTIVE THEORY OF PARTY SWITCHING

The reason that conventional studies of party switching have generated what I contend are empirically inaccurate findings is because they have failed to consider that party switching results from the conflicts between party leaders and legislators. To address this problem, I first scrutinize the party-legislator relationship.

I. Parties, Legislators, and Electoral Institutions

Cox and McCubbins argue that political parties are created in order to solve collective dilemmas legislators face (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 83). Expecting that each legislator speaking on behalf of her own interests might result in legislative disasters, to maximize reelection probability and the political interests they can acquire in the legislative branch, legislators surrender a part of their autonomy to form political parties. Once a political party is established, its political powers are mainly based on its seat share in the parliament. To maximize their seat shares and political powers, party leaders persuade and mobilize members of the public to support legislators' reelection. In short, reelection is in the mutual interest of both party leaders and legislators, and the reelection probability is affected by both legislators' personal traits and their party's reputations (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 109-110).

Electoral institutions serve as key components of the interactive structure between party leaders and legislators and designate the roles they play in political campaigns. In party-centered elections, political parties play the leading role at the campaign stage. Party leaders not only create party platform and policies to address

crucial issues, but also promote party brand names to voters. In such a party-centered election, the leaders control ballot access and the right to use the party label (Cox and McCubbins 1994) and legislators only have limited connections with their constituencies. As previous studies on party switching claim, because legislators' reelection relies on party support, party leaders can exercise ballot control over nomination and campaign money to hold their legislators in the party. Thus, legislators yield, comply with party discipline, and are less likely to switch parties.

New Zealand provides an illustration of this assertion. According to parliamentary and party rules, MPs were compelled to be present while parliament was sitting. While parliament was not in session, all MPs needed to serve on parliamentary Select Committees four days per week. MPs did not have enough time to provide constituency services and to establish personal connections with voters and the electoral and parliamentary institutions helped New Zealand's parties enhance party reputations. Therefore, party discipline in New Zealand's parliament was recognized as stricter than that in any other modern democratic legislature (Jackson, 1973, 118). In the Argentine Chamber of Deputies, closed-list PR places the legislator reelection in the hands of the provincial governors and party bosses, limits legislators' direct connections with voters as well as their ability to develop a professional legislative career, and reduces their incentives to specialize and to develop strong legislative institutions (Jones et al. 2006).

Institutional coercion and party labels are not the only resources party leaders utilize to maintain party discipline. In candidate-centered electoral systems, political parties can play a supplementary role and help legislators cultivate their personal reputations in the legislative branch. Committee assignments, career advancement within the party or government, increased influence over party policy positions, and

access to legislative perks can be utilized as party leaders' disciplinary tools (Heller and Mershon 2008, 911; Pekkanen et al. 2006). Party leaders can also finance legislators' reelection, support their preferred bills, and spend public funds on constructing their constituencies in order to help legislators' reelection and to secure their loyalty (Desposato 2006b, 62). In Epstein, Brady, Kawato, and O'Halloran's (1997) comparative study of legislative institutions in the US and Japan, they find that even though the candidate-centered electoral systems did not provide ballot control over nomination for political parties, party leaders could make their legislators cast party-line votes by enhancing the policymaking role of committees and regularizing members' careers within these committees. In Congress, Speakers worried about how transfers might affect the reelection chances of individual members of Congress and composed committees to help all members win reelection (Katz and Sala 1996, 23). This mechanism then gave rise to professionalization, careerism, and a decentralized seniority system in the national legislature, reduced career uncertainty (Epstein et al. 1997, 967), and made key committee posts become a reward structure (Crook and Hibbing 1985). Similarly in Japan, to maximize members' reelection probability, the first four or five terms of a member's legislative career were dedicated to constituent-relevant policy areas (Epstein et al. 1997, 967; Mulgan 2003; Schoppa 1991, 82; Pekkanen et al. 2006). Each LDP member was appointed to a parallel Policies Advisory Research Committee (PARC) and to a Diet committee, gradually cumulating their expertise and practical experience about government policies and enough seniority to influence the ministry (Schoppa 1991, 82-83; Curtis 1988, 92).

II. Party Discipline and Party Switching

Legislator ambitions of reelection and career advancement afford party leaders disciplinary tools to manage their legislators by threatening to withhold the benefits of

the party label and to hinder legislators' intraparty advancement (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 126; Heller and Mershon 2008, 912). If legislators can enhance their prospects both for reelection and career advancement without relying on the endorsement and electoral support from their parties, party discipline might not be imposed to them.

Weak party discipline does not necessarily drive legislators to switch parties. Contrarily, Heller and Mershon (2008) find that the more a party disciplines its legislative members to vote with the party and against their underlying preferences, the more likely the members are to defect from the party. The logic behind such a counterintuitive finding is that party switching occurs while party discipline conflicts with legislators' reelection goals and has a two-fold meaning: On the party leader's side, when a leader decides to withhold the benefits of the party label and hinder a legislator's reelection, she discerns an election without relying on the legislator's personal characteristics. Should she depend on the legislator for winning reelection, the leader would not block his reelection. On the switcher's side, he defects from the party because he expects his reelection without party support. Should he rely on the party label, he would not defect.

An emerging literature supports my arguments and indicates that the lash of discipline drives legislators to rebel. Nemoto et al. (2008) investigate the party rebellion over postal privatization in 2005 in Japan and find that the change in the seniority rule and policy specialization for district rewards strengthened LDP Prime Minister Koizumi's party discipline, but also influenced LDP MPs' reelection chances and drove them to vote against Koizumi's privatization bill. Heller and Mershon (2008) study party switching in the Italian Chamber of Deputies from 1988 to 2000. They also find that more disciplined parties saw more switching.

Based on the discussion above, I argue that in contrast with candidate-centered

and party-centered electoral systems, electoral systems simultaneously fostering candidates' personal reputations and providing party leaders ballot control over nomination are more likely to ignite the conflict between party leaders and legislators and to drive legislators to switch parties. My focus on the type of electoral systems has theoretical and empirical justification. The theoretical justification derives from conventional studies of party switching. My argument runs against previous studies, including Ames (1995a, 1995b, 2002), Mainwaring and Scully (1995), Mainwaring and Shugart (1997), and Desposato (1997, 2006b), asserting that the extent of candidate-centered elections drive legislators to switch. The fundamental theory underlying these studies is that candidate-centered elections encourage a personal vote, strengthen the link between candidates and the electorate, and weaken party control over legislators.

To illustrate how the exogenous factors affect the party-legislator relationship and drive them to defect, in the following sections I examine interactions between LDP party leaders and their MPs and investigate LDP legislators' party switching. I find that defectors switched from the LDP for different reasons under SNTV and MMM. In the SNTV era, LDP MPs switching party affiliation for avoiding punishment from voters discontented with LDP government's poor performance and for enhancing their chances of reelection. In the MMM era, LDPs defected mainly due to the conflicts with party leaders' rigid discipline.

PARTY SWITCHING IN THE JAPANESE POLITICS

I. Party-Legislator Relationship and Switching in the Early Age

A. Personalistic SNTV, Factions, and Party Management

Ten years after the Second World War, with the unification of the Liberal and the

Democratic Party into the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the '1955 System' (*gojugonen taisei*) was established. The LDP became the dominant force in Japanese politics and continuously held an absolute majority in the Japanese Lower House until its breakup and temporary fall from power in 1993. Despite its continuity in power, intraparty competition among party factions has never ceased. As stated above, party factions within the LDP were considered as a by-product of SNTV (Park 2001, 429; also see Cox and Rosenbluth 1996; Cox and Thies 1998; Ramseyer and Rosenbluth 1993, 8-12; Reed and Thies 2001).⁵ Due to the intense competition in a multimember district, to maximize their reelection chances, LDP candidates not only had to distinguish themselves from and compete with other co-partisan candidates in the same district, but also had to bring 'pork' to local districts and establish strong patron-client linkage with their constituency electorate (Nemoto et al. 2008, 500). Thus, particularism became one of the most important characteristics of Japanese electoral politics. In the campaign arena, LDP MPs spent enormous amounts of money organizing personal support base, or so-called *koenkai*, establishing patron-client relationships with their constituency electorate and exchanged policy pork for consistent electoral support (Bouissou 1999; Ramseyer and Rosenbluth 1993, 23). In the legislative arena, each LDP politician usually specialized in a particular issue-area to become a policy expert within the party, or so-called *zoku giin* (members of policy tribes) who had developed skills and knowledge in their specialized fields.

To manage its lawmakers and make them toe the party line in highly personalized SNTV, a seniority system linked to the legislative posts and career advancement was applied to mediate legislators' personal-vote incentives and soothed their

⁵ Students also argue that factions evolve from Japan's hierarchical social structure. See Park 2001 for detailed discussion.

fragmentation-related grievances (Nemoto et al. 2008, 503). According to the ladder-like seniority rule, the first four or five terms of a member's legislative career were dedicated to constituent-relevant policy areas (Epstein et al. 1997, 967; Mulgan 2003; Schoppa 1991, 82; Pekkanen et al. 2006; Nemoto et al. 2008, 508). Each LDP member was appointed to a parallel PARC and to a Diet committee. After working hard in the PARC and the Diet, a LDP legislative member then became a *zoku* member with expertise and practical experience about government policies and enough seniority to influence the ministry (Schoppa 1991, 82-83; Curtis 1988, 92).

Political factions played an essential role in both campaign and legislative arenas. In the campaign arena, faction leaders provided a shelter for accommodating the intraparty competition in electoral campaign and raised party's funds and bankrolled their faction members in the multimember districts (Ramseyer and Rosenbluth 1993; Bouissou 2001, 582). In the legislative arena, the leaders negotiated with each other over the distribution of legislative posts, including Diet committee and PRAC assignments, cabinet posts, and party presidency, helped LDP MPs efficiently climb the ladder of success within the party (Park 2001, 431), enhanced their policy influence, and fulfilled their goals of career advancement (Cox, Rosenbluth, and Thies 2000, 116; Nemoto et al. 2008, 500). The politics posts then became the reward for faction members' fidelity. In other words, faction politics tightly linked with the seniority rule and the multimember district elections and helped the LDP to maintain its intraparty discipline under the highly personalized SNTV.⁶

The other important party bylaw that helped the LDP maintain party stability was the proportional allotment of cabinet and party posts. As stated above, factional

⁶ Although party factions played a determining role on political recruitment and allotment of legislative and government benefits, scholars argue that they did not perform policy-making function. See Bouissou 2001, 582.

leaders were responsible for reaping political posts for their faction members and faction leaders were to maximize the number of posts available to their members. Meanwhile, the LDP was mainly controlled by five major factions and any of the five factions could easily overwhelm the LDP government by defecting. In other words, any serious conflicts among party factions might result in party dealignment and the collapse of the LDP. To foreclose unequal treatment of any given faction and to avoid any faction taking an exit option, a proportional rule of post allocation became the consensus among faction leaders (Park 2001). Party factions set an overall numerical framework of portfolio distribution that took into consideration balance among the factions. The criteria then reduced post allotment to simple arithmetic. Bouissou (2001) studies the post allotment in Japan and asserts that the full-fledged reshuffles of cabinet and party posts not only enabled LDP backbenchers to advance career ladders by following the seniority rule, but also attenuate the intraparty conflicts within the LDP.

B. Party Switching in the SNTV Era

Due to the seniority rule and the proportion rule of post allotment, the intraparty competition within the LDP looked like a tempest in a teapot. Despite the frenetic intraparty competition within the LDP, the conflicts among factions had never brought down the LDP regime until 1993. In the SNTV era, LDP MPs switched party affiliation not due to the intraparty conflicts but to escaping from electoral accountability and voters' discontent with government performance, especially with egregious corruption and declining national economy. For instance, in mid-1976, six Diet members defected from the Liberal Democratic Party and formed the New Liberal Club (NLC) due to the eruption of Lockheed Scandal. In the later election, the fledgling NLC won votes from a discontented electorate in the urban area and

successfully acquired eighteen seats in the Lower Diet.⁷ Similarly, a series of bribery scandals implicating top LDP politicians also made LDP politicians generally pessimistic about the 1994 election.

Had widespread corruption been the only problem of its governance, the LDP might not be brought down because Japanese citizens had been acquainted with the LDP's corruption since the 1976 Lockheed scandal. Nevertheless, the collapse of stock prices and Japan's deepest and longest depression beginning in 1991 became the last straw of the LDP regime. Beginning in 1986, stock and real estate prices greatly inflated within a few years. Following the peak in 1989, asset prices rapidly came down in the first half of the 1990s. Stock prices declined by 60 percent from 1990 to August 1992. The burst of the bubble economy in the first half of the 1990s left real estate business and banks holding large debts without sufficient earnings from properties to service outstanding loans. Because borrowers bankrupted, banks could not collect debts and started to accumulate non-performing loans, which was the main cause of the long depression.

During the disastrous recession, Japanese people not only experienced rising unemployment rate and minus economic growth, but also clearly saw the ineptitude and corruption of bureaucrats. Despite blaming technocrats for not raising interest rates and preventing a bubble from happening in the first place, for not lowering interest rates immediately after the bubble bust in 1990, and for providing LDP government misinformation which led to the worst financial bankruptcies in the postwar history (Kaihara 2008, 392), citizens surely knew that technocrats were merely the LDP's scapegoat and that the LDP had to account for all the policy failure.

⁷ However, the NLC had never achieved such a tremendous success again. Eventually, it was forced to form a coalition with the LDP in 1983 due to financial problems and was eventually dissolved and rejoined the LDP in 1989.

In the 1989 Upper House election, the Japanese electorate voted against the LDP and resulted in the LDP's staggering loss in the election. The LDP's catastrophe in this election thus became the precursor of the 1993 Lower House election and worried the LDP MPS, especially backbenchers. Finally, Ozawa Ichiro led 35 switchers from the LDP and joined with the Centrists and Socialists to give birth to the Hosokawa cabinet in August 1993.

LDP backbenchers' defection is predictable and completely rational. As stated above, faction leaders battled for political posts and redistributed them to faction members based on their seniority. While political resources were abundant, those fledging rookies' reelection and career advancement were funded by faction leaders. However, due to public anger on widespread corruption and deep recession, the resources faction leaders could contribute to their members' reelections dramatically decrease. In addition, because the seniority rule guided the post allocation, the legislative perks backbenchers could acquire might not be enough for securing their reelection; instead, the notorious LDP party label might impede their reelection.

When the backbenchers were tormented about the public anger and worried about their reelection. Party switching provided an alternative for escaping electoral accountability. In contrast with staying in the LDP, party switching not only enabled LDP backbenchers to disentangle themselves with the LDP's corruption and policy failure, once being reelected, by aligning with other parties, those backbenchers could receive cabinet posts immediately without waiting 15 to 17 years before getting a portfolio.

II. Party-Legislator Relationship and Switching in the Post-Reform Era

A. Electoral Reform and New Party System

The new installation of a mixed member system directly affects the proportionality of the Japanese party system and Japanese interparty and intraparty politics. Despite the political turmoil after the 1994 electoral reform that temporarily lifted the effective number of parties in the Diet up to 4, the effective number of parties in the Diet declined to 3 in the 1996 election and 2.2 in the 2005 election. As we can observe in Figure 2, the gap between the effective number of parties in elections and its counterpart in the Diet increased after the 1994 electoral reform.⁸ In other words, the new electoral system tends to underrepresent minorities and independent candidates are less likely to be elected.

[Figure 2 Goes Here]

As to the interparty politics of Japanese party system after the 1994 electoral reform, even though the LDP could not individually control a majority in the Diet until the 2005 parliamentary election, it remained playing a determinant role in the Diet.⁹ Table 1 demonstrates the effective number of parties in government coalitions after the 1994 electoral reform. It shows that the effective numbers of parties in government coalitions remain relatively small despite the installation of MMP.

[Table 1 Goes Here]

In contrast with the insignificant influence of electoral reform over Japanese interparty politics, its influence over interparty politics is relatively dramatic. On the nominal list, party reputation highly overlaps with candidates' reputation in FPTP elections. On the party list, closed list proportional representation (CLPR) system also

⁸ The average difference between the ENP in elections and the ENP in the Diet under then SNTV elections is only 0.4. However, after the 1994 electoral reform, the average different under MMP is 1.2.

⁹ In the 1996 election, the LDP was 12 seats short of a majority in the Diet and had to form a government coalition with New Party Sakigake and the Social Democratic Party. In 2000, the LDP cooperated with the New Komeito and the New Conservative Party and constructed a surplus coalition. In the 2003, the 3 seats short of a majority also required the LDP to maintain its coalition with the New Clean Government Party.

enables party leaders to decisively control the access to and the rank on the list. In addition, as stated above, the disproportionality of the mixed member system is unfavorable to independent candidates and minorities' election. Thus, for party leaders and legislators, they are aware of the fact that in general, the probability of reelection without party endorsement becomes relatively low. To sum up, the mixed member majoritarian (MMM) system provides more ballot control to party leaders over their legislators in nomination processes. Cox, Rosenbluth and Thies (1999) compare LDP faction leaders' political power before and after the 1994 electoral reform. They find that MMP enabled LDP leaders to consolidate constituencies by ruling out faction leaders' intervention on nomination processes (Cox, Rosenbluth and Thies 1999, 55-56).

B. Electoral Reform and Intraparty Politics in Japan

SNTV did not directly affect the degree of political corruption and the absence of bureaucratic autonomy, but it did result in the fractionalization of the LDP. Even though eliminating party fractions was most prime ministers' platform, when they came to power, none of them ever dealt with this problem until Koizumi Junichiro became the 87th prime minister in 2001.

Koizumi's party reform was supported by institutional factors, public opinions, and LDP reformists. First, as stated above, the 1994 electoral reform not only altered the Japanese political environment, but also enabled Prime Minister Koizumi to strengthen his power and to reorganize the LDP structure. The new MMP electoral system assigned 300 seats to be elected from FPTP, and 180 to be apportioned via CLPR. Both of the nominal list and the party list support LDP party leaders to retrieve their political power on ballot control.

Koizumi's selection process also enabled him to strengthen his power and to

suppress faction leaders. In April 2001, because of LDP's declining public approval ratings and the forthcoming House of Councilors election, some LDP members voiced their complaints against the back-room deal of LDP president selection processes. According to the new LDP presidential primary rules, each of 47 prefectures has three votes. The 141 votes would be added to the votes reserved for 386 LDP Diet members (Bowen 2003, 21-22). Unlike the previous presidential primary, the new primary rules provided more say to local LDP members and limited the influences of Diet members, whom were mostly managed by faction leaders. In the primary, Koizumi swept 121 of the 141 prefecture votes and defeated former prime minister Hashimoto by a final tally of 298 to 155 votes.¹⁰ After Koizumi became the prime minister, he started to strengthen his power and to rid the LDP of party factions. First, as usual, he appointed 11 of 18 ministries to faction members, but not proportionally according to the size of factions. Even though Hashimoto's faction was the largest one in the Diet, it only acquired 2 ministers.

The privatization of Japanese postal service was the second step Koizumi took to weaken party factions. The Japanese postal service not only provides basic mail delivery services, but also the largest financial institution in the world (Calder 1990). When Tanaka Kakuei, the 64th and 65th Prime Minister, served as Minister of Posts and Telecommunications during the late 1950s, he started to solidify the relations between the LDP and postmasters. By increasing the number of commissioned postmasters, who were citizens contracted by the state without taking examinations, Tanaka privatized these public occupations as political patronage for young LDP members who lacked popular support bases. To ensure postmasters providing

¹⁰ Even though the largest faction leader Hashimoto won a majority of Diet member votes, senior LDP members thought that once Hashimoto became a prime minister, the LDP might lose the forthcoming upper house election. Thus, Koizumi successfully won the LDP presidency (Bowen 2003, 22).

long-term electoral support to LDP regimes, Tanaka even preserved the inheritance practices of the postmasters (Johnson 1986, Calder 1990). Most Japan's 19000 commissioned postmasters were actually responsible for gathering votes for LDP candidates via their personal networks. They even occupy significant proportions of the LDP's local membership base. Thus, for LDP members whose reelection relies on local patron-client relations, the privatization of the Japanese postal service might overwhelm their local electoral support and risked their reelection (Maclachlan 2006). In July 2005, Koizumi government submitted the contentious postal privatization bills to the House of Representatives, and it was passed by five votes (233 vs. 228) in favor of the privatization. However, in August, the House of Councilors voted down the bill by seventeen votes (108 vs. 125). As a result, Prime Minister dissolved the House of Representatives and called for reelection over the contentious issue of the privatization of Japan Post (Maclachlan 2006, 14).

C. Electoral Reform and the Dynamics of Electoral Defection in Japan

The dynamics of electoral defection in Japanese politics provides an illustration for the interactive theory of party switching. As stated in the outset of this paper, the average defection rate for LDP MPs is merely 2.2% between 1979 and 1990; however, it hiked up to 12% after the electoral reform. Increases in the defection rates resulted from the political conflicts between party leaders' ballot control and legislators' individual-based clientelism. Even though the 1994 electoral reform intended to control the degree of political corruption, since Japan's political corruption resulted from its political structure and the absence of bureaucratic independence, the purpose of controlling corruption via electoral reform failed. Cox, Rosenbluth and Thies find that the new electoral rules did not entail any changes directly pertinent to the allocation of posts within the LDP. Factional leaders remained controlled the

distribution of political resources (Cox, Rosenbluth and Thies 1999).

Although the electoral reform failed to control the degree of political corruption, as mentioned above, the installation of the new mixed member electoral system did reduce faction leaders' influence over nomination processes (Cox, Rosenbluth and Thies 1999). In SNTV elections, since electoral rules favored candidate reputation and patronage systems were controlled by individual MPs, LDP presidents decentralized their political power to faction leaders and individual MPs and consistently supported their reelection. Thus, the defection rates in SNTV elections were relatively small. In contrast to SNTV, the mixed member electoral system provided LDP president better ballot control over party endorsement. Nevertheless, for LDP MPs' whose reelection relies on individual-based clientelism, they still thought their patron-client networks could provide considerable electoral support for their reelection even if they could not acquire party endorsement from the LDP. In other words, the new installation of MMP ignited the conflicts between party leaders' ballot control and legislators' individual-based clientelism, and moreover, drove the LDP MPs to defect.

The dissolution of the Japanese lower Diet in 2005 provides the best illustration to demonstrate how the conflicts between LDP president's ballot control and rural-based LDP legislators' clientelism drove these MPs to defect from the LDP. As stated above, the privatization of Japan's postal service was one of Prime Minister Koizumi's most important policies. Due to its inefficiency and redundant personnel, the enormous postal system had exacerbated government deficit. However, since most rural-based LDP MPs were relied on postmasters' personal networks, Koizumi's privatization policies were viewed as his strategy on purging party factions. As shown in Table 2, Hashimoto and Kaimei factions voted against Koizumi's privatization

policy.

[Table 2 Goes Here]

According to an opinion poll conducted by a political journal on August 8th, 2005, over 70% Japanese citizens supported Koizumi's privatization policies. Given his high popularity and voters' support of the postal privatization, Koizumi assumed that Japanese electorate would vote for the LDP instead of LDP MPs who voted against privatization. Thus, he refused to provide party endorsement to those defectors in reelection. On the defectors' side, since most defectors had been elected several times and had constructed solid social networks in their constituencies, they expected that their reelection probability without LDP endorsement remained high. Finally, these legislative defectors decided to switch from the LDP. To prevent these LDP defectors from reelection, Koizumi recruited fledgling politicians and nominated them as "political assassins" in these defectors' districts. The conflict between Koizumi and faction leaders demonstrates that tightening ballot control conflicts with faction members' individual patron-client networks and results in the faction members' defection.

Discussions and Conclusions

Whereas previous studies have argued that candidate-centered electoral systems drive legislators to switch party affiliation, this paper examines party switching before and after the 1994 electoral reform in Japan and demonstrate that the argument fails to fit empirical evidence well. Juxtaposed with conventional wisdom of party switching, this paper focuses on the party-legislator relationship. Extending insights from the literature highlighting legislators' reelection goal and the interactions between party leaders and legislators, I assert that strict ballot control of closed-list systems is not

the only disciplinary tool party leaders can utilize to manage their legislators. In personalistic electoral systems, a seniority system linked to the legislative posts and career advancement can mediate legislators' personal-vote incentives and enable party leaders to secure legislators' loyalty (Epstein 1997; Nemoto et al. 2008; Pekkanen 2006). Preferred committee assignments, financial support for reelection, and legislative perks are all possible strategies that party leaders can use in order to help legislators' reelection and to keep them in line.

Following the assumption of legislators' incentives of reelection and career advancement, I assert that the threat to legislators' reelection not only comes from party leaders' ballot control and party discipline, but also comes from dissenting voters. Legislators stay in a party because it provides consistent and reliable electoral support for their reelection. While legislators perceive threat from electoral uncertainty, they might switch party affiliation in order to ensure their reelection. Statistical analysis supports this assertion and demonstrates that legislators switch party affiliation to deflect blame for undesirable outcomes of high corruption and high unemployment.

The theoretical model fits well when applied to analyze party switching in the Japanese politics and explains why LDP could maintain its 38-year reign despite the drastic intraparty competition in the SNTV era. In addition, in this era, I find that LDP members defected from their party not because of the intraparty conflicts, but due to the exogenous public anger with the LDP's widespread political corruption and deep economic recession. To maximize their reelection probability, LDP backbenchers defected from the LDP. In addition, career advancement also affect party switching. If MPs expected that switching parties could blackmail their old patron, LDP, or ally with other parties to form a new government coalition, they would defect for

enhancing their career advancement.

Party switching in the MMM era has a different scenario. The electoral reform not only strengthened party leaders' control over the access to and the rank on the ballot. In addition, the new president selection process also enabled LDP president to focus more on public demands, instead faction leaders' greedy requests. These institutional factors combining with Koizumi's high popularity shaped his leadership and became the fundamental momentum of his political reform. By breaking the seniority rule and the proportional rule of post allotment, Koizumi temporally ridded the LDP of faction politics and successfully preceded with his privatization bills. However, promoting postal privatization not only hindered the rural-based LDP MPs' reelection probability, the violation of party norms also blocked backbenchers' expectation on career advancement. He thus ignited the conflict within the LDP and finally expelled LDP members for voting against his privatization bill and finally drove them to defect.

Attentive readers might wonder whether the institutional factors will keep affecting the intraparty politics of the LDP and driving its member to defect. As stated above, it is noteworthy that public support on Koizumi's privatization bill played a significant role in the intraparty conflict within the LDP. Since the eruption of economic recession, governments and prime ministers had never enjoyed such high popularity as Koizumi did. Therefore, even though Koizumi's predecessors had elaborated on political reform and eliminating faction politics, none of them had ever succeeded. By the same token, we should not be surprised that his successors terminated intraparty reform. Even though institutional factors strengthen LDP presidents' ballot control, it does not necessarily mean that the presidents are capable of practicing these discipline tools and of making their MPs toe the party line. While

party popularity is low, to maximize their seat shares in both diets, the LDP presidents still have to rely on candidate's personal reputation and surrender themselves to faction politics. Thus, to increase its seat share in the Lower Diet and to lift his depressing approval rating for preparing the incoming Upper Diet election, Abe Shinzo not only followed the old route of faction politics and proportionally allocated cabinet posts according each faction's seat share in diets, but also allowed the anti-privatization rebels back into the LDP. His concessions dramatically weakened party discipline and showed that the LDP presidency, again, yielded to faction politics. This does not mean that institutional factors do not matter. Had the LDP presidential selection process and the electoral system remained the same, faction leaders would have kept dominating the allotment of cabinet posts and the back-room deals among faction leaders would not have any chance to elect a Koizumi-like reformer. In short, I argue that institutional factors provide necessarily, not sufficient conditions, for fueling LDP presidents' powers.

Number of Switches in the LDP

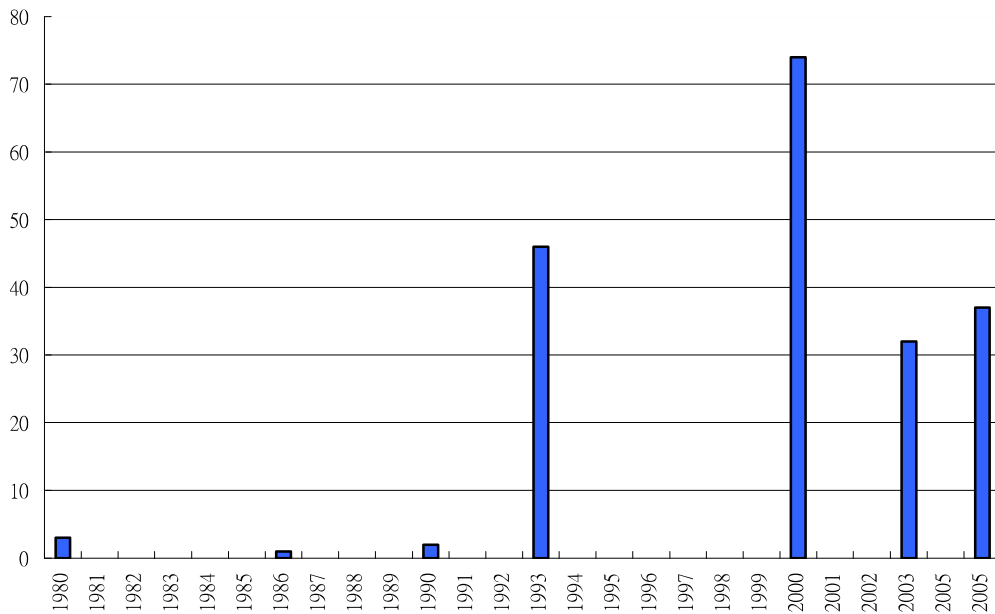


Figure 1 Party Switching in Japan

- a. Before the 1994 electoral reform, the Japanese lower Diet (House of Representative) was composed of 511 members. After the electoral reform, there were seats.
- b. Defection in the 1996 election has been omitted because it was a transition election from SNTV to MMM.

Figure 2 Effective Numbers of Parties in Japanese Elections and Diet

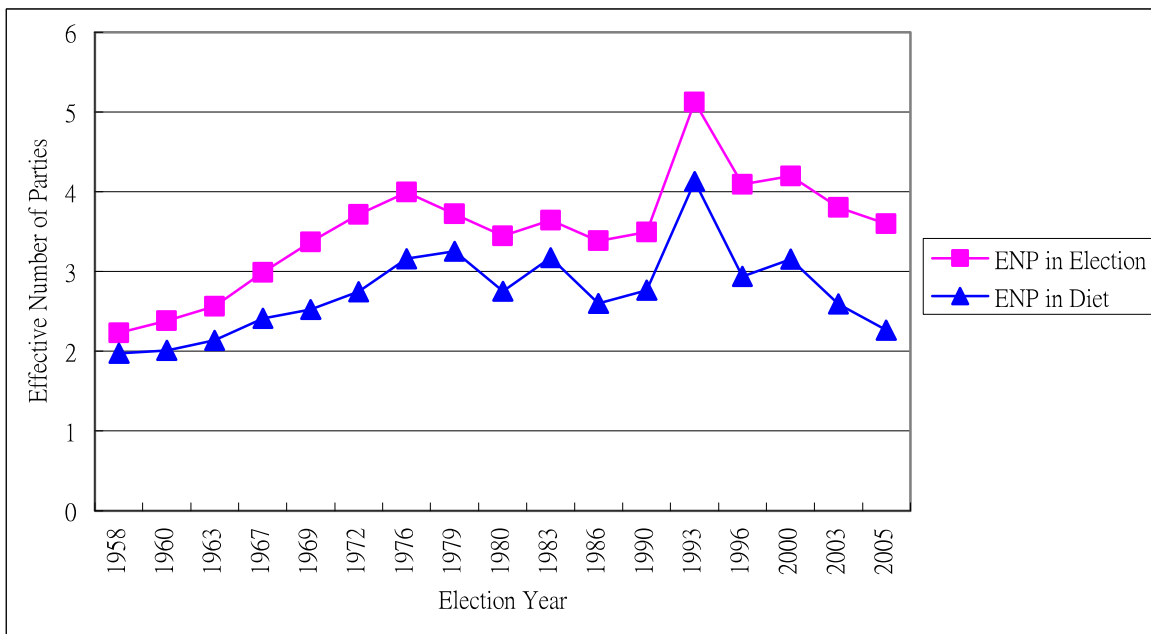


Table 1 Effective Number of Parties in Japanese Government Coalitions after the 1994 Reform

Election Year	1996	2000	2003	2005
ENP in Government	1.14	1.24	1.27	1
Prime Minister	LDP	LDP	LDP	LDP

Table 2 the Attitude of LDP Party Factions toward the Postal Service Privatization

Factions	Lower House			Upper House		
	Opposition	Absence	Total Seats	Opposition	Absence	Seats
Hashimoto	16	3	51	5	2	35
Mori	1	1	51	0	0	26
Kamei	12	1	30	12	0	15
Horiuchi	3	5	33	3	4	15
Yamazaki	1	2	24	0	1	5
Takamura	0	1	13	0	0	2
Kawano	1	0	10	0	1	1

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