

**EXPLAINING SUBOPTIMAL INSTITUTIONAL
FRAMEWORKS: THE EFFECTS OF INTRA-PARTY
CONFLICT ON ELECTORAL RULE STASIS IN JAPAN**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DSP	Democratic Socialist Party
FPTP	First past the post
GHQ	General Headquarters (of the Allied Occupation)
JCP	Japan Communist Party
JSP	Japan Socialist Party
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
MMD	Medium-member district
MMM	Mixed-member majoritarian
MMP	Mixed-member proportional
PR	Proportional representation
SMD	Single-member district
SNTV	Single non-transferable vote

INTRODUCTION: THE LDP'S DILEMMA

While the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) controlled a majority of the seats in the Japanese Diet between 1955 and 1993, it was never a truly dominant party. The LDP's electoral popularity peaked in 1958 – the first election after its formation – when it won 58 percent of the vote, and the party failed to win a majority after 1962. Perhaps more telling, fewer and fewer people identified themselves as LDP partisans over time. According to monthly polls by the *Jiji Tsushin* between 1960 and 1990,¹ the LDP last had more than 50 percent public support in December 1960, and more than 40 percent in January 1970. Although the party ultimately stayed in power for 38 years, its impending demise – on the heels of various political scandals and economic upheavals – was consistently predicted before every election.

The possibility of electoral defeat was not lost on the LDP's leaders, who resorted to various tactics to shore up the party's declining popularity. The government boosted public spending before elections to temporarily increase GDP growth and create the illusion of a strong economic performance (Kono and Nishizawa 1990), while giving policy benefits to key supporters during periods of economic crisis (Calder 1988). The manipulation of fiscal and regulatory policy was at best a stop-gap solution, however, especially after the 1980's when mounting public debt made irresponsible expenditures problematic.

What has received less attention in the literature on Japanese politics – and what this paper is concerned with – is the LDP's failure to implement an obviously beneficial tactic that could have secured the party's long-term dominance: *altering the electoral system to win more seats with fewer votes.*

¹*Jiji Tsushin* is the rough equivalent of the Associated Press (AP) in Japan. Thanks to Steven Reed for this information.

Between 1947 and 1993, Japanese elections were held in medium-member districts under a single non-transferable vote formula (MMD-SNTV), and various facets of this system helped the LDP maintain a bare parliamentary majority. It allowed smaller parties to win seats in larger districts, diminishing incentives for opposition parties to coordinate candidates against the LDP (Christensen 2000). The high degree of malapportionment in favor of rural areas – the LDP’s traditional support base – also helped the party garner more seats than warranted by its vote share (Christensen and Johnson 1995; Reed and Thies 2001b).

MMD-SNTV was not, however, the *optimal* system for the LDP. There are other electoral formulas, particularly first-past-the-post (FPTP) rules as used in the United States or Great Britain, which grant significantly more seats to larger political parties (Cox 1996; Gallagher 1991). Indeed, contemporary simulations showed that the LDP could have garnered a large super-majority had it changed the electoral formula to FPTP. The party faced few legislative obstacles to institutional change, because the opposition only controlled a minority of the seats. And, in fact, the LDP leadership floated the idea of fundamental electoral reform three times – in 1958, 1973, and 1989. Despite having both the incentive and the clout, however, *the LDP never actually changed the electoral system*, and the party was ultimately ousted from power in 1993.

This case of institutional *non-change* in Japan echoes a critical disjuncture in the literature on electoral rule endogeneity. While various scholars – most notably Riker (1980) – have predicted that any institution with distributional biases is subject to political manipulation, cross-national empirical work suggests that electoral rules are surprisingly stable over time (Nohlen 1984). To the extent that political actors seek control of the policy-making process,

however, we *should* observe political parties manipulating electoral rules in order to increase their legislative representation. Why, then, does electoral rule change happen so rarely?

This paper sheds light on this puzzle of institutional stasis by focusing on a theoretical dimension lacking in the current literature: the role of *intra*-party dynamics. Even though a party as a whole may stand to benefit from electoral rule change, that does not mean that *all incumbents* will be guaranteed re-election under a new system. And, although the literature has long acknowledged inter-party asymmetries in the benefits and costs accrued from electoral rule change, the same distributional asymmetries can pit members of the same party against one another. Crucially, MPs who are harmed by a proposal may refuse to support it in a parliamentary vote, thus potentially dooming its passage. Indeed, perceptive party leaders may simply back off of reform bills if they are likely to harm many incumbents.

I will argue that the weakness of the LDP leaders vis-à-vis rank-and-file Diet members prevented party bosses from replacing the SNTV formula with a single-member plurality system, leaving the party to compete under a suboptimal institutional framework for much of its tenure in government. In particular, I will look at three aborted attempts to alter the electoral formula in Japan during the LDP's single-party dominance (1945-1993). In Chapter 1, I will briefly review the comparative politics literature on electoral rule manipulation. Chapter 2 describes the postwar origins of the SNTV electoral system, the evolution of party politics in the subsequent decades, and how incentives to alter electoral rules strengthened over time. Chapter 3 examines how intra-party dissension within the LDP prevented the successful implementation of electoral reform.

CHAPTER 1

STRATEGIES FOR STAYING IN POWER

The Manipulation of Public Policy and Formal Institutions

Strategic institutional change has important implications for representative democracy. This is because electoral manipulation may allow politicians to remain in power beyond their popular mandate. The ultimate manifestation of repeated incumbency – single-party dominance – grants the ruling party the uninhibited ability to shape investment in specific sectors, control openness to foreign influences, and dictate welfare provisions and health coverage, essentially giving “one political party... a continuous opportunity to pursue its historical agenda” (Pempel 1990). As yet, however, there is no robust theory of how partisan motivations affect the frequency and type of electoral rule change, and, in fact, the conventional wisdom in the literature is that electoral systems are inherently “sticky.” As Lijphart (1994) writes: “One of the best-known generalizations about electoral systems is that they tend to be very stable and to resist change.”

This omission in the literature is puzzling in light of the interest in other political strategies that can help extend government longevity. For example, researchers have long examined the manipulation of *public policy*, particularly those instruments pertaining to economic performance. Various studies – including Erickson et al’s analysis of American voter behavior (2000) and cross-national work by Lewis-Beck (1988) and Pacek and Radcliffe (1995) – show that voters frequently make electoral decisions based on the economic management skills of politicians.² Accordingly, politicians have incentives to manipulate public policy in order to

²Various scholars have argued that economic outcomes are not primary determinants of government

create the *perception* that the economy is performing well. Nordhaus's (1975) seminal study on political business cycles, for example, argues that politicians try to lower unemployment immediately before elections. Ames (1987) finds that Latin American presidents increase public expenditures before midterm legislative elections in order to solidify their political support. Palmer and Whitten (2000) show that, in parliamentary systems, parties in power are more likely to call for national elections when the economy is performing well, *i.e.* when they are more likely to win.

Politicians similarly manipulate *political institutions* to increase their legislative clout. As Riker writes, institutions that have an asymmetrical impact on political actors tend to be unstable, as actors will seek to modify them to suit their interests (Riker 1980). Scholars have examined how political preferences influence the design of legislative committees (Gilligan and Krehbiel 1987; Shepsle and Weingast 1987; Calvert 1995), the power balance between the executive and the legislature (Moe and Caldwell 1994; Frye 1997; Shugart 1998), the number of cabinet portfolios (Mershon 2002), and bureaucratic delegation (Geddes 1991; McNollgast 1999; Huber and Shipan 2002). Generally speaking, all formal political institutions create distributional benefits in favor of some actors over others (Knight 1992), and, as such, are *endogenous* to political competition: in addition to affecting political behavior, institutions are also affected *by* the strategic concerns of actors.

What Electoral Rules Do

What is true of these various political institutions should also be true of electoral rules, whose purpose is to decide who gets represented in government, and, hence, who gets to make

incumbency, or that voters do not always punish poor economic performance. For these notable exceptions, see Przeworski and Cheibub (1999), Remmer (1991), and Stokes (1996).

public policy – the *sine qua non* of political life. More specifically, electoral rules affect two critical political relationships: 1) inter-party politics, by determining the distribution of seats in parliament, and 2) party-voter linkages, by altering the criteria that voters use to make choices at the polls, and consequently what politicians do to get their support. Politicians can choose to manipulate electoral rules in ways that bias both of these elements in their favor. Before explaining the strategic decision-making underlying changes to these rules, let me explore each of these institutional effects briefly.

The principal function of electoral rules – and the one that has received the most academic attention – is determining how *votes* are converted into parliamentary *seats*. One of the most robust findings from the electoral politics literature is that larger parties tend to benefit from winner-takes-all, plurality rules – as employed in the United States and Great Britain – while smaller parties are more likely to win seats under proportional representation, or PR – as used in the Netherlands and Sweden (Duverger 1954; Rae 1967; Taagepera and Shugart 1989; Lijphart 1994). The logic is straightforward: when there are more seats to be distributed within a given electoral district (as under PR), candidates and parties need fewer votes to win each seat. The difference in the votes-to-seats translation between electoral rules is a function of the district magnitude, or the number of parliamentary seats allocated to each district: the larger the magnitude of the district, the more proportional (and better for smaller parties) are election outcomes (Sartori 1976; Reed 1991; Cox 1997). Even among large-magnitude systems, the way in which votes are pooled in and across districts – between the single-transferable vote, the Hare quota, or the d’Hondt rule, for example – can affect the exact proportionality of the vote-to-seat translation (Lijphart 1986; Benoit 2000; Schuster et al. 2003).

The distribution of seats between parties matters, because it has second-order effects on how parties behave once in the legislature. Most notably, the number and size of parties determine whether – and what type of – coalition governments form (Laver and Schofield 1990; Laver and Shepsle 1990). And of course, the number and type of parties in government affect public policy. Hallerberg and Von Hagen (1999), Tavits (2004), and Chhibber and Nooruddin (2004), for example, all show that multi-party governments tend to engage in greater deficit spending, because coalition partners are unable to restrain each other’s spending needs to the extent that a single-party government can constrain expenditure demands among its own members.

By influencing the extent to which societal interests are mirrored in government, electoral rules can also influence what political actors *do* once they are elected into office. Carey and Shugart (1995), for instance, argue that electoral rules largely determine whether election candidates pursue strategies to maximize the *personal* vote – the competence of the individual candidate – or the *party* vote – the attractiveness of the party’s overall programmatic profile. This choice in electoral strategy affects the type of policies pursued in government. Politicians concerned with maximizing the personal vote may seek to demonstrate competence by bringing back more “political pork” in the form of public works projects, which can result in government overspending and debt (Weingast, Shepsle, and Johnsen 1981; Lizzeri and Persico 1999; Milesi-Feretti, Perotti, and Rostagno 2002). If the *party* vote matters more, however, parties will try to differentiate themselves by pursuing ideological policy programs that provide public rather than private goods. There is extensive evidence demonstrating that leftist parties – which are mostly backed by labor unions – tend to increase spending on social welfare programs and pursue unemployment-reducing policies, while rightist parties – which typically represent

investors and businesses – tend to focus on lowering inflation by *reducing* government spending (Hibbs 1977; Cameron 1984; Blais, Blake, and Dion 1993; Alt and Lowry 1994; Garrett 1995; Boix 1997).

The importance of electoral rules cannot be overstated in terms of their effects on both political representation and policy outputs. Because electoral rules create systematic biases that benefit larger parties over smaller parties or vice versa, it should *theoretically* be in the interests of political parties to alter the electoral system to win more votes and seats – their electoral “bang for the buck.” Do parties, then, actually manipulate electoral rules in a predictable fashion?

Country case studies suggest that, when rule changes *do* occur, they tend to reflect partisan preferences. The most compelling evidence comes from work on Germany (Bawn 1993), Mexico (Diaz-Cayeros and Magaloni 2001), Korea (Brady and Mo 1992), Japan (Kono 1997), and Eastern Europe (Lijphart 1992), all of which confirm that parties consistently try to make the best strategic choice available to increase their vote-seat ratio.

Cross-national work on the overall frequency of electoral rule change, on the other hand, indicates that electoral systems appear to be relatively *stable over time*. Depending on whose operationalization of “change” one uses, there were 30 to 40 major electoral rule changes in advanced industrialized democracies between 1960 and 1990 (Nohlen 1984; Lijphart 1994). Admittedly, most cross-national studies of electoral rule change preceded the 1990’s, when various countries instituted new “mixed-member” systems that combine elements of both FPTP and PR – notable examples being New Zealand, Japan, and Venezuela (Shugart and Wattenberg 2001). Even counting these recent reforms, however, electoral rules do not change as frequently

as one would expect, given the strategic benefits available to actors under different electoral frameworks.

This disconnect between expectation and reality is not easy to resolve, because, even if we know that parties *do* make strategic decisions with regard to electoral rules, the circumstances under which these rules are changed are by no means straightforward. Most notably, the actors in the position to change electoral rules – majority parties or coalitions – are in power precisely because they are the very ones who benefit most from the status quo. Cox (1997) lays out a very general framework for predicting institutional change, arguing that rule changes are likely only when: 1) the status quo is shifting against the dominant party, or 2) there is great uncertainty about the future prospects of the party. The classic Lipset and Rokkan (1967) thesis falls firmly into the first category: when the franchise was expanded in early 20th-century Europe, the logic of electoral rule choice was dictated by the entrenched conservative parties attempting to weaken challengers from the fast-rising labor parties. Boix (1999) employs statistical tests to verify this theory and shows that whether conservative parties switched the electoral system from plurality to PR depended on the expected vote share of new parties.

A growing literature on institutional choice under high levels of uncertainty supports Cox's second point. Studies have shown that, when uncertainty is extremely high – with little common knowledge about issue salience, social cleavages, or the number and size of political parties – actors tend to be risk-averse and opt for the “safe” choice of PR electoral rules, which prevents any party from suffering disproportionately large losses (Przeworski 1991; Olson 1998; Shvetsova 2003). Andrews and Jackman's (2005) refinement of Boix's (1999) empirical analysis also confirms that high levels of uncertainty in the early 20th century significantly constrained strategic institutional manipulation.

While this research on initial electoral rule *choice* corroborates the intuition that parties pick electoral systems that maximize their legislative representation, it is not clear how to extend this insight to explaining long-term electoral rule *change*. For the most part, this is a methodological problem of case selection. The existing literature tends to explore strategic behavior under unique, once-in-a-lifetime cases of post-independence or suffrage expansion when the quality of information was inherently low, and, more importantly, the historical situation *mandated* that parties pick some electoral rule. Whether parties behave similarly under more “normal” conditions is questionable, and, for the most part, has been unexplored. While uncertainty clearly affects party strategy, for example, how do incentives change when the level of uncertainty varies over time? Are parties more likely to change rules (to PR or some other type of system) when uncertainty is high, or will they only make strategic choices when vote distribution is stable and they can accurately predict how much they will benefit from electoral manipulation?

Existing theories are unable to answer these questions, because we only know what factors correlate with *successful* electoral rule change, but not what explains *non-change*. While the bias in favor of studying actual events rather than non-events is common in most disciplines, electoral rule *non-change* is far more frequent than change; as such, it is as important, if not more so, to understand the incentives and constraints *inhibiting* the manipulation of electoral institutions.

Selecting on the dependent variable (by only studying successful institutional change) is problematic, not just on a speculative level, but because it has led to erroneous theories that over-predict the frequency of large-scale electoral manipulation. While competition between parties appears to affect choices in the initial structure of electoral rules, this factor by itself

cannot explain the frequency with which electoral rules are *subsequently* changed, as there are many cases where no changes were made *even when political parties would have benefited from strategic manipulation*. Put differently, while actual cases of electoral rule change tend to help the party in power, not all such opportunities to benefit from manipulation are exploited. Indeed, if a party's parliamentary bargaining power is the primary constraint on institutional manipulation – as has been put forth most prominently by Benoit (2004) – then we should have seen frequent electoral formula changes in the Japanese case that I began this paper with. The stickiness of electoral rules cannot be explained by existing accounts, and constraints *other* than inter-party bargaining must also have been at work.

Needless to say, for electoral reform legislation to be implemented, it must get (at least) a majority of the votes in parliament. I argue, however, that, for this legislation to be even debated in parliament, a “proposer” party must first decide to place such a bill on the agenda. Accordingly, the appropriate starting point for any theory of institutional change is not inter-party conflict, but rather *intra*-party negotiations over whether electoral reform should be pursued.

Intra-party consensus is necessary for a reform bill to pass; this is because legislation is unlikely to get enacted if most members of the proposing party do not vote for it. The relevant groups within the party are the *party leader(s)*, whose goal is to maximize the aggregate party seat share in parliament, and the *rank-and-file MPs*, who care foremost about protecting their own incumbencies. While the interests of the two are not necessarily at odds – after all, the rank and file's policy-making clout will increase with the size of the party – they can clash over electoral reform. Because large-scale changes to the electoral system require district boundaries to be redrawn, seats to be reapportioned, and politicians to move to different districts, they can

actually harm the reelection chances of some MPs. As a result, reforms that benefit the party as a whole may nevertheless be vetoed by particular factions and rank-and-file members who stand to lose from electoral rule change.

As I will go on to show in the rest of this paper, the institutional history of postwar Japan indicates that the LDP was, in fact, aware of strong incentives to change the electoral system, and party leaders responded by repeatedly trying to alter the postwar SNTV formula. At each step along the way, however, rank-and-file MPs with weak electoral prospects – notably younger LDP politicians – threatened to veto any unilateral attempts at electoral reform. By examining specific cases of electoral rule change *failure*, this paper provides a unique insight into the political process of institutional change and highlights the critical role played by intra-party conflict.

CHAPTER 2

THE EVOLUTION OF THE JAPANESE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The *initial* design of electoral rules is heavily influenced by exogenous, historical exigencies that constrain the choice-set of political actors. In postwar Japan, political parties had to work within the parameters set by the Allied Occupation's General Headquarters (GHQ), which sought to replace many of the prewar elites with new political actors. But within the limits dictated by these historical conditions, political parties acted strategically to maximize parliamentary representation. Consistent with arguments by Lipset and Rokkan (1967), existing actors sought to solidify their power by limiting the competitiveness of newly mobilized political forces – primarily labor/socialist parties. While the uncertainty endemic to “first elections” made parties somewhat risk-averse (Shvetsova 2003), electoral rule choice generally followed seat-maximization principles.

Japan After World War II

Although political parties in Japan flourished in the 1920's and early 1930's, their parliamentary role diminished rapidly with the ascent of the military and the mobilization of the war effort in East Asia (Duus 1998). Prewar elections were held under an MMD-SNTV system, which had been established in 1925 as a compromise between the three primary parties of that time (Kono 1997).³ Although democratic competition was suspended in the 1930's, the party organs of two prominent parties – the Seiyukai and the Minseito – survived World War II relatively intact (Fukui 1970). These parties quickly regrouped as the Liberal and Progressive

³The Seiyukai, the primary party during this period, wanted an SMD system, while the two smaller parties – the Kenseikai and the Kakushin Club – advocated a more proportionate, MMD system. MMD-SNTV was picked as a compromise (Kono 1997).

Parties, both of which were ideologically conservative, relied on political support from large business organizations (the *zaibatsu*), and were generally pro-American (Masumi 1985). Two leftist parties also emerged – the larger Japan Socialist Party (JSP), whose support lay with the labor unions, and the smaller Japan Communist Party (JCP), an explicitly Marxist-Leninist organization. Both parties were relatively new to the Japanese parliamentary arena, as labor activists and communists had been heavily repressed (if not imprisoned) by the military during the war (Gordon 1991).

After the end of World War II, the top priority of the GHQ was to draft a new constitution that guaranteed a fully democratic system with a limited, largely ceremonial monarch. They pushed for elections to be held by 1946, so that a new parliament could ratify the constitutional document as drafted by the GHQ. Although the three main parties – Progressives, Liberals, and Socialists – had legislative authority to pick the electoral system for this first ballot, their options were restricted by the GHQ, which wanted to limit the influence of prewar elites and maximize the representation of new political actors. For this purpose, American advisors pushed for a relatively proportionate electoral system that would increase the representation of local notables who were not locked into any preexisting party network (Hellegers 2001). The GHQ was also opposed to pure PR, however, which it felt could lead to an excessive splintering of political parties. In other words, the operating constraint for Japanese parties was to pick an electoral system that was neither too proportionate nor too disproportionate.

In October 1945, Prime Minister Kijuro Shidehara proposed a “limited vote” electoral system with large-member districts, where voters would be given between one and three votes depending on the actual size of their constituencies. While this proposal was more proportionate than the prewar MMD-SNTV alternative (and thus satisfied the GHQ), the limited vote system

was also incumbent-friendly, as it required ballots to be cast for individual candidates, rather than parties. The candidate-focus made the “limited vote” system attractive to the Progressive Party, which – with 274 out of 466 seats – had the largest number of incumbents.⁴ Although the Progressives would ideally have preferred a more disproportionate, single-member district (SMD) formula, it was widely understood that the GHQ would veto this alternative as being too restrictive vis-à-vis new candidates and parties (Hellegers 2001; Kono 1997). The Socialists and the Liberals, on the other hand, both preferred a more proportionate electoral formula, but they lacked the legislative clout necessary to override the Progressives. Fearing the active intervention of the GHQ should a decision over electoral rules stall, the Cabinet – with support from the Progressives – quickly passed an electoral bill establishing large-member districts under the limited vote on December 15th.

The political landscape shifted dramatically in January 1946, however, when the Occupation purged a large number of politicians from holding public office, citing political responsibility for the Pacific War. The Progressives, in particular, were heavily gutted, with 260 of their initial 274 members being stricken from candidacy rosters (Kono 1997). The candidate-centric focus of the limited vote system, which had seemed ideal for the Progressives in 1945, led to significant losses in the 1946 election when the party – suddenly lacking established candidates – could only reclaim 110 seats. The Liberals picked up 148 seats (out of a total of 464) to become the primary party, and, while no single group held a majority, the conservative bloc (Liberals and Progressives) joined forces to control the Diet.

Once in power, the Liberals quickly pressed for a new electoral system more amenable to their interests. Their first choice was to replace the limited vote system with SMDs, which

⁴Although the Shidehara Cabinet was technically a nonpartisan government, Shidehara himself was an outspoken conservative with strong American ties who subsequently joined the Progressive Party in 1946.

would grant larger political parties a disproportionate seat bonus. Knowing that an SMD plan would be vetoed by the GHQ, however, the Liberals instead proposed the MMD-SNTV system that had been used prior to World War II. Etsujiro Uehara, who was installed as home minister in February 1947, stated:

I believe that, given the principle of establishing stable partisan politics based on a two-party system, a system of single-member districts and single-entry balloting would be most ideal. Small party fragmentation hinders the development of democracy. However, since this sort of one-step approach would be difficult, I would like at the outset to adopt a system of medium-sized districts and single-entry balloting. (Masumi 1985).

The Liberals were joined in this initiative by the Progressives, who were the second-largest party and hoped to regain their electoral losses under a more disproportionate electoral formula (Kono 1997). The Socialists and Communists, who were smaller than their conservative counterparts, predictably opposed this initiative, preferring to maintain the large-member districts that were already in place. Although the GHQ was initially opposed to changing an electoral system that had only been used once (Masumi 1985), fear of increasing Communist influence – the JCP had picked up six seats in the larger-sized districts – led the GHQ to support the Progressive-Liberal proposal for MMD-SNTV (Wada 1996). This new (or depending on one's historical view, old) system gained legislative approval in March 1947.

In that same year, the Progressive Party absorbed some minor parties and defectors from the Liberal Party to form the Democratic Party. The Democrats positioned themselves as the centrist alternative to the leftist Socialists and the conservative Liberals. For close to a decade, the three main parties – Socialists, Democrats, and Liberals – continued to split parliamentary seats without any gaining a single-party majority. The Socialists suffered a brief setback in 1951, when the party split over whether or not to support the San Francisco peace settlement ending the

U.S. Occupation.⁵ The left-wing parties reached a compromise in October 1955 to reunify under one banner, however, and the business community – fearing a rise in socialist sentiment and labor mobilization – responded by urging the conservatives to put aside their differences and counter the socialist resurgence. One month later, Japanese politics underwent what in hindsight was its most critical event: the merger of the Liberals and Democrats to form the LDP, which stayed in power continuously until 1993.

Evolving Preferences over the Electoral Formula

Between 1955 and 1993, the LDP dominated Japanese politics with a single-party majority, while the four other major parties – the JSP, the JCP, the religious Komeito, and the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) – failed to form an effective alternative to conservative hegemony. The LDP's success in the 1960's and 1970's is not so surprising, given that the Japanese economy posted double-digit GDP growth during that period, and voter satisfaction was high (Inoguchi 1982). Economic performance, however, slowed down in the 1980's, and a variety of negative externalities from growth – pollution, unequal wages, increasing land prices – as well as the illumination of various corruption scandals threatened the LDP's electoral viability (Anderson and Ishii 1997). While the LDP was quick to identify simmering social dissatisfaction and provided both public goods (e.g., cleaner air) and private goods (e.g., construction pork-barrel) to satisfy voter demands (Calder 1988; Okimoto 1989), the LDP's popularity, as

⁵The point of contention was over the Treaty's provision for the continued presence of American bases in Japan. The Left Socialists were against the treaty, while the Right Socialists voiced qualified support. For four years, the two parties both retained the mantle of the Japan Socialist Party, but operated independent of one another and supported different candidates. The Left Socialists were electorally stronger, as they had the support of the main *Sohyo* labor federation, while the Right Socialists were more centrist and had a more decentralized support base.

measured in monthly public opinion polls, dropped steadily from an average of 36.6 percent in the 1960's to 28.2 percent in the 1970's.

Various causes have been posited for the LDP's electoral success in the face of declining approval ratings. One is the high level of malapportionment, where rural areas – the LDP's traditional stronghold – had more representatives per capita than the urban regions where the opposition parties were stronger, allowing the LDP to win disproportionately more seats than votes (Christensen and Johnson 1995; Scheiner 1999). Another is that the opposition parties were not effective at coordinating candidates to prevent the excessive fragmentation of non-LDP votes, although this problem appears to have decreased from the 1980's onwards, when parties had better voter data and more electoral experience (Christensen 2000; Cox and Niou 1994). A third factor is that the MMD-SNTV electoral system prioritized the personal over the party vote, and thus tended to enhance incumbency advantage and kept dominant parties in power (Curtis 1971). The incumbency return rates for LDP candidates increased from 64 percent in the 1950's to 86 percent in the 1960's, 82 percent in the 1970's, and 90 percent in the 1980's.⁶

Even though the combination of incumbency advantage and rising malapportionment helped the LDP maintain a bare majority, party leaders repeatedly sought to gain a more permanent advantage by adopting an SMD electoral system. This was a direct response to the LDP's declining electoral margins, as the party's vote and seat shares steadily dropped from 58 percent and 62 percent, respectively, in 1958 to 37 percent and 46 percent in 1993. In the 1970's and 1980's, the LDP was split internally by factional power battles over who would assume the party leader's mantle, and some LDP dissidents left the party to form the splinter New Liberal

⁶This compares with reelection rates for incumbents from other parties of 76 percent in the 1950's, 73 percent in the 1960's, 75 percent in the 1970's, and 79 percent in the 1980's.

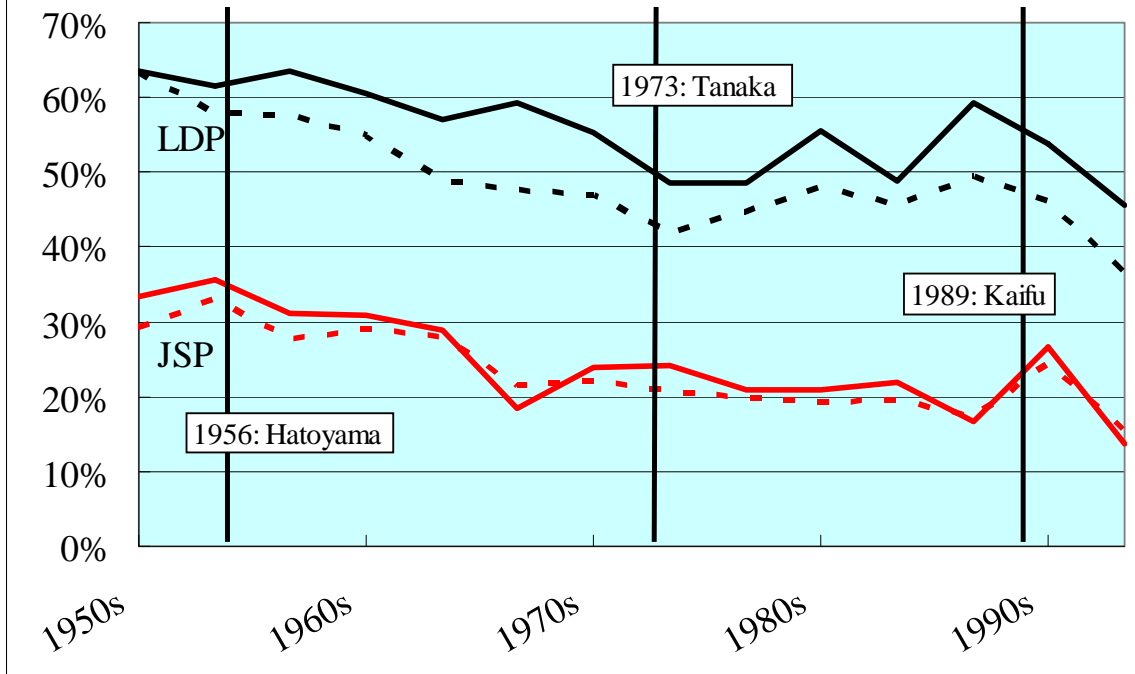
Club, which competed independently in the 1976 and 1983 elections.⁷ As the dominant party in an unbalanced, multi-party system, the LDP stood to benefit greatly from SMD electoral rules, which award large seat bonuses to the party with the highest vote share (Duverger 1954; Gallagher 1991; Reed 1991). An SMD system also would have had the added advantage of diminishing the factional infighting (Cox and Rosenbluth 1993) and high electoral costs (Cox and Thies 1998) endemic to multi-member districting, wherein LDP candidates (and their factional bosses) were forced to compete against one another in the same district.

With the looming specter of electoral defeat, the LDP leadership proposed the adoption of SMDs with plurality rules on three occasions – in 1956 under the Hatoyama Cabinet, in 1973 under the Tanaka Cabinet, and in 1989 under the Kaifu Cabinet. Figure 1 displays trends in the LDP and JSP's support between 1955 and 1993, along with the timing of the three electoral reform proposals.

⁷Despite competing independently in elections, the New Liberal Club formed parliamentary coalitions with the LDP. Members of the New Liberal Club eventually rejoined the LDP after the 1983 election.

Figure 1: Fluctuations in LDP and JSP Support

(Solid line = Seat share; Dotted line = Vote share)



CHAPTER 3

INTERNAL DISSENT WITHIN THE LDP

None of these three reform initiatives was adopted, despite strong electoral pressures to do so. I argue that these proposals stalled because of a factor frequently ignored in the comparative politics literature: *intra*-party dissent over the distributional asymmetries caused by institutional change. Specifically, when candidate vote shares are based on personalistic, geographically-specific support, an incumbent who consistently wins under the existing electoral formula or districting structure may not be as successful under new boundary delimitations (Desposato and Petrocik 2003). As such, party leaders who cannot promise reelection to a substantial number of their own MPs may face significant internal opposition to electoral rule change.

Whether this internal opposition is sufficient to block a reform bill depends on the ability of the rank and file to actually veto party proposals, which, in turn, depends on the degree of rank-and-file independence from the party leader. In party systems where the leadership controls a resource valuable to individual candidates, the rank and file may have no choice but to accept the leadership's demands. This situation arises when voters have stronger allegiances to the party than to individual candidates (making party endorsement valuable in elections), or when official candidate nominations are decided unilaterally by the party leadership (as opposed to in an open primary) (Carey and Shugart 1995). On the other hand, if candidate survival is only weakly linked to party support, individual MPs have greater flexibility to operate outside of the party leader's dictums. The bottom line is that the party will only propose changes if they believe the rank and file will accept (or can be coerced to accept), since – without support from the latter – these proposals are unlikely to secure a parliamentary majority.

Intra-party conflict *is* prevalent in the LDP – and thus crucial to its policy-making flexibility – precisely because the party leaders are weak relative to the rank and file. While some countries have been portrayed as being party-centric – Great Britain comes to mind as a prototypical party-dominant parliament – the extent to which individual candidates in Japan are independent of the party is well documented (Curtis 1971; Okimoto 1989). The primary factor explaining rank-and-file autonomy is the electoral system: the MMD-SNTV electoral formula emphasizes the personal vote more than the party vote (Carey and Shugart 1995; Cox 1997; Kono 1997). Candidates campaign based on their own credentials, often highlighting the amount of pork they can bring to their districts, rather than on the programmatic profile of the party (Curtis 1971; Ramseyer and Rosenbluth 1993; Richardson 1988). In a comparison with the United States, Germany, and Great Britain, Bawn, Cox, and Rosenbluth (1999) find that the vote share of individual Japanese candidates are least affected by overall swings in their party's popularity, suggesting an electoral decoupling between individual and party performance.

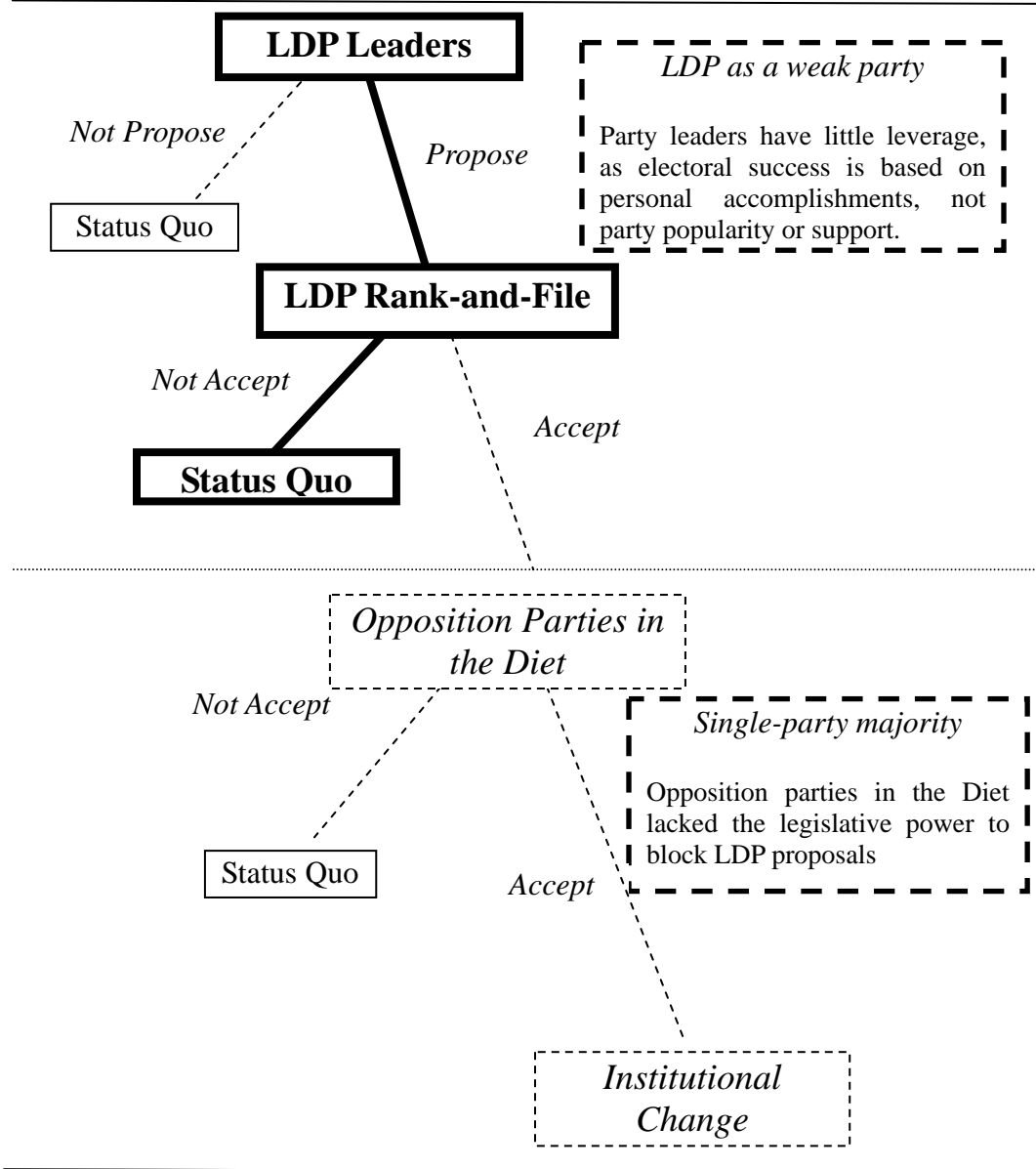
One of the hallmarks of this candidate focus is the ubiquitous *koenkai*, or personal support networks, which individual politicians develop in their own districts. Through *koenkai*, which are independent of the local party organization, politicians listen to their constituents' demands and fund private goods in the form of trips to hot springs, volleyball tournaments, and karaoke nights, to the tune of \$1 million a year per politician (Christensen 2000; Ramseyer and Rosenbluth 1993). These *koenkai* give politicians a robust electoral base on which to campaign, so that, even when MPs fall out of favor and lose the party's nomination, they can still run as independents with a good chance for reelection (Baker and Scheiner 2004; Reed 1991). The primacy of these local networks in electioneering makes electoral rule changes that entail redistricting all the more costly for incumbent MPs.

Because individual incumbents can defy the commands of the party leadership and, to some degree, survive on their own, they can credibly threaten to veto proposals initiated by the party leadership. Intra-party negotiation thus become all the more critical, and LDP leaders are constrained from initiating electoral rule changes that are likely to affect the reelection prospects of a significant portion of the rank and file (Christensen 2000). Figure 2 on the next page depicts the sequential party and parliamentary stage framework as applied to the Japanese case.

Other factors that have constrained institutional manipulation in different countries, notably opposition in parliament, have been less relevant in the Japanese case. With a parliamentary majority between 1955 and 1993, the LDP was not required to accommodate objections from other political parties in the Diet. While consensus-building was the norm, the LDP has forced legislation through the Diet unilaterally when a time-sensitive bill was on the agenda and there was no chance of getting other parties on board. Examples include the renewal of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty in 1960, the adoption of a consumption tax in 1989, and, most relevant, the switch to an MMD-SNTV system in 1994 (Calder 1988; Pempel 1998).

It should be noted that, in some countries, the national constitution explicitly specifies the electoral system, thereby raising the legislative hurdles to institutional change when compared to a simple legislative statute. The Japanese constitution is extremely lax, however, allowing electoral rules to be changed at will by a parliamentary majority. When the Occupation's GHQ was writing the new constitution in 1945, their initial draft specified the usage of an SMD

Figure 2: The Process of Institutional Change in Japan



electoral system, which many believed would foster closer ties between voters and representatives (Hellegers 2001). As discussed earlier, however, American concerns about the over-concentration of power among the incumbent prewar elites eventually led to a shift in preferences towards a more inclusive, proportional representation system. Colonel Charles Kades of the GHQ's Government Section also argued on normative grounds that electoral system provisions should be left to the Japanese people to decide rather than be stipulated in a constitution dictated by a foreign power. The final form of the Japanese constitution reflected this about-face and defined electoral rules as a statutory matter. Table 1 compares the initial and final drafts of the electoral system provisions in the Japanese constitution.⁸

Table 1: Provisions for Electoral Rules in the Japanese Constitution	
First Draft of the Committee on the Diet <i>Article 8</i>	Final Version <i>Article 47</i>
For the purpose of electing members of the Diet the state shall be divided into election districts. <i>One member shall be elected to the Diet from each such district.</i> Election districts, to be established by law, shall be composed of contiguous territory, shall not cross prefectural boundary lines, and shall be approximately equal in population. [italics added]	Electoral districts, method of voting, and other matters pertaining to the method of election of members of both Houses shall be fixed by law.

How much, then, did intra-party competition influence LDP behavior? Analyzing the extent to which internal conflict impeded institutional change is inherently difficult, as there is typically little information about events that *did not* occur (as was the case with major electoral rule change). Indeed, researchers have tended to dismiss the importance of internal dissent in general, as parties seem to vote cohesively when proposals get to a parliamentary vote. This,

⁸Information on the drafts to the constitution, as well as debates concerning the specific provisions, were taken from Hellegers (2001) and McNelly (2000).

however, is a classic case of observational equivalence: a unanimous party-line vote *may* reflect shared preferences among all members, but more likely is the manifestation of intra-party compromise, forged through side payments to potential dissidents in the form of campaign aid or patronage party positions. In essence, the *form* of the final proposal always reflects the careful internal bargaining that parties engage in; a break in the ranks is frequently not observed because party leaders prefer to shelve a contentious bill rather than subject it to a public rejection in a parliamentary floor vote.

What we *can* do, however, is study the debates that occurred between the initial proposal for electoral rule change and its final outcome – whether that be a legislative vote or withdrawal from parliamentary consideration. In the Japanese case, there were three high-profile attempts by the LDP leaders to alter the electoral formula: in 1956 under the Hatoyama Cabinet, in 1973 under the Tanaka Cabinet, and in 1989 under the Kaifu Cabinet. Only the first was put to a parliamentary vote; the latter two were withdrawn due to significant opposition within the LDP. To foreshadow the rest of this section, Table 2 outlines each proposal’s content, as well as how the LDP and JSP fared electorally before and afterwards. Consistent with LDP fears that its electoral dominance was at risk, the party generally did worse in the election *after* the proposal failed than they did before; the JSP, on the other hand, tended to do better.

Table 2: Electoral Reform Proposals in Japan (with election results for the LDP and JSP before and after)							
Proposal		<i>1956: Hatomander</i>		<i>1973: Kakumander</i>		<i>1989: Kaimander</i>	
Details		457 SMDs, 20 two-seat districts		Mixed-member majoritarian (no specifics)		Mixed-member majoritarian 300 SMDs, 170 PR	
Election Years		1955	1958	1972	1976	1986	1990
LDP	Votes	63.2%	57.8%	46.9%	41.8%	49.4%	46.1%
	Seats	63.6%	61.5%	55.2%	48.7%	59.4%	53.7%
	Seats: Votes	1.01	1.06	1.18	1.17	1.20	1.16
JSP	Votes	29.2%	32.9	21.9%	20.7%	17.2%	24.4%
	Seats	33.4%	35.6	24.0%	24.1%	16.8%	26.6%
	Seats: Votes	1.14	1.08	1.10	1.16	0.98	1.09

The first serious electoral reform initiative was Prime Minister Ichiro Hatoyama's proposal in 1956 to adopt a (primarily) SMD system. While the unification of the Liberals and Democrats in 1955 created a super-party controlling 64 percent of the legislature, Hatoyama wanted the LDP to win two-thirds of the Diet's seats so that the party could amend the constitution to strike the Article 9 "Peace Clause," which prohibits the country from having a standing army (Kono 1997). In 1956, under the auspices of the Prime Minister's Office, Hatoyama formed the Electoral System Research Council (*Senkyo-seido Chosa-kai*), which recommended a plan for a pure SMD system with 495 districts. Facing opposition from some rank-and-file MPs, a special sub-committee of the LDP altered the plan slightly to create two-seat districts in regions where the party's support was weak, so that LDP candidates could win at least one of the two available seats. In March 1956, the cabinet submitted an Electoral

Reform Law to the Diet, calling for 457 SMDs and 20 two-member districts, for a total of 497 Diet seats.

The Socialists responded quickly, arguing that the proposed district boundaries were biased in favor of LDP incumbents, and, more importantly, that the LDP had willfully manipulated the more neutral plan submitted by the Electoral System Research Council by creating two-seat districts. At the same time, there was ambivalence within the LDP about the actual efficacy of reform. The Liberals and Democrats had just recently merged into one party, and there were significant doubts about how popular the party would be in the future, as well as about the ability of the two former opponents to coordinate same-district candidates in the next election (Reed and Thies 2001a). The party itself was barely unified, and factional power battles over the leadership and direction of the LDP – impelled by the poor health of Hatoyama himself – prompted the *Asahi Shimbun* to run a series of articles on the “Crisis of the Conservative Party” (*Asahi*, 6-8 April 1956).

Widely denigrated as “Hatomander”⁹ by its critics, this was the only time in post-war Japanese history that an SMD redistricting plan was publicly announced. A riot nearly erupted on the Diet floor when the LDP tried to force the bill through the Lower House, and the proposal was ultimately abandoned in the House of Councillors (the Upper House) in June 1956. In the subsequent 1958 election, the LDP still managed to win a safe majority of 62 percent, but this proved insufficient to alter Article 9 of the constitution.

Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka’s 1973 initiative to adopt a mixed-member majoritarian electoral system (MMM) – dubbed “Kakumander” – presents a more striking example of the

⁹Named after the more popularly known American term “gerrymander,” derived from when Eldridge Gerry, governor of Massachusetts between 1810 and 1812, drew up electoral districts resembling salamanders in order to maximize his party’s seat share (Cox and Katz 2002).

effects of intra-party conflict. An MMM system, which has separate SMD and PR tiers with voters casting ballots in both, had first been proposed by the non-partisan Electoral Reform Deliberation Council (1970-71).¹⁰ The council believed that a PR system would reduce the personalistic electoral competition endemic to SNTV, and, thus, ultimately diminish the corruption and bribery that had been rising during the 1960's (*Jichisho* 1980). Following significant losses to the JSP in the December 1972 election, when the LDP's seats decreased from 288 to 271, Tanaka seized on the Deliberation Council's proposal as a way to secure a safe majority for the party. In a press conference on December 25th, Tanaka publicly announced his support for an SMD system and subsequently established a Boundary Delimitation Committee under the auspices of the Prime Minister's Office. In March 1973, the LDP's own Electoral System Research Council put together a comprehensive reform plan, and, in April, Tanaka indicated that he would send an MMM electoral reform bill to the Diet within a month.

Simulations by newspapers at the time showed that the LDP would have made significant gains under a mixed-member system. One model showed that the LDP would have increased its share of House seats from 55.2 percent to 78.9 percent under MMM. Even more significantly, had the LDP been able to push through an SMD system, it was predicted that it would secure as much as 89 percent of the seats in the Diet, with minor parties only winning a total of nine seats (Hrebenar 1986).

The opposition parties immediately took to the streets (literally), disparaging the plan as "Kakumander" and accusing the LDP of circumventing the will of the people. On May 11th, the JSP, JCP, and Komeito publicly committed themselves to stifle any debate on the measure and

¹⁰The nonpartisan Electoral System *Deliberation* Council (*Senkyo-Seido Shingi-Kai*), which was comprised of some politicians but mainly of public thinkers and academics, is not to be confused with the LDP's Electoral System *Research* Council, an in-house subcommittee with definitely partisan motives.

threatened to block all 100 government bills that the LDP hoped to present during that Diet session. The three parties also began to distribute pamphlets criticizing the reform plan, and, on May 15th, orchestrated public demonstrations in 565 locations with a total of 320,000 protestors (*Asahi Chronicle* 2000).

More threatening to Tanaka and the LDP leadership, however, was internal dissent from their backbenchers. Faction leaders feared that even the *submission* of a redistricting plan would create confusion and in-fighting among those who stood to lose their seats, and the bill was withdrawn before it even reached the Diet floor. Tadao Kuraishi, head of the LDP's policy council, criticized Tanaka's forceful pursuit of SMDs as an action equivalent to "crossing the river and burning down the bridge" (*Asahi* 15 February 1989). Ryugen Hosokawa, a famed political critic who was appointed to the Boundary Delimitation Committee by Prime Minister Tanaka, later lamented:

I agreed to become a committee member because the Prime Minister promised to put his life on the line to implement these changes. However, a subordinate came during the meetings and asked this time to destroy the delimitation plan. He said that if a delimitation plan crystallized, there would be significant upheaval within the LDP. In the end, the committee was only a fleeting vision. Both the government and opposition parties are only interested in their own electoral fortunes. Electoral system reform would only be possible under a dictator. (*Asahi* 9 March 1989; translation by the author).

On May 10th, 1973, the LDP – upon request from the speakers of the Lower and Upper Houses – agreed to pull the bill from consideration during that Diet session. The party leaders did not immediately abandon their project, however, as the LDP included the adoption of SMDs in its 1976 electoral platform. The arrest of Prime Minister Tanaka in 1977 over a scandal involving kickbacks from an American airplane manufacturer (the "Lockheed Scandal"), however, made electoral reform a secondary concern, and the proposal was quietly dropped.

The final act in the LDP's quest for electoral system change began in 1988-89, on the heels of another major scandal and rising political mistrust.¹¹ In November 1988, Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita reconvened the non-partisan Electoral System Deliberation Council, which had been in hibernation since Tanaka's heyday in 1971, to develop recommendations for electoral reform. While Takeshita resigned shortly thereafter, when his own role in the recent scandals came to light, the reform initiative was passed on to the new prime minister, Toshiki Kaifu. Kaifu had the backing of Ichiro Ozawa, an LDP kingmaker, who believed that a two-party system, based primarily on SMDs, would make politics cleaner and more policy-oriented (Christensen 2000; Ozawa 1994).¹² Although this Deliberation Council was supposed to be independent, its proposals substantially favored the LDP, which had tried to influence the Council by making public comments in support of a larger share of SMDs. Not only did its official recommendation for an MMM system echo suggestions of the LDP's own internal committee, but the council succumbed to LDP pressure and drafted a boundary plan that heavily biased the value of the vote in favor of rural districts – the party's traditional support base.¹³ In April of 1990, the Deliberation Council formally recommended an MMM system, comprised of 501 seats with a 6:4 SMD:PR ratio.

¹¹Many politicians and bureaucrats were indicted in 1988 for accepting company stocks from Recruit Cosmos, a human resources firm, at pre-flotation prices and cashing in when prices soared after the IPO.

¹²While Ozawa failed to push through reform in 1989, he was a key precipitator of electoral rule change in 1993, when his faction left the LDP to support the opposition parties.

¹³As a matter of fact, the Deliberation Council – knowing that constituency delimitations were a profoundly sensitive political process – initially stated that it would not involve itself in drawing up the boundaries. The LDP charged the council with this task, however, because the party leaders knew that they would be unable to resolve the conflicting demands made on them by various factions. Giving the job to an external body provided the LDP with a useful scapegoat in case of internal opposition. The Deliberation Council was ultimately unable to keep malapportionment below the normatively accepted 1:2 level, as the LDP pressured the body to consider factors other than population, such as regional identity. The LDP's rule-of-thumb was to first distribute one seat to each prefecture regardless of population, and then allocate seats to prefectures proportionately (so that even the least-populated districts got at least two seats).

The opposition parties attacked the new proposal, accusing the LDP of blatant institutional manipulation, which contravened the “spirit of democracy” (*Asahi* 20 October 1989). They argued that, while electoral reform was viable in the long run, the LDP was covertly trying to push through partisan institutional change under the guise of eliminating corruption. Komeito Chairman Koshiro Ishida argued that the LDP was engaging in a bait-and-switch by pushing electoral reform without fixing the bigger problem of malapportionment. Vice Chairman Katsu Kawamura of the DSP accused the LDP of simply trying to deflect attention and criticism from the prevailing “Recruit Scandal,” which had already cost the LDP two prime ministers and an Upper House majority (Reed and Thies 2001a).

These accusations were not without merit: an *Asahi Shimbun* simulation indicated that, under the proposed plan, the LDP stood to win up to 375 seats – an impressive 75 percent of the total – compared to the 59 percent that the party held at the time. In contrast, the adoption of a mixed-member proportional (MMP) system,¹⁴ which tends to benefit smaller parties and was also on the agenda, would have produced only 193 seats for the ruling party (*Asahi* 28 April 1990).

In November 1990, the LDP’s Electoral Reform Research Council proposed a modified MMP version of the original plan. The number of seats was reduced to 471 (300 SMD and 171 PR), and, instead of having 11 regional blocs, the PR portion was collapsed into one nation-wide district. Perhaps most importantly, voters were given only one vote to cast for an SMD candidate, rather than being given two separate votes for the SMD and PR tiers. The shift from MMM to MMP, which was less beneficial to the LDP, reflected the increased clout of the opposition

¹⁴Mixed-member *proportional* systems have linked tiers, in which voters are given one vote to cast in the SMD portion, but the total seat share of a party is determined by summing the SMD votes and then distributing proportionately. Mixed-member *majoritarian* systems, in contrast, have completely unlinked tiers where voters get one ballot each for SMD and PR candidates.

parties, which controlled the Upper House starting in 1990 and, thus, had greater influence over the legislative agenda (Reed and Thies 2001a).

Unable to mollify the opposition parties with this concession, however, the LDP in the end returned to the MMM plan (with a vote each for the SMD and PR tiers), with one national PR district and a 300:170 SMD-to-PR ratio. This bill, submitted to the Diet in August 1991, was the first redistricting bill submitted to a legislative vote since the “Hatomander” proposal 35 years earlier. The JSP, JCP, and DSP kept up the pressure in defense of the status quo MMD system, while the Komeito argued for a return to the MMP alternative; all of the opposition parties agreed, however, that reapportionment should precede any discussion of comprehensive electoral system change.

While opposition dissent complicated the passage of the bill, the ultimate veto to Kaifu’s MMM plan – named “Kaimander” – came from the LDP’s own rank and file. The most contentious issue was the creation of new SMDs, which required a significant reapportionment of seats and drew the ire of LDP incumbents. MP Yoshinobu Shimamura from the Watanabe faction pointed out that, if the existing MMDs were split into *single*-member districts, some incumbents would have to move to a different district altogether. He stated that: “Leaving your district means death. There are those who strongly state that they will never leave their district, and will run as independents if necessary” (*Asahi* 7 September 1991; translation by the author). This resonated with another popular quote: “Rains of blood will fall if districts are tampered with” (*Gikai Seido Kenkyu-kai* 1991).

The primary axis of conflict was between senior party members, who were electorally secure, and young backbenchers, who had weaker *koenkai* and were less likely to survive in new electoral districts. Tsutomu Hata, a future LDP president and the point-man for the Kaimander

plan, argued that the existing SNTV system needed to be abandoned if only to reduce rapidly rising malapportionment, which could no longer be contained while keeping district magnitude within the accepted range of three to five. The rank-and-file MPs, however, voiced strong opposition. One of the “rebel” leaders, Junichiro Koizumi, argued that reapportionment should precede any major changes, because SMDs were not “temperamentally suited to the Japanese people” (*Asahi*, 12 September 1991). Koizumi’s group (*Seiji Kaikaku Giin Renmei*) claimed that, based on their own internal survey, 48 out of 97 MPs wanted to keep the existing SNTV system. Public opinion was also not in the leadership’s favor, as a series of polls showed that more than 70 percent of the voters either disapproved of, were indifferent to, or professed ignorance about reform (Reed and Thies 2001a). The Kaimander attempt ended in September 1991, when the bill was withdrawn from the Diet and Prime Minister Kaifu resigned.

The irony of the Kaimander case is that a virtually identical MMM plan was ultimately adopted in 1994, after the LDP had lost its first election in 38 years. The central issue in the preceding 1993 election was electoral system reform, driven by the emerging public consensus that political corruption was directly attributable to the SNTV system. Backing into a corner, LDP leaders had no choice other than to put forth proposals of their own, but they dragged their feet and advocated either minimal change or reforms that were disproportionately tilted in the LDP’s favor (Reed and Thies 2001a). While this minimalist approach allowed the LDP to assuage intra-party critics who had opposed reform in previous episodes, it led to massive defections by electorally insecure, junior backbenchers and ideologically driven, senior politicians who sought to capitalize on the LDP’s hesitance and stake their claims as political reformers (Reed and Scheiner 2003). The lesson, perhaps, is that party leaders cannot satisfy

everybody all the time and that this Catch-22 can be critical for parties with weak internal discipline.

To recap, the remarkable feature of these three episodes of failure of institutional change was that the LDP leadership was unable to forge a consensus *even when the adoption of a new system would have substantially improved the aggregate strength of the party*. Because many districts were affected by the proposed change, weaker politicians with tenuous support bases refused to support the party leaders and ultimately forced the party to abandon the reforms. As I have already argued, the longevity of the SNTV electoral formula in Japan was determined largely by divisions *within* the party over the distributional asymmetries from change, rather than by strategic calculations with regard to *other parties*, as the existing literature tends to assume.

CONCLUSION

Formal institutions structure the intensity and character of political competition. They determine who gets into government, which viewpoints are represented in policy debates, and how diverse ideas are aggregated into legislation. Institutions are not all alike, however, and different formal rules grant power in different amounts to different actors and priorities. Importantly, because these institutions are not set in stone, they are subject to alteration by those who would benefit from an alternate framework. Electoral rules, which have a direct effect on the parliamentary representation of political parties, are particularly vulnerable to partisan manipulation. As Sartori (1968) once wrote: “[Electoral rules] are the most specific manipulative instrument of politics.”

In this paper, I have discussed how *internal conflict* can constrain parties from implementing their legislative priorities, even when they have a parliamentary majority. Intra-party dissension is caused by the distributional asymmetries from large-scale change, as the redrawing of district boundaries and the reallocation of seats can make some incumbents more vulnerable in the next election. Party leaders can still enforce a party-line vote when they have effective mechanisms to control the rank and file, such as valuable party endorsements or campaign money. When they lack these resources, however, initiatives for electoral rule change can be vetoed internally. In Japan, the LDP was unable to replace the traditional MMD-SNTV system with a more beneficial SMD or mixed-member formula, because the party leaders lacked effective control over individual MPs and their faction bosses.

This is not to say, though, that electoral rules never change. As even most casual observers are aware, the Japanese electoral formula was altered in 1994 from MMD-SNTV to a mixed-member system combining SMD and PR districts. This incident followed a watershed

moment in Japanese politics, when defection by the Ozawa faction in 1993 led to a no-confidence vote that ousted the LDP cabinet. The focal point of the subsequent Lower House election was electoral reform. Opposition parties argued that the MMD-SNTV system needed to be replaced because it created incentives to overspend on pork-barrel projects. The debates and negotiations during this period are better discussed in excellent essays by Reed and Thies (2001a) and Ray Christensen (2000). In the subsequent Lower House election, the LDP was unable to recapture a majority, and an eight-party coalition of former opposition parties formed a government under Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa. While this new coalition government lasted less than a year, it succeeded in implementing its electoral mandate – namely switching the electoral system. In fact, there are numerous incidences from other countries – notably Italy and New Zealand – in which the electoral system was altered due to public opposition against the incentives generated by the status quo framework.

Ultimately, however, the 1994 electoral reform of Japan was not a case of institutional manipulation *per se*, but rather of concession to public pressure. Manipulation implies a purposeful attempt by political actors to subvert an outcome preferred by the public to one that is more consistent with partisan goals. The three cases of electoral reform failure by the LDP satisfy this criterion of partisan institutional manipulation, as there was no significant public pressure forcing all politicians to accept the need for institutional change. I believe that these low-leverage situations are precisely the scenarios under which intra-party conflict can play a critical inhibiting role. Although intra-party politics, particularly in the context of LDP factionalism, have been discussed in most studies of Japanese politics, the subject has never been explored in the context of electoral rule change. We would also do well to remember that intra-party politics are not only a hallmark of the Japanese approach, but can be found in most

other political systems as well – think, for example, of the conflict between social vs. fiscal conservatives in the Republican Party in the United States.

This paper has introduced the often-acknowledged – but frequently underestimated – theoretical and empirical role of intra-party dynamics. It has also demonstrated how examining non-events, particularly when actors do not behave in predictable ways, can give us valuable insight regarding the interplay of power at a more subcutaneous political level. I hope that the historical narrative and theoretical framework explored here can provide new avenues for future research on electoral rule change.

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