

POLITICS OF REGIME CHANGE UNDER THE ONE-PARTY DOMINANT RULE IN JAPAN: LESSONS FROM THE RISE AND FALL OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF JAPAN

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide a comprehensive review of the social and political background concerning the rise and fall of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). Japan has been ruled by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) since 1955. The DPJ won a landslide victory in the 2009 general election and ended the LDP's one-party dominance regime. Most Japanese had high expectations of the DPJ's new leadership as shown in Hatoyama's Cabinet approval rate of over 70% in September 2009. The DPJ's rule, however, created confusion and disappointed many Japanese. The 2012 general election brought the LDP back to be the ruling party. On the other hand, the DPJ fell into its worst crisis since its foundation in 1998.

A few important questions arise: How could the LDP stay in power with the dominant one-party regime for more than 50 years? What factor did the DPJ bring to the ruling party in the 2009 election? Why did the DPJ fail to retain its power as the government in the 2012 general election? Based on the above questions, this paper reviews recent literature about the Japanese regime change in 2009 and discovers some implications for the future studies on the dominance of single-party regime. One of the similarities between Japanese and Malaysian politics is the dominance of single-party regime, which has survived or will survive for a long time. Like the LDP in Japan, the Malaysian dominant party United Malays National Organization (UMNO) holds hegemony within the ruling coalition Barisan Nasional (BN). The BN has been the ruling coalition in Malaysia since 1974. This research is a preliminary study of the comparison between two dominant parties in Japan and Malaysia.

In the first part, I clarify the reasons why the government led by LDP could stay in power for more than 50 years with the exception of a short period between 1993 and 1994. In the second part, I define the characteristics of the organization of the DPJ and explore how this party could form a government. In the last part, I refer to the common characteristics between Japan and Malaysia and list recommendations for future research topics on dominant single-party regimes.

The Secret of a Long Rule

What system has made the LDP's long rule possible? Recent literature suggests the importance of clientelism. Kitschelt and Wilkinson define clientelism using three components: contingent direct exchange, predictability, and monitoring.¹ First, the

¹ Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I Wilkinson, "Citizen-Politician Linkages: An Introduction", 2007 in Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson eds. *Patrons, Clients, and Politics: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*, New York, Cambridge University Press, pp 1-49.

exchange between principal and agent is contingent and direct. It concerns goods from which non-participants in the exchange can be excluded. Second, such exchange becomes viable from the perspective of politicians, if voter constituencies respond in a predictable fashion to clientelistic inducements without excessive opportunism and free riding. Third, short of constituencies' spontaneous and voluntary compliance with the clientelistic deal, politicians can invest in organizational structures to monitor and enforce clientelistic exchanges.² Two recent notable studies by Scheiner and Saito explain the LDP's dominance through clientelism.³

The puzzling thing about Japanese politics was that the opposition kept failing to take over the government although the LDP was suffering from unpopularity among the Japanese due to inefficient economic management and perpetual corruption since the 1990s. Scheiner explains the reasons for the opposition's failure using three factors: a combination of clientelism, fiscal centralization, and institutional protection for the principal beneficiaries of the clientelist system.⁴

Party competition in democracies usually assumes competition based on a programmatic system, where politicians pursue policy programs that distribute benefits and costs to all citizens, regardless of whether they voted for the government of the day or not. However, Japanese party competition, same as that of Italy and of Australia, is based on the clientelistic system, which creates direct and personal bonds, usually through material side payments between politicians and citizens.⁵

However, the clientelistic party system alone cannot make the LDP's long dominance possible. Under fiscal centralization in Japan, the important decisions regarding local policies are decided at the central government level. Meanwhile, access to the budget of the central government enables LDP politicians to dispense favors or pork barrel to win the support in the local constituencies; hence, the opposition politicians are unable to garner strong support at the local level. In addition to the fiscal centralization, institutional protection for the principal beneficiaries of the clientelist system like the bigger apportionment of seats to rural areas also contributed to the LDP's long dominance.

Saito also finds clientelism in LDP's politics.⁶ He applies the concept of "perverse accountability," which was originally used for the analysis of political machines or clientelist parties in Argentina by Stokes, to the LDP's politics.⁷ Under competitive democracy, politicians are assumed to have fulfilled the accountability to voters in order to come back into office. However, the voters had no real choice except the LDP,

2 Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I Wilkinson, "Citizen-Politician Linkages: An Introduction", 2007 in Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson eds. *Patrons, Clients, and Politics: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*, New York, Cambridge University Press, pp 9-10.

3 Ethan Scheiner, *Democracy Without Competition in Japan: Opposition Failure in a One-Party Dominant State*, New York, Cambridge University Press. 2006; 齊藤淳『自民党長期政権の政治経済学—利益誘導政治の自己矛盾』勁草書房、2010年。

4 Ethan Scheiner, *Democracy Without Competition in Japan: Opposition Failure in a One-Party Dominant State*, 2006

5 Herbert Kitschelt, "Linkages between Citizens and Politicians in Democratic Polities." *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 6/7, 2000, pp. 845-879; Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I Wilkinson, "Citizen-Politician Linkages: An Introduction", pp 1-49.

6 齊藤淳『自民党長期政権の政治経済学—利益誘導政治の自己矛盾』勁草書房、2010年。

7 齊藤淳『自民党長期政権の政治経済学—利益誘導政治の自己矛盾』勁草書房、2010年; Susan C. Stokes, "Perverse Accountability: A Formal Model of Machine Politics with Evidence from Argentina," *APSR* 99, 2005, pp 315-26.

in the national level election until the late 2000s. On the assumption of the lack of a government change, the voters who demand pork barrel at the local level are forced to compete against one another and to show their loyalty to LDP politicians. The accountability under the LDP dominance functions in the opposite direction against the assumption of democratic competition. Because of clientelism and fiscal centralization, the opposition parties suffer from weak local foundations at the local level. Due to the weak local foundations of the opposition fronts, it is harder to recruit promising new candidates at the local level.

Who are the main supporters of the clientelistic LDP politics? Rosenbluth and Thies define the “iron and rice” coalition as the strong supporters of the LDP.⁸ This is similar to Bismarck’s “steel and rye” coalition in the nineteenth-century Germany. With the “iron and rice” coalition backing the LDP, the heavy industry businessmen provided money for campaigns during the election period and farmers turned out in large numbers to vote in favor of the political party.⁹ In return for their financial contribution to the LDP for political campaigning, the heavy industry corporations received some rent and protection against international competition for many years. Farmers also benefited as the LDP-led government imposed a high tariff on imported agricultural products.

The Rise and Fall of the DPJ

Changes in the 1990s

Until the end of the 1980s, the LDP’s dominance seemed sustainable. However, the LDP’s dominance based on clientelism was challenged in the 1990s by three new elements: electoral reform, decentralization reform, and socioeconomic changes.¹⁰ In this paper, I look at these factors briefly.

Electoral reform was implemented in 1994. Japanese postwar Lower House election was carried out with the Single Nontransferable Vote in Multimember Districts (SNTV/MMD) from 1947 to 1993. Under the SNTV/MMD, candidates in the Lower House election often had to fight with the members of the same party in the same constituency. Candidates in the same party could not differentiate themselves from the policies.

The “solution” to this dilemma was personalism. Candidates focused to some degree on “home turf” neighborhoods, and campaigned on promises (and, for incumbents, track records) of pork and patronage. They would compete to provide favors to constituents, to direct pork-barrel spending from national budget, and to provide all manners of constituency service.¹¹ SNTV/MMD, however, was changed into Single Member District (SMD) in 1994. Since its introduction, SMD has changed the electoral strategies gradually. The old personalistic appeals to dispense pork barrels

⁸ Frances McCall Rosenbluth and Michael. F. Thies, *Japan Transformed: Political Change and Economic Restructuring*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2010.

⁹ Frances McCall Rosenbluth and Michael. F. Thies, *Japan Transformed: Political Change and Economic Restructuring*, 2010.

¹⁰ Frances McCall Rosenbluth and Michael. F. Thies, *Japan Transformed: Political Change and Economic Restructuring*, 2010.; 齊藤淳『自民党長期政権の政治経済学—利益誘導政治の自己矛盾』勁草書房、2010年; 砂原庸介「政権交代と利益誘導政治」御厨貴編『「政治主導」の教訓—政権交代は何をもたらしたのか』勁草書房、2012年。

¹¹ Frances McCall Rosenbluth and Michael. F. Thies, *Japan Transformed: Political Change and Economic Restructuring*, Princeton, 2010, p 55.

and patronages are replaced with programmatic party competition on national and foreign policy issues.

Since the First Phase of Decentralization Reform (1995–2001), the transfer of power from the central government to the governors of each respective prefecture was implemented. The discretionary subsidies from the central government were gradually eliminated in the 1990s. Decentralization reforms since the 1990s weakened the fiscal centralization that supported clientelism. The decentralization reforms resulted in the following for the Lower House elections between 2000 and 2012. (see Table 1 and Graph 1).

There are two socioeconomic changes to be considered. The first socioeconomic change is urbanization and demographic transformation. Japan's spectacular economic growth after World War II caused large migrations from rural to urban areas. A largely rural nation of farmers and small-time shopkeepers became one of urban workers. The number of non-party affiliated voters increased in the urban areas. LDP's clientelistic control based on the monitoring of voters in rural areas gradually lost its effectiveness.

The second socioeconomic change is economic stagnation since the 1990s. The bursting of the economic bubble and the prolonged stagnation of the Japanese economy reduced the resources available to be distributed to the local clients. From the beginning of the Koizumi administration, the reduction in public works started and the national subsidies to the local government were eliminated. For all of these three reasons, clientelistic linkages between the LDP and voters became weak.

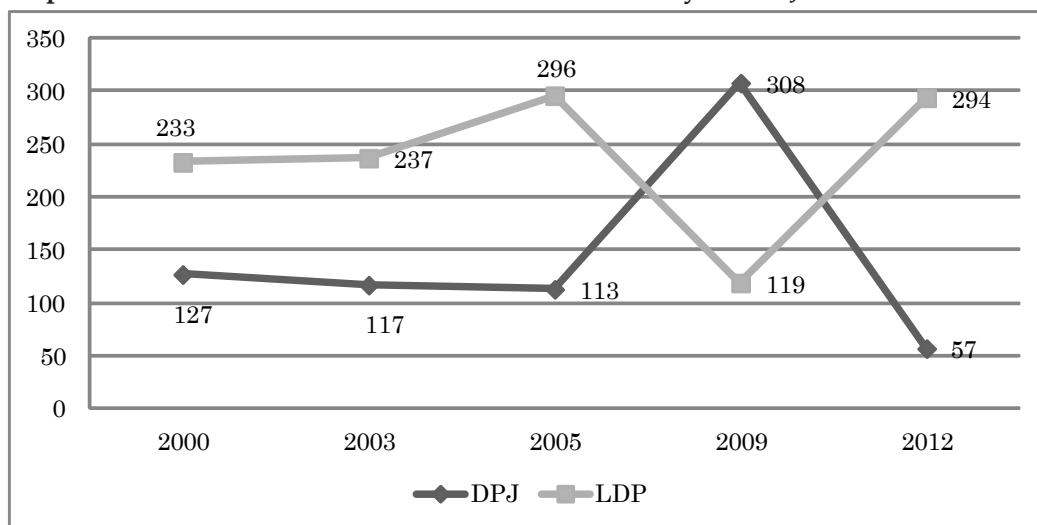
Table1: Results of the Lower House Elections from 2005 to 2012

	2005	2009	2012
<i>DPJ related parties</i>			
DPJ	113	308	57
SDP	7	7	2
PNP	4	3	1
NPN	1	1	0
NPD	1	1	1
TPJ	—	—	9
<i>LDP related parties</i>			
LDP	296	119	294
New Komeito	31	21	31
NRP	—	0	0
JRP	—	—	54
JCP	9	9	8
Your Party	—	5	18
others	0	0	0
Independent	18	6	5
Total	480	480	480

Source: 朝日新聞 and 読売新聞

Abbreviations: Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), Social Democratic Party (SDP), People's New Party (PNP), New Party Nippon (PNP), New Party DAICHI (NPD), Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), New Renaissance Party (NRP), Japanese Communist Party (JCP), Tomorrow Party of Japan (TPJ), Japan Restoration Party (JRP)

Graph 1: The Number of Lower House Seats obtained by the DPJ and LDP



Source: 朝日新聞 and 読売新聞

The DPJ and the Introduction of the Election Manifesto

The DPJ was formed in 1998 by four opposition parties. In 2003, the DPJ merged with the Liberal Party and became the main competitor against the LDP. The merger of the DPJ with other opposition parties was facilitated by the SMD, which was anticipated to create a two-party system. It is undeniable that this rapid development of the DPJ transformed its organization into a motley collection of politicians from different parties.¹² In addition to that, the DPJ had a weaker organizational base than the LDP. The number of party members in all Japanese political parties gradually decreased since the 1990s. However, the LDP managed to secure 1.1 million party members in 2007, while the DPJ had only 40 thousand members. Only the LDP could collect donations from companies and other organizations, for over 2 billion yen (中北 2013; 読売新聞 2008年12月31日). DPJ can be described as a “resource-restricted” party (「資源制約型政党」). We can point out that this huge disparity of resources between the LDP and other parties had made change of government difficult.

The question then is how the resource-restricted DPJ seized power in the 2009 general election. The secret of DPJ's success was the “manifesto” approach. The DPJ adopted the manifesto approach since the 2003 general election. The DPJ's manifesto approach was based on policy programs that appealed to urban voters who criticized pork barrel spending in rural areas. The concept of the DPJ's manifesto as symbolized by the slogan “From Concrete to People (「コンクリートから人へ」)” defined the

¹² 新谷卓「マニフェストと民主党」藤本一美編『民主党政権論』学文社、2012年、168-169頁。

beneficiaries of the policies to all citizens, regardless of whether they voted for the government of the day or not.

One of the DPJ's leading policies was the introduction of "child allowance (子ども手当)", which was paid to people who were bringing up children residing in Japan, aged up to 15 years. As a general rule, child allowance covered all people who were bringing up children residing in Japan, regardless of their family incomes and nationalities. While the LDP's clientelistic approach faced serious challenges, the DPJ's manifesto approach met the needs of the changes of the 1990s.

Why did the DPJ fail?

Why was DPJ unable to retain its position as government in the 2012 general election? The DPJ suffered a crushing defeat not only in the 2012 general election, but also in the Upper House election of 2013. As I explained earlier, the DPJ's organizational base was weak right from the beginning. Therefore, the DPJ attempted to fill the resource gap with the manifesto approach. However, there were serious problems with the DPJ's manifesto formulating process. The DPJ's manifesto approach was modeled after the Labor Party's approach in the United Kingdom. The manifesto formulating process of the Labor Party was open to the public, and rank-and-file members of the party could join the formulating process.¹³ On the other hand, the DPJ's manifesto formulating process was closed to the public; only a few Diet members and the party leadership secretly formulated the manifesto to avoid the LDP's catch-up of the policies. After forming the government, the DPJ admitted the manifesto formulating process was devoid of sufficient consideration and deliberation, out of necessity and feasibility of policies.¹⁴ The DPJ's top-down manifesto formulating process made the party governance vulnerable and reduced the feasibility of policies after they came into power.

Another important question is why the DPJ was unable to consolidate its organizational base during the ruling party days. In other words, why was DPJ unable to transform the party organization into a clientelistic one like LDP? The reason is simple: the state resources accessible to the DPJ had almost run out before the DPJ formed its government. When the DPJ took power of government, Japan was already suffering from serious cumulative debts incurred by both the central and local governments. Hence, the DPJ government did not have much room for policy choices from the beginning because of these debts. Globalization also narrowed the range of policy choices for the DPJ government. The diffusion of the neoliberal policy deprived the government of chances to intervene in the market. Hiwatari found that international capital movement forced the government to adopt the disinflation policy during the depression period.¹⁵

As described above, the DPJ failed to transform itself to neither the programmatic party, which is based on the manifesto approach, nor the clientelistic party, which uses the state's financial resources. This failure of the DPJ led to its defeat in the 2012 general election and the Upper House election of 2013.

¹³ 阪野智一「イギリスにおける政党組織の変容—党組織改革と人民投票的政党化への動き」『国際文化研究』16号、2001年、39-40頁。

¹⁴ 民主党マニフェスト検証委員会『マニフェストの中間検証』民主党、2011年 (<http://www.dpj.or.jp/article/100252>)。

¹⁵ 樋渡展洋「小泉改革の条件—政策連合の弛緩と政策過程の変容」『レヴァイアサン』39号、2006年、100-144頁。

Lessons from Japanese Experiences for Malaysia

What can we learn from the experiences of the rise and fall of the DPJ? What are the similarities between Japanese politics and Malaysian politics? The Malaysian regime has been categorized as electoral authoritarianism or competitive authoritarianism by political scientists.¹⁶ The most important factor for competitive authoritarianism is the unfair resource gap between the incumbent and the opposition. This “resource gap theory” is useful to explain the longtime rule and downfall of competitive authoritarianism.

In Mexico, the monopolistic control of money and human resources has become the basis of longtime rule by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional: PRI). However, resources that have been transferred from the state to the PRI were reduced after the privatization started in the 1980s, and the PRI faced strong opposition on a more level playing field.¹⁷

Although Japan has not been categorized as competitive authoritarianism, the resource gap theory can apply to the Japanese case. The ruling parties in Japan and Mexico had developed a strong clientelistic system that distributed patronages or favors in exchange for support. Meanwhile, the opposition parties typically had the character of the “resource-restricted party.” This resource gap was the main reason why the ruling parties in Japan and Mexico could stay in power for such a long time. In addition to that, fiscal centralization enhanced the clientelistic system in Japan.

However, electoral reform in 1994, the decentralization reform, and socioeconomic changes, including urbanization and economic stagnation since the 1990s gradually eroded the basis of the clientelistic system in Japan. The DPJ took the manifesto approach to make up for its organizational weakness as a resource-restricted party. The DPJ’s new approach matched the trend since the 1990s and became the driving force to form the government.

After the DPJ succeeded in forming the government, it suffered internal conflicts among its members. This problem finally caused it to lose its grip on the government in the next election. Another reason why DPJ could not stay in power was its wrong approach in the formulating process of the manifesto. The DPJ’s manifesto formulating process was closed to the public and only a few Diet members and the party leadership secretly came up with the manifesto.

If we examine Malaysian politics, the BN has formed the government since the 1970s. However, Malaysia also experienced rapid socioeconomic changes as seen in Japan. The urbanization rate is now over 70% and the lifestyle of the middle class is increasingly becoming dominant in city areas. The opposition parties now rule state governments in urban areas and are becoming more powerful at national level. From the experiences of a one-party dominant regime such as Japan and Mexico, we know

¹⁶ Schedler, Andreas (ed), *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006 ; Steven Levitsky, Steven and Lucan A., *Way, Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

¹⁷ Kenneth F. Greene, *Why Dominant Parties Lose: Mexico’s Democratization in Comparative Perspective*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2007; Kenneth Greene, “The Political Economy of Authoritarian Single Party Dominance,” *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 7, pp 807-834, 2010.

that the chance of the government change increases with a progressive reduction in the resource gap between the ruling party and the opposition. Malaysia is now certainly on the way to a regime change. The next important question is the timing of the change. One of the causes of the DPJ's failure was the non-transparent formulating process of the manifesto. In the Malaysian 13th General Election in May 2013, both the BN and the opposition put forward their manifestos in the campaign. The DPJ's experiences may give Malaysian political parties some lessons to reflect upon.