Party Democratization and the Salience of Party Leaders

Kenneth Mori McElwain
Michio Umeda

abstract

How has the democratization of Japanese political parties affected their public popularity and policy preferences? We focus on a major transformation in the 1990s: the introduction of electoral primaries, instead of a pure legislative vote, to select the party leader. We find two significant effects. First, leader primaries increase the short-term popularity of the party, in large part because those elections attract more media attention. Second, primaries have begun to accentuate intra-LDP divisions between rural vs. urban interests. Leader contenders generally differ in their geographical support bases, and while rural contenders have been more successful thus far, party membership is growing faster in urban areas. Both findings suggest that internal democratization has both immediate and long-term effects on the sources of party popularity.

Key words: party democratization, media, Liberal Democratic Party, Democratic Party of Japan, Prime minister

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, LDP leaders rose to prominence through their proficiency in backroom dealings. Top contenders offered cabinet or party portfolio to different faction bosses, and whoever could forge a stable intra-party coalition became the LDP President (Sato and Matsuzaki 1986; Kohno 1997). While public support has always mattered to some degree, insofar as unpopular leaders have shorter lifespans, it has rarely been cited as the primary criterion for selecting the party leader.

The electoral success of Koizumi Jun'ichiro as LDP President epitomizes a new model of political leadership that is built on public popularity, not factional brokering. Koizumi came to power promising administrative reforms and neoliberal economic policies that appealed to moderates but went against the interests of the party's core constituency groups. Indeed, Koizumi vowed to destroy the LDP before he let conservative interests derail his goals. The conflicts between Koizumi and the party establishment came to a head in 2005, when Koizumi ousted LDP legislators who had voted against his signature postal privatization bill, dissolved the Diet, and nominated new candidates to run against his former co-partisans. The 2005

Lower House election was a triumphant rout, both for the party collectively and for Koizumi's handpicked candidates. In effect, Koizumi won handily by trading the LDP's "hard" conservative base for "softer" support from urban, independent voters who had long eluded the party.

While no party president has replicated Koizumi's success, there is general consensus that the popularity of party leaders matters more than ever. The 1994 electoral reform ushered in a two-party (or at least, a two-camp) system, and voters now face an explicit choice between prime ministerial candidates when casting their ballots. Televised party leader debates have become staples of the media's election coverage. This public interest in party leaders is partly in response to the latter's growing political influence. Various administrative reforms since the late-1990s have strengthened the power of the Cabinet, thus weakening the dependence of party leaders on intra-party organs to craft policy alternatives (Estevez-Abe 2006; Maclachlan 2006; Takenaka 2006). The introduction of public subsidies to political parties also increased the financial—and by extension, electoral—clout of party leaders (Cox et al. 1999).

We believe these arguments all have merit, but their focus is on whether party leaders *can* act independently, not whether they would *want* to. The greater material or policy resources of leaders only matter—for intra-party bargaining or public policy outputs—if the preferences of party leaders and backbenchers are at odds. Nor do we know if the growing stature of party leaders—who may attract more floating votes but disenchant the base—is a net *electoral* positive for the party collectively.

In this paper, we examine one source of emergent conflict among party elites: *changes in how parties select their leaders*. For most of its history, the LDP picked its leader by a majority vote of its members of parliament. As a result, the president's selection and survival was tightly linked to keeping at least half of the party's incumbents—who mostly represent rural interests—happy. Since the late 1990s, however, the LDP has switched to using an "*electoral college*" framework, wherein grassroots party members in each prefecture also get a vote. Although legislators still matter most (numerically), the enlargement of the leader's selectorate—which now include party members in urban areas—means that leaders must now cater to a broader cross-section of the party's base to stay in power. The result is that party leaders have new incentives to win over centrist public opinion, even if this raises the ire of conservative, rurally-oriented legislators. This change in leadership structure is not unique to the LDP. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), in government since 2009, also has used party primaries to pick its leaders, albeit less regularly than the LDP.

We ask three questions that elaborate the causes and effects of changes in leader selection methods. First, do leadership selection rules affect the popularity of party leaders? By comparing both public opinion surveys and media news coverage, we find that leaders elected through "electoral colleges" tend to have higher levels of *initial* support than those selected by legislators. Second, do candidates for party leader represent distinct socio-economic cleavages or groups, thus reflecting genuine policy tensions within the party? We compare the vote share of different presidential candidates in LDP primaries, and find that there is a growing urban

vs. rural cleavage in their support bases. Finally, can popular party leaders mobilize a new generation of partisan grassroots members to replenish the thinning personal support networks of *individual* legislators, thus increasing their intra-party bargaining position? Using the number of registered LDP primary voters, we demonstrate that the party is increasing its social penetration in urban areas, although there is weak evidence that individual party leaders can mobilize long-term voter interest.

PARTY LEADERS AND PARTY DEMOCRATIZATION

Conventional accounts of parliamentary politics have linked election outcomes to the breadth and depth of the electorate's partisan identification with political parties. Where voters have strong emotional attachments to specific parties—based on history, demographics, socioeconomic status, and other structural factors—ballot choices depend on sentiments about the party overall, not about any specific candidate. This logic extends to the salience of party leaders. Because the Prime Minister in parliamentary systems is selected indirectly—voters pick a candidate or party, who then form alliances in the legislature to pick the PM—party leaders have generally been seen as agents of the parties they belong to, not as distinct characters with independent electoral appeal of their own.

Fluctuations in party vote shares and election turnout since the 1970s, however, suggest gradual dealignment in the affective relationship between voters and specific parties (Mair 1997; Wren and McElwain 2007). As economies mature and are integrated into global markets, distributive class conflicts have declined in salience, generating a drift between traditional parliamentary cleavages and the preferences of the electorate (Hug 2001; Inglehart 1997; Mair et al. 2004). Active membership in political parties has also been declining, replaced by a new cohort of political independents (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000).

While partisan identification is weakening, there is abundant cross-national evidence that the salience of *party leaders* is growing. Looking across parliamentary systems, Dalton, McAllister, and Wattenberg (2002) find that the media pays increasing attention to party leaders over individual candidates or policy platforms. Farrell (2002) notes that televised party leader debates have become a staple of election campaigns. These phenomena fit into the growing scholarship on the "presidentialization of parliamentary politics" (Poguntke and Webb 2005). As more voters base their ballot decisions on televised political news, which in turn focuses more on party leaders, the electoral weight of party leaders also grows commensurately.

These visions of parliamentary politics are at odds with accepted wisdom about Japanese politics. Japanese voters have eschewed "mass parties" with deep social penetration, and ballot decisions have been based on personal attachments to individual candidates, not to political parties (Richardson 1997). Many authors attribute this to the multi-member district, single non-transferable (MMD-SNTV) electoral system: parties had to run multiple candidates per district

if they hoped to win a legislative majority, and so co-partisan candidates were incentivized to differentiate themselves based on personal qualities and achievements, rather than advocating overlapping policy platforms (Curtis 1971; Kohno 1997; Ramseyer and Rosenbluth 1993). Scheiner (2005) argues that the high degree of fiscal centralization plays a crucial role: local governments depend on fiscal transfers from the national government to fund infrastructural investments, thus placing a premium on candidates who can extract tax funds for their districts. The ruling LDP consolidated its vote base by distributing fiscal funds *qua* public works to rural districts, whose votes are disproportionately valuable because of the high degree of legislative malapportionment (Ohmiya 1992). Given this political landscape, power within the LDP was wielded by the five major factions, each of which was led by party elites who raised campaign funds, secured candidate nominations, and bargained over cabinet portfolio for their followers, all with the goal of cobbling together enough intra-party support to be chosen as party president (Fukui 1970; Ramseyer and Rosenbluth 1993; Sato and Matsuzaki 1986).

But as Krauss and Nyblade (2005) note, Japanese party leaders—much like their foreign counterparts—have been playing an increasingly prominent role in election campaigns, independent of their factional backing. One explanatory factor is electoral reform in 1994, which replaced MMD-SNTV with a mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) system that combines 300 seats in small, single-member districts and 180 seats allocated proportionately to political parties in eleven regional blocks. Electoral reform was motivated by the revelation of high profile corruption scandals, which were linked to the money politics and clientelism endemic to personalistic campaigning under MMD-SNTV (Christensen 1994; Reed and Thies 2001). The reformers' expectation was that the new MMM system would weaken incentives for intra-party competition and encourage parties to develop and compete based on coherent ideological programs. Factions would lose their influence, as their role in fighting over candidate endorsements would lessen (Cox et al. 1999; Krauss and Pekkanen 2004). The introduction of new public subsidies to political parties also shifted the financial locus from factions—whose fundraising abilities became restricted—to party leaders—who (at least nominally) controlled these subsidies.

A second reason for the growing salience of leaders is their heightened policy powers. Through a series of administrative reforms between 1997-2001, the Cabinet Office gained financial and human resources to craft their own policies (Estevez-Abe 2006). In the past, policies were generated *within* political parties: an LDP Prime Minister mostly proposed legislation that had been vetted by his party first. With more research staff and money, the Cabinet now has greater autonomy to develop its own policy alternatives, even when there is significant opposition from the governing party's own backbenchers or status quo-oriented bureaucracies (Takenaka 2006). Some relevant cases include Prime Minister Koizumi's antiterrorism (Shinoda 2003) and postal privatization (Maclachlan 2006) legislation. Given the enhanced policy powers of Prime Ministers, voters have good reason to evaluate the competence and priorities of party leaders *independent of* that of the leaders' parties.

Our paper is concerned with a natural ramification of the enhanced stature of leaders: the importance to parties of finding *popular* leaders. Japanese parties—like those in most advanced industrialized democracies—have historically maintained a top-down organizational structure. Legislative factions determined the party's policy programs and selected the party leader. This ensured centralized legislative control of the party's affairs, since a leader's selection and survival depended on ensuring the electoral success of his party's incumbents. For a rural party like the LDP, leaders had strong incentives to advocate greater redistribution of public works and subsidies, using tax funds collected disproportionately from urban residents.

However, this legislature-dominated model is not the best way to pick a leader, if the goal is to appeal to the electorate. Should voters care about the identity of the party leader, a superior method is to decentralize the process, principally through intra-party *democratization.* By involving registered voters or dues-paying party members, the party can stage electoral primaries that will produce winners who, by definition, have a modicum of public appeal. Popular leaders can, in turn, generate collective benefits to the party. Prime Minister Koizumi, for example, increased the vote share of LDP candidates in 2005 by 2-3% in districts where he made campaign stops (McElwain 2009). Kabashima and Imai (2002) find similar electoral coattail effects in the 2000 election, when party leader evaluation influenced the PR tier voting results in particular. They contrast their results with past research during the MMD-SNTV (pre-1993) period, when leader image seemed to have limited effects on voting behavior.

Democratizing the leader selection process comes with some costs to the current elites. If leaders act as agents of whoever selects them, then broadening the selectorate will dilute the correspondence between the interests of current selectors and the party leader. For example, if the status quo procedure is to select leaders through an "MP vote", then the leader's preference matches that of the median incumbent. If a primary system is employed, however, party members from unrepresented districts will also have a say. As McElwain and Giencke (2009) argue, elites will only agree to weaken their control over the party leader when not doing so harms the electoral fate of the party. Put differently, elites will decrease their *share* of the political pie if that will increase the aggregate *size* of the pie itself. Using cross-national data on leader selection methods, they find that the probability of leader selection democratization increases with the number of electoral losses over the last three cycles.

This cost-benefit logic of party democratization applies to Japan as well. The LDP originally restricted its leader selection process to its legislators, through either a formal vote or closed-door factional negotiations. Prime Minister Fukuda Takeo implemented a proto-primary system in 1978, with the goal of increasing party transparency in the wake of Tanaka Kakuei's Lockheed Scandals. All official party members could vote to narrow down the list of contenders to two, from which legislators would pick the winner (used in 1978 and 1982). However, this system kicked in only when somebody challenged the sitting president prior to the biennial party congress. This almost never happened in practice, since unpopular LDP leaders who had lost factional support would simply resign before facing a formal challenge. The LDP also

TABLE 1: PRIMARY METHODS FOR LDP AND DPJ PRESIDENTIAL SELECTIONS

(Years Utilized)

LDP	*End of Term Resignation*	*During Term Resignation*
1989-2001	10,000 Party members = 1 MP vote	1 vote per prefecture (47 total) · Cast by prefectural branch boss · (1995; 1998)
2001-		3 votes per prefecture (141 total) · Each prefecture picks a) whether to use primaries, and b) seat allocation rule (FPTP, PR) · (2001; 2007; 2008)
2002-	300 total prefectural votes. · Each prefecture receives three votes. Remainder allocated w/PR. · *Must* use primaries. · Seats allocated by D'Hondt PR. · (2003; 2006; 2009)	
DPJ	*End of Term Resignation*	*During Term Resignation*
1996-	Local politicians = 100 points · Votes tabulated nationally and allocated by D'Hondt PR Primary = 300 points · FPTP in each SMD	MP Vote

* Legislators (MPs) have always been given one ballot each for both the LDP and DPJ.

forestalled maverick challengers by increasing the requisite number of cosponsors needed to mount a presidential bid from ten to fifty in 1982.[1] Scandals and repeated electoral losses gradually pushed the party to increase internal transparency, and prefectural party branches were each given one vote in 1989. Firmly ensconced in power until 1993, however, the LDP never faced a strong need to open up its processes completely to grassroots party members. Indeed, the party's official membership has traditionally been very small, as the core politician-vote nexus has been through the *koenkai*, or personal networks, of individual politicians.

The move to electoral primaries began in earnest in the 1990s. Table 1 lists the evolution in LDP leader selection rules since the 1990s, divided into cases where a leader needed to be replaced in the middle or at the end of his term. There have been three relevant actors in this process, whose relative influence has varied over time. Processes that incorporate different constituencies—legislators, local party officials, and grassroots members—are referred to in the literature as the "electoral college".

The first constituency, LDP parliamentarians from the Upper and Lower Houses, has always had one vote each to cast for leader contenders. The second constituency, prefectural party bosses, has had their input increase over time. Each branch was given one vote in 1989, albeit only when the last leader resigned in the middle of his term. The allocation of this ballot was determined at the discretion of the prefectural branch leader.

In 2001, following Prime Minister Mori's disastrous tenure and facing an unpromising Upper House election, the LDP decided to increase these local ballots to three per prefecture. At the same time, prefectures were given greater discretion in determining how those ballots

1) The number of cosponsors was reduced to 20 in August 1989. Since then, the requisite support has oscillated between 20 and 30 legislators.

would be allocated. Where the leader had resigned prematurely, prefectural bosses could continue to decide their vote allocation *or* they could choose to involve the party's third constituency—grassroots members. Local branches could also decide individually whether the largest vote-getter would be given all three votes, or whether they would be distributed proportionately based on the competitiveness of the primary race. Since April 2001 (when Koizumi won), many prefectural branches have *voluntarily* chosen to stage a primary to determine how to cast their ballots. They were not required to consult grassroots members, however, and in Hiroshima and Yamaguchi, only local party officials and legislators were invited to participate in 2001. In 2007, only 35 prefectural branches staged primaries to determine their three-vote allocation to replace PM Abe Shinzo, who had resigned suddenly. By contrast, all prefectures used primaries in 2008 (to replace PM Fukuda Yasuo), but some prefectures used winner-take-all vs. proportional representation to allocate their votes.

Grassroots primaries have been *mandatory* only when the preceding leader completed his full term. In 1995 and 1999, a proto-primary system was used to pick a new president: for every 10,000 member ballots, a contender received one additional vote.[2] This system was overhauled again in 2002, so that primary votes would be tabulated at the prefectural level, rather than nationally. The prefectures collectively receive 300 votes: three are given automatically to each of the forty-seven prefectures, and the remaining 159 are distributed proportionately based on the number of grassroots LDP members. Each prefecture's allocation of seats is distributed to presidential candidates proportionately (D'Hondt rule) based on their vote share in the grassroots primary. Primaries in 2003, 2006, and 2009 followed these guidelines.

In revisiting the history of leader selection, the most decisive break in legislative autonomy came in 2001, when the LDP granted prefectural branches autonomy in determining how their votes would be allocated. Why did LDP legislators consent to devolve their control over the party leadership? Lin (2009) argues convincingly that this concession was based on a miscalculation of contextual factors. The expectation among the party elite was that prefectural votes would simply mirror the factional power balance of the Diet, resulting in a victory for Hashimoto Ryutaro, the establishment favorite. However, the LDP bosses had severely underestimated voter disenchantment with Prime Minister Mori, as well as lingering disapproval of Hashimoto since his unpopular tenure in the mid-1990s.[3] The prefectural primaries were held a few days before the MP vote, and Koizumi won close to 90% of the vote allocations. Not wanting to reject their members' preference, many legislators switched their vote from Hashimoto to Koizumi, and as a result, Koizumi was chosen as LDP President in an

2) In 1999, for example, Obuchi Keizo (the eventual winner) received 143 primary votes. This rule was technically in operation until 2002, but its use was obviated in August 2001 when Koizumi ran uncontested (after he had been voted in very recently in April 2001). For more details on LDP presidential elections, see the party website at: http://www.jimin.jp/jimin/jimin/ayumi/index.html

3) Hashimoto had to resign as LDP President in 1998, when the LDP lost significant seats in the Upper House election.

unexpected landslide. Given the strong media interest in the primary process and the subsequent electoral success of Koizumi, the LDP has chosen to retain primaries since then.

As of 2010, both the LDP and DPJ allow for the use of electoral colleges, combining MP votes and primaries, in the selection of party presidents. The DPJ's method is arguably more decentralized, although it is used infrequently. Each of the 300 single-member districts counts as one point, and district-level primaries are held to determine which contender gets that district's vote. 100 additional points are given to local party politicians, whose votes are aggregated nationally and distributed proportionately (using the D'Hondt rule). Finally, each Upper and Lower House MP counts as two points.[4] Since the DPJ has historically been a smaller party than the LDP, local politicians' and primary voters' point allocations have been weightier than that of national-level legislators.[5]

It is important to reiterate that primaries are not mandatory for either party today. When a *presidential term is concluded*—generally after two or three years—the LDP and DPJ must utilize the electoral college framework with primaries to pick the successor. When a president resigns in the *middle of his term*—due to scandals, declining popularity, or illness—then the LDP allows the selection of a replacement leader by MPs and optional primaries. Every LDP MP gets one vote, and the party's prefectural branches each count as three votes (one vote until 2001). The DPJ, by contrast, permits leader replacement by a pure MP vote. In addition, if only one nominee stands for the presidency for either party, then no election is required. This last point actually serves as a loophole, since a party's major factions can coordinate behind a consensus candidate, allowing favored leaders to extend their tenure without public input.

Table 2 lists each presidential selection for the LDP and DPJ since 1993 and 1998, respectively.[6] Leaders who won multiple terms are denoted by a number next to their names (e.g. Obuchi2 refers to Obuchi's second term as LDP leader). The method for selection denotes each included constituency: "No Vote" (where there was only one candidate), "MP Vote" (where legislators voted), "Prefectural Representatives" (where legislators and representatives of each prefecture voted), and "Primaries" (grassroots party members given some share of the votes). Where primaries were only used in a subset of prefectures, we have noted this as a "Limited Primary". We have also listed whether presidential selection was required by the end of a term, as well as the number of contenders in each race.

The LDP has mostly stuck with electoral colleges since 2001, while the DPJ has generally favored MP votes. In September 2010, the DPJ held a full electoral college primary between

4) In 2002, the DPJ also allowed the party's electoral candidates in the upcoming election (i.e. non-incumbents) to vote for the leader as well. Their votes counted as one point.

5) The DPJ's electoral college methodology has also changed over time. For example, the point allocation to local politicians was 47 until 2004. For more details about the DPJ's leader selection process, please see: http://www.dpj.or.jp/governance/policy/senkyo_policy.html

6) The DPJ data starts later, as the party was not founded till 1996 and its first succession did not come till 1998.

TABLE 2

LDP Leader Selection				
Date	Winner	Method	End of Term	# Candidates
09/17/93	Kohno 2	No Vote		1
09/22/95	Hashimoto 1	MP + Prefecture Representatives	Y	2
09/11/97	Hashimoto 2	No Vote	Y	1
07/24/98	Obuchi 1	MP + Prefecture Representatives		3
09/21/99	Obuchi 2	MP + Primary	Y	3
04/05/00	Mori1	No Vote		1
04/24/01	Koizumi 1	MP + Primary (Limited)*		3
08/10/01	Koizumi 2	No Vote	Y	1
09/20/03	Koizumi 3	MP + Primary	Y	4
09/20/06	Abe	MP + Primary	Y	3
09/23/07	Fukuda	MP + Primary (Limited)*		2
09/22/08	Aso	MP + Primary (Limited)*		5
09/28/09	Tanigaki	MP + Primary	Y	3

*Prefectural-level primaries are optional, as determined by prefectural party branches. Where primaries are not held, prefectural party officials decide the vote allocation.

DPJ Leader Selection				
Date	Winner	Method	End of Term	# Candidates
04/27/98	Kan 1	No Vote		1
01/18/99	Kan 2	MP + Prefecture Representatives		2
09/25/99	Hatoyama 1	MP + Prefecture Representatives	Y	1
09/09/00	Hatoyama 2	No Vote	Y	1
09/23/02	Hatoyama 3	MP + Party Candidates + Local Assembly Members + Primary	Y	4
12/10/02	Kan 3	MP		2
05/18/04	Okada 1	No Vote		1
09/13/04	Okada 2	No Vote	Y	1
09/17/05	Maehara 1	MP		2
04/07/06	Ozawa 1	MP		2
09/12/06	Ozawa 2	No Vote	Y	1
09/21/08	Ozawa 3	No Vote	Y	1
05/16/09	Hatoyama 4	MP		2
06/04/10	Kan 4	MP		2
09/14/10	Kan 5	MP + Local Assembly Members + Primary	Y	2

the incumbent Kan Naoto and the former leader Ozawa Ichiro. Before then, the DPJ had not held a primary since 2002; between these periods, most leaders had been replaced mid-term. The LDP, by contrast, has aggressively used primaries, even when leaders resigned suddenly and votes from MPs and local party leaders would have technically sufficed. Examples include the selection of Fukuda Yasuo in 2007 and Aso Taro in 2008. To clarify this distinction, we have highlighted primary elections in Table 2.

DO PRIMARIES MAKE THE PARTY STRONGER?

While the determinants of party democratization are an important research topic in their own right, we are most interested in examining their effects on the popularity of political parties.

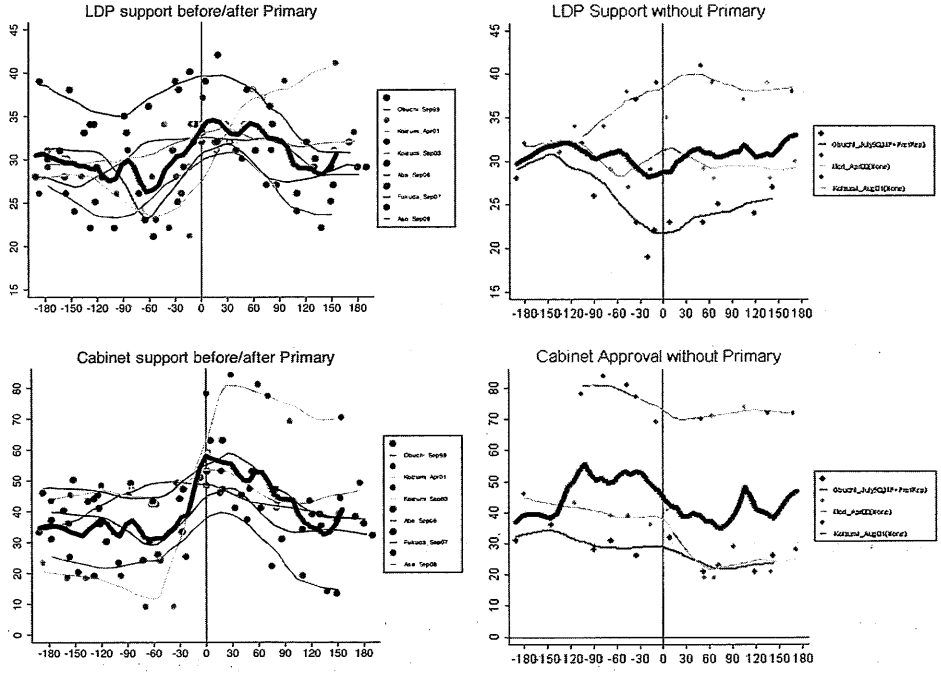
Case studies and large-N quantitative evidence both suggest that parties democratize their presidential selection procedures for instrumental reasons. More specifically, elites hope to improve the popularity of the party by mobilizing supporters, corralling media attention during primaries, and strengthening the legitimacy of the eventual winner. In this section, we examine whether these goals have been met, utilizing primary-related data since 2000.

Are Leaders Selected in Primaries More Popular?

Let us begin by tackling the most basic question: do primaries produce more popular leaders? The traditional "MP Vote" method ensured that the party president had sufficient legislative backing to manage the *parliamentary* caucus. A primary system, by contrast, moves the focal point to the electoral arena, as voters—albeit only dues-paying party members—have greater input. The very process of consulting voters should increase the odds that the eventual winner enjoys higher levels of popularity, given that support from voters is critical to winning primaries in the first place.

We examine the effects of different selection methods on the popularity of party leaders in two ways. First, we look at public opinion data for short- and long-term changes in voter support for political parties and the Cabinet in the wake of leader successions. Cabinet ratings matter particularly for the governing party, since the leader of the majority party serves as the Prime Minister of Japan. Second, we test one likely cause of variability in leader popularity:

FIGURE 1: THE EFFECTS OF NEW PARTY LEADERS ON LDP POPULARITY



newspaper coverage of the leader selection process. The very act of hosting an electoral primary attracts attention to that party over multiple weeks, which in turn should increase voter knowledge of the party's policy priorities and the contenders' profiles. MP votes to pick the leader, by contrast, only take one day, and if the probable winner is known beforehand (based on factional negotiations), then there is very little drama.

Figure 1 displays *public opinion support* for the LDP and the Cabinet in the six months before and after a new leader is selected, divided by whether leadership replacement utilized primaries or not (horizontal axis = number of days). The top two panels present the proportion of voters who listed the LDP as the party they felt the closest affinity to, based on polling data from the Asahi Newspaper. The bottom two panels display Cabinet favorability data, where respondents were asked whether they supported, did not support, or had no opinion on the Cabinet's performance.

The clearest finding is that the usage of primaries produces a bump in LDP and Cabinet support (an average 7% gain in party support and 25% gain in cabinet approval), while leaders selected by only MPs and prefectural representatives (e.g. Obuchi 1998) or without any vote at all (e.g. Mori 2000 and Koizumi 8/2001) do not evince similar benefits (3% gain in party support, 8% loss in cabinet approval).[7] Another point to note is that the boost in popularity is relatively temporary. Leaders elected through primaries seem to enjoy a honeymoon period of about 100 days, after which the rose-tinted glasses come off and support rates return to pre-primary levels. One important caveat is that a large fraction of the LDP's primary effect is driven by Koizumi's skyrocketing popularity in April 2001, when LDP support increased by about 15% and Cabinet approval rose by almost 70%. Even if we take Koizumi out, however, we can still observe a positive bump after primaries: 6% and 16% gains in party and cabinet support rates, respectively.

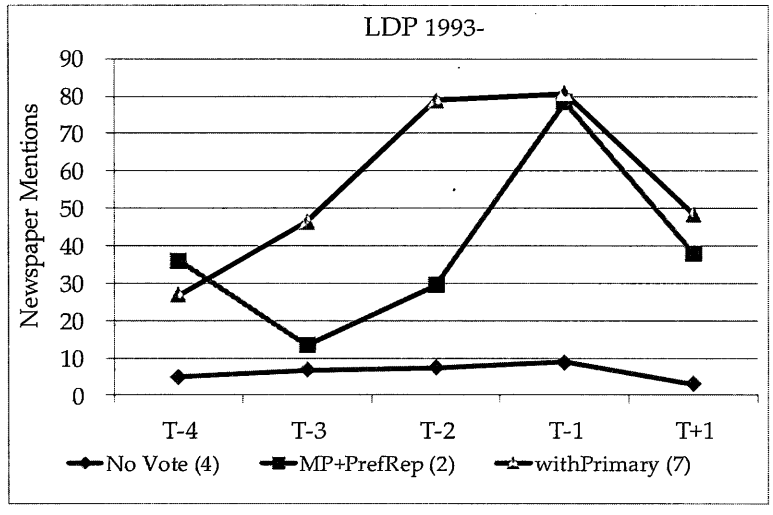
Unlike the LDP, the DPJ has held a primary only twice: in September 2002 and September 2010 (only the former is included in this analysis). Therefore, we cannot conclude with confidence whether primary-based presidential elections help the DPJ mobilize more support. In particular, the DPJ presidential election in September 2002 was conducted just after Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to North Korea, which dominated news media coverage. While not displayed here, our preliminary analysis of DPJ primaries showed that the party experienced neither a short- nor long-term bump in popularity, with or without a primary.

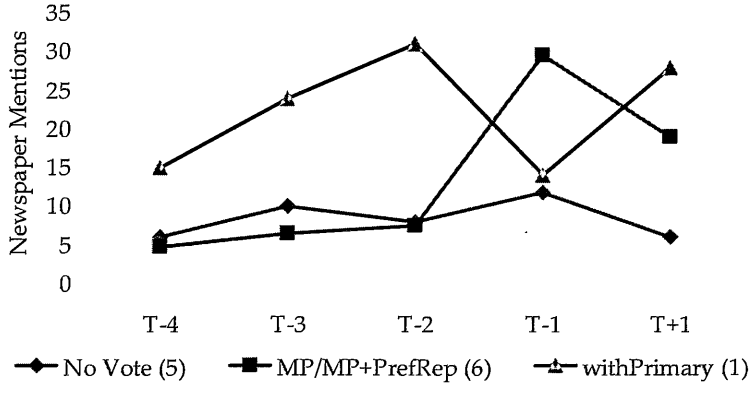
We next look at one plausible cause of this variation in party popularity: *media coverage* of primary vs. non-primary presidential elections. Given that the leader of the majority party

7) These numbers are calculated as the differences in average party/cabinet support rates before and after the inauguration of a new leader. The post-inauguration number is the *average of the two polls* after the leadership selection. The pre-inauguration number is the support rate *two months before* the selection; if the two-months-prior date lay between two survey periods (i.e. 3 months before and 2 months before), we took the average of these numbers. We used the selections of the LDP presidents since 1998 (Obuchi 1) until 2008 (Aso) for the calculation. All the following numbers are calculated in the same way.

is more or less guaranteed to be the Prime Minister, the outcome of intra-party presidential elections may have enormous ramifications for the country. Leadership primaries involve public campaign speeches, televised debates, and endless dissection by media observers and political elites. Extended over multiple weeks, they focus public attention on the party in ways that are not seen in general elections, where media attention must (by law) be shared between parties. By contrast, these media benefits do not accrue to leader selection via MP votes, which tend to occur when leaders resign mid-term (often suddenly). As the party needs to pick a new replacement quickly, opportunities for extended campaigning and media exposure are severely limited. While public attention may spike immediately before an MP vote, the aggregate attention should be lower. Moreover, if grassroots party members are not directly involved, there is less incentive for voters to pay attention to news reports and otherwise inform

FIGURE 2: MEDIA COVERAGE OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS





themselves, thus diminishing the public opinion payoffs of the leader selection process. Our hypothesis, then, is that media attention will be greater in primary elections, especially for the majority party (the LDP for the period under observation), than in an MP vote.

We test this by tabulating the number of newspaper articles on party presidential elections, counting from four weeks before the actual election date to one week afterwards. We conducted a keyword search on the terms "総裁選" (sousaisen) for the LDP and "代表選" (daihyousen) for the DPJ from the national editions of the Yomiuri Newspaper, using the *Yomidasu* database.[8] Figure 2 plots weekly newspaper mentions for the LDP and DPJ, with each line depicting a different method for leader selection.

For both the LDP and the DPJ, newspaper attention is significantly higher when the leader selection process is more democratic. Primary elections have a higher average level of newspaper mentions, although there is a noticeable spike in the week before an MP vote. Our tentative conclusion is that the prospect of leader turnover increases media attention on the party, with the level of interest correlated with the "democratic-ness" of the process itself.

Figure 2 also shows that the media coverage for the DPJ primary suddenly declines in the final week of the campaign. This is due to a specific event in September 2002 (date of the DPJ primary): PM Koizumi's visit to North Korea and the return of Japanese abductees. This news dominated media coverage and the DPJ selection was drowned out. An additional point is that the absolute number of mentions for the DPJ is significantly lower than that for the LDP across the board. This is not necessarily surprising: the LDP has been in government for most of the period that we covered (1998-2009), making the LDP's presidential election—the de facto process for picking the Prime Minister—a higher salience event. While the DPJ's leader replacement is not worthless *per se*, our finding speaks to the difficulty that opposition parties face in trying to attract the media's attention.

To summarize, our analysis of public opinion suggests that leaders chosen in primaries tend to benefit from a popularity bump, but that this uptick is very limited in duration. Part of this increased popularity is driven by heightened and prolonged media focus. However, both media attention and public favorability fades as the novelty wears off, to be replaced by more objective evaluations of the leader's performance. After all, a leader chosen by a primary is not necessarily a *better* leader—simply a more popular one.

Do Primaries Reflect Intra-Party Policy Cleavages?

From an instrumental perspective, leader primaries focus public attention on the party and increase its popularity (in the short-run). This benefit comes with attendant costs. Under a pure MP vote, the leader wins by best representing (or promising to represent) the interests of the party's legislators. The introduction of an electoral primary, however, broadens the

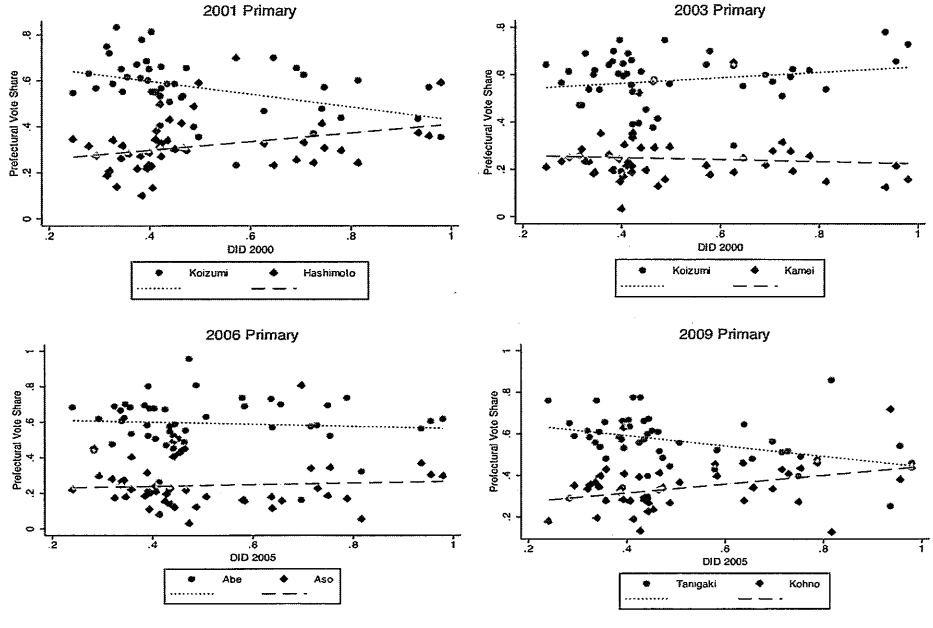
8) Different terms are used for the LDP and DPJ, as each party calls its leader by different names.

selectorate to include voters from regions without any incumbents. In the case of the LDP, this means a shift of the median voter from heavily rural areas—the party's traditional legislative stronghold—to more urban regions.

One implication of this organizational shift is the growing salience of the urban vs. rural policy cleavage among the LDP's elite. The conservative establishment of the party has always prioritized rural interests, via regulatory favors to the postal and agricultural industries or fiscal redistribution from urban to rural regions. With a preponderance of legislators from these areas, prime ministers have often hailed from regions like Niigata (Tanaka Kakuei) and Shimane (Takeshita Noboru). Of course, intra-party conflicts have been based traditionally on personal animosity and rivalries, not policy disagreements *per se*. With the participation of urban voters, however, minority subgroups now have a shot at influencing the party presidency by marshalling urban members in primaries. Given the greater prospects of success, we should observe a concomitant increase in the number of urban leadership contenders.

We estimate the salience of an urban vs. rural divide by examining the prefectural vote shares of LDP presidential candidates in electoral college primaries. Figure 3 depicts the prefectural vote share of the Top 2 candidates in the 2001, 2003, 2006, and 2009 primaries. Prefectures are arrayed along the horizontal axis by the Densely-Inhabited Districts (DID) Index, wherein higher values indicate more urban regions. Although the data is not cut and dry, there is a bifurcation in the contenders' support bases. In 2001 and 2009, there is a strong relationship between urbanization and vote share for the two main candidates; the relationship in 2003 and 2006 is slightly weaker.

FIGURE 3: TOP TWO CANDIDATES IN LDP PRIMARIES, BY URBANIZATION



This graphical representation reveals some interesting trends. First, candidates with stronger rural profiles still tend to win the presidential election. In the 2001 election, the top two candidates were Koizumi and Hashimoto. While the conventional view is that Hashimoto—the leader of the establishment Tanaka-lineage faction—was more popular in rural areas, our data suggests that Koizumi was actually more successful. In 2003, Koizumi's fortunes shifted, garnering more support in urban areas than his main rival Kamei Shizuka. Abe Shinzo, who won in 2006, was widely seen as a direct successor to the Koizumi-style of populist politics, but his support too was slightly more concentrated in rural areas. The 2009 election saw the victory of Tanigaki Sadakazu, who was also stronger in rural areas. His contender, Kohno Taro, was from an urban district (Kanagawa 15th) and advocated a more city-oriented, socially liberal policy agenda.

Second, Figure 3 reveals that none of these primary races was close. In the 2009 contest, which was the tightest of the four estimated, the average vote margin between Tanigaki and Kohno was 22.5%. The biggest blowout was 2006, when Abe's average prefectural vote share was 35% larger than Aso's. It is difficult to assess whether this is due to the lack of strong leadership contenders, or whether the urban-rural intra-party cleavage still lacks salience. One plausible explanation is that two strong candidates may strategically avoid running against each other, for fear of splitting the party (if they care about the fate of the collective group), or for fear of ruining their future prospects if they lose prematurely (if they care about their own careers). In 2009, for example, many LDP supporters urged Masuzoe Yoichi, a widely admired Upper House MP, to run for the party presidency. He declined to do so, and Masuzoe has subsequently left the party. Another plausible factor is a pure bandwagon effect on the part of voters: if the primary's electorate is heavily tilted in favor of one specific candidate, then many members may avoid backing the clear loser, for fear of losing redistributive transfers from a vengeful party leader.

Of course, primaries are not panaceas that will automatically compensate for the rural bias of the LDP's legislators and transform the party's outlook. While a reasonable supposition is that primaries will shift the LDP president's gaze towards urban areas, this is complicated by the fact that the party's support base is still concentrated in rural areas. The median DID of single-member districts in the 2009 lower house election was a fairly urban 0.64 (corresponding to Chiba 9, Aichi 8, and Shiga 1). By contrast, the median DID where the LDP won an SMD seat was 0.41 (e.g. Nara 4 or Miyazaki 2). In "limited primaries" following resignations, where every prefecture gets three votes, the median prefecture was Oita, whose DID rating is 0.44. Even in "full primaries" following the end of terms, when prefectures receive votes proportionate to overall membership, the median prefecture was Aomori, whose DID is 0.45.[9]

Because the majority of LDP grassroots members reside in rural areas, LDP local primaries

9) This rural bias is not directly a function of the electoral system. The median LDP grassroots member in 2009 was in Ishikawa (DID = 0.48). These numbers are also very close to the median district in Upper House elections (which is less malapportioned), Ehime, where DID was 0.51.

may continue to elect presidents who prioritize rural interests. For example, despite the seemingly greater public recognition of Kohno Taro in 2009, Tanigaki—the establishment rural candidate—beat him soundly. However, the distinction between urban and rural candidates speaks to the growing salience of policy- or issue-voting. The strong predictive power of DID on primary vote shares between Kohno and Tanigaki indicates a bifurcation in the preferences of LDP members. In fact, the rural bias of primary voters may be stronger than that for legislators: legislators must temper their beliefs to appeal to non-LDP members for their electoral success, but voters do not face similar pressures to moderate their partisan views. This would be consistent with research on US House elections, where primaries are blamed for increasing partisan polarization.

If "electoral college" primaries are to produce different types of LDP leaders than "MP votes", the grassroots base of the party must incorporate more urban voters. We turn to this question next.

Can Popular Leaders Compensate for Declining Candidate Support Networks

One anticipated effect of electoral reform in 1994 was to shift the nature of the politician-voter linkage from clientelistic quid pro quo exchanges to programmatic policy debates. Indeed, many LDP politicians opposed reform precisely because they feared that their *koenkai* would be rendered obsolete. As more voters cast their ballots based on fluctuating evaluations of the party leader or the party's policy platform, each candidate's electoral fate could become more uncertain.

There is mixed evidence whether *koenkai* are less salient in Japanese elections today (Christensen 1998; Taniguchi 2004). However, a new study by Reed, Scheiner, and Thies (2009) demonstrates that party affiliation has supplanted candidate characteristics as the strongest predictor for electoral victory. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that voters care more about *policy*; it could also signify that vote choice depends increasingly on affinity with party *leaders*. If the former (policy) is true, then individual politicians who lost their *koenkai* could still "recoup" their losses should voters develop enduring partisan identities. If the latter (leaders) matters, however, then support bases would become even more volatile, given that public support for party leaders tends to be unstable. As Yukio Maeda's paper in this volume notes, trends in party and Cabinet popularity have become decoupled since Koizumi's reign in the early 2000s, suggesting growing independence between the public support for party *leaders* versus the party's collective *brand*. From a purely analytic perspective, it is difficult to distinguish between the leaders versus policy hypotheses using aggregated primary data. For example, voters may join a party because of initial affinity with a leader, but stick around after they learn more about the party's policies.

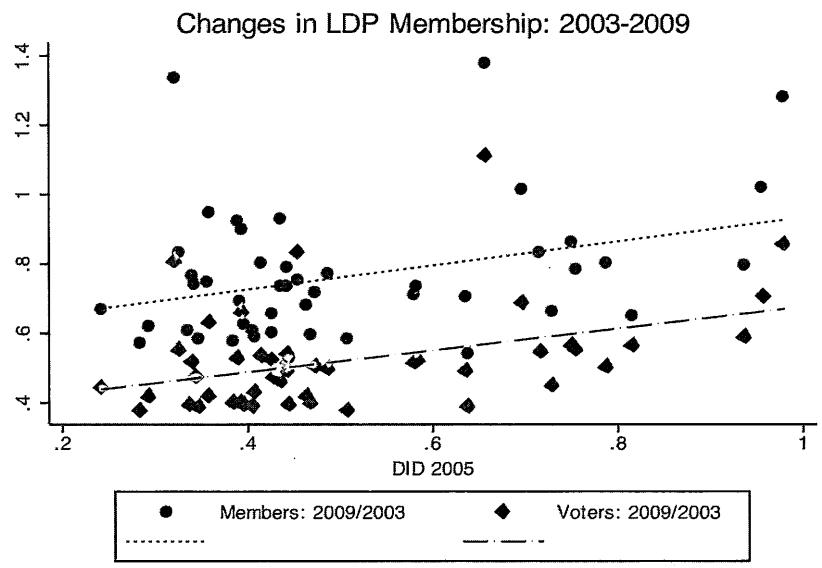
Instead, we try to test a related question: has the gradual decline in the personal support bases of candidates been offset by an increasing number of grassroots members? This is of

practical import to parties, since an increase in membership—whether they stay for the leader or for policy—represents an expansion in their core support bases. While our earlier examination of popularity ratings and media attention demonstrates short-term benefits to staging leader primaries, an increase in party membership connotes long-term gains for the party collectively.

We estimate this by examining changes in the number of LDP party members between 2003 and 2009. Party membership is notoriously tricky to measure, since parties have great leeway and minimal oversight in determining the qualifications for membership.[10] We use a conservative estimate: the number of eligible voters in LDP primary contests. These are people for whom the LDP has concrete mailing addresses and whose payment of membership dues has been verified. We plotted these numbers against myriad independent variables, such as the vote share of the eventual primary winner (whose popularity may spur more people to join the party) or the closeness of the prefectural race (more people may participate when victory margins are smaller). We do not discuss or display all of them here, but in general, we uncovered very weak relationships between race-specific factors and LDP membership growth.

However, we did discover one statistically significant relationship: urbanization and party membership. Figure 4 plots the proportionate growth in LDP membership from 2003 to 2009 (i.e. 2009 membership divided by 2003 membership) against the DID Index of urbanization. We also show the growth in the number of people who *voted* in a primary from 2003 to 2009, which serves as a proxy for "active" membership. The linear "best fit" line demonstrates that both

FIGURE 4



10) In any country, one can find examples of dead voters still enrolled in the party, or family pets counted as a party member.

dependent variables (total membership and total turnout) are positively correlated with urbanization.

One caveat: turnout and membership in general have declined in many regions (i.e. the ratio is below 1.0), which speaks to Koizumi's disproportionate success in mobilizing supporters in 2001 and 2003. This also suggests that party membership is driven by the popularity of specific leaders, which does not bode well for stable long-term growth in the LDP's core base. However, Figure 4 shows that the LDP is making *relative* inroads in urban than rural regions—precisely those areas that the party has been weaker in historically. While this is not necessarily beneficial to the LDP's establishment candidates, who tend to be clustered in rural regions, it does suggest a gradual transformation in the vote base of the LDP.

We should add a more general word of caution. Our analysis of membership fluctuations is still speculative, in part because we lack good, concrete data in the pre-1993 electoral reform period. Moreover, there are multiple reasons for changes in party membership that are not directly related to the appeal of leaders. For example, LDP Upper House members were incentivized to enroll more voters between 1982 and 2000, as their ranking on the closed-list proportional representation system was based on their ability to corral new members (McElwain and Reed 2009). We hope to conduct more detailed research on this topic in the future.

SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Our paper presents some preliminary evidence on the relationship between party leader selection methods and the popularity of political parties. We find that *democratic methods*—notably local primaries—increase public support for parties, although these effects appear to last only about 100 days. One reason is that party primaries increase short-term *media attention* on the party more than do MP votes, thus generating temporary public interest. Although there is little evidence that popular leaders can shore up the party's base by encouraging more voters to join (and stay in) the party, there is an ongoing transformation in the membership base of the LDP towards urban regions. This could result in primaries producing very different leaders—more urban and more public relations conscious—than under the LDP's old top-down system, where party representation was concentrated in traditionalist, rural regions.

There are a number of questions we hope to tackle in the future. First, if primaries convey benefits to the party, then why doesn't the DPJ—which spent its first decade of existence in opposition—stage more of them? The party has eschewed the "democratic" option between 2002-10, which seems counterintuitive given that opposition parties get less day-to-day attention from the media, and thus should jump at any opportunity to improve its public profile. One potential explanation is that the party is still divided internally over basic policy directions. A primary, where competing contenders criticize each other, could prove disastrous to party

unity and reveal the lack of policy coherence to the public. This is certainly plausible, given that the DPJ is comprised of ex-Socialists, centrist ex-LDPers, and fairly conservative politicians from the Liberal Party. In September 2010, the competition between Kan Naoto (the incumbent president) and Ozawa Ichiro (the contender) certainly revealed significant divisions within the DPJ's parliamentary caucus. Of course, the potential for infighting is an insufficient explanation for avoiding primaries. Few people would argue that the LDP is internally united, but its factions have a long history of cooperation—or at least, foregoing conflict—and internal rivalries are largely based on personal antipathies, not policy direction.

Second, what can parties do to leverage and extend the tenure of their more popular leaders? Both the LDP and DPJ replace their leaders fairly quickly, which makes sense for *un*popular leaders. However, replacing one leader with another does not guarantee a recovery in long-term popularity, especially if the successor was available only because he had been rejected in an earlier primary. A new leader may benefit from a brief honeymoon period, but his baseline level of popularity is likely to be lower than his predecessor, especially if he is a candidate who has been around for a while. Although the LDP and DPJ both have term limits, only one leader—Koizumi—was affected by this ceiling.

The biggest problem for both the LDP and DPJ is that neither has figured out a way to develop a new cohort of potential contenders and market them to the public. Given the growing salience of party leaders in the decision-making calculus of voters, the Holy Grail is figuring out the determinants of leader popularity. This is especially crucial to attracting floating voters, who comprise a large segment of the public. What complicates the issue is that floating voters are fickle, and fairly random factors—public gaffes, changes in global economic trends, etc.—can produce large swings in the popularity of leaders. As of now, both parties are simply responding to these diachronic fluctuations by being trigger-happy in firing leaders.

It is not clear if taking the "long view" on leaders is necessarily better, but one way to resolve this problem may be to increase the electoral college's share of primary votes. In both parties, legislators still have a dominant say in picking the next leader, with primary results only mattering on the margins. This incentivizes prospective candidates to focus foremost on cultivating parliamentary support; those who fail to do so—even if they have latent public popularity—never see the limelight. A stronger primary component in the electoral college may create a decisive shift in the profile of leadership contenders, thus improving the baseline popularity of the party.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Christensen, Ray. 1998. "The Effect of Electoral Reforms on Campaign Practices in Japan: Putting New Wine into Old Bottles." *Asian Survey* 38 (October):986-1004.

Christensen, Raymond. 1994. "Electoral Reform in Japan: How It was Enacted and Changes It May Bring." *Asian Survey* 34 (7):589-605.

Cox, Gary W., Frances McCall Rosenbluth, and Michael F. Thies. 1999. "Electoral Reform and the Fate of Factions: The Case of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party." *British journal of political science* 29:33-56.

Curtis, Gerald L. 1971. *Election Campaigning Japanese Style.* Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd.

Dalton, Russell J., Ian McAllister, and Martin P. Wattenberg. 2002. "Political Parties and their Publics." In *Political Parties in the New Europe: Political and Analytical Challenges,* ed. K. R. Luther and F. Muller-Rommel. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dalton, Russell J., and Martin P. Wattenberg, eds. 2000. *Parties without Partisans: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Estevez-Abe, Margarita. 2006. "Japan's Shift Toward a Westminster System: A Structural Analysis of the 2005 Lower House Election and Its Aftermath." *Asian Survey* 46 (4):632-51.

Farrell, David M. 2002. "Campaign Modernization and the West European Party." In *Political Parties in the New Europe: Political and Analytical Challenges,* ed. K. R. Luther and F. Muller-Rommel. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fukui, Haruhiro. 1970. *Party in Power: The Japanese Liberal Democrats and Policy-making.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hug, Simon. 2001. *Altering Party Systems: Strategic Behavior and the Emergence of New Political Parties in Western Democracies.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Inglehart, Ronald. 1997. *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Kabashima, Ikuo, and Ryosuke Imai. 2002. "Evaluation of Party Leaders and Voting Behavior: An Analysis of the 2000 General Election." *Social Science Japan Journal* 5 (1):85-96.

Kohno, Masaru. 1997. *Japan's Postwar Party Politics.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Krauss, Elliot S., and Robert Pekkanen. 2004. "Explaining Party Adaptation to Electoral Reform: The Discreet Charm of the LDP?" *Journal of Japanese Studies* 30 (1):1-34.

Krauss, Ellis S., and Benjamin Nyblade. 2005. "'Presidentialization' in Japan? The Prime Minister, Media, and Elections in Japan." *British journal of political science* 35:357-68.

Lin, Chao-Chi. 2009. "How Koizumi Won." In *Political Change in Japan: Electoral Behavior, Party Realignment, and the Koizumi Reforms,* ed. S. R. Reed, K. M. McElwain and K. Shimizu. Palo Alto: Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center.

Maclachlan, Patricia L. 2006. "Storming the Castle: The Battle for Postal Reform in Japan." *Social Science Japan Journal* 9 (1):1-18.

Mair, Peter. 1997. *Party System Change.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mair, Peter, Wolfgang C. Muller, and Fritz Plasser, eds. 2004. *Political Parties and Electoral Change: Party Responses to Electoral Markets.* London: Sage Publications.

McElwain, Kenneth Mori. 2009. "How Long Are Koizumi's Coattails? Party-Leader Visits in the 2005 Election." In *Political Change in Japan: Electoral Behavior, Party Realignment, and the Koizumi Reforms,* ed. S. R. Reed, K. M. McElwain and K. Shimizu. Palo Alto: Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center.

McElwain, Kenneth Mori, and Erin Giencke. 2009. "The Instrumental Decentralization of Party Leader Selection." In *Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association.* Toronto, Canada.

McElwain, Kenneth Mori, and Stephen R. Reed. 2009. "Reforming Japan's Upper House: Lessons in Unintended Consequences." In *UCLA Conference on Japan's Politics and Economy.* UCLA.

Ohmiya, Takeo. 1992. *Senkyo-Seido to Giin-Teisuu no Zesei.* 3rd ed. Tokyo: Hokuju Shuppan.

Poguntke, Thomas, and Paul Webb, eds. 2005. *The Presidentialization of Politics: A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ramseyer, J. Mark, and Frances McCall Rosenbluth. 1993. *Japan's Political Marketplace.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Reed, Steven R., Ethan Scheiner, and Michael F. Thies. 2009. "Party-Centered, More Volatile: New Ballgame in Politics." *The Oriental Economist* 8-9.

Reed, Steven R., and Michael F. Thies. 2001. "The Causes of Electoral Reform in Japan." In *Mixed-Member*

Electoral Systems: The Best of Both Worlds?, ed. M. S. Shugart and M. P. Wattenberg. New York: Oxford University Press.

Richardson, Bradley M. 1997. *Japanese Democracy: Power, Coordination, and Performance.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Sato, Seizaburo, and Tetsuhisa Matsuzaki. 1986. *Jiminto Seiken.* Tokyo: Chuo Kouron-sha.

Scheiner, Ethan. 2005. *Democracy without Competition in Japan: Opposition Failure in a One-Party Dominant State.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shinoda, Tomohito. 2003. "Koizumi's Top-Down Leadership in the Anti-Terrorism Legislation: The Impact of Political Institutional Changes." *SAIS review* 23 (1):19-34.

Takenaka, Harukata. 2006. *Shushou Shihai--Nihon Seiji no Henbou.* Tokyo: Chuo Kouron Shinsha.

Taniguchi, Masaki. 2004. *Electoral Reform in Japan.* Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press.

Wren, Anne, and Kenneth Mori McElwain. 2007. "Voters and Parties." In *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. C. Boix and S. Stokes. Oxford: Oxford University Press.