

Abstracts

Frances Rosenbluth, Jun Saito, Kyohei Yamada: Electoral Adaptation in Japan: Party Strategy after Electoral Rule Change

Japan adopted largely majoritarian electoral rules in 1994 that have begun to reshape the political landscape in dramatic ways. The old rural-urban divide between the parties in fact masked a strategy of relying on groups that could be easily mobilized and monitored for purposes of allocating the vote among multiple candidates. Under the new rules, programmatic appeals are a more efficient way to gain a plurality of voters, leaving the old mobilizational strategy in disarray and consequently put an end to the LDP's long-term dominance. We speculate that clientelistic transactions between voters and politicians continue to decline because, given the system's majoritarian electoral incentives, rebundling rural protectionism with the social insurance concerns of the urban poor will be more ideologically consistent and therefore electorally efficient.

Nobuhiro Hiwatari, Structural Reforms at OECD Countries: The international monetary and domestic legislative causes of policy similarity

This paper explores the international economic and representative democratic determinants of production market policies, which has been showing a very similar trend among OECD countries since the 1980s. The originality of this paper lies in its incorporation of economic recessions and partisan preferences as critical causes. This paper finds that most countries undertook structural reforms in order to revive the economy and boost trade without disrupting monetary stability in a volatile international context, although some governments undertook the reforms as a domestic response to a banking crisis. This finding combined with the discovery that a right legislative median rather than the inauguration of a rightist government promotes structural reforms casts doubts on the interpretations that claim structural reforms are a creature of governments representing international trade interests or staunchly devoted to market fundamentalism.

Gregory W. Noble, Political-bureaucratic alliances for fiscal restraint in Japan

Japan lacks political leadership and wallows in pork, critics charge, yet from the late 1990s Japanese leaders exercised surprising restraint over aggregate spending, and reoriented budgetary expenditures from distributive outlays such as public works toward

social welfare and other forms of programmatic spending. The departure from particularism reflected not only commonly-cited electoral and bureaucratic reforms strengthening the hand of the prime minister, but also the efforts of senior LDP policy experts such as fiscal hawk Yosano Kaoru and rising tide advocate Nakagawa Hidenao to combine with sections of the bureaucracy, particularly officials seconded to the cabinet from the Ministry of Finance and METI, to overcome factional and backbench resistance and restrain expenditures. LDP leaders eventually reached a consensus on the need to increase taxes, but failure to convince the public contributed to the LDP's downfall.

Yves Tiberghien, The Political Consequences of Inequality in Japan

This paper focuses on the consequences of the structural reform program initiated by LDP leaders under prime ministers Hashimoto, Obuchi, and Koizumi. It argues that these structural reforms have played a role in increased economic restructuring, increased economic diversification and rising inequality. It further argues that the significant rise in inequality, largely driven by increased labor dualism, has led to increase voter demand to policy response. This created new policy space that the DPJ has successfully exploited in its new positioning in the 2007 and 2009 elections. The paper offers a framework on the social feedback effects generated by partial structural reform programs in a coordinated market economy, such as Japan.

The paper reviews data on inequality, labor dualism, and on public perceptions toward this rising inequality. It also offers an early evaluation of the DPJ's policy actions in power in response to the inequality conundrum and evaluates these responses. The new social cleavage around inequality now plays a major role in the process of political realignment in Japan.

Kay Shimizu, Koza Miyagawa, Political Consequences of Structural Change: Explaining the LDP's Decline

What explains the 2009 electoral loss by Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and more generally, Japan's changing political landscape? While the LDP's loss to the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) was large in vote count and impact, creating the first non-LDP government in the post-war period, the LDP's popularity had been in gradual decline over several elections. Despite its advantageous position as the incumbent party in power and the continued absence of a strong opposition party, the LDP lost crucial votes even in

districts long under their control. Such electoral results suggest a long-term, amplifying structural change that has shifted the political preferences of Japanese voters. We seek to explain the LDP's decline over the past several elections by exploring many of the ongoing structural changes in Japan and their influence on political outcomes.

Jun Saito, Local Government Reform and the Demise of the LDP

The Liberal Democratic Party maintained its electoral dominance largely by means of its divide-and-conquer tactics over the local government. The LDP's political control over the local government was so tight that anti-LDP political movements in the early 1990s were based on the idea of decentralization. The LDP took advantage of coalition partners to retain its government party status, but the policy concessions due to coalition bargaining resulted in the erosion of the party's support base. In particular, the series of municipal mergers toward March 2006 resulted in magnified volatility of the LDP's seat winning capacities and resulted in a decisive electoral defeats in the 2007 upper house and the 2009 lower house elections.

Kyohei Yamada, Geographic Income Distribution and the LDP

This paper uses municipal-level income data from 1973 to 2008 and discusses the patterns, causes and consequences of income inequality across Japanese municipalities. The empirical analyses reveal four main findings: (1) income inequality across regions increased since around 2000. (2) The growing income disparity in the last decade coincided with the economic stagnation of the rural areas. (3) There are pieces of information suggesting that the stagnation of the rural areas is due in part to the cutback of transfers from the national to local governments. (4) The LDP-led coalition's vote shares in small-sized municipalities were lower in 2005 and 2009 than in the previous Lower House elections.

Yukio Maeda, Economy, Cabinet Approval, and LDP support

Many studies indicate that recent Japanese prime ministers exert a greater influence on the electoral fortunes of governing party than their predecessors before the electoral and administrative reforms. However, this observation is mainly based on the period during the Koizumi cabinet. As Koizumi was very popular in his first year and the last year of his tenure, the general observation that prime ministers have a larger influence on

public opinion than in the past may be unwarranted. This paper compares the impact of cabinet approval on the support for governing party before and after the two reforms by analyzing the monthly poll results published by the Yomiuri Shimbun.

Kenneth Mori McElwain, Michio Umeda, Party Democratization and the Saliency of Party Leaders

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.

Benjamin Nyblade, The 21st Century Japanese Prime Minister: An Unusually Precarious Perch

The nature and rapidity of turnover of prime ministers in Japan in recent years (2006~2010) is nearly unprecedented both historically in Japan and in comparison to other developed parliamentary democracies. This paper contextualizes the recent high degree of turnover in the post of prime minister both in historical and comparative perspective. The central argument of the paper is that the recent rapid turnover in the post of the prime minister is a perverse consequence of the increased prominence and influence of the post and the greater electoral importance of the party label in a time of great electoral volatility and voter dissatisfaction.