Overview

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THE MOMENTOUS PUSH for political reform that swept Japan in the early 1990s had its genesis in a series of scandals, including the Recruit stock-for-favors scandal of 1988 and the Sagawa Kyubin influence-peddling scandal of 1992, that enveloped the political world. Public outrage at the corruption forced lawmakers to take action, leading to the passage by the Diet of a package of political reform bills in early 1994. During the lengthy debate on reform, focus shifted from merely devising measures to deter future scandals to fundamentally changing the Japanese party system.

The British-style party system served as the model for electoral reform. Several features of the British model were attractive to Japanese reformers: party-centered, policy-centered elections where the outcome accurately reflects voter preferences and comparatively frequent changes in government among just two or three political parties. Proponents of a new electoral system for Japan were particularly concerned with eliminating the factors that had contributed to the Liberal Democratic Party's monopoly on power for nearly four decades and blocked the development of a strong, viable opposition party. British-style party politics was seen as the embodiment of the very elements that needed to be incorporated into the Japanese electoral system.

The movement for change culminated in the revamping of the electoral system for the House of Representatives (Lower House). The essays in this volume assess the extent to which the Japanese political system has shifted toward the British model, based on the campaign process for the October 20, 1996, election, the first in the Lower House under the new system.

Prelude to Reform

The driving forces behind electoral reform were a group of younger Diet members who had left the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in June 1993 to form the New Party Sakigake (*sakigake* means pioneer) and a group of senior politicians led by Ozawa Ichiro and Hata Tsutomu, who had left the LDP at the same time as the younger politicians to form the Japan Renewal Party (JRP). To understand the goals of political reform, let us turn our attention to the views of these politicians.[1]

The reformers agreed on a central proposition: that multiseat electoral districts must be abolished. Under the old electoral system for the Lower House, each voter cast a single ballot in an electoral district. These multiseat districts yielded not one victorious candidate but between two and six winners. LDP candidates were forced to compete against each other in a single district if the party was to have any chance of gaining a majority in the Lower House. At the grass-roots level, the party was weak and policy-based campaigns were almost nonexistent because individual LDP candidates concentrated on establishing and nurturing personal voter networks in order to win re-election. Intraparty competition, moreover, spurred the rise of factions within the LDP. Over time, the perception grew that the system of multiseat electoral districts—by creating factions that provided the money with which candidates serviced their electoral districts—was responsible for money politics and political corruption generally. Many politicians came to believe that single-member districts were more likely to foster party-centered, policy-centered elections.

Many political scientists shared the criticism of the multiseat electoral districts by younger members of the Diet. Taking British and German mass parties as a model, these scholars criticized parties based on personal support organizations as "pre-modern" parties. The voices of these academics as conveyed through the mass media widely influenced public opinion.

The largest opposition grouping, the Social Democratic Party (SDP),[2] which presumably would benefit from a system with two major parties, opposed the introduction of single-member electoral districts because of the fear that such a system would lead to an overwhelming LDP victory at the polls and the SDP's demise. The SDP sought the support of two smaller opposition groups, the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) and the Komeito (Clean Government Party), to block

the LDP plan. The reformers in the LDP then tried to obtain the support of the DSP and the Komeito by offering a plan that called for a mixed electoral system of small single-member districts and large proportional representation districts.

After much discussion on various reform plans, lawmakers decided on a system combining single-member districts and proportional representation. The new system divided the country into three hundred single-member districts and eleven proportional representation blocks. The two hundred seats in these blocks would be determined according to the share of the vote parties received within each block, and parties would assign seats to candidates according to a predetermined list. Voters would cast ballots in both their single-member district and their proportional representation block.

Younger LDP members tended to support reform because most of them faced eroding electoral bases and were highly dissatisfied with having to spend great amounts of time, effort, and money to service their constituencies. In addition, these members were more dependent than veteran politicians on the floating vote, which made them more vulnerable to the fallout from political scandals.

The financial demands of elected office, reformers felt, provided the grist for corruption. For Ozawa and Hata, who played a decisive role in the reform movement, however, rising campaign expenses were a secondary matter. Their main concern was the lack of political leadership in Japan.

Ozawa, who had reached the post of LDP secretary-general, one of the highest posts in Japanese politics, in his late forties, was in particular different from LDP kingmakers Takeshita Noboru and Kanemaru Shin and other senior LDP leaders in that he took a longer-term view of the country's affairs and did not simply focus on preserving the system that allowed party members to channel government funds and public works projects to their home districts. As deputy chief cabinet secretary under the Takeshita administration, Ozawa tackled a succession of thorny issues in connection with U.S.-Japan trade friction, including negotiations over the opening of the construction market, joint development of the next-generation fighter-supporter (FSX) of the Japanese Air Self-Defense Force, and the opening of the telecommunications market, and as secretary-general of the LDP during the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the Persian Gulf War, he had thought long and hard about Japan's future place in the international political arena. Consequently, Ozawa came to see the need for a national vision

and strategy. Ozawa feared that the LDP's pork-barrel system and its policy of protecting interest groups such as farmers and small merchants were major impediments to the pursuit of Japan's national interest. Without drastic change, the country, he felt, would face deepening crises owing to its inability to respond effectively to international issues.

To Ozawa, then, political reform was not just a means to prevent more scandals, but a strategy to bring about restructuring of the state. Giving political leaders a free hand to institute economic reform in accord with national interests would destroy the LDP's fractionated power structure stemming from interfactional rivalry and the personal character of individual politicians' *koenkai* (personal support organizations). Once the old power structure ceased to function, the party could put an end to the overwhelming influence of traditional economic sectors such as agriculture and small merchants.

Also, to stifle the kind of pacifist thinking that had prevented Japan from making a more positive international contribution by, for example, dispatching Self-Defense Forces personnel to peacekeeping operations overseas rather than relying solely on "checkbook diplomacy," Ozawa thought it necessary to create a two-party system in which the SDP would shed its left wing and become a more responsible participant in government. Japan would then have either two conservative parties or a conservative party and a moderate social democratic party. Both the LDP's faction-based structure and the SDP's existence as the perennial opposition party were seen to be rooted in the multiseat electoral districts. By reforming the electoral system, then, both problems could be dealt with.

One important byproduct of a thorough reform would be correction of the imbalance of seats caused by the overrepresentation of rural areas, which many current Diet members had been unwilling to consider. The result would be a party system in which consumers constituted the base of conservative support, as the new urban class of salaried workers replaced farmers and small-business owners as the middle class.

Ozawa took inspiration from the New Conservatism that swept Japan in the 1980s under the influence of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Ozawa hoped to replicate their successes by implementing political reform. Once that was accomplished, he could turn his attention to the long-term goals of restructuring the economy and administrative reform.

The Sakigake's political reform plan for a mixed system of single-seat districts and proportional representation blocks represented the views of the conservative rank and file, while Ozawa's reform philosophy reflected the position of top national elites. By combining top-down and bottom-up reform, changes to the electoral system proved possible.

In the midst of growing public expectations for political reform in 1992, Hosokawa Morihiro, former governor of Kumamoto Prefecture, had established the Japan New Party (JNP) in May of that year, drawing support mostly from the new middle class, especially women and salarymen in large cities. Hosokawa had an aura of urban sophistication and, unlike Ozawa, an attractive public demeanor. The JNP actively sought media attention and quickly managed to gain widespread political support. Hosokawa thus played an important part in attracting public support for Ozawa's reform effort by speaking to the interests of urban salarymen, who are not well organized as a constituency with political influence.

In the summer of 1993, the forces for change had their chance. A no-confidence motion against the Miyazawa administration for failing to implement political reform passed the Diet because Ozawa and his allies would not vote with the LDP. It was later that month that many party members bolted from the LDP to form the JRP and Sakigake. After the Lower House election on July 18, in which the LDP fell from power for the first time in thirty-eight years, in the midst of tense negotiations with other parties about forming a non-LDP government, the Sakigake and the JNP proposed that the new government dedicate itself to political reform. The single condition for participation in the coalition would be support for the system combining single-member districts and proportional representation. These two parties agreed to work with six other parties, including the JRP, the SDP, the DSP, and the Komeito, to form an anti-LDP coalition government under Hosokawa as prime minister that would bring about electoral reform by the end of the year. Thus, political reform was made the coalition government's top priority. After a great deal of time and effort, the Diet passed the political reform package bill on January 29, 1994. An amendment, which reapportioned three hundred seats to single-seat districts and two hundred seats to proportional representation blocks, was passed on March 4.

Having achieved their goal of giving momentum to political reform, however, the key players in the reform movement—Ozawa,

Hosokawa, and Takemura Masayoshi, leader of the Sakigake—saw their alliance unravel. From their days in the LDP, the members of the Sakigake had opposed Ozawa's efforts to create a more centralized party. With the establishment of the Hosokawa administration, they watched as Ozawa cooperated closely with the Komeito and continued his efforts to amass political power under the guise of the anti-LDP movement. Sakigake members sought to maintain their distance from Ozawa and to retain a separate political identity.

The Sakigake faced several problems as a member of the coalition government. Several of Hosokawa's policies were inspired by Ozawa's new conservatism, and these were difficult to accept based on the Sakigake's ideological position. In the area of foreign policy, many Sakigake members leaned toward SDP policy stances or those of the dovish LDP factions of the past. In the conflict with Ozawa, the Sakigake had hoped that the JNP would align with it, but the JNP began to shift toward Ozawa and drifted apart from the Sakigake. The Sakigake had no choice but to align itself with the SDP, which had become isolated within the Hosokawa administration. The Hosokawa administration, which lasted from August 1993 to April 1994, was followed by the Hata administration, which survived only two months until June 1994, when the administration of socialist leader Murayama Tomiichi came to power. Murayama's coalition government consisted of the LDP, the Sakigake, and the SDP. In barely a year since losing the reins of power, the LDP returned to ruling-party status. This was a major achievement for the LDP, which as an opposition party had lost members and had been on the verge of dissolution. Now it was helping Murayama, a Socialist, to form a new cabinet. The LDP's return to power quickly revitalized it.

Under the leadership of Ozawa, the JRP deepened its ties to the Komeito and the DSP. The JNP, which suffered a sharp decline in popularity due to a scandal that involved Hosokawa, joined with these parties to form the New Frontier Party (NFP) in December 1994. The leaders of the Sakigake and the SDP, after allying with the LDP in June 1994, were subjected to increasing criticism within their parties, and numerous fissures developed in the ranks. Some members left to join the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) founded in September 1996 by third-generation politician Hatoyama Yukio and Minister of Health and Welfare Kan Naoto. The Japan Communist Party (JCP), content to follow an independent path, steered clear of these events. In October 1996, Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro—who

had come to power after Murayama stepped down in January—called the first Lower House election under the new system. The main contest in that election was between the LDP and the NFP. The election raised several interesting questions, including whether the recently formed DPJ would establish itself as a stable third party, and whether the Sakigake and the SDP would survive.

ANALYSIS OF THE 1996 ELECTION

What impact did the electoral reform have on the structure of individual parties and the Japanese party system as a whole? Specifically, has there been a shift away from candidate-centered elections, which presumably derive from the existence of multiseat electoral districts? In other words, have reformers realized their goal of introducing party-centered, policy-centered elections?

The first three chapters of this volume adopt a case-study approach to focus on how the koenkai of conservative party candidates functioned in the election. The authors made an effort to choose a variety of candidates and districts. The first chapter studies Aichi Kazuo, an incumbent and second-generation politician from an urban district; the second looks at Nukagawa Fukushiro, an incumbent in a rural district who began his political career as a prefectural assembly member; and the third follows Hirasawa Katsuei, a newly elected Diet member from a downtown Tokyo district.

These three candidates had different political backgrounds. Aichi was then from the NFP and was supported by the Komei, a local organization of the former Komeito. He battled with candidates from the DPJ and the LDP. Nukagawa was a middle-ranking member of the LDP and ran against an NFP newcomer. Hirasawa entered politics after a career as a bureaucrat. He won a hard-fought contest as the LDP candidate against an NFP candidate formerly affiliated with the Komeito.

The first and second chapters analyze how redistricting affected long-standing koenkai. The authors trace the evolution of each koenkai from the time of the candidate's first election. One reason for devoting attention to koenkai history is to show that they have a number of functions and are not simply "hothouses of money politics." These functions include acting to stem pressures on politicians from those seeking favors and in some cases helping to shore up a politician's

autonomy. In Aichi's koenkai, located in the growing metropolis of Sendai in Miyagi Prefecture, another function was seen. Beyond servicing the electoral district, his koenkai also acted like a fan club or a volunteer organization. Koenkai in large urban areas tend to have this characteristic.

The third chapter analyzes how new candidates form koenkai in newly created electoral districts where there is no incumbent from the same party. The creation of a koenkai begins with efforts to contact and gain the support of community leaders, who are asked to serve in top positions within the koenkai. Other influential figures are then chosen from various business groups and localities within the district to fill second-rank posts within the koenkai. This networking process thus generally resembles koenkai creation under the previous electoral system.

Hirasawa, because he was a candidate "imported" from outside of the district by the LDP, did not have relatives or friends in his district. As a result, he created a koenkai weighted toward influential local people. He also put much effort into absorbing into his organization the koenkai established by other candidates under the multiseat electoral district system. His koenkai was not completely new, but a merger of these older networks.

From these three cases, we can point to the following general trends in the recent election: First, achieving the main goal of electoral reform, namely, party-centered, policy-centered elections, implied that koenkai would be disestablished and revived as part of local party branches. But as the examples indicate, networks of personal connections between candidates and influential local people were as decisively important as in the past. Chapter 3 reveals that the koenkai was still indispensable in races with candidates from other parties in the single-seat districts. This is true for other conservative candidates. In neither the LDP nor the NFP were efforts made to create organizations that would replace the koenkai.

In all three cases, however, the vote-gathering activities of local politicians played a more important role than in the past. Because only one candidate per district was endorsed in each party, local politicians could not, as they had under the old system, act as bystanders while candidates from the same party competed against one another. But local politicians did want to avoid being known as belonging to a certain Diet member's camp. And Diet members wanted to avoid becoming so reliant on local politicians that they lost their autonomy.

Both sides were thus motivated to preserve their autonomy, making efforts to reorganize the party at the local level and unify koenkai sluggish. In Hirasawa's campaign, the presence of local politicians (Tokyo ward assembly members) was more visible compared with either Aichi's or Nukagawa's campaigns because Hirasawa was a new candidate and had not fully established his koenkai.

Both professional and industry associations responded favorably to LDP candidates once the party appeared headed to victory. These business organizations had substituted as the party organization, using social ties to mobilize votes. This function did not appear to have changed. Yet in the case of Aichi, the NFP candidate who had expected to win Sendai (and in Hyogo Prefecture, as analyzed in chapter 4), business associations maintained neutrality. Moreover, the LDP victory in the Lower House election led to a revival of their LDP support in each prefecture. The "ruling-party effect" on interest groups was especially widespread.

Second, the three cases also make clear that campaign platforms appear to have had little impact on the candidates' ability to attract votes. In the proportional representation blocks, blockwide campaign organizations were largely form over substance, and electioneering was virtually nonexistent. Gathering votes in single-seat districts was considered tantamount to gathering votes for the proportional representation ballot. Even Aichi, a veteran politician, had little time to concern himself with the proportional representation seats in the Tohoku area because he was too busy stumping for his candidacy in the single-seat district. In any case, none of the candidates running in single-member districts engaged in campaigning for proportional representation blocks.

Chapter 4 investigates local politics in two prefectures and reveals that an important change has occurred. A gap has formed between central and local party organizations with respect to the composition of party coalitions and the affiliations between Diet members and local politicians. The reorganization of the political system at the national level led to this gap. But political reorganization at the national level was merely a matter of individual Diet members changing their party memberships. Political reorganization could not involve party reorganization unless the gap between local politics and national politics disappeared and the distribution of parties at the local level was in accord with the distribution at the national level.

The existence of this gap suggests that local politics is becoming a fixed and independent arena separate from national politics. This alters

the stereotype of Japan as a centralized state. A typical example is the city of Kobe in Hyogo Prefecture where the LDP was the minority party before it lost power at the national level in 1993. But even in constituencies in which the LDP held a majority, governors, heads of municipalities, party leaders, and local politicians all relied on koenkai to be elected, thus indicating an independent spirit at the local level and the desire to remain autonomous from Diet members representing the constituency and the central party organization. In municipal assemblies, the same tendency was noted among the many nonpartisan politicians.[3] This can be interpreted to mean that securing national government appropriations to please local constituents, though widespread, is not indispensable for gathering votes. The implication for local politicians is that assisting the campaigns of Diet members merely supplements vote-gathering efforts by koenkai.

In Hyogo and Okayama prefectures, it is also important to note that the splintering of the LDP in 1993 had little impact on the two prefectural assemblies. Most assembly members remained in the LDP, despite the decision by many of the Diet members to whom these assembly members were affiliated to join the JRP. This trend was seen in many other prefectures as well. In both prefectures and municipalities, the political power structure proved "resilient," meaning that it was not directly linked with changes at the national level.

Chapter 5 examines elections in what Americans refer to as "company towns." The author asks whether the unions or companies play the main role in elections, and what changes have occurred owing to the revisions in the electoral system. To answer these questions, the author considers Toyota City, home of the Toyota Motor Corporation, and Hitachi City, home of an Hitachi, Ltd. manufacturing plant. Under the system of multiseat electoral districts, company management (section manager or above, who are numerous), small companies with business ties to the dominant company, and subcontractors all supported LDP candidates in both cities, whereas unions supported candidates fielded by the unions in the same district. In Toyota, union candidates were affiliated with the DSP, whereas in Hitachi, they were members of the SDP. In both cities, the union-backed candidates as well as the management-backed candidates were elected time and again. After the shift to single-member districts, however, the "segregation of niche" between unions and management disappeared, and the conditions under which races were fought became far more difficult for both the union and management sides.

The chapter shows how management and labor sought to handle elections so that their amicable relationship would not break down. In Toyota, the former DSP candidate moved to the NFP and defeated the LDP candidate, and behind the scenes, the union took a more active approach than the company to the election. In Hitachi, the Socialist candidate, who had moved to the DPJ, lost to the LDP candidate. Because the LDP candidate was the minister of international trade and industry, the company put forth more effort in this election to ensure that he did not lose. Had these special circumstances not applied in Hitachi, the company doubtless would have distanced itself from the election campaign.

Even with the shift to single-member districts, it is difficult for conservative party candidates to get elected simply based on the support of a single company, no matter how large it is. This book suggests that they need to arrange support from small businesses directly through their koenkai rather than through large companies. Neither can the SDP or the DPJ rely on unions alone, because of their political disinterest and declining membership. Those candidates also need to put effort into organizing their koenkai. Candidates who rely heavily on companies or unions face increasingly difficult election races.

Chapter 6 considers the results of a survey conducted with the cooperation of regional bureau editors at the *Yomiuri Shimbun,* one of the largest newspapers in Japan. The consequences of the new electoral system, specifically with respect to how campaign activities were carried out in the single-seat districts, become clear through the observations of staff reporters who gathered information on the election. This valuable data is subject to the limitations inherent in survey methods, but it provides a complete picture of campaign activities across the country.

The main finding of the survey is that in the country as a whole neither the image of the party leader nor the party campaign platform had a major effect on electoral outcomes. In hard-fought races, personal services and simple contact with voters were critical, in addition to the shift to single-seat districts. As a result, in these electoral districts, the primary aim of electoral reform—changing from candidate-centered elections to party-centered elections—remained a distant one. By reducing the size of electoral districts, the role of local politicians has increased, and candidates need their support. On the other hand, cooperation among LDP members, who until recently had been competing against one another, was successful in quite a few districts,

though rather than forming local party branches, they simply reorganized their koenkai. In the case of the NFP, the koenkai organizations of former JRP members, the former Komeito organization, and the former DSP Yuai-kai (the national political arm of the former Domei, or Japan Confederation of Labor) cooperated in the election, but these ties can hardly be regarded as the basis of a new local party organization. In the case of the DPJ, too, its local organization was virtually nonexistent. But as the research survey showed, the responses of candidates, interest groups, and local politicians to the new electoral system differed widely, and it is difficult to predict how they will change in the future. As a whole, the survey underscores the results of the case studies in chapters 1 through 5. By showing that campaign activities differed by district and by party, the survey also makes clear the risk of simple generalization.

WAS POLITICAL REFORM SUCCESSFUL?

In Japanese politics, the situation remains fluid as mergers and realignments among parties continue. Consequently, it is difficult to determine whether various developments noted at the local level in the October 1996 Lower House election represent long-term trends. Keeping this in mind, however, we can make the following observations on the 1996 election and future developments based on the joint research presented here.

First, the primary goal of reforming the political system—that is, to reduce the amount of money spent on elections to prevent the occurrence of further scandals—was only somewhat successful. Revisons to the Public Election Law strengthened the prohibition on wining and dining constituents in exchange for votes and made candidates jointly responsible for campaign violations by their campaign managers. In addition, the amount of funds that can be used for campaign activities was reduced. It is clear that reliance on dubious political donations declined.

In this election, however, candidates spent more money than in past elections. There were three reasons for this. First, vote-gathering bases had to be reorganized due to the reapportionment of electoral districts. Second, because the election was predicted to be early under the new system, politicians spent more time on campaign activities under the new law prior to announcing their candidacy and on efforts to establish and maintain an electoral base. Third, in the smaller

electoral districts, the reforms meant that candidates had to put more effort into wooing individual candidates, thus making maintaining a high profile in one's district a more important factor. But it should also be pointed out that in subsequent elections, the circumstances that led to the first and second reasons for higher campaign costs will disappear, so it is possible to foresee that, after three or four elections, campaign spending will decline, especially with a rising number of districts in which incumbents achieve a dominant position and the number of powerful opposition candidates decreases. Whether the loss of powerful opposition candidates is beneficial or not is, of course, a separate matter.

Second, more fundamental reform to bring about party-centered, policy-centered politics went unrealized. As each chapter makes clear, party campaign platforms were almost never an issue in this election as policy cleavages among parties were vague. This was not a matter of laziness, but part of the structural and historical background common to parties in advanced industrial countries. Because this sort of background has no connection to changes in the electoral system, we will not examine it here. However, the basic point should be emphasized that a certain agreement exists among citizens on major policy issues. The conditions in the 1950s in most Western nations referred to as the "end of ideology" have reemerged today with the retreat of socialism and social democracy as well as the end of the cold war. Against the backdrop of this "second end of ideology," the longstanding policy distinctions have been obliterated or confused (Otake 1997). As a result, a major theme of political reform has been the ideal of party-centered, instead of policy-centered, politics. This involves the establishment of a party system in which (1) a governing party, characterized by strong leadership and unswayed by individual politicians' interests, is entrusted with responsibility for the electorate by the mandate of the electorate and (2) an opposition party exists that is capable of taking power when the ruling party loses the confidence of the electorate. Whatever the arguments over political reform, it was not possible to undertake any reform—such as holding an election in which voters are forced to choose between two very different policy packages—other than the shift to a two-party system with basic policy consensus. Even under the banner of administrative and economic reform, the Hosokawa coalition government largely continued LDP policies. Among those administrations that followed Hosokawa, moreover, none has urged major changes in policy.

Considering the limits to party-centered politics as evidenced by the 1996 election campaign, let us now consider leadership in the governing party. According to the British model of party politics, the governing party is one that has centralized power under a party leader. But Japanese politicians have been strongly opposed to losing their personal autonomy to a strong party organization. Incumbent members of the Lower House have indicated that they would reject moving to proportional districts. Also, because of redistricting, there were cases in which two incumbents under the old system had their electoral bases in the same district. In these situations, the "Costa Rican method" (having incumbents alternate terms as proportional representative and single-seat-district representative) is a common compromise. As long as the ideal of British-style politics was advocated at an abstract level no problems arose on the surface, but once the impact of a centralized party on politicians became apparent, both junior and middle-ranking Diet members began to directly oppose this shift.

When Margaret Thatcher was prime minister of the United Kingdom during the neo-reform era in the 1980s, she only rarely changed her cabinet personnel during the twelve years of her administration. Moreover, after shuffling her cabinet to survive the 1981 economic crisis, Thatcher did as she liked with respect to personnel changes. The German electoral system (a system that combines proportional and single-seat representation) was championed by some Japanese political scientists during the debate on political reform. Like the British system, the German system also permits few changes in the leadership position, as we can see in the case of Helmut Kohl, who maintained power longer than Thatcher. But if Japan were to adopt a system that concentrates political power in top party leaders, thereby forcing Diet members (with the exception of Komeito and JCP members) to abandon their status of "rulers of their own fief," it would be intolerable to conservative politicians, who, as a practical matter, have taken for granted an egalitarian distribution of cabinet posts and party offices. Criticism of Ozawa's "entourage politics" in the NFP was fundamentally a reflection of the mentality nurtured by the decentralized power structure of Japanese party politics and the egalitarian political culture. Dislike of powerful leadership was at the root of opposition by some LDP members in 1997 who criticized Kato Koichi for his "dictatorial" ways when he was elected LDP party secretary-general for the third time.

Even before the LDP breakup in 1993, this opposition to strong party leadership had been institutionalized in the system allowing dual candidacy in the single-seat district and in the proportional representation district. In the event that candidates lose in their respective single-seat district races, yet have the same ranking on the party's proportional representation list, priority is given to the one who loses by the narrower margin. Ozawa, as LDP party secretary-general, had "arbitrarily decided" the ranking of candidates for the House of Councillors' proportional representation in 1992. The party-centered election was recognized in the image of powerful party leaders, who could decide the rank "arbitrarily." The rule allowing dual candidates to be placed on the same rank in the proportional representation list made the system nominally party-centered. Anti-Ozawa sentiment not only limited Ozawa's influence on party realignment but also was built into the election law.

In the 1996 Lower House election, each party recognized the principle of giving priority to incumbents. Because modifying this principle was regarded as very difficult, the autonomy of incumbent Diet members increased vis-à-vis party executives. In the past, LDP factions were the main mechanism for endorsing new candidates to oppose incumbents. The new electoral system successfully constrained factional politics, which had promoted the influence of special interests, and it also ended intraparty competition in election districts.[4] However, opportunities for new candidates to challenge incumbents declined precipitously. On this point, the reform led to an outcome that is the reverse of party-centered politics. With respect to the LDP's party structure, we note a tendency toward looseness, in which Diet members are more independent and think of the party simply as a label, much like parties in the U.S. Congress or in the Third and Fourth Republics of France.[5]

The tendency to vote for candidates rather than parties did not necessarily change, as noted earlier. In fact, the role of koenkai in collecting votes actually expanded. The LDP, which once again became a ruling party, has moved farther away from a party-centered character.

The reforms have had no visible effect on creating stronger political leadership by centralizing power in the parties. Moreover, by weakening the factional system, the reforms made it impossible for faction leaders to collectively exert party leadership, but have not led to the emergence of a substitute form of leadership. One outcome of former Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro's administrative reforms in the

1980s was that they made possible control by the Tanaka/Takeshita faction (Otake 1997, chap. 12). The reforms of 1993–1994 were closely linked to criticism of this kind of political leadership, and have had the effect of decentralizing party power. Today, the resuscitation of the factions is impossible and undesirable. But if a substitute leadership structure fails to emerge, Japan will have no way to resolve its leadership vacuum.

As the influence of factions was undermined under the new electoral system, formal LDP executives, especially the president, the secretary-general, and the directors of the LDP Executive Council and the LDP Policy Affairs Research Council, were accorded greater relative importance. The lack of a candidate to oppose Hashimoto Ryutaro in the LDP presidential election held in the summer of 1997 was symbolic. Our thesis is that although the factional rivalry within the LDP weakened, the reforms did not furnish party executives with sufficient leadership to overcome the division of power arising from shifts in electoral bases. The Hashimoto cabinet, which was supported by the LDP-Sakigake-SDP coalition, reinforced LDP executive leadership by using the necessity of the coalition in a backhanded way— after forging the three-party agreement, Hashimoto, wielding the agreement as a *fait accompli*, then sought approval from the Executive Council and the Policy Affairs Research Council.[6] If the LDP regains the position of single governing party, this structure will collapse, and the influence of the three top-ranking offices will decline.

Third, the creation of the second pillar of party-centered politics— the existence of a second party that is capable of running the government in place of the LDP—has not yet occurred.[7] This was due to the failure of non-LDP parties to join together during the process of political reorganization, rather than a consequence of the electoral system. Today, every party has a chance to belong to a consolidated ruling party coalition and, hence, shows little inclination to remain in the opposition, confronting the parties in power. This is mostly due to the impact of the election system. We consider this issue below.

Gathering votes through the efforts of koenkai and interest groups have been regarded as major shortcomings of Japanese politics. These two features are normally thought of as the same type of phenomenon. But in fact, they are different types of vote-gathering and under certain conditions are mutually exclusive. If a candidate's koenkai is strong enough, he has less reason to rely on interest groups. Aichi Kazuo, discussed in chapter 1, is a case in point. But among politicians

who try to achieve administrative reform are those who recognize that stronger ties to koenkai members are indispensable given strong opposition to these reforms from unions and industries.[8] Politicians who emerged from urban citizens' movements yet know the difficulties of mobilizing citizen networks in support of politicians, have strengthened their vote-gathering organizations based on a bond of personal trust, much as LDP koenkai in the past.[9] These politicians would like to carry out their original intention of excluding vested interests.

In the debates over political reform, the huge expenses to sustain koenkai were a major issue because they invited intervention in politics by private business. Both interest groups and koenkai were considered one factor of political corruption. However, as the above examples make clear, it is not necessarily impossible to sever the linkage between koenkai and vested interests.

Few candidates, however, can depend on the autonomous vote-gathering capabilities of the koenkai and eliminate reliance on interest groups. In single-seat districts, the outcome was the opposite of what was predicted. In multiseat districts, candidates could win a seat by capturing 15 to 20 percent of the vote, but under the new system, candidates (with the exception of those in large urban areas) must have 30 to 40 percent of the vote.[10] These percentages are very difficult to attain only through koenkai or public notoriety.

At the time of electoral reform, the prevailing belief was that 50 percent of the vote would be necessary to win single-seat districts,[11] so candidates could not be elected based on support from interest groups and would need to promote policies that attracted the support of the average voter. However, the average voter had less and less interest in politics due to disappointment in political developments since 1993, so voter turnout did not increase. As a result, candidates could not afford to lose the support of interest groups. They avoided making any statements that would lead to a conflict with the interests of any group. For the leaders of the LDP, these circumstances not only limited support for the administrative, economic, and social reforms they wanted but also were especially costly in that the opposition could maintain a degree of influence. To gain the support of a large number of interest groups, being part of the governing coalition is more important than ever.

Immediately following the election, a movement strengthened to establish a consolidated governing coalition, either through a conservative alliance of the LDP and the NFP or an LDP-SDP-Sakigake

coalition. Every party, except the JCP, wished to be in the governing coalition, even at the expense of ideological integrity. As a consequence of the new electoral system, the NFP's effectiveness as a strong alternative opposition party has been made more difficult. It is also very hard to form a large opposition group based around the DPJ. Before the electoral reform, a candidate could retain his seat based on support (with a 15 to 20 percent turnout rate) from specific social groups such as religious organizations, unions, or koenkai. This strategy was criticized as leading to the protective and status-quo-oriented nature of Japanese party competition and it became an object of reform. But because the new system unduly weakened and destabilized the position of Diet members, they became too sensitive to the influence of social groups.[12] A two-party system with an opposition group capable of running the government thus became more difficult to achieve. A situation reemerged in which the LDP was the dominant party while the opposition was fractionated.

In today's electoral system, 40 percent of the Lower House seats are distributed on the basis of proportional representation. But both politicians and political scientists see this system as consisting primarily of single-seat districts. Campaign activities are assumed to focus on the single-seat districts, and despite the two-ballot system (in which voters cast one ballot for the single-seat district candidate and one ballot for the proportional representation block party), the possibility that voters might split their ballots is largely ignored. In other words, they do not consider that voters might choose a candidate in a single-seat district but not vote for that candidate's party in the proportional representation block.[13]

In the 1996 election, voters who defied the common wisdom and split their votes are estimated at 10 to 20 percent of the total (Yomiuri Shimbun-sha 1996, 42–43). If small parties, especially the JCP and the SDP, emphasized the proportional representation blocks, as the JCP did, and placed well-known new faces high on their candidate lists, and if party leaders urged voters to split their ballots as a way to increase their share of the proportional representation vote, these parties would win many more seats. Even the NFP could have pursued a strategy of asking voters to divide ballots between single-seat districts and proportional representation blocks.

The one reason that a party would choose not to adopt this strategy of emphasizing proportional representation is that priority is placed on electing incumbents, leaving the party unable to place a large

number of new candidates in the proportional representation district. Because of Japan's lifelong employment system, candidates must first retire from their jobs just to run, and it is extremely difficult to return to their former job should they lose the election. Therefore, it is very difficult for parties to find attractive new candidates. But a more important reason for the lack of new recruits who are willing to risk their employment is the decentralized structure of parties, despite the reform slogan of party-centered politics.

We offer the following general reason for why there has been no special emphasis on the development of proportional representation blocks. In the debate over reforming the electoral system, one hypothesis was that once the system changed, parties would become more unified sooner or later. This view ignored insights derived from the concept of "institutional legacy" in the institutional approach to politics. Even the recognition that the current Lower House election system is based on single-seat districts is an extension of past experience on the part of politicians on how to run elections and of recent debate on how to reform the system on the part of reformers, and is an example of an institutional legacy. The cognitive bias that neglects the proportional representation blocks was fostered when the German-type mixed system was discussed during the debate on reform in the early 1990s. In the German-type mixed system, proportional representation carries more weight than in the system combining single-seat districts and proportional representation introduced in the Lower House: the parties' total seats are determined with proportional representation and seats are distributed first to the winners in single-seat districts, with the rest being filled from the proportional representation list. When this system was rejected, the importance of proportional representation was erroneously wiped out from the minds of politicians and political scientists alike, despite the fact that the newly adopted system allocated 40 percent of seats to the proportional representation blocks.

The above bias was most evident among each party's incumbent Lower House members, who were completely unprepared to contest seats in the proportional representation blocks. Not only did party organization not exist in the blocks, but members also did not recognize the blocks as having any significance. Despite the relatively long preparation period, members entered these races with no campaign strategy for the proportional representation blocks. They focused only on their own survival and did not think about increasing the vote for

the party as a whole—a natural response given the current party structure. Even if they were to give serious consideration to increasing the party vote, members have no other organizational basis but their koenkai. This is because the koenkai established during the period of multiseat election districts are clearly an institutional legacy of parties and politicians. In addition, where members opt for dual candidacy, they find it necessary to concentrate their campaign activities in the single-seat district to make sure that if they lose it is by the smallest margin possible.

In conclusion, we find that the electoral reform program has yet to show little success. In fact, Japanese politics is moving in the opposite direction from what had been expected. Given the enormous amount of energy that has been expended, it would be nearly impossible to consider any further substantial reforms to the electoral system.[14] If the analysis in this book is correct, there is an important discrepancy between the institutional implications and their perceptions of the new electoral system. The ramifications of dual candidacy, the practice of ex post facto ranking for the proportional representation list, and the seat distribution ratio between single-seat districts and proportional representation blocks have yet to be fully explored. Minor changes (or what appear to be minor changes) in rules might have significant impacts on the system. As a precondition for investigating these possibilities, it is necessary to understand how the new electoral system has operated thus far. I will conclude with the hope that this book will be the starting point of future research on these subjects.

NOTES

1. For a more detailed account of the views and activities of these two groups, see Otake (1996).

2. The SDP was known as the Japan Socialist Party until February 1991, when it was renamed in English the Social Democratic Party of Japan. On January 19, 1996, "of Japan" was dropped from the party name.

3. The existence of nonaffiliated members has been the subject of criticism by some political scientists, who see them as reflecting a backward political climate in which voters choose candidates on the basis of personal obligation rather than parties on the basis of party platforms.

4. Factions are still maintained for the purpose of distributing cabinet positions

and top-ranking party offices. Although the reforms failed to centralize power in the parties, we predict that as further decentralization takes place factional leadership will decline and the seniority system will become further institutionalized (as in the U.S. House of Representatives during the 1950s and 1960s).

5. In studies of voting behavior, it is clear that even in Japan party image is of far greater importance than candidate image (see the research started by Miyake, Kinoshita, and Aiba [1986] in 1967). While endorsement by a major party is not indispensable for winning an election, it is very important. The implication is that even in the past, Japan has had elections that are in some degree party-centered. In this instance, Japan is similar to the United States. But as mentioned, calls for party-centered elections in the 1990s were not meant in this sense.

6. Even Policy Research Affairs Council Chairman Yamazaki Taku recognized this (*This Is Yomiuri,* October 1996, interview, 164). Secretary-General Kato Koichi's adherence to the LDP-Sakigake-SDP coalition is due to the LDP's lack of a majority in the House of Councillors, but also because Kato believes that LDP leaders can persuade party members on various matters, arguing that otherwise the three-party coalition would collapse.

7. This despite the fact that from the standpoint of voters' expectations, the JRP, unlike the previous opposition parties, was recognized from early on as a party capable of running the government, and within a short time the JNP and Sakigake achieved the same level of public confidence as the JRP (Miyake 1995, 86–87).

8. Sato Ken'ichiro, who moved from the Sakigake to the DPJ, is an example (per his statement at the meeting of the Japanese Politics in the New Era group on October 23, 1996).

9. Kaieda Banri and Maehara Seiji, both of whom moved from the JNP to the Sakigake and then to the DPJ, are examples (interview with Kaieda, February 17, 1996, and Maehara's statement to the meeting of the Japanese Politics in the New Era group on December 15, 1996). Kan Naoto can also be included (see Kan 1980; also per his statement at the same group on July 22, 1997). Of course, their koenkai have a more volunteer character than those of ordinary conservative politicians, and their vote-gathering strategies relied much more on a public image cultivated through the mass media. Needless to say, if a politician can rely on an image-based strategy, it is easier to dispense with the influence of unions and trade associations.

10. Of those elected in single-seat districts, ten were elected with 20 to 29 percent of the vote, 97 with 30 to 39 percent, 97 with 40 to 49 percent, 61 with 50 to 59 percent, and 35 with 60 percent or more.

11. Because only a simple majority is needed to win in single-seat districts, it is not necessary to gain 50 percent of the vote. In cases in which more than three strong candidates run, only 20–30 percent of the vote might be sufficient

for victory. Nonetheless, debates focused on 50 percent because the hypothesis was that the shift to a two-party system would soon be realized.

12. Of course, the dominance of the LDP and incumbents (vis-à-vis opposition candidates) made possible increased autonomy among governing party Diet members. At the same time, the likelihood of politics in which power alternated between parties declined.

13. Sato Seisaburo has written that the split vote is "eminently suited" to the Japanese sense of balance, to which great importance is attached, and suggests the possibility that this phenomenon will become even more widespread (Sato 1997b, 181). I am in general agreement with Sato concerning the changes brought about by electoral reform, with the exception of his argument on the instability of the new one-party dominant system. See also Sato (1997a).

14. In a recent public opinion survey on whether to amend the Constitution, the majority of respondents, especially younger Japanese, favored amendment. In addition, among those who indicated they were nonpartisan, their first priority was to introduce referendums at the national level and to revise the system of choosing the prime minister, making this office subject to a national election. As former Prime Minister Nakasone stated, even if reform takes more than ten years, it may not be impossible to realize fundamental change of the electoral system (Nakasone and Miyazawa 1997. Public opinion polls are also contained in their volume).

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