

DEMOCRACY WITHOUT COMPETITION IN JAPAN

Opposition Failure in a
One-Party Dominant State



ETHAN SCHEINER

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Opposition Failure in a One-Party Dominant State

Despite its democratic structure, Japan's government has been dominated by a single party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), since 1955. This book offers an explanation for why, even in the face of great dissatisfaction with the LDP, no opposition party has been able to offer itself as a credible challenger. Understanding such failure is important for many reasons, from its effect on Japanese economic policy to its implications for what facilitates democratic responsiveness more broadly. The principal explanations for opposition failure in Japan focus on the country's culture and electoral system. This book offers a new interpretation, arguing that a far more plausible explanation rests on the predominance in Japan of clientelism, combined with a centralized government structure and electoral protection for groups that benefit from clientelism. Although the central case in the book is Japan, the analysis is also comparative and applies the framework cross-nationally.

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Democracy Without Competition in Japan

*Opposition Failure in a One-Party
Dominant State*

ETHAN SCHEINER

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*To Boo Boo,
Doo Doo,
Dr. D,
and the love of my life,
Melanie*

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Glossary of Abbreviations

ELECTORAL SYSTEM TERMS

| | |
|----------|--|
| PR | proportional representation |
| SMD | single member district |
| SNTV/MMD | single nontransferable vote in multimember districts |

JAPAN

| | |
|-----|---|
| CGP | Clean Government Party (<i>Kōmeitō</i>) |
| DPJ | Democratic Party of Japan (<i>Minshutō</i>) |
| DSP | Democratic Socialist Party (<i>Minshatō</i>) |
| HC | House of Councillors (also called the Upper House) |
| HR | House of Representatives (also called the Lower House) |
| JCP | Japan Communist Party (<i>Nihon Kyōsantō</i>) |
| JNP | Japan New Party (<i>Nihon Shintō</i>) |
| JSP | Japan Socialist Party (<i>Nihon Shakaitō</i>) |
| LDP | Liberal Democratic Party (<i>Jiyū-Minshutō</i>) |
| NFP | New Frontier Party (<i>Shinshintō</i>) |
| NLC | New Liberal Club (<i>Shin Jiyū Kurabu</i>) |
| SDL | Social Democratic League (<i>Shakai Minshu Rengō</i>) |
| SDP | Social Democratic Party (formerly the JSP) (<i>Shakai Minshutō</i>) |

AUSTRIA

| | |
|-----|--|
| FPÖ | Freedom Party of Austria (<i>Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs</i>) |
| ÖVP | Austrian People's Party (<i>Österreichs Volkspartei</i>) |
| SPÖ | Social Democratic Party (<i>Sozialistische Partei Österreichs</i>) |

BRAZIL

| | |
|-----|---|
| PSD | Social Democratic Party (<i>Partido Social Democrático</i>) |
| PT | Workers Party (<i>Partido dos Trabalhadores</i>) |

GERMANY

| | |
|---------|---|
| CDU/CSU | Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (<i>Christlich Demokratische Union/Christlich Soziale Union</i>) |
| SPD | Social Democratic Party (<i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i>) |

ITALY

| | |
|-----|--|
| DC | Christian Democratic Party (<i>Democrazia Cristiana</i>) |
| PCI | Italian Communist Party (<i>Partito Comunista Italiano</i>) |
| PSI | Italian Socialist Party (<i>Partito Socialista Italiano</i>) |

MEXICO

| | |
|-----|--|
| PAN | National Action Party (<i>Partido Accion Nacional</i>) |
| PRD | Party of the Democratic Revolution (<i>Partido de la Revolucion Democratica</i>) |
| PRI | Institutional Revolutionary Party (<i>Partido Revolucionario Institucional</i>) |

SWEDEN

| | |
|-----|---|
| SAP | Social Democratic Party (<i>Sveriges Socialdemokratiska Arbetarparti</i>) |
|-----|---|

TAIWAN

| | |
|-----|---|
| DPP | Democratic People's Party (<i>Minchuchinputang</i>) |
| KMT | Nationalist People's Party (<i>Kuomintang</i>) |

OTHER ACRONYMS

| | |
|------|--|
| DID | densely inhabited districts (common measure of urban-ness) |
| FECL | Foreign Exchange and Control Law |
| FIL | Foreign Investment Law |

| | |
|------|-------------------------------------|
| FILP | Fiscal Investment and Loan Program |
| GDP | gross domestic product |
| GNP | gross national product |
| JEDS | Japan Elections and Democracy Study |
| JES | Japan Election Studies |

Acknowledgments and a Note on the Use of the Online Appendix

I have many, many people to thank for helping make this book possible.

However, first, let me refer readers to a supplementary online appendix for the book. This appendix can be accessed by following the links from my Web site at *www.ethanscheiner.com*. (Yes, I succumbed to cyber-spatial egocentrism for the book.) To shorten the manuscript and keep it tightly focused, I cut many details and discussion of potential counterarguments and put them in the online appendix. Much of my work is based on multivariate quantitative analysis, but most readers of this book are unlikely to be interested in technical aspects of the statistics, even if they are intrigued by the substantive results. Therefore, I kept the substantive discussions of the quantitative work but moved the tables and technical discussions of the multivariate analyses to the appendix.

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A NOTE ON CONVENTIONS

Throughout this book, I write Japanese personal names according to Japanese convention: family name (surname) followed by given name.

Introduction

The Puzzle of Party Competition Failure in Japan

Japanese party politics are a puzzle. In 1955, the Liberal and Democratic Parties merged to form the conservative Liberal Democratic Party. The LDP's precursors had dominated the Japanese government since the prewar period, and the LDP's formation meant that a single party was in control. Given the seemingly incompatible personalities and policy positions – as well as intraparty antagonism – of those forming the LDP, many Japanese were skeptical of the new party's ability to stay together (Calder 1988: 59–60). But power proved to be impressive glue; the party remained largely intact for decades. That power helped hold the party together is hardly shocking. However, the LDP not only stayed together but also ward off nearly every electoral challenge over the next five decades: Between 1955 and 2005 (when this book was completed), the LDP was out of power for a total of ten months and 20 days.

Two points make this puzzle all the more difficult to understand. First, Japan is a democracy. Citizens maintain all the usual civil liberties, and non-LDP parties contest elections, hoping to topple the LDP. Second, and most troubling, *the LDP is not popular*. As of the writing of this book, it had been over 40 years since the party received a majority of the vote in an election for the national House of Representatives. During the 1990s, in the face of severe economic stagnation, party corruption, and seeming paralysis on the part of the LDP when it came time to do anything about such issues, displeasure with the party grew dramatically. Nevertheless, no real challenge to the LDP was able to sustain itself.

This book attempts to make sense of this puzzle.

Note that for space reasons, I have cut from this book a number of pieces of less directly relevant analysis, responses to potential counterarguments, and, especially, technical details and results of the statistics discussed. I have placed this material in the online appendix, which can be linked from www.ethanscheiner.com.

THE IMPACT OF CLIENTELISM

As a Japan scholar, I recognize that this puzzle is perhaps *the* defining feature of postwar Japanese party politics and, likely, the issue that acts as the greatest obstacle to Japan in overcoming its economic problems. However, as a student of comparative politics, I am just as concerned with understanding how a competition-less party system is possible in a democracy. Democracy is founded on competition. How is democracy without competition possible?

As someone trained in comparative politics, my first efforts at making real sense of the puzzle focused on party competition and the failure of party competition in other countries, but my biggest clues came from speaking to people in Japan. In my early work on this project, I asked Japanese politicians, political party staffers, journalists, and regular citizens why they thought the opposition was unable to challenge the LDP. They tended to offer three specific explanations. First, almost without fail, opposition party politicians and staff members mentioned their party's difficulty in finding attractive candidates to run. Second, opposition members were quick to note the LDP's resource advantage. That is, the LDP was able to use the resources of the state – especially in the form of subsidies and funding of projects in areas such as construction – to encourage particular regions to support the party. This resource edge was doubly advantageous for the LDP because it also encouraged donors to contribute money to LDP candidates, who, if victorious, could continue distributing state resources. The third explanation usually came from journalists, voters, and non-opposition party politicians, who argued that many voters simply did not trust the opposition. They explained that it was not clear what the post-1993 new parties stood for, in particular noting the seeming incompatibility of the different politicians who had joined together to form the parties.

Over time I realized that the three explanations actually worked together, with an important thread running throughout. In particular, Japan's clientelist structure – whereby the LDP-led central government rewards its supporters with patronage – plays a central role in all three of the problems the opposition has faced in recent years and goes a long way toward explaining the failure of Japan's opposition.

RESEARCH DESIGN ISSUES

Case studies often note the heavy role of clientelism in Japan. But they seldom consider Japan explicitly from the larger perspective of clientelist systems more generally or examine it within the larger context of different forms of linkage (programmatic or clientelistic) between politicians and citizens. Placing Japan and its clientelist system in this larger perspective provides a greater sense of the system's importance to Japan's political outcomes such as party competition failure. And in turn, the comparative perspective allows us

to use what we learn about the impact of the system in Japan to understand clientelism and programmatic politics in other countries.

I began this project seeking to understand opposition failure in Japan. However, throughout the process, I was concerned with the case study problem: How can one derive generalizable conclusions from analysis of only a single case?

To address this problem, I took three steps. First, I constantly asked how my Japan-specific findings fit (or did not fit) into the existing theoretical literature. By doing so, I was forced to consider what findings about Japan might contribute to a broader understanding of politics. Second, I made substantial use of *intra*-Japan comparisons. Intracountry (both cross-regionally and over time) comparisons are particularly useful because they can bring in variation on variables that are vital to understanding the problem under consideration, while controlling for numerous factors that are not the focus. Third, I introduced substantial analysis of other countries as well. The intensive field work of scholars in other countries allowed me to push my findings further by introducing variation in both the dependent and independent variables.

My conclusions grew out of this intersection between theory, my own field work, and secondary sources. To begin my field work, I conducted interviews aimed at looking into the plausibility of various theories of party failure. The information gleaned from the interviews pushed me to consider new theoretical frameworks, which I evaluated through additional interviews and statistical analysis. In light of the results, I added new questions to future interviews and tested new questions through statistical analyses. Then, where possible, I looked to secondary sources to consider the broader applicability of the findings.

THE ARGUMENT IN BRIEF

The leading explanations for opposition party failure in Japan focus on the country's culture and electoral system, but, as I explain in Chapter 2, there are substantial limits to both explanations. Using interviews with Japanese politicians, data on Japanese new party development, statistical analysis of public opinion surveys, and close attention to the cases of other countries, I argue that the reason for the failure lies in a combination of clientelism, fiscal centralization, and institutional protections for the principal beneficiaries of the clientelist system.

Theories of party competition usually assume competition over programmatic issues. For this reason, many observers of Japanese politics with whom I spoke referred to the LDP – with its emphasis on catch-all clientelist politics – as somehow not a “real” party. However, in reality, numerous political systems throughout the world are founded on clientelist modes, where parties elected to office reward their supporters with private goods. Clientelist parties create direct bonds with voters, usually through side

payments such as pork barrel. In programmatic systems, opposition failure like Japan's is rare, but ruling party dominance and opposition failure are more common under clientelism. Clientelist systems' emphasis on administrative infrastructure and bonds created through side payments places a burden on opposition parties, which usually have little access to such benefits. In Japan, the opposition has faced a big disadvantage because of the importance of organized blocs of votes that are tightly tied into LDP clientelist networks. However, clientelism by itself is clearly not a sufficient explanation for opposition party failure as new and opposition parties do make inroads in clientelist systems, most obviously in recent years in Italy, Austria, and Mexico.

In combination with particular structures, clientelism can be debilitating for opposition parties: The combination of clientelism and governmental fiscal centralization causes especially great problems. In clientelist systems where access to funding is controlled by the central government, local governments must rely heavily on its financial graces. For this reason, in such systems, local organizations, politicians, and voters have strong incentives to affiliate with the national ruling party, and parties that are not strong at the national level have a much harder time gaining local office. In Clientelist/Financially Centralized systems, such as Italy, Austria, and Mexico, nonnational ruling parties have had great difficulty winning local elections. And, in the highly Clientelistic/Financially Centralized Japanese case, the opposition has been extraordinarily weak at the subnational level, with the primary exceptions to this rule occurring in areas that simply do not rely as much on the central government.

Local weakness has a major effect on opposition success at the national level. In Japan, where controlling organized blocs of votes is central to electoral success, it is important for national politicians that local politicians and organizations campaign on their behalf. The lack of local groups that are affiliated with the opposition greatly hinders national opposition candidates' chances of success. Also, in the highly candidate-centered electoral system used at the national level in Japan, it is critical for parties to run under their banner candidates who have substantial experience and connections. Typically, these candidates have held local office. Because they hold few local offices, Japanese opposition parties have been doubly disadvantaged: They have been both weak locally and deprived of a pool of strong candidates that would have helped them gain ground at the national level. The heart of my analysis of national level failure of Japan's opposition focuses on the post-1993 period. However, this candidate recruitment problem no doubt was even more critical to opposition failure in the pre-1993 era, as Japan maintained an even more candidate-centered electoral system at the time.

The combination of clientelism and one other factor – institutionalized protection of clients of the ruling party – has further hindered opposition party success. Strong candidacies are indeed critical to the success of parties

in candidate-centered systems, but the lack of such candidates is not sufficient to explain opposition failure: The longtime dominant Christian Democratic Party was knocked out of power in Italy, another Clientelist/Fiscally Centralized system that has utilized a candidate-centered electoral system. In both Italy and Japan, opposition groups pushed for an end to their respective governments' clientelist practices and gained greater popularity as a result, but the countries' different electoral arrangements channeled these efforts into different levels of success. Compared to the Italian proportional representation electoral system in place during the time of the early decline of the DC, Japan's current electoral system, which emphasizes winner-take-all single member districts, has made it extremely difficult for the opposition to mount a challenge to the LDP in the regions most supportive of clientelism. One third of Japan's SMDs are provided to rural areas, where the heart of the pro-clientelist forces in Japan resides. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the LDP was able to use about 50 percent of the total rural vote to win at least 75 percent of the seats in such areas. As a result, over that time, party competition largely occurred only in the remaining two thirds of the country.

Rather than having one party system, Japan has come to contain two *parallel party systems*: One is rural and LDP-dominated, whereas the other is more urban and competitive. In the early postwar period, Japan was heavily rural and dependent on government favors. The LDP was able to use government resources in clientelist exchange to dominate party politics. But, as Japan grew more urban, fewer areas required government support. In such areas – especially as Japan's economy slowed – clientelist practices and the LDP itself grew increasingly unpopular. Nevertheless, the rural areas continued to rely upon the clientelist practices, support the ruling party, and hold a sufficient number of SMDs to provide the LDP with a solid seat base. Indeed, over 1996–2003, even if the opposition had been *hugely* successful and took nearly 60 percent of nonrural seats, it would still have had only about 40 percent of all the Lower House seats.

Finally, in Japan the opposition of the post-1990 period has been made up of new parties, and the clientelist and centralized system caused them additional difficulties. The importance of close links to the central government in clientelist, financially centralized systems causes most new party formation to occur from the top-down. As a result, Japan's leading new parties have typically been made up of a number of politicians from various widely different preexisting parties, which therefore faced difficulty organizing their members and agreeing on policy positions. In the case of the formation of the LDP, which controlled government resources, this reinforced the use of clientelist practices. In the case of Japan's new opposition parties of the 1990s, parties that had no such access to resources, this top-down pattern focused party formation on national level elites and made difficult grassroots level development based on a unifying platform. This not only harmed the parties' internal dynamics but also made it less clear to the public what such

a motley crew of politicians could have in common. Voters have had greater difficulty deciphering the basis of such parties and, when skeptical of their unity, became less likely to support them.

Ultimately, the first two of these problems – the difficulties opposition parties have faced as a result of their great weakness at the local level and their inability to gain representation in clientelism-supporting areas because of the dominance of particular electoral arrangements – are sufficient explanations for the failure of Japan's opposition. The third problem – lack of party organization and coherence – served to exacerbate the other obstacles the opposition faced. By taking advantage of hurdles like these, the LDP has been able to maintain its dominance despite declining popularity.

HOPE FOR OPPOSITION SUCCESS?

As I completed the final revisions on this book in the summer of 2004, the Democratic Party of Japan narrowly defeated the LDP in an election for the House of Councillors, the less important branch of Japan's government. Although the election was by no means a sign that the LDP's grip on the Japanese government was due to expire, it did act as a reminder that permanent opposition failure is by no means a given. The opposition may indeed succeed. However, it will not do so simply by finding new and more attractive issue appeals to make to Japan's voters. The foundations of Japanese politics I describe above greatly hinder the effectiveness of such appeals. Instead, as I describe in Chapter 10, future opposition success will ultimately depend on defections by LDP elites away from the ruling party or on changes in the structural foundations themselves.

The Importance of Party Competition and a Model of Party Competition Failure

A democracy predicated on the ability to “throw the rascals out” is far less convincing when it exists only in the abstract than when it is backed up by periodic examples of rascals actually flying through the doors.

T. J. Pempel (1990: 7)

This is a book about how party competition can fail.

The ability of opposition parties to challenge ruling regimes is integral to representative democracy. A viable opposition is important not just because competitive elections are a necessary condition of most definitions of democracy (e.g., Schumpeter 1942) but because opposition is in fact a critical check on a country's rulers. Writing in the Schumpeterian tradition, scholars such as Downs (1957) and Schlesinger (1991) tell us that in order to get elected, parties are drawn to reflect the public's will. In competing with each other for votes, parties are in fact vying to better represent the general public. Where one party is dominant, there is little competition, and, as a result, the dominant party need not be very responsive. Party competition forces political elites and voters alike to consider alterations to the existing political agenda; examine alternative ideological, cultural, or policy ideas; and reevaluate which societal groups should be represented by the government and how.

In some cases, the impact of competition may appear insignificant to all but the most involved observer, as it simply leads to debate over “minor” details of legislation, but in many other cases the impact is more obviously profound. Competition over ideas and office offers incentives for election-seeking politicians to avoid inefficient and stagnant policies that both harm the general interests of the country and lead the policies' proponents to get bounced from office. The quest for electoral support can also force parties to look out for the interests and desires of societal groups that might otherwise go ignored and unrepresented. Most of all, the presence of a viable opposition and party competition provides the ultimate check against unrestrained

power. As long as a party fears loss of office, it will be much less likely to act arbitrarily.¹

Outcomes such as these give observers one more reason to spout the virtues of democracy. However, if, as Schattschneider (1942) suggests, democracy needs parties in order to function, a system made up of non-responsive parties suggests problems in democracy's functioning. Under democracy, we expect a type of natural selection to occur among parties. Obviously, we expect parties to survive when they do things to make themselves electorally successful. And we expect parties that are unsuccessful over the long run to be replaced by others that are sufficiently adaptive or entrepreneurial enough to find new ways to overcome the obstacles blocking the success of their predecessors.

Ultimately, then, democratic party theory tells us that, in times of voter distress, credible alternatives will challenge the existing order. Nevertheless, democracies do exist where, even in times of distress, opposition parties have great difficulty selling themselves as credible challengers.

This book offers an understanding of which factors within a democracy can get in the way of the development of viable opposition parties and thereby lead to a failure of party competition. My argument focuses on clientelism, which I discuss in greater detail later. Clientelism is not sufficient to bring about party competition failure, but when a system is founded on clientelist exchange, opposition parties typically face some difficulty because of their lack of access to governmental benefits. More powerfully, the combination of clientelism and two other factors – centralized governmental fiscal structure and institutionalized protection of those who benefit from the clientelist distribution of resources – greatly hampers opposition party efforts to compete with the ruling party.

VARYING LEVELS OF PARTY COMPETITION

In considering party success and failure, I focus on party competition, in particular as it takes the form of turnover in office. There are numerous ways that opposition parties can be “successful” in a political system. Even small parties can enter into coalition governments and often (see, for example, the

¹ Individual politicians may fear electoral loss even if their party as a whole does not, but, as Kitschelt points out, “Voters do not know how their preference for a particular politician is likely to affect the ultimate outcomes of democratic decision making” (2000: 848). On top of the simple uncertainty of aggregating a large group of preferences into a single set of policies, legislators may face the problem of cycling majorities, whereby no policy outcome can ever be clear. A lack of party responsiveness is therefore a problem even when specific politicians fear electoral loss because it is parties that overcome this social choice problem by working out a collectively preferred set of policies for politicians (Aldrich 1995; Kitschelt 2000).

TABLE 1.1 *Number of Years That “Non #1 Party” Holds Power: 1950–2003 (Selected Countries)*

| Country | Number of Years |
|----------------------------|-----------------|
| United States ^a | 22 |
| United Kingdom | 19 |
| Germany ^b | 18 |
| Israel | 17 |
| Italy | 10 |
| Sweden | 9 |
| Austria | 8 |
| Mexico ^c | 3 |
| Japan | 0.9 |

“#1 Party” refers to the party that controlled the national government for the largest number of years. Numbers here refer to the number of years that parties other than this “#1 Party” controlled the national government.

^a Refers to the number of years the Democrats controlled the presidency. However, it should also be noted that the Republican Party only controlled the House of Representatives for 10 years and the Senate for 14 years.

^b Includes pre-unification West Germany. Note that the figure for Germany does not include the 1966–9 period in which the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats shared power in a “grand coalition.”

^c Refers to the number of years non-PRI parties controlled the presidency. However, it should also be noted that there was a non-PRI majority in the Congress for 5 years.

Sources: McGeveran (2003), www.worldstatesmen.org.

Free Democratic Party in Germany) gain influence far beyond their numbers because they add enough seats to combine with a larger party to create a majority government. Also, even a semipermanent opposition party can play an important policy role if the government takes up its issues. However, in considering party *competition*, turnover in office is the gold standard. It is turnover in office – where the rascals are actually thrown out of power – that indicates that accountability genuinely exists, thereby increasing the pressure on parties to act responsively to the public. And it is responsiveness based on accountability that upholds the democratic links in representative democracy.

The extent of party turnover in office varies widely from country to country. Table 1.1 demonstrates this variation in a number of contemporary democracies.² Each country listed provides its citizens, at a minimum, a fair

² My case selection becomes clearer when I introduce Figure 1.1.