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シンポジウム報告  
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Japanese Party Politics through Election Results for the Last Three Decades

Aiji Tanaka (Professor of Political Science, Waseda University)

In his presentation titled “Japanese Party Politics through Election Results for the Last Three Decades”, Prof Tanaka first addressed the question of why Prime Ministers in Japan have been so fragile in recent years. According to him, there are three possible reasons for the fragility: party leaders’ lack of understanding about the Japanese electorate, electoral system, and lack of cohesiveness of each major party to enhance motivation of party members to change their party leader to win the mid-term election. With respect to the first reason – the lack of understanding on the electorate, Prof Tanaka presented the results of the last 3 lower house elections to argue that even though big national swings of voters seemed to take place in 2005, 2009, and 2012 elections on surface, the number of votes gained by the 2 parties suggested that the structure of the electorate has not changed so much. The LDP support base, therefore, has been shrinking but stable.

Prof Tanaka also provided explanations for the LDP survival and comeback in 2012. First, the LDP has been heavily dependent on the organized voters with the additional assistance from the Kohmei, a party based on very solid organization. Also, the low voting turnout helped those parties based on solid organization. When voting turnout goes up, and when a chunk of independent voters goes to a particular party, such as the DPJ, then the LDP loses the election. The 2009 Lower House election was the case in point. But he suggested that the LDP has a dilemma in maintaining a majority of seats in the Lower House, mainly stemming from the fact that even with the help of the Kohmei, the LDP cannot win an election (i. e., a majority of seats in the Lower House) , when the voting turnout goes up and when most of the independents voters goes to a particular party, such as the DPJ.

AGU & SNU Conference
“Korea and Japan in a Global Context”

**Japanese Party Politics
through Election Results
for the Last 3 Decades**

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&
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**Three reasons for fragility of Prime
Ministers in recent Japan**

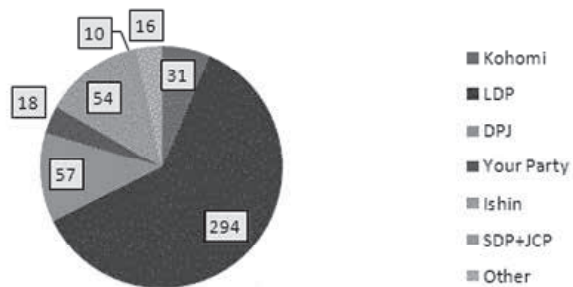
1. Party leaders do not understand structure of Japanese electorate.
2. Electoral System:
 - 2-A. SMD (Single-Member District) System with the PR (Proportional Representation) System.
 - 2-B. Each upper house election works like a mid-term evaluation of the incumbent Prime Minister.
3. Lack of cohesiveness of each major party enhances motivation of party members to change their party leader to win the mid-term election.

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Lower House Election in 2012

Figure 1-A. Seat Gained by Parties, 2012

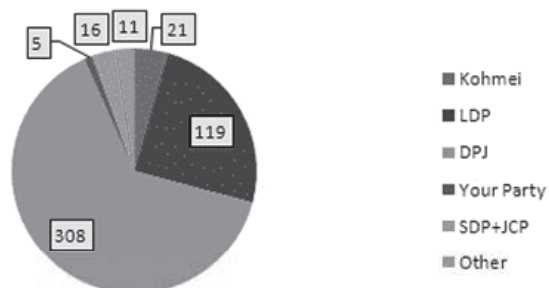


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Lower House Election in 2009

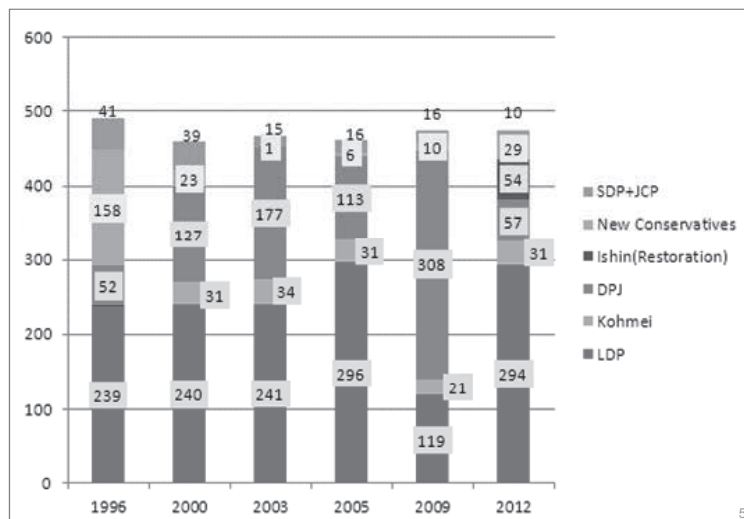
Figure 1-B. Seat Gained by Parties, 2009



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Figure 2. Seats Gained by Parties, 1996-2012



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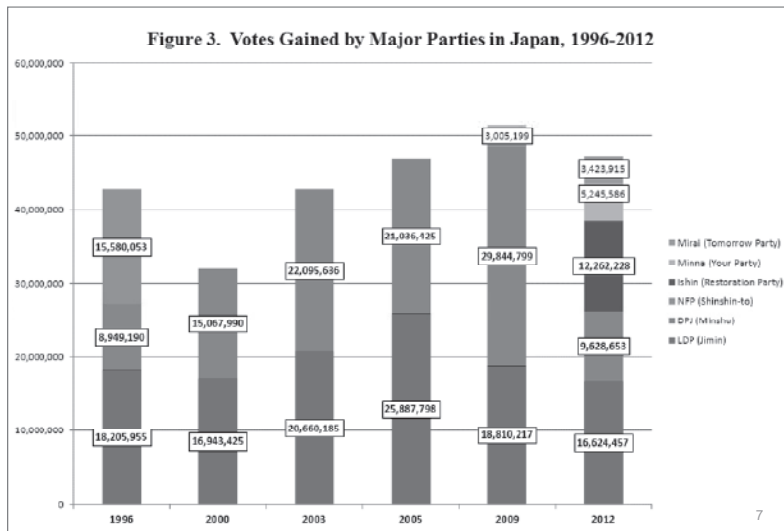
Big Swings at the Last 3 Lower House Elections --- real swing or not?

- When we look at the number of seats won by the 2 major parties (i.e., LDP and DPJ), it looks like big national swings of voters took place in the 2005, 2009, and 2012 elections on surface.
- But, when you look at the number of votes gained by the 2 major parties, the structure of the electorate has not changed so much.
- The increase of independent voters, while the LDP support base has been shrinking but stable.

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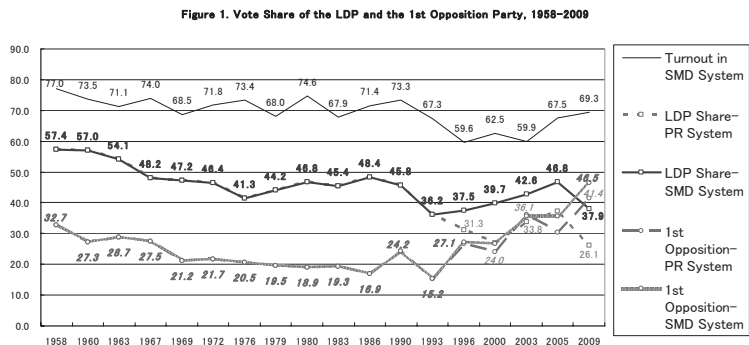
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Figure 3. Votes Gained by Parties, 1996-2012



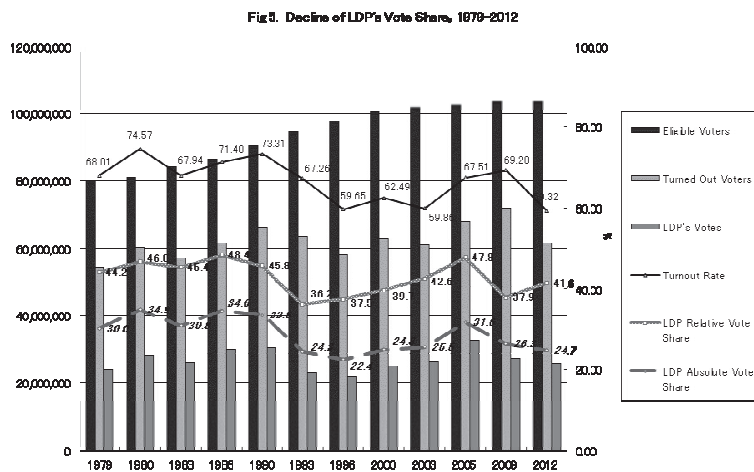
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Figure 4. Election Results in Post-war Japan, 1958-2009:
the Decline of the LDP and the Rise of the 1st Opposition Party



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Figure 5. The Numbers of Voters and LDP Votes, 1979-2012

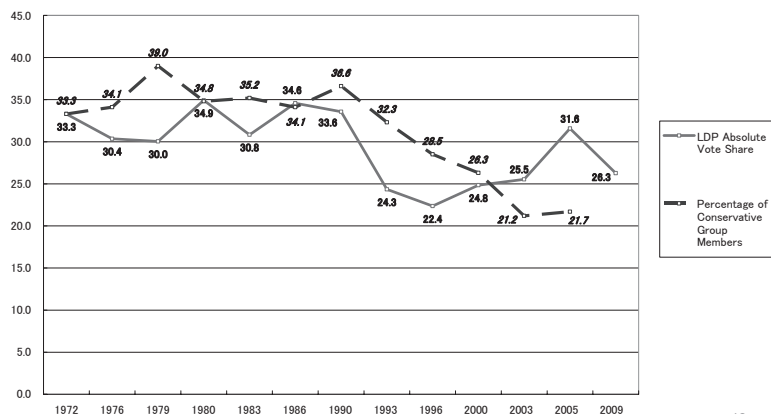


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Figure 6. Decline in the LDP's Vote Share and Proportion of Organized Voters, 1972-2009

Figure 3. Percentage of Conservative Group Members and LDP's Absolute Vote Share, 1972-2009



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Table 1. Estimates of Komei's Help to LDP,
2000-2012

Table B. Estimates of Komei's Help for LDP at Elections in 2000-2012

Year	LDP's Votes	Estimates of True LDP's Votes ⁽¹⁾	Komei's Votes	Komei's Help for LDP ⁽²⁾	DPJ's Votes
1986	29,875,501		5,701,278		
1990	30,315,417		5,242,675		
1993	22,999,646		5,114,351		
1996	21,836,096		*		6,001,666
2000	24,945,806	21,063,208	1,231,753	3,882,598	16,811,782
2003	26,089,326	21,861,482	886,507	4,227,844	21,814,154
2005	32,518,390	28,385,144	981,105	4,133,246	24,804,786
2009	27,301,982	22,970,615	782,984	4,331,367	33,475,334
2012	25,643,309	21,414,839	885,881	4,228,470	13,598,773

Note * Since Komei Party merged into NFP (New Frontier Party) in 1996,
no record regarding Komei's votes in 1996.

Note(1): Estimates of True LDP's Votes = LDP's Votes - Komei's Help for LDP⁽²⁾

Note(2): Komei's Help for LDP = Komei's Votes in 1993 - Komei's Vote in each year

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The Reasons for the LDP Survival and Comeback,
1996-2003, and 2012 ---- 2005 is an exception.

- **The LDP** has been heavily dependent on the organized voters.
- In addition, **the LDP** made coalition with **the Kohmei**, a party based on very solid organization, from 2000 on.
- The low voting turnout helped those parties based on solid organization, i.e., **the LDP** and **the Kohmei**.
- When voting turnout goes up, and when a chunk of independent voters goes to a particular party, such as **the DPJ**, then **the LDP** loses the election. The 2009 Lower House election was the case in point.

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Dilemma of the LDP to maintain a majority of seats in the Lower House.

- The LDP's support base has been shrinking but stable. Although the **the LDP** cannot win a majority of seats in the Lower House without the help of **the Kohmei**, the LDP's force seems to be stable with the help of **the Kohmei**.
- Even with the help of **the Kohmei**, the LDP cannot win an election (i.e., a majority of seats in the Lower House), when the voting turnout goes up and when most of the independents voters goes to a particular party, such as **the DPJ**.

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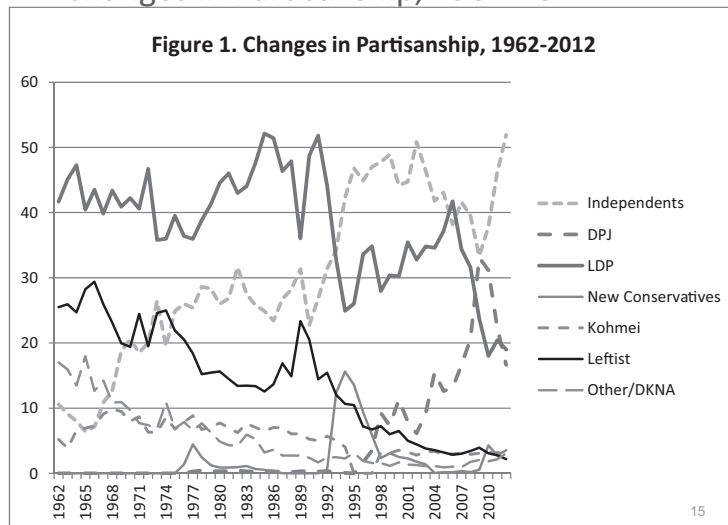
Difference in the LDP's Strength between 2005 and 2012

- In 2005, **Koizumi** mobilized the organized voters who are loyal to **the LDP** as usual; in addition to this, **Koizumi** attracted many of the unorganized/independent voters to shift from **the DPJ** to **the LDP**.
- In 2012, **the LDP** did not win many more votes than 2009, but simply **the DPJ** lost it so badly.
- The victory of **the LDP** was due to the very low popularity of **the DPJ** after its administrations.

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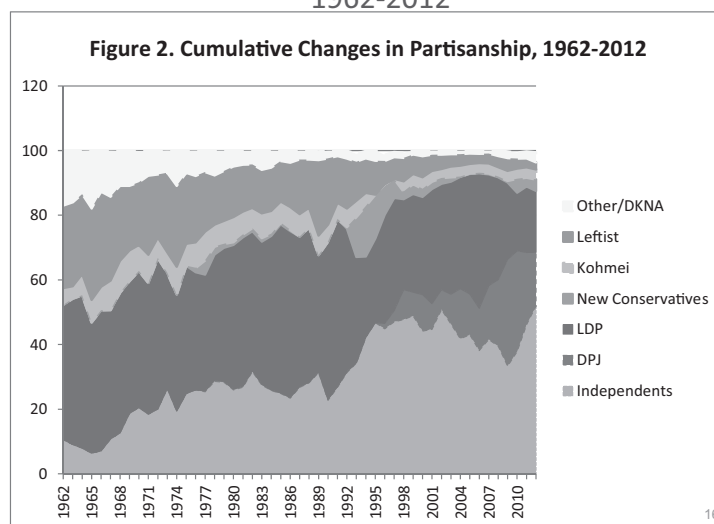
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Figure 7. Rise of Independent Voters and Changes in Partisanship, 1962-2012



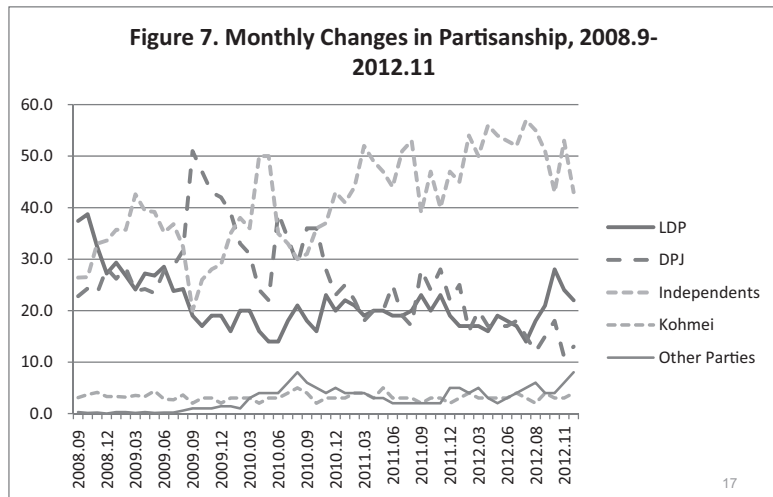
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Figure 8. Cumulative Changes in Partisanship, 1962-2012



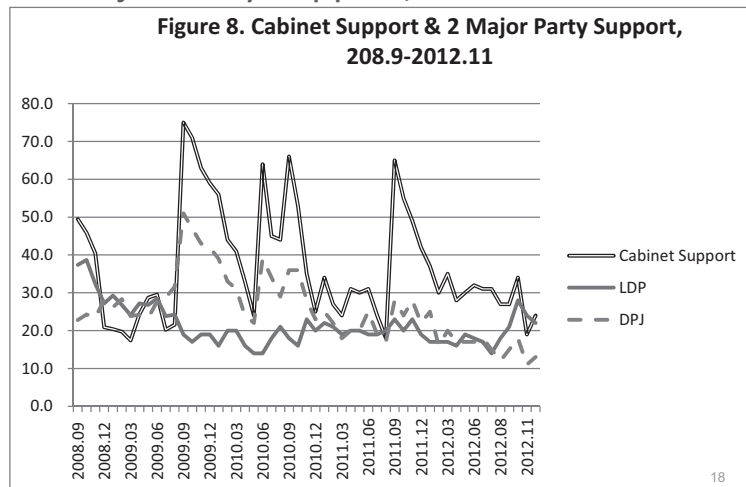
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Figure 9. Monthly Changes in Partisanship, 2008.9-2012.11



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Figure 10. Cabinet Support & Two Major Party Support, 2008.9-2012.11



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Explanations by the Electoral System (1)

- **The SMD** (Single Member District) system helps the largest party to win more seats than its vote share. ---- In each district, a party that wins one vote more than the runner up can win the seat in each district. In a system that has 300 districts, Party A in theory can win all the 300 seats with only 300 more votes than Party B if Party A gains one vote more than Party B in every single district.
- Under the SMD system, a swing is more likely to take place because of the mechanism mentioned above.

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Explanations by the Electoral System (2)

- The Upper House elections usually come in between the Lower House elections.
- The Upper House elections work as if they were mid-term evaluation of each Prime Minister's administration. The midterm always works against the incumbent.
- In recent years, those rank and file members of the LDP, as well as the DPJ, tend to ask change of their party leadership when their party is not popular according to public opinion surveys.
- Therefore, the rank and file members wish to change their prime minister, when the incumbent prime minister is not so popular in conjunction with the upper house elections.

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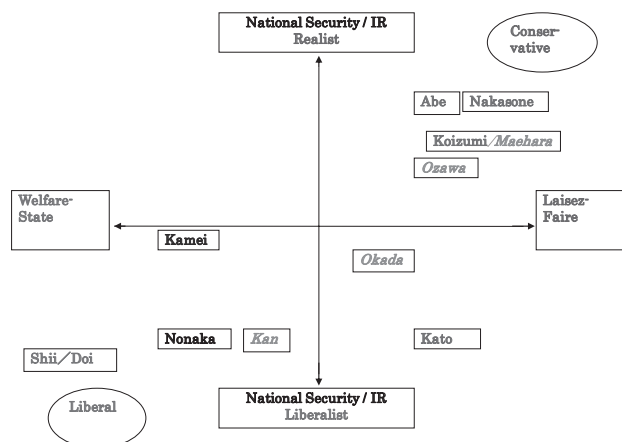
Lack of Cohesiveness of major parties in recent Japan

- As Figure 11 and Figure 12 show, both the LDP and the DPJ have quite difference in policy orientations among their party leaders.
- Therefore, both the LDP and the DPJ leaders constantly face revolts of some members within their own parties.
- Consequently, neither the LDP leader nor the DPJ leader cannot effectively make a party's decision on any controversial issues, such as TPP.

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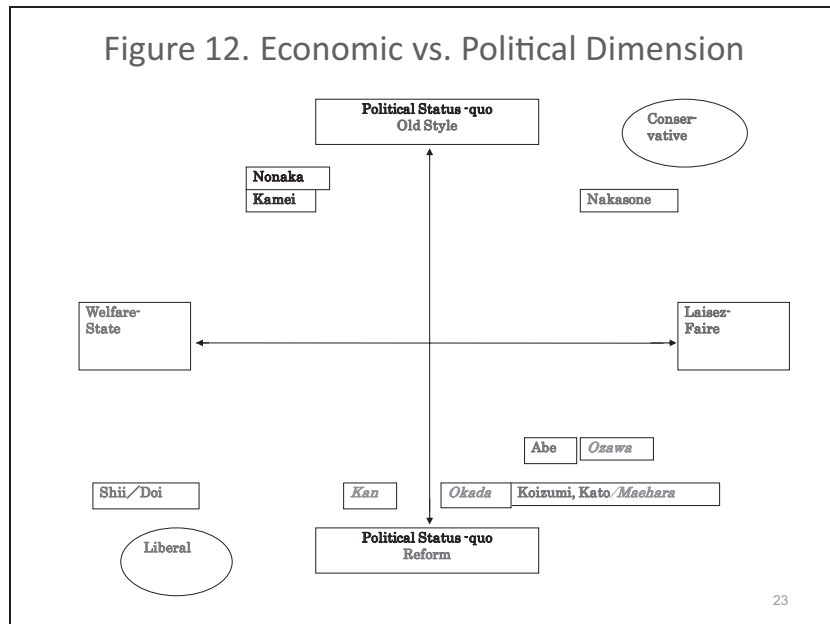
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Figure 11. Economic vs. National Security Dimension



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Conclusion

- Japanese major political parties cannot maintain policy line of each party, because both parties (i.e., the LDP and the DPJ) contain such different policy orientations among their party members.
- PM faces the similar dilemma as other PMs faced.
- It will be very difficult to replicate what PM Koizumi achieved in 2005. Even Koizumi himself cannot now replicate his own performance of 2005.

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