

# Changing Party-Voter Linkages in Japan since the 2000s

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**Abstract** | Japanese politics since the 2000s has witnessed an instability of the party system, an increase in electoral volatility, and the emergence of populist political leaders who gain strong support from the voters. This study provides an analytical framework to understand these political events in Japan, drawing on comparative studies of the Western and Latin American political parties. Party-voter linkage of the Japanese parties and voters under the '1955 System' had been stable through clientelistic and ideological linkages. However, since clientelism has declined with the socio-political changes in the 1990s, there were no firmly established party-voter linkage patterns between major political parties and voters. This research suggests application of party-voter linkage models to understand the changes in the Japanese party politics from a macroscopic perspective.

**Keywords** | Japanese party politics, party-voter linkage, clientelistic linkage, programmatic linkage, charismatic linkage

## Introduction

As a result of political and administrative reforms since the mid-1990s, Japanese politics has undergone various changes in the party system, electoral behavior, and power structure within the government. It started with voters' antagonism toward the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) conventional pork-barrel politics, their demands for political reform, and the LDP members' criticism against their own party. In consequence, clientelistic linkages between the LDP and voters, and those between individual LDP Diet members and voters have declined. Meanwhile, progressive opposition parties such as the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) lost their ideological identity in the 1990s, resulting in the loss of voters' support which had been possible through ideological linkage. Due to the

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clientelistic and ideological linkages, Japanese party politics under the '1955 System' had remained relatively stable, with political confrontation between conservatives and progressives. However, Japanese party politics in the 2000s became unstable with the decline of these linkages. This instability included the increase of nonpartisans and decrease of voting rates, the emergence of conservative-populist politicians with high popularity, frequent changes of the leadership in the government, and landslide victories either by the LDP or the DPJ in national elections. It is clearly distinguishable from the party politics of the '1955 System.'

What was the major factor that kept the Japanese party system stable before the 1990s? There had been strong linkages between the Japanese political parties and voters under the 1955 System. Clientelism had been a core linkage factor between parties (the LDP in particular) and voters during the era. At the same time, conflicts between conservatives and progressives over the Japanese constitution and national security issues had led to the establishment of ideological linkage between parties and voters. Political and administrative reforms from the 1990s have brought about positive results for Japanese party politics. There was, however, backlash in the 2000s, such as the decline of party-voter linkage, the increase in instability, and the rise of populist leaders. What are the reasons for these distinctive features? This study suggests that the changes in Japanese party politics be understood from the perspective of party-voter linkages. As preliminary research to understand those changes from a comprehensive, diachronic perspective, this study proposes the party-voter linkage model as a tool.

There have been successful attempts to analyze the changes of Japanese party politics after the 1980s. These studies explored Japanese party's internal politics or electoral strategies, especially focusing on the reform of the electoral system in 1994 and changes that occurred after the economic recession during the 1990s. But they neglected to provide an intertwined analysis tool to understand changes in Japanese politics in the 1990s and 2000s. Nor did they suggest a macroscopic analytical framework for a diachronic understanding of the election results. For example, a recent study by Park Cheol Hee (2011) on the instability of Japanese politics explains the issue through the Democratic Party of Japan's (DPJ) political and electoral strategy, and intra-party conflicts in the policy-making procedure. Go Seon Gyu (2013) uses the result of the 2013 House of Councilors election and points out that the instability of Japanese party politics stems from electoral volatility. These attempts offer valid analysis to understand the changes in Japanese politics. However, there are limitations to explain the structural and macroscopic cause of instability at the party system

level and the fundamental cause of electoral volatility. They provide applicable accounts of individual cases in that they explain the instability of Japanese politics and the increase in electoral volatility, with retrospective or prospective voting behavior and with the party's strategy to mobilize the electorate in each election. Nevertheless, it is not enough to understand the structural changes in Japanese party politics. This study tries to analyze instability and volatility of Japanese party politics and the emergence of populist political leaders and their high popularity from the viewpoint of structural changes in party-voter linkage patterns. Its objective is to suggest a microscopic analytical framework to understand the changes of Japanese party politics through party-voter linkage models, adopted from case studies and comparative studies of the Western European and Latin American political parties.

## Party-Citizen Linkage and Kitschelt's Linkage Models

### 1. Party-Citizen Linkage

Kay Lawson (1980) was an early researcher to classify a political party's role as a medium connecting the government and the citizen. She classifies the role of the party between the government and the citizen into four categories and demonstrates characteristics of each linkage: participatory linkage, policy-responsive linkage, linkage by reward, and directive linkage.<sup>1</sup> For example, while participatory linkage refers to the party's role as an agency that helps the citizen participate in the government, policy-responsive linkage means that the party plays a role in making the government officials responsive to voters' points of view. Linkage by reward is somewhat similar to clientelism, whereas directive linkage is formed when the government uses the party as a means of coercive rule over subjects (Lawson 1980, 13-14).

The concept of 'linkage' can be applied to analyze relations of not only the government and the citizen, but also various political units. Unlike Lawson, who emphasizes the role of the political party as a medium between the government and citizens, Herbert Kitschelt and Kenneth M. Roberts recognize mutual connection between the party and the citizen from the perspective of 'linkage' (Kitschelt 2000; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Roberts 2002); the political party is not just a medium between the government and the civil society, but a

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1. Thorough explanation about the concept of linkage is omitted, as it digresses from the main point of this research. Various discussions around the concept can be found in Lawson's study (1980, 5-11).

political agent that is self-determined to secure support and loyalty from citizens by strengthening the bond with them. In this perspective, the party-voter linkage model tends to emphasize the party's mobilization strategy. Yet, citizens (voters) under democratic systems are not merely the object of mobilization, but they have power to achieve their interests or reflect their opinions on the party by using their voting power or material resources. Taking such characteristics of democracy into consideration, party-citizen linkage should be understood as an interaction between the party and the citizen. In other words, changes in the linkage between the party and the citizen must be understood from the perspective of reciprocal causation (Lawson 1980, 10).

Roberts (2002) classifies party-society linkage into five categories based on the level of association and degree of contingency, while insisting that, in order to understand the crisis of Latin American political representation, the way that the party mobilizes supports and responds to social changes should be analyzed from the perspective of party-society linkage. The categories are, first, political brokerage and patron-clientelism; second, encapsulating linkages<sup>2</sup>; third, programmatic linkages<sup>3</sup>; fourth, personalistic linkages and charismatic bonds; fifth, marketing linkages.<sup>4</sup> It is noteworthy that each linkage is not mutually exclusive and could occur at the same time (Roberts 2002, 15). According to Robert's analysis, recent party politics in the Latin American countries still show clear evidence of political brokerage and patron-clientelism, whereas encapsulating and programmatic linkages are diminishing. In contrast, personalistic linkages and charismatic bonds are growing, which are related to the emergence of populist leadership. Marketing linkages also tend to be intensified as individual preference and choice strongly influenced political representativeness, resulting in the increase of each voter's mobility (Roberts 2002, 26-28).

## 2. Kitschelt's Citizen-Politician Linkages<sup>5</sup>

As mentioned above, previous studies suggest different linkage models. They are valuable in concretely categorizing and differentiating each party-citizen linkage

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2. Kaufman defines a party founded on clientelistic linkage as the 'machine party'. The concept of encapsulating linkage is similar to Lawson's participatory linkage (Roberts 2002, 15).

3. Though it is termed programmatic linkage, this category covers ideological matters.

4. Marketing linkage distinguishes itself from the other four in that it is unsustainable, accidental, and temporary. It is similar to Panebianco's professional-electoral party (Roberts 2002, 19).

5. Kitschelt develops the term 'party-society linkages' into 'citizen-politician linkages'. In this article, I revise the term as 'party-voter linkages.'

case. This study, however, is a preliminary study that analyzes changes in the Japanese politics from the perspective of party-citizen linkage, applying a simplified version of linkage models, the Kitschelt model. Western Europe-centered studies based on Downs or Lipset & Rokkan's theories have assumed that responsibility and reactivity of voter-politician linkages only follow the politicians' ideological-programmatic appeals or policy achievements. Kitschelt (2000) criticizes that it neglected alternative linkage models. In other words, they neglect charismatic linkages based on each political leaders' characteristics or clientelistic linkages based on direct awards and selective material benefits, as they consider ideological-programmatic linkages the ideal linkage pattern for a democracy.

According to Kitschelt (2000, 850), political parties offer policy packages under programmatic linkage, and reward voters 'indirectly,' not through selective incentive.<sup>6</sup> As a result, benefits from the ruling party's policy program are distributed regardless of the voters' support for certain parties. Competition among the parties, based on programmatic linkages has been depersonalized and more systemized compared to clientelism. On the other hand, modern clientelistic linkage for mutual benefit occurs in the form of machine politics or competition among providers of selective incentive (Kitschelt 2000, 849-50).

Under the democratic system where clientelistic and programmatic political parties have weakened, accountability of the politicians tends to depend on the retrospective voting or charisma of the individuals (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007, 24). Charismatic authority involves directness and great passion as charisma refers to unique persuasion skills that inspire followers with belief in the leader's ability to present a better future and overcome suffering. Charismatic politicians, in order to accentuate themselves, tend to promise everything to everyone regardless of the strategy of their party (Kitschelt 2000, 849). According to Kitschelt (2000, 855), charismatic leaders rule by theatrics rather than by the strenuous and laborious means of building their own group. This contrasts to party-voter linkages based on programmatic competition, which limits the role of personal leadership. However, he also agrees with other scholars that charismatic, clientelistic, and programmatic linkages are not mutually exclusive, but compatible.

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6. Although it is not specifically mentioned, it can be inferred that Kitschelt did not separate ideological linkage between the party and voters because weakening of the ideological party and all inclusive party phenomenon are considered as a given in Western Europe.

### 3. Personalization of Politics and Charismatic Linkage

Unlike programmatic or clientelistic linkages, it may be unfamiliar to mention charismatic linkage as the connection between citizens and political parties in a democracy. Forming charismatic linkage is often considered a negative phenomenon, opposite to democratic values, as it focuses on individual politicians. Nonetheless, in modern politics, more and more voters support certain political parties founded on the leader's personal characteristics or charisma. The concept 'personalization of politics' explains this phenomenon. As an example, McAllister (2009, 571) explains that it is common for liberal democratic countries to name their governments after their leader rather than the ruling party. This trend is not only restricted to countries that have a presidential system, but also became commonplace in major countries that have a parliamentary system. In this sense, it is also known as the 'presidentialization of politics.' Such phenomenon is often explained with a lower sense of party identification and loyalty among voters and a decrease in the number of party members. There are various other explanations, but in regards to technology, the development of the media and its usage in election campaigns played a big role (McAllister 2009, 572).

In recent years, presidentialization of politics has been widespread across democratic political systems, especially parliamentary systems (Poguntke and Webb 2007, 1). It can be understood as an increase in leadership power resources and autonomy within the party and the executive as well as the development of leadership-centered electoral processes. From the perspective of election politics, appeals to the voters for support are increasingly leadership-centered and the media deliberately covers the election competition by focusing on the leaders (Poguntke and Webb 2007, 5-10). Poguntke and Webb mention Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair, Silvio Berlusconi, and Helmut Kohl as evident examples of 'presidentialization of politics.' As today's elections put more emphasis on the candidates than on the party, and the voters' choices are based on either election issues or the candidates, election volatility has increased (Dalton et al. 2009). A decrease in unity and loyalty for the party means that voters are vulnerable to manipulation and incitement. As political parties and voters become dealigned, more and more political leaders tend to mobilize support based on personality, introducing inflammatory leaders like Haider in Austria and Le Pen in France (Dalton et al. 2009, 61). It implies that, even in advanced democracies, the relationship between parties and voters is formed based on candidates' images or certain issues rather than the party's traditional

ideology (Farrell and Webb 2009). This again indicates that political responsibility is transferring from the collective and organizational level to a more personal level (Poguntke and Webb 2007, 352).

The study of the Italian case clearly shows presidentialization of the parliamentary system and the consequential emergence of charismatic linkage. It is obvious that the voting pattern in Italy has changed to voting for charisma rather than issues or ideology of the parties (Calise 2012, 174). Voters are likely to cast their votes in accordance with a sense of belonging with the leaders, not with traditional standards such as policy, ideology, or material benefits. The expression ‘Party of Prime Minister’ (Partito del Purumie) is shown as the reflection of such phenomenon (Calise 2012, 115). With widespread mass media, personalization of politics brought about populist voting patterns and a certain leader-centered ‘Personal Party’ (Calise 2012). In the case of Japan, similar changes are occurring regarding the presidentialization of parliamentary politics, and there are active discussions on the concepts of domination by the prime minister or politics of the prime minister (Takenaka 2006; Machitori 2012).

## Changes in Japanese Party Politics: LDP and DPJ

### 1. Collapse of the 1955 System and Party-Voter Linkage

Postwar Japanese politics was characterized by ideological competition between the conservatives and progressives, with the LDP as the predominant party in the so-called ‘1955 System.’ The party-voter linkage of the LDP adopted the form of clientelistic linkage based on personal connection and material reward in lieu of ideology. Therefore the linkage between the LDP, which took an economy-first policy and transformed into a catchall party, and voters was consolidated through the network between individual politicians and voters at the ‘association of supporters.’<sup>7</sup> Moreover, policy making of the professional groups in the Diet, such as the Policy Affairs Research Council (PARC) or policy specialists (*zoku giin*) reflected close ties with interest groups like Agricultural Cooperatives or the Construction Association. Clientelistic

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7. In 1961, for example, the number of supporters associated with each LDP member was assumed to sum up to ten million nationwide. It means that 10 percent of the population joined the associations. In the 1980s, most of the LDP members provided services to 50-80 associations organized in their constituencies, such as hot spring trips or field trip to the National Assembly (Shinoda 2013, 61-62).

linkages were formed not only at the personal level, but also at the party level. The PARC and policy specialists served as a channel for the LDP to provide selective benefits.<sup>8</sup> The LDP provided voters who engaged in relatively less competitive and inefficient fields such as agriculture, construction, and retail business with programmatic and material rewards, which came back as votes in elections (Han Euisuok 2011, 266). From this perspective, weakening of organized votes that have been prominent since the 1990s can be seen as reflecting the weakening of clientelistic linkages. For example, *Taiju* or *Taiju no Kai*, an organization of the Director of the Postal Bureau, could mobilize 1,030,000 votes for the LDP in the 1980 House of Councilors election but only 470,000 votes in 2001. Japan Federation of Construction Contractors also mobilized 1,740,000 votes in 1980 but ended up with 270,000 votes in 2001 (*Nihon keizai shinbun*, August 1, 2001). Party-voter linkage based on clientelism has a negative connotation but there are also positive effects for accountability and responsiveness to voters, as well as political stability.

Long-term predominance of the LDP had been criticized for developing partisan and pork-barrel politics in combination with the institutional characteristic of the medium constituency system. In consequence, clientelistic citizen-party linkage that had supported the '1955 System' started to break up along with discontent of urban voters and the competitive economic section, and objection from the opposition party (Scheiner 2007, 277).<sup>9</sup> After a series of scandals in Japanese politics, such as the cases of Recruit Holdings and Sagawa Express, politicians' corruption and collusion between politics and business became big issues, followed by a drastic increase of demands for political reform and changes to break down partisan and pork-barrel politics. Most of all, the collapse of the bubble economy and delay on economic growth resulted in deficiency of resources for profit distribution (Sunahara 2012, 61) and the internal crisis over political reform ended in defection of some of the LDP members in 1993 and the party's loss of power.

While the LDP secured its foundation of support on a basis of clientelistic linkages, opposition parties like the SDP founded voters' patronage on ideology. Indeed, the LDP was also connected to their followers through conservatism.<sup>10</sup>

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8. The LDP can be seen as a mass clientelist party in that clientelism was achieved at the level of the party (Reed and Simizu 2009, 7-9).

9. For the cause of clientelistic linkage formation in Japan and its operation methods, refer to Scheiner (2007, 278-85).

10. The term 'ideological linkage' is used here to prevent confusion. Ideological-programmatic linkage can also be used in that ideology often takes the concrete form of policies such as the 'US-Japan Security Treaty' and the 'Peace Constitution.'



Progressive parties could only secure a limited range of support, as they had limited access to government resources and a narrow support base. They therefore had to be ideology-oriented, emphasizing pacifism and anti-Americanism (Kim Sang-jun and Kim Chi-gang 2013).<sup>11</sup> In this respect, it can be said that ties between opposition parties and voters were based on ideological linkage rather than clientelism. After the 1980s, however, the phenomenon of ideological support surprisingly changed. According to the research on the correlation between patterns of support for political parties and ideological conflicts of conservatism and progressivism conducted by the Association for Promoting Fair Elections (*Akarui Senkyo Suishin Kyōkai*), the coefficient in 1972 was 0.76 whereas that in 1987 was 0.46, and in 1996 it went down to 0.36. This indicates that ideological linkage between the party and its followers has weakened (Tanaka 2003, 210-11).

## 2. Changes in Japanese Party Politics since the 1990s

The issue of corruption and inefficiency shown through LDP's pork-barrel politics and clientelistic linkage expanded to voters' distrust and dissatisfaction of the LDP and party politics in general. The medium constituency system and the ensuing faction politics were considered to be critical factors. There were extensive changes in Japanese party politics and election politics after the reorganization of the party system and the LDP's loss of power, both of which took place around 1993, and the 1994 reform into the single-member constituency system.

### (1) Increase of Nonpartisans

During the LDP's collapse in 1993, the establishment of an LDP and SDP coalition government and changes of the SDP's ideological identity, substantial numbers of voters shifted to nonpartisans (Kim Pöm-su 2009). For example, the percentage of nonpartisans in the mid-1990s grew to 50-60 percent whereas in 1990 it was only 35 percent (Nakakita 2012, 116). This tendency continued in the 2000s; according to Fuji Network's survey conducted in January 2007, 40.3 percent answered that 'there is no party to support' and as many as 60.2 percent of the respondents said they were 'nonpartisans' (Ida 2007, 48). As the nonpartisans are more interested in politics at national level than constituency

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11. Kim Sang-jun and Kim Chi-gang (2013) analyze the vulnerability of Japanese opposition parties using the concepts of organization party and institution party. Unlike European countries where social cleavages led to the creation of institution parties, Japanese political parties started as organization parties, which narrowed political support for the opposition parties.

level, policies of the parties and their images have become extremely important. Nonpartisans in urban areas particularly felt strong antagonism toward the LDP's clientelism. Anti-clientelism in the metro region strengthened with the appearance of a competitive opposition party (DPJ) that strongly criticized the LDP's clientelism. The media also criticized clientelistic policies for giving rise to corruption and inefficiency. Prime Minister Koizumi played the main role in changing clientelistic linkage (Scheiner 2007, 295-96).<sup>12</sup> Political support from the nonpartisan group shows high volatility. For instance, in the 2001 General Election, the LDP gained twice as many votes from the nonpartisans than the DPJ. In 2003 House of Representatives Election, however, only 25 percent of them voted for the LDP whereas 55 percent voted for DPJ (*Nihon keizai shinbun*, November 8, 2003).

As shown, voters' breakaway from political parties is one of the factors accelerating 'presidentialization of politics.' In accordance with an increase in the percentage of nonpartisans, popularity of the Cabinet has become critical, which in turn means that popularity of the Prime Minister has also become important (Kim Sang-jun and Pak Ho-sŏng 2013, 119-21). Ida (2007, 55) suggests the riskiness of granting authority to a charismatic demagogue, as elections in the era of non-partisans have characteristics of popularity voting instead of policy voting.

## (2) *Emergence of Elections Based on Manifestos and Party-centered Elections*

Manifestos in Japanese central politics have come into the picture since January 2003 when the governor candidates accepted the creation of a manifesto proposed by the governor of Mie Prefecture, Kitagawa Masayasu. This was followed by the DPJ, the first opposition party, bringing up the issue during the debate among party leaders on June 11 (Sone 2006, 70-71).<sup>13</sup> Kitagawa, the driving force behind the introduction of the manifesto and the joint representative of the '21st-Century Provisional Commission for Administrative Reform,' criticized Japanese society for its tendency to solve problems through certain individuals (leadership) and pointed out that political parties should obtain voters' trust through a manifesto containing promising policies (Pak Myŏng-hŭi and Chŏe Ŭn-bong 2013, 115). Unlike the LDP, who established strong ties with the voters through years of clientelism, the DPJ, a resource-constrained party that lacked

12. Such changes had a close relation with Koizumi's election strategy that focused on getting support from the nonpartisans. Koizumi compared nonpartisans to a gold mine after making a clean sweep in the 2005 General Election (Ida 2007, 48).

13. DPJ had been reviewing the introduction of manifestos since 2000 (Pak Myŏng-hŭi and Chŏe Ŭn-bong 2013, 115).

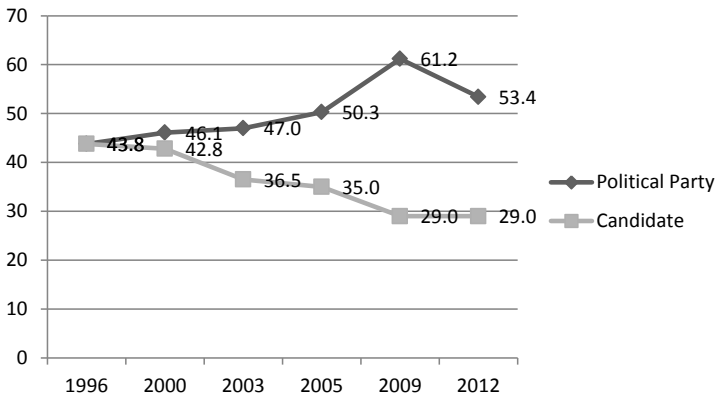
human and material resources, aggressively accepted the proposal. The DPJ's proposal of policies through the manifesto enabled it to gain its position as an alternative party to the LDP (Uegami and Tsutsumi 2011, 22-26).

The DPJ put emphasis on 'post-bureaucracy' in the 2003 House of Representatives manifesto. For the policy agenda, it presented bureaucratic connection, subsidies, and prevention of budget waste for public utilities. It also proposed a 'New Government' structure that differentiated from the LDP's party operation plan ([http://archive.dpj.or.jp/policy/manifesto/images/Manifesto\\_2003.pdf](http://archive.dpj.or.jp/policy/manifesto/images/Manifesto_2003.pdf). Accessed April 3, 2014). Kan Naoto, the President of the party at the time, demanded Prime Minister Koizumi to compete through manifestos but Koizumi refused it by expressing negative reactions to the use of the term manifesto. Yet Koizumi announced, in the 2003 LDP's Presidential Election, that his pledges would be equal to the 'party's pledge' (Pak Myŏng-hŭi and Chŏe Ŭn-bong 2013, 116). The LDP would have had no other option than to respond to the DPJ's manifesto movement that diffused supports from voters. In the 2004 House of Councilors Election and 2005 House of Representatives Election, the DPJ strongly criticized the LDP's bureaucrat-led, pork-barrel politics and proposed various policies to overcome the problems. In particular, it focused on neoliberal reformist policies ([http://archive.dpj.or.jp/policymanifesto/images/Manifesto\\_2004.pdf](http://archive.dpj.or.jp/policymanifesto/images/Manifesto_2004.pdf), [http://archive.dpj.or.jp/policy/manifesto/images/Manifesto\\_2005.pdf](http://archive.dpj.or.jp/policy/manifesto/images/Manifesto_2005.pdf). Accessed April 3, 2014). Notwithstanding, Koizumi also actively pushed forward neoliberal reforms, resulting in almost no differences between the two parties' policies. On the other hand, while Koizumi put more emphasis on the US-Japan Cooperation for foreign affairs and security's aspects, DPJ concentrated on building trust among East Asian countries, which established a programmatic cleavage (Park Cheol Hee 2011, 41-43).

The DPJ successfully became the alternative ruling party by clearly establishing the political cleavage. The DPJ's president Ozawa adopted 'People's lives come first (*kokumin no seikatsu ga dai-ichi*)' as the slogan in the 2007 House of Councilors Election to highlight the welfare-oriented manifesto. In the 2009 House of Representatives Election, he insisted on an anti-LDP policy line, which resulted in securing a foundation of support (Park Cheol Hee 2011). Despite this increase in the importance of the policy in elections, there was a sharp division of opinions on whether Japanese party politics after the electoral reform had transformed into a policy-centered two-party system. Since the manifesto was introduced in 2003, more analyses evaluated that the Japanese election has been switching to policy-centered and party-centered (Go Seon Gyu 2006, 7-8).<sup>14</sup> As

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14. Nakakita (2012, 127) insists that manifesto is the evidence that the Japanese political parties are



Source | The Association for Promoting Fair Elections, *Nationwide Attitude Survey on the 46th General Election of the House of Representatives*, 47. Accessed April 10, 2014. <http://www.akaruisenkyo.or.jp/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/070seihon1.pdf>.

**Figure 1.** Ratio of Votes That Support Political Parties and Candidates under the Single-Member District System

an example, Nakamura (2012) points out that electorates view the Japanese political party system from the perspective of political cleavage between the ruling and opposition party and cast votes based on their evaluation of the parties since 2001. In fact, on the main factor of voting for a candidate in a single-member constituency for the House of Representatives Election that has been taking place since 1996, the percentage of voters who answered ‘political party’ is continuously increasing in comparison to those who said individual ‘candidate.’

In the case of the House of Councilors Election as well, party-based supports showed an increase but candidate-based supports continued to decrease (The Association for Promoting Fair Elections, *Study on the 22nd House of Councilors Election*, 67. Accessed April 10, 2014. <http://www.akaruisenkyo.or.jp/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/22sangaiyo.pdf>). A statistical analysis of Councilors’ activities in their constituencies from 1985 to 2010 reveals that the validity of reelection strategies focusing on each candidate declined. On the other hand, along with bolstered competition between the parties, the influence of vote share of the party over that of individual candidates has also increased (Hamamoto and Nemoto 2011).

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making a transition to market-competition democracy, integrating the aims of their policies and appealing to the voters.

### (3) Reinforcement of Political Leadership

Together with the increase in nonpartisans and emergence of manifesto elections, another prominent phenomenon in Japanese politics is the reinforcement of the power of the party's president and the prime minister. After the 1994 Electoral Reform, Japan implemented a combination of two distinct rules: single-member constituency and proportional representation, resulting in greater centralization. Moreover, the reform of the Campaign Finance Law strengthened the position of the central party (Estévez-Abe 2006, 641-43). This then reinforced the power of the party president. The bureaucracy, which once played a leading role in Japan's economic growth, was faced with demands for reform after disclosure of high ranking officials' corruption scandals and lack of risk management ability during the Kobe Earthquake and the terror by *Aum Shinrikyō* (*Aum* Supreme Truth). Then Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryūtarō initiated administrative reform in order to reinforce the prime minister's leadership and the function of his residence. The consequence was the emergence of another powerful authority like Koizumi. It is well known that Koizumi exercised strong leadership based on the result of political and administrative reforms made from the mid-1990s while pursuing neoliberal policies and pushing ahead with post-LDP politics.

Koizumi's great triumph in the 2005 election clearly showed that the Japanese political system is shifting into a Westminster system that centralizes power for the party leadership and prime minister, the so-called Britannicization of Japan (Estévez-Abe 2006, 633). This is also known as presidentialization of Japanese politics (Krauss and Nyblade 2005), which resulted from both Koizumi's leadership and successful political and administrative reform (Ida 2007, 12). Although Koizumi's successors did not exert as much power as he did, efforts to reinforce the role of political leadership, the prime minister in particular, and its functions continued. The DPJ continually stressed politics led by the prime minister through the manifesto from the 2003 Election, even until after its rule in 2009.

### 3. Japanese Party Politics after the Mid-2000s

With the strengthening of bipartisanship, the function of the cabinet, and the prime minister as a result of political and administrative reforms, introduction of manifesto election led Japanese politics in a positive direction. However, the number of nonpartisans still increased, while clientelistic linkage between the LDP and voters and ideological linkage with the opposition party, represented by the SDP, declined. In addition, with the fall of existing party-voter linkage,

**Table 1.** Results of the House of Representatives Elections for Major Parties<sup>15</sup>

Year	First Party	Second Party	Third Party
2003	LDP (237)	DPJ (177)	Kōmeitō (34)
2005	LDP (296)	DPJ (113)	Kōmeitō (31)
2009	DPJ (308)	LDP (119)	Kōmeitō (21)
2012	LDP (293)	DPJ (57)	Japan Restoration Party (54)

Japanese politics was thrown into chaos, and political leadership and the party system destabilized. Instability of party politics caused by the electoral volatility became evident in the House of Representatives Election of the LDP and DPJ after 2005.

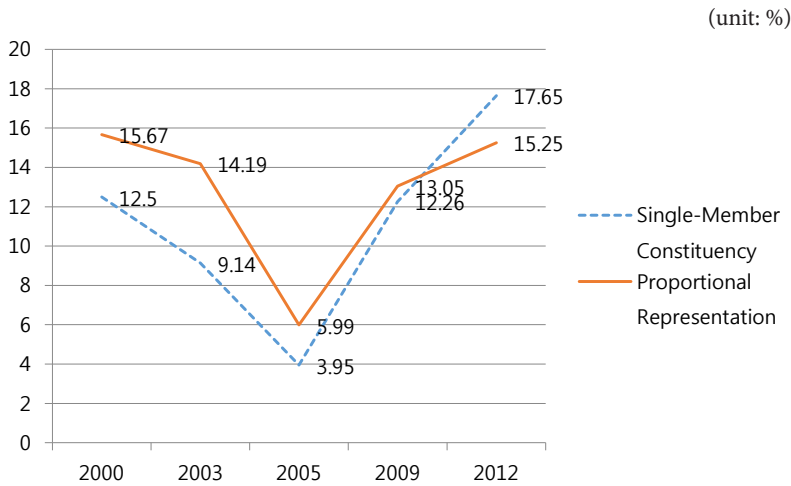
If one assesses electoral volatility of the party system based on the votes each party gained, it can be measured that instability has increased in recent elections—of course the nature of single-member constituency where the seat difference can be as few as one, needs to be taken into consideration. When comparing each election result using the Pedersen Index, electoral volatility had decreased after 1996 but went back up again since the election in 2005.<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, the party system seems stable despite expansion of the gap between the LDP and DPJ in the 2005 Election. This is because the Pedersen Index uses the difference of votes instead of number of seats.

As shown in the figure, the Pedersen Index is useful to identify the volatility of the party system. The changes of voters' support also shows increase in volatility. Changes of electoral support for the five political parties included in this analysis, namely LDP, DPJ, Kōmeitō, JCP, and SDP, clearly indicate high volatility for the LDP and DPJ, unlike the other three parties that have a fixed foundation of support based on ideological and programmatic linkages.

Table 2 shows what percentage of electorates casted votes for the same party in the three successive elections. For example, 71.0 percent of the people who voted for the LDP in the 2003 election voted for the party again in 2005, 37.6 percent of which voted for the same party in 2009. These numbers clearly indicate that the two biggest parties have failed to build stable ties with their supporters.

15. There are 480 seats in total. The numbers in parentheses show the number of seats.

16. Pedersen Index, a traditional and simple method to measure volatility under the party system, has been applied. Powell and Tucker introduced two types: Type A which neglects parties with less than two percent of the votes and Type B which only includes stable and sustainable parties. This research adopted Type B, including only five political parties, which are LDP, DPJ, Kōmeitō (Clean Government Party), JCP (Japanese Communist Party) and SDP.



**Figure 2.** Electoral Volatility of Japanese Political Parties after the 1996 House of Representatives Election<sup>17</sup>

**Table 2.** Changes in the Same Voters' Voting Ratio for the Same Party in Comparison to the Voting of Previous Election (%)<sup>18</sup>

	2005	2009	2012
LDP	71.0	37.6	70.5
DPJ	64.0	78.8	24.7
Kōmeitō	75.3	69.7	76.4
JCP	62.2	67.0	67.2
SDP	50.0	41.7	42.9

Source | Go Seon Gyu (2013).

Frequent replacement of the leadership occurred during these changes. From Koizumi's retirement in 2006, until its defeat in the election in August 2009, the LDP went through three Prime Ministers: Abe, Fukuda, and Asō. In the case of the DPJ, since it seized power in 2009 and until Abe of the LDP came back to the office in 2012, there were also three replacements in the leadership:

17. There can be a slight difference in the degree of volatility, depending on the methods. However, issues regarding methodology will not be discussed here. For methodology, refer to Pedersen (1979) and Powell and Tucker (2009).

18. The author modified and rearranged figure 4 in Go Seon Gyu (2013, 282).

Hatoyama, Kan, and Noda. This implies that the populist leaders who exercise strong leadership in ideology and programs gain public attention and support. Koizumi's populist leadership and his high popularity of over 50 percent during his term of office are already well-known facts. Similarly, the mayor of Osaka, Hashimoto, and the former mayor of Tokyo, Ishihara, showed similar styles with Koizumi and the public supported them quite fervently.<sup>19</sup> They had kept an extreme conservative stance, which was detached from the majority of Japanese people, on issues such as constitutional reform, right of self-defense, and comfort women. But they were still consistently supported. According to an opinion poll conducted in early 2012, Hashimoto came first as the politician most desirable for Japan's leader with 21.4 percent support, followed by Ishihara who received 9.6 percent (*Sankei shinbun*, January 16, 2012). In this sense, public demand for strong leadership can be explained as being generated from instability of the leadership caused by volatility of party system.

## Changes in Japanese Politics and Party-Voter Linkage

In the '1955 System,' the LDP was in ideological conflict with the JSP over revision of the pacifist constitution and the US-Japan alliance, while consolidating its clientelistic linkage with voters. During the political changes in the mid-1990s, however, the LDP's clientelistic linkage as well as the JSP's ideological linkage with their supporters weakened, leading to an increase in the number of nonpartisans. This indicates that individual characteristics of a party's leader or a prime minister became more important (Ida 2007, 11). With the decline of clientelistic and ideological party-voter linkages, linkage patterns were to be transformed. Based on the Kitschelt's linkage models, reinforcing programmatic or charismatic linkages would be an alternative. Theoretically, however, forming a programmatic linkage could be a better option for a political party (Luna et al. 2014). This is because programmatic linkage is more affordable than clientelistic linkage in terms of political cost and is capable of structuring stable linkages with voters through the party label (Luna et al. 2014, 6). This strategy is especially efficient for the opposition parties who have limited access to policy tools and the material resources of the government. A good example would be the DPJ's lead in the election manifestos.

In securing political supports from the voters, the DPJ has tried to form

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19. For example, Koizumi's politics was criticized as 'theatrical politics' (Yi Ki-wan 2007; Yi Myŏn-u 2006; Yi I-bŏm 2006; Ōtake 2006). Hashimoto, based on his populist politics, went to the fore as the next prime minister in 2012 (Pak Myŏng-hŭi 2012; Han Euisuok 2012).



programmatic party-voter linkage through manifestos since the early 2000s. However, it failed to differentiate its economic policies, which were the focal issue in elections in the 2000s, from those of the LDP's, except during certain periods around the 2007 House of Councilors Election and 2009 House of Representatives Election. Moreover, Hashimoto Tōru and Ishihara Shintarō, who were at the center of public attention, were unable to advise economic policies distinct from both parties. It eventually led to the situation where personal charm of political leaders became more important than policy orientations in the electoral competition (Yi Chōng-hwan 2013, 165). With the phenomenon of political personalization, voting standards tend to shift from political party to party leader in today's Japan (Iio 2013, 47).

### 1. Forming Programmatic Linkages and Its Setback

One of the objectives of the political reform in the 1990s was to make political parties compete with their programs. It led to the establishment of the DPJ's Think Network 21 (*Sinku Nettowāku 21*) in 2001 and Public Policy Platform (*Kōkyō Seisaku Purattofōmu*) in 2005, and the LDP's Think Tank 2005 · Japan (*Sinkutanku 2005 Nihon*) (Pak Myōng-hūi and Chōe Ūn-bong 2013, 114). It implies efforts of both parties to strengthen programmatic linkage using manifestos. In other words, increasing demands for each party to issue a manifesto urge a new type of party-voter linkage (Mori 2006, 127). It is well-known that the leading opposition party, DPJ, officially decided to introduce manifestos in 2003, which was followed by the establishment of the Research Institute of Manifestos (*Manifesto Seisaku Kenkyūkai*) by young LDP politicians (Mori 2006, 138). The DPJ put emphasis on the weakening of bureaucrats' influence on policy-making and on the breakdown of the LDP's pork-barrel politics in its manifesto. At that time, the LDP presented a program named the "Declaration of Koizumi's Reforms," starting de-facto electoral competition through manifestos. Neoliberal policies from both Koizumi and the DPJ were not differentiated until the 2005 House of Representatives election. As a result, it was hard for both parties to form strong programmatic linkage with the voters through distinctive policy programs.

In the late 2000s, the DPJ finally started to develop distinctive policy programs from those of the LDP. Koizumi's LDP emphasized neoliberal policies domestically and US-Japan cooperation internationally, while neglecting to improve relations with other Asian countries. The DPJ, after Ozawa was elected party leader in 2006, formed distinctive policy programs by stressing enhancement of the social welfare system and friendly relations with

neighboring states, while criticizing structural reform problems (Park Cheol Hee 2011, 39-44). In the 2007 House of Councilors election, Abe tried to gain support from the voters with conservative ideology while succeeding Koizumi's neoliberal policy line. Meanwhile, the DPJ was able to win the election by emphasizing 'life politics.' The DPJ successfully won the 2009 House of Representatives election based on the anti-LDP policies which raised expectation of the voters for regime change. However, the DPJ failed to form a consistent and comprehensible policy line because the party consisted of various groups that had diverse ideologies and policy orientations. In consequence, the party also failed to establish strong leadership that could guarantee coherent policies (Yi Chae-chŏl and Chin Ch'ang-su 2011). When Kan Naoto became the prime minister, the DPJ's policies partly followed the track of the LDP, pursuing financial soundness and recovery of the US-Japan relationship (Park Cheol Hee 2011, 51). A party system consisting of parties based on programmatic linkage can be formed only when the parties generate polarization of their positions on political and policy issues (Kitschelt and Wang 2014, 44). But the LDP and the DPJ failed to differentiate their policies in the 2000s, except for a certain period of time (Zakowski 2011, 200-2). Coexistence of various policy groups within each party hindered them from developing programmatic linkage with the voters.

Since the DPJ issued a manifesto in 2003, it became common for political parties, including the LDP, to draft manifestos in order to gain electoral support. This phenomenon did not necessarily lead to reinforcement of programmatic party-voter linkage. According to the survey conducted by *The Asahi Newspaper* (*Asahi shinbun*) on August 31 and September 1, 2009, 81 percent of the respondents answered that the DPJ's overwhelming victory in the election was possible because of the public 'expectation for regime change.' On the other hand, only 38 percent said that DPJ could win because of their 'policies,' while 52 percent of the respondents opposed this idea (<http://www.asahi.com/senkyo2009/news/TKY200909010400.html>. Accessed April 5, 2014). This implies that programmatic party-voter linkage was not firmly established through manifesto elections in the 2000s. While manifestos were introduced to strengthen the ties between voters and parties in the late 1990s when the number of nonpartisans dramatically increased, it was also used as a strategy for creating a better image in the elections (Nakakita 2012, 104, 134).

Where there is a lack of clientelistic and programmatic linkages, possibility of charismatic linkage, which depends on the political leader's charisma and unique characteristics, increases (Luna et al. 2014, 5-6). With the DPJ failure to achieve political results promised through manifestos, the public started to have

heightened expectations for the leadership of individual politicians, rather than the pledges of parties (Iio 2013, 70).

## 2. Increase in Importance of Political Leaders and Possibility of Forming Charismatic Linkage

Previous studies point out that popularity of political leaders, as well as their image and policies, has become important in elections. The LDP has downsized its organization and mobilization of voters by party organization has declined since the 2000s (Krauss and Pekkanen 2010, 7; Iio 2013, 50). As a result, elections in the 2000s showed party-centered electoral competition, and the importance of public support for the prime minister and party leaders increased. Kabashima and Imai (2002) analyzed results of the House of Representatives elections from 1993 to 2000 to show that evaluation of the party leader played an important part, especially in proportional electoral districts. This analysis is backed by the fact that Koizumi, as the leader of the ruling party, declared that he would resign if the LDP did not hold a majority of votes in the 2005 House of Representatives election, and Okada, the leader of DPJ, also announced his intent to resign in case of losing the election. This was the first case where leaders of both ruling and opposition parties laid their resignation for an election (Go Seon Gyu 2006, 9).

In the past, the prime minister's popularity was not so related to election results. For example, the LDP won the 1976 House of Representatives election despite the fact that the Prime Minister Miki Takeo's approval rate was 19.4 percent. The LDP was also able to maintain its power as the ruling party with only 22.2 percent of support for the Mori Yoshirō cabinet before the House of Representatives election in June 2000. These examples showed that support for the members of LDP were not connected to support for the party and its leader, and that LDP's ruling power was possible because of individual candidates in each constituency (Maeda 2010, 896). But the prime minister's popularity has proved to be an important factor through the 2005, 2009, and 2012 elections. Maeda (2010, 891-97) stresses that the results of each election are closely related to the popularity of Koizumi, Asō, and Noda.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Yi I-bōm (2008)

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20. Koizumi's support rate recorded 50.7 percent within the Cabinet before the House of Representatives Election in November 2003, 45.8 percent in September 2005. For Asō, the rate was only 21.5 percent within LDP in August 2009. In Noda's case, the rate was even lower, recording 19.4 percent within DPJ in December 2012. Both LDP and DPJ were completely defeated in respective elections ([http://www.tv-asahi.co.jp/hst/poll/graph\\_naikaku.html](http://www.tv-asahi.co.jp/hst/poll/graph_naikaku.html). Accessed March 21, 2014).

analyzed the House of Councilors elections after the mid-1990s and confirmed that the evaluation of the prime minister played a significant role in securing support. Conversely, the support rating has become closely related to the term of the prime minister (Kim Sang-jun and Pak Ho-sŏng 2013).<sup>21</sup>

The importance of the party leader's image and popularity is also evident in the LDP's presidential elections after the mid-1990s. In the past, the head of a faction tended to become the head of the party. Out of eight presidential elections from 2001 to 2012, starting with Koizumi being elected as the leader, 6 of the elected candidates were not the head of any faction. Moreover, out of a total of 27 candidates in the period, only 10 were faction leaders (Iio 2013, 56). These are said to be the result of the introduction of the vote for the rank and file members of the LDP, and political leader-centered electoral behavior reinforced after the introduction of a single-member district system.<sup>22</sup> Ida (2007, 54-55) argues that recent trends of frequent political advertisements highlighting the personal character of party presidents also reflect the rising importance of party leaders' individual popularity. Demands for the direct election of the prime minister can be seen to be related as well (McAllister 2009, 584).

The tendency of party-voter linkage formation based on the voters' expectations of individual politicians is clearly reflected in the increase of *shuchō seitō* after 2010 (Han Euisuok 2012).<sup>23</sup> In the 2012 House of Representatives election, Japan Restoration Party (JRP) managed to secure 54 seats and became the third party. The JRP had been created by the merging of Osaka Restoration Party and Sunrise Party of Japan, which depended solely on Hashimoto and Ishihara's popularity. Your Party, organized by Watanabe after his defection from the LDP, also secured 18 seats. These parties did not have stable linkages with certain support groups. Therefore, they depended on the popularity of individual leaders for votes (Kim Sang-jun and Kim Chi-gang 2013, 296-97).

As discussed above, the party-voter linkage in Japanese politics has been transformed along with decline of clientelistic and ideological linkages. There were efforts to form programmatic linkages through manifestos, but policy programs between parties were not differentiated. For example, the LDP's

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21. Kim Sang-jun and Pak Ho-sŏng (2013) explain that Japanese politics in the 2000s has transformed from 'faction politics' to 'popularity politics.'

22. Candidacy and election of group leaders are prominent in the case of the DPJ (Iio 2013, 58-89). This may be because the party was an association of various political powers.

23. A *shuchōseitō* is a party organized by the heads of local governments such as Osaka Restoration Party, Tax Reduction Japan, and Aichi Is Top of Japan. It was formed in order to reflect opinions of the locals in the central politics and to gather political powers to back their policies up (Han Euisuok 2012, 250).

neoliberal policies carried forward in the early 2000s by Koizumi and Abe were not in line with Abe's economic policies when he was back in office in 2012. Moreover, the DPJ's policy line was frequently altered with the annual change in leadership. It made the voters realize that major political parties do not necessarily have coherent policy orientation. In other words, the possibility of forming party-voter linkage based on programmatic linkage has declined. On the other hand, charismatic linkages seem to work more strongly with solid personalization of politics. Simply speaking, when the parties do not have distinctive policy programs, the possibility of forming strong charismatic linkage grows.

The party-voter linkage of major Japanese political parties after the mid-2000s illustrates that the clientelistic and ideological linkages, which used to be strong under the 1955 System, have weakened. While major parties have made some efforts to form programmatic linkages with voters, the charismatic linkage has become a dominant party-voters linkage pattern. But domination of a specific linkage pattern does not mean that the other linkage patterns do not work.

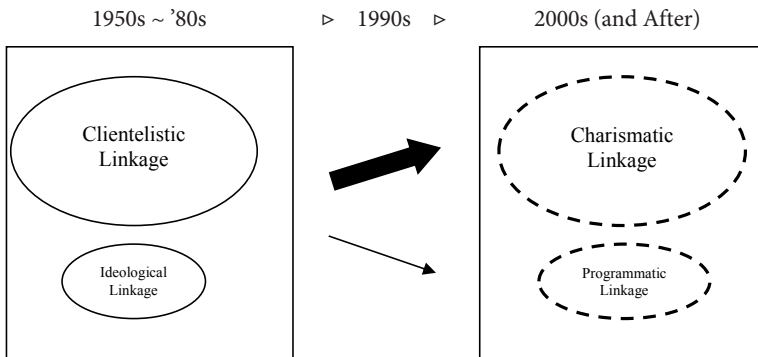


Figure 3. Changes in Party-Voter Linkages in Major Japanese Political Parties<sup>24</sup>

24. Major parties under the '1955 System' refer to the LDP and the JSP; in the 2000s, they refer to the LDP and the DPJ.

## Conclusion

Japanese politics has gone through significant changes throughout the 1990s' political transformation. With the weakening of traditional clientelism of the LDP, the birth of new parties, and the emergence of a strong opposition party, some began to discuss the realignment of party system. However, others stress the increase of nonpartisans and the voter's dealignment resulting from parties' failure to attract voters. This study analyzed changes of Japanese party politics from the perspective of party-voter linkage and examined the possibility of charismatic and programmatic linkages as a replacement of traditional clientelistic linkage. Japanese party politics has tended to be competitions between the conservatives, especially since the mid-2000s (Park Cheol Hee 2014). The programmatic linkage failed to become a consolidated linkage pattern because major parties were not able to come up with distinctive policies. When party-voter linkage is unstable, short-term evaluations or expectations on parties' performance become the main variables in elections. This indicates that Japanese party politics is likely to continue to be unstable. At the same time, reinforcement of charismatic linkage would lead to the appearance of populist politicians (parties) who take a radical ideological and political path. This may cause the emergence of aggressive and populist politicians who obtain strong public support and power to exert party leadership.

This is an introductory study that suggests a new analytical framework. In consequence, it lacks an empirical and detailed analysis on current Japan's party-voter linkage patterns. However, it has two important implications for understanding changes in Japanese party politics. First, this study provides a new analytical framework with a structural and macroscopic perspective. Second, it attempts to apply a model from the comparative case studies of Western European and Latin American parties to Japan's case. As T. J. Pempel points out, the 1990s was the time of regime shift in Japanese politics. Since then, party-voter linkages have also been changing significantly. Further empirical analysis is necessary to find out how Japanese political parties and voters are forming linkages as they face new socio-political challenges.

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