

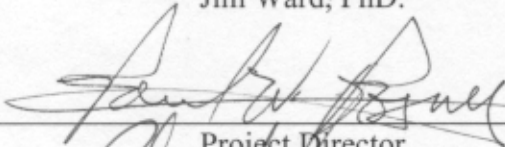
**JAPAN'S LIBERAL DEMOCRATS:  
MAINTAINING POLITICAL DOMINANCE FROM 1955-1993**

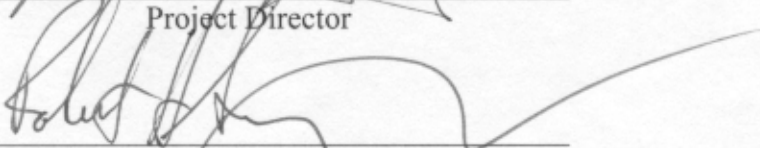
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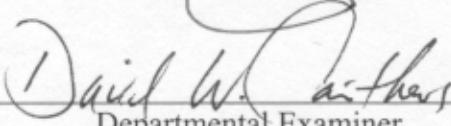
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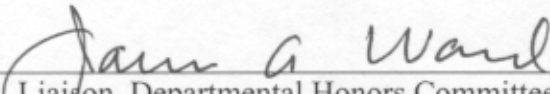
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## **An Introduction to the First Party System**

Japan is democratic, industrialized, and among the wealthiest and most powerful nations in the world with a truly unique political system. This unique political system enabled the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) of Japan to maintain complete political dominance over both houses in the Japanese parliament (also known as the Diet) for nearly four decades. In no other country will one find a democratic political system, which facilitated such a period of one-party rule that lasted for nearly four decades.

There are logical reasons that help explain the LDP's long-lived control of the Diet. One unfamiliar with the Japanese political system might claim that the electorate supported the party, and therefore continued to re-elect LDP delegates in national elections. If this was simply the case, one could argue that Japan is not as unique as many researchers suggest. However, we will learn that it was not the voters' love for the LDP that kept them re-electing the party to power, but a combination of complex and unchecked electoral laws, a fear of change embedded in the Japanese cultural mindset, the lack of reliable opposition party competition, as well as other minor factors. This paper will seek to dissect the many reasons why the party was able to maintain control of the Diet for so many years.

There are several reasons why it is important to understand how the LDP dominated Japanese politics for nearly forty years during what has become known as the First Party System. First, in learning more about the Japanese political system, we will begin to grasp the importance of electoral systems in democracies and how

they can facilitate corruption and both inter and intra-party competition, thus greatly affecting the outcome of elections.

Second, in piecing together the factors that aided the LDP rule, we can begin to understand the political mindset of the Japanese people, thus giving us a clearer picture of one of the most important allies and trading partners of the United States. Third, having a better understanding of how the party remained in power helps us to see how the party regained power in the elections of 1996, and continues to be a dominant party even today. Although the LDP's power is not as strong as it was during the First Party System, it continues to maintain a dominant position in both the upper and lower house of the Diet.

Over the years, experts on Japanese politics have written numerous articles and texts citing a plethora of reasons for how the LDP maintained political hegemony. After hours of research and comparing various data, I consider the Japanese electoral system to be the primary factor behind the LDP's sustained rule. Electoral law greatly impacts four other factors that must be addressed in this paper in order to understand the unique 38-year rule of the LDP. The first is the role of money politics,<sup>1</sup> which made a direct impact on the LDP's longevity and power in the lower house of the Japanese Diet. The last three factors, which include the importance of LDP factions, the role of public opinion, and the fragmentation of opposition parties, are essential in the overall picture although they are not as widely regarded reasons

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<sup>1</sup> The term "money politics" will be used throughout this paper in order to describe the relationship between political fundraising and the corruptive practices of politicians. LDP members accepted bribes and received money in return for political favors. LDP politicians involved with money politics would abuse campaign finance law in order to advance their career.

for LDP dominance as the electoral system or money politics. Had the electoral system not been in place in the manner in which it was during the First Party System (1955-1993), the last three factors would have not likely had as significant an impact on LDP rule. While numerous other factors were discussed in the research, I found these four to be most influential in facilitating the LDP's long political reign. While there are numerous factors that when combined aided in LDP dominance, the chart on the following page indicates the significant connections among these five essential factors. While this chart does not discuss every possible connection between these factors, it does clarify the significant points that will be examined throughout this analysis.

*Significant Connections Sustaining LDP Dominance 1955-1993*

Factors	Importance to LDP Hegemony	Effects on other Factors
Electoral System	<p>Multi-member districts allowed several candidates from the LDP to run in the same election, increasing competition among members. The malapportionment of medium-sized districts, gave heavier weight to the rural and more conservative areas, with the LDP being the only conservative party in the early years of the First Party System. The Political Offices Elections Law was flawed and unchecked, thus allowing the LDP to ignore certain provisions, such as completely reapportioning districts every five years.</p>	<p><i>Money Politics</i>- The large LDP was able to run more than one candidate in multi-member district elections, causing intra- party competition and the need for large sums of money in order to compete with other factions effectively.</p> <p><i>Factions</i>- Intra-party competition separated members of the LDP into five factions, each with a strong leader.</p> <p><i>Public Opinion</i>- Although the LDP was victorious in elections during the First Party System, the party did not often earn a majority of the popular vote.</p> <p><i>Opposition Parties</i>- Other parties, regardless of their size, did not have the funds available to run multiple candidates in district races. This made it difficult to take power away from the LDP.</p>
Money Politics	<p>The LDP was not only large but very wealthy. The party would frequently give political favors in return for monetary contributions from big business. A weak Political Funds Control Law allowed the LDP to under-report contributions, and added to the party's corruptive practices.</p>	<p><i>Factions</i>- Political fundraising increased competition among factions. Money established relationships between individuals within factions and big business.</p> <p><i>Public Opinion</i>- Eventually the public began to demand political reform. Even business grew tired of the expense of money politics. Corruption and scandals within the LDP caused feelings of apathy toward the political system.</p>
Factions	<p>The LDP was too large to effectively function. Therefore, factions gave the party strength. The factions helped the LDP raise more money than other parties, and the LDP could run several candidates from different faction in district elections.</p>	<p><i>Money Politics</i>- Personal ambition and desire for power among faction leaders resulted in a need for large funds. Politicians competed for financial support from businesses. Money was also needed as a part of an expensive political lifestyle.</p>

*Significant Connections Sustaining LDP Dominance 1955-1993 cont...*

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Importance to LDP Hegemony</b>	<b>Effects on other Factors</b>
Factions cont...		<i>Opposition Parties-</i> The LDP had the luxury of running candidates from each faction during district elections. Therefore, there was more choice for voters with the LDP. The strength that factions gave the LDP made the party look large, stable, and cohesive in comparison to the opposition.
Public Opinion	There was an overall conservative mindset among Japanese since the end of World War II. The public feared change and instability. The Cold War encouraged pro-American policies, and the LDP was supported by the States.	<i>Opposition Parties-</i> The public did not welcome any radical political changes that would make Japan unstable.
Opposition Parties	The opposition was not seen as a credible alternative for Diet control. The JSP, once a viable opponent of the LDP, rapidly declined in public support.	<i>Public Opinion-</i> The public did not view smaller parties of the opposition as a legitimate option for leading the Diet. Competing parties were unable to compromise on policy or how to remove the LDP from power.

The electoral system acts as a foundation for all other factors discussed in this paper due to its strength in the political process and the impact that it has on the other four factors. The electoral system established a series of requirements with regard to the size of districts, how many candidates could run in a district, and how much money was needed to run for a lower seat. Districts were never completely reapportioned during the First Party System, allowing for a fairer representation of lower house seats. Urban districts were underrepresented, while a more conservative, rural public continued to reap the benefits of the larger apportionment of the Diet.

With such a district system, the powerful LDP easily sustained its position of authority. Cox and Thies assert that the single, non-transferable vote (SNTV) system used for lower house elections was a direct cause of money-laden politics and Japan's personalistic factions (1998, 267). The SNTV system will be further discussed in the following section on the electoral system.

The electoral system and the SNTV made an unequivocal impact on the issue of money politics with LDP members. Although the law established fundraising standards during the First Party System, campaign finance laws were not enforced and therefore were either disregarded or manipulated. By ignoring the law, the LDP ensured that massive amounts of money flowed into its accounts, padded the pockets of politicians, and helped make the party significantly wealthier than all other opposition parties combined. The SNTV system established lines of competition among LDP members during elections. This competition for seats and power in the Diet led to the development of factions, which helped the LDP raise considerable amounts of money.

Parties were able to run more than one candidate per district, which gave rise to intra-party competition. This intra-party competition, in turn, began to separate members within the party based on seniority, power, and bank accounts. The law established a medium-sized district system and the SNTV among same-party candidates, which not only hurt the opposition's ability to take seats away from the LDP in elections, but also made it difficult for the public to vote LDP candidates out of office. The LDP had the funds and size necessary to run several candidates in any

particular district, while smaller parties could only afford to run one. Running more than one candidate in a district increased LDP odds of winning a seat. Based on electoral law, it was possible for candidates to take a district with less than a majority vote.

Aside from the electoral system's impact, the factors of money politics, factions, public opinion, and opposition parties are all closely connected. Money politics and factions have mutual influences such that members within a LDP faction desired power and prestige and would abuse the game of money politics to further their interests. Likewise, money politics contributed to intra-factional conflict and competition, and allowed the LDP to acquire unethical financial gifts from big business in return for political favors over many years. Public opinion and opposition parties had a mutual impact on each other. While the Japanese public feared change and instability, they would not support another political party *en masse*. Similarly, the fragmentation and disorganization of the opposition did not encourage public support.

When examining significant connections, one can also trace the impact of factions on the opposition and money politics on public opinion. Factions impacted opposition parties during elections when several LDP candidates representing different factions had the ability to compete for the same district seats. This gave the LDP an advantage over the opposition as it gave the voters more of a choice. Since factions were established on personality and not policy, they added strength and stability to the LDP, while causing the opposition to seem fragmented and weak. The

factions also allowed the LDP to raise a substantially larger amount of money than any of the other parties.

Money politics affected public opinion of LDP during the First Party System due to the party's abuse of money and corruption scandals that news media made vivid. Eventually business and the public cried out for reform of the corrupted system. A low public opinion of the LDP and a growing number of independents, not linked to a particular party, actually contributed to LDP dominance. The competition among factions greatly increased the amount of money that the LDP raised.<sup>2</sup> This introduction of the many connections involved in the LDP reign only covers the basic format for what is to be discussed in this paper. The following analysis will more fully develop the preceding points. We will begin this analysis by examining the role of the electoral system, followed by examinations of money politics, factions, public opinion, and opposition parties.

### **THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM**

To understand the role of the LDP in Japanese national politics, one must first examine how the electoral system has substantially aided the dominant party.

Numerous Japan watchers have noted that the electoral system is unquestionably the primary factor in determining the one-party rule of the LDP from 1955-1993. I agree

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<sup>2</sup> It was very difficult to obtain data concerning the fundraising of the LDP. Data used in this paper is only for several elections throughout the First Party System. Fundraising data for consecutive elections was unavailable.

that the role of the electoral system during this period was the principal determinant for Diet control, and the basis for the importance of the additional factors discussed in this paper. Due to the way in which the electoral law is written, LDP candidates competed for district seats among fellow party members. The need for large sums of money was necessary to gain an advantage over their competitors. Factions, the role of opposition parties and public opinion of the LDP also resulted in continuing one-party rule, but not as independent factors. Instead, all play a significant role in LDP domination by means of the electoral system. Before we can examine the importance of additional factors, we must take a closer look at the electoral process by focusing on the role of medium-sized districts and the laws governing campaigns and elections.

### **Medium-Sized Districts Favoring the Conservatives**

The lower house of the Diet will be our primary focus since it is by far the most powerful and influential branch of the Japanese government, even in contemporary Japanese politics. Under the 1947 Constitution the lower house, or the House of Representatives, had ultimate powers in legislative decision-making, passing a budget, and electing a prime minister. However, election districts for the lower house pre-date the 1947 Constitution; they were drawn largely from boundaries set when the electoral system was created in 1925 (Anderson 1993, 407). Each district had multiple members; the number of those elected depended on the size and population of the district. The First Party System, named for LDP rule from 1955

until 1993, consisted of a medium-sized district system, which was used for all lower house elections during this period. Districts were drawn so that the number of seats for each generally ranged from two to five. According to Hrebenar, there were only two exceptions: the Anami Islands with one seat and the Hokkaido district with six seats (2000, 102). Though it may seem reasonable in theory to vary the number of seats for each district based on the size of the population, one must recognize that the electoral districts during the First Party System were drawn according to the census of 1946. Larger districts tended to be located in rural Japan where farming and agriculture largely supported the economy. As Japan industrialized, many people began to migrate to the cities and urban areas began to grow. This left an imbalance in the populations of districts and gave greater weight to the voters in rural areas, although the larger population now resided in the cities. Rural Japan tended to be much more traditional and resistant to change.

According to Curtis, the term “medium-sized district” was given to Japan’s First Party System because fewer candidates were elected in each district than under the large-district system from 1900-1920 and more than in the small-district system used for two elections in the 1920s. Japan’s district system was unique among other democratic nations because of its complicated combination of a medium-sized district system, widely known in English-speaking political science as a single entry, non-transferable vote system (SNTV) (Curtis 1999, 140).

The SNTV was established in the 1947 draft of what Richardson and Flanagan call the MacArthur Constitution (1984, 40). According to this draft, votes within a

district could not be transferred among the candidates from the same party. The distinctive feature of this system was that each voter cast a single vote for a particular candidate, yet in each district there were multiple candidates from varying parties. For example, let's take an imaginary district, which has five seats up for election. If the LDP ran three candidates, one receiving fifty percent of the vote and the other two receiving only five percent each, the votes obtained by the more popular candidate cannot be transferred to other party members and thus increase their share of the vote. This is true even if four other candidates from smaller parties each received ten percent of the vote. Although the total percentage of the LDP vote in this district is sixty percent, the LDP would only claim one seat in the lower house, while the smaller parties would receive eighty percent of the district's total seats. This helps clarify why the LDP felt a need to run multiple candidates with the hope that in giving the public a wider choice of candidates, the party would receive a larger percentage of the vote. A strong party, like the LDP, could easily run several candidates, thereby increasing its odds of electing more than one LDP candidate to the lower house. In order to win a majority of seats, it became necessary for the LDP to nominate at least two, if not more, candidates in each district so as not to risk losing a district to another party. Candidates within the LDP began competing for seats in the same districts, leading to fierce intra-party conflict. Since each of the candidates running was under the LDP banner, the party could not develop a campaign for a particular candidate. Therefore factional membership, discussed in

greater detail in the following sections, became a necessity with medium-sized districts.

We know that popular support for the LDP declined during its tenure, yet the party remained dominant due to the electoral system. Richardson and Flanagan assert that while the LDP received over fifty percent of the popular vote from 1958 to 1963, its popular vote then declined and remained below fifty percent until 1983 (1982, 76). The LDP acquired seats based on the voting percentages acquired during elections. For example, while running three candidates in a district with five open seats, a candidate could win with as little as 20 percent of the vote. Due to the electoral process during the First Party System, the malapportionment of the districts, and the size of the party, the LDP always obtained seats in excess of its voting percentage. Although the medium-size district arrangement aided the LDP somewhat in maintaining political control, it did not operate independently. Aside from electoral law and the LDP receiving a majority of seats without a majority of popular support, there were also three important political effects, which resulted from a medium-sized constituency system.

First, the system tended to intensify competition within parties as well as give smaller parties a chance to compete. Parties such as the LDP would only run candidates in districts where there was a plausible chance to win a seat in the lower house. Second, the de facto proportional representation system found within the medium-sized district system encouraged the formation of new, smaller parties. These smaller parties could compete with the larger, more powerful parties with a

somewhat reasonable chance of success by only acquiring a small percentage of the vote. For example, a party obtaining only twenty percent of the vote in a five-member district would be elected. However, we know that as a result of the LDP's historical strength it would be difficult for a lesser party to challenge the LDP's dominance. The third political effect was an unanticipated fragmentation of the LDP's opposition (Hrebentar 2000, 42). The proliferation of smaller parties, all with different ambitions and varying plans for public policy, seemed incapable of taking the Diet and control of Japan from the well-established Liberal Democratic Party.

### **Electoral Law**

What began as a fairly strong two party system in 1955, with the Liberal Democratic Party and the Japan Socialist Party, ended up being a collage of a rapidly changing, seven party system by the 1980s. As shown in Table 1, the early days of the 1955 First Party System showed the political dominance of the LDP and the JSP. While the Left had a following during this time, it could not compete with the conservative politics of the LDP.

<b>Table 1</b>	
<b>Distribution of Lower House Seats After 1958 Election</b>	
<i>Party</i>	<i>Seats</i>
LDP	298
JSP	167
Communists	1
<u>Other</u>	<u>1</u>
Total Seats	467

Source: Kohno 1997, 118.

Since the LDP was the clear victor in the post-war era and during the Cold War, it may not come as a surprise that party members would attempt to manipulate and abuse that power. The LDP took advantage of two widely recognized electoral laws. The Public Offices Elections Law (POEL) and Political Funds Control Law (PFCL) are two electoral laws that have guided the actions of all Japanese political parties, regardless of size. The POEL sets the basic rules of representation in the Diet, while the PFCL deals with the significant problem of regulating financial contributions made to parties by individuals or businesses (Hrebenar 2000, 38). The PFCL will be discussed in greater detail in the following section. The POEL established the medium-sized district system and single non-transferable vote. The law has several serious flaws, which operate to maintain LDP dominance. First, there was an unworkable reapportionment provision that made it fairly easy for the LDP to ignore the malapportionment problem. Although the POEL requires that electoral districts be revised proportionately based on population after every five-year census, there was never a checks and balances system set in place through the provision to ensure the revisions (Hrebenar 2000, 46). The LDP knew this and took full advantage of the situation by refusing to reapportion the entire Diet during the First Party System. Instead, it relied on partial adjustments only when periodic public and political pressures would arise. Electoral law not only inhibited the full reapportionment of the Diet, but it also established stringent requirements for candidates wishing to run for office and the date of upcoming elections.

## **Running for Office and Elections**

The electoral law established in the 1947 Constitution made it easy for a candidate to run for office, but exceedingly difficult to win. Very little money was required up front by law in order for a first-time candidate to run for a seat in the lower house. This amount would be returned to the candidate if he received at least five percent of the vote (Kohno 1997, 102). At this point, there was no incentive to join a faction to help with financial support for beginning a campaign.

Aside from the initial monetary contribution, Japanese law placed other requirements on the campaign process. First, elections in Japan are not on a set schedule, as with the American system in which national elections occur on the first Tuesday of November at two year intervals. In Japan the exact date may not be determined until just weeks beforehand. The Japanese Constitution indicates that a general election must occur no later than forty days after the lower house has dissolved. The Cabinet has the constitutional authority to dissolve the lower house at any point in time, without having to provide any information to other Diet members. Consequently, the date when the House of Representatives dissolved was not widely known among politicians, thus giving candidates limited time to prepare and launch a massive campaign. The Prime Minister will often time the dissolution so as to optimize his party's chances of electoral success in the ensuing election (Richardson and Flanagan 1984, 40).

Having taken a closer look at the role of the electoral system, we can better understand how it aided in the LDP's hegemonic control over the Diet. One can

clearly see that the effects of the medium-size district system and the single non-transferable vote, and the electoral law in relation to campaigns, have helped enable the Liberal Democrats to remain comfortably in control of government for nearly forty years. However, it is not enough to focus only on the electoral system to explain the LDP's political dominance. Japan's electoral system simply gives us a basis from which to start further exploration. In order to survive a campaign, it was not only necessary for candidates to abide by every electoral factor; they also had to raise a tremendous amount of money. The need for the excessive amount of political funds and the role of money politics inevitably caused corruption and facilitated LDP longevity in the Diet. The implications of money politics are discussed in the following section.

### **MONEY POLITICS**

Hrebear quotes Ozaki Yukio, an early Japanese writer, as stating that “the leader of a party in our country must have five qualifications: one to four are money, and the fifth is political ability” (2000, 59). This statement is not far from the truth. Financial security within a party answers two essential questions: who has the power and who will be successful in elections. However, Japanese law during the First Party System restricted how much money could be donated to a particular party and stipulated that any monies collected through fundraising must be recorded. The law that required the reporting of various political funding activities, the Political Funds Control Law (PFCL), established a comprehensive set of stringent campaign

restrictions. Yet the LDP, as well as other parties, largely ignored these restrictions. Even at the onset of the First Party System, the LDP was the party of choice for both business and the public for reasons such as a new sense of stability offered by the conservatives and the desire to proclaim pro-Americanism policies. Since Japan had been destroyed by war under a military dictatorship and the United States supported the country's reconstruction and development, pro-American and American-approved politics were popular. Therefore, when the LDP conservatives took power, the party was immediately able to gain financial aid from various supporters. As time passed, and the LDP continued to grow in size and in political prestige, it would be incredibly difficult for an opposition party to rival the magnitude of LDP budgets. According to the law, all parties were seen as equals and were supposed to meet certain criteria in campaigning for office and fundraising. However, the law which established the criteria for fundraising did not allow the parties the amount of money they needed to run effective elections.

By law candidates were limited to a certain maximum level of campaign expenditures, which was calculated on the basis of a flat sum plus so many yen per voter in the constituency. This amount never seemed to be sufficient, so the party, and factions within the party, took it upon themselves to pursue alternative ways to acquire funds. While this may seem like a blatant way to break the law, the practice was so widespread and left unchecked that it was as if there were no law at all. With the LDP being the largest and most powerful party in Japan, it is no wonder that a larger amount of money was needed to function. Hrebemar asserts that socialist

parties such as the JSP and the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), relied on labor union support for funds, and that smaller parties such as the Japan Communist Party (JCP) and Komeito had efficient grassroots organizations (2000, 66). The LDP had neither option for fundraising and therefore resorted to money politics. Japan's electoral system acted as a catalyst for the excessive use of money politics during the First Party System, a term used in this context to help describe the relationship of political fundraising with a successful political career by any means necessary. It is widely known to Japan watchers that the extensive funds raised by the LDP, and the ways in which they raised those funds, helped enable the party to remain in power during the First Party System from 1955-1993. Money politics is not only closely connected to the electoral system, but also to the development of party factions, the lack of competition from opposition parties, and the public's view of the Liberal Democrats. Without the use of money politics, one could argue that the LDP may not have been as dominant a power in Japan. It is necessary to concur with this statement if for no other reason than to see the effects of tremendous amounts of money used to secure LDP support from numerous businesses. However, it is also important to note that the electoral system established the need for such large funds. The system was the primary creator of money politics.

There are three areas that must be addressed when examining the role of money in the Japanese political system. First, we need to look at the way in which the LDP acquired financial support during the First Party System. The legality of the LDP's fundraising practices has been questionable. Massive fundraising efforts on

behalf of individuals and factions, as well as the apparent lack of recording contributions aided in the long tenure of the LDP in the Diet.

Second, being a politician in Japan is incredibly expensive. Campaigns have traditionally been extremely costly, as is the lifestyle of an elected official. Politicians are expected to not only raise money for the campaign, but also to continue to raise funds for the elaborate and busy lifestyle of a politician. Finally, there were always many demands made on the government by financial contributors, which inevitably led to numerous incidents of political corruption and large-scale scandals. Looking at these three factors, one can begin to understand why so many Japan watchers assert that money politics is one of the primary ways in which the Liberal Democrats remained in control of the Diet from 1955-1993. In the area of money politics, however, it is with fundraising that most of the illegal and unethical activities occur.

### **Fundraising in Japan**

In order to understand how fundraising works within the LDP in Japan, one must dissect the party as a whole and begin to look at it in terms of its factions. As previously mentioned in the above section on the electoral system, intra-party competition within the LDP has always been intense when it comes to elections. Therefore, the need for high fundraising levels during elections was not exclusively intended for competition with opposition parties, but for competition among LDP members running in the same district. In the most extreme cases, conflicts resulted in an escalating pattern of money politics and vote buying. Competing factions also

fought for financial contributions made by banks, big business, and individuals.

Basically the fundraising practices of the party can be broken down into two parts: the difficulty in tracking exact amounts of money raised due to over and under-reporting and the role of campaigns in the fundraising process.

Reports on the amount raised from fundraising are very difficult to examine because of the exaggerations reported for political motives. For example, in the early 1980s, both the Fukuda Takeo and Nakasone Yasuhiro factions were reporting billion-yen incomes in order to impress LDP Diet members with their fundraising capabilities in an attempt to win the position of prime minister (Hrebenar 2000, 63). However, the Tanaka faction, which was one of the LDP's most powerful in the early 1980s, reported low levels of income in an effort to keep a low profile during Tanaka's legal problems.<sup>3</sup> It only reported money collected by the faction's senior members on an individual level, but not the faction as a whole since the faction itself was collecting large amounts of money. Underreporting of factional fundraising is more common than the rare example given with the Takeo and Yasuhiro factions, primarily because factions do indeed raise much more financial support than they want other factions, or other parties, to know. With the LDP's power lock on the Diet, they would often just ignore restrictions mandated by law, such as fundraising law. The 1976 revisions of the Political Funds Control Law required that all income and expenditures over 10,000 yen be reported. However, with its many loopholes,

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<sup>3</sup> Prime Minister Tanaka received 500 million yen (\$4 million) in bribes from Lockheed Corporation to facilitate the purchase of its aircraft by All Nippon Airways. He was forced to resign as Prime Minister and to withdraw from the LDP (Library of Congress 1994).

the law was designed to hide more than it revealed (Hrebenar 2000, 60). Major factions such as those led by Ohira Masayoshi, Miki Takeo, and Fukuda Takeo provided no reports at all on their sources of funds. From these examples, one can see that the LDP as a party greatly underreports its real income from fundraising that occurs throughout the year. Hrebenar asserts that in addition to the 24 billion yen in party funds collected, the five factions of the LDP reported funds collected at a total of 16 billion yen, and seven individual senior politicians reported combined donations of over 2.8 billion yen. However large these numbers seem, most political observers believe the real total income of the LDP could be as great as 500 percent more than reported (Hrebenar 2000, 61). This clearly tells us that the LDP is not only extremely well-financed, but also that the party significantly underreports money raised.

According to Hrebenar, the primary source of LDP funds during the First Party System was “corporate Japan” when Japanese businesses gave an officially reported total of nine billion per year in the late 1970s. He then cites a 1989 survey given by the *Asahi Shimbun*, a Japanese newspaper, showing that about thirty-nine percent of the funds raised by the LDP came from corporations (2000, 69). The truth remains that business has contributed a large portion of the LDP funds since the party rose to power in the mid-1950s. It was quite common for political trade-offs to occur between politicians and business leaders. Basically these trade-offs required LDP leaders to promise businesses special tax breaks or rapid passage of bills to help acquire government contracts in return for financial support of the party. Aside from raising money through political trade-offs, politicians seeking office would invite

corporate executives to formal fundraising parties. Other invited guests would include high-level government officials and fellow politicians. Candidates would hold fund-raising parties nearly every day, bringing in an average of 20 million yen to a politician's coffers; an especially influential politician can expect around 50 million yen. These parties became so essential for the LDP to raise high levels of money that, during the 1980s, anywhere from one-half to one-third of some factions' funds came straight from these events (Hrebentar 2000, 70). Raising money in this manner was actually a rather clever way to avoid either over or under-reporting funds since in the pre-1995 period the Political Funds Control Law did not require politicians to report any money earned at fund-raising parties.<sup>4</sup> Parties were the most effective way to raise undetected money from very large contributors.

Due to their apparent lack of grassroots support, the Liberal Democrats did not rely heavily on the contributions of individuals to support the LDP because they had no real base with the public. Instead LDP members depended largely on the financial gifts of corporate business (Hrebentar 2000, 81). During the First Party System from 1955-1993, the voters became mere bystanders in the democratic process. In fact, Japanese electoral law has hindered the public from becoming active participants in the political process. In a later section, we will see how this public inactivity has actually aided LDP dominance. The Japanese are less involved in politics than in democracies elsewhere in the world. Due to the LDP's hegemony since 1955, and because of inhibiting electoral laws, the average voter was usually

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<sup>4</sup> In the mid-1990s, the PFCL began to require that political parties report all funds collected at fund-raising parties.

bored and uninterested in elections. Therefore it was rare for individuals to contribute money to a particular party or faction. The lack of monetary contribution among the public caused the LDP to rely heavily on business for financial support. Therefore, LDP politicians had enormous expenses of their own in order to build on the relationships between the party and big business, such as the actual process of running for office and the expense of the occupation itself.

### **The Expense of Being a Politician**

Over the decades, campaigns as well as the lifestyle of politicians in Japan have become extremely expensive. In order to show more clearly the need for large amounts of money, it is necessary to also look at the Diet upper house for a moment. In the national House of Councilors elections, 500 million yen (approximately \$1.7 million) was considered necessary for a successful run for office in the mid-1970s. By 1980, the amount had risen to 700 million yen (estimated at \$2.4 million) (Hrebentar 2000, 67).<sup>5</sup> The lower house elections are a further example of the excessive need for funds. Insiders estimate that prior to 1996 an incumbent needed 40 million yen to be reelected. However, most candidates spent at least 100 million, and newcomers needed twice that amount. During a campaign, many politicians would spend about 30 to 50 million yen for a handful of pre-election meetings.

Aside from the expense of running for office, simply being a Diet member is a very expensive occupation. A survey discovered that the average LDP Diet member

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<sup>5</sup> According to the Library of Congress, the exchange rate in 1978 was 211 yen per \$1, the 1980 rate was 227 yen per \$1, and the 1992 rate was 123 yen per \$1.

attended over 30 ceremonies, receptions, and funerals each month. Each of these events requires that the politician give a sum of money, the amount determined by the event. For example, a typical “gift” for a family at a funeral would be 10,000 yen, and 30,000 yen for a couple at their wedding (Hrebenar 2000, 67). These gifts would be given to LDP supporters in their particular prefecture. The average LDP Diet member also claimed to spend about 1 million yen per year on hosting parties. These parties could be fundraising efforts or entertainment for individual or corporate supporters. Salaries of LDP politicians average 18 million yen per year. Moreover, the government will only pay for two secretaries, and most politicians must hire another two in order to have a more efficient office. Since a politician’s salary is not large enough to satisfy the high cost of expenditures, LDP members must find income from other sources. Hrebenar notes that a survey done in 1989 by the *Asahi Shimbun* showed that about thirty-nine percent of these funds came from corporate contributions, seventeen percent from fund-raising parties, fifteen percent from individual contributions, twelve percent from government salary and subsidies, nine percent from the member’s factional leader, and eight percent from loans (2000, 67). Results from this survey clearly show the need for a politician to find outside funds to carry on with his/her business as a representative. Over the years, however, this need for money became an obsession and led to unethical, illegal, and corrupt practices among political figures. Fundraising and money politics have become common to increase personal wealth and power and are no longer used exclusively for the necessary costs of being a politician. Although it seems that constant political

corruption should end power abruptly and harshly, the unchecked practices of the LDP actually helped it remain in power for nearly four decades. Kick-backs, or political favors given in return for financial support, gave such a large and pro-business party like the LDP an advantage over any other party.

### **Demands on the LDP Controlled Government: Kick-backs and Corruption**

According to Eric C. Browne and Sunwoong Kim, the basis of Japan's alternative to state-sponsored capitalism was patronage, protection, and paternalism. There was no mistaking that the relationship between the party and big business was entirely based on the exchange of money for political favors. Favors in the form of certain regulatory policies, protectionist trade policies, and government contracts were usually "repaid" by campaign contributions made to the party (2001, 142). Often these contributions were given directly to the factions within the LDP instead of the party as a whole since contributors typically had a close relationship with a member or leader of a faction. One must keep in mind that LDP factions were more competitive with each other than they were with other parties. Political "deals" or kick-backs were made among factions, not the party itself. These contributions were usually made at special fundraising functions.

Corporations always contributed massive donations at what Pempel (1998) calls "encouragement parties" held by politicians. Large groups would gather at these parties where local government expenditures were used for the entertainment of national officials and bid rigging occurred for public construction projects. These are

just a few examples of what occurred with money politics (Pempel 1998, 140). While one may think that weaker parties with less money and power would be the ones demanding reform, it actually was large-scale Japanese businesses that were particularly upset by the extent of the corruption. Why would businesses that benefited from giving contributions to the LDP be upset by the corruption? The answer lies in the costly structure of doing business within the country. Political bribery, immense entertainment costs, and loosely interpreted regulations became increasingly expensive for the businesses (Pempel 1998, 143). In many cases, the benefits of the political kick-backs did not seem to outweigh the financial cost to the business.

The issues of corruption and high electoral costs became a catalyst for those who desired electoral reform. This would mean a complete overhaul of the system and a replacement of Japan's multimember electoral system with some version of a single-member district system. Browne and Kim note that citizens, as well as businesses, began to demand political reform as a result of the spiraling corruption scandals surrounding money politics. A series of well-publicized scandals, where huge amounts of money were paid in order to acquire business favors, added to the call for reform from both the public and opposition parties. Two of the most famous and widely covered corruption schemes were the Lockheed and Recruit scandals. The Lockheed incident occurred when former Prime Minister Tanaka was arrested for having accepted bribes from the Lockheed Corporation (Hrebemar 2000, 108). In the Recruit scandal, the Recruit Cosmos Company distributed large amounts of its stock

to a list of Diet members. These politicians later cashed in the stock and made large tax-free gains (Hrebenar 2000, 87). Although the politicians themselves are much to blame for the corruption that saturated the LDP and the Diet, most Japan watchers agree that the unchecked use of money politics caused the initial problem.

When looking at the use of gifts for such events as weddings and funerals, it is important to remember that Japan is a society in which the act of giving gifts and money are commonplace upon first-time introductions, or with requests of assistance from senior or prestigious people (Hrebenar 2000, 71). This could not be more true than in the political arena. Trading favors between LDP politicians and business interests became not only common, but expected. Large corporations would give billions in financial gifts to the LDP, expecting something in return. Individual executives might have enjoyed vacations or financial kick-backs, while the corporation received a boost. In the early 1970s, for example, Ito Hiroshi, the former managing director of the Marubeni trading company, decided to give Prime Minister Tanaka some money when he asked for Tanaka's assistance on airplane sales to All-Nippon Airlines. In return for the assistance with ANA, Tanaka thought that a gift of 500 million yen seemed appropriate. Another example of such trade-offs was seen through the construction industry. Although Japanese law prohibits the construction industry from contributing money to government officials, construction firms may make substantial contributions based on a percentage of contracts they are awarded (Hrebenar 2000, 71). Therefore, the LDP can increase the amount of money collected from the construction industry if it increases the number of contracts awarded in a

given year. This raises the incentive for the LDP to use policy and legislation to enter into government-sponsored construction projects.

Policy-setting was not only dominated by the LDP's frequent use of trade-offs and financial kick-backs, but also with pressure from *zoku* policy tribes, which were born out of extremely powerful special interest groups. *Zoku* tribes were not established when the First Party System was created but were formed as a result of the changing relationship among politics, business interests, national organizations and interest groups.

The relationship between business interests and politics began to change in the late 1970s when the importance of national organizations declined sharply. As national organizations declined, special interest groups began to offer a more serious contribution to the political game. Politicians were busy serving the interests of narrow constituencies, which led to the *zoku* phenomenon. These special interest groups exerted a strong influence over political parties and government, and played an important role in setting the national policy agenda. Peak organizations representing big business, labor, and farmers were both organized and powerful. During the period of economic growth between 1955 and 1970, the nature of the demands they pressed on the government were national in scale (Curtis 1999, 43). These organizations aggregated the interests of thousands of groups into a limited and cohesive set of policy demands, which aided in structuring political competition among the political parties. *Zoku*, Gerald Curtis contends, is a term that became widely used in the 1970s to refer to a type of "policy tribe." In other words, a *zoku*

politician was a senior member of the LDP who had gained expertise and experience about a particular area of policy. He would then use his seniority within the party to influence the ministry responsible for that particular policy agenda (Curtis 1999, 53). I found no research to suggest that *zoku* politicians existed in opposition parties, only that the idea of *zoku* was born from the LDP and continues to play a prominent role in the political process due to their influence over particular ministries. Over time, a *zoku* politician became more specialized, such as a telecommunications *zoku* or a fisheries *zoku*. Such politicians are undoubtedly the political agents of special interests, acting as intermediaries between civil society and the bureaucracy.

Even with all the problems of money politics, the role of *zoku* policy tribes is another factor that most Japan observers agree aided the LDP in their 38-year reign over national politics. The party grew to be extremely large with not only factions, but also numerous connections with industry and corporations. Money became the means by which politicians exerted their power. By underreporting the massive amount of money raised through fundraising, the LDP remained more financially secure than any other party. Japanese politics was a game that those in power played when dealing with trade-offs and political kick-backs. LDP politicians often used this game to keep their bank accounts full until the next campaign. While the role of money and law are primary reasons for LDP hegemony, they are not independent causes for the party's long dominance. We will now turn our attention to three additional factors that are less widely regarded as reasons why the LDP maintained political power.

## **FACTIONS**

The factions of the LDP are among the oldest and most institutionalized in the world (Cox and Rosenbluth 1993, 577). Factions evidently helped sustain LDP control during the First Party System, and there is more evidence that factionalism had many more positive than negative effects on sustaining the LDP's 38-year rule. While all factions remain a part of the LDP as a whole, they function as separate entities in many ways. There are two primary reasons that the existence of LDP factions has assisted in LDP dominance: the role of the Japanese electoral system and the ability of the faction leaders and members to collect large amounts of money.

First, the electoral system has implicitly caused the development of factions within the LDP. The LDP has always been a large party, so large in fact, that with the medium-sized districts and the single, nontransferable vote, the party could run several candidates in a particular district at the same time. However, running more than one candidate from the party increases the competition among members, causing politicians to separate and create political cliques based on power, prestige, and personality.

Second, with the size and initial power of the LDP at its creation, there has always been an inevitable struggle for power among party leaders and LDP members, which has driven the LDP's ambition to raise massive sums of money. Faction members gain more power and money than LDP politicians who do not wish to join a faction and attempt to operate independently. Although all LDP factions are indeed

members of the same party, there is fierce competition among members of different factions. The electoral system and the ability to raise money were both assets for the LDP's political reign.

### **The Electoral System: Elections and Seats in the Diet**

A number of factions gave the LDP an advantage over other opposition parties since each faction could nominate a candidate, thus increasing the party's odds of gaining seats. The multi-seat districts of the electoral system produced what is referred to as "semi-proportional effects" since a candidate needed to win only fifteen percent of the vote to gain a seat (Christensen 2000, 10). This electoral system is known as semi-proportional because it allowed smaller parties to gain seats. These parties would have had difficulty in gaining seats in a plurality system, such as with single-seat districts. Winning seats with a relatively low percentage of the vote encouraged ardent competition among LDP party members. The electoral system, therefore, encouraged intra-party competition and the factional divisions.

When more than one candidate from the LDP ran in the same district, intra-party competition ensued. With the LDP being Japan's largest party, members wanted to distinguish themselves from their party colleagues. Conservative candidates would distinguish themselves with regional or occupational ties or with their organizational expertise. Competition at the intra-party level was not based on ideological differences. According to Do Rosario, the factional system has been necessary for the LDP's survival because with the large number of members and seats

in the Diet, the party has simply been too large to function as a monolith (1991, 17). With the electoral system of medium-sized districts, members of competing factions have been able to run against each other in general elections. This enables the LDP to run at least two, and often times more, candidates in the multi-member constituencies making up the lower house.

Factions were a necessity for candidates who planned on running an effective campaign for upcoming elections. Japanese law set stringent rules for the campaigning process, yet laws on fundraising were much more lax, allowing the party to raise substantial amounts of money. Factional support was needed for fundraising, networking, and obtaining first-hand knowledge about the timeline for the elections. If a candidate chose to run as an independent within the LDP, he would have to find out about deadlines for elections through the media, just like other Japanese citizens. It would be as if the candidate were not actually a member of the party at all. Factions gave strength to the LDP as the individual parts functioned for the benefit of the whole.

### **Power and the Ability to Raise Money**

Masaru Kohno believes that the role of factions was essential in facilitating party dominance because factions gave politicians within such a large party the opportunity to fight for political power and prestige (1997, 109). The primary way in which members of factions earned power and prestige was through their ability to raise money. Constant competition among members created enormous accounts that

greatly aided in the LDP's ability to maintain Diet control. Opposition parties could not compete with the funds collected by LDP factions. While this intra-party competition did create a large financial base for LDP members, one would think that with the constant struggle for power, factions would bring discontinuity and weaken the strength and legitimacy of the party. However, Christensen asserts that factional struggles have actually facilitated the LDP's longevity in power (2000, 162). The LDP already had the advantage of being the party in power since the left-right split in the 1950s. It could allocate money, positions in the cabinet, and pork-barrel projects to help solve dilemmas in the Diet, and with its considerable funds, members were able to provide gifts to their constituents. Cox and Thies assert that candidates would often offer traditional gifts to voters, such as funeral wreaths, wedding sake, and cash gifts in the hopes that their generosity would be remembered by the voters come election time (1998, 272). It was much easier for politicians to gain prestige within the party and money to offer such gifts to voters by becoming a member of a faction.

LDP members joined factions based on the impression of which group would bring the most benefits in the long run and which leader could raise the most money. Factions were based on the contrasting personalities and ambitions of their leaders, not on opposing policy stances. Since several factions could run candidates in district elections based on the electoral system, and factions were not separated by policy, candidates could not rely simply on partisan affiliation during a campaign. It was necessary for candidates to distinguish themselves from competitors in other factions. Cox and Thies point out that one way to distinguish one's self from a

competitor is to outspend him/her (1998, 269). However, in order to outspend one's intra-party rival, one must be able to succeed in raising money for the faction itself.

The fundraising ability of the factions was a strong determinant of how successful they would be in elections. It is important to note that Japanese candidates spent more money competing among themselves than they did for opposition parties. From the 1960s until the late 1970s, faction leaders were largely responsible for all fundraising and were expected to raise most of the money themselves. However, from the late 1970s until the early 1980s, this attitude changed dramatically. Faction leaders no longer had all the pressure from the party for having to raise such large amounts of money on their own. With rising costs, it was increasingly difficult for leaders alone to acquire the amount needed to fund political activities. Instead, factional members now shared in the responsibility of fundraising, spreading the weight of raising money more evenly across the five LDP factions. This shared responsibility for fundraising gave rise to what Curtis calls "collective leadership" among all members within the faction (Curtis 1999, 80).

It is widely known that politicians respond to incentives that affect their self-interest, and personal power is a strong incentive. The constant intra-factional competition among leaders, as well as members, would result in factional prominence. Whatever faction had a leader who became prime minister would be the recipient of countless political benefits and financial gain. LDP dominance was not facilitated by the size of the party itself, but by the peculiar relationship between the factions within the party. Competition from elections, the ability to raise money,

name recognition for the voter, and the constant battle for prestige among members further assisted the reign of the Liberal Democrats.

### **PUBLIC OPINION**

Perhaps it seems too simple to state that one of the reasons the LDP remained in power for so long was the fact that the Japanese public supported its policies and ideological preferences. If the voting public did not like the way the LDP was leading, would they not stop re-electing LDP candidates to office? Could we not assume that if a similar situation occurred in another developed democracy that the unpopular party would no longer maintain dominance in national level politics? In fact, exactly the opposite was true in the case of the LDP. Although the public had an ever-increasing low opinion of the LDP, they continued to re-elect the party to office with usually less than a majority vote. This seemingly contradictory public attitude toward the LDP will be clarified through further discussion.

We have discussed in detail how Japan is unique in many ways with respect to the political arena. The issue of public support and the re-election of LDP candidates to the Diet is much more complex than one might suspect. Public opinion of the LDP can be broken down into three distinct factors that have perpetuated the party's political reign. Why were LDP candidates consistently elected to office if they had such low voter support? It does not seem to make much sense that the voting public would continue to re-elect candidates from a party that was losing popularity and not

meeting the needs of its constituents. In order to begin to grasp this contradiction, one must look at the strikingly strong conservative mindset among the Japanese, the decrease in party identification, and the passive nature of the voting public. These three factors with regard to the public opinion of the LDP helped the party maintain political control.

First, there is an overall conservative mindset from which the Japanese public cannot depart. This mindset was created and solidified due to the vivid memory of past political rule and instability. The economic crisis in the postwar era and a Cold War mentality added to this conservatism. Second, there has been a loss in party identification over the years as a result of the LDP's inability to connect with the public on a grassroots level. With unchanging election results and a feeling of being ignored by politicians, no wonder there was a growing sense of apathy and cynicism among Japanese citizens. This apathy has led to a politically inactive public, which does not hold its elected officials accountable for their actions by voting them out of office. The third factor is the peculiar way in which Japanese voters are active in the political process. For the most part they are very passive and only vote out of a sense of cultural responsibility. While these three factors seem as though they would in some way hinder the LDP's position of power, in fact, they only helped the party maintain its place as Japan's political hegemon.

## The Conservative Mindset

It is little wonder why the Japanese public seemed to be permanently trapped in a conservative mindset during the postwar era. Curtis notes that Japan was once a land torn by social conflict, controlled by a militarist government, and ruined by war (1999, 38). A strong and new democratic government and an increasingly powerful economy gave the public in the second half of the twentieth century a long awaited sense of stability. The transition between these two stages obviously made the public cautious of anything that would put this new political stability in jeopardy. The *Tokyo Shimbun*, a Tokyo-based newspaper, conducted a poll after the 1990 lower-house elections, asking the question why the LDP continues to be victorious. Thirty-three percent of respondents said that it was because they feared political instability (Hrebenar 2000, 13).

How has the LDP brought stability to Japan? Even before the inception of the LDP, worldwide events began to formulate conservatism in Japan. As early as 1948 with the outbreak of the Cold War, the United States changed its occupation policy to focus on reconstruction and reforming Japan as an ally (Masumi 1995, 165). This helped proliferate the pro-conservative thinking of Japanese politicians, as well as the mindset of the public. Since its creation in the mid-1950s, the LDP has spent a great deal of time establishing itself as a party responsible for both the prosperity Japan has experienced in the postwar era and for policies concerning diplomacy and state security. These policies and prosperity caused Japan to regain strong worldwide respect since the devastation of World War II. LDP dominance was also buttressed

during the Cold War with an increase in the American desire for Japan to be a stable and reliable ally (Christensen 2000, 20). The American influence on restructuring the Japanese political system was immeasurable. Masumi asserts that U.S. Department of State records from the mid-1990s indicate that the CIA gave financial contributions to the LDP (1995, 166). In the atmosphere of the bipolarity between the United States and the Soviet Union, any alternative to the pro-American policies of the LDP was seen as unacceptable in the eyes of the Japanese public. Therefore, a radical change by removing the LDP from power would upset the sense of stability felt by the Japanese public, the politicians, and the American government.

The Japanese public is undeniably resistant to change. In 1979 the Ministry of Health and Welfare conducted a poll that revealed that 73 percent of the respondents claimed to be conservative (Hrebenar 2000, 25). Basically, the Japanese electorate fears political change that would go against everything it has grown to accept. This is one reason why the Japanese did not try to oust a stable ruling party by voting for an opposition party like the Japanese Socialist Party. Reform was quite a terrifying and unsettling word for the voting public during the 38-year rule of the Liberal Democrats. This conservative mindset is not simply an effect of Japanese history on the older generations. Young Japanese voters have also been fearful of reformist action. And although they remained dissatisfied with LDP politics, they continued to elect LDP candidates to office based on familiarity, conservatism, and with the understanding that things should remain as they have always been.

Historically, the LDP has been said to be strong in rural areas and weaker in urban constituencies. Japanese tend to reside in the communities of their birth, thus remaining in the same electoral districts for a majority of their lives. This is positively associated with a higher voter turnout because those who remain in the community of their birth possess a stronger sense of connection to their community and an intense concern for their districts (Hrebenar 2000, 104). This strong connection to community also called for a cultural obligation in the act of voting, which will be discussed later in more detail. While LDP rural support remained fairly strong, due in large part to the malapportionment of the Diet and the seemingly unfair advantage given to the less populated rural districts, the party had also expanded support in the urban communities. An increase in income and standard of living helped the conservative mindset grow in both rural and urban areas.

Entering the 1980s, the LDP began to restore its weakening popularity among Japanese voters. The party began to undergo a drastic change, moving from the party that represents the rural farmer to the only stable party for the new urban middle-class family. With the exception of the 1983 election, the conservatives won more than 50 percent of the vote in the elections from 1980 through 1990 (Hrebenar, 105). This increasing support for the LDP is generally attributed to the widespread economic growth throughout the 1980s when Japan Inc. was thought of worldwide as the new economic giant. Since the economic recovery occurred when the LDP was in control of the Diet, there was a proliferation of conservatism in the electorate. Economic growth and development helped a majority of Japanese families identify themselves

as a part of the middle-class. Every public poll conducted during the 1980s concerning class indicated that more than 90 percent of Japanese believed that they belong to the middle-class. Being associated with a financially secure tier of the public, Japanese began to think and act more conservatively than in previous years. Although this rise in conservatism did help the LDP remain in power for almost forty years, the party's political control was also facilitated by a sense of voter apathy. These two seemingly contradictory factors both aided in this continuing dominance.

### **A Loss of Party Identification and Voter Apathy**

One would be led to believe that the LDP has remained in control of Japanese politics because of voter support at the polls. The LDP must have a strong grassroots support base, with the public involved in the political process. This could not be further from the truth. Although the LDP regularly won most national level elections, it hardly enjoyed the unquestionable support of the Japanese citizenry. With the exception of public support in the 1980s the public generally did not have a high opinion of the LDP during the First Party System, despite widespread economic rebirth. Yet despite this low opinion of the LDP, the public did not transfer their vote to another party *en masse* for reasons to be explained in the next section. Although the LDP was victorious in elections, Pempel shows that according to national public opinion polls, the high point of LDP popularity was never much above forty percent, which was reached in 1960 (1998, 5). The only time since 1960 when LDP popularity rating reached a higher number was in 2001, after the appointment of the reformist Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. After the party reached the 40% mark

in 1960, it experienced a steady decline down to twenty-five percent in the mid-1970s. From that point on, citizens who called themselves “independent” outnumbered those who aligned themselves with the Liberal Democratic Party.

In the 1960s, with the LDP’s popular support at forty percent, less than ten percent of Japan’s voters identified themselves as “independents.” By 1993, the year the LDP lost control of the lower house and thus the entire Diet, that figure was up to thirty-eight percent (Pempel 1998, 159). By the early 1990s, the “non-party supporting strata” outnumbered the supporters of all Japanese parties combined (Curtis 1999, 34). This growing sense of independence and decline in party loyalty actually helped the LDP remain as a political hegemon for almost four decades. The public continued to re-elect politicians from the stable, conservative LDP although they did not have a high opinion of that party, nor did they identify themselves with that party.

This decline in party support seemed to have weakened the control the LDP had over the Diet, yet it was never weakened enough to enable an opposition party to be victorious. The disconnection the public felt with the party and politics in general led to feelings of apathy and cynicism, thus driving voters to become disengaged from the political process. Voters have expressed their dissatisfaction and apprehension by limiting their participation in the electoral process. This behavior supports the argument that Japanese voters react to the problems of the ruling party with apathy and cynicism rather than outrage and anger. We would expect the latter behavior would lead to voting the LDP out of office, thus allowing for an opposition

party to gain some political power. Although voter turnout gradually decreased during the LDP's tenure, it was still surprisingly high for an apathetic people disengaged in the political process. For example, the Library of Congress estimates that voter turnout was 76.9% in 1958, 67.9% in 1983, 72.4% in 1990; a new low was reached in 1993 with 67.3% (L.O.C. 1994). Voting during elections was basically the only way the public was involved in politics, and many would argue that even this amount of political participation was not a widespread cultural phenomenon.

Perhaps one might assume that since the public was not involved in the political process, this could be tied to a singular group and not based on the overall population. However, the lack of political involvement is not linked to a minority of the public. The Nihon Hoso Kyokai (NHK) Public Opinion Research Institute has done extensive research on the passivity of citizen participation in national politics and in 1973 asked respondents what was the desired form of political participation for the Japanese citizenry. A surprising majority, sixty-three percent, responded that voting in elections and then entrusting all political affairs to the elected politician was the desired form of participation (Hrebenar 2000, 19). From this perspective, it is evident that the public viewed politicians as trustees, fully capable of making political decisions on its behalf without direct communication or representation. NHK concluded from the study that the Japanese concept of political participation is simply limited to voting. In other words, if the act of voting was not so ingrained the Japanese psyche as a connection to culture and heritage, the people of Japan would not be politically engaged at any level.

### **A Cultural Explanation for Political Participation**

While Japan is a highly developed, industrialized nation with approximately fifty years experience with democracy, it has an unusually low level of public political participation apart from voting. Japanese political culture is an intriguing case that combines fairly high levels of voter turnout with a sense of disconnection to the political process and cynicism and animosity toward both politicians and the parties in general. According to Hrebendar, with the single exception of the act of voting during elections, the Japanese public is an extremely passive, noninvolved citizenry (2000, 17). Many would agree that this odd behavior is closely tied to Japanese culture and social conduct. It is generally accepted that Japan is one of the world's most "social" societies, meaning that the public is carefully divided into groups such as family, community, prefecture, and occupations. There is widespread agreement among Japan watchers, such as Gerald Curtis, Y. Kuroda, Scott C. Flanagan, Bradley M. Richardson, and James White, that voting is not a political activity, but instead a part of a Japanese social behavior.

Japanese citizens are strongly encouraged to vote, not to express their political views or to support a particular policy, but instead as a function of responsibility to whichever social group they belong. Rural communities have often competed among themselves for the honor of having the highest voter turnout in an administrative district (Hrebendar 2000, 18). Local governments have offered cash awards to communities who win the competition. Individuals feel a strong obligation to the

group with which they are most often associated. The idea of indebtedness between people and their social superiors, kin, or peers was common during the early days of the LDP, and to some extent, still exists today. Group-oriented voting habits were extremely common. Organizations, businesses, and even communities would advocate that members or residents vote together for certain parties or candidates. There was always tremendous pressure to follow the group, although “group-voting” was never actually *forced* on individuals. However, this group-oriented behavior began to break down as Japan became more urbanized and as people left the rural districts.

Similar to the United States, overall voter turnout has declined throughout the years, but the general rule of the more rural a district, the higher the voter turnout, still stands. Since the rural communities during the First Party System had an unbalanced advantage with the electoral system’s medium-sized districts and the percentage of votes needed to obtain seats, it is no wonder that the LDP politicians could be re-elected time and time again.

The pattern of high voter turnout slowly declined as the LDP neared the final years of its tenure. In the 1990s, the public grew more uncomfortable with corruption scandals, and the LDP’s abuses of money politics. So why did the public not transfer their votes to a different party, thus ending the LDP’s many years of dominance? The lack of party competition drove voters to continually re-elect LDP politicians although LDP popularity was on the decline. This is one of the factors that has helped keep the LDP in power for so long.

## **OPPOSITION PARTIES**

All opposition parties during the First Party System defined their goal as removing the LDP from power. However, social change gradually forced most of them to abandon the promise of fundamental, radical change made by the Socialist Party during the early post-WW II years. After the war, most citizens began to embrace a more conservative, democratic ideology, since Japan's political history was lined with dictatorships and military control. As ties with the United States grew stronger, so did the desire for a conservative government. There would be no exceptions. Over time this new wave of conservatism led to the decreasing power of the JSP, which rivaled the LDP. With the left unable to become a creditable opposition to LDP dominance, Japanese politics degenerated into a struggle among willful LDP politicians for positions of power and prominence (Brown and Kim 2001, 145). When examining opposition parties, one can see that their lack of public support and inter-party cohesion further facilitated the LDP's dominance. This is especially true with regard to the power within LDP factions. Voters had a broader choice among several LDP faction candidates at the polls, while the fragmented opposition could only support one candidate per party. Also the opposition typically embraced a different platform from the conservatism of the Liberal Democrats. We have seen that the Japanese resisted any change that could possibly bring instability to the political system. Therefore, presenting any radical change in ideology was not the way for the opposition to win seats and the confidence of voters.

The reasons why the LDP maintained power for nearly four decades have always preoccupied the minds of Japan watchers, the Japanese public, media, and politicians. Former LDP Prime Minister, Miki Takeo, stated in a 1982 speech, “if one party holds on to power too long, it becomes corrupt” (Hrebenar 2000, 14). One cannot deny that this was a bold statement for the Prime Minister to make about his own party, yet he saw a danger in one party holding power for a lengthy period of time. In order to better understand why the role of the opposition parties has aided LDP dominance, it is necessary to first look at the early leftist parties—the Socialists and Communists—and how their inability to persuade the public to view them as a legitimate option for Japan hindered their competitive edge with the LDP. This inability led the public to feel as if there was no alternative to control the Diet, and therefore they continued to elect LDP candidates. Divisions among later opposition parties also aided in LDP dominance since the public did not regard smaller, less experienced parties as having the ability to rule a stable, democratic system.

### **The Leading Opposition**

The Japan Socialist Party and the Japan Communist Party have been the only two constant opposition parties to the LDP since the mid-1950s. The LDP-dominated Diet legally excluded the JSP from all coalition proposals during the First Party System because of its extreme leftist policies. The JSP was left with the only option of a non-LDP coalition. However, since no non-LDP coalition government could be formed without the JCP’s thirty or so seats, the only possible coalitions had to be directed by the LDP (Hrebenar 2000, 14). Pempel argues that the closed nature of the

conservative LDP has consistently denied the Left any effective participation in policy-making (1982, 297). The constant denial of a political voice, one that could be seen as affecting policy, caused conflict among members of the Left. The Socialists had been facing splits and ideological conflicts since 1947. Over the next three decades, the public regarded the JSP as a “de-legitimized party,” where few could see the potential for the party to participate in national level politics. The public, needing conservative stability after the war, turned to the LDP and did not even give the JSP a chance. Lack of support among the public and even critics of the conservatives provided an indication of the apparent illegitimacy of the JSP. A public opinion poll carried out by the *Asahi Shimbun*, a well-known Japanese newspaper, showed that people chose the adjective “undependable” more than any other word to describe the image of the JSP (Hrebenar 2000, 15). Being “undependable” simply meant that the party was unwilling to compromise with conservatives to the extent that the public desired. The opposition was not viewed as credible or dependable based on their inability to compromise and their leftist policies, which “deprives voters of a meaningful, credible alternative regime and forces many critics of the LDP into its camp” (White 1981, 391). One can see that as long as the public viewed the leading opposition party as undependable, the LDP was safely in control of Japan’s political system. Therefore, even with a large percentage of voters wanting a change in power, the lack of an alternative remained an obstacle. It was much like supporting the party that was considered somewhat of a “lesser of two evils” since there was no other competitive party that could stand up to the LDP.

### **No Legitimate Alternative**

In the spring of 1980, one major poll found that half of the public wanted an end to LDP rule while only thirty-percent wanted it to continue (Hrebemar 2000, 10). However, these disgruntled voters felt they had no choice since they feared reform and the thought of instability in a system with which they had come to be so familiar. Moreover, they did not view any opposition party as a possible alternative. Japan watchers such as White have discovered that in spite of the cynicism and apathy felt by a large majority of Japanese voters, the public was reluctant to move away from the LDP or to transfer its vote to opposition parties that promised dramatic change and reform (1981, 390). One can assert that regardless of the voters' dissatisfaction with the LDP, there has not been a simultaneous rise in voters' confidence in the ability of the opposition. White asserts that even those who profess that they do indeed support a party other than the LDP do not really want the opposition to replace the party. Public opinion polls during the later years of the First Party System appeared to support this view.

In 1985, the *Yomiuri Shimbun* asked the public why the LDP had remained in power for so long. The public responded with three very frequent answers: "There is no other political party" (48.4%); "They agree with its policies" (38.2%); and "The other parties cannot cooperate against the LDP" (34.2%). Following the 1990 lower house election, which again brought victory to the LDP, the *Tokyo Shimbun* asked why the opposition failed to overcome the LDP in yet another election. Thirty-four percent responded with "because the opposition parties' policies were not attractive"

(Hrebenar 2000, 13). Does this mean that if the opposition could somehow gain popularity and resemble a stronger party than the LDP, it could have taken power from the Liberal Democrats by winning votes from those who previously elected LDP candidates? We can assume that the answer is yes, since it was no secret that the public did not necessarily trust nor encourage support of the LDP.

Although the Japanese must put a certain amount of trust in elected officials to make decisions on their behalf, it seems that this only occurs out of necessity and not by choice. There is an unusually low level of trust given politicians in Japan. In 1979, the Asahi evening news reported that out of 5,000 respondents, seventy-nine percent answered that they did not trust politicians (Hrebenar 2000, 21). Japan's case seems so interesting since the same respondents felt that politics provided one of the most important occupations for Japanese society. In light of these poll results, it is easier to see why LDP candidates, being members of a stable party, continued to be re-elected even if the public had a high level of distrust for the politicians themselves.

In the 1986 lower house election, the LDP won a larger share of the popular vote than in any election over the previous twenty years. This initially gives the impression that the public greatly supported the LDP and had much enthusiasm about a continuing conservatism in the Diet. However, the party's success was largely due to the failure of opposition parties to convince voters that they were a legitimate alternative (Curtis 1999, 34).

By the late 1980s, opposition party leaders were trying to reassure the public that they were just as pragmatic as the LDP and would not change Japan's basic

domestic and foreign policies if they were to come to power (Curtis 1999, 32). This left opposition parties with the problem of deciding what political stance they would take and which policies they would favor. They wanted to bring about political reform, not necessarily for policy changes, but instead to change the way in which politicians behaved. The poison of money politics in the LDP, along with numerous scandals, was apparent to the public and to the opposition. However, anti-LDP parties could not compromise on anything—policy, coalition arrangements, or even how they would go about removing the LDP from power. Constant disagreements among opposition party leaders did not help the voters gain much confidence in their ability to do any better than the LDP.

### **Division and Fragmentation Among Later Parties**

One of the problems facing the opposition during the First Party System was the difficulty in forming the various opposition parties into a coalition based on compromise which would be capable of taking power away from the LDP. The nature of the alternative coalition government able to replace the single-party rule of the LDP was a major topic of conversation in Japanese political circles during the late 1970s (Hrebenar 2000, 10). Electoral setbacks for the Liberal Democrats in a few elections during the 1970s and 1980s gave opposition parties some hope as they watched carefully for any frustration that would cause a split in the LDP. The media also played a part in spreading rumors that factions were preparing a split to form coalitions with other parties. Many factions decided that the benefits of remaining within the LDP outweighed the costs of leaving and joining the opposition. However,

there have been splits within the LDP to form conservative-moderate parties, such as the Komeito Party in 1964 and the New Liberal Club in 1974 (Hrebemar 2000, 103). Hrebemar asserts that the classic phrase “divide and conquer” is one of the best descriptions of the reason behind the continued rule of the LDP. If the opposition remained frustrated and divided on how to displace LDP seats, the Diet would continue to be ruled by the conservatives. A fragmented opposition tends to be less moderate and thus will probably increase the prospects for systemic instability. It is also less efficient in its ability to replace the ruling party, therefore inherently contributing to the stability of the ruling party (Hrebemar 2000, 12). Richardson and Flanagan assert that the fragmentation of the opposition was one of the primary factors that enabled the LDP to retain control of both houses in spite of the fact that the LDP failed to receive a majority of the popular vote in most of the national elections (1982, 77). Hrebemar also asserts that the LDP’s declining popular vote was due to the rise in smaller opposition parties. However, these parties could not take diet control away from the LDP because of the malapportionment of electoral districts. The LDP always acquired a higher percentage of seats than its voting percentage primarily due to the overrepresentation found in rural districts and the ability of the party to run more than one candidate in each district (Hrebemar 2000, 104). The opposition could not win a majority in elections to steal power away from the LDP, so the only alternative was to compromise.

Removing the LDP seemed impossible. Therefore, during the early 1980s the discussion changed from wanting to simply oust the LDP to formulating a coalition

with the LDP in order to help direct the future of Japan along with the ruling party. A party that simply claimed to be another pragmatic catchall party like the LDP was unlikely to generate massive support. The trick was to convince voters that supporting a new party would maintain a stable political and economic system, resembling the LDP, but not resembling it too much (Curtis 1999, 36). If a new party looked like the LDP, there was little reason for voters to not continue supporting the LDP. While compromise among the opposition seemed to be the only acceptable alternative to regaining seats, division and a proliferation in the number of smaller opposition parties did not initially help serve the opposition's cause. Although some LDP members left to begin smaller parties, the LDP maintained its dominance for several more years by being flexible enough to change with the times. The LDP widened its support in the 1980s by beginning to form coalitions with other conservative parties, comprised of former members of the LDP, such as the New Liberal Club. Due to this active approach to combating its opposition, the LDP became the world's last dominant example of one-party rule in a democratic system.

### **The End of LDP Hegemony in 1993**

In conclusion, we have examined five factors that have greatly impacted the LDP's ability to control national level Japanese politics during the First Party System. I have argued that the electoral system was the primary cause for LDP hegemony, while the role of money politics, factions, public opinion, and opposition parties also aided in LDP dominance. I have shown how the medium-sized districts and the

SNTV have benefited LDP candidates and how this electoral system worked as a catalyst for excessive money politics, implicitly causing the party to separate into factions that could raise substantial amounts of money for the party. Similarly, I have demonstrated that the party represented stability and conservatism for the public, and ran several candidates in each district, giving the LDP an advantage over the opposition. I have also shown how these factors impacted each other to benefit the LDP. However, if this argument is correct, how has the LDP been able to maintain Diet control after the electoral reforms of 1994, after they temporarily lost Diet control? To understand how these five factors continue to benefit the LDP today, even after electoral reform, one must first explore how the new system was created.

The Liberal Democratic Party enjoyed uninterrupted conservative rule from the party's establishment in 1955 until it lost its majority in the upper House of Councillors in 1989 and then control of the more important lower House of Representatives in 1993. Morihiro Hosokawa was a former LDP member and leader of the Japan New Party (JNP). Under Hosokawa's leadership, the JNP was the only politically untainted and conservative alternative to the LDP to capture enough votes from those who protested the corruptive practices of the Liberal Democrats. With his party in power, Hosokawa gained the position of prime minister.

Hosokawa became a symbol for reform. His administration was viewed as the solution to the problem of malapportionment in the electoral system and the corruption behind money politics. However, in order for the new Hosokawa government to introduce and then implement any type of reform package, it was clear

that LDP was still needed for a functional coalition. LDP president, Yohei Kono, was a reformer and offered to help Hosokawa to put together a reform bill that would overhaul the entire electoral system for the first time since 1947. While this compromise seemed to be for the benefit of all parties, Kono and other LDP leaders had manipulated the reform package so that the LDP would dominate the new system as well (Hrebenar 2003, email). The LDP wanted to regain power of the Diet and decided that passing a new electoral reform package would appease the public, business, and the opposition, and would help clean up its corrupt image.

The new electoral system would not only change the electoral system for the House of Representatives, but would also make changes in the Political Funds Control Law in order to alleviate the problem of money politics. The leadership created a new combined system, which established plurality voting in single-member districts, for 300 seats, with regional, closed-list proportional representation (PR) for the remaining 200 seats. However, opposition parties, such as the JSP and the JCP, were not in support of the single-seat system. The opposition had demanded reform that would fairly reapportion the Diet, and the LDP, a major player in the compromise reform plan, replied with this new system, which all parties recognized as a system that would eliminate many members of the opposition and benefit the large LDP (Hrebenar 2000, 50). Thomas Lundberg asserts that in the reformed system, similar to the mixed system used in Russia, the plurality and PR list seats are completely separate and there is no party list compensation for the results of the 300 single-member district races. This means that the new electoral system was created with a

strong element of majoritarianism, which means that the largest, best-organized parties are likely to gain the most seats at the expense of the smaller parties (Lundberg 1995). The new system would clearly benefit the LDP just as did the old electoral system.

The reforms did not fundamentally change the Japanese system since political leaders have not forced a two-party alternating system. Clearly the LDP has been able to dominate the single-seat and PR districts, as they regained control of the Diet in the 1996 elections. New political funds laws have not yet cleaned up money politics, and factions have continued to aid the LDP with the ability to raise large amounts of money without much restriction. The opposition remains fragmented and has not been able to run legitimate campaigns with attractive policy agendas in order to convince voters they are capable of Diet control. The public remains disconnected from the political process with the exception of voting, and although the LDP does not enjoy the ultimate control that they once had during the First Party System, as they lost their majority in upper house elections in 1998, they continue to be the only option for national control in Japan.

The introduction of this paper revealed three reasons why the topic of LDP hegemony was important to study. First, through a clearer understanding of the Japanese political system and the single party rule of the LDP, it is evident that electoral systems are indeed influential components of election outcomes. We can take what was learned throughout this research regarding the role of an electoral system and apply those concepts to electoral systems in other countries. We have

learned how the multi-member and malapportionment of districts have helped facilitate the development of factions and intra-party competition, thus leading to excessive money politics. Electoral systems impact other democracies as well with corruptive practices and money scandals, such as the old Italian system with its intra-party preference votes (Cox & Thies 1998, 267). Second, we also now have a better understanding of the mindset of the Japanese people and how they view and engage their political system. The Japanese public, while only politically active through the act of voting, feel a great sense of responsibility to their community and their social group to continue to participate in that manner. Third, as previously discussed, we examined what happened after the LDP's brief fall from power in 1993 and then its return to dominance in the next election. Hrebener indicates that there is still no legitimate alternative for Diet rule and that the LDP will continue to maintain dominance unless a viable option emerges (2003, email). One can clearly see that regardless of the 1994 reforms, the role of the new electoral system, money politics, factions, public opinion, and opposition parties continue to benefit the LDP and will enable the large, conservative party to continue dominating the Japanese government.

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