Has the Electoral System Reform Made Japanese Elections Party-Centered?\textsuperscript{1}

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1 Introduction

Japan’s post-World War II politics has been characterized by one-party dominance. Since its foundation in 1955, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has continuously governed the country except for a short period from 1993 to 1994. Hence, the characteristics of the LDP largely defined Japanese politics in the last half century. Among other things, candidate-centered electoral campaigns have been an important feature of the LDP politics (see, for example, Ramseyer and Rosenbluth 1993). LDP candidates focus on advertising their personal beliefs and achievements rather than the party’s policies during electoral campaigns; and once elected, they work hard to bring pork-barrel projects and other particularistic benefits to their home districts so that they can claim credits in their re-election bids.

The country’s 1994 electoral law reform, which will be elaborated in the next section, was intended to change such practice. It was argued that Japan’s electoral system was creating incentives for legislators to specialize in localized behavior, leading to political corruption and inefficient public spending. The electoral system reform was passed by the legislature while the LDP was temporarily out of power, and it was hoped by many that the new system would transform the country’s politics from a one-party dominant system with candidate-centered elections into a competitive two-party system with party-centered elections.

Thirteen years have passed since the reform, and four general elections (1996, 2000, 2003, and 2005) have been conducted under the new system. Both scholars and the mass media have been scrutinizing the consequences of the reform; in particular, much attention has been paid to the impact of the reform on the
number of parties (e.g., Nishikawa and Herron 2004; Reed 2007). Yet, there has not been any systematic analyses on whether and the extent to which the new system changed the nature of electoral competition from candidate-centered to party-centered. This is similar to the state of the literature on electoral systems in general; while the impact of electoral systems on the number of parties is one of the most studied topics in comparative politics (e.g., Duverger 1954; Rae 1971; Lijphart 1994), there are relatively fewer studies on the effect of electoral systems on whether the elections are party-centered or candidate-centered (e.g., Carey and Shugart 1995; Grofman 2005).

This paper seeks to empirically assess the impact of the electoral reform on the nature of electoral competition in Japan. This analysis is important not only because it evaluates whether the reform has brought about intended consequences but also because the nature of electoral competition will have important implications for the future of Japan’s party politics. Some scholars assert that the personal support bases of many LDP politicians are so strong that the national electoral issues such as the prime minister’s popularity or the policy platforms of major parties do not matter in their electoral successes. If this is the case, Japan’s party politics may return to the LDP’s one-party dominance. Yet, if Japanese elections are indeed becoming more and more party-centered, the seats of strong LDP incumbents may not be as secure as they appear to be and the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) may have a chance to defeat the LDP and win power.

In the next section, I will elaborate the details of the electoral system reform in Japan and the expected political changes, and Section 3 will examine the issue
while referring to scholarly works on the effects of electoral systems on the nature of electoral competition. I will then empirically investigate the impact of the reform in Section 4. Section 5 concludes the paper with some discussions on the future of Japanese party politics.

2 The 1994 Electoral Law Reform and its Intended Consequences

The electoral reform bill was passed by the Diet in 1994 while a non-LDP coalition cabinet was in power, abolishing the Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) system and introducing the parallel plurality-PR (proportional representation) system. The SNTV system was used to elect the members of the House of Representatives from 1947 to 1993. Under the SNTV, the district magnitude varied across districts depending upon the population, but it was typically between three and five. Each voter cast one ballot for an individual candidate, and top N candidates in an N-member district were elected.

The standard explanation maintains that the candidate-centered political style in Japan stemmed from this multi-member electoral system. Since multiple candidates from the LDP competed in each district, the LDP candidates could not simply rely on the party’s name for electoral victory but instead needed to differentiate themselves and maintain personal supporters. Hence the candidates devoted much money and energy in activities that would enhance their name recognition and reputation in their home districts. Pork-barrel politics and corruption were natural consequences of this incentive structure of the legislators.
There were attempts to change the electoral system from the SNTV to something else in the 1950s and 70s, but the momentum for a change was built in the late 1980s when a major political corruption case and other issues shook the entire political system (Reed and Thies 2001). “Political reform (Seiji kaikaku)” became an important key phrase in the political scene, and abolishing the SNTV system came to be considered as an integral component of the reform.

On February 10, 1989, prime minister Noboru Takeshita, in his parliamentary policy speech, declared that political reform was the “most important agenda” of his cabinet and said that his cabinet would examine “the way elections ought to be” and carry out drastic reforms. On April 27, 1989, an advisory committee to the prime minister (Seiji kaikaku ni kansuru yushikisha kaigi) submitted a report on political reform which listed the realization of “less costly, policy-centered elections” as one of the agendas although it did not explicitly argue that the SNTV had to be abolished.

On May 23, 1989, the LDP released a document called “Fundamental Principles on Political Reforms (Seiji kaikaku taikou)” in which the party declared to “seek a transition to a new electoral system,” arguing that “many of the principal tasks that are the core of the political reform are in an inseparable relationship with the revision of the SNTV system.” The document also contended, “Under the SNTV system, elections tend to be personal-based rather than party-based. As long as a party seeks to be a majority party, in-fighting within the party is inevitable. This facilitates the tendency that the politicians place the emphasis

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of daily activities and electoral campaigns on non-policy-related things, causing pork-barrel politics and costly elections...”

On April 26, 1990, an advisory council to the prime minister on the electoral system (Senkyo seido shingikai) submitted a report on the electoral system of the House of Representatives to prime minister Toshiki Kaifu. The proposed electoral system was a mixture of the single-member district (SMD) plurality component and the PR component and is quite similar to the new system that was later enacted into law in 1994. The report contended,

“Elections to the House of Representatives should be contested as competition of policies of political parties that seek to obtain power and implement policies. However, under the current electoral system, ... elections inevitably become contests among personal candidates rather than contests among parties and policies... These problems that are taking place under the SNTV system can no longer be solved by applications of the current rules, and the current electoral system has to be fundamentally reformed in order to materialize policy-centered and party-centered elections.”

To achieve those goals, the report recommended the parallel plurality-PR system, arguing that the plurality portion of the system allows the voters’ choice as to which party to rule the country to be clearly expressed while the PR portion of the system lets minor parties obtain parliamentary seats. It is interesting that it appears that the council considered that, perhaps somewhat naively, by combining two components, the country can enjoy the positive features of both components.

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In sum, under the old SNTV system, LDP candidates’ electoral campaigns focused on personal appeal and achievements such as pork-barrel projects and casework, and voters also chose candidates based on their personal appeal. The introduction of the new system was expected to transform the whole electoral structure and make the elections party-centered and policy-oriented—a situation in which candidates appeal the policies of their parties to the voters, who then would decide their vote choices based on the parties’ policies.

The land-slide victory of the LDP in the 2005 general election, in which many LDP candidates with no or very little local ties and name recognition were elected, appears to be an example of a party-centered election in which the high popularity of the prime minister overrode local contexts and candidate characteristics. Yet, without a systematic analysis, we do not know whether the significant national swing for the LDP in 2005 was an idiosyncratic phenomenon or a natural consequence of the electoral system reform.

3 Theoretical Considerations

Under the new electoral system, the seats of the lower house were divided into two groups: 300 members are elected from the same number of SMDs, and 200 (later reduced to 180) are from 11 regional PR blocs. Each voter casts one ballot for an individual candidate running in the SMD and one ballot for a political party that registers a list of candidates in the region. Since it is a combination of two separate components, the impact of the electoral rule on the nature of elections is not straightforward to predict. Rather, we have to consider the effect of each component and also how the two interact.
In considering the relationship between the two components, the fact that Japan’s mixed-system is a parallel system as opposed to the Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP) system is crucially important. Under the MMP rule used in Germany and New Zealand, the main battlefield of electoral competition is the PR portion because it ultimately determines the number of seats allocated to each party, and the race for the SMDs are of secondary concern. On the other hand, under the parallel rule, winning an SMD will directly increase the party’s total number of seat by one; hence the SMD portion is more important than the MMP system (McKean and Scheiner 2000).

What, then, is the impact of SMD on whether the elections are candidate-centered or party-centered? Although there has been much research on the SMD rule’s impact on the number of parties (e.g., Duverger 1954; Taagepera and Shugart 1993; Blais and Carty 1991), we know much less on the SMD rule’s impact on the level of personalization of elections. Although the United Kingdom and the United States both use the same SMD plurality rule, it is traditionally well accepted that parties’ and party leaders’ popularity largely determines the SMD races in the United Kingdom while individual candidates’ qualities are significant in the U.S. Congressional elections (e.g., Gaines 1998).

In their widely cited article on the rank ordering of electoral systems in terms of the politicians’ incentives to garner personal votes, Carey and Shugart (1995) classify the two countries’ systems in different groups. Since primary elections are used in almost all states in the United States to determine who would receive the party’s endorsement, the party leaders do not control candidate nominations in the U.S. system. On the contrary, in other SMD systems such as Britain and
Canada, party leaders decide who would run under the party’s label. They argue that the British SMD system is like a closed-list PR election with only one seat available in each district. Since the nomination is determined by the party leader and the candidates’ electoral fortunes are dependent on the party’s popularity, individual candidates have no incentives to cultivate a personal vote. In short, the SMD system does not have a uniform impact, but whether the elections become party-centered or candidate-centered depends on other factors, in particular, the candidate nomination rules.

The LDP’s candidate nomination rule in SMDs is different from both the U.S. and U.K. systems. On the one hand, primary elections are extremely rare, and even when primaries were held, the party’s local branches typically played an active role in screening candidates. Hence the LDP’s practice is quite different from the U.S. system. On the other hand, the party leadership’s power is not as strong as in Westminster political systems because the incumbent LDP legislators basically obtain the party’s endorsements automatically. The LDP’s candidate nomination rule thus cannot be easily classified to either category, and the LDP’s candidate selection practice may have a quite unique impact on the nature of electoral competition.

Since LDP incumbents (almost) automatically win endorsements in the same districts for the next election, those who keep winning in elections will create strongholds in their local districts. Having stable supporters, they will become self-reliant in their re-election bids, not being dependent on the party’s popularity or resources to stay in office. Since those veterans can be relatively autonomous
from the party leadership, the party may experience difficulty in being internally united and presenting coherent programs to the public.

At the same time, we should not ignore the movement for a party-based election in Japan. The DPJ released its first “manifesto” before the 2003 election, arguing that it is different from traditional electoral promises or slogans in that a manifesto is a coherent plan of policies promised by a party, not by individual candidates, and that voters should choose a ruling party in a general election by comparing manifestos. Since then, it became common for major parties to publish a manifesto for elections.

Also, the number of parties has been reducing throughout the post-reform era, and the DPJ has become the only alternative to the LDP. The country’s party system is nowadays a two-party system from various indicators (Reed 2007). The number of SMD candidates from the DPJ has been steadily increasing and has reached 289 in 2005 (96% of all SMDs). Hence, the movement for a party-centered election is becoming stronger, and the environment for it is ready.

Then, will party-centered electoral changes take place in Japan? One may say that we have already seen one in the 2005 election. Koizumi’s LDP won in 219 of 300 SMDs, compared to 168 in the 2003 election. Also, as I will show later, there was a relatively uniform electoral swing to the LDP around the country in this election, enabling even some of the candidates with no or little local connections to get elected. Yet, this event only gives a partial answer to the question. We do not know whether a similar party-based electoral swing can work against the LDP.
Although I have written elsewhere that “A reverse swing in the next election is entirely possible” (Maeda 2005, 626), in fact we do not have any theoretical or empirical reasons to assume that the pattern of vote transfers between the LDP and the DPJ is symmetrical. To be sure, those who previously voted for opposition parties but switched to the LDP in 2005 because of Koizumi may well switch back to the opposition in the next election if they are dissatisfied with the post-Koizumi LDP government. However, it is far from certain whether the core supporters of the LDP will abandon their local LDP candidates if they do not like the prime minister and what he does. Hence, while there is no doubt that a reverse swing is possible up to a certain point—new bandwagon supporters may quit easily—whether the swing will go deeper than that point is an entirely different story.

To reiterate, the 2005 election demonstrated that the LDP can obtain influx of votes from opposition parties when the party or the prime minister is popular, but it does not necessarily mean that the opposite is also true. Whether the opposition, namely the DPJ, can attract similar influx of votes from the LDP when the LDP or the cabinet becomes unpopular is not known yet. If the core supporters of LDP incumbents would not care national political issues but firmly stick to their local politicians so that they would continue to obtain particularistic benefits, it will be difficult for the DPJ to defeat strong LDP incumbents even when the national electoral tide goes strongly against the LDP. Hence, whether the party-based electoral choice is taking place only among swing voters or it is indeed spreading to all voters, including traditional LDP backers, is an extremely important question in considering whether an alternation in power in which the
DPJ unseats the LDP would take place in the foreseeable future. In the next section, I will empirically investigate this problem.

4 Empirical Investigation

Figure 1 plots the LDP’s vote share in the SMD component (Panel A) and in the PR component (Panel B) in the four post-reform elections against the proportion of the population living in “Densely Inhabited Districts” (DID), defined by the government’s Statistical Bureau.\(^6\) This is a widely-used measure of the level of urbanization, which has been known as a strong predictor of the LDP’s strength. It is clear from the figure that the LDP obtained higher shares of votes in rural areas than in urban areas although this urban-rural gap is not visible at all in 2005. Comparing the PR and SMD votes, it is noticeable that the SMD votes are much more varied than the PR votes. It should be safe to consider that this difference stems from the fact that SMD votes are affected by various local contexts, such as the reputation of the incumbent, how many candidates competed, and whether the major parties nominated candidates. On the other hand, PR votes more directly reflect the voters’ evaluation of political parties.\(^7\)

This contrast between PR votes and SMD votes is also clear from the pattern of vote changes. The change in LDP vote shares from the previous election has

\(^6\)The actual data compiled by Taku Sugawara (University of Tokyo) were obtained from his website at http://freett.com/sugawara_taku/data/2003did.html, accessed on June 18, 2006.

\(^7\)Of course, PR votes are, to some extent, influenced by what political parties do in SMDs, namely whether they nominate SMD candidates (so-called “contamination effects”; see Herron and Nishikawa (2001)). Yet, unlike small parties, the LDP nominates candidates in most districts, and also I am going to exclude the districts where the LDP did not nominate a candidate from my analyses. I thus believe that this will not be a major issue in the subsequent analyses.
a wider variation across districts in the SMD portion (standard deviation: 10.2) than in the PR portion (standard deviation: 6.2). Also, in the 2000 election in which the unpopular prime minister Yoshiro Mori entered the election with a remarkably low 18.2% approval rate (Naikaku Sori Daijin Kanbo 2001), the LDP’s average PR vote shares indeed declined by 4.3%; yet the average SMD vote shares contrarily went up by 4.3%. Again, it appears that the PR votes reflect the voters’ evaluation of the party and/or the government while the SMD votes are influenced by other factors as well. In the following, I will use the change in the PR votes as a proxy of the change in the LDP’s (and the government’s) popularity.

The differences between the PR and SMD components shown above already suggest that Japan’s post-reform elections are not entirely party-centered. If voters are casting ballot solely based on their evaluation of the political parties and their programs, there should be no difference between the two components of the electoral system. Yet, no one would be predicting that the extensively candidate-centered elections in Japan instantly changed to purely party-centered elections when the new system was introduced. A more interesting and practical question is when and where people base their votes on parties and national issues as opposed to candidates and local contexts.

— Figure 2 about here —

Figure 2 shows the patterns of vote changes of the LDP in the SMD and PR components. The x-axis is the vote swing in SMD from the previous election, and the y-axis is for the swing in PR. Circles that are on the 45-degree line are districts where the LDP gained (or lost) the same amount in SMD and PR, suggesting a
party-centered election. On the contrary, circles that are far from the 45-degree line are districts where the swings in SMD and PR were different.

The three graphs in Figure 2 indicate a changing pattern of the linkage between the two components of the electoral system. In Panel A (the 2000 election), almost all districts are located left of the y-axis, indicating a strong tide against the LDP in the PR portion, perhaps largely due to the low popularity of prime minister Mori. However, in terms of the SMD vote swing, a large majority of LDP candidates increased their vote share. The linkage between PR and SMD was weak—the party’s (the party leader’s) low popularity was directly reflected in the PR vote swing, but not in the SMD vote swing.

In 2003, two years after Koizumi became the prime minister, the LDP fared much better than in 2000. In most districts, the LDP increased the PR vote share, as shown by the fact that most circles in Panel B are located right of the y-axis. In terms of the SMD swing, it is still varied, but the circles are now located relatively close to the 45-degree line, compared to Panel A, showing an increased tendency that the fates of LDP candidates in SMDs are influenced by the party’s popularity.

Panel C is for the 2005 election in which Koizumi led the LDP to a historic victory. It is immediately clear that the linkage between PR and SMD is now even more stronger: more and more districts are clustered around the 45-degree line, and a large majority of them had positive swings. Koizumi’s high popularity apparently produced increased vote shares in both SMD and PR.

This trend of the strengthening PR-SMD linkage can also be confirmed by a measure of linear relationship of the two dimensions. The correlation coefficient
increased from .326 in 2000 to .585 in 2003 and finally .759 in 2005. These graphs and numbers suggest that the post-reform elections in Japan are becoming increasingly party-centered; yet perhaps it would be prudent to wait to observe another election before making a definitive conclusion since the 2005 election was unique in many senses.

Let us move on to the next question: In what kind of districts is the party’s popularity (represented by the PR swing) strongly related to the SMD swing, and in what kind of districts is it not? In many districts, especially in 2000 and 2003, the SMD swing and the PR swing seem independent to each other, suggesting a candidate-centered election; yet in other districts, the two swings are moving together, which implies a party-centered election. In other words, if we treat the SMD vote swing as the dependent variable, the impact of the PR vote swing, which I use as a proxy of the popularity of the LDP and the government, on the dependent variable is not uniform across time and districts: it is significantly positive in some, but not in others. What determines this variation?

I expect that the urban-rural gap creates this variation. Rural areas have been enormously benefitted from the LDP’s policies, such as protectionist measures for farmers and small business owners and massive spending on public works projects in less populated areas. LDP supporters in those areas were the beneficiaries of such practice, and also LDP politicians there have been securing votes by promising and delivering those particularistic benefits.

LDP incumbents in those areas would not have felt imminent needs to change their campaign practice when the electoral system changed. People’s mobility is low in rural areas, and LDP politicians there typically have stable support
bases that are well organized in the *koenkai* structures. For those candidates, transforming their campaign strategies and advertising the party’s programs as opposed to their personal achievements would be an unnecessary gamble. Having stable supporters who want LDP politicians to continue working hard to bring pork back to the district, they may simply try to keep winning elections by the traditional way. With candidates who maintain the candidate-centered, pork-promising campaigns, supporters would also simply continue their practice: vote for the LDP candidate and expect benefits. Hence, party-centered elections may not be observed in rural areas or at least less pervasive than in urban districts.

— Table 1 about here —

Table 1 shows the results of regression analyses of the SMD vote swings in post-reform Japanese elections. The leftmost column is for the pooled sample, and the rest is for the analyses of individual elections. Since I expect that the PR vote swing and the level of urbanization have interactive effects on the dependent variable, a multiplicative interaction term (PR Swing \times \text{DID}) is included in the model. The SMD vote share in the previous election is a variable that represents the base from which the swing takes place. Where the LDP obtained a large vote share in the previous election, it has a large base of votes to lose. As expected, this variable has a significant and negative impact in all four models. The incumbency status variable takes the value of one if the candidate was victorious in the SMD in the previous election. Those who secured a seat in the PR portion are not considered as incumbents here. Whether there was a special election in the SMD since the previous general election is also included in the model. Finally, for the
pooled sample only, the dummy variables of 2003 and 2005 are specified in the model.

To exclude anomalous cases from the analysis, the following districts were taken out of the sample: where either the LDP or the largest opposition did not nominate a candidate in the current or previous election; where an independent or “other” party candidate received 10% or more votes in the current or previous election; where a “postal rebel” candidate (a former LDP legislator who was expelled from the party by Koizumi after opposing the postal privatization bill in 2005) ran; and where redistricting was conducted.8

Since an interaction term between the PR swing and DID is included, the impact of the PR swing on the dependent variable has to be interpreted with varying levels of DID. For example, the coefficients of the PR swing and PR swing × DID are .548 and .304, respectively, in the pooled model. In that case, the slope coefficient of the PR swing is:

\[ .548 + .304 \times \text{DID}. \]

Since high values of DID mean urban areas (the maximum value is 1), this result shows that the impact of the PR swing on the SMD swing is larger in urban districts than in rural districts. The significance of the slope coefficient of the PR swing also varies with DID, and the standard error of the PR swing’s coefficient in the pooled model is calculated in the following way (Friedrich 1982; Brambor, Clark, and Golder 2006):

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8I decided that redistricting on the following districts before the 2003 election were negligible, and hence they were included in the analysis: Chiba 7, Tokyo 12, Tokyo 13, Shizuoka 7 (formerly 9), Shizuoka 8, Mie 2, Mie 3, Osaka 16, Osaka 17, Kumamoto 1, and Kumamoto 2. Also, Hokkaido 7 is exactly the same as the old Hokkaido 13.
\[
\sqrt{.034 + (.035 \times DID^2) + (2 \times -.032 \times DID)}
\]

where .034 is the variance of the coefficient of the PR swing, .035 is the variance of the coefficient of the interaction term, and -.032 is the covariance between these two coefficients.

Since both the coefficient and the standard error of the PR swing change with the value of DID, graphical presentation is useful in evaluating the effect and the significance of this variable. The four graphs in Figure 3 show them, and they correspond to the four models in Table 1. The solid lines represent the coefficient of the PR swing, and the dotted curves show the 95% confidence intervals. Hence, where the zero line (the x-axis) does not fall within the confidence interval, the impact of the PR swing is statistically significant.

--- Figure 3 about here ---

It can be seen that in all four graphs the solid line has a positive slope and lies above the x-axis, meaning that the PR-SMD linkage is stronger in urban areas than in rural areas. Furthermore, in 2000 and 2003, the PR-SMD linkage is statistically insignificant in rural areas (where DID is below approximately .5 in 2000 and .3 in 2003), which is consistent with my expectation that the party’s popularity is not important for rural LDP candidates’ electoral fortunes. In 2005, the PR swing’s impact is significant regardless of the level of urbanization, which is not surprising because we have seen in Figure 2 that the PR-SMD linkage in 2005 was much stronger than that in the earlier elections.
Conclusion

The evidence provided in the previous section has shown that party-centered elections are taking place (1) more in recent elections than in the past and (2) more in urban districts than in rural districts. As for the first point, probably we can simply say that it has taken some time while the various electoral actors (voters, candidates, and party leaders) were adjusting their behavior in the new environment. Also, the introduction of manifestos in elections—it is not clear whether this is a consequence of the electoral reform or independent of it—may be facilitating this trend.

As for the second point that elections in urban areas are becoming more party-centered, several factors may be creating this phenomenon. First, the LDP has always been less strong in urban areas; thus it is relatively more difficult for urban LDP members to have a long political career and develop high name recognition and personal support bases. Second, urban dwellers have not been benefitted from the LDP’s traditional pro-rural policies, and hence they may have potentially wanted an alternative to the LDP that advances pro-urban agendas. Third, since urban people tend to move more frequently than rural people, it would be more difficult for urban LDP legislators to win personal loyalty and attachment from supporters.

What do these results imply about the future of Japanese party politics? In particular, will there be an alternation in power within the next few elections? If the electoral competitions are indeed becoming increasingly party-centered, the DPJ has a chance to gain a large number of votes when the government becomes unpopular. Such a swing in votes may not take place in rural areas; yet the DPJ
may not necessarily need to win seats in the countryside to defeat the LDP in the total number of seats.

Since the LDP won an unprecedentedly large number of seats in 2005, the LDP will most likely lose seats in the next election—unless another major political event takes place. Will the change be large enough for the DPJ to overtake the LDP? Very unlikely. Let me show why.

— Figure 4 about here —

Figure 4 shows the distribution of the difference between LDP candidates’ vote share and DPJ candidates’ vote share in SMDs in the 2005 election. The districts where the LDP won are on the right side of the graph, and the districts that went to the DPJ are on the left side. It is apparent that many LDP winners in 2005 had a large margin to their DPJ contenders. It will thus take a quite large swing in votes from the LDP to the DPJ if the DPJ is to win a half of SMDs in the next election. In fact, that swing will have to be about twice as large as the swing for the LDP in 2005, which would not be a realistic scenario.

Nevertheless, the tendency toward party-centered elections will make electoral results more volatile since the prime minister’s popularity and other national issues will strongly affect the races everywhere, nullifying the situations in individual districts such as the incumbent’s career achievements. In the 1997 election in Britain, the Labour Party increased its vote share by 8.8% while the Conservative Party’s support dropped by 11.3%: this is what can happen in a party-centered

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9The districts where either party did not nominate a candidate, the districts where postal rebels ran, and the districts where neither party won are excluded, leaving 249 SMDs in the data.
political system. If a swing of this size takes place in the next election in Japan, the DPJ would easily defeat the LDP and win power. Hence, whether Japanese elections have become or will become party-centered is a crucially important question to consider if we are interested in the future of party politics and a possibility of an alternation in power in Japan.

\(^{10}\)The data are from http://www.parties-and-elections.de/unitedkingdom2.html, accessed on June 5, 2007.
References


Figure 1

(A) LDP’s PR Vote Share

(B) LDP’s SMD Vote Share
Figure 2

(A) 2000
(Correlation coefficient: .326)

(B) 2003
(Correlation coefficient: .585)

(C) 2005
(Correlation coefficient: .759)
Table 1 (Dependent variable: vote swing in SMDs from the previous election)

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<th></th>
<th>All 2000</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td><strong>Dependent variable: vote swing in SMDs from the previous election</strong></td>
<td><strong>Coef. (SE) p-value</strong></td>
<td><strong>Coef. (SE) p-value</strong></td>
<td><strong>Coef. (SE) p-value</strong></td>
</tr>
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<td>PR Swing</td>
<td>0.548 (0.185) 0.003 ***</td>
<td>0.272 (0.325) 0.656 *</td>
<td>PR Swing * DID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR Swing * DID</td>
<td>-3.830 (1.323) 0.004 ***</td>
<td>-6.150 (4.942) 0.216 *</td>
<td>-6.342 (3.680) 0.087 ***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prev. SMD Vote Share</td>
<td>0.304 (0.288) 0.105 ***</td>
<td>0.612 (0.786) 0.438 *</td>
<td>-0.356 (4.123) 0.000 ***</td>
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<td>3.293 (0.569) 0.000 ***</td>
<td>3.995 (1.331) 0.000 ***</td>
<td>-0.298 (0.825) 0.000 ***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Election</td>
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<td>-10.910 (5.022) 0.032 *</td>
<td>-6.342 (1.129) 0.000 ***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interception</td>
<td>23.636 (2.153) 0.000 ***</td>
<td>27.957 (5.126) 0.000 ***</td>
<td>14.743 (5.369) 0.007 **</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incumbent</td>
<td>2.763 (0.569) 0.000 ***</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>17.755 (5.369) 0.000 ***</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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</table>

* significant at 5%; * significant at 1%; *** significant at .1%.
Figure 3

(A) All Elections

(B) 2000

(C) 2003

(D) 2005
Figure 4

The LDP’s vote margin over the DPJ in SMDs