

Panel to be Announced

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'Examining the Process of the 1994 Japanese Electoral Reform'

Summary

This paper investigates the process of the recent electoral reform in Japan (1990-1994), focusing on the strategies of political parties and their interaction. I discuss the two distinctive phases in this process. Phase I saw the need of political reform that was acknowledged by the cabinets and the governing parties but opposed by the Socialists and other opposition parties. In Phase II, however, all political parties agreed to participate in the negotiation to complete the electoral reform.

SNTV: its systematic features and problems related to the Japanese party system

Firstly we overview the features of the Single Non-transferable Vote (SNTV) system. The SNTV resembles Single Transferable Vote (STV), as is employed in Ireland. However the SNTV is without the vote transferral and therefore, the ordinal ballot of STV.¹ Voters are given a vote for an individual on a categorical ballot. Candidates with the largest number of votes are elected up to the number of seats allocated for the district. In Japan the number of seats varies from two to six, originally based on the population census in 1946 and partial reapportionment was carried out in 1964, 1975 and 1986. However, the difference in the population per seat among districts never seemed to cease: in 1990 the difference widened up to 3.38 times between the least and the most populated districts per seat.²

The nontransferability of votes results in the less proportional profile of the SNTV. Although the overall result for all parties shows some proportionality, its mechanism works in favour of larger parties. Like the plurality system, minor parties lose all the votes if a candidate fails to receive enough votes to compete against the lowest ranking of the winners. In other words, smaller parties are always under represented for the votes they receive. According to the existing quantitative calculation, the threshold is about 10-15 per cent; if a party's share in votes is less, it is likely to receive smaller proportion of seats.³ Since 1955 when the basic composition of the Japanese party system was established, the favoured parties are only the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the Social Democratic Party of Japan (SDPJ), which have often held over 70 per cent of seats with about 50 per cent of votes.

Among the aforementioned features, the combination of multi-member districts and the non-transferability of votes, directly creates the problem of wasted votes.

¹Taagepera & Shugart, *Seats and Votes*, Yale University, 1990, 28-29.

²Based on the population census by Japan Population Census Bureau, October 1990.

³*Seats and Votes*, pp.68, 72.

There was criticism from all sides: all parliamentary parties suffered from this as the votes cast for unsuccessful candidates were completely worthless. The sense of uselessness of one's vote among voters was another recognised problem. Some have argued this feature as being one of the reasons for increasing political detachment among the public.

The multi-member districts also created the intra-party rivalries. Larger parties such as the LDP and the (SDPJ) were usually capable of sending more than a candidate, which inevitably caused a fierce competition among candidates from the same party. While the SDPJ was better in organising the voters for respective candidates with the support from the labour unions, the LDP relied heavily on the locally organised associations of supporters for individual candidates (Koenkai), enhancing the factionalism. It is needless to say that the uncoordinated intra-party competition significantly confused the local constituencies.

Although SNTV is an irregular form of plurality system in theory, its quasi-proportional outcome was also targeted by critiques in the late 1980s. This was prompted by the loss of so-called '1955 System' when the Japanese party system was approaching a Westminster-type two party system appeared to emerge with the unification of the LDP and the SDPJ. In 1980s, however, the LDP has failed to remain as the dominant party in the Diet and probably more importantly the support for the SDPJ was stripped by its splinter and new parties. In 1990, there were at least three small- and medium- sized parties apart from the two major parties holding 15% of the seats in the House of the Representatives. Under the legendary premise that Japan is an homogenous society, the Westminster-type two party system was supposed to be ideal, and so the LDP and the SDPJ saw a cause to introduce an electoral system which would gradually reform the Japanese party system, in which case both parties were to increase their share in the Diet. This was joined by the academic voicing their concern for the 'fragmentation' or 'Italianisation' of Japanese politics, otherwise.

However, there was opposition from the small and medium sized parties against the removal of proportional features from the existing electoral system. The concern was common to the SDPJ. In comparison with the fluctuation of the LDP support, which was contained within a certain range, the decline of the SDPJ was apparent. It was not unlikely that the SDPJ would be victimised to be one of small- and medium-sized parties as a result of introducing a plurality system. The alternative approach to system change was reapportionment under the current SNTV. The delay of reapportionment was an obvious problem as the population moved. After each election, 'the weight of a vote' was calculated along with the electoral outcome as a part of the counter argument against the proposals for the change of electoral system. However, since there was no written definition of the acceptable difference in the weight of a vote in the electoral law, and there was no institutionalised mechanism of reapportionment. The only solution was the judgement by the Supreme Court functioning as the constitutional court, which invariably took long time, normally a few years after the latest population census is published.

The Environment, Interested Parties and their Strategies

The successive LDP governments had already set up advisory councils for electoral reform seven times to since the SNTV came into force in 1947.⁴ As the LDP had constantly held over 40 percent of votes in elections for the House of Representatives, if plurality system would have been introduced, the party could reach over the two thirds of the seats in the House. This would save the LDP from having to negotiate with the opposition parties when introducing any bill into the Diet, including one to change the Constitution, which requires the consent of two thirds of all the members in the both Houses.

The most important example took place in 1956 under the Hatoyama cabinet, which became the first LDP cabinet after its unification in 1955 when socialist parties united to become the Social Democratic Party of Japan. Hatoyama, whose pledge was to reform the Constitution to enable the rearmament of Japan, set up the fifth Council for Electoral System and attempted to introduce the simple plurality system. It was also aimed to curve the Socialist expansion, and the reform bill had strong conservative elements such as the restriction of unions' participation in the electoral campaign and public campaign speeches. Also, the districting plan became notorious as 'Hato-mander', favouring the LDP members from the former Hatoyama's Democratic Party. The bill met a fierce opposition, led by the Socialists who barely held 33.4% of the seats in the House of Representatives, and the sacrificed LDP members from the former Liberal Party. It also created a strong scepticism among the public towards the change of electoral system as it seemed solely to be motivated by political interest. The electoral reform became accompanied by a negative connotation and starting a debate for the system change became a taboo, especially among the opposition parties.

The change of the atmosphere was caused by several reasons. Firstly, there was an air of emergency among the LDP that it needed to create a somewhat positive image about themselves. To remain the government party for nearly four decades meant that they were involved also in unpopular tasks. In 1988, the first consumption tax was introduced. From the experience of the failed effort in 1987, the LDP consolidated its members and carefully carried out negotiation with opposition parties. Although the bill itself succeeded, immediately after that a money-related scandal was revealed in the same period. The 'Recruit Affairs' — a series of revelations involving LDP party leaders, such as former and current prime ministers, cabinet members, in stock market manipulations and insider trading — surprised the public. In addition to the huge sum of money and the number and the importance of those who were involved in this scandal, the insensitivity towards corrupt practices among politicians was seriously questioned. The LDP had to prove that it could police itself

It was also desirable for the LDP members. The huge budget they needed for the electoral competition under the SNTV against other LDP candidates within their constituencies had enhanced the fractionisation of the party. For faction leaders it was always burdensome to prepare large money to provide junior members electoral campaign and younger members felt the hierarchical control from the

⁴For the process of the establishing the postwar electoral system, see my PhD dissertation, *Political Reforms under the Military Occupation: the Experience of Japan and Germany*, LSE, 1997, forthcoming.

above. The loss in the 1989 House of Councillors election was momentous: the dominance of the LDP was lost although the election involved only half the members of the House.

Secondly, there was a strong public support for political reform. Although it was merely expressed in vague but high support for 'political reform' in opinion polls, the government and political parties had sensed the mood and incorporated the issue in party manifestos in the 1989 election for the House of Councillors and the 1990 election for the House of Representatives. The LDP formed a party committee for political reform in 1989. The government appointed a council to discuss the issues of political reform, including the electoral system, in 1990. These moves inflated public expectation for reform. The efforts of the government and political parties were welcomed by powerful interest groups. The Association of Economic and Business Organisations (Keidanren) had expressed its support for successful political reform to be completed and also published its own proposals.⁵ Leading figures of the media were invited to constitute a large part in the aforementioned eighth Council for Electoral System.⁶

Finally, the split of the LDP and the formation of a coalition government with eight parties changed the obstinate attitude of the SDPJ and two other middle-sized parties. It did not take place until July 1993, and the process towards electoral reform had already passed the point of no return. Nevertheless, the fact that the government was formed by the SDPJ dominant coalition demanded the party to assume responsibility over the issue. The majority of anti-LDP parties in the House of Councillors also consented to this turn. The defeat of the LDP in the 1989 election was so large that their success in the 1992 election was still insufficient to recover their majority. It was not until 1995 that control over the LDP in the House of Councillors was guaranteed. The fact was well understood by the LDP: in 1993 the LDP chief secretary, Kajiyama, had remarked that the LDP should postpone the discussion over electoral reform until the House of Councillors election had taken place two years, in the middle of the time when the House of Representatives special committee was engaged in discussing the issue.⁷ If the SDPJ wished to influence the course of reform, it should be done before 1995.

Government

The significant feature of the series of cabinets from 1989 to 1994 is the lack of strong leadership. The LDP's largest Takeshita (former Tanaka) faction had sent its leader to the office but had to resign in 1989 as his involvement in the Recruit Affairs became public. Instead, the faction switched to support leaders from minor factions for the prime minister's office and successfully influenced cabinet policies as kingmakers. Mostly, the cabinet followed the consensus reached among the LDP through its established decision-making forums such as the LDP Executive Council. However, as seen in Figure 1, from 1988 to 1994 there were four cabinets

⁵ *Asahi*, 19 June 1989.

⁶ Ishikawa argues that the invitation of the media figures was intended to avoid criticism by them when the report was to be published. The reports by former councils were fiercely targeted by the media criticism for being the result of sheer party interest. Masumi Ishikawa, *Sengo Seiji Shi*, Tokyo, Iwanami, 1995, 180.

⁷ *Asahi*, 4 June 1993.

in seven years. Considering the Miyazawa cabinet held office almost three years, the other prime ministers stayed in the office only a year on average. Nevertheless, there were occasions when the prime ministers had to exercise their power over the party and in the Diet in conflicting issues, even in spite of the disagreement from the other LDP factions. Such occasions, there were two possible strategies to gain support: either to negotiate with the large faction in the LDP or to appeal to the public. While the LDP support was usually more effective in terms of the life of a cabinet, the public tended to favour the leaders from minor factions, although the two were not necessarily exclusive. This is because the smaller factions are de facto more isolated in the circle of political, bureaucratic and business connections and thus, had 'cleaner' images. In this sense, the campaign for political reform was timely for weak prime ministers in this period. It was an appealing issue for the public, which was tired of frequent corruption and scandals. Although the eighth Council for Electoral System was set up during the Takeshita government, its undertaking was enthusiastically supported by the following governments, even after the LDP stepped down from the governing party.

The LDP

Despite of the loss of dominance in the House of Councillors, the LDP was still by far the strongest party in the House of Representatives, which is prior to the former. Nevertheless, the event was symbolic in the sense that the LDP's victory in the election was not necessarily guaranteed. In accordance with the introduction of the notorious consumption tax, the public support for the LDP was worse than ever because of the Recruit Affairs at the end of 1980s. The LDP had an urgent need to restore the public confidence and the solution was the campaign for political reform. By doing so, it wished to control the direction of reform and to play down its negative image before the next election in 1990. For decades, despite of the failure of Hatoyama, the LDP preferred the simple plurality system to the SNTV. However, taking account of its unpopularity, the LDP had been suggesting the 'combination' system of simple plurality and proportional representation with a single vote. A fixed number of seats is to be allocated for plurality districts and the national proportional representation district, and a voter is to cast his/her vote to an individual in the respective plurality district. The votes are then to be aggregated to allocate seats for the proportional representation seats. This proposal was nearly submitted to the Diet in 1973 by the Tanaka cabinet, but had to be abandoned, confronted by the opposition parties, media criticism and the discord among the LDP. The situation was basically unchanged in the late 1980s. The opposition, in particular that in the House of Councillors, was sizeable, and the incumbent LDP members were not happy about the uncertainty of their re-election under a new system. As a compromise, the LDP employed the combination of simple plurality and proportional representation again, but with two votes. By this way, the candidates who were accepted to run for a plurality district and at the same time to have his/her name added on the party list could ensure a higher chance of winning a seat. Also, the number of seats allocated for proportional representation and plurality system was reset from 200/300 to 171/300, increasing the

proportion of plurality system seats from 60 to 64 per cent.⁸

Opposition Parties

Opposition parties had been opposing almost all proposals for a new electoral system by government-appointed councils. Firstly, the government was formed by the LDP, and they were sceptical about the neutrality of the proposals by the 'third body'. Secondly, the current SNTV had never been ideal, but was preferable in comparison with the LDP-endorsed simple plurality system. For the SDPJ, geographically sparse urban intellectuals had been an important source of support as well as locally organised labour. For smaller parties, it was even a matter of survival.

The problems of SNTV was, however, also acknowledged by the opposition parties. The lack of effective electoral strategy in terms of the number of candidates to maximise the utility of votes was a problem not only for the LDP but for SDPJ. The under representation of minor parties was also of concern, as it had constantly discouraged voters. The resulting huge proportion of wasted votes was a target for mass media criticism. Not surprisingly, they supported the proportional representation in theory. Nevertheless, they never took an initiative for electoral reform in the face of an LDP majority, which would steer the direction of the reform.

Instead of their passive attitude towards electoral reform, the opposition parties appealed to the legitimisation of the current system by condemning the problems of the SNTV for not its mechanism, but its malfunction. They claimed the gap of seats/votes ratio among districts should be normalised by swift reapportionment and more strict regulation on political finance to combat the corruption alleged to be the result of fierce rivalry in local constituencies. Obviously, the rigorous implementation of the SNTV still would not solve the problems related to unproportionality and wasted votes. As a long term and more fundamental solution, they had referred to the German-type 'Personalised Proportional Representation'. However, because of its unfamiliarity, the proposal of such a bill was only theoretically considered.

Process of change

As shown in Figure 1 (p.9 of this paper), the process of electoral reform is divided into two phases. Phase I starts from late 1989 and lasts until December 1992 when the reapportionment bill for the current SNTV passed the House of Representatives emergency meeting. Phase II starts from January 1993, as the ordinary session of the Diet started, until March 1994, when four political reform bills including one for electoral reform passed the Diet. In Phase I, the urgency of the political reform became an acknowledged issue, first by the government and the LDP, and then the opposition parties. In the beginning, the term 'political reform' was understood in its broadest sense, and electoral reform was only one of

⁸The LDP Summary of the Essentials of Political Reform (*Jiminto Seiji Kaikaku Kihon Yohkoh*), 25 December 1990.

the issues covered. However, the opposition parties sensitively reacted to the proposals on the electoral system, especially the one in the report of the eighth Council for Electoral Reform: a system which employed simple plurality and proportional representation, allocating a fixed number of seats to respective constituencies. They claimed the delay of reapportionment under the SNTV was the prior task to be dealt with. The other issues of political reform started to drift away from focus and the schism between correcting the SNTV and the introduction of a new electoral system started to emerge. Helped by the majority in the House of Councillors, the discordant LDP members and the public which saw a legitimacy in their claim, the opposition parties succeeded in avoiding the issue of a electoral reform and the reapportionment was carried out.

Phase II started right after that when the ordinary session started in the next year. Although a short term improvement of the current SNTV was achieved, it remained a partial correction and in the face of heightened public awareness and expectation, more drastic measures needed to be taken. The LDP saw the opportunity arise and decided to promote the simple plurality system as a party. To respond to this, the opposition parties started to consider various forms of alternative electoral system, mostly with some element of proportional representation. Some of their proposals were substantially close to the former proposals by the LDP. However, the LDP refused to compromise with them, buying time till the power balance in the House of Councillors was to be reversed two years later. The Miyazawa Cabinet started to prepare a cabinet bill based on a simple plurality system, which the opposition parties would refuse to discuss as a basis of electoral reform. The LDP's tactics enraged the opposition and led them to propose a vote of non-confidence in the Cabinet. However, it was not only the opposition parties which the government had to face. The following events describe the critical point of the history of the LDP and also that of postwar Japanese politics. At the vote, 38 LDP members joined the oppositions and 16 were absent, enabling the proposal to pass 255 versus 220. Subsequently the LDP rebels left the party to form two new parties and the LDP lost its majority. The general election was held in July 1993 and the LDP left the office for the first time since 1955. The new coalition government was formed with eight parties, including the LDP splinter parties and the SDPJ. The Hosokawa Cabinet promised to accomplish political reform, with the introduction of a new electoral system which closely followed the report by the eighth Council for Electoral Reform. At this point, there was no discordance in terms of introducing a new electoral system. All that was left to be dealt with were the technical difference and political interests. The bills passed in January 1994 after the initial rejection by the House of Councillors and the informal negotiation by the party leaders.

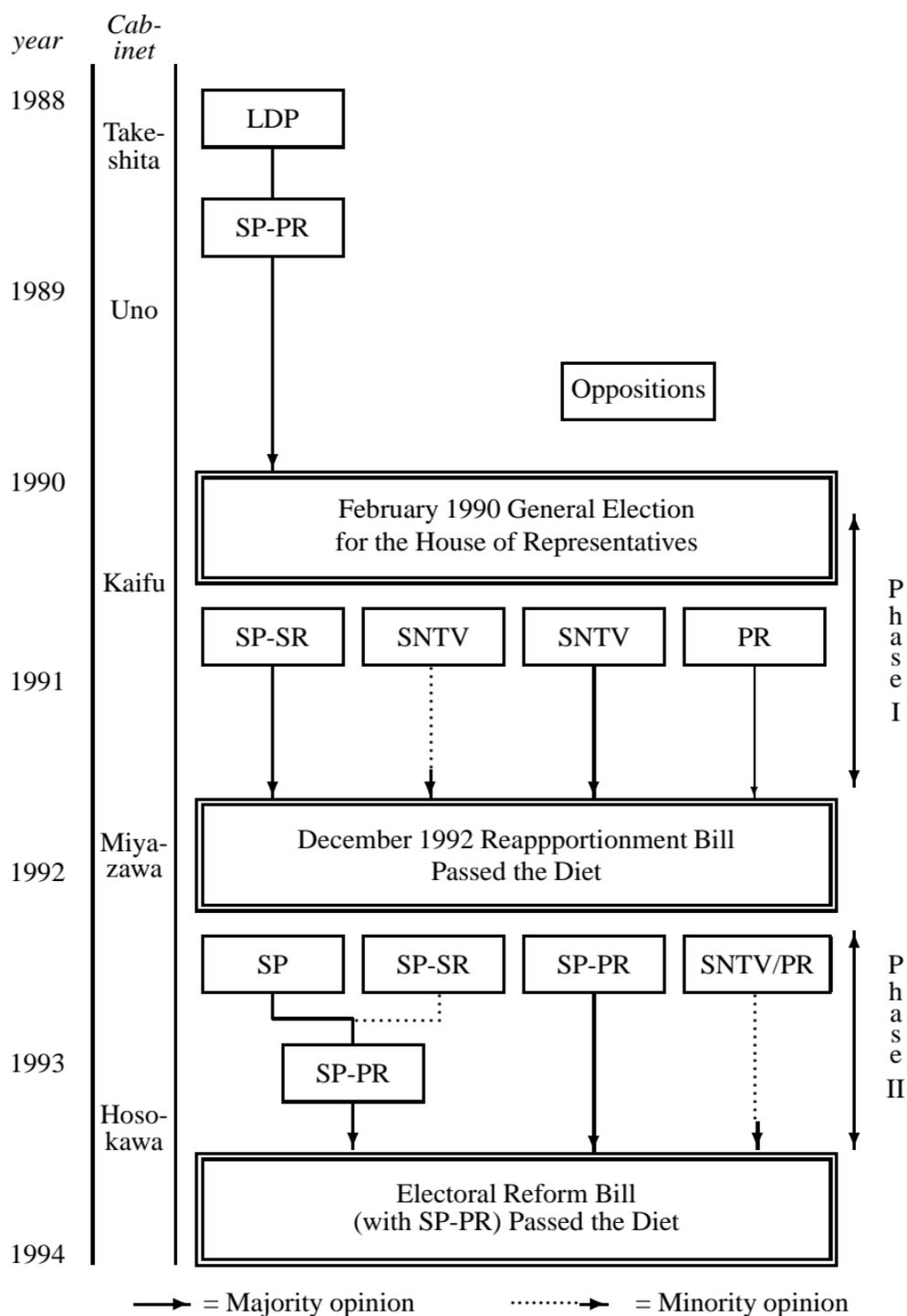
Phase I: Acknowledging the Need for Electoral Reform

Organising a council to discuss electoral reform was suggested by Takeshita Cabinet towards the end of his government in 1988. The LDP government had suffered severe damage in its involvement in the Recruit Affair and was in need of proving its ability to eliminate corrupted custom from politics. However, the Prime Minister had to resign before his promise was fulfilled, as his own involvement in the

affair was revealed. The eighth Council for Electoral Reform came into existence under the next Uno Cabinet in June 1989. The Council was chaired by Horie, the Dean of the Faculty of Law in Keio University. Twenty seven members excluded representatives from political parties to avoid the difficulties in reaching a conclusion because of political interests. Instead, the Council included a large proportion of leading media figures, who had been the most aggressive critics against the proposals for electoral reforms in the past.

The report was submitted in April 1990 to the Kaifu Cabinet, which succeeded Uno after the LDP's loss in the election in February. The issues covered were the electoral reform for the House of Representatives, modification for the House of Councillors, the regulation of political finance and corrupted customs and a proposal for legal assistance for political parties. The main stress was on the electoral reform of the House of Representatives, abolishing the current SNTV. Their reasoning is summarised as: the multi-member districts, accompanying intra party rivalries which had disabled competition between parties over policies and invited corruption, and the SNTV together allowed the fragmentation of the party system and as a consequence enabled the LDP to stay in the government for too long. Therefore, in order to create a stable two party system, the simple plurality system is desirable. However, it is important to represent minor parties as they also reflect the public opinion. To supplement the simple plurality system, they recommended allocating a certain proportion of seats to the proportional representation list system to guarantee the representation of minor parties.

Figure 1
The shift in Support for Different Electoral Systems



It is clear that the Council had the Westminster-type two party system as a model in which government change occurs more regularly than the current 'one and a half' party system. On the other hand, government change by means of

forming coalitions was regarded negatively, as it was 'unstable' and the government formation would be decided by the 'negotiation between political parties but not directly by the public choice (through election: author)'. In practice, the report recommended allocating 301 seats to the plurality system and 200 seats for the proportional representation, which was divided into eleven 'blocks'. The dislike for the participation of smaller parties appeared in the introduction of thresholds. Parties could send candidates for plurality districts only when they had more than five members in the Diet or had received more than one per cent of the votes in the last general election. For the election of proportional representation, parties needed to meet the conditions for the plurality districts or have a number of candidates more than 20 per cent of the number of seats for the respective block. Voters were provided two votes, one for a categorical vote in the plurality district and one for a party list in the block. On the other hand, a candidate could run for both plurality district and have one's name added on the party list to increase the likelihood of election.

It has many similarities with the aforementioned LDP Summary of the Essentials of Political Reform. The major differences were the ratio between the plurality system and proportional representation (300/171), without the increase of the number of total seats, and no seats for parties with less than 2 per cent of votes in the proportional representation on the national level. The conditions for a party to send a candidate is that it has more than five members in the Diet or received more than two per cent votes in the last general election or has more than 35 candidates. The similarities are, however, not surprising as the Council and the LDP had informally met frequently for negotiation, otherwise there was no possibility for the report to be accepted by the LDP Cabinet or the LDP majority Diet.

To these proposals for a new electoral system, the opposition parties reacted passively. As the contents of the report by the Council for Electoral Reform became public, the SDPJ referred to it as 'a disguise through which the government is attempting to introduce a plurality system', and the CGP called it as 'the government attempt to reorient the problem of electoral reform from reapportionment to the system itself'.⁹ The opposition parties also refused to attend the Council-organised sessions to present their opinions regarding the report.¹⁰ The SDPJ, the Clean Government Party (CGP), the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) all called for the reapportionment under the current SNTV. When it came to the alternative electoral system, however, there was no co-ordination. The SDPJ and the DSP suggested some form of proportional representation, the CGP was considering the 'Personalised PR' in Germany and the Communists proposed proportional representation on prefectural unit. There was no attempt to cooperate to write a proposal in unison to counter the LDP. There was a relatively easy mood due to the belief that the LDP's proposal would not pass under the opposition's majority in the House of Councillors.

The atmosphere changed after the House of Representatives election in February 1990. In spite of the previous scandals, the LDP secured the majority and the SDPJ increased seats from 86 to 139. However, other small and medium sized parties — the CGP, the DSP and the Communists — all decreased their share. The

⁹ *Asahi*, 29 June 1989.

¹⁰ *Asahi*, 28 October, 7 December 1989.

LDP found the voters were less punitive than they were in 1989 and their fervour towards electoral reform had also cooled down. Moreover, if the recovery of the LDP was to continue, the majority position of the LDP in the House of Councilors would be restored in the next five years. Although the discussion for the electoral reform continued, a cautious voice started to be heard. On the other hand, the SDPJ, whose share in the House of Representatives increased to 27.1 per cent, became more optimistic towards its future. The party carried out a hearing with its members on the electoral reform and found the preference was the German-type proportional representation. It also started to attend the sessions of the Council for Electoral Reform, which had an effect on the rest of opposition parties joining.

Encouraged by the decrease of hard core opposition, Prime Minister Kaifu declared that he would put his office at stake in order to pass the political reform bills. He asked for the opposition parties to cooperate in this task. By August 1990, the Kaifu Cabinet managed to introduce a cabinet bill to the Diet emergency meeting and a Special Committee for Electoral Reform was set up in the House of Representatives. However, what was at stake was the support from the largest Takeshita faction of his party, which refrained from sending the prime minister after the Recruit Affairs. As many LDP members belonged to the faction, the faction wanted to carry the process of electoral reform as carefully as possible, since there was considerable anxiety among the incumbent members and the introduction of the new system would strip the power of faction leaders by destroying the patron-client relationship between them and the rank and file members. The more determined Kaifu became, the more cautious an attitude LDP leaders started to show. The chairman of the LDP Investigation Committee for Electoral System even suggested waiting for another year. By the end of September, the chairman of the Special Committee declared the abolition of the bill because of the large opposition, both from the LDP and opposition parties. Kaifu threatened the dissolution of the House of Representative if the bill failed, which cost him the support of Takeshita faction. He abandoned his run for the LDP Presidential election of the same year, stepping down from the government office at the same time.

The next Miyazawa Cabinet, also from a minor faction but supported by Takeshita faction, took a careful stance in regard to the electoral reform issue, although it was an unavoidable issue as the public expectation was higher than ever. 1991 did not see large progress in the issue, as the whole Diet was engaged in the issue of sending the Peace Keeping Organisation. As the peace process in Cambodia progressed, the government aimed at sending the Self Defence Force as a part of the United Nations Peace Keeping Force. The whole Diet was consumed over the issue of constitutionality of PKO.

During this year, the opposition parties again returned to the reapportionment of the SNTV instead of a new electoral system. In May, the CGP declared that it would not co-operating in the proposals for political reform without reapportionment being carried out. The SDPJ was also facing declining support after the party took a very inflexible attitude in the debate over the PKO bills and eventually failed.¹¹ In June, the DSP explained the party position as it has no interest in changing electoral system, but support only the reapportionment under the current SNTV. The SDPJ joined the opposition, supported by the Association of Labour Unions. On the other hand, the LDP continued to unite the party under the combination system despite some oppositions.

It was only in 1992 when political reform returned to being the main issue of the government and the Diet. The Miyazawa Cabinet maintained a careful attitude and explained that the government aimed at the reapportionment of the current SNTV during the ordinary session and more fundamental reform would be proposed by November 1992. The opposition parties welcomed giving reapportionment priority. They were joined by some of the LDP members. In particular, newly elected members were against electoral system change, as they did not welcome the need to change their electoral strategy. Fifteen newly elected LDP members formed a Political Reform Study Group and declared their opposition to the introduction of a plurality system. On 10 December, after the long negotiation, the reapportionment bill passed the Diet.

Phase II: The Strife over a System Change

The passage of the reapportionment bill left no time for the LDP government to reintroduce the political reform bills. On the same day, the LDP Committee for Political Reform published the 'Principles of Political Reform', which employs a simple plurality system for all 500 seats of the House of Representatives. In December 1992, Prime Minister Miyazawa spoke to the leaders of the opposition parties of his strong will to introduce bills based on the LDP 'Principles'. However, the LDP was not entirely consistent on the simple plurality system. That is apparent from the fact that 'Principles' were not accepted as the LDP party decision, but only 'approved' by the LDP Executive Council. To submit bills before the end of the session, the LDP sought to persuade the opposition in the party and at the end of March 1993, the LDP decided to support the political reform bills as a party. In fact, at the same time creation of a splinter party was in progress as Takeshita faction split up over the everlasting revelation of corruptions, but this was also suspended as the LDP requested all members to commit themselves in the effort to pass the political reform bills.

In response to the LDP's making headway, the opposition parties started to put their views together. In the beginning their support shifted between the German-type Personalised PR system and the combination system similar to the proposal by the Council for Electoral Reform. By the end of May, however, the combination system was proposed by the SDPJ as a basis to form a united front. It was joined by the CGP, the DSP and the Japan New Party (JNP), and received support from academic, union leaders and some of business leaders. Although the LDP

¹¹ *Asahi*, 12 June 1991.

still maintained a simple plurality system as its formal party position, the difference between their proposal a year earlier and that of the oppositions had never become this small.

At this point, we notice there is no opposition but all started to support the change of electoral system. Schematic confrontation between the LDP versus the opposition, or the simple plurality system versus the combination system appeared to be there, but the schism existing in Phase I was completely swept away. In fact, no fundamental difference existed between the two sides. It soon became apparent that the LDP's formal support for the plurality system was principally driven by a tactical consideration to bring out the maximum compromise from the opposition. Having seen the united front of the opposition parties for the combination system form, the LDP leaders had suggested a possible compromise and by the next month, the party openly started to discuss the combination system. Now the most significant difference between the two sides appeared to be the proportion of seats allocated to the plurality system. The LDP used to demand 300 out of 471 (64%) and the oppositions proposed 275 out of 500 (55%).

Here again, however, the opposition parties stiffened their attitude as they saw the LDP was opting for a compromise and shifted their support to a system with a stronger proportional representation profile. The LDP retaliated by reconfirming its adherence to the simple plurality system and the LDP Chief Secretary suggested that 'the LDP should wait for the power balance in the House of Councillors to reverse'.¹² On this, the LDP finally pushed itself to the point of splitting the party. The opposition parties proposed a vote of non-confidence and among the LDP, those who once suspended the splinter movement and those self-claimed 'reformers' co-operated with the opposition. The proposal passed and the Cabinet dissolved the House of Representatives.

In the following election, the LDP lost the majority in the House of Representatives and seven opposition parties joined to form a coalition government.¹³ The Prime Minister was from the JNP, the fifth party in the coalition. The parties in the coalition had very little in common — ideologically it ranged from socialists to the LDP splinter party and historically the SDPJ had nearly half a century history while the JNP was established in 1992, not to say the NCP. The only thing in common was that they all opposed the LDP, and the government made it clear. Hosokawa promised that it would complete the political reform by the end of the year. The last half of the year was spent by the government coalition drafting the bills to be introduced in the 1994 emergency meeting. The LDP also started to prepare a renewed version of the 'Summary of the Essentials of Political Reform'.

¹² *Asahi*, 4 June, 1993.

¹³ Six parties from the House of Representatives: the SDPJ, the New Creation Party, the CGP, the JNP-Frontier, the DSP, the Union of Social Democrats and a party from the House of Councillors: the Union of Democratic Reform joined the coalition government.

Table 1
Major Differences in the Proposals for Electoral Reform

	<i>Plan 1</i>	<i>Plan 2</i>	<i>Plan 3</i>	<i>Plan 4</i>
<i>seats</i>				
simple plurality	274	280	300	300
PR	226	220	171	200
basic unit for PR	single national	7 blocks	prefecture (47 districts)	11 blocks

Plan 1 = Government Proposal

Plan 2 = Alternative Government Proposal

Plan 3 = The LDP Proposal

Plan 4 = Final Plan, also by the Council for Electoral Reform

Table 1 summarises the major differences in the proposals for the electoral system. Plan 1 is the government proposal after the negotiation with the LDP. The proposal passed the House of Representatives Special Committee for Political Reform and was transferred to the plenary session. The turbulence was well-expected, however: there were supporters of the political reform among the LDP members, even though the bills were prepared by the government. Their local constituencies were watching over their behaviour on this issue. On the other hand, the SDPJ had unyielding opposition against even a partial introduction of the simple plurality system. Those members among both the LDP and the SDPJ acted according to their belief, rather than the formal party platform. The following are the result of the roll-call vote in the House of Representatives and the House of Councillors.

The bill passed in the House of Representatives with majority support, but the House of Councillors failed because of the large dissenting votes from the SDPJ. The victory of the SDPJ in the 1989 House of Councillors election had resulted in a contradictory outcome for the government coalition. The government, however, did not give in. On 28 January, Hosokawa and LDP President Kohno met for the final negotiation. The government there proposed Plan 2 in Table 1 as a compromise for the LDP's formal proposal (Plan 3), but failed to achieve the latter's agreement. But a compromise was struck: Plan 4, principally following the original proposal by the Council for Electoral Reform in 1990. After the meeting, the prime minister commented that 'it was a large compromise to the LDP's demand'.¹⁴ The bill was proposed to the Diet the next day, and the both Houses passed the bill without specifying the date when the bills to come into effect.

¹⁴ *Asahi*, 28 January 1994.

Table 2
Results of the Roll-Call Votes, 1993-1994

Vote at the House of Representatives on 18 November 1993

(506, excluding those who were out of the country and the chairperson)

<i>Support</i>	270	<i>Oppose</i>	226	<i>Abstention</i>	10
GC	252	The LDP	204	The LDP	7
the LDP	13	GC	5	GC	1
Independents	5	(All SDPJ members)		(A SDPJ member)	
		Communists	15	Independent	2
		Independents	2		

Vote at the House of Councillors on 21 January 1994

(248, excluding the chairperson)

<i>Support</i>	118	<i>Oppose</i>	130	<i>Abstention</i>	3
GC	110	The LDP	94		
the LDP	5	GC	18		
Independents	3	(All SDPJ members)			
		Communists	11		
		Other	6		
		Independents	2		

GC = Government Coalition

Conclusion

Two phases discussed in this paper show a significant contrast in terms of actors and their strategies. In Phase I, the cabinets and the LDP were the proponents of reform, as they were urgently in need of the recovery of public confidence. There was a difference in their motive. While the former sought to increase its power over the party by taking up a popular issue among the public, the latter saw an opportunity to introduce simple plurality system and maximise its seats in the Diet. The opposition parties were all anti reform. Although they were aware of the popularity of the issue among the public and the pressure groups, the possible loss of seats accompanying the change of electoral system made them cautious in this regard. Instead, they supported the partial modification of the existing electoral system by calling for reapportionment, which had not been carried out since 1986. A clear schism appeared in this period, between the cabinet-LDP versus the opposition parties led by the SDPJ.

As it turned out, the two years' period (1990-1992) was not sufficient for the political parties to reach an agreeable proposal for a new system. There was also a concern about the introduction of plurality system among the public, cultivated by the negative campaign by the oppositions. Supported by the majority in the second house, the House of Councillors, the oppositions successfully persuaded the government to enforce the reapportionment bill instead.

However, the division between the reformer versus the anti-reformer started to fade away as the reapportionment had been conducted. Reapportioning only can correct a part of problems of the SNTV but those of wasted votes, intra-party rival-

ries were yet to be dealt with. The public expectation for a thorough reform was still present. The Cabinet was also determined to complete the reform. This time the impetus was shared by the opposition parties. Their majority in the House of Councillors was guaranteed only until 1995. If electoral reform was inevitable, it was important to take advantage of this position when the power of the LDP was contained. To form a united front against the LDP with other parties, however, the SDPJ had to give up its traditional affiliation for proportional representation. The combination system of simple plurality and proportional representation was much closer to the simple plurality system. But by increasing the seat allocation for proportional representation, proportionality would be increased and seats for allying medium and small parties would be secured. The SDPJ's switch to the combination system filled the gap between the cabinet, the LDP and the opposition parties. Hereafter the focus of the electoral reform debate shift to the subtle adjustment of political interests.

It is still unexplained why the SDPJ, nor any of other parties in the anti-LDP alliance, gained a confidence in maintaining their seats in spite of the introduction of simple plurality system. The DSP leader had voiced this concern in 1991, that 'unless the SDPJ becomes much larger in the Diet, the LDP will win overwhelmingly if the combination system is introduced'.¹⁵ There had been no change in the circumstances for the SDPJ or minor parties. The following explanations would not exhaust all possibilities, but might illuminate some important factors. Firstly, the LDP started to support simple plurality system instead of combination system, which, if introduced, would more severely damage the opposition parties. Moreover, an opinion was growing among the LDP that the party should postpone the electoral reform till the majority of the House of Councillors to be recovered. If the LDP agreed on this and persuade the cabinet, the loss of the oppositions could become unrecoverable. This forced the SDPJ to take choose one from negative options. Secondly, the LDP government was replaced by the coalition government, in which the SDPJ held the majority. Although the SDPJ had to compromise largely in terms of electoral reform policy, it would have less concern about the neutrality of statutory instalment process which would be carried out by a government appointed body after the legislation.

¹⁵ *Asahi*, 19 June 1991.