Low turnout and why it matters. The case of Japan
From stable mobilised voters to non-participants. An
explanation for continuing LDP dominance?

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This is very much work in progress and is the first draft of a new project. I would very
much appreciate any comments or suggestions, particularly on how to manipulate the
limited electoral data made available by the Japanese government.
Low turnout and why it matters. The case of Japan
From stable mobilised voters to non-participants. An explanation for continuing LDP dominance?

“On election day, why don’t you all have a lie-in” (Prime Minister Yoshio Mori, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Monday 19 June 2000)

Introduction

Japan, as most post-industrialised economies, is suffering from an acute crisis of political mobilisation that is particularly manifesting itself in low turnout. Participation should have increased in the past twenty years as access to information and education have increased and Japanese demographics have changed.¹ In reality, at a time when access to information has been at an all-time high and despite attempts to make voting easier, turnout in Japan is low. Japan is suffering from a domestic economy which is in crisis, a failing bank sector, rising unemployment, and is in the midst of seismic changes in its attitudes towards peacekeeping activities abroad, global security and its long-standing Constitution. Furthermore, she has a population which is rapidly ageing. For all of these reasons, Japan should be seeing increased political participation. In fact, the traditional Japanese methods of voter mobilisation have collapsed and no effective methods of ‘chasing’ the voter have emerged.² Consequently, turnout has fallen. The hypothesis of this paper is that it is the traditional sectors of the electorate who supported the Japanese left who have become disengaged with the political process the most. This has potentially resulted in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) being able to sustain their dominance (all be it in the form of a coalition government because of their lack of majority in the Upper House). The hypothesis of this paper is that whereas until 1993 LDP dominance was assured because of the electoral system, government control of the nation’s purse strings, malapportionment and an opposition who had given up any intention of attempting to win elections, with the newly rejuvenated opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) and an electoral system which is slowly creating a two-party system plus minor parties, it is low turnout which is currently keeping the LDP in power.

Low turnout in Japan has traditionally been considered to benefit the right of centre LDP. In my opening quotation by Prime Minister Mori, this fact is rather painfully illustrated. Mori, not known for his diplomacy or ability to avoid controversy, suggested days before the House of Representatives election in 2000 that voters should stay in bed on Election Day. In the midst of an election when nation-wide attempts to improve turnout were underway, this gaffe, rather delightfully, outlines the traditional relationship between low turnout and right-wing gains in Japan. With an increasing number of traditional left-wing voters being non-aligned and turnout dropping, this paper will attempt to assess whether low turnout has been particularly caused by falling turnout from traditional left-wing supporters. If this is the case, this has surely contributed to sustaining LDP dominance in the past eight years since they took control of the Diet in their own right after the crisis of 1993. Furthermore, with the new post-1955 system that is emerging³, it is important to question whether the old assumptions made by politicians about such things as low turnout benefiting the LDP are in fact still important factors.

In this paper, after briefly examining why the LDP were able to dominate Japanese politics during the 1955 system, the term used to describe the period 1955-1993 of LDP dominance, I shall show using public opinion poll data the extent of the drop in traditional mobilisation patterns in Japan. These will particularly show that it is traditional supporters of the left that have become most alienated from politics. According to public opinion polls, younger voters, white-collar workers, and urban voters, who have all been left-wing party supporters throughout the period of LDP dominance, no longer support any party when polled about their party of support. As turnout in elections has dropped significantly in the past decade or so, this paper’s hypothesis is that it is these voters who account for this drop in turnout and could potentially be sustaining LDP-dominance.

The extent of low turn out in Japan and its growth in the 1990s

Turnout has become a particular problem in Japan since the House of Councillors election in July 1995. Whilst clear from Graphs 1.1-1.2 that the problem of falling turnout already existed before 1995, it was the extent of the low turnout in this first national election since the historic defeat of the LDP in July 1993 that opened the eyes of the Japanese media and government to the problem. In this election turnout was 44.5%.

As can be seen from Table 1.1, turnout is particularly low in the ‘second-order’ elections for the House of Councillors. Traditionally seen by the Japanese electorate as being unimportant elections, these have seen lower levels of voting and a greater degree of protest voting. Whereas the importance of the Upper House has become increasingly important since the 1990s, turnout has particularly dropped in these elections. (Graph 1.2)

The Japanese government has recently started to take measures to increase turnout. Up to and including 1995’s House of Councillors election, polling stations were only open from 8am until 6pm. As a result of the low turnout the Japanese Government took measures to increase turnout. Polling station hours were increased from 6pm until 8pm meaning they were now open for twelve hours on Election Day. Elections are always held on Sundays in Japan to facilitate businessmen who may work a long distance from home and work long hours. In a

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move to address the problem, the Government has also made voting prior to the day of the election a less bureaucratic process. Whereas before proof of being away from the electoral district on the day of election was required, anybody can now vote in the week prior to the day of the election. The registration system for voting has also been slightly simplified which I feel could have an impact on the House of Councillors elections in particular. Prior to the changes in 2000, one had to be resident in a district for three months before becoming eligible to vote yet was not able to vote by post in the previous district or even if one had moved house within the same district. It is now possible to vote by post or in one’s former polling station. The reason for this having a particular effect on Upper House elections is that it is a fixed term election on the third Sunday of July every three years. The Japanese employment system has traditionally relocated employees from April 1 onwards. This is particularly true for civil servants. The academic year begins in April and also means that students and academics move around this time. Most rented housing contracts are also made for a year beginning in April. The former restrictions would have particularly hit voters in House of Councillors elections who had moved...
that year. These measures will have surely had some impact, yet there is no estimate of the actual impact of these precise reforms.

The Japanese process of voting remains problematic despite these reforms. Polling stations are based on primary school districts which means that most people have a considerable walk to a polling station. This is a further area of research which I feel could lead to an interesting comparative study but is not the topic of this paper. Voting requires writing the name of the candidate. Whilst literacy is very high in Japan, this system still requires votes to know the name of the candidate and is therefore a disincentive for the politically un-savvy. Other structural impediments make it difficult for Japanese to vote, but these, as above, are the subjects of other papers. What remains important however, is the increasing decline in turnout despite attempts to improve the numbers participating in elections.

Table 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election date</th>
<th>H of R turnout</th>
<th>H of C turnout</th>
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<tr>
<td>December-76</td>
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<tr>
<td>October-79</td>
<td>68.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>June-80</td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>74.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>June-83</td>
<td></td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December-83</td>
<td>67.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July-86</td>
<td>71.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>July-89</td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February-90</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July-92</td>
<td></td>
<td>50.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July-93</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>44.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July-95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October-96</td>
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<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July-98</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June-00</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>56.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July-01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What have been the traditional reasons for sustained LDP dominance?

Reasons for LDP dominance during the 1955 system, the period 1955-1993 of LDP single party rule, have long-been known. The main reason which is considered to have sustained the LDP for so long is the LDP’s amazing ability to transform itself in keeping with the times and by spending their way through government funds strategically designed to optimise electoral support. This strategy of the LDP always being ahead of the electorate is often said to be because of the factional system that meant the LDP was five parties within one throughout the 1955 system. The party managed to co-opt traditional opposition policies into its platform, most notably anti-pollution and environmental legislation in response to the various incidents in the

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5 Commonly thought to be approximately 99.4% but this has become so ‘well-known’ that the Japanese government no longer cites it within its statistical data set.
sixties and seventies of mass-pollution in Japan. A further tactic of the LDP was to rely on public-works projects as a major way of ensuring political support by promising pork in return for support.

A further factor in the dominance of the LDP was the medium-sized constituency, single-non-transferable-vote electoral system. This electoral system required a party who wanted to gain an outright majority in the election to put up more than one candidate in every district. Very soon after its formation, the JSP stopped doing this. The net-result was that the party would never be able to form a government without forming a coalition of sorts. Johnson and Christensen have shown the improbability of such a coalition being formed. Indeed, the Japan Socialist Party as the main opposition party no longer had a vision of being a government-forming party and had decided amongst itself that its main function was to be in parliament to provide a check and balance function against the LDP.

A final factor in LDP dominance during the 1955 system was the malapportionment of the old electoral system. For example in the 1979 Lower House election, one vote in the most over-represented constituency Hyogo 5 was worth 3.87 times a vote in the most under-represented constituency, Chiba 4, a dormitory town of Tokyo. In the 1977 Upper House election prefectural constituencies the greatest degree of malapportionment occurred. A vote in Tottori was worth 5.26 that of one in Tokyo. This malapportionment was sustained by the LDP as their traditional supporters were farmers. Rice-market liberalisation was restricted by the LDP to sustain high-levels of support in rural areas where votes had more affect in keeping them in power.

Problems of data
Unlike the United States, the United Kingdom etc, Japan has no major election study. This means that time-series data about party preference in elections is virtually impossible to obtain. Thus election analysis, without carrying out one’s own survey, is problematic. A group of academics based around the University of Tokyo have carried out some Japan election Surveys (1967, 1983 and 1996 House of Representatives elections) yet this data is not released. A group of American and Japanese academics came together and analysed the 1976 election and used this data to publish *The Japanese Voter*. Unfortunately this book was published fifteen years after the collection of the data rendering its usefulness somewhat less than it should have been. However, this book does provide us with a good sense of the trends of voting behaviour during the 1955 system, most notably, its descriptions of what the authors considered to be the mobilized groups within the Japanese electorate and can thus become a useful source for comparison of the 1955 system with the post-1955 system. But this still does not provide any time-series data.

All major newspapers in Japan have their own polling departments which tend to carry out monthly surveys of party preference. Again this data is rarely made available outside of the

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organisation. This data, even when available has obvious limitations. Firstly, it is public opinion poll data. Furthermore, this data is extremely limited. Firstly, it asks about party preference according to category of electoral district (metropolitan, urban, semi-urban or rural), age, sex and occupation (farmers, white collar workers, blue collar workers, manual labourers. Self-employed, non-working). The non-working category does not specify if this includes retired people or not, or whether it is just unemployed people. As many Japanese women are predominately housewives and would not class themselves as unemployed, this category is made even more problematic as there is no explanation as to what it exactly constitutes. There are also no questions made of voting preference according to income or to level of education. However, where this data can be useful is that it provides time-series data of trends in party of preference and can then be compared with actual election results to add some limited flesh to the skeleton results that elections give us.

The data in this paper has been obtained from Asahi Shinbun. Party preference according to age, sex, occupation and type of constituency was made available to me up to March 2000. I am currently in negotiations with the newspaper to obtain the next four years of data from them. This paper has thus been limited in its analysis of public opinion poll party of preference until 2000.

Similar problems exist with election results. Newspapers immediately after the election only publish percentage totals of seats and turnout. Furthermore there is a habit in Japan of the papers publishing results before the total count has been completed. This means that actual vote totals are difficult to obtain. Actual totals of votes are not published until at least a year after elections by the government (www.stat.go.jp). Two publications, Kokkai Binran published by Nihon seikei shinbunsha and Seikan Youran, published by Seisaku jihousha publish basic election results twice a year. Numbers of total eligible voters in each electoral district can only be obtained by approaching each Prefectural election committee. The data used in this paper for the 1996, 2000 and 2003 elections is from the data set compiled from these multiple sources by Tani Satomi of Okayama University.

Who voted for who in the 1955 system – mobilized voters resulting in stable voting behaviour.

Which social-structural variables have accounted for Japanese voting patterns? This data has been accumulated from the Flanagan et al 1976 study and are useful data with which to compare the 1955 system with the 1990s period of collapse of long-term dominance of the LDP.12 Increasingly since the 1960s, a variable which no longer has an impact on voting behaviour is education, due to the widening participation within the Japanese educational system. Age has slowly declined as an explanatory variable especially in urban areas. In rural areas though, it has retained its salience in explaining voting and party preference with older members of the electorate being supporters of the LDP.

Further socio-structural factors which explain party support in Japan are type of occupation and unionisation and they are more important than age or education as predictive variables. In particular farmers and the self-employed (particularly in small-retail and manufacturing sectors) tended to be LDP supporters, whereas blue and white collar workers were divided over party of support depending on their unionisation. As unionisation in Japan is at the level of company rather than as a cross-sectional ‘trade’ union, and based in large organisations, unionised

workers are more likely to be white collar workers than blue collar workers.\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, left-wing party supporters in Japan in the 1955 system were more likely to be white-collar workers than blue-collar workers.

With the expanding tertiary sector, workers are becoming less unionised. Whilst sheer numbers of members are dropping, so to, is the ability of the union to mobilise its members. This, according to Flanagan et al was the beginnings of change in the 1980s from a hard core unionised support for the Japanese left to a more fluid voting pattern. Self-employed workers are also declining as the Japanese economy becomes more globalised. This has affected the core support for the LDP.

Finally, Flanagan et al confirmed that social networks have been an important variable in stabilizing Japanese voting patterns. This is particularly true for the LDP who rely on networks based on community, kinship, occupation, school, and other social ties. These social networks are mainly effective in LDP mobilisation and work primarily in rural contexts. Community based networks have been particularly LDP oriented and these lose all effectiveness within a urban or metropolitan\textsuperscript{14} context. Unions work as a similar social-network based mobilisation force for the left parties.

Flanagan et al, prior to publication attempted to bring their 1976 data up to date for their 1991 publication. In conclusion they acknowledge that

“Japanese voters appear to be becoming more volatile and more responsive to social network cues and psychological influences that are not based on nor exclusive to broad occupational and demographic categories. This conclusion regarding increased volatility, or at least the increased potential for volatility, is reinforced by the findings regarding the declines in the proportions of self-employed and the falling levels and party loyalty of unionists… This change foreshadows a rise in electoral volatility.”\textsuperscript{15}

How has support amongst mobilized groups changed since the 1955 system?

I shall now turn to discussion of how attitudes to party preference have changed since the 1955 system and how the electoral volatility predicted by Flanagan et al has manifested itself. The following data is taken from Asahi Shinbun and is taken from their monthly survey in which they ask members of the electorate for their preferred party and for any party for which they have strong support.

As detailed in the discussion of both the limitations of the data and in comparison with the variables highlighted above, I shall be analysing party support public opinions polls according to age, type of constituency of residence of voter and occupation. In the graphs I will show data according to LDP support, left-support (Japan Socialist Party until 1996 and Democratic Party of Japan since 1996), others, which includes all other minor centre parties in Japan (apart from the Japan Communist Party (JCP)) and non-partisan support.

\textsuperscript{13} Flanagan, \textit{ibid}, p 69.
\textsuperscript{14} Japan’s largest 13 cities
\textsuperscript{15} Flanagan, \textit{ibid}, p 82.
In the following data, the clear trend is in the increase of the non-aligned nature of the Japanese electorate. Furthermore, voters traditionally aligned with the left seem to have become alienated from mainstream politics to a greater level than voters traditionally aligned with the right. After considering this polling data, I shall then question whether this decline in party-alignment of left-voters accounts for the drop in turnout. If this is the case, the drop in turnout can be considered a contributing factor to the dominance of the LDP.

Graph 1.3 shows the relative stability of party of preference throughout the last 10 years of the 1955 system. In 1989, various scandals and political issues came together to result in the electorate turning against the LDP and to vote for the JSP. In this graph, this tendency is shown to have emerged from the middle of 1988 and culminated in the Upper House election of 1989, a ‘second-order’ election which saw a protest vote against the LDP.¹⁶

However, after this election, the status quo was momentarily restored until 1993. The growth of the support levels for other parties is because of the new parties, Shinseitō and Sakigake which broke away from the LDP and competed against them in the 1993 Lower House election. The other noteworthy aspect of this graph is the sudden increase from 1995 onwards of the non-aligned voter. 60% of the polled electorate have no party of preference in 1997.

Graphs 1.4 and 1.5 show the period 1988-2000 in more detail and according to age. We would expect the 20-24 year olds to be left-of-party supporters and the over 60s to be LDP supporters. In fact the 20-24 year olds were LDP supporters (apart from in 1993 with the emergence of the new parties), and in comparison to any other party, still are with around 20% support. The major development amongst young voters is the increase in the non-aligned voter, with over 70% in 1997 and nearly 70% in 2000 having no party of preference. These figures have particular significance as an explanation of low turnout. Whilst never strong opposition party supporters, they are a group which will strongly endorse protest votes and third-option parties (see 1989 and 1993) and their non-alignment would seem to strengthen the LDP position. Graph 1.5 shows more consistent support for the LDP as one would expect from voters over 60. Whilst this group has also increased in its tendencies to non-alignment, the fact that this segment of the electorate, which is the largest growing section of the population has managed to maintain a preference for the LDP is significant. The LDP voter seems to maintain stable support-patterns more than other voters.
In Graph 1.6, data from the metropolitan districts in which Flanagan et al predicted decreasing partisanship is shown. Whereas at the beginning of the 1955 system, the left-wing voter was thought to predominate in the urban districts, in the 1990s the left-wing voter has all but disappeared. The LDP voter remains to some extent, but here the significance is that metropolitan districts are volatile due to the increase of the non-aligned voter in these districts. Social networks have no real effect in urban areas and consequently traditional methods of mobilization for the LDP do not work. But neither does anything else seem to be mobilizing the left. This data would suggest that metropolitan areas are subject to swing voting should the non-aligned voter be mobilized but are also likely to be LDP supporting districts should the non-aligned voter remain in that undecided state.

In comparison in rural districts, where social networks have long been of major import in mobilizing LDP support, the non-partisan and the LDP supporter both account for about 40% of the electorate. As will be discussed below, there is still malapportionment in favour of rural districts, and thus the LDP are still benefiting from their relative support in these districts.  

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17 This is a tendency which is increasingly set to decline in its importance. The new electoral system calls for malproportionment not to exceed a ratio of 1: 2.49. To this end, both single-member and PR districts were adjusted in 2000 after the House of Representatives election.
Finally, in Graph 1.8, we see the decrease in the ability of the key-identified occupations as mobilisers of the left and right. All occupational sectors analysed show increasing tendencies towards non-alignment. But once again, this increased non-alignment is particularly prevalent from traditional left-wing party supporters, Whilst farmers and the self-employed are showing increased non-alignment, it has not been so pronounced as for blue and white collar workers which would suggest, once again, traditional LDP mobilised groups are displaying a less-prevalent tendency to non-alignment.

So, has the LDP benefited from low turn out?

These data have thus drawn a picture of traditional left-wing mobilised voters being more de-aligned than traditional supporters of the LDP. As has been seen above, turnout has dropped and in the remainder of this paper, I will attempt to analyse whether this drop in turnout can be attributed to the non-aligned voter, and in particular to those voters who have traditionally voted for the left.
Prime Minister Mori’s request in 2000 for people to stay in bed was based on the assumption, long-held in analysis of Japanese party politics, that low turnout benefits the LDP. In this next section, we shall use the very limited data that Japan releases about election results to analyse whether the LDP have indeed benefited from low turnout.

**Data from election results**

Due to the paucity of electoral data from Japan, the following section will rely on ecological fallacy to attempt to show if the hypothesis of this paper of low turnout maintaining LDP dominance can be shown to be correct. With no data examining how members of the electorate actually vote such as reliable exit polls, or a nationwide election study, the only data available which can indicate partisan support in Japan is electoral district data based on the notion discussed above that urban and rural dwellers will vote differently. Electoral districts have been traditionally categorised as metropolitan (Japan’s 10 largest cities), urban (shi), semi-urban (shi and gun) and rural (predominantly made up of gun). The newspapers have their own categorisation of the new districts in these categories but have yet to release the data. For the sake of this study, the new districts have been categorised based on analysing which areas of the old districts have been allocated to the new districts and according to the relative degree of urban areas (shi) and rural areas (gun) in each district.¹⁸

**Trends of relative voting for left (JSP and DPJ) and LDP**

Evidence does suggest that the hypothesis that the left is suffering most from low turnout is partially true. In Graphs 1.9-1.11, scattergrams show the spread of LDP and DPJ won districts according to their percentage of the vote and the turnout in the district. In each of these graphs, DPJ won seats have a greater tendency to be in constituencies which their there is low turnout with DPJ seats being congregated in the lower-left hand of the graph. However, contrary to the hypothesis, DPJ-won seats tend to be won with relatively low percentages of the total turnout of the constituency (with obvious exceptions and outliers) whereas we would have expected them to have to get overall higher vote percentages. I would expect that LDP mobilisation methods which are more broad-reaching and effective than those employed by the left, would mean that for the DPJ to be able to win a seat, they have to win proportionally higher numbers of votes than the LDP. My suggestion is that this is due to the higher number of wins of the DPJ within urban and metropolitan districts. If, after further testing, this proves to be true, it would therefore suggest that low turnout is not particularly proving to be a hindrance to the DPJ, despite evidence from the public opinion polls that suggest that it should be. Further testing therefore needs to be carried out in, particular, to see if the districts with low turnout where the DPJ win with low percentages of the vote are urban and metropolitan areas.

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¹⁹ When the 2005 census data is made available, these findings can be corroborated.
Graph 1.9. Percentage of votes for winning candidates (LDP and DPJ) compared to the level of turnout in electoral districts, October 1996

Graph 1.10. Percentage of votes for winning candidates (LDP and DPJ) compared to the level of turnout in electoral districts, June 2000

Table 1.2
Average turnout of single-member-districts according to type of constituency in DPJ and LDP won districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Metropolitan</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Semi-urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct 1996</td>
<td>53.66 (n=6, sd=2.64)</td>
<td>53.85 (n=3, sd=1.87)</td>
<td>59.91 (n=5, sd=2.27)</td>
<td>60.60 (n=3, sd=4.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPJ</td>
<td>55.54 (n=25, sd=2.4)</td>
<td>58.02 (n=25, sd=5.95)</td>
<td>61.46 (n=83, sd=6.14)</td>
<td>67.33 (n=36, sd=5.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
The tentative conclusion from the scattergrams that the DPJ wins in districts with a low turnout is also suggested in Table 1.2. Whilst we would expect that the DPJ would need considerably more votes (and a higher turnout would better enable this) than the LDP to win semi-urban and rural districts in 1996, the DPJ managed to win 17 single-member districts with lower average turnout in those districts than the districts in which the LDP won seats. However, this election was slightly problematic. The DPJ had only been in existence for three weeks at the time of this election and some districts could have been won by what Reed terms the ‘boom-effect’.20 Furthermore, the DPJ won only 17 seats in this election which problematises any results.

Table 1.3
Average turnout of single-member-districts according to type of constituency in DPJ and LDP won districts

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<th></th>
<th>June 2000 Metropolitan</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Semi-urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DPJ winning</td>
<td>58.68 (n= 26, sd=2.99)</td>
<td>59.28 (n=30, sd=3.07)</td>
<td>66.47 (n=19, 4.14)</td>
<td>69.67 (n=6, sd=7.4)</td>
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<td>single-member</td>
<td>district</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>district</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDP winning</td>
<td>58.25 (n=18, sd=2.39)</td>
<td>58.97 (n=25, sd=3.56)</td>
<td>63.99 (n=99, sd=4.94)</td>
<td>68.87 (n= 35, sd=5.1)</td>
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<td>single-member</td>
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Table 1.4
Average turnout of single-member-districts according to type of constituency in DPJ and LDP won districts

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nov 2003 Metropolitan</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Semi-urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DPJ winning</td>
<td>56.47 (n=31, sd=2.77)</td>
<td>57.15 (n=37, sd=3)</td>
<td>62.6 (n=31, sd=4.91)</td>
<td>67.33 (n=5, sd=6.22)</td>
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<td>single-member</td>
<td>district</td>
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<tr>
<td>district</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDP winning</td>
<td>56.77 (n=14, sd=2.29)</td>
<td>56.05 (n=21, sd=4.17)</td>
<td>61.49 (n=95, sd=5.03)</td>
<td>63.59 (n=35, sd=5.14)</td>
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<tr>
<td>single-member</td>
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</table>

In contrast to 1996, the 2000 and 2003 elections do give results that are slightly more in line with the hypothesis. To win a seat in the semi-urban or rural districts, the DPJ seems to need a higher turnout. We would expect these rural and semi-urban seats to be LDP strongholds and as such it is not surprising that the DPJ win them when there is a higher turnout.

In both 2000 and 2003, the DPJ and LDP, however, seem to win urban and metropolitan districts with a similar level of average turnout in the districts. If this suggested outcome is indeed true, how can this finding, which is inconsistent with the hypothesis be explained? Whilst we expect the LDP to find it more difficult to win urbanised districts and we expect the DPJ to gain more seats in this type of district, we would have thought that the DPJ would need a higher turnout to win one of these seats. The evidence so far suggests that this is not the case. This would suggest therefore, that urbanised voters have equal preference for the DPJ and the LDP and that the LDP has managed to penetrate the urban vote. Also, it is possible

20 Steven Reed, ‘bu-mu no seiji, shinjilyukurabu kara hosokawa renritsu seiken e’, Leviathan, 18, 1996.
that the non-aligned voter, when elections happen, become divided into the LDP and DPJ supporting camps.

There seems to be insufficient evidence therefore to say that the DPJ are suffering because of low turnout. However, conventional wisdom suggests that the left does do badly because of low turnout in Japan and further work is needed to show whether this is the case in the newly emerging two-party system that has been created since the end of the 1955-system. Before finally concluding, I shall briefly look at other reasons which can be accountable in explaining LDP-continuing dominance.

Other reasons for the LDP remaining dominant during the 1990s and noughties.

There are other factors which account for the LDP dominance into the newly named 1998 system, the period 1998 to the present day in which the LDP is the lead party in a coalition government because of its lack of a majority in the Upper House. Most of these factors are connected with the new electoral system which was introduced in 1994.

Firstly, the LDP has benefited from the relative imbalance of single member districts to PR seats. Traditional LDP campaign practices have survived the changes to the electoral system and favour candidates who campaign within limited spaces. The traditional method of campaigning as described by Curtis have been maintained. The jiban districts of concentrated still exist as a concept and koenkai, the support groups are still in existence and are still the main method of voter mobilisation in the non-metropolitan districts. The opposition party the DPJ, can not simply gain as many SMD seats as the LDP due to the embedded structures the LDP have in place such as koenkai and jiban. This is shown in Chart 1.2. In SMD, issues are localised which also reinforces LDP support in return for pork barrel style public works projects which have been a LDP mobilisational method since the beginnings of the 1955 system. Whereas in the old electoral system the opposition were able to take the bottom one or two seats in the medium sized electoral districts, the new SMD clearly result in more wasted support for the opposition. The seat reduction from 200-180 PR seats in 2000, has also limited the opposition’s ability to soak up seats from a segment of elections where the electorate tend to vote in the form of a protest vote - as the electorate see the PR section of the electoral system as the ‘second-order’ part of the electoral system and ensuing Diet.

Chart 1.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Number of seats in SMD Total = 300</th>
<th>Number of seats in PR Total = 200 in 1996 and 180 since 2000</th>
<th>% of seats from SMD of total number of seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td>DPJ</td>
<td>LDP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1996</td>
<td>169 (56.3)</td>
<td>17 (5.6)</td>
<td>70 (35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2000</td>
<td>177 (59)</td>
<td>80 (26.6)</td>
<td>56 (31.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other factors continue to promote support for the LDP. The new electoral system has maintained the old system of the elector writing the name of the candidate selected on a blank ballot paper. A large party like the LDP is able to publicise its message to a far greater degree than the opposition and thus benefits from this system. Since 1996 the opposition DPJ has had to rebuild and redefine both mobilisational methods and an infrastructure for the party which broke away from the old socialists which once again leaves the LDP in a dominant and powerful position.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that the non-aligned voter has been in ascendance in Japan. This paper has then tested to see whether the low turnout which has been increasing has been at the expense of the opposition and benefited the LDP. Turnout has undoubtedly dropped and this paper has attempted to analyse whether this drop in turnout can be attributed to traditional left-wing partisans who have been shown by polling data to have become de-aligned to a greater extent than traditional LDP supporters.

Whilst these conclusions are still tentative and based on limited data, turnout seem to have less of an impact on election results than we would expect. It would seem that the DPJ needs marginally higher turnout to win seats in rural and semi-urban districts, whereas in metropolitan and urban districts, turnout does not seem to affect the result.

Even were more evidence able to show that the left has suffered from low turnout, it remains to be seen whether this will be a long-term state of affairs. The left is in a period of growth and resurgence. The DPJ managed to win 177 seats in 2003, forced the discussion of policy manifestos in Japanese elections for the first time and is generally in a period of ascendance. Whether a two-party system will really emerge remains to be seen. Should this happen, there might be two possible impacts on the problem of low turnout in Japan. It could be that a two-party system will either negate the effects of low turnout by engaging voters once again and providing an incentive for voting as the electorate will feel that their vote can make a difference in forming governments which is a luxury which hitherto the Japanese have not had, or, it could continue to worsen for a myriad of reasons, none other than the LDP’s continued dominance of power.