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The Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese Studies Series

THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF JAPAN

THE REALITIES OF 'POWER'

Kōji Nakakita

Translated by Stephen Johnson

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ROUTLEDGE

The Liberal Democratic Party of Japan

This book provides a thorough analysis of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP) from a variety of perspectives including its factions, party presidential elections, the distribution of posts, national elections, local organisations, the policy making process and partner organisations.

Drawing on comprehensive and up-to-date data, as well as a large number of interviews, internal party documents and quantitative data, *The Liberal Democratic Party of Japan* explains the machinery of the Japanese government and ruling party, exploring how policies are made. In so doing, the chapters also analyse the strengths and weaknesses of today's LDP through a comparison of Koizumi Jun'ichirō and Abe Shinzō, both having established long-lasting administrations through their strong leadership.

Demonstrating how the LDP has changed significantly over recent years, particularly since the political reforms of 1994, this book will be extremely useful to students and scholars of Japanese and Asian politics.

Kōji Nakakita is Professor of Politics at Hitotsubashi University in Tōkyō, Japan. He has published seven books in Japanese including *The Establishment of the 1955 System in Japanese Politics* (2002).

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The Liberal Democratic Party of Japan

The Realities of ‘Power’

Kōji Nakakita

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Series editor preface

The Liberal Democratic Party of Japan

Kōji Nakakita

The Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese Studies Series is now well past its 100th volume, and has published across a wide variety of areas relating to Japan, including political science, social anthropology, international relations, modern history, education, business, economics, religion and the arts. The broad aim of the series is to inform readers of the many aspects of Japan and Japanese people, using objective and where necessary critical methodologies. We believe that the rest of the world can learn much from the experience of what is now the third largest economy in the world and is heir to sophisticated national traditions.

Some books in the series are translations of books that appeared originally in Japanese (and in two cases French). We believe that books presenting original and high-quality research on Japan in Japanese (and other languages) deserve the wider distribution that publication in English should provide. The present volume by Professor Nakakita, a renowned specialist in the politics of his own country, has been translated by Dr Stephen Johnson, himself a contributor to the series.

The Liberal Democratic Party is by far the most successful political party in Japan. Since it was founded in 1955, it has had to relinquish power only during two periods: for several months in 1993–4, then between September 2009 and December 2012, though since 1994 it has usually exercised power in coalition with much smaller parties. As the dominant party presiding over one of the world's leading economies, it is embedded in a political system that embraces not only the LDP and the National Diet (Parliament) but also government ministries and agencies as well as interest groups representing business, agriculture, the professions and other sections of society.

The book provides much illuminating detail about politics in Japan over recent decades. Accepting the overarching framework of single-party dominance, Nakakita develops two fundamental arguments. The first is that since the transitional decade of the 1990s the political system has changed in significant ways. In earlier decades – and despite the commanding position of the LDP – political decision making was to a remarkable extent a ‘bottom-up’ affair, and the central executive was relatively weak. In contrast, following reforms put in place in the late 1990s, by the 2010s the executive had become far stronger and better coordinated, with policies executed more smoothly. Putting it another

way, constraints on arbitrary use of power by government are significantly weaker than when rival factions within the LDP enforced real limits on governmental power, and prime-ministerial turnover was frequent. Today, factions within the LDP remain important but almost all of them back the regime.

Nakakita's second key argument relates to political leadership. By common consent, the two most important prime ministers since 2000 have been Koizumi Jun'ichirō (2001–6) and Abe Shinzō (2012–). Some observers are inclined to see them both as cut from the same cloth of a rightist bloc intent on overturning much of the democratic ethos put in place by the Allied Occupation between 1945 and 1952. Nakakita shows, however, that both the intentions and practice of these two men have significantly differed. Koizumi was a neoliberal intent on eradicating the featherbedding of vested interests, and his methods could be spectacularly confrontational. Abe, by contrast, has been much more traditional and kind to vested interests in his methods, while centralising real power in the hands of a small number of officials, many of them based in the prime minister's office. The author shows that, although Abe makes much of his economic reforms informally called 'Abenomics', he has been striving to promote pride in nationhood, and to rehabilitate certain aspects of the regime that developed under the Meiji Restoration of 1889. In particular he has sought to strengthen Japanese defence capacities and if possible to revise the 1947 'Peace' Constitution, though success in this is by no means assured.

For anybody interested in the modern political development of Japan, this book is a well-argued source of essential insights.

Arthur Stockwin
Roger Goodman

Preface

The LDP is a political party which represents contemporary Japan. Following its formation in 1955, and after maintaining its position in government for an unprecedented 38 years, it then lost power twice, in 1993 and then 2009. On both occasions, there were those who said the party's time was at an end. However, in each case, the LDP in fact was to arrange for its return to power within a small space of time. What is more, following the misadventures of the DPJ government, the LDP is regarded again as 'all powerful' (*ikkō* in Japanese). In this way, the LDP has weathered the storms that accompanied losing power, only to heighten its resilience, all the more. Today we can say in the very least, it has become extremely difficult to imagine for the foreseeable future a world where the LDP will not be a key player in Japanese politics.

This book provides a comprehensive analysis of the LDP from a variety of perspectives including its factions, party presidential elections, the distribution of posts, national elections, the policy making process and partner organisations. We also look at the local party and personal support organisations of elected politicians.

It is possible to appraise Japan's ruling party in a variety of ways. In recent years, especially since the return of the Abe government after 2012, Japanese public opinion and the mass media has tended to see things in either black or white, something which may have been spurred on by the spread of social media. In this context, opinions of the LDP tend to polarise around either the positive or negative. My view is that whether one supports the LDP or not, it is essential to start from the position that attempts a sober assessment of the real situation that the party finds itself.

The academic approach that this book takes is an empirical one. Aside from drawing on the general news media, the analysis is sourced from the party's newspaper *Jiyūminshu* (previously *Jiyūshinpō*) and its monthly magazines, as well as a large amount of quantitative data. Along with materials collected by the author, the book uses internal party documents available in the above party publications, as well as *Jiyūminshutō* (ed.), *Jiyūminshutō 50 nenshi shiryōhen*, Tōkyō: Liberal Democratic Party, 2006. Also, we have carried out a substantial number of interviews with LDP Diet members, staff at party Headquarters and those working for factions, as well as individuals associated with such organisations as

the Keidanren and Kōmeitō. Most of these, however, were given on the condition of anonymity.

Any analysis of a contemporary situation like this one faces certain difficulties alongside the obvious problems associated with having access to only limited information. This is understandable given the object of our enquiries is itself in a state of constant flux. Indeed, one reason for the LDP's longevity is its ability, since foundation, to flexibly morph its organisation and ideas in each period. As a consequence, we need to recognise that the current situation is just one chapter in a much longer story of change. This book regards the mid-1980s as the heyday of the LDP under the '1955 System' and through a comparison with this time, we try to capture a likeness of the LDP today. Of course, it is the political reforms of 1994 which explain a large part of why the party changed between these two times.

Having said that, since those reforms, it is not as if developments inside LDP have followed just one track. For example, in recent years both the cabinets of Koizumi Jun'ichirō and Abe Shinzō might be cited as LDP governments which have enjoyed strong leadership and achieved good results in national elections. However, meaningful differences exist between the political methods of Koizumi and Abe, due to the emergence of the DPJ and the change in government which took place in 2009. Thus, when looking at the LDP's situation today, we also need to have some consideration for the changes that have taken place since the period of Japan's political reform.

The Japanese language version of this book *Jimintō: 'Ikkyō' no jitsuzō* was published on 25 April 2017 as a monograph in the Chūkō shinsho series. Happily, this gained a circulation of about 20,000 copies and was reprinted twice. The book also led to a number of interviews and reviews by scholarly and more general media outlets, including magazines and newspapers and it has been rated by some as the most authoritative study of the LDP today.

The English version is a full and fair translation of the Japanese original, but a limited number of changes have been made to bring its contents up to date. The first is a second section added to the conclusion which provides a simple account of the changes that have taken place in the LDP since 2017. The second are additions to data to make the tables and figures as current as possible. Readers should note that this book has been translated following the Japanese convention of expressing people's names in the order family name first, given name second.

That this English volume is to be published as a monograph in the Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese Studies Series, with its distinguished history, is a signal honour. This opportunity has been given me by the University of Oxford's Professor J. A. A. Stockwin and Professor Roger Goodman, to whom I must offer my heartfelt thanks. I would also like to register a debt of deep gratitude to Ms Stephanie Rogers and Ms Georgina Bishop who helped me in editing the manuscript and Professor Nakano Kōichi of Sophia University, who recommended this book to Professor Stockwin.

Dr Stephen Johnson, also an author in this series, undertook the translation work. I can imagine it was quite a task to deal with me as the project advanced,

while fitting all this in around his busy job in finance. To him, I would like to offer special thanks. As it turns out, Stephen and I were old friends during our days as graduate students, and I do feel particularly pleased that we have been able to recover our former relationship through this work.

I must also thank Hitotsubashi graduate students Ōwada Yūta, Kurono Shōta and Tani Kei, each for the support they gave to the translation project. I would like to also express my gratitude to Chūkō shinsho's former chief editor Shirato Naoto, who was so kind in making supportive proposals at the time of the English publication. It goes without saying that any and all responsibility for this book rests solely with the author.

Glossary of main terms and abbreviations

CDP	Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan
CEFP	Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy
Dōyūkai	Japan Association of Corporate Executives
DP	Democratic Party
DPFP	Democratic Party for the People
DPJ	Democratic Party of Japan
IGPD	interest group policy division
JA	Japan Agricultural Cooperatives
JA Zenchū	Central Union of Agricultural Cooperatives
JCP	Japan Communist Party
JMA	Japan Medical Association
JSDF	Japan Self-Defence Forces
JSP	Japan Socialist Party
Keidanren	Japan Business Federation
Kōmeitō	Formerly Clean Government Party established by Sōka Gakkai
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
MMM	Mixed Member Majoritarian
Nisshō	Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry
PM	prime minister
PR	proportional representation
PRC	Policy Research Council
PRCB	Policy Research Council Board
RPRPPC	Ruling Parties' Responsible Persons Policy Committee
YKK	Group of Katō Kōichi, Yamasaki Taku and Koizumi Jun'ichirō

1 Factions

The ‘parties within a party’ weaken

On the road to retreat

The twilight of the Heiseiken

At one time, faction was a byword for Liberal Democratic Party politics. During the period spanning from the 1980s to the early 1990s, the Thursday Club led by former Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei and its descendent factions, reigned as the largest such organisation. The Thursday Club’s successor was the Keiseikai, the faction of Takeshita Noboru. Not only did this faction gather a huge number of Diet members under its protection, but it arranged them as ‘policy tribes’ (*zoku-giin* in Japanese), the Diet members who specialised in various areas of policy, chief among which were matters relating to construction and the Japan Post. These policy tribes would deal with lobbying and extend their networks into industry organisations. In this way, the Keiseikai once demonstrated overwhelming strength in party presidential elections, playing the role of political kingmaker. It even built a deep connection with the opposition parties, making the management of affairs in the legislature an area of expertise.

The Heisei Kenkyūkai (or Heiseiken) which succeeded the Keiseikai, however has shown none of the potency of earlier years. Measured by its Diet membership, it was still the second largest faction after the Seiwa Seisaku Kenkyūkai (Seiwakai), but it had completely lost the ‘iron bonds’ that held it together during the time when its members would ‘line up together at bento box lunches’. Since the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) had won control of the government in 2009, powerful and key faction members were defecting, one after another. The list of leavers was long; Ishiba Shigeru, Kosaka Kenji, Itō Tatsuya, Kamoshita Ichirō, Tamura Norihisa, Sakurada Yoshitaka, Tanahashi Yasufumi, Kawai Katsuyuki and Yoshikawa Takamori.

This faction was unable to hold itself together because of failed leadership. Nukaga Fukushirō, who was appointed faction chair immediately after the 2009 general elections, did have experience as party Policy Research Council (PRC) chair and as finance minister. However, he lacked any record of challenging for the party leadership, having abandoned his candidacy in both the 2006 and 2007 LDP presidential elections. Indeed, Nukaga has not been highly regarded as a faction leader, both on the basis of his ability to raise funds and his skills as a manager

2 *Factions*

of his organisation's membership. Thus, virtually no voices have been heard advocating him as a candidate for the party leadership and his more likely highest promotion will be to the position of Speaker of the House of Representatives.

In recounting these details, we can see that the Heiseiken's biggest problem may be the absence of an obvious alternative to Nukaga within its ranks. The faction could muster few members to back deputy chair Motegi Toshimitsu even with his experience of important posts in the party and government, and his accomplishments as a political operator. Another deputy chair, Takeshita Wataru, might have been put forward, although this would have not been a positive choice, there being no reasonable expectation of him sharing in the high political talents of his brother and former prime minister, Takeshita Noboru. Obuchi Yūko, the second daughter of Heiseiken founder Obuchi Keizō, was also seen as a rising star in the faction, until she was forced to resign her position as Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, because of problems with 'money politics'. The Heiseiken has been stuck between a rock and a hard place, ever since.

The Heiseiken's difficulties did not originate recently and can be traced back to 1992 when the Hata Tsutomu group, led by Ozawa Ichirō, seceded from the faction (then called the Keiseikai). The real turning point for the faction came with the party presidential elections of 2001, when the then faction chair, Hashimoto Ryūtarō, lost to Koizumi Jun'ichirō. From that point onwards, Prime Minister Koizumi, whose slogan was 'Smash the old LDP', pushed forward neoliberal policies in areas such as the government's privatisation of the Japan Highway Public Corporation, and the Japan Post, while promoting cutbacks in public works spending. As Koizumi plotted the dismantling of this faction, he landed successive blows on the Heiseiken, and in doing so, was even able to draw on the support of Aoki Mikio, who was a dominant figure in that same faction and the LDP's secretary general of the upper house at that time.

In the 2003 party presidential elections, the Heiseiken was unable to rally itself behind Fujii Takao and it tasted another defeat at the hands of Koizumi. The next year, on the discovery of illegal political contributions by the Japan Dental Association, the political organisation of the Japan Dentists Federation, Hashimoto was driven out of his position as faction chair. In the 2005 general elections, after the Heiseiken lost several members who had rebelled against the government's postal privatisation programme, Tsushima Yūji, someone perhaps never likely to be considered a candidate for the premiership, filled the vacancy at the head of the faction. These developments underlined how far the faction had lost its verve.

Today, the faction's main office is located on the third floor in the Western Annex of the Zenkoku Chōson Kaikan, a building just behind the LDP Headquarters. At one time, the office of the Keiseikai/Heiseiken used to be in the premises of the Sabō Kaikan, and then the TBR Building, but after it moved, the floor space it occupied halved. Faction staff were reduced from previously four or five people, to just two, and with that, the faction's capacity to handle

lobbying from various constituents and industrial organisations also markedly weakened. Even the ‘Corps of Secretaries’, that had been organised so rigidly as the shock troops of party and national elections, have now come to resemble more of a social club.

The case of the Kōchikai

The Kōchikai (Kōchi Seisaku Kenkyūkai) traces its origins back to Yoshida Shigeru, and like the Heiseiken, it has been considered part of the ‘conservative mainstream’. It is a faction of some renown, and the launching pad for the prime ministerships of Ikeda Hayato, Ōhira Masayoshi, Suzuki Zenkō and Miyazawa Kiichi. Former bureaucrats played a central role in the Kōchikai and Ikeda, Ōhira, and Miyazawa were each former Ministry of Finance officials before joining. It was sometimes called as the ‘Aristocrats’ Club’, because though members of this faction were knowledgeable about policy, they were seen to be timid when faced with the cut and thrust of politics. The Kōchikai has, regardless, come to hold its own as one of the top three LDP factions, alongside the Seiwakai, which traces itself back to Kishi Nobusuke and Fukuda Takeo, and the Keiseikai/Heiseiken. In recent years, however, this same Kōchikai has been struggling through its own malaise.

The most significant reason why the Kōchikai has fallen into such difficulties is to be found in the ‘Katō Riot’, which occurred in 2000 when the then faction chair, Katō Kōichi unsuccessfully sided with a vote of no-confidence against the cabinet of Mori Yoshirō, tabled by the opposition parties. It followed that the Kōchikai divided in two, and rather unusually, both factions took on the Kōchikai name.¹ In 2008, these two strands reunited but were unable to dispel the ill-will created by the ‘Katō Riot’. In response to the faction’s handling of the party presidential elections of 2012, the Kōchikai split again, and certain faction members, led by former party president Tanigaki Sadakazu left to form a group called the Yūrinkai.

The loss of faction unity has been undeniable. Since 2009, in addition to the ten or so colleagues who left the faction with Tanigaki, heavy hitters such as Suzuki Shun’ichi, Shiozaki Yasuhisa, Suga Yoshihide have also departed. Even though he was faction chair, Koga Makoto chose to withdraw from frontline politics after deciding not to stand in the 2012 general elections, despite his broad personal connections, fundraising ability and strong skills as a manager of the group. Koga’s influence continued to run through the faction afterwards, but his power declined due to his mishandling of the 2015 party presidential elections, which saw Abe Shinzō re-elected unopposed. Today, the Kōchikai’s position as the third largest faction is under threat from the Ikōkai, led by Asō Tarō.

This loss of the Kōchikai’s animal spirits resembled the same process in the Heiseiken. Like the Heiseiken, the office of the Kōchikai is located in the Zenkoku Chōson Kaikan, in its Western Annex on the sixth floor. The Kōchikai has occupied a similar amount of office space in terms of meeting rooms and reception rooms as the Heiseiken, but compared to the time when the premises

4 *Factions*

were located in the Nihon Jitensha Kaikan, which were offices appointed with a separate area for the chair and administration each, floor space has shrunk to as little as one-third of that previously. Moreover, at its peak, faction staff head-count was five, but today totals just two.

If we sustain this comparison with the Heiseiken a little further, however, one can suggest things are somewhat more up-beat within the Kōchikai. One reason for this is the presence of Kishida Fumio as faction chair. Of course, it might be pointed out that he has an unpromising position, given he lacks experience in any of the three main party executive roles such as secretary general. Neither has he been a candidate in party presidential elections. He has, however, served for a long period as minister of foreign affairs, an important cabinet post, he is young and well positioned for what happens when Abe is no longer in charge. Elsewhere, inside the Kōchikai, others are watching and waiting for the next LDP regime that is to come. Foremost among them is Hayashi Yoshimasa, who has already stood in party presidential elections. Of course, these factors may be a source of instability in the future also.

One thing that helps hold the faction together is the Kōchikai brand. The faction was created immediately after Japan's conservative forces united and it is the same Kōchikai that produced Ikeda Hayato, who was appointed prime minister after the US Japan Security Treaty Dispute in 1960, an emergency that defined the legacy of his predecessor, Kishi Nobusuke. In contrast to Kishi, Ikeda chose as his slogan, 'tolerance and perseverance'. He shelved constitutional revision and gave weight to dialogue with the parties of opposition. Later, from the same faction, Ōhira Masayoshi when foreign minister in the Tanaka cabinet, managed to normalise Sino-Japanese relations while preserving Japan's pivotal US relationship. The liberal and dovish ideas fostered within this faction along with its history, have served to underpin the Kōchikai's brand for sure.

Has the Seiwakai's time come?

Of the three largest factions that have existed from the LDP's beginnings, it is the Seiwakai which has been most powerful in recent years.² The Seiwakai traces its lineage back to Kishi Nobusuke and Fukuda Takeo. It was the faction that endured continual disappointments during the golden years of the Tanaka faction and its successors the Keiseikai and Heiseiken. However, from its ranks Mori Yoshirō and Koizumi Jun'ichirō were appointed party president. Under these two leaders, the faction achieved its long-held desire to become the largest such LDP grouping. Subsequently, its members Abe Shinzō and Fukuda Yasuo were made party leader in succession and two terms later, Abe was re-appointed LDP president. Consequently, the Seiwakai now seems to hold the same position enjoyed by the Keiseikai in days gone by.

Here it is worth considering how the LDP Diet membership has been divided among its largest factions, namely the Keiseikai/Heiseiken, Kōchikai and Seiwakai, since the mid-1980s (Figure 1.1).³

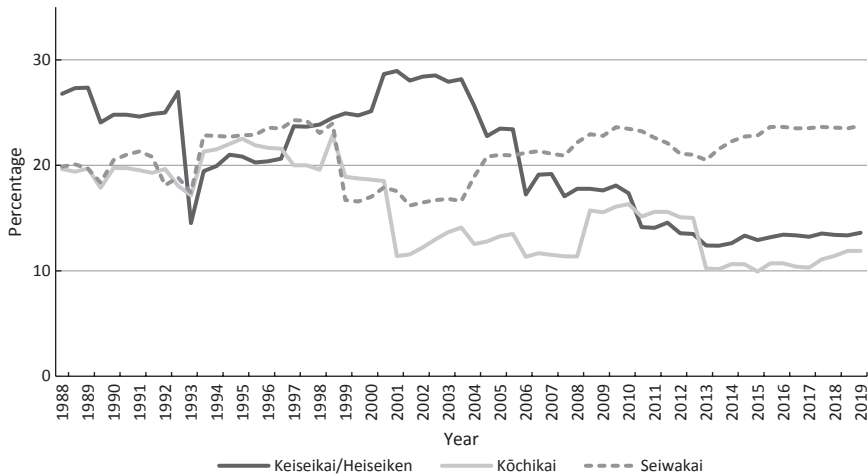


Figure 1.1 LDP top three factions' share of membership in both houses of the Diet (1988–2019).

Source: *Kokkai binran*.

Ever since the Keiseikai was formed in 1987 by Takeshita Noboru, mostly as a successor organisation to the Tanaka faction, it maintained itself as the ruling party's largest by some margin. The expression, the 'Keiseikai Dominance' was coined for this era in the LDP's history. But this ended once the faction chair Kanemaru Shin was forced to resign from the Diet due to the Tōkyō Sagawa Kyūbin Scandal. Subsequently, the struggle to determine his succession deepened, with the result that the Hata faction led by Ozawa Ichirō split from the Keiseikai in 1992. In line with Takeshita's wishes, Obuchi Keizō took over control of the Keiseikai, but the grouping retreated to third position within the LDP. By 1993, at the time the LDP found itself out of power, this faction changed its name to the Heiseiken.

After vying with the other factions for a period, what put the Heiseiken back to pole position was the formation of the Hashimoto Ryūtarō cabinet. Obuchi Keizō, the faction boss of this time, forewent his own candidacy as party president in order to support Hashimoto, who was one of the leaders of the Heiseiken and enjoyed popularity with the public, and who then won the party presidential election. As the Heiseiken approached the 1996 general election, it was flourishing once again as the LDP's largest faction. Even after defeat in the upper house elections of 1998, the Heiseiken's leader Obuchi took over from Hashimoto as prime minister. During the same period, there were defections from the rival Kōchikai of Kōno Yōhei and his supporters, following a change in that faction's leadership. At the Seiwakai too, Kamei Shizuka's group split from the faction, giving the appearance that the 'Keiseikai Dominance' had been restored.

In fact, this was the point in time from which a sharp reversal of fortunes took place, with the Seiwakai assuming a leading position in the party. The Mori

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cabinet was the first Seiwakai-run government in 22 years, and during its term the ‘Katō Riot’ occurred as noted above, with the result that a major split took place in the rival Kōchikai. It followed that the Seiwakai was able to organise party matters in such a way that the LDP presidency was transferred within itself, from Mori to Koizumi. Koizumi was the leader who identified the Heiseiken as the main ‘reactionary forces’, and he directed his attacks onto it to trammel its power. In the 2005 general election, fought on the issue of postal privatisation, a succession of Diet members opposed to this policy left the Heiseiken and Kōchikai, resulting in the Seiwakai leap-frogging them to assume top position in the party.

Later, the Seiwakai dominance, which was derived from the opportunities of the Koizumi government, grew further through the party presidencies and premierships of Abe and Fukuda. Despite this, the Seiwakai’s share of the LDP Diet membership did not rise, stuck at about the level it had been during the mid-1990s. In fact, its membership was never as high a proportion of the parliamentary party as it had been for the Keiseikai and Heiseiken, during that faction’s heyday. This dominance of the Seiwakai was then a relative phenomenon, something that drew its strength from the collapse of the Heiseiken and Kōchikai.

If its membership numbers were not so great, neither was the faction’s pulling power. When Koizumi resigned from the premiership, he did so without returning to the Seiwakai. Likewise, his political successor and second-born son, Koizumi Shinjirō has operated without factional affiliation. Following the change of government in 2009, several individuals, including Koike Yuriko, Takaichi Sanae and Yamamoto Ichita seceded from the faction. Even Nakagawa Hidenao, once a faction caretaker departed the organisation after losing contests for the leadership. Again, after the 2010 House of Councillors elections, faction cohesion was lost in the elections for party leader in the upper house, and the Seiwakai’s candidate for that post, Tanigawa Shūzen, did not win. Chair Mori’s subsequent announcement of his intention to withdraw from the Seiwakai left a bitter aftertaste which has invited disunity into the organisation ever since.⁴

The role of faction leadership has also proved weak. Machimura Nobutaka, who was appointed Seiwakai chair in 2006, for a long time proved unable to stand in party presidential elections. This state of affairs continued until he finally stood in 2012, although he was to compete with Abe Shinzō from the same faction, thereby splitting the organisation and inviting defeat. In 2014, the faction chair passed from Machimura to Hosoda Hiroyuki, but Hosoda has not been considered a suitable candidate for the party presidency. Some say the organisation had already become Abe’s faction, but even if this is so, it seems clear that faction cohesion had been greatly diminished since the days of Mori’s leadership.

The growing number of Diet members without faction affiliation

What has been more striking than the advance of the Seiwakai, so conspicuous over the last decade, is the increase in numbers of Diet members who have no affiliation to any faction. Even in the 1980s, when most were thought to be tied to a faction, about one-tenth of LDP representatives in the legislature had no such

affiliation. However, in recent years, that number has risen to about 30%, making this group one of the largest bodies inside the party and rivalling the Seiwakai in size (Figure 1.2). In addition, there is now a custom that sees all those who achieve high office resigning their faction ties. This includes those who are appointed to the premiership and deputy premiership, along with the three top LDP posts of secretary general, chairs of the General Council and Policy Research Council, and it also applies to the speakers of the lower and upper houses of the Diet.

The numbers of Diet members who had no faction affiliations first started to grow with the arrival of 83 new members, known as the ‘Koizumi Children’, elected in the 2005 postal privatisation general elections. Koizumi and Takebe Tsutomu, who was secretary general of the LDP, encouraged these new members to be free of faction linkages. The party leaders created training and information sharing measures, which would otherwise have been provided by the factions. They also offered opportunities to meet with the prime minister regularly. Moreover, party Headquarters even went so far as to add ¥1 million to the unaffiliated members’ ‘rice cake money’, given to LDP Diet representatives ahead of the New Year holidays. At the time a gathering called the ‘Unaffiliated New Diet Members’ Salon’ was established.

With the departure of backers such as Koizumi and Takebe, a change took place under the Abe cabinet, which saw those members who had previously defected, return to the LDP. Also, an increasing number of ‘Koizumi Children’ started to join factions at this point. As time passed, these new members developed relationships with other Diet members who belonged to factions, and they were easily embroiled in the scheming of those groups that wanted to become the majority in successive party presidential elections. The percentage of Diet members without factional affiliation which had been 20.2% in the immediate aftermath of the postal privatisation general election, had fallen to 12.9% by 2008.

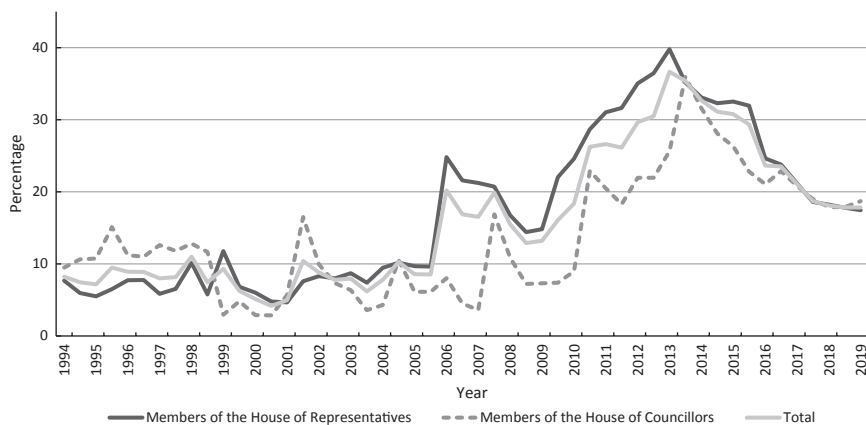


Figure 1.2 Share of LDP membership in both houses of the Diet with no factional affiliation (1994–2019).

Source: *Kokkai binran*.

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The second phase of the growing number of Diet members with no affiliation to factions came with the change to a DPJ government in 2009. In order for the LDP to recover its fortunes, it was forced to orchestrate the dissolution of its factions. Once in opposition, the factions' function of distributing jobs was redundant, and their sales of party fundraiser tickets and other finance raising activities dropped dramatically. It was during this time that the Seiwakai closed its offices located in the old building of the Akasaka Prince Hotel, moving them to rented premises near the LDP Headquarters. Faction membership was not well regarded by the electorate and reflecting this, defections from these organisations increased to the point where those free of any ties to a faction outnumbered the total membership of the Seiwakai.

The third phase of growth came with the 2012 general election. The LDP, which found itself in opposition before the poll, decided to promote the selection of candidates through open recruitment. Just as it had in the upper house elections of 2010, the LDP won a majority of seats in 2012 general elections, with the result that some 115 members were newly elected to the Diet, a total which well exceeded the tally of 'Koizumi Children'. In many cases, candidates who had been chosen through open recruitment had no faction identity on being elected. And even though many incumbents were also re-elected, the proportion of the unaffiliated LDP Diet members rapidly increased.

Since then, just as happened after the 2005 postal privatisation general election, there have been many in the 2012 cohort of newly elected members who went on to join a faction. Some of the prior difficulties that factions had in providing jobs and funds for their members have been eased by the return to government. In addition, a new faction called the Suigetsukai was established in 2015 by Ishiba Shigeru, who had left the Heiseiken and was a Diet member without factional affiliation for some time. In this context, the proportion of Diet members without factional affiliation, which was 36.7% at its peak, fell to 21.1% in 2017. Even so, compared to prior levels of around 10%, this proportion continues to be sustained at a relatively high level.

It is also worth noting some of the differences between the two chambers of the Diet that exist in this respect. Compared to the House of Representatives, the proportion of members without faction affiliation in the House of Councillors remains relatively low and for this reason, the three major factions maintain control in the upper house. The upper house, however, has been influenced by the changes in the lower house and in general, the need to be a faction member has become less pressing than before, to the extent that there is a progressive weakening of faction organisations taking place within the upper chamber of the legislature too.

Factions in former times

Characteristics of LDP factions

Commonly the term 'faction' (*habatsu* in Japanese) had come to mean groups which exist within political parties and which compete for control of the wider

organisation. It is not unusual to find political parties with factions, but there were some characteristics of LDP factions which marked them out during their high point in the mid-1980s.

First was their non-ideological character, and at the core of their existence, ideas or policies did not necessarily have significance for them. Factions also existed within the former Japan Socialist Party (JSP), but these were organised along the lines of the fundamental ideological differences between left and right. Factions were also an important structural element within Italy's Christian Democratic Party, which maintained party dominance over a similarly long period to that seen in Japan. But compared to these cases, within the LDP, which managed to widely organise non-Socialist groups, the degree to which its factions were driven by personal advancement or self-interest, was much greater.⁵

Of course, within the LDP also, some factions showed some tendencies based on ideas and policies. For example, the *Kōchikai* has been a dovish or liberal faction which was not enthusiastic about constitutional revision. Meanwhile, the *Seiwakai* has been said to be hawkish or right wing, eager to change the Constitution of Japan. But this was all relative, and even for example, Fukuda Yasuo was known as a dove though he was the son of Fukuda Takeo, a founder of the *Seiwakai*. Recently, LDP factions have professed themselves to be more like policy groups, but it remains rather difficult to argue that these are based on any agreement on ideas or policies.

The second characteristic is that factions have been highly institutionalised. This means, the extent of the membership has been clear, and maintained for a long period. There are organisation rules and established institutions headed by a chairperson. A faction also has its own independent recruitment function and fundraising capability, administrative staff are also located in offices, established on a permanent footing and meetings convened on a periodic basis. In certain circumstances, policies have been developed and the results of those efforts published. Elections have been managed through their own apparatus, established for this purpose and independent of the party machine. Factions such as these have functioned at almost the same level as a party organisation, so much so that they have been known as 'parties within a party'.

Because of the existence of factions and personal support organisations established by Diet members, the institutional development of the LDP was itself extraordinarily impeded. As the years passed, management of the party became conditional on the existence of factions, and rules were formed to manage relations between them. By illustration, it was impossible to be a member of more than one faction and personnel reshuffles became the norm, which balanced the distribution of government, legislative and party positions between these groups. Only in this respect had the LDP been institutionalised, meaning the ruling party really only held together through an alliance of its factions.

Strong criticisms of the LDP's faction politics were voiced for a long time.⁶ In particular, factions have been seen as an obstacle to party unity. Their existence undermines the authority of the party president, promoted money politics and encouraged dealings behind closed doors, with policy considerations largely