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Party System Fragmentation and Institutionalization: Japan’s Party System in the 2010s

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ABSTRACT
The paper analyzes the party system change at the level of Japan’s national politics. The party system after the 1990s can be classified into three periods according to some indicators to measure party system change. The present party system in the 2010s is characterized by the LDP dominance and fragmentation and fluidity of opposition parties. It is called “Abe ikkyō politics (安倍一強政治)” which means the LDP dominance under Abe administration. At the final section of the paper the problem of party system fragmentation and ruling party dominance is argued referring to the theory of party system institutionalization and democratic consolidation.

KEYWORDS: Japanese politics, political party, party system, institutionalization, democratic consolidation

Introduction
The Abe administration started again in December 2012 lasts for more than seven years to the present\(^1\). It is exceptionally long in Japan’s politics since the average years of an administration in post-war period has been approximately two and a half years and after 1993 in particular only one and a half. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) with the second Abe administration won three general elections (2012, 2014 and 2017) and was reelected in each of them. The LDP and its coalition partner the Clean Government Party (CGP) not only won the elections but also secured absolute majority (two-thirds) in the House of Representatives (HR). It is called “Abe ikkyō politics (安倍一強政治)”, which means the LDP dominance under Abe administration.
Researchers of Japanese politics have analyzed and argued the reasons of Abe dominance. A group of analyses emphasizes centralized power of the

\(^1\) First Abe administration started in September 2006 was enmeshed in some scandals including cabinet ministers and resigned one year after. “Abe administration” in this paper refers to the second one.
Prime Minister (PM) and his office (Aoki and Nonaka 2016; Nakakita 2017: Ch. 3; Makihara 2016: Ch. 2; Asakura 2016; Tasaki 2014). Some other researches focus on the failure of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) that was in power before the LDP and Abe came (back) to government in 2012 (Sunahara 2017; Maeda and Tsutsumi eds. 2015; Japan Rebuild Initiative ed. 2013). Although these are not studies on party system, there have already been analyses of the party system change in the 1990s and 2000s (Matoba 2012; Yamamoto 2010). However, these studies do not have enough theoretical implications of party institutionalization to develop the theories for comparative studies of politics.

In this study, I will analyze Japan’s party system change since the 1990s, particularly in the 2010s. From the analysis, I will lead theoretical implication of party institutionalization in comparative perspective. The paper is structured as follows. Firstly, some characteristics of party system change since 1993 will be analyzed. The party system after the 1993 general election can be classified into three periods according to some indicators to measure party system change. Then, in the second section, I will focus on the party system in the 2010s referring to the fragmentation of opposition parties that occurred in the latest general election held in October 2017. It will indicate the LDP and Abe administration dominance and also fragmentation and fluidity of opposition parties. In other words, the fragmentation of the opposition allows the LDP and Abe administration to be consolidated.

Thirdly, I will argue the problem of party fragmentation referring to party institutionalization theory that was usually argued for party politics in developing countries. As political scientists studying party politics in developing countries argued, weak institutionalization of party system that can often be seen in developing or newly democratized countries will harm democratic consolidation with making politics destabilize. They therefore argued that party system institutionalization is necessary for consolidating democracy. Although Japan is a developed and consolidated democratic country, the argument of party system institutionalization will shed light on the present situation and problem of Japan’s politics and democracy.

**Party System since the 1990s: the Three Periods**

Japan’s politics in the post-war era is called “the 1955 system”, named so after the foundation of the LDP and of the Socialist Party of Japan (SPJ) in this year the LDP is twice larger than the largest opposition SPJ and it

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2 I have published a paper analyzing party system change from the 1955 system to the one after the 1990s (Kanamaru 2009).
sustained government until 1993 for 38 years. The 1955 system ended in August 1993 when the LDP lost majority at the general election and eight parties formed a coalition government (Hosokawa administration). Although the anti-LDP government lasted only for eight months and LDP came back to government in coalition with the SPJ and a new party Sakigake, the party system in the Diet in this period was extremely in flux (Kanamaru 2009).

Figure 1.1: Change of electoral volatility index: 1958-2017
Source: Ishikawa 2004 (1958-2003) and Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Website on election related resources (2003-2017).

Party system stability in the 1955 system and instability in post-1955 system is clearly shown in the change of electoral volatility index (Pedersen 1979). The index shows how the number of seats each party wins has changed between two successive elections. The more seats each party wins have changed between elections, the higher the index goes up. Figure 1.1 shows the change of index since 1958 (the first general election after 1955) to 2017 (the latest general election). The index had been quite low and stable in the 1955-system era, while it increased steeply after 1993.

Party System Change after the Breakdown of the 1955 System
Although the party system after 1993 has been quite unstable in general, the change of party system is not always equal if you take a close look at the change of index during this period (Figure 1.2).
Figure 1.2: Change of electoral volatility index: 1993-2017
Source: Matoba 2012: Appendix 6 and 7 (1990-2005); Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Website on election related resources (2009-2017)

High instability of party seats in the 1990s is a result of new party formation in this period. Many parties were formed and distinguished in this period. Seats moved from an old party to the other new party is reflected in high electoral volatility in this period. High volatility, however, as shown in 2005-2009 and 2009-2012 elections, reflects a big swing from the LDP to DPJ and back again from the DPJ to LDP. In 2009 general election the DPJ won two thirds of total seats in the Lower House, although the LDP kept the same two thirds seats before. In the next election (2012), the LDP won two thirds again while the DPJ lost. These big swings in the 2009 and 2012 elections show quite high volatility in this period. In a period between these highly volatile elections, from 2000 to 2009, party system seems to be highly stable.

Electoral volatility index does not always show how fragmented a party system is. This parameter is indicated by fragmentation index, invented by Douglas Rae (1968)\(^3\). The higher the value (up to 1.0) is, the more fragmented a party system is. Figure 1.3 demonstrates the change of fragmentation index of the party system in the HR since 1993. It shows that the high values in the 1990s keep decreasing until 2009 and then rise in the 2010s.

\[^3\] Fragmentation index (FI) is calculated by the formula: $FI=1-\Sigma Si^2$. $Si$ represents the proportion of seats won by party $i$. 

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The change of party system can be seen in the other index, the effective number of parties index\(^4\) invented by Laakso and Taagepera (1979), which “takes both the number and size of parties into account in order to give a more accurate depiction of a particular party system” (Reilly 2006: 126). This index in Japan’s HR since 1993 again demonstrates almost the same trend as fragmentation index (Figure 1.4). Throughout the 2000s, effective number of parties index gradually went down to two. This means that a two-party system was formed in this period.

\[^4\] Effective number of parties (ENP) Index is calculated by the formula: \(\text{ENP} = 1 / \sum S_i^2\). \(S_i\) represents the proportion of seats won by party \(i\).
Three Periods of Japan’s Party System since the 1990s
According to the indices of party system change, the party system after the breakdown of the 1955 system can be classified into three periods: the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s.

(1) Party System in the 1990s: 1993-2003
In this period, three general elections were held (1993, 1996 and 2000). One of the outstanding features of the party system in this period is the fact that no party could achieve a majority. Even the LDP could win less than half of the total number of seats in the HR. This enabled the opposition to come to power after the 1993 general election, although there were as many as eight opposition parties. This is in contrast with the 1955 system. Another distinguishing feature of party system in this period is extreme fragmentation and fluidity of opposition parties. Although they could form a coalition government in 1993, it was too unstable to remain in power. After the breakdown of the Hosokawa coalition government, which lasted for eight months, a minority-coalition Hata administration started, lasting but two months. Ichirō Ozawa, who was the “kingmaker” of Hosokawa administration, amalgamated seven opposition parties to form the New Frontier Party (NFP) in order to challenge the LDP. The NFP was able to win 31.2 percent in the 1996 general election, while the LDP won 47.8 percent. The percentage of these two parties seemed to show a new two-
party system was formed. But the NFP consists of too various members to be sustainable. Then, in the next general election held in 2000, the NFP was dissolved and nine parties in total won seats in the HR. Not only the opposition but also the governing parties were seriously unstable in this period. The LDP, the usual governing party, was broken down in 1993, and then they managed to come back to administration in 1995 to form a coalition with the SPJ, a former rival under the 1955 system. Since 1995, the LDP remained in administration with a coalition partner. After the 1996 general election, the LDP again formed a coalition with the SPJ and new party Sakigake. After that, the LDP exchanged its coalition partner with the Liberal Party (LP) and the CGP in 1999, with the CGP and the Conservative Party (CP) in 2000, and with the CGP in 2003.

(2) Party System in the 2000s: 2003-2012

Three general elections were held in this period: in 2003, 2005 and 2009. Party system change in this period is characterized by the convergence of opposition parties and the formation of a two-party system. The LDP, however, consolidated under the leadership of PM Koizumi, and was supported by various strata of society including young people and urban dwellers. Opposition parties, on the other hand, were encouraged to converge and to become larger to be a countervailing power. In 2003, the Liberal Party led by Ozawa merged with the largest opposition DPJ in 2003. After the DPJ was defeated in the 2005 general election in a sweeping victory of the LDP led by Koizumi, the DPJ broadened its support when unpopular Abe, Fukuda and Asō administrations succeeded after Koizumi. Then, in the 2009 election, the DPJ won back about two-thirds of the total number of seats in the HR and took over from the LDP. The DPJ government was not stable. The administration changed every year, from the first Hatoyama administration to the third Noda administration. The DPJ government at last gave way to the LDP in the next general election held after Prime Minister Noda dissolved the HR in 2012.

(3) Party System in the 2010s: 2012 to present

The third period starts with the LDP’s landslide victory in the 2012 general election. The second Abe administration began with an absolute majority (two-thirds of total seats) by the LDP and CGP coalition and has lasted for more than five years. One distinguishing characteristic of the party system in this period is obviously a strong, stable and sustainable government by the LDP and CGP. Conversely, the opposition parties, including the DPJ,
were seriously fragmented and fluid in this period. Many opposition parties formed and disappeared in this period, and the fluidity has continued until the latest general election held in October 2017. The fragmentation of the opposition parties is the other feature of party system in this period. In the next section, the features of the party system in the 2010s will be analyzed in detail. The party system in each period is summarized in Table 1.1.

| Year   | Government | Opposition | Features                                                                 |
|--------|------------|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1990s  | Fragmented | Fragmented | Weak government and weak opposition Overall unstable party system          |
| 2000s  | Solid      | Solid      | (Forming) Two-party system Change of government (2009 and 2012 general election) |
| 2010s  | Solid      | Fragmented | Strong government and weak opposition “Abe-Ikkyou” (The LDP and Abe dominance) |

Table 1.1: Party fragmentation of governing and opposition parties

**Party System in the 2010’s: LDP Dominance and Fragmentation of the Opposition Parties**

*The Abe Administration with the LDP Dominance*

One of the outstanding features of the party system since 2012 has been the LDP dominance in the Diet. Thanks to the Single Member District (SMD) majoritarian electoral system, the LDP swept to victory in every general election since 2012, and Prime Minister Abe has maintained his administration for more than five years until now. Although the LDP has a majority in the Diet, they formed a coalition with the CGP and dominate more than two thirds of the total number of seats in the Lower House, as presented in Table 2.1.
General Election | LDP  | CGP  | LDP+CGP
---|---|---|---
2012 | 61.3 | 6.5 | 67.8
2014 | 61.1 | 7.4 | 68.5
2017 | 60.4 | 6.2 | 66.6

Table 2.1: Percentage of seats in the HR: LDP, CGP and coalition

The absolute majority in the Diet enabled the government to pass some controversial bills listed in Table 2.2 (Makihara 2016: Ch. 2-3). The Abe administration steamrollered some controversial bills through the Diet, against a fierce opposition. The bills included many national security or defense issues that were so controversial or confrontational that the LDP governments in the 1955 system could not easily pass them in the Diet.

| Year | Bill Description |
|------|------------------|
| 2013 | Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets |
| 2014 | Change of Constitutional interpretation to allow the right to collective self-defense (decided by cabinet council) |
| 2016 | Security-related bills |
| 2017 | Conspiracy bill |
| In the near future? | Amendment of the Constitution |

Table 2.2: Controversial Bills passed in Abe (second) Administration
Source: Makihara 2016: Ch. 2-3.

Abe administration passed the controversial bills by means of centralized power of Prime Minister’s office and an absolute majority in the Diet. That is the reason why it is called the politics of “Abe and the LDP dominance”. On the other hand, the opposition’s weakness is another factor that allows the LDP and Abe’s dominant power.

**Fluidity and Fragmentation of Opposition Parties**

Another feature in this period is fragmentation and fluidity of opposition parties. It already began under the DPJ government. Before the 2009 election, Yoshimi Watanabe, Kenji Eda and other the LDP members and DPJ’s Keiichirō Asao founded Your Party (みんなの党). In 2010, some previously LDP members, including Takeo Hiranuma, Kaoru Yosano and Shintarō Ishihara (Governor of Tokyo at that time) formed the Sunrise Party of Japan, and some LDP and DPJ members formed the Japan
Renaissance Party (改革クラブ), later renamed to New Renaissance Party (新党改革).

While in the years 2010-2011 new parties were formed mainly by the LDP members, in 2012 some DPJ members left to form new parties. The most serious example was fifty members of Ozawa group left the DPJ when they disagreed with Noda administration’s proposal of Consumption Tax reform to raise its rate from eight to ten percent. The Ozawa group formed the Party of People's Life First (国民の生活が第一) in this year but the name was changed in several times and the membership was unstable (Maeda and Mori 2015: 249-257).

Only a few months before the 2012 general election was held in December, the Osaka Restoration Party (ORP 大阪維新の会), a local party led by Governor of Osaka prefecture and former famous attorney and TV commentator Tōru Hashimoto, formed a national party by the name of the Japan Restoration Party (JRP 日本維新の会) with seven Diet members of the LDP, DPJ and Your Party. A month later former Governor of Tokyo prefecture Ishihara and his party the Sunrise Party (太陽の党) joined the JRP (Yomiuri Shinbun ed. 2012: Ch. 4).

These cases of new party formation since 2009 show the reality of the opposition’s fragmentation and fluidity that is more serious than some indicators (electoral volatility, fragmentation and effective number of parties index) revealed. In this period, about 30 parties appeared in the Diet as listed in List 2.1. An analysis reveals four patterns of forming new parties: 1) division – a split from a party, 2) a merger with another party/parties, 3) only a change of the name, and 4) the founding of a party by new members from outside the Diet. Incumbent members of the Diet (pattern 1, 2 and 3) formed most of the new parties. Only some are totally new parties formed by non-incumbent members of the Diet.

List 2.1. List of parties formed in the 2010’s
2009 (1)
Your Party (みんなの党)
2010 (3)
Sunrise Party of Japan (たちあがれ日本)
Spirit of Japan Party (日本創新党)
New Renaissance Party (新党改革)
2011 (3)
Tomorrow Party of Japan (日本未来の党)
Daichi/ True Democratic Party (大地・真民主党)
Kizuna Party（新党きづな）
2012 (8)
New Party Daichi/ True Democrats（新党大地・真民主）
People's Life First（国民の生活が第一）
Japan Restoration Party（日本維新の会（旧））
Sunrise Party（太陽の党）
Green Wind（みどりの党）
Tax Cuts Japan – Anti-TPP – Zero Nuclear Party（減税日本・反TPP・脱原発を実現する党）
New Party Daichi（新党大地）
People's Life Party（生活の党）
2013 (1)
Unity Party（結いの党）
2014 (3)
Restoration Party（維新の党）
Party for Future Generations（次世代の党）
People's Life Party & Taro Yamamoto and Friends（生活の党と山本太郎となかまたち）
2015 (4)
Assembly to Energize Japan（日本を元気にする会）
OSAKA Restoration Party（おおさか維新の会）
Party for Caring Japanese Kokoro（日本のこころを大切にする党）
Vision of Reform（改革結集の会）
2016 (3)
Democratic Party（民進党）
Japan Restoration Party（日本維新の会（新））
Liberal Party（自由党）
2017 (3)
Party for Japanese Kokoro（日本のこころ）
Party of Hope（希望の党）
Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan（立憲民主党）

The 2017 General Election
The 2017 general election again led to the creation of new parties. This process suddenly started when some newspapers reported on 21 Oct. that PM Abe had decided to dissolve the HR in the very near future. And this began opposition parties’ fragmentation. More than a year before, Koike
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Yuriko, who was a LDP Diet member, left the party to run Tokyo Gubernatorial election, held in July 2016. With her personal popularity, she won the election as an independent candidate against the LDP candidate and became the Governor of Tokyo. A few months later, she founded a new local party – the Tokyo Citizen First Party (CFP 都民ファーストの会) to take part in Tokyo Prefectural Assembly election in the following year. At the Assembly election held in July 2017, the CFP won a sweeping victory against the LDP and CGP, which showed her popularity and the strength of her party.

A month before the 2017 election, on 25 Sept., Koike by herself announced at a press conference the foundation of the new Party of Hope (PoH 希望の党) to stand for general election. The announcement was only several hours before PM Abe announced at a press conference the dissolution of the HR. As soon as Koike and some of the HR member formed the PoH, other opposition members began to join it because her popularity was expected to help them to win seats. One of the opposition members was Seiji Maehara, the president of the largest opposition party, the Democratic Party (DP 民進党). He had a meeting with Koike on Sept. 26th and agreed for the DP and the PoH to merge. On the day the HR dissolved, the general assembly of the DP members of the Diet approved the dissolution of the party and its members would stand for election under the PoH (Asahi Shinbun, 29, Sep. 2017). On the other hand, Koike declared that she was not going to accept all the members of the DP, and excluded some members who did not differ ideologically. This “exclusion statement” moved some members of the DP to form another new party, the Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP 立憲民主党), headed by Edano Yukio, previously a chief secretary of the DPJ (Asahi Shinbun, 3, October 2017). Some other members of the DP participated in the general election independently and members of the House of Councilors remained in the DP.

Party formations that took place around the 2017 general election are shown in Figure 2.1. As indicated in this figure, four patterns of new party formation can be seen in this series of events. The first pattern, division, occurred dramatically when the DP’s leader Maehara decided to merge his party with the PoH. Some members of the DP, excluded by the PoH, formed the CDP. As a result, the DP divided into four parts: the members 1) who went into the PoH, 2) who formed the CDP, 3) who remained to the DP, and 4) who became independent. Before that some members went out from the JRP to join the DP. This is also a case of a split of a party. The second pattern, a merger, usually coincides with a split. Many DP members
joined the PoH when they left the DP. The case that the JRP members joined the DP is another case.

Thirdly, the CFP is a party newly formed by the Governor of Tokyo, Koike, to take part in prefectural assembly election. Thanks to Koike’s popularity, the new party won the election and many new members won seats in the assembly. Koike aimed to win the general election in order to form a new party, PoH, after the CFP’s success in the Tokyo assembly election. Almost the same thing happened in Osaka in 2008. After a popular TV commentator and lawyer, Hashimoto Toru won the gubernatorial election in Osaka prefecture, he formed a new party, the Osaka Restoration Party, to participate in the prefectural assembly election. He intended to control the assembly through the party, and then succeeded in winning the election. It seems easier for local parties to win the assembly election rather than national elections for two institutional reasons. One reason is that Japan’s local politics is a presidential system, and the other – the fact that local assembly elections are held under the Single Non-transferable Vote (SNTV) system that resembles to the proportional representation in its effect to give advantage to small and new parties (Sunahara 2017). These
institutional reasons enabled Tokyo’s Koike and Osaka’s Hashimoto to succeed in their new parties at the local level but not at the national level. The fourth and final pattern can be observed in the formation of the PoH and to some extent in the name change from the DPJ to DP (since some members joined the DP from JRP).

Party System Institutionalization and Democracy

Party System Institutionalization of Japan’s Post 1995 System

Japan’s party system in the 2010s is characterized on the one hand by a dominant, powerful and stable government, and by fluid, fragmented and unstable opposition on the other. While the governing parties, the LDP and the CGP, have gained absolute majority in every general election since 2012 and Abe administration is continued, opposition parties have been desperately fragmented and fluid in this period. In sum, the LDP’s dominance and fragmentation of opposition are two sides of the same coin. The reasons why the LDP and Abe’s dominance is successfully maintained are variously analyzed by researchers, as outlined in the introduction.

What, then, will be the problem for party system fluidity and fragmentation? Many developing countries including those from Asia, Africa and former Communist countries, were democratized in the 1990s and afterwards, but many of them were led into political instability, ethnic conflict, civil war or an authoritarian regime. Introducing free election with a multi-party competition did not always help to consolidate democracy and stabilize party politics. Political scientists studying party politics in developing countries, therefore, argued that institutionalization of the party system and party organization would be significant for newly democratized countries to achieve these objectives.

In a frequently cited article, Scott Mainwaring, specializing in party politics in Latin America, identified four dimensions of party system institutionalization (Mainwaring 1998: 69-70).

1) Stability in Patterns of Interparty Competition
2) Party Roots in Society
3) Legitimacy of Parties and Election
4) Party Organization

These points are applicable to Japan’s party system in the 1990s and to the opposition parties in the 2010s. Firstly, electoral volatility is obviously high in the general election held in the 1990s and then in the 2010s, as we saw in Figure 1.2. Secondly, party and society relations have weakened since the 1980s not only for the opposition but also for the LDP. On the one hand, this is shown in the volatility of party support, as mentioned
above. On the other, the relations with intermediate groups like business groups, labor unions, local communities or individual support groups have weakened. Although the support base for the LDP is relatively deep and solid compared with that of the DPJ and other opposition parties, the organization of their supporters, especially Kōenkai and interest groups, have deteriorated in comparison with the ones under the 1955 system (Sugawara 2009).

The third point does not fit Japan’s case since the history of democratic practice is longer there than in newly democratized developing countries. But the seriously decreasing level of voter turnout casts doubt on the electoral and democratic legitimacy. Decline of voter turnout is a problem of Japan’s politics as in other advanced democratic countries. The declining trend can be seen in Figure 3.1 that plots the average voter turnout of general elections held in successive ten years since the 1950s. The average turnout began to decline in the 1990s and steeply dropped in the 2010s.

![Figure 3.1: General Trend of Voter Turnout: the 1950s-2010s](image)

Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications Website on Election related resources

Interestingly, a closer look at the change of voter turnout since 1990s reveals the fact that voter turnout moves inversely to the fluidity of party system shown in Figures 1.1 to 1.3. In the 1990s, when the party system was seriously fragmented for both the government and the opposition, voter turnouts were relatively low. In 2005 and 2009, however, when the two-party system was consolidated, the turnout was high. Conversely, in
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the years 2012-2017, the turnout declined again when the opposition parties became fragmented.

![Figure 3.2: Voter Turnout of General Elections: 1990-2017](image)

Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications Website on Election related resources

The change of voter turnout seems to be influenced by party system fragmentation. In fact, in the latest general election, held in 2017, it was often reported that opposition parties were too fragmented and most of them were too new for voters to support. Conversely, in 2009 general election when the DPJ was consolidated to be a challenger to the LDP, voters were excited to change government by their votes for the first time since the 1955 system was broken. It can be supposed that voters cannot decide for which party to vote, nor do they recognize the new parties when the party system is too fluid and many parties are born and disappear. Finally, newly formed opposition parties have quite weak or no organization. Moreover, a weakly organized opposition party is often dependent for support on the popularity of the leader. A detailed analysis of new parties formed in the 1990s found that each party had weak organization (Kabashima ed. 1998). Political scientists have already published many analyses of the DPJ and its administration (Uekami and Tsutsumi eds. 2011; Mikuriya ed. 2012). Most of the analyses of the DPJ indicated the weakness of the organization. A joint research project led by Maeda and Tsutsumi, in particular, emphasizes that the (Diet) members of
the party were too diverse in their ideology, policy preferences and origins to integrate to form a solid organization.

On the dimension of party organization, Mainwaring specifically argued about personal parties. A personal party is characterized by the presence of a strong (sometimes charismatic) leader and direct support to the leader without an institutionalized organization. As he wrote, in numerous developing countries “many parties are little more than personalistic vehicles for their leading figures” and “in more institutionalized systems, the party is not subordinate to the leader” (Mainwaring 1998: 77-78). This means that party system instability is often led by personal party/ies.

Two types of personal parties can be seen in developing countries (Kanamaru 2014): the large personal party and the small personal party. Large personal parties win massive support in election and sometimes gain power by virtue of personal popularity of their leader. They can be seen in the presidential system since a popular president forms their own party to win parliamentary election. In the parliamentary system, however, large personal parties emerge and take control in parliament. One of the typical cases is Thaksin in Thailand, who won a parliamentary election and seized power with his personal party, the Thai Rak Thai Party. Small personal parties can often be observed in the elections that were held soon after democratization. In the early elections held after the newly introduced multiparty system, innumerable influential individuals form parties to stand for election. As often said in the Philippines, the “one person, one party” situation is usually observed in developing countries.

In Japan in the 2010s, the ORP in Osaka was Governor Hashimoto’s personal party and the CFP in Tokyo was a personal party of Governor Koike. Hashimoto’s ORP tried to organize a national party in the Diet by merging with the Sunrise Party but it was not successful. In the 2017 general election again Koike attempted to form a national party, the PoH, accepting some members from the DP, and she could not succeed either. These cases show that it is easier for personal parties to succeed in the presidential than in the parliamentary system.

When we take a close look at the case of Koike’s CFP and PoH, the CFP at the time of Assembly election was heavily dependent on her popularity and the organization was not institutionalized at all. The party was, in fact, Koike’s personal party. When the 2017 election was announced, Koike declared the creation of the PoH at a press conference, saying “I myself found the new party.” In fact, two career Diet members, Wakasa (previously a LDP member) and Hosono (a DP member) had been preparing to build a new party for her. This indicated that Koike took the
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process to build a party away from Wakasa and Hosono, and then she herself created the new party. The press conference symbolizes that the PoH is obviously Koike’s personal party and the party did not have official organization, a party platform or other official rules.

Party System Institutionalization and Democracy
The reason why political scientists emphasize the significance of party system institutionalization is that it is necessary for consolidating democracy, particularly in developing and newly democratized countries. Why, then, is party system institutionalization necessary for consolidating democracy? Mainwaring and Torcal pointed out that weak institutionalization leads to uncertainty of electoral outcomes and undermines electoral accountability. They wrote:

“In contexts where parties disappear and appear with frequency, where the competition among them is ideologically and programmatically diffuse, and where personalities often overshadow parties as routes to executive power, the prospects for effective electoral accountability suffer.” (Mainwaring and Torcal 2005: 25-6)

In sum, electoral accountability is the essence of democracy. Weak institutionalization undermines democracy by damaging electoral accountability.

Then, political scientists studying developing countries emphasize how instability of party system leads to instability of the politics itself and undermines the legitimacy of electoral politics and democracy. Some of the developing countries that introduced multi-party free election suffered from serious instability of politics, conflicts or a civil war (Mansfield and Snyder 2005), difficulty in peace building (Paris 2004), and underdevelopment (Collier 2009). Some of the countries that experienced political instability after introducing free election reverted to authoritarianism. These cases show that attempts at democracy combined with a weakly institutionalized party system damage the legitimacy of free election and democracy itself. Although it is difficult to imagine that civil war and serious political conflict will arise in Japan, it is possible that the legitimacy of election and liberal democracy will be undermined in Japan’s politics. As seen before, the undermining of electoral and democratic legitimacy can already be observed in the serious decline in voter turnout.
Finally, the danger of “populism” against democracy that is often argued in Japan and other Western democracies seems to be a result of weak institutionalization. A personal party, in general, is one of the results of weak institutionalization of a party system, as Mainwaring and others argued. Personal parties are mostly dependent on their leaders’ popularity, have weak or no organization, and are often identified with “populism”. Hashimoto and Koike have been called populist politicians and some researchers analyzed their political style as “populism” (Arima 2017; Matsutani 2010). Populism itself has both positive and negative effects for democracy, as Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) indicated. They identified four negative effects of populism on democracy: 1) circumventing minority rights, 2) eroding the institution to protect fundamental rights, 3) establishing a new political cleavage, and 4) making agreement difficult by moralizing politics. Some populist parties in Western Europe have succeeded at the national politics, which is perceived as the crisis of democracy, with an emphasis on these negative effects. The negative effects seem to apply to Japan’s personal parties as well.

**Conclusion**

Political reform carried out in the middle of the 1990s, particularly the electoral system reform, aimed to form party-centered politics or party competition by a two-party system to enable governmental change. After a turbulence of party system fragmentation in the 1990s, the two-party system was being formed gradually until the 2000s, and in 2009, at last, the DPJ could defeat the LDP to form a government. Although the DPJ could win electoral support at that time, it could not consolidate its organization and support base, as many researchers have observed. In other words, it was not successfully institutionalized. The failure of institutionalization of the opposition – not only in the case of the DPJ but of all the other opposition parties – led the fluid and fragmented opposition in the 2010s. In addition, it allowed the LDP dominance again. From the perspective of comparative politics, party competition with free election is necessary, but it is not enough to consolidate democratic party politics. Not only party competition but also party system institutionalization is necessary for democracy. The conclusion from the analysis of Japan’s party system fluidity since the 1990s is that party institutionalization for both government and opposition is necessary for democracy. Analyzing closely the 2010s party system in Japan, opposition fragmentation caused by weak institutionalization enables Abe administration and LDP dominance. Abe and LDP dominance is often
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criticized for its steamroller and nationalistic ideology. However, the problem in Japan’s politics is not only connected with Abe and LDP dominance but there is also a more serious problem with weak institutionalization of opposition, because party system institutionalization is necessary for electoral legitimacy, democratic accountability and consolidating the democratic regime.

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