

Comparative One-Party Rule: Japan and Mexico Compared

Hiroki Takeuchi (htakeuch@smu.edu)

Southern Methodist University (SMU)

Keely McNeme (kmcneme@smu.edu)

Southern Methodist University (SMU)

ABSTRACT

A critical aspect of democracies is the peaceful transition of power between multiple parties through fair and free elections. Although a party may remain in power for subsequent terms, decades of staying in power typically indicate a rigged electoral system. Japan and Mexico in the twentieth century offer two interesting cases. A single party dominated both for several decades—Japan by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) from 1955 to 2009 while Mexico by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) from 1929 to 2000—but Japan was classified as a democracy while Mexico was classified as authoritarianism. Both the LDP and the PRI were known for electoral clientelism and corruption. Given the surface-level similarities of one-party rule between these two countries, what makes these different classifications? Moreover, after experiencing the loss of power in the twenty-first century, the LDP is still the dominant party in Japanese politics, while the PRI is not in Mexican politics anymore now that both are classified as electoral democracies. What explains the divergent trajectories taken by these two former one-party ruling parties?

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One crucial aspect of democracies is the peaceful transition of power between multiple parties through fair and free elections. However, some countries are considered to have one-party rule and are regarded as a democracy rather than authoritarian. One of those countries is Japan, which became a parliamentary democracy dominated by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). In contrast, Mexico was ruled by a single party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI: *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*), from 1929 to 2000 and was classified as an authoritarian country. Both the LDP and the PRI were notorious for electoral clientelism and corruption, so what differentiates Japan as democratic and Mexico as authoritarian is still puzzling.¹

Mexico and Japan in the twentieth century offer two interesting cases. While trends in the classification of authoritarian and democratic regimes have been changing in the post-Cold War world, analyzing regime classification during the Cold War can offer important insights. These two countries share a lot of similarities. Both became significant allies of the United States during the Cold War framework, for Mexico by its geographic proximity and shared border and for Japan through post-war occupation and subsequent close economic partnership. While Japan experienced miracle economic growth, growing at an average rate of approximately 10 percent for 23 years between 1950 and 1973, Mexico also experienced development during this time—although, on average, at a lower GDP growth rate. Interestingly, both countries hosted the Olympic Games in the 1960s (Tokyo in 1964 and Mexico City in 1968).

¹ John Aldrich and John Griffin write “Japan was only putatively a democracy so long as the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was effectively uncontested for power, regardless of the extent of factional competition with it. See John H. Aldrich and John D. Griffin, *Why Parties Matter: Political Competition and Democracy in the American South* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 23.

Moreover, both countries were involved in the global economy and benefited from international economic transactions throughout the century. As a result, both the LDP and the PRI were challenged for dominance due to the end of the Cold War and the enhancement of economic globalization. Notably, after experiencing the loss of power in the twenty-first century, the LDP is still the dominant party, while the PRI is no longer a formidable force in Mexican politics; additionally, both Japan and Mexico are classified as electoral democracies. In other words, the LDP has survived the challenge of the post-Cold War world's new political and economic environment, while the PRI has failed to do so. What explains the divergent trajectories taken by these two former one-party ruling regimes?

This paper aims to explore pathways of how the similarities and differences of one-party rule during the Cold War have led to different paths taken by the LDP and the PRI in the twenty-first century. Perhaps the most ubiquitous characteristic the two one-party ruling parties shared during the twentieth century was the patron-client networks that formed their one-party dominance. However, the LDP and the PRI took different strategies for confronting the electoral systems that might challenge their political dominance. The LDP simply sought to win each election to stay in the majority in the Diet. In contrast, the PRI sought to deter opponents through supermajority victories, and the former is a typical strategy for democratic elections, while the latter is for authoritarian elections.² Although both parties used patron-client networks as the tool to win elections, the LDP used clientelism to win while the PRI used clientelism to win *big*.

² For LDP's electoral strategy, see Ethan Scheiner, *Democracy Without Competition in Japan: Opposition Failure in a One-Party Dominant State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). On PRI, see Beatriz Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For typical strategies in authoritarian elections, see Masaaki Higashijima, *The Dictator's Dilemma at the Ballot Box: Electoral Manipulation, Economic Maneuvering, and Political Order in Autocracies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2022).

The difference in their electoral strategies brought at least two unintended consequences. First, the PRI was required to rely more on vote buying and electoral fraud to win a supermajority than the LDP, which attempted only to win a simple majority. Thus, during the periods of one-party rule, the PRI cheated more often and more widely across the board, enhancing clientelism and corruption on a larger scale than the LDP. As a result, the PRI found it more difficult to gain legitimacy through elections.

Second, the LDP had more incentive to make a coalition with smaller parties to stay in power than the PRI, which successfully used clientelism to win big in elections. In fact, the LDP formed a coalitional government for the first time in the 1990s when external factors made clientelism start to fail as the winning strategy; LDP's winning margins became slimmer, and eventually, opposition parties' coalition overtook the main legislative body in 1993. Since then, while its capability to win more votes through clientelism has consistently declined, the LDP has won most of the elections by building a coalition with a smaller party known as the Komeito. In contrast, lacking experience in coalition building, the PRI has refused to cooperate with the National Action Party (PAN: *Partido Acción Nacional*) despite ideological similarities, while Andrés Manuel López Obrador and his political party, the National Regeneration Movement (MORENA: *Movimiento Regeneración Nacional*), have risen in Mexican politics in the twenty-first century. In 2023, the LDP remains a dominant force in Japanese politics while the PRI's influence has faded in both the Presidential office and the Congress of the Union.

In this paper, we suggest that each party's electoral strategy during the one-party ruling period is causally linked to why the LDP has managed to remain dominant while the PRI has failed to retain its relevance. We will first compare the LDP and the PRI in the twentieth century and explore why the LDP was classified as democratic while the PRI was classified as

authoritarian. Then, we will delve into the differences between the patron-client networks in Japan and Mexico and how it was used to support one-party rule. Third, we will analyze the electoral outcomes and political changes in both Japan and Mexico for the dominant party and the opposition, focusing on when the opposition emerged and sometimes overtook the dominant party since the 1990s. In conclusion, we will discuss generalizable insights from comparing the two cases.

One-Party Ruling Parties Compared: LDP vs. PRI

Far from being a binary system, democracy exists on a spectrum, with democracy on one side and authoritarianism on the other. By nature, many countries exist within the gray space, showing characteristics of both regimes. Erica Frantz uses categorical typologies to classify authoritarian regimes, creating four broad categories: dominant-party, military, monarchic, or personalist; yet in many cases, these authoritarian regimes, regardless of type, often introduce elections to stabilize their regime and make them more resilient.³ “Democratic” elections can stabilize the regime by providing an alternative channel for dissent to be heard, demonstrating a dictator’s strength through electoral mobilization, information gathering on the opposition and the ruling elites supporting the leader, and hindering coordination among the opposition.⁴ However, this muddies the waters when classifying regimes and leads to questions of democratic legitimacy. As Frantz finds, authoritarian regimes often fall out of power by losing control over

³ Erica Frantz, *Authoritarianism: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 70. In their comparative large-*N* study of authoritarian regimes, Barbara Geddes and her coauthors find that a dominant-party dictatorship tends to be more resilient than a military or personalist dictatorship. See Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz, *How Dictatorships Work: Power, Personalization, and Collapse* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁴ Higashijima, *The Dictator’s Dilemma at the Ballot Box*, 35.

their elections. Yet, just as a regime can hold elections and be considered authoritarian, a regime can hold elections where the same party is elected consecutively and yet still be regarded as democratic.⁵ Therefore, no precise, easily definable, and distinguishing characteristics can clarify whether a regime is democratic or authoritarian. Theoretically, there is a line where a regime crosses over from authoritarian to democratic (or vice-versa), yet general scholarship disagrees on that line. For example, for almost 70 years, the PRI was considered a dominant-party dictatorship, with “a single political party controls leader selection and policy” with the leader as head of the party and country.⁶ Yet, although Japan was also ruled unflinchingly by the LDP for almost 50 years, the LDP was never considered a dominant-party dictatorship, and Japan was always considered a democratic country after World War II.

The PRI and the LDP utilized similar tools to curate votes throughout their decades-long stint in power. The main one was the cooptation of key demographics of voters: the rural poor for the PRI and influential sectors such as agriculture and industry for the LDP. The cooptation was achieved through patron-client networks, with certain constituencies receiving more money than others, either as a reward mechanism or an attempt to gain more support for the party in power. For example, district voting for the PRI in large margins often received more money in poverty relief programs. Similarly, the LDP used intergovernmental transfers to shore up districts with flailing electoral support.⁷

Although the strategies for maintaining power were the same, the LDP and the PRI had different goals during the elections. The PRI’s goal was to win big: i.e., by such a high margin,

⁵ Frantz, *Authoritarianism*, 124. See also Higashijima, *The Dictator’s Dilemma at the Ballot Box*, chapter 6.

⁶ Frantz, *Authoritarianism*, 74. Scheiner, *Democracy Without Competition in Japan*, 12.

⁷ Taylor C. McMichael, “Electoral Strategy and Intergovernmental Transfers in Postwar Japan: Who Sees the Unseen Pork?” *Asian Survey* 58(5) (2018): 847–73.

the opposition held no power and could not challenge the party. The LDP's goal was simply to win, no large margin required. Although the LDP held a majority in the Diet, it never had such a high majority that it could change or revise the Japanese Constitution, which required a two-thirds majority for both chambers.⁸ Although some factions in the LDP did have some constitutional revision goals in mind, the constitution generally worked in favor for the LDP. Constitutional revision was never needed with a scattered opposition and the ability to pass bills relatively unilaterally made it redundant. Additionally, the LDP knew constitutional revision was largely unpopular among the general Japanese population, making it a risky move and one with little payoff. Although the PRI operated in a presidential system, not a parliamentary one like Japan, it often held so many seats that the PRI could unilaterally make policy decisions without ever considering the opposition's input. In contrast, the LDP frequently consulted with the opposition and would even collaborate on certain bills. This was the key differentiator in making the PRI an authoritarian regime while the LDP remained a party within a democratic regime.

We suggest that the nuance lies within the nature and quality of elections between those two countries. Japan's LDP was the dominant party and did not have a wide margin of support within Japanese constituencies. Instead, the LDP was dominant simply because the opposition, the Japanese Socialist Party (JSP), was feeble in comparison and lacked the organization to overtake the LDP. As its party platform declared that both the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty and the Self-Defense Forces—the Japanese military—were unconstitutional and that its goal was to abolish them, the JSP never gained credibility to become a ruling party among Japanese constituencies during the Cold War. However, even though the JSP never held the majority in

⁸ In addition, Article 96 of the Japanese Constitution stipulates that the affirmative vote of a majority of all votes cast at a special referendum is required to make amendments to the Constitution.

the Diet, it was resilient, and the LDP's victory margin remained slim.⁹ Additionally, the electoral system in place gave few incentives for the JSP, or any opposition party, to unite and present a strong challenge to the LDP. In the 1955 system, only 15 percent of the vote share was required to win a seat; the JSP could still win a large number of seats in the Diet comfortably, even if they were unable to grasp the majority. In contrast, the PRI actively manipulated elections and suppressed the opposition in Mexico, evident by the wide margin of victories the PRI held in major Mexican constituencies. The PRI's electoral winnings were based on what Ellen Lust-Okar calls the "divide-and-rule effect" by constraining and splitting the opposition, where districts with lower PRI margins of victories were bribed to continue voting for the dominant party.¹⁰

In sum, we argue the strategies learned during the period of party dominance from the LDP, namely coalition building and being attuned to voters' desires, have preserved the LDP's status as the main Japanese party in the 21st century. In contrast, the PRI has mostly faded into the background of Mexican politics, with no major resurgence on the horizon. Moreover, the PRI never operated outside of a system where they were in control; therefore, the party could not ultimately succeed in a more democratic government. While they did win a few elections after the democratic shift, it can be argued that this was more of a backlash against PAN than an actual desire for the PRI to be in power again.

⁹ Leonard Schoppa describes that until the 1980s "Japanese politics revolved around the competition between the dominant LDP and the always-losing but resilient Japanese Socialist Party (JSP). See Leonard J. Schoppa, "Introduction: From the 1955 System to the '2000 System'" in Leonard J. Schoppa (Ed.), *The Evolution of Japan's Party System: Politics and Policy in an Era of Institutional Change* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 3.

¹⁰ Ellen Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World: Incumbents, Opponents, and Institutions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Electoral Clientelism Compared

Patron-client networks are a staple of authoritarian regimes. For example, the Chinese Communist Party has used patron-client relationships between businesses and local bureaucrats to coopt commercial actors and prevent the market economy from threatening China's one-party rule.¹¹ With one of the best tools for keeping power by cooptation, establishing robust patron-client networks help incumbents be reelected by keeping those same officials (or designated successors) in control for decades. Both the LDP and the PRI stayed in power by taking advantage of patron-client networks and weaponizing them for electoral gains.¹²

Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith explain the power of bloc voting, which “takes seemingly democratic institutions and makes them appear like publicly traded companies. Every voter...has a nominal right to vote, but effectively all the power lies with a few key actors who can control the votes of large numbers of shares or deliver many votes from their village.”¹³ Politicians will promise individual voters, the leading influencers of the bloc, a small—usually monetary—reward in exchange for their vote, thereby influencing a large group of people for the price of one. Those in power will then measure their levels of support relative to other districts and, in the next electoral cycle, take tax dollars and reward essential backers to stay in power.

¹¹ Jie Chen and Bruce J. Dickson, *Allies of the State: China's Private Entrepreneurs and Democratic Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Ling Chen, *Manipulating Globalization: The Influence of Bureaucrats on Business in China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018); Yue Hou, *The Private Sector in Public Office: Selective Property Rights in China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Kellee S. Tsai, *Capitalism Without Democracy: The Private Sector in Contemporary China* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).

¹² Geddes *et al.* find that the strategy for a dominant party to develop extensive patron-client networks is particularly helpful to prevent economic crises to destabilize the regime for dominant-party dictatorships. See Geddes, et al., *How Dictatorships Work*, 187–90.

¹³ Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith, *The Dictator's Handbook: Why Bad Behavior Is Almost Always Good Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 167

This serves two functions: a) by enriching key supporters, politicians cultivate that relationship and guarantee their backing in future elections; and b) the welfare of those outside the coalition reduces, and their overall power in the political system also reduces. Moreover, this becomes a self-reinforcing mechanism, as supporters, “fearing exclusion and poverty under an alternative leadership, are all the more fiercely loyal.”¹⁴

The Iron Triangle and LDP's Dominance in Japan

Ethan Scheiner points out that “clientelism plays front and center in the Japanese political system, and clientelism lies at the core of Japanese opposition failure.”¹⁵ Local politicians and organizations use bloc voting, or the organized vote, to deliver large swaths of votes to the party, with the LDP monitoring and enforcing the practice.¹⁶ Voting in Japan varies from Western voting, as Japanese voters are among the least partisan in the developed world. Instead, “Japanese voters are mobilized at election time mainly by the lure of pork barrel, only marginally by policy issues, and even less by ideals and visions.”¹⁷ Japanese pork includes “government subsidies, official price supports and import quotas, targeted tax breaks, regulatory favors in the allocation of trucking routes, and other policy benefits.”¹⁸ In the case of Japan, the personal relationships politicians cultivate with voters go far beyond just providing pork; often, politicians are seen at personal events such as weddings or funerals of constituents with whom they have a

¹⁴ Ibid., 184–5.

¹⁵ Scheiner, *Democracy Without Competition in Japan*, 64.

¹⁶ Steven R. Reed, “Patronage and Predominance: How the LDP Maintains Its Hold on Power,” *Social Science Japan Journal* 25(1) (2022), 83–100.

¹⁷ Haruhiro Fukui and Shigeko N. Fukai, “Pork Barrel Politics, Networks, and Local Economic Development in Contemporary Japan,” *Asian Survey* 36 (1996), 268–9.

¹⁸ Brian Woodall, *Japan Under Construction: Corruption, Politics, and Public Works* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 9–10.

close relationship. These side payments often benefited specialized groups such as rice farmers, small business sectors, regions lacking high-growth industries, and declining industries.¹⁹ These ended up not only being economic benefits to those sectors but regulatory benefits as well. This patron-client system in Japan affected domestic politics and how Japan interacted on the international stage. For example, many trade deals the Japanese attempted to conduct during the time of LDP dominance were torpedoed by the inability to compromise on protections for the rice industry; those protections were a byproduct of the patron-client system keeping the LDP in power.²⁰ The Japanese clientelist systems were enforced by the “Iron Triangle” (*Tetsu no Sankakkei*), consisting of interest groups (*gyōkai*), politicians (*seijika*), and bureaucracy (*kanryō*). The LDP politicians with strong connections with particular industries and an influential bureaucracy are called *zoku giin* (“tribe Diet members”). The *zoku giin* are “veteran representatives with expertise and influence in a policy sector.”²¹ However, their “expertise” is not based on detailed knowledge of particular policies but on their influence over how government money benefits particular interest groups.²² For example, the politicians of *kensetsu zoku* (“construction tribe”) usually do not have construction engineering expertise. Still, they are familiar with the political engineering of budget increases for construction projects that would benefit pro-LDP construction companies.²³ Takenaka Heizō, an economist who served as the top

¹⁹ T.J. Pempel, *Regime Shift: Comparative Dynamics of the Japanese Political Economy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 63–5.

²⁰ Mireya Solís, *Dilemmas of a Trading Nation: Japan and the United States in the Evolving Asia-Pacific Order* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2017).

²¹ Ellis S. Krauss and Robert J. Pekkanen, *The Rise and Fall of Japan’s LDP: Political Party Organizations as Historical Institutions* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 17.

²² For example, the personal support organization office of the *kensetsu zoku* Diet member I visited in Miyazaki Prefecture in January 2011 was located in the local construction company’s headquarters, suggesting strong collusive ties between the *zoku giin* and local construction companies.

²³ Scheiner, *Democracy Without Competition in Japan*.

economic advisor for the Koizumi Junichirō administration, summarizes the collusive relationship between construction companies and LDP politicians under the Iron Triangle as follows:²⁴

Construction-related companies are notorious about their strong collusive relationship with the ruling party [i.e., the LDP]. These companies support the ruling party by financial contribution (*seiji kenkin*) and various means of electoral cooperation (*senkyo kyōryoku*), and the ruling party supports the companies by expanding public construction projects (*kōkyō jigyō*). And the bureaucracy maintains its strong influence by coordinating the relationship between the LDP and the companies.²⁵

Ellis Krauss and Robert Pekkanen suggest that three political institutions supported the Iron Triangle: *kōenkai* (“personal support organization”), intraparty factions (*habatsu*), and the Policy Affairs Research Council (PARC: *Seimu Chōsakai*).²⁶ These three institutions gave LDP Diet members a solid incentive to run electoral campaigns producing personal votes and to become experts in distributing public money to particular industries as a *zoku giin*. Francis Rosenbluth and Michael Thies argue that these three institutions emerged in Japanese politics because of the unique electoral system called the “single nontransferable vote” (SNTV), which existed in the Lower House of the Japanese Diet from 1947 to 1993.²⁷ The SNTV electoral

²⁴ For Japanese individuals referenced in the text, surnames come first before given names.

²⁵ Takenaka Heizō, *Kōzō Kaikaku no Shinjitsu: Takenaka Heizō Daijin Nisshi* [The Truth of the Structural Reforms: Minister’s Diary of Takenaka Heizō (Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Shinbun-sha, 2006), 17. When introducing a Japanese source, we put the author’s surname first and given name last.

²⁶ Krauss and Pekkanen, *The Rise and Fall of Japan’s LDP*.

²⁷ Francis McCall Rosenbluth and Michael F. Thies, *Japan Transformed: Political Change and Economic Restructuring* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

system consisted of multimember districts, where three to five candidates were elected from each district. Hence, the LDP had to have multiple candidates win from a single district to stay in office as a ruling party. As a result, to differentiate themselves from other LDP candidates, each LDP candidate had to produce their own personal votes and their own particular industries for their constituencies.

The *kōenkai* was an institution “through which individual Diet candidates constructed or incorporated a network of groups in which their constituents participated.”²⁸ Saitō Jun, a political scientist and a former Diet member in Japan, observes that the *kōenkai* institution formed a collusive mechanism of the LDP’s long reign by providing a forum of reciprocal patron-clientelistic interactions between the LDP (patron) and the voters (client).²⁹ It is important to note that the *kōenkai* was not a policy-based but a personal network-based organization for national-level politicians. They were organized hierarchically, with national politicians at the top, leading local politicians and local business notables at the intermediate levels, and large numbers of voters at the bottom.³⁰ The *kōenkai* functions as a favor factory, with politicians providing connections for jobs, spouses, and education while donating—or using tax dollars to fund—large sums of money to projects deemed important by the *kōenkai*. In exchange, members keep the politician in office by voting and campaigning on the candidate’s behalf. Spending for government public works is also another enforcement mechanism of patron-client networks. As of 2001, roughly 15% of Japan’s GDP was invested in construction alone.³¹ With the entire

²⁸ Krauss and Pekkanen, *The Rise and Fall of Japan’s LDP*, 17.

²⁹ Saitō Jun, *Jimin-Tō Chōki Seiken no Seiji Keizaigaku: Rieki Yūdō Seiji no Jiko Mujun* [The Political Economy of the LDP Regime: Self-Contradiction of the Patron-Client Politics] (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō, 2010).

³⁰ Scheiner, *Democracy Without Competition in Japan*, 71.

³¹ Takako Okuda, “Mechanism and Dynamics of Japanese Clientelism: Examination of Politics of Pork Barrel Politics in the 1990s.” Unpublished Master’s Thesis, Duke University (2001).

industry backing the LDP, the LDP rewarded them for their loyalty by investing tax dollars into public works projects and providing contracts to the construction companies who support the LDP most arduously.

Another political institution that supported the Iron Triangle was the intraparty factions of the LDP. Factions were considered “an indispensable aid to the careers of LDP Diet members.”³² Just as the *kōenkai* institution was separate from policy preference or political ideology, it is important to note that “the major goal of LDP factions and the reason for their existence were unrelated to policy.”³³ Krauss and Pekkanen argue that factions emerged as a strategy to win an LDP presidential election.³⁴ Beginning in the 1970s, cabinet posts were distributed proportionally according to factions, and hence factional politics of the LDP gave faction leaders a solid incentive to increase their own members. If your faction was bigger, you would receive more votes when you ran for the LDP presidential election. Thus, one of the principles in politics under LDP dominance was “the number [of LDP Diet members] means power” (*kazu wa chikara nari*).³⁵ Tanaka Kakuei followed this principle most explicitly. While serving as prime minister (1972–1974), Tanaka made strong connections with construction companies and created a large fundraising mechanism through his famous *kōenkai* organization, Etsuzankai. After stepping down from the prime minister position due to the Lockheed financial scandal in 1974, he used the fund to form the largest faction in LDP, the Tanaka Faction (later known as the Keiseikai),

³² Krauss and Pekkanen, *The Rise and Fall of Japan's LDP*, 18.

³³ *Ibid.*, 100.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, chapter 4.

³⁵ Shinoda Tomohito, *Seiji Shudō vs. Kanryō Shihai: Jimin Seiken, Minshu Seiken, Sei-Kan 20-Nen Tōsō no Uchimaku* [Political Leadership vs. Bureaucratic Rule: LDP Administration, DPJ Administrations, and Behind-the-Scenes Competition for Leadership Between Politics and Bureaucracy of the 20 Years] (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun-sha, 2013), 47.

which influenced the LDP's decision of who would become the party president from the mid-1970s until Koizumi became prime minister in 2001.³⁶

Among the three political institutions that supported the vested interests of the Iron Triangle, the PARC arguably contributed most to bringing *zoku giin* to the center of the decision-making processes of the LDP-dominant regime. There was an unwritten rule in the LDP that “all proposals for legislative bills had to go through the party first, before going up to the cabinet and then to the Diet for passage.”³⁷ It was the norm in the LDP's decision-making processes that policy proposals were discussed at the PARC first, then brought to another important intraparty institution, the Executive Council (*Sōmukai*).³⁸ It is important to note that the PARC was not just the chief policymaking body but that it also “performed important socialization, training, and career-structuring functions for both the party and government, [and hence] it was an almost uniquely powerful party organ among the parties of parliamentary democracies in the industrialized countries.”³⁹ Thus, like the *kōenkai* institution and the intraparty factions, the PARC helped create reciprocal interactive relationships in the LDP-dominant regime.

And most importantly, LDP Diet members differentiated themselves by specialization in the PARC divisions, which became the basis of the “expertise” of the *zoku giin*.⁴⁰ Tanaka tried to strengthen the functions of the PARC to institutionalize the LDP's intraparty decision-making processes, aiming to create a system of *zoku giin* cultivating the patron-client networks that

³⁶ Shinoda Tomohito, *Seiji Shudō vs. Kanryō Shihai*, 47–8. However, the literature on party politics tends to argue that factions lack continuity in voter support because they lack continuity in name, and that as a result factional politics would prevent party politics from functioning. See Aldrich and Griffin, *Why Parties Matter*, 35.

³⁷ Krauss and Pekkanen, *The Rise and Fall of Japan's LDP*, 19.

³⁸ Takenaka, *Kōzō Kaikaku no Shinjitsu*, 82.

³⁹ Krauss and Pekkanen, *The Rise and Fall of Japan's LDP*, 158.

⁴⁰ Inoguchi Takashi and Iwai Tomoaki, *Zoku Giin no Kenkyū* [Research on Tribe Diet Members] (Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Shinbun-sha, 1987).

supported the LDP-dominant regime. As a result of Tanaka's institutionalization of the PARC, the relationship of each *zoku giin* with specific bureaucratic agencies in a particular policy area was institutionalized.⁴¹ In other words, beginning in the 1970s, the bureaucratic ministries, the PARC divisions, and the *zoku giin* shared the same compartmentalized policy areas. The LDP's intraparty decision-making process through the PARC weakened the party president's (hence the prime minister's) policymaking leadership. The norm that every proposal for a legislative bill would go through the *zoku giin*-dominated PARC divisions before reaching the cabinet meant that the prime minister could not control the bill until the *zoku giin* modified it. Under the LDP-dominant regime, the prime minister could not exercise his leadership but simply responded to the collusive Iron Triangle of interest groups, the *zoku giin*, and bureaucracy. The Prime Minister in Japan was generally accepted to be a weak position, with a few notable exceptions. The office was plagued by obligations to factions within the LDP and the autonomous bureaucracy, which diminished the power available for the Prime Minister to wield. While recent reforms have changed this power structure, Abe and Koizumi have been the only Prime Ministers to fully take advantage of the new system.⁴²

Poverty Relief and PRI's Dominance in Mexico

[Under Construction]

The PRI in Mexico is widely understood as holding on to power through patronage politics. Vote buying was a key mechanism to hold onto power for the PRI. Beatriz Magaloni shows how the PRI attempted to maintain control of the masses by using the National Solidarity

⁴¹ Krauss and Pekkanen, *The Rise and Fall of Japan's LDP*, 169.

⁴² Aurelia George Mulgan, "Japan's Political Leadership Deficit," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 35(2) (2000): 183–202.

Program (PRONASOL: *Programa Nacional de Solidaridad*), a poverty relief program in effect from 1989–1994, during the relative decline of the PRI.⁴³ The PRONSASOL was targeted towards municipalities sliding towards the opposition rather than given to municipalities that the PRI won with a wide margin. In fact, “the PRI diverted funds from municipalities that it expected to win by large margins and concentrated resources where they could make a difference between voters remaining loyal to the regime or defecting.”⁴⁴ This makes sense because the government’s share of revenue was declining, leading to scarcer resources and, therefore, less of an ability to coopt voters as the PRI had enjoyed in past decades. Bueno de Mesquita and Smith explain: “As the size of the winning coalition enlarged, Mexico’s tax rates followed suit by declining, just as they should when politicians need to curry favor with many instead of a few.”⁴⁵ When the PRI was a dominant power, the politicians in Mexico offered “liberal access to government spoils and opportunities for corruption” for those part of the regime, making politics “the principal road to economic success.”⁴⁶ These spoils were then distributed to the loyal elites, creating a robust patronage system that persisted for decades within Mexican politics. Even at the height of its power, the PRI consistently invested large sums of money into the electoral system to continue winning by huge margins, even when the opposition was too weak to threaten the ruling regime.

⁴³ Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy*, chapter 4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁴⁵ Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, *The Dictator’s Handbook*, 187.

⁴⁶ Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy*, 47.

Summary

[Under Construction]

Although the patron-client networks in Japan and Mexico functioned similarly, their goals were fundamentally different. Individual politicians used patron-client systems in Japan to stay in power, resulting in the national party granting favors to specific industries supporting the LDP politicians. Mexico, in contrast, was a party-centric government, with the PRI making decisions for the party rather than individual politicians attempting to stay in power. While the LDP politicians had individual electoral strategies and used their offices to fulfill campaign promises to their supporters, the PRI had a systematic party strategy for staying in power. Additionally, the PRI used their resources as a party to manipulate elections, including constitutional revision, in their favor. The LDP benefitted from the existing electoral rules, and when external circumstances forced them to change to satisfy voters, they changed their electoral strategy to better fit the new rules. This fundamental difference classified Japan as a democracy while Mexico remained authoritarian.

While the LDP did not outright retaliate against its dissenters (i.e., JSP voters) in the same way PRI did in Mexico, they did use the state to conduct coordinated attacks against organized labor. The majority of JSP's voters belonged to unions in sectors such as the railroads, tobacco, and telecommunications. The state, run by LDP politicians, made moves to nationalize these industries and destroy the JSP's party base. This was conducted under the Nakasone Yasuhiro administration. The move worked, leaving JSP in a weakened state on the eve of the 1994 economic crash in Japan.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Sources to be found.

Inflection Points and their Aftermath: 1990s and 2000s

The PRI's Demise

After decades of dominance, both the PRI and the LDP lost their dominant positions in national elections in the 1990s. While this was a shock to outside observers, those familiar with Japanese and Mexican politics saw the writing on the wall years before the actual downfalls of the parties. Although the reasons for the decline differed for both, it is generally understood that the LDP lost power due to the public's discontent after the end of the miracle-growth years and the several scandals within the LDP that incentivized voters to support the opposition. The PRI faced a similar economic crisis in 1994, but the opposition has steadily begun growing in strength and trust in the eyes of voters in the decade preceding the financial crisis. With their name synonym with corruption and electoral fraud, the economic incentives the PRI used to bribe voters no longer held any weight after the financial crisis, which allowed the already-growing opposition parties, the PAN and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD: *Partido de la Revolución Democrática*), to oust the PRI from the electoral majority and eventually for the PAN to win the Presidency in 2000.

However, the PRI in Mexico already began showing signs of decay in the 1980s; before winning all state, municipal, and congressional elections with hefty margins, but after the 1980s, these clear victories began to slip. Federico Estévez and his coauthors write: "The central pillar of the PRI regime was its monopolization of mass support through economic performance, distribution of material rewards at election time...and the mobilization of voters through wide-reaching clientelist networks."⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Federico Estévez, Alberto Diaz-Cayeros, and Beatriz Magaloni, "A House Divided Against Itself: The PRI's Survival Strategy After Hegemony," in Edward Friedman and Joseph Wong

Mexico was a dominant-party system for almost 70 years; however, there was still an illusion of opposition parties. With the PRI being center-right, the left remained in disarray in “countless parties, quasi parties, and currents... [giving] a façade of competition.”⁴⁹ However, by 1946, the PAN emerged as the sole opposition while the PRI absorbed the other, smaller parties. The PAN was the more conservative, right-wing alternative to the regime. Although the PAN went decades without seeing actual electoral results, it still served an essential function as the outlet for voters to punish the PRI when the Mexican economy was down, or a corruption scandal came to light. However, these votes were futile in shaking the PRI’s hold on power up until the 1980s. The PRI remained a united front until ideological divisions caused the more left-wing part of the PRI to split and form a new party, the PRD, in 1989. After the PRD was established, Mexico had three main political parties: PRD, the furthest left; PRI, the moderate; and PAN, the furthest right. While the PAN had existed long before the PRD, the internal split in the PRI allowed the PAN to gain a foothold in local and, eventually, national elections. PRI voters became split between the PRI and the PRD, allowing voters disillusioned with the PRI and, subsequently, the PRD to finally gain a majority in some elections. As the PRI continued to be ineffective governors, the electorate began to catch onto the economic cycles coinciding with elections. In the runup before the elections, economic conditions improved as PRI officials allocated subsidies to districts as an incentive to vote for them. These subsidies continued for a

(Ed.), *Political Transitions in Dominant Party Systems: Learning to Lose* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 43.

⁴⁹ Daniel C. Levy and Kathleen Bruhn, “Mexico: Sustained Civilian Rule and the Question of Democracy,” in Larry Diamond, Jonathan Hartlyn, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset (Eds.), *Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America*, Second Edition (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999), 542.

short while after the elections as a reward for winning districts and stopped until the next election cycle.

Another major reason for the PRI's downfall was the electoral reforms implemented from 1977 through 1996. These reforms were chiefly inspired by "the desire to silence and co-opt opposition and discontent, to impress the external world, and to give the opposition improved (but actually impotent) channels through which to express their interests and demands."⁵⁰ They were often demanded by the opposition and used as concessions for the PRI to maintain its supermajority, but ironically, they eventually led to the PRI's own downfall. One of the more hurtful reforms was seat designations, which guaranteed 100 seats out of the 400-seat Chamber of Deputies for the opposition part(ies). Eventually, no leading party could have more than 70 percent of lower chamber seats, putting the two-thirds majority needed for constitutional reform at a razor-thin margin.⁵¹ By 1996, the Federal Electoral Institute was an independent agency, along with other equalizing reforms, which finally permitted a significantly more equal playing field for the opposition. However, despite these reforms, the PRI continued with corrupt election management. Some examples include "stuffing ballot boxes, bribing voters, busing villagers to the polls to vote for the PRI, and tampering with tallying computers."⁵² However, this corruption eventually backfired once Mexico's economy began to downturn in the 1980s and 1990s.

The PRI captured the votes of Mexicans through economic incentive programs. There are three main types of Mexican social programs: Discretionary private goods (clientelism), geographically targeted discretionary transfers of public goods (pork barrel), and non-

⁵⁰ Dorothy J. Solinger, "Ending One-Party Dominance: Korea, Taiwan, Mexico," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (January 2002), 34.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.34.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.36.

discretionary distribution of public goods.⁵³ Conditional party loyalty was the primary mechanism of PRI dominance. The party machine “targets particularistic transfers to reward the loyalty of its core supporters” to ensure core voters do not transform into swing voters.⁵⁴ This was done through a federal fiscal pact “negotiated between the states and the federation called the National System of Fiscal Coordination,” a crucial part in the PRI’s dominance and perpetual weakening of the opposition.⁵⁵ However, as the PAN slowly gained legitimacy in more powerful offices, fiscal decentralization was a critical compromise between the still-dominant PRI and the PAN, further weakening the PRI’s ability to “win big” in future elections. Party decentralization within the PRI also contributed to the PRI’s weakening; instead of specially chosen candidates, the party began holding party conventions and primaries for nominations of candidates. This weakened the accountability system within the PRI and encouraged even more party splintage, already taking place in the early 1990s when this change occurred.

The primary election pivotal to the PRI’s downfall was in 1994. Before the election, Mexico officially joined the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which enhanced the economic conditions of the states and municipalities near the U.S. border. Incentivized by trade and free markets and being financially rewarded, these voters were de-incentivized from voting for the PRI since the main draw of the dominant party was the distributive economic resources given to its core constituents. There was also rising national discontent and turmoil, with the Chiapas uprising, the Colosio assassination, and the overall national economic downturn. However, the PRI still won over the divided opposition parties, the PAN and the PRD.

⁵³ Alberto Diaz-Cayeros, Federico Estévez, and Beatriz Magaloni, *The Political Logic of Poverty Relief: Electoral Strategies and Social Policy in Mexico* (New York, Cambridge University Press: 2016), 160.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 160.

⁵⁵ Estévez et al., “A House Divided Against Itself,” 45.

The starkest contrast between the response of the LDP and the PRI is their ideological shifts. To be a dominant party, the ideology of all candidates must be broad enough to appeal to the majority of the population, meaning that ideological convictions within the party are often weaker than in multiparty states such as the United States or the United Kingdom. However, one of the main weaknesses of the PRI was that candidates, elected officials, and other party members left the PRI on ideological grounds. Before the conception of the PRD, which originated from leaders within the PRI unhappy with the PRI's policies, the opposition party PAN was essentially a non-threat. However, the opposition began gaining steam after voters detected a potential weakness to exploit within the PRI and could vote for an ideologically similar party to the PRD. The PRI could have easily formed a coalition with the PRD; the majority of PRD members were former PRI members. However, they failed to do so, and the continuing national recession and poor decisions made by President Ernest Zedillo made the midterm elections in 1997 a bloodbath for the PRI. "Legislative policies were utterly transformed. For the first time in its history, the PRI was obligated to compromise with the opposition to pass ordinary legislation."⁵⁶ Encouraged by the modest gains by the opposition in 1997, voters were further incentivized to vote for the opposition parties in 2000, allowing the PAN and Vicente Fox to win the presidential election for the first time in almost eight decades.

As we will argue, while Japanese politicians paid attention to voters' wants and changed the party direction, even creating new coalitions and making political sacrifices on legislation to remain in power, the PRI garnered a reputation as impossible to change. Instead of compromising on policy, the party allowed an internal divide to become a party schism with the formation of a new party, the PRD, siphoning off voters from the PRI bloc in the process. When

⁵⁶ Diaz-Cayeros et al., *The Political Logic of Poverty Relief*, 163.

the Mexican economy showed signs of deterioration, the PRI relied on subsidies to prop up important voting districts, ignoring others who expressed anger in the ballot box. The PRI made no meaningful reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, and the reforms they did make only strengthened the opposition's (PAN) position and made themselves weaker, despite having voting majorities. The PRI became known as ineffective among voters, giving the incentive to vote for opposition parties as Mexico's economic situation only declined. Eventually, the monetary rewards for voting for the PRI were no longer enough to keep voters, and the PRI was voted out.

Fox was the first non-PRI candidate to win the presidential election in almost a hundred years. This win was only made possible through the PRD split from the PRI, which showed that the ruling party could be successfully challenged. However, Fox was also an ideal candidate himself. Fox appealed to younger, more educated, and urban voters through a platform advocating for change. Another vital aspect of Fox was his sheer charisma; U.S. political strategist Dick Morris said: "Fox has a chemistry with the people of Mexico that is beyond belief."⁵⁷ This charisma helped him successfully challenge the PRI candidate, Francisco Labastida, with 46 percent of the popular vote.

The end of PRI dominance is generally considered to be in 2000 when the PAN's Fox won the presidential election. He served a lackluster six-year term until 2006, when Felipe Calderón, another PAN candidate, won the Presidency. During the dozen years that PAN held the highest office, they managed to avoid the economic crises that had cyclically plagued Mexico until 1994 and kept inflation at bay for the majority of their terms. However, the transition of power to a new dominant party set expectations high for the PAN candidates, higher than they

⁵⁷ Quoted in Sam Dillon, "Businessman Breaks Political Mold," *New York Times*, July 4, 2000, 3.

were ever likely to achieve. The Global Financial Crisis of 2008 erased most of the progress Mexico's economy had made and gave voters a concrete reason to search for other options in the 2012 election. Important factors during the years between the crisis and the election were that "the Mexican economy, tightly linked to that of the United States, shrank by 6.2 percent. This made Mexico the Western Hemisphere's worst performer that year, trailing Paraguay and even Haiti. Employment fell and joblessness and underemployment rose, running counter to President Calderón's main 2006 campaign promise."⁵⁸ A myriad of other factors, including a rise in the drug trade, violence, and the militarization of local police forces, also contributed to Mexican's general unhappiness with the PAN by 2012. In surprising events, they voted in PRI candidate Enrique Peña Nieto. "Even before campaigning officially began at the end of March, most polls showed Peña Nieto drawing 45 to 50 percent support and enjoying a comfortable lead of 20 points or more over any rival" showing how many Mexican voters had lost faith in the PAN and were willing to vote for the PRI candidate again even without much national public exposure Mexico had to Peña Nieto as a presidential candidate.⁵⁹ In the resulting election, the PAN's legislative majority fell by multiple percentage points, with the PRD losing in the Senate but gaining in the lower chamber. The PRI gained double digits in the Senate but lost its majority in the lower chamber. However, the PRI still had not regained the crucial two-thirds majority needed to change the Constitution and therefore was subject to legislative checks the party hadn't seen before while in power. However, the PAN failed to dismantle many essential bureaucratic and institutional mechanisms the PRI had utilized to keep its hold on power in the 20th century.

⁵⁸ Gustavo Flores-Macías, "Mexico's 2012 Elections: The Return of the PRI," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2013), 129.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 133.

Part of this includes the distribution of resources at the local and state levels, which held many important, lower-level offices for PRI politicians.

Many people anxiously watched the 2018 presidential election, wondering if the PRI would return another victory and regain its position as a dominant-party regime over Mexico. However, the Presidency went to López Obrador, a candidate from the new party MORENA, by a landslide margin of over 30 points. López Obrador defeated the PRI candidate and the candidate put forward by a coalition alliance between the PAN and the PRD, the right and the left of Mexican politics. The MORENA is characterized by its left-wing social stances against globalization and the market-oriented reforms. It performed very well in its first national election, winning the Presidency and the legislative branch, along with its coalition partners, the left-wing Labor Party and the Christian conservative Social Encounter Party. In contrast, the PRI candidate came in third, and the PRI lost several percentage points in both legislative chambers.

With another election not coming until 2024, knowing if the MORENA is here to stay is impossible. Mexico has renegotiated the NAFTA into the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, weathered the pandemic, and is currently experiencing high gas prices and a slowing economy like many other countries. However, the 2018 election proved that the PRI would almost certainly never regain its long-standing one-party majority rule despite several reforms still needed to reinforce Mexican democracy.

The LDP's Revival

The LDP faced an economic downturn similar to Mexico in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Having experienced almost three decades of miracle economic growth, the Japanese economic downturn shocked the system. However, the LDP maintained strong ties with key

economic sectors, the most notorious being agriculture and Japan Agricultural Cooperatives (JA: *Nōkyō*). It functioned as an electoral machine of the LDP by systematically gathering the vote behind individual politicians in exchange for LDP politicians with strong collusive relations to defeat or weaken reformist efforts to adapt agriculture.⁶⁰ These systematic electoral machines with reciprocal relationships with the LDP politicians they elect, as well as electoral rules that benefitted rural voters more likely to be a part of a JA coop or otherwise benefit economically from LDP rule, such as through infrastructure projects, helping maintain the LDP rule on power even after the economic downturn. Through electoral reform in 1994, the LDP lost for the first time since the 1990s.

Michael Norris describes the pre-1994 SNTV system as “encourage[ing] the proliferation of koenkai networks and money politics, entrenching clientelistic behaviours in elections. Electoral malapportionment was a result of the pre-1994 electoral system and encouraged politicians to appeal to segments of the population through pork-barrel politics and protectionist policies. This structural defect also allowed the LDP to garner a majority of seats, without a majority of votes.”⁶¹ As a result, *kōenkai* gathered the votes for the LDP candidates. This behavior was encouraged by the LDP’s hold over fiscal transfers, which allowed rewards to be given to the *kōenkai* networks if they could elevate their representative to an exceptionally high position within the LDP or the Diet. The SNTV only encouraged this relationship, as it pitted LDP candidates against each other in elections.

⁶⁰ Patricia L. Machlachlan, “The Electoral Power of Japanese Interest Groups: An Organizational Perspective,” *Journal of East Asian Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (December 2014), 429–58.

⁶¹ Michael J. Norris, “The Liberal Democratic Party in Japan: Explaining the Party’s Ability to Dominate Japanese Politics,” *Inquiries Journal* Vol. 2, No. 10 (2010), <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/296/the-liberal-democratic-party-in-japan-explaining-the-partys-ability-to-dominate-japanese-politics> (accessed March 13, 2023).

As a result of this system, the LDP never won “big,” but they won just enough to maintain a legislative majority or plurality to secure the premiership. The last time the LDP won the majority vote in Japan was in 1963; for over thirty years after that, it maintained its majority by the technicalities of the electoral system. Another aspect of this was extreme malapportionment. Japan went through a period of massive urbanization during the miracle-growth years; however, electoral boundaries and seat reallocation were never updated to match the new population movement. As a result, by 1994, the value of rural votes was almost three times that of urban votes.⁶² The LDP took advantage of this, as most of their voters came from rural areas, and argued that the 1947 constitution did not allow redistricting. With malapportionment and the SNTV system, “during a fifty-year period (1955–2005), the LDP had been out of power a mere 10 months and 20 days.”⁶³

When the LDP lost the majority in the 1994 election, the JSP was so disorganized that the LDP was able to form a tightly run minority government, working with JSP representatives despite significant ideological differences. Although this “coalition” was not long-lasting, it allowed the LDP to remain in control of legislative policy even when it was weak. After the JSP collapsed and a new opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), was created, the LDP faced the most credible threat to its dominance it has ever seen. In response, the LDP formed a coalition in 2003 with a smaller, religious-based party Komeito, which has still remained intact. This strengthened LDP until its loss to the DPJ in 2009; however, due to poor management and scandal, the DPJ was the majority for only three years before the LDP regained the majority under the second term of the Abe Shinzō administration that started in 2012.

⁶² Richard Mulgan, “The processes of public accountability.” *Australian Journal of Public Administration* Vol. 56, No. 1 (1997): 25–36.

⁶³ Norris, “The Liberal Democratic Party in Japan.”

Although Japanese politicians had to adjust their winning strategies after the 1994 electoral reform, they have continued to deliver pork to their districts once elected into office. This is thought to be because “the reform did little to alter their ability to discern the levels of support provided by the different municipalities in their districts and influence transfers in ways that disproportionately benefit certain municipalities over others.”⁶⁴ However, this means that often the party cannot redirect pork into more supportive districts over less supportive ones. Additionally, oftentimes the districts were configured in such a way that with less money, the LDP still commanded high levels of support relative to other districts. These fiscal transfers continue through 2000. This system allowed LDP politicians to reward municipalities with overall smaller prizes and continue to be elected during times of economic downturn (and, therefore, smaller budgets). Yet, the system of this “tournament theory” was not in place for the PRI in Mexico, making it impossible for the party to stay in power after pork flow became less during tight budgetary years.

The LDP’s most significant difference from the PRI was its ability to build coalitions to remain in power. In the 1990s, when the LDP was losing grip on power and faced its first electoral loss since the 1950s, they rallied around several smaller opposition parties, effectively the ruling party operating in opposition despite not having a clear majority. As a result, many Japanese scholars do not even consider the LDP’s first actual loss to be until the DPJ won in 2009, over a decade after the 1994 electoral loss. The LDP was also at the forefront of reform, agreeing to electoral reform in 1994 and continuing other administrative reforms throughout the 1990s. Administrative reforms consolidated power behind the prime minister’s office, giving the

⁶⁴ Amy Catalinac, Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, and Alastair Smith, “The Tournament Theory of Pork Barrel Politics: The Case of Japan,” *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 53 (2020), 1684.

office the institutional conditions to implement their policy as a “strong prime minister” (*tsuyoi shushō*).⁶⁵ Although many structural reforms were not implemented until Koizumi became Prime Minister in 2001, incremental reformism kept the LDP relevant to voters and gave the party direction, allowing the LDP to remain in power even as the LDP politicians with vested interests fell out of favor relative to the new reformists.⁶⁶

The LDP faced similar challenges in Japan as the PRI did in Mexico but did not lose badly until the 2009 election of the DPJ. After the 1990s economic slowdown, the party went through a series of transformative reforms to attempt to respond to the growing displeasure of the Japanese public, including administrative reform, the electoral reforms of 1994, and Koizumi’s reforms. Prime Minister Koizumi ascended office in 2001 as an outsider, with the campaign slogan “Destroy the LDP.” Tobias Harris describes Koizumi as a significant turning point, running on a platform of anti-factionalism, elevating reformism, implementing top-down leadership once in office, and, of course, destroying the very party whose banner he campaigned under.⁶⁷ However, this slogan was meant to attack the “old” LDP, a party with entrenched vested interests, in favor of a refreshed, more independent party that could accelerate reformism. When Koizumi stepped down in 2006, many believed that Japanese politics had changed sufficiently for the trend and momentum of Koizumi’s reforms to continue.⁶⁸ However, Koizumi’s successful

⁶⁵ Machidori Satoshi, *Shushō Seiji no Seido Bunseki: Gendai Nihon Seiji no Kenryoku Kiban Keisei* [The Japanese Premiership: An Institutional Analysis of the Power Relations] (Tokyo: Chikura Shobō, 2012).

⁶⁶ Hiroki Takeuchi and Keely McNeme, “The Domestic Political Economy of Japan’s New Geoeconomic Strategy,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* (FirstView, 2023), 1-21, <https://doi.org/10.1017/jea.2022.32> (accessed March 13, 2023).

⁶⁷ Tobias S. Harris. *The Iconoclast: Shinzō Abe and the New Japan* (London: Hurst & Company, 2020), p. 80.

⁶⁸ Margarita Estevez-Abe, “Japan’s Shift Toward a Westminster System: A Structural Analysis of the 2005 Lower House Election and Its Aftermath,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (August 2006), 632–51.

tenure was followed by three short stints of LDP Prime Ministers. Finally, frustrated with the lack of progress on reforms, the Japanese public voted for the new DPJ in 2009. Still, this initial electoral success was again met with frustration after several unfortunate factors, including the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, led to another three Prime Ministers in three years. Frustrated again by the lack of effective governance by the DPJ, the Japanese voters again turned to the LDP and elected Abe for his second tenure as Prime Minister despite his failed first tenure from 2006 to 2007.

Abe served the longest tenure of a Japanese prime minister, serving for eight consecutive years before stepping down in 2020 to another LDP successor. He utilized the incremental reforms the LDP had put in place since the 1990s to become the most effective prime minister since Yoshida.⁶⁹ Several of his reforms and policy implementations changed the trajectory of Japan's future, including his three-pronged Abenomics economic plan to tackle stagnant growth and raise the inflation rate to 2 percent, his gradual dismantling of JA, consolidation and centralization of the Prime Minister's Office (*Kantei*) and the bureaucratic arms of the Japanese government, and his pursuit of regional trade agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (officially ratified as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement of Trans-Pacific Partnership in 2018) and the Regional and Comprehensive Economic Partnership in 2020. Although Abe stepped down in 2020, citing health reasons, he played a significant role in the LDP leadership until his assassination in 2022. There was initial turmoil in LDP leadership after Abe's term as Prime Minister ended, with the election of Suga Yoshihide only lasting for 13 months before he was replaced by the current Prime Minister Kishida Fumio. However, the LDP

⁶⁹ Takeuchi and McNeme, "The Domestic Political Economy of Japan's New Geoeconomic Strategy."

has remained a force in Japanese elections, with no viable opposition after the DPJ collapsed after its failed years in the majority.

Conclusion

The LDP and the PRI were both dominant parties with similar trajectories in their respective countries, yet there was a fundamental change with its genesis in the 1990s that occurred for both parties. For the LDP, it was the economic collapse that finally pushed reform to the forefront of Japanese voters' minds and raised the prominence of that faction of the LDP. This faction, led most prominently by Koizumi and Abe, fundamentally reshaped elections and the center of power in the Japanese government, further empowering the Prime Minister at the expense of Diet members. For the PRI, the defining moment was their first loss in the Congress of the Union in 1997. This increased confidence for opposition parties among Mexican voters, which accumulated enough momentum to oust the PRI from the Presidency in 2000. Based on the accumulated knowledge discussed in the previous pages, we argue two points: 1) the PRI was required to win big while the LDP only needed to win the plurality sufficient to maintain the Premiership and 2) it was the LDP's ability to build coalitions that made the party successful in the post-Cold War Japan.

The PRI was required to win big because of the constitutional majority. Constant rewriting of rules, balancing checkbooks, and maintaining hegemony in Mexican politics required the rules be consistently rewritten to favor the PRI in the context of the time. By having a fixed constitution (or being the minority in the legislature), the PRI was unable to rewrite the rules to suit their needs. Eventually, Mexican voters caught onto the cycle of increased funding and economic recovery before and immediately after elections, before another three years of

middling growth and financial hardship until the next election. Until NAFTA, almost the whole population of Mexico relied on those governmental funds and were willing to endure the cycle if the returns were big enough – until the money ran out. Once the PRI started winning small, their ability to rework the system and continue to financially reward their supporters (and punish their detractors), their majorities across Mexico began to dwindle.

The LDP did not face this problem. Instead, the LDP benefitted by being the more established party in Japan's governing system after 1955. They did not have to rewrite the rules, because the rules directly benefited their electoral results. As the JSP had unrealistic plans for Japan in the twentieth century – namely, declaring the Self-Defense Forces unconstitutional and stepping back from the American security alliance – the party was never organized enough to pose a threat to the LDP's well-oiled machine. However, unlike the PRI, the LDP was more responsive to the Japanese people's discontent and took upon the initiative to rebuild Japan's electoral infrastructure and rules. This was a popular platform among Japanese voters, who rewarded reform-minded politicians with higher offices (recall Koizumi's slogan of "Destroy the LDP").

Although the LDP remained open to diagnosing the cracks in the system, their goodwill among voters took a (so far) irreparable hit after the 1994 crash. As such, they became partners with Komeito, which had a similar platform to the LDP but was rooted in religion. Since this coalition was made, the LDP has not held a majority in the Diet without Komeito's seats. This is in sharp contrast to the PRI, whose inter-factionalism split the party apart to create a rival party on the ballot at a time when the PRI was already struggling to win big as required. Although the LDP too suffered a party split, Koizumi managed to take over the struggling party with his own

army of reformers, reviving the LDP banner.⁷⁰ Voter confidence in the LDP's stability was reinforced after the DPJ's three years in power and then eight years of Abe's second tenure as Prime Minister straight after.

Unlike the LDP, the PRI was never able to regain voter's trust and confidence.⁷¹ After decades of losing economic cycles, their platform no longer resonated with Mexican voters; voters just needed to believe that the PAN had a chance at winning nationally, a credential they slowly built up during the end days of the PRI. Once Mexican voters saw the PRI stand a chance of losing, they flocked to the polls for the PAN in much higher numbers, even if they had voted for the PRI in the past. Another factor working against the PRI was its inability to shift its platform from within, causing rifts in the party that were never repaired. The PRI was operating under the Cold War paradigm when it became clear in the 1990s that the world was slowly being regenerated as something new, with new economic strategies required for prosperity. Although Mexico was never a prosperous country during the Cold War era, relative to other countries like the United States or in Europe, the new trade deal of NAFTA offered a chance for Mexicans to thrive independent of government assistance, and the PRI did not acknowledge that reality in its domestic political strategy. Instead, the party continued relying on poverty-relief programs to buy votes.

⁷⁰ Many of these same reformers were ousted by more "typical" LDP politicians after Koizumi's retirement, but the old guard continued under the LDP name and party mission. Reform remained a part of LDP candidate's platforms, but without the same vigor as from the Koizumi years.

⁷¹ However, the PRI reconstructed itself in the state governorships after its defeat in the 2000 presidential election, which led to its surprising return to the presidency in 2012. See Joy K. Langston, *Democratization and Authoritarian Party Survival* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

The vanguard of democracy has taken quite a hit in the 2020s, with Donald Trump's isolationist rhetoric, the January 6th riots at the U.S. Capitol, Brexit, and the rise of populist movements throughout Europe. We hope that by analyzing the line between democracy and authoritarianism, this paper contributes to further understanding of authoritarian tactics as well as the greyer areas democracies can backslide into. As of 2023, Japan remains a strong democracy, despite the LDP's continued dominance, who has taken a leadership role in Asia in the United States' absence. For the good of democracies everywhere and to continue battenning the region, Japan will ideally remain a country with free and fair elections of candidates prioritizing international cooperation, democratic values, and economic partnership. Mexico under its MORENO president seems a more fraught situation, with more populist and isolationist rhetoric.⁷² Ideally, Mexico will continue to reinforce its electoral systems to avoid party dominance and ensure free and fair elections across the country.

⁷² See Rafael Bernal, "Top Foreign Policy Lawmakers Accuse López Obrador of Trying 'to Sabotage Mexico's Democratic Institutions,'" *The Hill*, February 24, 2023, <https://thehill.com/latino/3873398-top-foreign-policy-lawmakers-accuse-lopez-obrador-of-trying-to-sabotage-mexicos-democratic-institutions/> (accessed March 13, 2023).