

# **Central-Local Relations and Change in Japan's Prefectural Elections**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Despite widespread calls for political change stemming from public dissatisfaction over a plethora of evidence of backdoor dealings and how politics has been run, intent to thoroughly reform the political system is not evident among parties. In this paper, I investigate why this is so among local parties. I argue that one largely overlooked reason is the restrictions on local governments in the form of central-local relations. Because local governments depend on the center for funds and administrative support to implement many policies and carry out public works projects, they cannot afford to endanger their relations with the central government and are thus cautious when responding to public demands for administrative reform. They are also circumscribed by what local governments can carry out given their limited administrative and financial powers.

In the first part of this paper, I look at the intent of parties to affect change by examining local party manifestos from the LDP and the DPJ across 23 prefectures. Local party manifestos began to be used in 2003 and has been increasingly in elections ever since. My inquiry is made based on an analysis of local party manifesto content. Policy proposals are categorized into various groups, and the compositions of manifestos are compared across parties. I establish that local parties look beyond voters' preferences and their own ideological positions when proposing policies. Specifically, central-local relations are also taken into account.

In the second part, I investigate how the contents of LDP local party manifestos vary with the strength of central-local relations. First, I compare the parties of local politicians in prefectural assemblies with the parties of national politicians in their respective Lower House election districts to determine the degree of matching between parties of local and

national politicians. Next, I draw from the analysis of local party manifestos in the previous section and examine it in view of the degree of congruity between parties of local and national politicians.

Results indicate that prefectures with closer central-local relations (as approximated by the degree of matching between parties of local prefectural assembly politicians and Lower House politicians) have a lower proportion of policies that deal with administrative and political reform. This confirms my hypothesis that local governments in prefectures with stronger central-local ties are more restrained than local governments in prefectures with weaker ties, and therefore are less likely to propose policies advocating administrative reform.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Political apathy and disenchantment with the political system in Japan has been rising over the years, from when blatant political corruption amongst bureaucrats and politicians in the 1980s shocked the nation and destroyed the high esteem in which bureaucrats were held. Severe pollution in the 1970s, exacerbated by the reluctance of the government to face them head-on in the face of resistance from politically-important big businesses and industries; ineffectual policies to pull Japan out of its two decade-long recession and boost economic growth; and increasing dislocations within the economy brought about by high speed growth and subsequently by slowing growth have resulted in an increasingly loud chorus of voices calling for changes within the government. The landslide victory of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in the recent elections in December 2012 and ousting of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) from the government was seen not as a mandate from the people to rule, but rather, as Prime Minister Abe himself put it, 'a rejection of the last three years of political confusion' (Nakamoto, Dickie and Soble 2012).

Yet in the midst of intense voter dissatisfaction and calls for reform, it seems as if little change has actually been effected. Parties still rely heavily on pork-barrel spending to entice voters and policies still skirt around key issues such as welfare reform for women and part-time workers rather than tackle them head on (Miura 2012). The absence of change could be due to either the changes not being proposed in the first place, a failure to implement the changes, or a combination of both factors.

In this paper, I look at the intent to change among local governments. Local governments are closer to the ground than the central government, and are therefore in better positions to identify and address the demands by the public (Hill and Fujita 2000). At the same time, local governments are also gaining power and accumulating resources that



enable them to play larger roles in national policymaking (Muramatsu 1988). To investigate the intent of parties in local governments, I turn to party manifestos.

Party manifestos are tools by which parties 'outlin[e] practical foundations for government policy or [use] as opportunities for criticizing opponents', and are 'statements of intent', indicative of actual policy plans of parties (Bara 2005). Manifestos, in principle, provide the menu of policy options from which voters vote for the party most in line with their ideals and preferences. At the same time, voters' demands reflected in election results and channels of communication between governmental bodies and the public, such as through the lobbying of local assemblies or legislatures, mean that party manifestos are influenced by voter preferences as well. Empirical evidence supports the view that external voter-related factors such as poor electoral performances are important for effecting change in party organizational structure and policy positions (Harmel et al. 1995), in which one of the channels of reflection is in party manifestos (Janda et al. 1995).

While parties and voters influence each other, I believe that the pattern of local party manifestos also reflect a third, external factor – the institutional relationship between governmental bodies, or specifically, between local governments and the center. Local governments are different from national governments due to the presence of the central government and overarching national policies that act as additional constraints on the options and maneuvering space available to local governments. On the other hand, local governments are more shielded from pressures from international organizations and governments than are national governments (Kim 2011; Pak 2000). Because parties in local governments are cognizant of the restraints in place that demarcate the political and administrative powers of local governments vis-à-vis the center, policy options in manifestos are restricted to those that are politically, administratively, fiscally and ideologically feasible, or at the very least not wildly impossible or unrealistic given the

prevailing relations and plausible future trends. Given that parties are held accountable to their election promises and are kept in place through the electoral process, I argue that local party manifestos may reflect more of the restraints faced by local governments than the ideological positions of local political parties. In particular, I argue that the pattern of policies in local party manifestos points to the interdependent relationship model as a more accurate description of the relationship between the center and local government, as opposed to the more commonly-cited vertical-administrative model.

This paper is organized as follows. I first describe the increasing importance of party manifestos in elections, and argue that central-local relations should be taken into consideration when examining the reasons for the lack of differences in policy proposals across party manifestos. Next, I outline four models of central-local relations, and examine patterns of policies in manifestos in the context of central-local relations. In the fourth section, I describe the methodology for my analysis of local party manifestos, and explain the results of my analysis in the fifth section. Finally, I look at the results of the manifesto analysis in light of a separate test where I match the parties of local politicians in prefectural assemblies to the parties of politicians in the Lower House in their respective electoral districts.

## **2. THE RISE OF MANIFESTOS**

### **2.1 THE 1994 ELECTORAL REFORM**

The reform of the electoral system from the Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) system in a Multi-Member Districts (MMD) to one with a Single-Member District (SMD) component and a Proportional Representation (PR) component was effected at the national level in 1994. The electoral reform was implemented with the goal of moving away from personalistic politics to focus on party image and policy issues. Under this vision, a party-based electoral strategy of appealing to voters would replace vote mobilization through personal networks and traditional channels. With the predicted increase in attention to party platforms, there was an expected rise in importance party manifestoes, through which parties communicate their vision and plans. The use of party manifestos started in 2003 with the need to enhance the party label as intra-party competition amongst candidates was eliminated (McElwain and Reed 2009; Kamata 2004). Manifestos were also meant to appeal to non-partisan voters, who have been increasing as the proportion of swing voters in the population has increased (Curtis 2004).

The 1994 reform transformed electoral politics at the national level, but did not directly change electoral rules at the local level where politicians at the prefectural and municipal levels are still directly elected in multi-member districts. Yet local-level politics were also transformed with the electoral reform. As parties started issuing manifestos to draw voters in competition with one another in national-level politics, political parties also started issuing party manifestos as a means of competition in local elections. The rise in importance of manifestos in local elections began in 2003, when 11 candidates – primarily from Iwate, Kanagawa and Fukuoka – unveiled local manifestos when standing for elections (Kamata 2004).

Rosenbluth and Thies (2010) believed that the combined effects of the 1994 electoral reform and reforms thereafter were the main reasons for greater decentralization. A series of measures that increased autonomy and power of local governments were put in place following the 1994 electoral reform: the Decentralization Promotion Law was implemented in 1995; the Comprehensive Laws on Decentralization in 2000; the Trinity fiscal reforms in 2005; and the New Decentralization Promotion Law in 2007. While fiscal constraints faced by the central government and considerations for greater efficiency by delegating administrative functions to the local governments were real, Rosenbluth and Thies contended that these pressures had existed for a long time and were insufficient in explaining the sudden impetus for decentralization. The timing of the move of granting greater fiscal and administrative autonomy to local governments suggested that the 1994 electoral reform and its effects were the main impetuses that prompted the wave of decentralization.

## **2.2 THE KOIZUMI REFORMS**

The most important way the LDP kept a stronghold on its dominance over Japan's political arena since 1955 was by channeling resources and large amounts of pork-barrel spending into politically important constituents, and maintaining close relations with large organized groups and their individual *kōenkai*. However, the first appearance of the DPJ in 1996, the rise in its support in both urban and rural areas, as well as evolving expectations and demands of the electorate changed the rules of the game. Maintaining previous clientelistic bonds proved to be increasingly expensive, while calls for cleaner politics eventually forced politicians to respond and change their ways. Koizumi, the LDP Prime Minister at that time, and his supporters, decided that the past electoral strategy of depending on individual

*kōenkai*, clientelistic spending and personal vote-seeking was not sustainable and had to be phased out. Hence, Koizumi drastically cut back infrastructural spending and subsidies to the agricultural community, liberalized markets to pave the way for more open and cleaner ties between politics and businesses, an reduced transfers to local governments (Kabashima and Steel 2007).

These measures weakened the ties the LDP had forged with its supporters, particularly those who relied heavily on the particularistic spending by the LDP, and correspondingly increased the number of unorganized swing voters not affiliated with any one particular party. At the same time, the DPJ took this opportunity to make advances to capture the votes of urban voters who had moved away from supporting the LDP, resulting in large increases in support for the DPJ even in rural areas, which had traditionally been the stronghold of the LDP. Together, this meant that the DPJ was now a viable challenger to the LDP in 'every type of electoral district' since the 2005 election (Reed, Scheiner and Thies 2012). In particular, the reduction of subsidies to local governments greatly weakened the LDP's support base.

The diminished importance of particularistic spending was accompanied by a further shift in emphasis from the personal attributes of politicians running for office, to a focus on the party platform and party identity each candidate belonged to. The increase in the number of unorganized voters meant that policy substance increased in importance, and so did party manifestos. In particular, after the Koizumi reforms, electoral politics changed after 2005 (Reed, Scheiner and Thies 2012).

Although these changes were effectively implemented at the national level, it had large ramifications for local politics as well. Although many local politicians were officially non-partisan, they were in fact affiliated with local party organizations of the LDP or DPJ etc., or were in the personal support groups of Lower House politicians. Local politicians were also

employed by national politicians as ‘foot soldiers’ for national election campaigns. This close relationship meant that changes effected at the national level were echoed at the local level as well, and the use of manifestos in local elections gained importance (Saito 2010).

### **2.3 EXPLAINING THE HIGH DEGREE OF CONFORMITY AMONG PARTY MANIFESTOS**

The electoral and political reforms did eliminate intra-party competition, diminish the importance of factions and increase the importance of party image. However, this did not result in a corresponding shift to a system where issues and principles rather than constituency service dominate policymaking. In other words, manifestos failed to evolve into the key component that ensured that Japanese politics transformed into the ideal two-party, policy-based model that was hoped for by many. A cursory examination suggests that there are great similarities between manifestos of different parties, where policy suggested and stances on issues are not clearly differentiated along a left-right continuum. (As can be also observed in Sections 5 and 6) manifestos tell a strikingly similar story and expound same values on both the national and local level (Curtis 2004).

The reason for this phenomenon has been attributed primarily to the absence of socio-economic and ideological cleavages in the population that has led to a general congregation of voters’ stances towards the center of the political spectrum. High speed economic growth have drastically increased the general standard of living, where affluence and relatively low inequality have created a large middle-income group that face largely the same issues and problems. That the Japanese society is largely homogenous also greatly contributes to the lack of social cleavages and differences in society that parties can leverage upon to differentiate themselves from other parties and appeal to a specific group of voters. This creates a centrifugal force that pulls party platforms towards the center to appeal to the

median voter (Down 1957), and is evident not only at the national level, but also at the local level. This issue is not limited to Japan, where Western democracies also face the situation where 'the ideological issues dividing left and right have been reduced to a little more or a little less government ownership and economic planning', primarily because the main political problems that industrialization had brought with it have been solved (Rousseas and Farganis 1968).

At the same time, however, I believe this is only part of the argument. Due to the different bases of support parties maintain (agricultural communities for the LDP and urban constituents for the DPJ), the convergence of overall voter preferences seem to be insufficient in accounting for the high degree of uniformity among local party manifestos. Moreover, it would make sense for political parties to distinguish themselves from other parties by responding more aggressively to the calls for change from below, yet parties do not seem to be doing so.

Hence, I next examine a third factor to explain the high degree of uniformity across policies proposed by different local parties: the relationship between the central and local governments.

### **3. CENTRAL-LOCAL RELATIONS**

The institutional framework in which the local and central governments operate affects the costs of interactions between these governmental bodies (Takao 1999), and these costs in turn affect the way in which governments behave in response to citizens' demands and pressure from other governmental bodies. At the same time, the expectation that a common leadership or ideology under the same party would ensure that policies implemented by central and local governments complement each other, or that central and local politicians necessarily support each other, may not hold by default. Local politicians require incentives to work together with national politicians and the central government (Lucardi and Rosas 2013). At the same time, they are also constrained by national regulations circumscribing their authority vis-à-vis the central government, and also by party rules. I believe that this in turn influences the behavioral patterns of local political parties, where recognition of these costs and restraints that local governments face translates into campaign promises that reflect the limitations faced by local governments.

Local politicians, being directly elected by the people, are held accountable for their actions and are forced to be more responsive to the needs of local citizens. Direct elections also provide a means through which local politicians held to the promises they make and are judged by the electorate on how well they fulfill their campaign promises and perform in office. Incumbents who perform well get re-elected, while those who fail to do so are not (Fisher and Hobolt 2010). This means that political parties cannot make wild campaign promises that are beyond their abilities to fulfill, and that party platforms and promises are circumscribed by the actual power of local governments.

Several theories describing the relationship between the local government and the center have been proposed, with models proposing different levels of control the center has



over local governments and different degrees of influence local governments have over the center. The dominant model is what Muramatsu (1988) calls the vertical administrative model, where local governments lack autonomy and are subordinate to the central government. However, the rise in the level of civil consciousness in Japanese society, increased leadership roles of local politicians and leaders, greater influence by civil groups and NGOs etc. since the 1970s have led to greater influence and input by local politicians and governments on both local and national politics. Many therefore contend that the Japanese local government has greater autonomy than commonly perceived (Reed 1986; Samuels 1983) One of the new models that has emerged is the interdependent relationship model, which includes elements of the vertical administrative model, but places greater emphasis on the plurality of points of influence in local governments (Muramatsu, *Local Power in the Japanese State* 1988). While there are other models that downplay the importance of the center, the strong financial and administrative control the center still has over local governments suggest that such models may not appropriately describe in the relationship between the center and local governments today.

Here, I briefly explain the models of central-local relations and subsequently examine pattern of policy proposals in light of these models.

### **3.1 MODELS OF CENTRAL-LOCAL RELATIONS**

The four models of central-local relations explained below are modified from the ones developed by Muramatsu (1988), but move beyond Muramatsu's emphasis on degree of competition between local governments by taking into consideration the power of the central government.

The table below illustrates the models of central-local relations:

	Degree of Control the Center has over Local Governments		
		Low	High
Influence Local Governments have over the Center	Low	Local governments and the center operate relatively independently – mutual independence	The Vertical Administrative Model
	High	The Horizontal Competition Model	The Interdependent Relationship Model

*Table 3.1 Models of central-local relations*

The institutional structure of the Japanese government makes it highly centralized and is one of the most unitary states (Takao 1992; Shirai 2006). Because of its highly centralized nature, the central government still exerts a strong influence over local governments, such that the models in the column ‘Low’ under ‘Degree of Control the Center has over Local Governments’ are included more for reference and comparison rather than for their actual applicability to the case of Japan today.

### 3.1.1 MUTUAL INDEPENDENCE

In this model, the central government has low control over local governments, and conversely, local governments also do not affect the center much. There are hardly any examples of this relationship between local and central governments in Japan. This is a better description of the relationship between federal and state governments, such as that of the United States (Muramatsu, *Local Power in the Japanese State* 1988).

### 3.1.2 THE HORIZONTAL COMPETITION MODEL

In the horizontal competition model, local governments are posited to exert strong influence over the central government due to the high reliance of the center on local governments for implementation of policies. Here, competition among local governments is a potent force in shaping the formulation and implementation of nation-wide policies (Muramatsu, *Local Power in the Japanese State* 1988). Local governments are forced to respond to demands and changing needs of their localities as are other governments, as not doing so would raise the ire of voters in the prefecture and endanger the party's chances of re-election. When such responses are coordinated across local governments, this has a significant impact over the policies of the central ministries, and in some cases, can force the central government to adopt and implement them on a nationwide basis (Reed 1982).

However, although there have been instances where policies initiated by local governments resulted in subsequent adoption by the central government (eg. free elderly medical care), Muramatsu and Ito (1986) found that significant differences between prefectures and localities mean that such nation-wide coordination is uncommon. Although the horizontal competition model may explain specific instances where nation-wide policies are shaped after policies initiated in localities, this does not hold most of the time, and is not a suitable model to describe the overall central-local relationship in Japan.

However, this is not to say that local governments are completely at the mercy of the central government. The Japanese Constitution and the Local Government Law grant local governments more authority than other unitary states such as Britain and France (although they grant local governments less power than in federal countries such as the United States and Germany) (Reed 1986). Moreover, although local taxes account for only about a third of local revenues – in FY2010, local taxes accounted for 35.2% of local government revenues

(Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2012) – the heavy dependence of the central government on local governments to carry out programs and implement policies throughout the nation gives local government an lever to exert their influence and ensure that their voices are heard by the center (Takao 1999).

### 3.1.3 THE VERTICAL ADMINISTRATIVE MODEL

The vertical administrative model is most often used to describe Japan's widely-perceived highly centralized, unitary political system where the center extends broad and tight control over local governments (Jain, Japan's Local Governance at the Crossroads: The Third Wave of Reform 2000). There are mainly two types of regulatory centralization: agents of delegated power and grants-in-aid programs (Takao 1999), and both are part of the four key factors that make up this model: 1) agents of delegated power; 2) financial relationships; 3) administrative of personnel; and 4) dynamics of the administrative process (Muramatsu, Local Power in the Japanese State 1988).

Firstly, agents of delegated power – mayors and governors – alone have decision-making powers over the policies delegated to local governments from the center. Before the revision of the Local Autonomy Law in 1952 (Matsufuji 2011), local assemblies could do little more than debate about the tasks delegated to local governments, and had virtually no say over its implementation and in the decision-making process. Legal relations between the agents of delegated power and the central government ensured that policies dictated by the central government would be implemented.

Secondly, strong limitations on the taxing authority and the expansion of responsibilities of local governments in the provision of public services such as provision of social services, better housing, improved education etc. mean that local governments

depend heavily on subsidies and grants from the central government to fulfill their roles. Local governments are heavily dependent on the national government for funding through subsidies and its grants-in-aid system, in which a section of a particular central ministry directs the administration of a specific grant program to the prefectural government.

Thirdly, the transfer of administrative officials from the central to local governments ensures that uniform administrative standards consistent with that found at the national level are established in local governments. Bureaucrats that move between central ministries and local offices form important lines of communication between local governments and the center.

Lastly, the administrative process where central bureaucrats who prepare budget drafts for the following year consult local officials to determine their budget positions in the following year is an important way through which the needs of localities are conveyed to the central government. As actual implementation of policies by central ministries fall to local officials, their demands have to be taken into consideration for smooth administration in localities.

Agents of delegated power, lack of fiscal autonomy and transfer of administrative officials from the center to local governments 'defer[red] development of . . . local political process[es]' in which citizens actively voiced their opinions and took responsibility to steer policies in a way that reflected their own interests. Instead, strong links to and high dependence on the central government resulted in 'one-way and submissive act[s] of petitioning and lobbying to central authority' and highly limited local government autonomy (Takao 1999).

### *Evolution Away from the Vertical Administrative Model*

The vertical administrative model was easy to sustain when there was sustained economic growth. The expanding pie made it easier to satisfy everyone, the consensus of economic growth as a national goal justified the highly-centralized state and explained the absence of conflicting demands from localities. In a way, Japan was a victim of her own economic success. Rapid economic growth brought about severe pollution deterioration of the environment, and social welfare failed to keep up with the evolving needs of citizens (Reed 1986). The subsequent slowdown in growth in the late 1980s, increased affluence, and a shift of attention from maximizing economic growth to citizens' welfare and protection of the environment led to calls for reforms to the political system to better take into consideration the needs of citizens. This led to citizens' movements emerging in the early 1970s that became important forces that catalyzed political reform. The rise of progressive political parties, which rode on voters' increasing dissatisfaction with the conservative government and captured increasing number of votes, also pushed local and national governments to implement reforms in line with citizens' demands (Muramatsu, *Local Power in the Japanese State* 1988). Moreover, a series of high-profile scandals involving politicians and bureaucrats also resulted in open popular support for local government reforms.

Therefore, reforms in the early 1990s were centered on two goals: 1) increasing the government efficiency in the face of the economic slowdown; and 2) eradicating political corruption that has surfaced repeatedly in preceding years. At the same time, globalization and technological advancement subjected politicians and bureaucrats to more external checks and balances. The media threatened to expose abuses of power, and globalization kept governments on their toes. These further pushed the case for greater political and administrative reform. Yet legislative changes in the 1990s that aimed to devolve some

functions from the center to local governments failed to effect its intended changes due to entrenched interests of national bureaucrats and politicians who clung on to power. The legislative changes did result in a transfer of power – but only in name and not in actual control (Jain, Japan's Local Governance at the Crossroads: The Third Wave of Reform 2000).

Jain (2000) classifies the reforms in the 1990s as a reform simultaneously from the top down and the bottom up. 'Bottom up' suggests that demands of citizens and inputs from actors other than the central government are playing increasingly important roles in the political scene in prefectures. Rise of the social media increases the volume of citizens' voices in the political process and their ability to influence the government, while increasing numbers of social organizations such as Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) provide information to the public and establish platforms for aggregation of otherwise diffused social interests (Kim 2011). These points of influence and increased number of actors playing active roles in the policymaking process, as well as the evolving relationship between both the local and central governments and among local governments themselves have led to new models of central-local relationships being developed.

#### 3.1.4 THE INTERDEPENDENT RELATIONSHIP MODEL

The interdependent relationship model suggested by Muramatsu (1988) is one where there is a more equal balance of power between the central and local governments. Here, policy directions from central ministries are considered alongside initiatives from local governmental organizations, and public policies are designed and implemented with interests of both in mind. This interaction and cooperation takes place in many forms, where the most common mode of interaction is one where the central ministry has

overarching control over the details of implementation of policies, even if such tasks are delegated to local governments to be actually carried out. At the same time, however, local governments often express their views in the process of implementation and even enter into conflicts with the central ministry due to divergent interests and viewpoints.

This interdependent relationship model is possible only when local governments have political resources and are able to use them. Muramatsu (1988) contended that starting in the late 1960s, local governments were able to accumulate and use the political resources necessary to assert themselves in the face of the central government. Local officials must act within the political and electoral constraints they face, but are also able to assert themselves in the face of the central government because the central government depends on local officials to carry out and successfully implement national policies and central objectives (Hill and Fujita 2000). Because all organizations do not possess all the resources they need, they depend on other organizations to fulfill their objectives (Rhodes 1982). Moreover, the rise in non-partisan voters who pay more attention to policies means that parties in local governments now have to take into greater consideration voters' demands. Local governments may consequently look to exercise greater autonomy from the center to be able to better respond to voters with greater flexibility and specificity.

However, local governments face a 'dilemma' between greater autonomy and more resources from the central government to carry out policies. Extensive control over administrative and financial resources by the central government creates the situation whereby local governments depend on central governments for resources to carry out policies and public services demanded by the people. The central government provides the experts and grants local governments the authority to carry out projects or provide certain services. Limited authority over local taxes and issuance of local bonds create the situation in which local tax revenues cover only a third of local expenditure and force local



governments to depend on the central government for funding (Shirai 2006). These funding and assistance from the central government often come with strings attached – conditions specifying how these funds can be used or circumstances etc. Yet at the same time, the desire for greater autonomy to better respond to demands from local residents also means that local governments attempt to free themselves from the influences of the central government and assert their authority through policy initiatives or by deviating from the central government’s policy preferences.

Local governments therefore face the problem of balancing expectations from local voters and toeing the line drawn by the central government to obtain the resources necessary to provide services and public goods. Local officials, being directly elected in electoral cycles, have to be responsive to voters’ demands. Yet over-stressing the independence of local governments and sidelining the directives from the central government may result in a situation where local governments cannot expect to obtain administrative help or resources from the central government (Muramatsu 1988; Hill and Fujita 2000).

### **3.2 MANIFESTOS AND CENTRAL-LOCAL RELATIONS**

Seen in this light, the promises by political parties in their campaign manifestos are constrained by the degree of autonomy local governments enjoy. Local politicians face having to satisfy the demands of local voters, and do so by tackling the least ‘expensive’ demands – demands that are aligned with the intentions of central ministries and the central government, which therefore generate the least friction between the central and local governments. These demands such as ‘increasing educational standards of schools within the prefecture’ or ‘more comprehensive care for the elderly and the disabled’ are

concerns of local residents but are also objectives of the central government. Centering on these policies, therefore, allow local governments to satisfy both sides simultaneously.

Conversely, more controversial and 'dangerous' promises such as administrative reforms and policies concerning controversial projects such as construction of dams are visibly less commonly found in party manifestos. Promises for administrative reform are made partially in response to calls by the public for greater transparency and for cleaner politics within the government, but carries the risk of running afoul of politically powerful groups within the central government and other governmental bodies. Conversely, controversial local projects often face opposition from local residents due to, for instance in the case of dam construction, disruption of normal lives and forced resettlements, although most of these projects are commissioned by central ministries often for flood control and water management (Toshiko 1999).

Local governments therefore face a dilemma when proposing policies: insisting on policies that are in line with central government preferences but are unpopular with local voters endangers the chances of reelection by local parties, but going completely along with the demands of local voters on issues that the central government opposes endangers the pipeline that local governments depend on to implement their policies and provide services. I argue that it is this recognition and the need to balance the demands and expectations on both sides that constraints the campaign promises of parties running for local governments.

Of course, proposals in manifestos could also very well reflect the very policies that the people are most concerned about, and parties are merely reflecting what is on the minds of the people themselves. While this may be true, I believe that this explains only part of the question. Policy matters such as care for the elderly, childcare, and better medical facilities and more personnel may occupy a large part of the people's concerns, but calls for

fundamental changes to the system are real.<sup>1</sup> A survey in 2001 showed that among voters who did not support the LDP, more than 66% of respondents cited the way politics was run by the LDP as the main reason why they did not support the party (Lin 2009). Parties that attempt to address such changes are likely to capture the votes of these people. Many politicians at the national level and prominent figures in society have recognized the need for reform of the political system. On March 3, 2008, for example, a group of approximately 150 politicians from the LDP, the DPJ and members of the academia and business communities initiated a political movement called 'Sentaku' – which means both 'choice' and 'washing clean' – with the aim of remedying the flaws in the political system and move towards the ideal two-party, platform-based political system where voters depend on 'coherent manifestos' rather than personalized politics to cast their votes (EIU 2008).

An instance whereby change has been demanded and initiated in the localities is in the area of environmental regulation. Certain localities, frustrated at the central government's reluctance to implement stricter environmental protection standards to protect local residents against increasingly severe pollution, took the initiative to put in place stricter standards and regulations. One example of such a locality is the city of Kitakyushu, whose anti-pollution measures subsequently caught international attention and spawned ties with other cities and international bodies. Citizens and private organizations themselves took it upon themselves to carry out the research needed to determine the damage done and what should be implemented to deal with the situation. These citizens then subsequently lobbied local assemblies and even legislatures to implement measures to improve their standards of living (Hitsumoto 1996). In many instances, policies or stricter standards initiated in

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: EIU 2008, Japan Politics: Political Realignment?, *EIU Newswire*, June 11; Takahashi, Kitazume, 2010, Voter Behavior Holds Key to Political System Change, *The Japan Times*, March 26.

localities were subsequently adopted nationwide (Jain, *Japan's Local Governance at the Crossroads: The Third Wave of Reform* 2000).

The impetus for such changes, therefore, is real and recognized by political leaders, both local and national. More specifically, since the 1990s, public demands for a more transparent and responsive system of governance, rising discontent with flagrant political corruption and external factors such as globalization and the spread of information technology have also given local politicians the leverage and incentive to initiate change at the local level with greater independence from the center (Jain, *Japan's Local Governance at the Crossroads: The Third Wave of Reform* 2000). Local politicians, increasingly, are setting policy agendas to fulfill the needs of particular localities rather than conforming blindly to directives from the central government. Yet although there is an increasingly stronger trend towards greater initiative-taking by local governments, such instances are far from commonplace (Takao 1999). I believe the reason why steps towards enacting such changes are limited can be at least partially explained by the restrictions facing local governments in light of the center-local relationship as explained above.

### **3.3 PREDICTED OBSERVABLE IMPLICATIONS**

Given the above argument, examining the pattern of policies in manifestos can shed some light on the central-local relationship in Japan. If the vertical administrative model is indeed the prevailing model, then in order to gain sufficient administrative and fiscal support from the central government to implement policies, local parties, regardless of their affiliations, should have a high degree of conformity to central government policies. Even opposition

parties<sup>2</sup> have to demonstrate a high degree of conformity to the ruling parties' policies, as if their proposed policies deviate too much from that of the center, their actual ability to implement those policies is likely to come under question. In other words, for their campaign promises to be credible, opposition parties would not have the incentive to propose policies that are starkly against the interests of the central government.

On the other hand, if the horizontal competition model is the relevant model, we would expect to see large differences in the manifestos as provinces compete with each other to implement policies in response to the demands of voters in different localities. Given differences in characteristics of prefectures in terms of demography, economic structure, level of wealth etc., policies proposed by local parties should differ considerably depending on these characteristics and needs of the provinces. Here, proposals by different parties in the same prefecture would exhibit greater similarity than proposals from the same party but from different prefectures. Put simply, under the horizontal competition model, the characteristics of prefectures, rather than the party identity, determine the patterns of policy proposal.

A balance between the vertical administrative model and the horizontal competition model is the interdependent relationship model. Under the assumptions of this model, patterns of policy proposals should show some variation within parties between prefectures, and between parties within the same prefecture. Under this model, we expect that while local governments have to respond to the need of voters within the prefectures, their actions are also constrained by the control the center has over local governments. They have to show deference to the central government, and have to take into account the preferences of the center while proposing policies within their localities. At the same time,

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<sup>2</sup> Here, I refer to parties who are not the dominant party in the central government as 'opposition parties'.

autonomy derived from limited fiscal resources as well as the need to exhibit some degree of responsiveness to voters' demands mean that policies proposed will vary between parties and between prefectures, depending on their ties with the central government.

A caveat must be included here. As it was the DPJ in power in the central government from 2009 to 2012, one might assume that local DPJ parties were more tightly constrained to the central government in the 2011 prefectural assembly elections than local LDP parties. I contend that this is not necessarily true. Given that 2009 to 2012 was the first time any party defeated the long-dominant LDP since 1955, the supporting infrastructure for the DPJ central government was weak. The DPJ's attempts to reform the bureaucracy and centralize political power in the party instead (Arase 2010) led to the partial breakdown of the traditional channels of cooperation between the ruling party and the bureaucracy. However, in the short period of time when the DPJ was in power, the DPJ was not able to fully build up its own bureaucratic and administrative infrastructural support system and transform itself into a mature ruling party like the LDP was (Tatsumi 2013). The unique roles of the LDP's Executive Council and the Policy Affairs Research Council in passing legislation (G. Curtis 2004) and deep-seated alliances between the LDP and the bureaucracy were not so easily replaced by new institutional structures. As such, I believe it is *not* necessarily true that the DPJ would be more constrained than the LDP politicians. Remnants of the old alliances and ties between LDP politicians, the bureaucracy and members of the community still persist, and local LDP politicians have incentives to preserve these ties. Therefore, it is unclear at the outset as to whether the LDP or the DPJ would be more constrained. I examine this relation in greater detail in the next section.

## 4. SCOPE AND DETAILS OF MANIFESTO ANALYSIS

In this section, I explain my decision to analyze local party manifestos and explicate the various components of my analysis.

### 4.1 ELECTION MANIFESTOS

Harmel et al. (1995) concluded that poor electoral performances are important stimuli for changes in party image. Party identity is shaped by the front the party presents to the public, either through the public image of the party leader and/or its organizational face, or through the policies the party stands for. One particularly important way through which parties attempt to influence their identity is how they package their election manifestos through which they espouse their stances on various political issues. With increasing voter apathy and increasing dissatisfaction and disillusionment with political parties in Japan, I believe one way parties seek to change their image is through election manifestos.

Though imperfect, manifestos are means of identifying party intent and indicating political priorities, and are important sources of information about the policy goals of parties (Ware 1995). Some may argue that manifestos may represent little more than just political rhetoric and strategies employed to secure reelection, but this merely suggests that the presence of policies proposed may not be what the party truly intends to implement once in power. This, however, also suggests that the *absence* of policies proposed are significant in that it means that these policies are simply not on the radar of political parties. Political parties have little incentive not to include potentially popular policies in their manifestos if they intend to implement them, especially if these policies are popular and can increase the appeal of the party to voters. Policies that are not explicitly included in

manifestos are, therefore, indicative of a lack of attention paid to it or an intention to implement those policies.

While some may question whether promises made in manifestos are indeed kept when parties are elected into power, Bara (2005) shows that governments try, as far as possible, to ensure that the pledges they made while campaigning are indeed adhered to. This could be because parties are held accountable to their pledges and face the possibility of not getting re-elected should they fail to keep their promises. It follows that the construct of election pledges – how they are phrased, the level of details included etc. – vary in relation to how certain a party is that it can carry out its promises when in power.

#### **4.2 THE LOCAL LEVEL**

Being closer to the ground, local level politics would plausibly be the in the forefront of bringing about the changes that the people want as local governments are better able to identify popular demands and act to satisfy them (Hill and Fujita 2000). As compared to the national government, local officials have a narrower range of issues to focus on, and are therefore able to be more responsive to needs and demands of citizens (Takao 1999). Local political party leadership is also becoming an emerging catalyst for change in Japan's political arena (Jain 2004). Local governments in Japan have more power than commonly perceived – for instance, many national policies are results of policies being implemented locally in response to popular demand by one or two local governments, then subsequently adopted at the national level that reestablishes uniformity amongst all localities when the success or failure of these policies become apparent (Reed, *Is Japanese Government Really Centralized?* 1982). Consequently, I look to policymaking at the local level to explain why has political change not come more readily to Japan.



Factors such as an absence of socio-economic cleavages and centrifugal forces pulling political parties towards the center to appeal to the greatest number of voters are commonly cited as reasons for the high level of similarities across party manifestos. However, examining politics at the local level also brings another dimension into the analysis. Local governments are constrained by regulations demarcating their autonomy, and their independence is highly dependent on the degree of fiscal freedom they enjoy from the central government. Relations between the center and local governments are crucial factors that must be considered when examining policy change proposals at the local level.

As such, I believe that another factor should be taken into consideration: the recognition of limitations that local governments face constrains the ex-ante policy proposals of political parties. In Sections 5 and 6, I analyze the lack of intent of policy change as observed in party manifestos in local elections in light of constraints faced by local governments and their relationship with the center in order to explain why have more changes not been effected despite strong calls for such.

### **4.3 CHOICE OF PARTIES**

Manifestos from the only LDP and DPJ are examined, mainly for two reasons: 1) the LDP and DPJ are the largest political parties in Japan with the biggest presences in Japan's political arena – in other words, the DPJ presents the greatest viable opposition to the LDP; and 2) both are not 'extreme' parties in the strategies employed by candidates and the parties sponsoring them are not entirely strategic or non-strategic.

The LDP and DPJ are by far the largest and most influential political parties in Japan, both at the national and local levels. They accounted for 80% of the vote choice in Japanese national elections in 2003 (Richey and Ikeda 2006), and 66% of district votes and 43% of

proportional representation votes in the 2012 election (Yomiuri 2012). In both the 2007 and 2011 local elections, the LDP and DPJ together accounted for 63% of all seats (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2007; 2011). Although the DPJ plays a much smaller role in local elections than it does in national elections (it accounted for 15% of the 63% of seats in the 2011 local elections), it is the greatest challenger to the LDP as evidenced by the even smaller number of seats won by other parties like the Kōmeitō (7%) or the JCP (4%). Candidates from the LDP and DPJ running in the 2007 elections made up 39% and 13% of all candidates respectively, dwarfing that of the Kōmeitō's 5% and JCP's 8% (Weiner 2008). That not only the candidate bases were large but also that the percentages of seats won by the LDP and DPJ were high suggested that their manifestos not only 'covered' a great proportion of the electorate, but were also not rejected by those who voted for these two parties.<sup>3</sup> Due to the large candidate bases these two parties combined have, examination of manifestos from the LDP and DPJ would together paint a broad and thorough picture of what the majority of the electorate have read.

The LDP and DPJ are parties that seek majority support (as opposed to parties such as the Japan Communist Party (JCP) or the Kōmeitō which are 'niche' parties that do not look not to win support from a broad base but rather to maximize support within a relatively limited group of people). The strategies employed by candidates and their parties are also not entirely strategic or non-strategic. For example, the Kōmeitō is clearly a strategic party: it runs candidates only when it assesses that they are likely to win, and '[t]he party rarely overestimates its strength, and its candidates rarely lose' (Weiner 2008). On the other hand, the JCP is what Weiner calls 'the prototypical sincere party', and does not seem to act strategically – it runs candidates in as many elections as possible even when there is little

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<sup>3</sup> With, of course, the assumption that that party manifestos did indeed affect voter choice.

chance of winning. That the LDP and DPJ seek to maximize their support and reach out to as wide a base of electorate as possible while not resorting to an 'extreme' election strategy means that their manifestos should reflect the 'average' election strategy (G. Curtis 2004).

#### **4.4 THE ISSUE OF PARTY**

Local-central relations invariably lead to questions of the role of parties in local elections. While the series of decentralization measures as mentioned above increased the autonomy and power that local governments have vis-à-vis the center and increased the importance of manifestos in local elections, it is unclear how relations within parties in the central government and in local party branches are affected, if at all. As explained previously, the 1994 electoral reforms changed the election rules for parties at the national level, but elections at the local level were not directly affected, which meant that local elections are still carried out in multi-member districts (MMD). Past (national and local) elections under the MMD system gave rise to a situation where local characteristics and personalistic politics largely determined the election winners while party platforms took a back seat. While the 1994 electoral reforms changed this situation at the national level, the rules of the game were not changed at the local level. There are two conflicting forces here: although the rules for local elections themselves did not change and therefore provided no direct impetus for local politicians to change their behavior, ties between Lower House politicians and local prefectural assembly members, and the political affiliations of local politicians to their parties were affected. This saw the increased emphasis on party manifestos in local election mirror the increase in importance of manifestos at the national level.

There have been very few studies studying the importance of party affiliation in prefectural assembly elections. Analysis of a working data set (Kay Shimizu, Multi-level

Elections Data on Japan: 1995 – 2012) suggests that party affiliation does matter somewhat in the electoral outcomes. Using data from the same set of prefectures as was used in the analysis of the manifestos (explained in Section 5), candidates from the LDP and DPJ together accounted for 55.9% of all candidates who ran for elections, but constituted 67.8% of all those who won the elections. Similarly, for the 2003 elections, 46.4% of all candidates were from either the LDP or the DPJ, while 67.8% of those who won were from these two parties. In both the 2011 and 2003 elections, the proportion of candidates from the LDP or DPJ who won elections was greater than the proportion of those who ran. This suggests, but does not prove, that party affiliation is positively correlated to success of getting elected. At the very least, party affiliation does not seem to lead to lower chances of success. Conversely, 33.2% and 24.1% of candidates who ran in the 2011 and 2003 elections respectively were not affiliated with any particular party, and those who won made up 24.6% and 16.2% of all candidates respectively. In prefectural assembly elections, not being affiliated with any party seemed to be negatively correlated with chances of winning a seat.

Breaking down the data into party-specific statistics yields a similar picture. In 2011, 35.1% and 20.7% of all candidates who ran were from the LDP and the DPJ, who then made up 47.7% and 20.1% of those who won respectively. In 2003, the corresponding figures for those who ran were 37.4% and 9.1%, and 48.9% and 10.1% of those who won were from the LDP and the DPJ respectively. This suggested that being an LDP candidate was consistently beneficial, while being a DPJ candidate yielded slightly more ambivalent but still generally positive benefits.

More tellingly, however, is a survey by The Association for Promoting Fair Elections. The percentage of voters who paid greater attention to party affiliation in local elections increased from 18.3% in 1995 to 37% in 2011, while the percentage of voters who placed greater emphasis on personal attributes decreased from a peak of 70.7% in 1995 to 49.5%

in 2011. 2011 marked the first time the percentage of those who looked to personalistic characteristics to decide who they supported fell below 50%. The 1995 local elections was the first elections that was held after the 1994 reforms, and was the start of this trend of steady decrease of percentage of those who based their decisions on personal characteristics of candidates and the accompanying increase of those who pay greater attention to party affiliation of candidates (The Association for Promoting Fair Elections 2012). Although the percentage of those who paid closer attention to personal attributes is still higher than that of those who pay attention to party affiliation, there is a clear trend of convergence, if not reversal. Party identity is becoming increasingly important in local elections, and is evidence that electoral changes at the national level resound down to local elections as well.

#### **4.5 THEMES OF POLICY PROPOSALS IN PARTY MANIFESTOS**

In this paper, complex text analysis programs and tools to analyze the contents of party manifestos are not utilized. Rather, a simple tally of specific themes in manifestos (eg. education, infrastructural spending, administrative reform etc.) across the 47 prefectures is taken. This methodology is chosen primarily because the effect of the perception people have of party manifestos on the way parties construct their manifestos is the main variable of interest here. I argue in this paper that relations between local governments and the center influence the way in which party manifestos are constructed. Whilst the actual content, or more specifically, the proportion dedicated to specific policy areas or different issues in party manifestos is most certainly relevant to this analysis, here I wish to focus on assessing the salience of inter-governmental relations in relation to people's perspectives of manifestos.

Most voters are unlikely to read through the entire manifestos or spend substantial time dissecting their contents, but are more likely to take note of the main issues and give a cursory glance through the details. Rölle (2002) shows that the people do not know a lot about party manifestos, while Bara (2005) finds that while few voters actually read the manifestos produced by parties, manifestos are used as materials in media reports during campaigns. Following thus, for the purpose of this paper, it would be more appropriate to examine the categories of policies proposed rather than the details of manifestos.

Manifestos are therefore analyzed by classification of policies into major areas of concern such as 'education' or 'administrative reform'. The particular circumstance of each locality also makes it difficult to compare details of proposals across prefectures. More importantly, the focus here is to examine the role of central-local relations in determining contents of manifestos to explain why have bolder and more effectual policies not been implemented in response to cries for change from the people. Rather than focusing on the differences between policies proposed amongst localities, here I seek to show the absence of the real change demanded by the people as observed by citizens through party manifestos. What is important here is how the people perceive the manifestos. If parties were intent on effecting the real change that is demanded by the people, it would be in their interest to indicate so prominently in their manifestos to appeal to voters. Conversely, the conspicuous perceived absence of such policies partially reflects the consciousness by local parties of the various constraints facing local governments in administration and governance of the different localities.

## **5. RESULTS OF MANIFESTO ANALYSIS**

### **5.1 ACCESSIBILITY AND AVAILABILITY OF MANIFESTOS**

The degree at which local manifestos were readily found on the internet – mainly through the websites of local parties in each prefecture – differed greatly. While the LDP had a page on its main party website that provided links to each local manifesto in all the prefectures, finding local manifestos by the DPJ was a lot more difficult. There was no compilation of local manifestos on the party’s main website. In most cases, the DPJ’s local political party organization also did not feature local manifestos prominently on their websites, and in many cases, local manifestos were not found at all. Out of the 23 prefectures surveyed for both the LDP and the DPJ, while LDP local manifestos could be found for all the prefectures, only 5 local manifestos from the DPJ were found. Out of the 5 manifestos, one was an outdated 2007 version of local manifesto. Instead of local manifestos, the prefectures of Iwate, Yamanashi and Ibaragi directed users to the general party manifesto in the main party website, which was also the one used in national level elections.

The difficulty in finding local manifestos and the absence of manifestos in the majority of prefectures suggested that manifestos did not feature as an important part in the DPJ’s election strategy at the local level in 2011. In Iwate, for instance, the first DPJ manifesto committee meeting commenced on September 29, 2011, after the 2011 local elections were held, and is evidence that the local party did not rely on local party manifestos to attract voters. Even if local manifestos were developed, the lack of attention paid to them by the DPJ was glaring. The DPJ party organization in Aomori, for example, had several links to its 2011 local manifesto on its website, but all the links were broken. Some prefectures did not have local manifestos even for the 2011 elections, despite local manifestos first surfacing in 2003 (McElwain and Reed 2009; Kamata 2004).

In contrast, the LDP paid much attention to the local manifestos of their local party organizations. There were a few standardized layouts that applied to all manifestos, and the main principles of policies and objectives in different prefectures were highly congruent. This, however, does not mean that the policies proposed were stylized and did not differ among prefectures. Although many policies proposed were highly similar across prefectures, there was also a surprisingly large degree of variation between the mix of policies proposed, especially for locality-specific policies.

## **5.2 CLASSIFICATION OF POLICY PROPOSALS IN MANIFESTOS**

Policies proposed in manifestos are firstly classified into policy categories depending on the content of the proposals. Policy categories are then further classified into broad groupings – what I term ‘policy types’ – in view of the relationship between the central and local governments, such that policy types reflect whether the specific policies proposed are particular to a prefecture or common across Japan, or whether it depends on fiscal handouts or subsidies from the central government. In addition, policy categories are also classified into ‘policy groups’ that reflect the nature of the policies – whether they are economic in nature, or whether they concern the welfare of residents, for example.

An example of the relationship between ‘policy categories’, ‘policy types’ and ‘policy groups’ is illustrated in the table below:



Specific policy	Policy Category	Policy Type	Policy Group
Build more retraining centers to equip workers with relevant and necessary skills	Boost employment	2 – Common across prefectures	Economy
Increase support (administrative and financial) for local businesses	Economic revitalization		
Increase export of local agricultural produce	Support local agricultural industries	3 – Local specific	
Import of advanced farming methods and technologies to improve efficiency of farming activities			
Increase transparency of local government procedures	Administrative reform		
Increase medical facilities and services catering to infants and young children	Childcare	2 – Common across prefectures	Welfare

*Table 5.1: Relationship between specific policies, policy categories, policy groups and policy types*

The differentiation of policy categories into policy groups and policy types allows for analysis with different emphasis to be applied to the policies proposed. While each policy category must belong to a policy type, policy groups are constructed mainly for the policies that are of particular interest, and therefore do not cover all policy categories (for example, the policy category of ‘greater protection against earthquakes, tsunami and other disasters’ does not fall into any particular policy group).

Policy categories, types and groups are further elaborated on below.

(I) POLICY CATEGORIES

Proposals in local manifestos were classified in to several categories depending on the nature of the policies. For example, proposals dealing with elementary education or high school educational standards were classified under ‘boosting education’, while those that

advocated training more nurses to supplement understaffed local hospitals and those that proposed greater integration between medical services offered in the prefecture were similarly classified under ‘improving medical care and increasing personnel’.

The table below presents the classifications of policies found in LDP local manifestos of 23 prefectures:

Policy Categories	LDP		DPJ	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Economic revitalization	17	8.67	3	5.45
Improvement of medical care and increase in personnel	16	8.16	2	3.64
Support local agriculture industries	16	8.16	2	1.82
Boost education standards	14	7.14	5	9.09
Boost employment	14	7.14	4	7.27
Childcare	14	7.14	4	7.27
Boost local tourism	12	6.12	0	0.00
Environmental protection	11	5.61	4	7.27
Development of internal transport network (within the prefecture)	10	5.10	0	0.00
Administrative reform	8	4.08	6	10.91
Boost infrastructure	8	4.08	1	1.82
Old age care	8	4.08	3	5.45
Safety	7	3.57	3	5.45
Development of external transport network (to develop the prefecture as a transport hub)	5	2.55	1	1.82
Greater protection against earthquakes, tsunami and other disasters	5	2.55	3	5.45
Revitalize the manufacturing sector	4	2.04	0	0.00
Dam construction / completion	3	1.53	1	1.82
Helping SMEs	3	1.53	2	3.64
Increase in cultural awareness and resident involvement in community activities	3	1.53	2	3.64
More comprehensive welfare and social safety net	3	1.53	4	7.27
Conveying the voices of residents to local Lower House politicians	2	1.02	0	0.00
Energy	2	1.02	1	1.82
Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)	2	1.02	0	0.00
Miscellaneous Policies	9	4.59	4	7.27

*Table 5.2: Policy categories and their frequency of appearance*

(II) POLICY TYPES

Each of these categories were also classified under 5 broader types: 1 – public works projects and policies that require substantial government spending, such as the construction of highways and investment in infrastructure; 2 – policies that are common across prefectures, such as boosting employment and stimulating the economy; 3 – policies that are particular to specific prefectures, such as supporting local agricultural communities or boosting local tourism; 4 – policies that are party-specific or which concern controversial issues on which the LDP and the DPJ are split on their stances such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) or construction of dams in certain prefectures; 5 – miscellaneous policies that do not fit into any of the previous categories, such as a proposal by the LDP in Shizouka to forge distinct identities for municipals to foster a sense of belonging in residents.

A policy category may contain policies in overlapping policy types, depending on the specific policies in question. For instance, under the category ‘development of external transport network’, Fukui prefecture’s proposal to develop its port into a hub to increase exchanges and establish commercial ties with other ports is considered as a policy specific to Fukui prefecture, but Hokkaido’s proposal to construct a local airport to better service its residents is classified as a public works project.

The 5 policy types and the number of policies in each type are illustrated in the table below:

Policy Type	Description	LDP		DPJ	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1	Public works project	16	8.16	1	1.82
2	Policies common across prefectures	88	44.90	22	40.00
3	Policies specific to particular localities	81	41.33	29	52.73
4	Party-specific policies	6	3.06	2	3.64
5	Miscellaneous policies	5	2.55	1	1.82

*Table 5.3: Policy types and their frequency of appearance*

### (III) POLICY GROUPS

Another way of analyzing the policies in manifestos is to classify them according to the nature of the policies into what I call policy groups. This classification into policy groups facilitated easier analysis of the types of policies that were proposed in manifestos. For example, while policies proposing for more childcare facilities to be built and for more comprehensive healthcare services for the elderly are classified under ‘childcare’ and ‘old age care’ respectively, both policies are also considered policies aimed at improving the welfare of the people. As such, certain policy categories fall entirely under certain policy groups, while others fall into different policy groups. Policy categories that do not share any common characteristics with other categories, are particular to certain prefectures, or are of particular interest in this paper, are not further classified into policy groups, but are analyzed by policy categories. In addition, policy groups may overlap and are not mutually exclusive. For instance, ‘economic activities (local)’ is a subset of ‘economic activities (locally and across Japan)’ (see below).

The policy groups as well as the number of times they are featured are shown below:

Policy Group	LDP		DPJ	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Economic activities (local and across Japan)	66	33.67	10	18.18
Economic activities (local)	35	17.86	3	7.27
Welfare	40	20.41	13	23.64
Standard of living	52	26.53	15	27.27
Administrative reform	8	4.08	6	10.90
Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)-related policies	2	1.02	0	0.00
Controversial policies	21	10.7	8	14.5

*Table 5.4: Policy groups and the number of policies under each group*

### 5.3 EXPLAINING THE RESULTS

The policies proposed in each party's manifesto show an interesting pattern of distribution. From Table 5.3, we can see that percentage of policies in both parties that bring about changes to areas that require improvements and that are common throughout Japan is roughly equal at 44.90% for the LDP and 40.00% for the DPJ. This reflects a common recognition across local parties across Japan of the areas that require change and that greater effort is needed to tackle several common issues faced nationwide. These are primarily welfare issues such as childcare, old age care, improving healthcare facilities and training more medical personnel, augmenting the welfare system and improving the social safety net system, increasing educational standards in schools, revitalizing the economy, and boosting employment. The LDP and DPJ exhibit a high degree of similarity in specific policy categories such as childcare (7.14% for the LDP, 7.27% for the DPJ), old age care (4.08% for the LDP, 5.45% for the DPJ), boosting employment (7.14% for the LDP, 7.27% for the DPJ) etc. These policy areas tackle problems that are found all over Japan, and while the specifics and modes of implementation of policies aimed at tackling these problems differ accordingly with the varying circumstances in different localities, the nature of such policies are essentially highly similar.

Table 5.4 also illustrates this trend. Approximately 20% of the LDP's manifesto contains policy issues that concern the welfare of citizens, while the corresponding figure for the DPJ is 24%. Similarly, policies that are aimed at improving the standard of living of residents take up roughly 27% of both the LDP's and DPJ's manifestos. Table 5.3 also indicates that the number of policies dedicated to party-specific policies is roughly equal for both the LDP (3.06%) and the DPJ (3.64%).

The main differences in policies proposed, therefore, concern public works projects and policies that are specific to particular localities. 8.16% of the LDP's policies are concerned with some form of public works projects or another, as compared to 1.82% of the DPJ's policies. Conversely, the DPJ has a larger percentage of policies that are specific to various localities at 52.73%, in contrast with the LDP's 41.33%.

Specific policy categories, types or groups that are of particular interest are further examined below:

### *5.3.1 Supporting Local Agriculture Industries, Boosting Infrastructures and Developing Local Transportation Networks*

The LDP has a much higher percentage of policies dedicated to certain policies such as supporting local agricultural industries and communities and boosting public infrastructure such as construction of roads, highways etc. than the DPJ (Table 5.2). These reflect the pattern of politics at the national level, where the basis for support for LDP's continued rule for over 50 years has traditionally been rural constituents whom the LDP has kept satisfied by lavishing generous amounts of pork-barrel spending to build local amenities and infrastructure (Curtis 1999). This is observed here as well, where public works policies and policies directed at upgrading or extending local transport networks as proposed by the LDP (4.08% and 5.10% respectively) is significantly higher than that proposed by the DPJ (1.82% and 0.00% respectively). The LDP maintains its strong support base in rural communities by supporting the agricultural communities and industries, and it signals its intention to continue doing so by dedicating 8.16% of its manifesto policies to the support of agricultural industries, as opposed to the DPJ's 1.82%. While electoral bases have been changing over the years (such as an erosion of support for the LDP over the years due to the

cut back in pork-barrel spending as mentioned previously), patterns of policies in manifestos are unable to capture this shift in voter support over time. Patterns of comparative advantage remain unchanged – ie. rural constituencies still primarily support the LDP more than any other party, and these are reflected in the patterns of policies in manifestos.

### *5.3.2 The Changing Needs of Society*

2.04% of the LDP local manifestos are concerned with showing greater support for local manufacturing firms. Although this is a small number, it is contrasted with 0.00% of the DPJ's policies that are aimed at revitalizing the manufacturing industry in Japan's prefectures. Although renowned for its high quality manufacturing and advanced level of technology involved in manufacturing processes, manufacturing in Japan is losing its edge to its Asian counterparts in lower-quality and less technologically advanced products such as electronics or consumer products. While there has been increasing recognition that restructuring of the Japanese economy away from products that require a lower level of technological requirement to products that require high technological requirements is necessary (METI 2012), workers in industries that are facing fierce competition from other Asian countries are obviously against this shift in economic structure. That the LDP pays attention to reviving local manufacturing that are threatened by economic restructuring and international trade suggests that there is some (although not seemingly overwhelming) reluctance to restructure the economy to better reflect Japan's comparative advantage.

In contrast, only 1.53% of the LDP's policies in local manifestos concern building a more comprehensive welfare and social safety net, as compared to the DPJ's 7.27%. Here, 'building a more comprehensive welfare and social safety net' refers to policies that target increasing employment and everyday support for the disabled, helping the unemployed

retrain and seek reemployment, greater protection for abused children and care for delinquent youth etc. While Japan's 'welfare for work' system was able to cater to all when economic growth was high and there was enough to go around, the economic slowdown beginning in the early 1990s left 'non-regular' workers (ie. part-time, temporary workers etc.) and female employees facing worsening employment conditions without an adequate social safety net to catch those who are hurt by the economic stagnation (Miura 2012). The LDP does not seem to pay much attention to these marginalized members of society, while the DPJ seems to be more attentive to the needs of these politically 'less powerful' groups.

### *5.3.3 Administrative Reform*

One locality-specific policy of particular interest is that of administrative reform.<sup>4</sup> Besides goals such as a more transparent government, cleaner politics, greater emphasis on the voices of residents, one of the main aims of administrative reforms is greater local administrative and fiscal autonomy (Wright and Sakurai 1987). This involves revising the relationship between the central and local governments.

Looking across all policy categories, administrative reforms make up 10.90% of the total number of policies proposed by the DPJ, but only 4.08% of that of the LDP (Table 5.4). Almost every local DPJ manifesto surveyed included a promise to carry out administrative reforms, while the 2011 manifesto for the Gunma prefecture even included a pledge to reform not only the administrative structure of the government, but that of the DPJ party itself.

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<sup>4</sup> Here, I consider administrative reforms to be locality-specific policies, as the varying nature and characteristics of prefectural governments mean that the scope and nature of administrative reforms differ accordingly.



The question here then is, under this hypothesis, given that it is the DPJ that is in power in the central government from 2009 to 2012, why do local LDP politicians seem more constrained than local DPJ politicians? I argue that this is due to the traditional lines of cooperation and alliances between LDP politicians and bureaucrats and the partial success of the DPJ in reconfiguring this relation. One of the stated objectives of the DPJ was to restructure the balance of power between bureaucrats and politicians and limit the power bureaucrats have over legislation and state resources. After coming to power, although the DPJ managed to break down past patterns of cooperation between the LDP and the bureaucracy with varying degrees of success, they had been less successful in building up their *own* alliances and establishing new frameworks to institutionalize politicians' rule over the bureaucracy. Elimination of meetings between politicians and administrative vice-ministers and having politicians play a larger role in designing policies and appointment of personnel within ministries dismantled the core institutions of the policymaking process. However, these measures also alienated many bureaucrats who were unhappy at the sudden and drastic reduction of their powers. Many were also frustrated with politicians who did not have the expertise nor an understanding of the 'subtleties of substantial policy issues', yet demanded to lead the process of policy formulation (Vogel 2010).

What this means for local DPJ politicians in the context of administrative reform is that they have a greater impetus than LDP politicians to advocate a 'continued' reform of the system to one which gives politicians more say in policymaking while better harnessing the expertise of bureaucrats with greater cooperation between the two. Advocacy of administrative reform here serves two purposes: firstly, proposals of administrative reform are in line with the voters' demands, which would earn politicians the support of voters within their constituencies. Secondly, DPJ politicians stand to gain from restructuring the relationships between the bureaucracy and politicians into one more in line with their ideal

relationship. This is one where politicians would continue to lead policymaking and have control over bureaucrats, but with greater collaboration between them to avoid repeating the confusing pattern of policy formulation and implementation characteristic of DPJ policymaking between 2009 and 2012.

In contrast, although the LDP was not in power in the central government at the time of the 2011 elections, it is in the interests of local and national level LDP politicians to preserve the lines of contact that have served them so well thus far. Strong ties between the local and central government means that local LDP politicians have been able to extract benefits from national level politicians – traditionally in the form of financial subsidies and aids for public work projects through the ‘pipeline’ that gives local politicians access to central governments funds. Although local politicians were unable to utilize this pipeline then as the DPJ was in control of the central government, there nonetheless exists the possibility that if/when the LDP returns to power, such pipelines would prove highly beneficial for local LDP politicians once again. This in turn incentivizes them *not* to implement drastic changes to the system. At the very least, in view of the chaotic state of policy formulation and implementation then, electoral strategy would suggest that it is beneficial to the LDP if the DPJ policymaking and implementation apparatus continued to be in disarray. It would therefore play to the advantage of the LDP local politicians not to advocate reform to maintain this confusion as long as it is the DPJ in power in the central government.

Here, the pattern of policies advocating administrative reform reflects the local parties’ consideration for themselves *and* for the party at the national level. This form of central-local relations encapsulates how the behavior of local political parties is affected by the behavior and considerations for the party at the national level.

#### **5.4 RELATING THE RESULTS TO THE TYPE OF CENTRAL-LOCAL RELATIONS**

At first glance, the results of analysis of the manifestos seem to suggest that the vertical administrative model still applies to the central-local relations today. The generally low percentage of policy proposals advocating ‘real’ changes to the system in the form of administrative reform or reform of party politics (as opposed to changes that tweak or improve on the current system without fundamentally changing the politics – improving childcare, for example) suggest an alignment of interests of local politicians to those of national-level politicians.

This is likely due to local government’s fiscal dependence on the center which results in the former aligning themselves with the interests of the latter. Similarly, parties that control the central government also control the national budget, and endeavors to increase funding to local governments compel local parties to adjust their policies in line with the preferences of the parties in control. Local DPJ manifestos, therefore, reflect little intent to change the administrative pattern and the politics as per residents’ demands. Only 10% of the DPJ manifestos are concerned with administrative reform – still a small percentage of policies proposed.<sup>5</sup> This reflects more ‘benign’ changes that are unlikely to diminish the power of their party at the national level and allows them to continue benefitting from the strong relationship with their counterparts in the central government. Although such ‘benign’ proposals such as infrastructural spending may increase competition between local governments and the central government for fiscal resources, at the very least, these do not

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<sup>5</sup> Even though almost every DPJ manifesto examined proposed administrative reform, such proposals were usually restricted to one ‘section’ each – ie. none elaborated on how they were going to carry out administrative reform in detail, nor did any local DPJ party dedicate a large portion of their manifesto to administrative reform.

threaten to undermine the way politics have traditionally been run or restructure the relationships among political actors in the government.

The pattern of manifesto content can also be attributed to the inclination of local politicians to align themselves along party policies to avoid antagonizing party leaders, possibly to maximize their career chances of being selected to run in national-level elections. This would compel them not to propose policies that would disrupt the organization of the party. Under this proposition, local DPJ politicians are unlikely to openly and widely propose administrative reform as active advocacy of political reform would inconvenience the party.

However, this does not conversely mean that local LDP politicians are free to propose whatever policies they feel will best earn them votes (given that the central government in 2009 is dominated by the DPJ). As explained above (Section 3.3), I believe that this is because LDP politicians still take into account the ties between politicians, bureaucrats and other political actors that have not been completely broken even with the DPJ in power in the central government. Although they were not bound to toe the line drawn by national-level DPJ politicians, local LDP politicians still have to take into consideration the limitations they face with regards to other political actors.

In summary, just as the interdependent relationship model suggests, local governments themselves too have a part to play in the policy-making process. The increase in political resources local governments can draw from and the dependence of national-level politicians on local politicians to gather votes and implement national policies means that local governments can increasingly reflect the demands of voters as well as their own initiatives. As local governments are gaining an increasingly louder voice in the political arena, local parties are not obligated to tie themselves as tightly to the preferences of the center. While local DPJ politicians face an additional constraint of needing to cultivate

favorable ties with the national-level DPJ politicians, local LDP politicians do not face this additional intra-party restriction and therefore are less obligated to toe this line. Nonetheless, local LDP politicians do not have complete autonomy in their policy proposals due to considerations of possible future cooperation. This explains how the central-local relations restrain parties in local governments such that both the LDP and the DPJ local parties are muted in their attempts to address the calls for real political change and reform.

### **5.5 WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?**

The pattern of policies observed shows confirms that local parties' manifestos are take into consideration the policy positions and preferences of national parties. Proportion of policies that tackle issues such as improving the welfare system, greater provision of childcare services etc. – policies that tackle widely-recognized problems which apply to large segments of the population, and are acknowledged by both parties to be essential policies that must be implemented in response to the changing needs of society – are highly similar across parties. On the other hand, policies that do not affect the population at large or that target specific groups that have traditionally been support bases for specific parties differ much more across parties. These include policies concerning agricultural communities and big businesses – who traditionally are constituents of the LDP – and low-wage workers and women – whose needs have been neglected under the old system – whom the DPJ are targeting to win their votes.

Moreover, the pattern of policies pertaining to administrative reform illustrates how local politicians' policy preferences reflect the positions of their parties at the national level. It can be seen that local political parties do not merely consider voters' demands and party ideology when proposing policies. Rather, the positions of their political party at the

national level and the relationship of local governments to the center are also taken into consideration.

In this section, I established that local parties consider beyond voters' preferences and their own ideological positions when proposing policies. More specifically, local parties also consider their relations with the party at the national level. In the next section, I investigate how the pattern of policy proposals varies with the strength of linkage between the central and local governments.

## **6. RESULTS OF ANALYSIS OF MANIFESTOS IN LIGHT OF CENTRAL-LOCAL RELATIONS**

In the previous section, I analyzed and compared the contents of local LDP and DPJ party manifestos. In this section, I provide evidence to show that party manifesto content depends on the *strength* of central-local relations. In view of the results of manifesto analysis as presented in the previous section, I now establish that: 1) there is a relationship between prefectural assembly (PA) election results and Lower House (LH) election results, and that link is backwards; 2) manifesto content is related to the strength of link between the central and local governments. I use data from the 2011 prefectural assembly elections and Lower House elections in 2009 and 2012, and the results of the manifesto analysis.

### **6.1 ANALYSIS AND METHODOLOGY**

First, using results of the prefectural assembly elections and the results of the Lower House elections, I calculated the extent to which parties of prefectural assembly politicians matches the parties of the Lower House politicians in the same election districts. This analysis makes use of data from a working dataset (Kay Shimizu, Multi-level Elections Data

on Japan: 1995 – 2012). ‘Matching’ here refers to the case when, for instance, an election district that has a LDP Lower House politician also has a LDP prefectural assembly member. The degree of matching is defined as how many ‘matches’ there are out of the total number of winning candidates in the prefectural assembly election. Furthermore, in order to investigate whether the link between results of the prefectural assembly and results of the Lower House elections is backward-oriented or forward-oriented (ie. whether prefectural assembly elections are linked predominantly to the Lower House elections that occurred before or after it), the 2011 prefectural assembly election results were compared to both the 2009 and 2012 Lower House election results.

The results of this comparison were then compared to the results of the analysis of manifesto content, where a policy group of particular interest – Controversial policies – is further investigated. The policy group ‘Controversial policies’ referred to here is the same as the one found under Section 5.2, Table 5.4, and refers to policies of contentious nature that potentially challenge the central government’s stance on certain issues, or in some way or another threaten the status quo, such as those pertaining to administrative reform, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), calls for greater local autonomy etc., and are likely to cause discomfort to the center in one way or another.

My hypotheses are two-fold. Firstly, I hypothesize that backward linkages rather than forward linkages matter. This means that the relationship between the 2009 Lower House elections and the 2011 prefectural assembly elections is significant, rather than the relationship between the 2012 Lower House elections and the 2011 prefectural assembly elections. For one, as Lower House politicians are pipelines through which localities obtain resources for expenditure and local projects, I postulate that prefectural assembly members who are from the same party as an already-elected Lower House politician in a particular election district are likely to be deemed by voters to be able to benefit more from the Lower

House politician, and therefore stand higher chances of being elected to the prefectural assembly. Secondly, the actions of national-level politicians and the central government are very visible and can have profound impacts on prefectures and localities, such that the inclination of voters to choose specific parties at prefectural assembly elections may be strongly influenced by what happens at the national level.

Secondly, I hypothesize that prefectures with low matching rates have relatively more policies that are considered 'Controversial'. In line with my central argument, I believe that local governments that have closer ties to the center are more tightly constrained by central-local relations, such that policies proposed by local governments in these prefectures are more unlikely to contradict or challenge the status quo or the policies of the central government. Conversely, prefectures with lower congruence face fewer central-local relations constraints, such that they are more likely to propose policies that respond to the demands of the people which may also challenge the authority and control of the central government.

## **6.2 RESULTS OF ANALYSIS**

Below, I present my results for the degree of matching of PA and LH election results. With this, I then establish the direction of linkages between the local and central governments.

### **6.2.1 CONGRUITY OF RESULTS**

Prefectures where the party of prefectural assemblymen matched the party of the Lower House member in over two-thirds (60%) of the electoral districts within the prefectures were considered prefectures with 'high congruence', while those where the matching was



less than one-third (30%) were considered prefectures with ‘low congruence’.<sup>6</sup> The rest of the prefectures were considered ‘average’ prefectures with matching rates of between 30% and 60%. The results of matching of PA election results and LH election results are shown below:

	Number of Prefectures	
	2009	2012
<b>Low Congruence</b>	11 (48%)	3 (13%)
<b>High Congruence</b>	3 (13%)	3 (13%)

*Table 6.1: Number of low and high congruence prefectures*

The general pattern of congruity across prefectures and across years supports the notion that congruity is correlated with patterns of policy proposals in manifestos. We first put aside the direction of linkages and look at overall patterns. With the LDP controlling the Lower House in 2012 and being the dominant party in prefectural assemblies, a lower number of prefectures is expected to be of low congruity in 2012 than in 2009. Also, the number of Controversial policies in these respective low-congruity prefectures is expected to be lower if the matching rate is higher.

Referring to Table 6.1, we observe that number of prefectures considered to be of low congruence in 2009 (11 prefectures) is higher than the number of low congruence prefectures in 2012 (3 prefectures). Also, the average percentage of Controversial policies for these prefectures with low congruity is also higher at 7.4% for 2009 than 6.9% for 2012. These match my expectations above and suggest that patterns of policy proposals are indeed correlated to degrees of congruity across prefectures and across years.

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<sup>6</sup> 30% and 60% merely represent average percentages chosen as benchmarks. Choosing any figure between 20% and 40%, or 50% and 70% did not yield significantly different results from the chosen benchmarks of 30% and 60% respectively.

### 6.2.2 DIRECTION OF LINKAGES

To determine whether it is the results of LH elections that are predominantly related to the subsequent PA elections or vice versa, I draw a link between the results of congruence matching as described above and the results of manifesto analysis in the previous section to illustrate the direction of influence in the central-local relations.

#### *Backward Linkages*

In the case of backward linkages, I examine the link between the 2011 PA elections and the 2009 LH elections. In the PA elections in 2011, the majority of politicians who ran for office and won were from the LDP (who comprised of 47.7% of all winners, as compared to DPJ politicians who made up 20.1% of all winners). In the 2009 LH elections, the DPJ won the majority of seats and became the ruling party in the Lower House.

As observed from the comparison of prefectural assembly candidates with the candidates who won the Lower House elections, there were 11 prefectures that exhibited low congruity and 3 prefectures with high congruity (Table 6.1). Examining the 11 prefectures with low congruity in further detail, I find that these prefectures made up 35.71% of all prefectures with Controversial policies. Furthermore, these 11 prefectures constituted 50.00% of prefectures where Controversial policies accounted for more than 10% of their policy proposals. This points to a relatively high percentage of policies that were Controversial (as compared to the comparison of the 2011 PA election data with the 2012 LH election data, as explained in the next section).

The 3 prefectures with high congruity constituted 11.11% of all prefectures that did not have any Controversial policies at all, and 16.67% of prefectures that had less than 10% of Controversial policies in their manifestos. Mirroring the results of the prefectures with

low congruity, these percentages are relatively low as compared to the analysis with 2011 PA election results and 2012 LH election results.

### *Forward Linkages*

For the case of forward linkages, the relevant datasets are the 2011 PA elections and the 2012 LH elections. The 2011 PA election is the same as the one mentioned above, where LDP constituted the majority of candidates and winners. For the 2012 LH elections, the LDP recaptured the LH in a landslide victory, rendering the DPJ a minority party.

In this case, there were 3 prefectures that exhibited low congruity and 3 prefectures exhibited high congruity. The 3 prefectures with low congruity constituted 14.29% of all prefectures with Controversial policies, and 10.00% of prefectures with Controversial policies that constitute more than 10% of their policy proposals. As compared to the results from the 2009 LH elections, this does not seem to suggest that these prefectures are particularly associated with Controversial policies, at least not any more so than the average prefecture. On the other hand, the 3 prefectures with high congruity made up 22.22% of all prefectures that did not have any Controversial policies at all, and 25.00% of prefectures that had less than 10% of Controversial policies in their manifestos. Again, these figures do not suggest that the prefectures with high congruity in 2012 have particularly low proportions of Controversial policies as compared to the case for 2009.

The results above are summarized in the figure below:

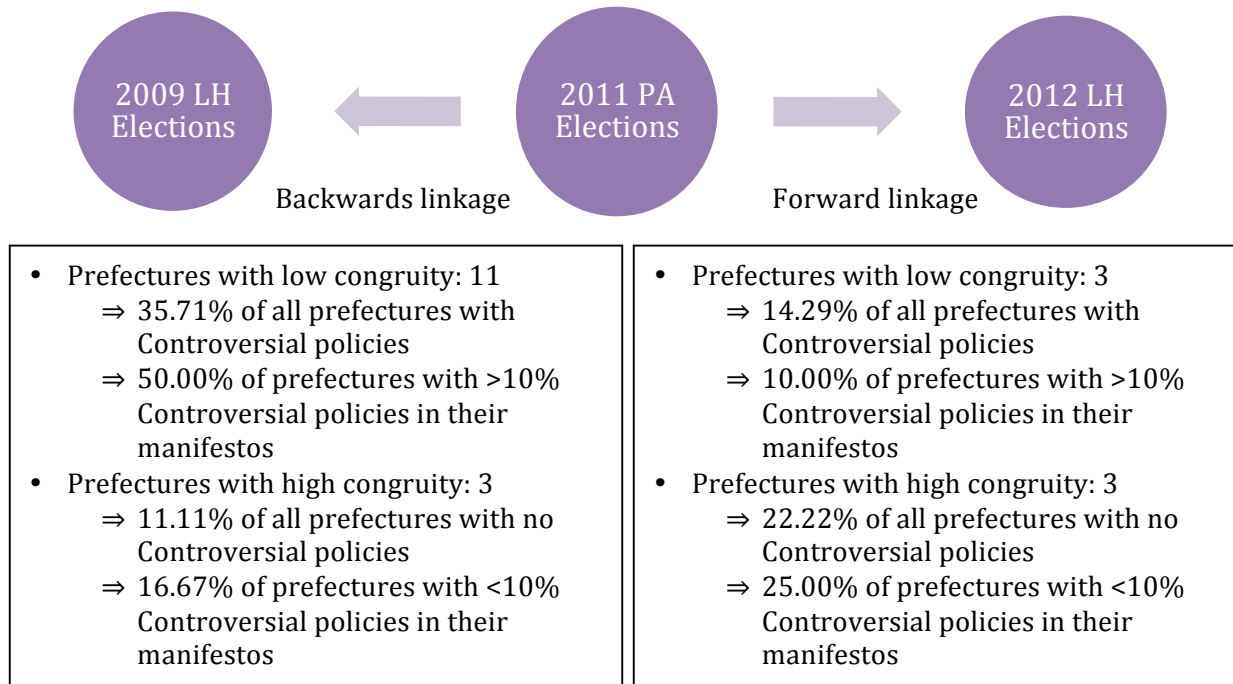


Figure 6.1: Backward and forward linkages between the 2011 PA elections and the 2009 and 2012 Lower House elections

Together, these suggest that the data for 2009 supports my hypotheses better than does the 2012 data. In other words, backwards linkages, rather than forward linkages, matter more. That congruity is correlated to the pattern of policy proposals also suggests that central-local relations are correlated with parties' manifesto proposals.

### 6.3 RECONCILING MY FINDINGS WITH WHAT HAPPENED

The above finding suggests that the link between prefectural assembly and Lower House elections are likely to be backwards. Yet what actually happened may seem to contradict my findings. Under my hypothesis of backwards linkage, for instance, the DPJ-dominated central government in 2009 should have resulted in a DPJ-dominated prefectural assembly in 2011. Yet it was the LDP that dominated the PA elections in 2011. Moreover, results of the 2012 Lower House elections also seem to support the hypothesis of forward linkage

instead: an LDP-dominated prefectural assembly in 2011 resulted in a LDP-dominated central government in 2012.

However, I contend that backward and forward linkages cannot be derived by looking at just the election results. Actual events should also be taken into consideration. The period from 2009 – 2012 was ‘special’ in the sense that it was the first time a party other than the LDP or an LDP-led coalition was dominant in the Lower House. Equally importantly was the 2011 Tōhoku Earthquake, which had a decisive effect on the election results.

I will next relate my argument to actual happenings on the ground and show how this fits into my hypothesis.

#### *Explaining the 2011 PA Elections Results*

In the 2009 Lower House elections, the DPJ won a majority, resulting in a Lower House dominated by DPJ politicians. Lower House politicians serve as pipelines through which resources are channeled from the central government to local governments, and I believe that the performance of the Lower House politicians as well as the party performance in general are important factors influencing the choice of voters in the subsequent 2011 election. Given this, while we might expect voters to choose more DPJ politicians in the 2011 prefectural assembly elections as the Lower House was predominantly DPJ in 2011, there was one other important factor that greatly influenced the choice of voters in 2011: the 2011 Tōhoku disaster.

The March 11 Tōhoku Earthquake which occurred just before the 2011 prefectural assembly elections were held had a decisive impact on the election results. In the face of extensive damage by the earthquake and tsunami which left 450,000 homeless, some 15,000 dead and over 2500 missing (National Police Agency of Japan, Emergency Disaster

Countermeasures Headquarters 2013), as well as the nuclear disaster with the meltdown of 3 reactors in Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, the inexperienced DPJ government was unable to respond to the multitude of problems that beset eastern Japan.

Internal communication and coordination within the government were sorely lacking, as the government lacked a viable and functional crisis management team to deal with such emergencies adequately and in a timely fashion. The breakdown in communication between the DPJ-led politicians and bureaucrats was a direct result of DPJ attempts to establish politician control over the bureaucracy, and ministries were unwilling to assume responsibility in implementing measures that were necessary to alleviate the situation on the ground, preferring to wait for politicians to lead the way. There was no viable contingency plan in case of emergencies – both in the government and in Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Then-Prime Minister Naoto Kan's inexperience led him to micromanage rescue efforts, which caused confusion on the ground and delayed critical response measures. Collaboration with external organizations such as foreign rescue teams were also haphazard, wasting valuable time before these teams were employed to the disaster zones. Moreover, the withholding of information from the public as well as the conflicting signals which were meant to prevent widespread panic and reassure people, instead led to a rapid erosion of trust in the government (Funabashi 2011).

In other words, the paralysis of the DPJ government in the face of the Tohoku earthquake shook the people's already-weak trust in the politicians and the ministries. This proved to be a decisive factor in the 2011 prefectural assembly elections that took place just after the Tohoku disaster, where voters, disillusioned with the DPJ, opted for the LDP instead.

### *Explaining the 2012 Lower House Election Results*

Conversely, if forward linkages were to characterize the relationship between prefectural assembly politicians and Lower House politicians, it would imply that one important factor influencing voters' choice of Lower House politicians would be the identity and performance of prefectural assembly members. Although we do observe here that the LDP dominated both the 2011 Prefectural Assembly elections and the 2012 Lower House elections, the landslide victory of the 2012 Lower House elections had more to do with voters' disillusionment with the previous DPJ government than approval of the LDP politicians' performance in local prefectural assemblies. As noted by scholars and echoed by the press, the LDP election in 2012 was not a mandate to rule, but a 'rejection of the last three years of political confusion' (Nakamoto, Dickie and Soble 2012). There could not have been a shift in voters' preferences towards the LDP stances in specific issues because there was little difference between the positions of the LDP and the DPJ, in terms of consumption tax, nuclear power, economic policy etc. (Schoppa 2012). It is therefore inaccurate to conclude that the results of the 2012 Lower House elections were largely influenced by the 2011 prefectural assembly elections.

In addition, regardless of whether this linkage is forward or backward, we would expect to see prefectures with low congruence have higher proportions of Controversial policies. As shown above, prefectures with low congruity had higher percentages of Controversial policies in 2009 than in 2012. That these relations are weaker in the case of comparison of the 2011 prefectural assembly election with the 2012 Lower House election supports the hypothesis that backwards linkage is dominant.

A comparison of the 2009 and 2012 data point to backward linkages as the more plausible relationship between prefectural assembly politicians and Lower House

politicians. More importantly, the above analysis examined how the strength of backward linkages is reflected in the content of manifestos – in other words, how the contents of manifestos are correlated the strength of central-local relations.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

I have showed that patterns of policy proposals differ according to the strength of central-local relations, where prefectures that exhibit stronger relations between the center and local governments have lower percentages of Controversial policy proposals. This strongly suggests that one factor inhibiting local parties from pushing for the change that the public demands is the strength of the relationship between the central and local governments.

### **PARALLEL TRENDS AND OBSERVATIONS**

I argued in this paper that the lack of proposals for administrative reforms as observed in local parties' manifestos reflect constraints faced by local governments in their relationship with the central government. More broadly, the actions of local governments are influenced and shaped by institutional structures including central-local relations and intra-party relations between local- and national-level politicians.

Observations of institutional structures affecting local politicians' behavior vis-à-vis the center are not restricted to patterns of policy proposals in manifestos. For instance, Lin (2009) shows that Koizumi was selected as party leader because of the changes to LDP's internal electoral rules, which gave local chapters greater voting power than before. LDP Diet politicians expected that voting by local politicians would follow factional interests and that they could rely on the alignment and support by local politicians. However, the public's immense dissatisfaction with the way politics was run in the LDP, the view of the LDP as a



'haven of backroom politics', and an increase in non-partisan voters who generally pay greater attention to policies and are less swayed by pork-barrel politics (Scheiner 2005) compelled local politicians to reconsider their strategies. Instead of unconditionally backing their factions, local politicians decided that the advantages of presenting themselves as being more responsive to the demands of the voters, which might in turn help them to secure re-election, outweigh the benefits of aligning themselves with their factions.

This illustrates how the relationship between national politicians and local chapters affects the behavior of local politicians. Here, a change in the institutional structure – in this case, the electoral rules within the LDP – coupled with the already-existing pressure for change, led to a deviation in behavior of local politicians from the past. Similarly, a parallel can be drawn between the relationship between local politicians and national politicians within the same party, and local governments and the central government as a whole. The support for Koizumi to be elected as party president was a one-time affair, but long-term considerations of fiscal needs and support by the central government discourages parties in local governments from going against the interests of the central government too frequently and too drastically. While the *change* in electoral rules was the impetus for local LDP politicians to go against preferences of national LDP politicians in 2001, the institutional structure *in place* prescribing the power of local governments discouraged local politicians from surfacing policies that could prove detrimental to their long-term relationship with the central government.

Similarly, parties in local governments are not the only ones who modify their behavior or act in a certain way due to the need for fiscal resources and administrative support from the central government or parties in power. Saito (2009) shows that how incumbent national politicians choose their party memberships can be explained by the need for them to align themselves with the ruling coalition to obtain the fiscal resources for public

infrastructure construction demanded by constituents. Although his paper studies the behavior of national politicians, this pattern of behavior can be observed in local politicians as well. I have explored how the behavior of local politicians is similarly constrained by the need to align themselves with the preferences of the central government to secure funds and resources. This need for resources (fiscal and administrative support or otherwise) influences the actions of incumbent national politicians, as well as local parties.

### **REMAINING QUESTIONS:**

#### *Room for Election Strategy?*

One might argue that the pattern of election manifestos reflects more of the election strategies that parties employ rather than the constraints that provincial governments face. I admit that it is virtually impossible to distinguish strategy from real considerations just by examining manifestos as all we observe are the outcomes of interactions of these factors, while we do not see what are actually driving these outcomes. However, I believe that the role of strategy here is limited. Manifestos have not played an important role in elections previously, and parties appeal to voters by other means besides manifestos. While this not mean that parties will not now turn to manifestos as an extension of their election strategy, I believe that parties did not have sufficient time to fully understand the best way to utilize this new means of communication, nor incorporate the use of manifestos as part of their election strategy. As such, while there is certainly room for strategy, I believe that party strategies are reflected less than real considerations and constraints for now.

### *How Special is the LDP?*

This paper has drawn upon manifesto data from primarily the LDP and to a lesser extent, the DPJ. While ideally such a study would entail an analysis of all manifestos from all parties such as the smaller Kōmeitō and the Japanese Communist Party, a lack of data has constrained my study on these smaller parties. Further research of such information could conceivably lead me to two very different conclusions. If these manifestos suggest greater conservativeness (ie. fewer proposals for reform of the political system) amongst the opposition parties, it would suggest that there might be other factors at play that influence party policy preferences as seen in manifestos. One obvious possible explanation would be the manifestos do not truly reflect what parties believe and are published just to enhance a party's popular image. Another reason why even local politicians from other parties do not push for political reform is because they too, stand to gain from strong relationships between the local and central government through links with their coalition partners. For instance, local Kōmeitō politicians could have been benefiting from their strong ties with national LDP politicians. This would compel local opposition politicians to preserve these old relations in order to continue benefiting from them.

If, however, the manifestos from these smaller opposition parties reflect a larger departure from old policies than those from the LDP and the DPJ, it would suggest two possibilities. One supports my hypothesis that manifestos and actions of local party branches reflect not only party policy preferences but are also constrained by the central-local relations. This would be the case if manifestos from these smaller opposition parties (which, in line with my analysis, would be less constrained than both the LDP and the DPJ) would reflect more of voter's preferences than the manifestos of the LDP and DPJ. Because they are less constrained by central-local relations (unlike the DPJ in 2011) and have a less of a vested interest in preserving the ties between the center and localities (unlike the LDP

in 2011), these parties have a freer hand to appeal to local voters or propose policies in line with party preferences.

However, there remains the second possibility that manifestos all but reflect an 'anti-ruling party' mentality amongst opposition parties. Just as how the DPJ expanded from 1998 to 2003 by absorbing politicians from across the political spectrum by trumpeting its 'anti-LDP' identification (Tatsumi 2013), these opposition parties could very well be resorting to the same tactic of attacking the party in power to draw upon the dissatisfaction and belief that voters have that the problem not only lies with the DPJ but with the party system as a whole (Jou 2012). This explanation is always a possibility, as it is virtually impossible to distinguish between the different intentions behind policy proposals (anti-ruling party, genuine party stances or consideration of central-local relations). If there was a way to distinguish the rationale behind the decisions to include certain proposals in manifestos and to leave out others, it would then be possible to examine how important central-local relations are as a factor for consideration by politicians.

Although the DPJ has been increasing in power in recent years, its politicians have not been able to match the performance of their LDP rivals both at the national level and even more so at the local level. Even in elections when the DPJ does well at the national level, it has not been able to improve its performance significantly at the local level (Scheiner 2005). The organization and availability of local DPJ party manifestos in contrast with that of the local LDP parties is a reflection of this disparity in performance – at the local level, the DPJ is simply not as organized as the LDP. Although one may argue that local manifestos do not play an important part in local elections today, it is nonetheless important to pay attention to such details to inspire voters' confidence in the party.

Ultimately, manifestos are but tools employed by politicians to communicate ideas and intentions to the electorate. Manifestos are essentially the same as campaign platforms, but the use of the foreign word 'manifestos' suggests something new and profound (Curtis 2004). The surge in interest in manifestos as a symbol of change in Japan's political system mirrors the demand for change to the prevailing system. While the use of policy proposals in manifestos as a harbinger for change is not accurate due to the numerous influences they reflect, but it can provide an indication of the *intentions* for change by local politicians.

In this paper, I have argued that a reason why such change may not be forthcoming is because local governments cannot respond freely to these demands due to considerations of their relations with the central government. Institutional relations, specifically central-local relations, constraining the behavior and choices that local political parties have possibly constitute a significant factor as to why local governments are not actively implementing those changes. Therefore, I suggest that manifestos do not only reflect politicians' intentions, but also other constraints – primarily center-local relations – that may obscure their true intentions to change. In particular, findings suggest that the interdependent relationship model is the dominant model here, as while the center obviously holds sway over local governments, local governments also enjoy some limited autonomy as can be observed by how patterns of policy proposal vary with the strength of central-local relations.

This paper is limited to examining the behavior and intent of local political parties as observed through manifestos, but is part of a broader discussion of how institutional factors affect the choice and behavior of political actors. While motivations and intentions to change may be real, these may be masked by these institutional relations that restrict what local governments can achieve. Further investigation how these institutional factors and

central-local relations permeate political decision-making and dictate Japan's pace of political change is left to future research.

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