

## SOCIAL CLEAVAGES, VOTER ALIGNMENT, AND DEALIGNMENT IN JAPAN

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### *Summary*

Starting from an interpretation of the cleavage-theory as a dynamic model of “freezing” and “unfreezing” of party systems and voter alignments, this paper tries to ascertain the major cleavage structures that have conditioned the development of the Japanese party system. After its formation in 1955, the post-war party system was mainly based on two cleavages — one economic and the other a cultural cleavage — but we have seen a growing tendency towards “unfreezing” since the early 70s. Neither the LDP nor the SDPJ, the two most important post-war parties, were able to transform themselves into catch-all parties, which led to a dramatic increase in the number of non-party supporters and floating voters. This dealignment brought about an instability of the system and a great fluidity in party labels in the 90s. The current system seems to be based on conflicts within the established elite rather than on social cleavages. The “unfreezing” of the system, and its further untying from the social structure, could cause a further weakening of its acceptance among the electorate.

### *I. Introduction*

The interrelationship between the social structure and the political system is a classical subject of Western social sciences, whereas we still do not have a comprehensive current study focussed on the social structure and political system of Japan. This striking feature is rooted in the fact that since the early 70s an approach claiming that Japanese society is “uniquely unique” and therefore incomparable to other societies, became popular not only in Japan, but also among Western scholars. In contrast to this position, it is the purpose of this paper to answer the following questions: Which are the relevant cleavage structures and conflict lines in Japan? Do we find interest aggregation and voter alignments comparable to those in Western societies? Do the party system and the voter alignments show symptoms of dealignment as they do in other industrialized countries? Starting with the cleavage-theory, which is interpreted as a dynamic model of “freezing” and “unfreezing” of party systems and voter alignments, this paper focuses on the interrelationship between the social structure and the development of the Japanese party system since 1955 as well as on voter alignment and dealignment over time.

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## II. *Theoretical Part*

Lipset and Rokkan systematically investigated the correlation between social structure and party system in the late 60s. According to their cleavage theory, the development of party systems can be interpreted as the translation of the cleavage structure of a given society into political party alternatives. The patterns of partisan support are explained in terms of the historical emergence of various lines of cleavage between large sections of national populations. Religious, ethnic, region, and class divisions have a deeply rooted historical meaning for people in many European nations, and large parts of the European party history since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be described in terms of interaction between the National and the Industrial Revolution.

The National Revolution caused conflicts between the central nation-building culture and the increasing resistance of ethnically, linguistically, or religiously distinct subject populations in provinces and peripheries (dominant vs. subject culture) as well as conflicts between the Nation State and the established corporate privileges of the church (government vs. church). The Industrial Revolution brought about conflicts between the landed interests and the rising class of industrial entrepreneurs on the one hand (primary vs. secondary economy), and conflicts between employers and workers on the other (employers vs. workers). One of Lipset and Rokkan's most prominent theses claims a "freezing" of the major party alternatives in the wake of the extension of the suffrage. Therefore, the European party systems of the 60s, with few exceptions, reflected the cleavage structure of the 1920s (Lipset/Rokkan 1967: 50). However, less known is the fact that Rokkan also discovered a tendency towards "unfreezing" of party systems and voter alignments in Western societies in the late 60s (Rokkan according to Flora 2000: 34), which was empirically proved by Dalton, Flanagan and others in the early 80s (Dalton 1984, Dalton et. al. 1984).

Taking Rokkan's comprehensive theoretical studies into consideration,<sup>1</sup> cleavage structures in his sense can be interpreted as a result of discontinuous processes of "freezing" and "opening" during "critical junctures" of the historical development of a given society (Flora 2000: 21). It makes sense to assume that the process of "opening" is accompanied by an "unfreezing" of the cleavage structure and by its new formation. Hence, the cleavage theory can be interpreted as a dynamic model of sequences of crises in the historical development of a given society, which at first result in a crystallization and freezing of the cleavage structure. With the emergence of new critical junctures, the cleavage structure breaks up and turns into a more complex constellation. However, due to a lack of empirical studies, it is still difficult to forecast what happens when fully developed party systems are affected by unfreezing and dealignment, but one might expect the emergence of new parties as predicted by Inglehard (1971, 1990) and Dalton (1984).

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<sup>1</sup> Rokkan's published and unpublished studies were recently compiled by Flora (2000). The English version was published by Oxford University Press in 1999.

### III. *Conflicts Caused by the National and the Industrial Revolution in Japan*

As mentioned above, conflicts caused by the National and the Industrial Revolution were very influential in shaping Western party systems and voter alignments, whereas hardly any conflicts were caused by the National Revolution in Japan. Even though we can identify a significant internal variation of social and ethnical minority groups (such as Burakumin, Koreans, Ainu or Okinawas) within the country, these groups are numerically insignificant. Conflicts between the Nation State and the rights of established religious communities have also been of less importance since Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582) and his successors destroyed the military power of the Buddhist sects during the unification of the empire in the 16th century. Religion might play a fairly qualified role in Japanese society today, but overall the Japanese do not regard their religious traditions as exclusive belief systems. The Japanese culture has drawn on elements from variously differing religious traditions, and most Japanese are both Shinto and Buddhist, rather than Shinto or Buddhist, and the levels of confessionalization are extremely low (Flanagan/Richardson 1977: 17). Nevertheless, the tradition of religious sectionalism found its expression in the foundation of the Buddhist Komeito party in the 60s. In general, however, none of the segmental cleavages typically associated with the National Revolution — neither regional, nor ethnic or religious — had the same impact on party formation and voter alignments as they did in comparable Western countries.

In contrast, the cleavages caused by the Industrial Revolution had a greater political salience in Japan than other forms of social division. In early post-war Japan, the primary sector maintained a relatively high share of net domestic product. In 1950, nearly 50% of the labor force was still engaged in the primary sector (compared, e.g., to about only 25% in Western Germany). The industrial-agrarian cleavage caused by the Industrial Revolution thus had a strong impact on party foundation and voter alignment in the early post-war years and was aggregated within the conservative party front.

The conflict between the classes emerged comparatively late. The share of employed persons engaged in the secondary industry increased from 21,9% in 1950 to 33,9% in 1970, but hit a ceiling during the 1970s with a maximum of 34,8% in 1980. Conversely, the first statistics of imperial Germany, in 1882, recorded a 34% engagement in the secondary sector, which reached 50% in 1960. This rate only began to decline gradually from the 80s (see Statistisches Bundesamt 1973 and 1996; Nihon tōkei nenkan 1999). The intensification of the class conflict too had an impact on party formation in Japan and led to the founding of the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP, *Jiyū minshu tō*) and the Japanese Socialist Party (JSP; *Nihon shakai tō*) in the middle of the 50s. The comparatively low percentage of persons engaged in the secondary industry meant that the Japanese working class never had the power to influence voting results as its counterparts in Europe did.

The Japanese primary sector, similar to that in other developed countries, currently accounts for only a small fraction of the total economic activities, while its secondary sector began to decline in relative terms during the 80s and the tertiary sector has come to the fore. The late development of the secondary sector meant that the shift to the tertiary sector, which exceeded 60% in 1995, was swifter and more drastic than in other industrialized nations and caused massive changes in the labor market structure and in living conditions. Along with the

emergence of the media society, this shift can, in general, be seen as a critical juncture in the development of industrial nations. In Japan, as in Western societies, this too led to a break up of the party system and voter dealignment. To understand these processes we should first review the development of the party system from its formation in the 50s, and, in a second step, investigate voter alignments and dealignment since then.

#### IV. *The Development of the Japanese Party System 1955-2002*

In 1955, essential political amalgamations took place that would fundamentally shape the Japanese party system until 1993. In October, the JSP reunited<sup>2</sup> and one month later, the two existing conservative parties formed the LDP.<sup>3</sup> These mergers ended a period of great fluidity in party labels and factional alignments on the Right and Left. Strong external pressure had encouraged these amalgamations of the political camps. Without the efforts of the labor federation Sohyo (*Nihon rōdō kumiai sōhyōgikai*), which had called for a reunification of the JSP to form a strong socialist party, the party would not have been formed. On the other hand, the business community, represented by Keidanren (*Keizai dantai rengōkai*), had required a stable, conservative government to maintain good relationships with the United States in order to thwart the JSP's growth and to cope with the growing labor movement. Pressured by the business world (*zaikai*) the two existing conservative parties were brought together to form a single one (Masumi 1992: 35). These mergers resulted in the establishment of the so-called 1955 system (*gojūgonen taisei*), with the conservative LDP as the party in power and the leftist JSP as the biggest opposition party. Following these amalgamations, the only other party left was the Japan Communist Party (JCP, *Nihon kyōsan tō*) that gained less than one-half of one percent of the seats at that time.

The Conservatives sought to strengthen the alliance with the USA and a reversal of specifically those parts of the new constitution referring to the symbolic status of the emperor, recognition of labor unions, equality of the sexes, and, of course, article 9, which prohibited Japan from having armed forces. JSP and JCP fiercely opposed the conservatives' position on all of these issues and were supported by Sohyo, which acted as a political organization at that time and played a leading role in expressing opposing opinions (Seifert 1997: 15).

According to Flanagan/Reed (1996: 334), the main cleavage of this constellation arose from differences in value systems. The shock of the military defeat and the radical reforms of the occupation period, coupled with the changes in the education system were stimulating rapid changes. This value change affected mainly the younger, more educated, urban and unionized sector. This unevenness created a sharp value cleavage between these segments of the population, which backed the Progressives, and the older, less educated, rural and non-unionized part of the society, which mainly supported the Conservatives (see also Watanuki 1967).

Despite the fact that this theory identifies a key feature of the Japanese party system, one should not fail to notice the economical cleavage that the political camps represented. As

<sup>2</sup> In October 1951 the party had split into two over the San Francisco peace settlement. The Left strongly opposed it and rejected any form of Japanese rearmament, whereas the Centre and the Right were prepared to give it qualified approval. See Stockwin 1992: 87.

<sup>3</sup> The Democratic Party (DPJ; *Nihon minshu tō*) and the Liberal Party (LP; *Jiyū tō*).

mentioned above, the pressure of the economic interest groups — the labor unions (labor) on the one hand and the business community (capital) on the other — had forced both these amalgamations. Thus, the party system and voter alignments in the 50s and 60s were based on two main cleavages: (1) An economic one, which was rooted in the conflict between capital and labor and (2) a cultural one, which was founded on a traditional vs. modern value orientation. The JSP represented the interests of the unionized blue- and white-collar workers and the better-educated, urban, post-war generation, whereas the LDP represented the interests of the old middle class and the less educated, rural pre-war generation. Consequently, in the 50s and 60s the Japanese party system, similar to the party systems in other industrialized countries, too was based on social structural cleavages.

The labor movement's split in a left and a moderate labor federation at the beginning of the 60s, was followed by the defection of JSP's right wing and resulted in the establishment of the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP, *Minshu shakai tō*). The economic development, the social structural changes in the labor force, the ebbing of the labor movement and a generational shift in the electorate led to a decline in the right and leftist vote from the early 1970s onward and gave rise to non-partisan swinging voters. As a result, the party system was transformed into a multiparty system during the 70s. The declining labor movement caused a diminishing of the JCP and DSP's supporter groups as well. Nevertheless, together with the Clean Government Party or Komeito, which had been established in 1964, they attracted the floating vote (*fudōhyō*) in the urban electoral districts and took advantage of the vacuum left by the decline of the LDP and JSP's share of the vote. However, the number of votes received and seats held by these parties fluctuated considerably (Masumi 1995: 7).

At the beginning of the 80s, Japan entered a period of neo-traditionalism that stressed the “roots” of Japanese society. The media played a major role in the production and marketing of tradition through historical television dramas, epic movies, endless multi-volume pictorial histories, and the like (Buckley 1993: 368). This conservative trend resulted in a swift LDP resurgence after its long decline.

At the end of the 80s the burst of the so-called “bubble economy” plunged the Japanese economy into a severe crisis. In addition, a series of political bribery scandals shook the country and gave rise to new parties calling for political reforms. In May 1992 the Japan New Party (JNP, *Nihonshintō*) was formed as a new conservative party under the leadership of Hosokawa Morihiro (\*1938), a former LDP politician and governor of Kumamoto. The 1992 Sagawa Express Co. bribery scandal<sup>4</sup> led to the leader of the largest faction within the LDP being convicted of having accepted, in violation of political contribution regulations, large sums of money from Sagawa (Kohno 1997: 137). The sentence resulted in an internal factional struggle for leadership, which finally caused the faction to split despite having no program, or interest differences. This gave rise to several defections from the party in the summer of 1993, which resulted in the LDP's temporary loss of power.

In the following years a series of mergers and more party splits occurred. Three different developments were of distinctive importance: (1) The dissolving of most of the opposition

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<sup>4</sup> Following the notorious Recruit Cosmos bribery scandal of 1988/89, the Sagawa Kyūbin bribery scandal shocked the Japanese public anew. In 1992 it was revealed that the president of Japan's second largest transport company, Sagawa Kyūbin, had donated large amounts of money to LDP politicians (among them five former prime ministers) as well as to politicians of the opposition camp (with the exception of the JCP). See Pohl 1992: 42f.

parties and the founding of the New Frontier Party (NFP, *Shinshintô*) in 1994, (2) the split of the SDPJ (the former JSP)<sup>5</sup> in 1996, and (3) the dissolving of the NFP and the formation of the new party system in 1997/98.

After the 1993 House of Representatives (HR) election, the two new conservative parties, the New Life Party (*Shinseitô*) and Harbinger Party or Sakigake, which had arisen from LDP splinter groups, formed a reformist coalition cabinet along with SDPJ, DSP, Komeito and the Japan New Party. Hosokawa Morihiro, the leader of the JNP, became the first non-LDP prime minister since 1955. However, the coalition partners did not as much agree on political issues as try to dislodge the LDP. Consequently, this coalition cabinet was in power for only nine months and lost its majority when the SDPJ withdrew in April 1994. Thereafter a most unlikely coalition government, composed of the SDPJ, LDP, and Sakigake, emerged and a Socialist, Murayama Tomiichi (\*1935), became Prime Minister. However, Murayama resigned one and half years later, and with the appointment of Hashimoto Ryûtarô (\*1937) as his successor, the LDP was in power again.

This coalition between the SDPJ and its rival LDP, along with the abandonment of SDPJ's traditional policy positions, was a controversial issue within the party, and both the left and the right wing announced that they would defect.

In August 1994, all the opposition parties (with the exception of the JCP) formed the second strongest party in the system by merging into another new party, called Shinshintô. This merger was primarily rooted in the hope of establishing an alternating two-party system and not in an agreement on policy issues between the merging groups.

In March 1996, a part of the left wing Socialists split off from the SDPJ to form the New Socialist Party (*Shin shakai tō*), which remained insignificant. In September, the right wing defected as well and, together with some minute splinter groups from the Sakigake and the LDP, formed the Japan Democratic Party (*Nihon minshu tō*). It claimed to be a party of “new conservatism” (Pohl 1996: 48). The split of the SDPJ had been forced by the co-operative labor federation Rengo (*Nihon rôdô kumiai sôrengôkai*), which had replaced the leftist Sohyo in the beginning of the 90s. Rengo had called for the founding of a moderate Social Democratic Party to establish a two-party system and increasingly refused to raise funds for the SDPJ (Köllner 1998: 279). After these splits, the remaining SDPJ became insignificant.

In the end of 1996, some former LDP politicians defected from the Shinshintô and formed a few short-lived parties. Other splits followed until the party was dissolved at the end of 1997. This development had been accelerated by the party's voting for LDP draft bills, a co-operation that was especially criticized by the former Komeito — which had continued to exist as a party within the party — as well as by the other groups (Pohl 1998a: 19f).

Following the dissolving of the Shinshintô, new parties appeared in the course of the following year. In January 1998 the Liberal Party (*Jiyûtô*) was formed, vaguely specified as a party “for the economy” (Pohl 1998b: 36), and consisting mainly of former LDP and DSP politicians. After its formation, the party held approximately 8% of the seats in the HR. April 1998 saw the merger of the Democratic Party with some other groups to form the (new) Democratic Party, which soon became the second strongest party by occupying roughly 20% of the seats. Nearly 50% of the parties' members were politicians from the former social

<sup>5</sup> In 1986 the party replaced its Marxist program, adopted a modernized platform and changed its English name into the Social Democratic Party. In Japanese it kept its old name until 1996.

democratic camp and roughly 50% were former Conservatives (Schmidt 2001: 158). In its own words, the party represents *citizens, taxpayers, and consumers* (program of the Democratic Party, year not specified). In October 1998, the former Komeito was re-established under the name New Komeito (*Shin kōmeitō*) and in April 2000, a small group defected from the Liberal Party and found the Conservative Party (*Hoshutō*). In December 2002, some minute DPJ splinter groups united with the Conservative Party and formed the New Conservative Party (*Hoshushintō*) (Asahi shinbunsha 2002).

Even after these changes, the party system is still characterized by an ongoing fragmentation of the opposition camp and one cannot predict whether it will undergo further transformation within the next few years. In contrast to the party system of the 50s and 60s, the current party system is barely based on social cleavages. Genuine political factors, such as political scandals and struggles among competing elites for political power, seem to be more influential in shaping the current system. We therefore have reason to doubt that these new parties will be less ephemeral than their predecessors of the early 90s. Nevertheless, the consistent inequality in the voting system<sup>6</sup> means that the LDP is still politically dominant, while the SDPJ has become politically insignificant.

Concurrently with these changes, voter turnout declined and reached a historical low with less than 60% in 1996. Volatility<sup>7</sup> grew from 12,5 in 1990 to 23,1 in 1993 and finally to 48,1 in the 1996 HR election. Moreover, in the period between 1989 and 2000 Japan saw eight prime ministers compared to only two in the 60s, four in the 70s and three between 1980 and 1989 (Schmidt 2001: 294f, 301).

## V. Voter Alignment and Dealignment

As mentioned above, the Japanese party system in the 50s and 60s was based upon two major cleavages — an economical one, representing the conflict between capital and labor (corresponding variables: occupation), and a cultural one, which was caused by differences in value systems (corresponding variables: age, education and place of residence). The following investigation focuses on the changes in voting behavior and voter alignment over time and tries to highlight the growing tendency of the “unfreezing” of the party system that has been occurring since the early 70s.

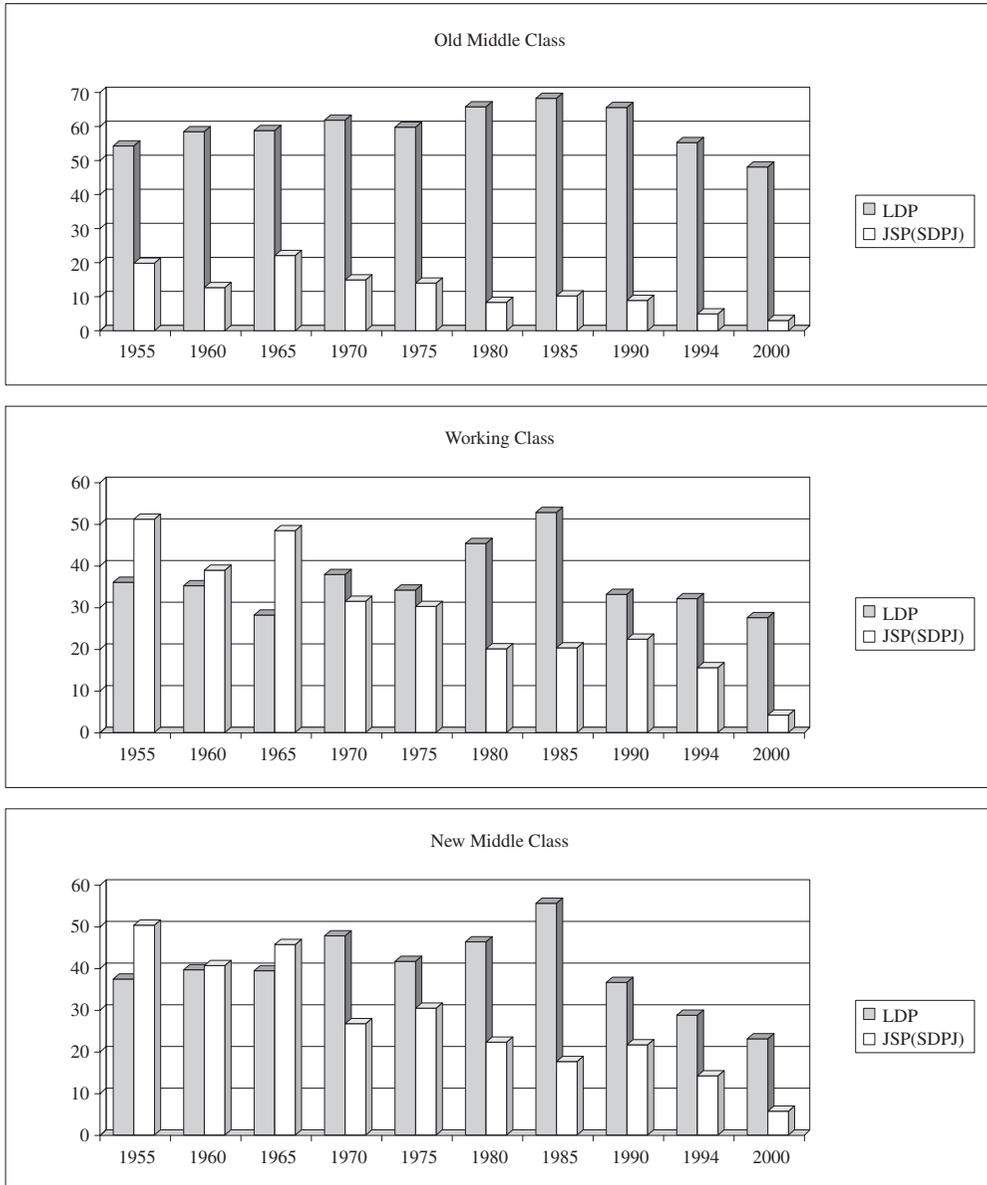
In investigating long-term voter alignment, two different developments should be taken into consideration: The first one is related to social structural changes that are causing a modification in the size of supporter groups. The second one concerns the shift in the partisans’ social structural composition over time.

With the rapid decline of the farm population from nearly 50% of the labor force in the 50s to around 6% in 1995, LDP’s supporter groups dwindled markedly. The self-employed,

<sup>6</sup> As pointed out by many authors, the LDP strongly benefited from the voting system (see, e.g., Hrebentar 2000: chap. 3). In 1994 a new electoral law was adopted. However, in the first election held after the reform, the gap between the votes received and mandates held grew markedly. The LDP gained 47,8% of the seats with only 35,7% of the vote, which was the highest bias for the party in a post-war election. Conversely, the JCP won only 5,2% of the seats, even though it obtained 12,8% of the vote. For details, see Seligman 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Volatility provides information on the continuity and change of a given party system. It summarizes the mandates won by the parties as compared with the previous election (Nohlen 1989: 92f).

FIG. 1. PARTY PREFERENCES OF THE SOCIAL CLASSES 1955-2000



Source: 1955-85: Surveys of the *Asahi shinbun* according to Masumi 1995: 473, 475. 1990, 1994 and 2000: Surveys of the *Akarui senkyo suishin kyōkai* 1990: 36, 1994: 36 and 2000: 43. The figures are based upon own calculation.

LDP's second principal supporter group, also declined in relative terms. On the other hand, the group of blue- and white-collar workers grew considerably. These facts should have favored the leftist parties, but the decrease in unionized workers from about 55% in 1950 to around 21% in 2000, caused the leftist supporter groups to shrink as well. Moreover, a generational shift occurred in the electorate. The sharp cultural cleavage that had emerged in the 50s between the post-war generation supporting the left parties and the pre-war generation backing rightist LDP, weakened in the 80s when the welfare generation entered the electorate. These socio-structural changes therefore resulted in a gradual decline of all parties' traditional supporter groups. Consequently, party competition strengthened because the number of unaffiliated voters increased considerably.

Based on public opinion polls, Table 1 provides data on party support from the mid-1960s until 2000. It is apparent that the party preferences of the surveyed voters approximately corresponded to the votes the parties received in elections. In the 60s and 70s, less than 50% of respondents preferred the LDP. In the 80s, this share grew due to the conservative trend mentioned above, but decreased notably over the 90s. The SDPJ received its strongest support in the 60s, which gradually declined over the time with a slight increase in 1990. In 2000, SDPJ's support reached its nadir with only approximately 4% of the vote. Parallel with the decline in SDPJ support, preferences for other parties increased notably over the 70s, but declined thereafter. In 2000, their support went up to roughly 24% of the vote.

A closer examination of voter alignment over time clarifies the fact that the alliance between the LDP and its traditional supporter groups still persists, whereas we find a distinctive dealignment of the left supporter groups from the SDPJ.

Figure 1 shows the correlation between class and vote. The old middle class clearly showed a preference for the LDP over time, while the working class as well as the new middle class strongly supported the SDPJ until the middle of the 60s. From the 70s onward the class cleavage weakened, and in the 80s, the LDP's support exceeded 50% in all social classes, while the SDPJ's support diminished dramatically. During the 1990s, however, the preference for the LDP declined, especially among the new middle class, but also among the working class. In 2000, only 27% of the working class and 22% of the middle class supported the LDP.

The cultural cleavage was weakened over time as well. In the 60s, there was a fairly clear correlation between age, educational level and party preference. While the young and better educated preferred the leftist parties, the older, less educated part of the population tended to vote conservative. Furthermore, there was a distinct interrelationship between the place of residence and party choice. Urban voters were the most likely to prefer leftist parties, whereas the rural population tended to vote conservative. As shown in Table 1, in the 90s the preference for the LDP was still increasing among the elderly. By the 90s there was, conversely, no longer any correlation between youth and a left vote. There was, however, still a strong one between a low level of education and a conservative vote, but none between a high level of education and support for the leftist. Table 1 furthermore reveals that in the 90s the LDP was still strong in rural areas, while the SDPJ support in urban centers had mostly dissipated. The other parties found substantial support among floating voters, especially among younger, better-educated urban voters, but as mentioned above, their support fluctuated considerably.

The decline of the value-cleavage is illustrated by the data given in Table 2. In the year 2000, 38% of the survey research pollee classified themselves as conservative or largely

TABLE 1. PARTY PREFERENCES BY AGE, EDUCATION AND PLACE OF RESIDENCE 1965-2000 (in %)

Year	LDP						JSP/SDPJ						Other parties					
	'65	'76	'86	'90	'94	'00	'65	'76	'86	'90	'94	'00	'65	'76	'86	'90	'94	'00
Overall	45	45	59	44	38	32	34	24	15	17	11	4	9	18	14	7	14	24
Age																		
20-24		38	55	23	15	7		21	9	17	3	1		23	20	1	23	17
25-29	38 <sup>⊗</sup>	40	62	32	21	17	45 <sup>⊗</sup>	27	12	12	11	1	11 <sup>⊗</sup>	24	14	11	15	25
30-34		42	59					25	15					21	14			
35-39	41	45	54	31*	31*	19*	42	31	17	17*	13*	2*	10	15	16	8*	14*	26*
40-49	45	45	55	41	36	22	34	26	15	20	11	4	9	18	18	8	16	28
50-59	53	47	60	45	42	35	26	23	19	20	12	4	8	19	12	8	14	24
60+	55	56	66	58	50	46	16	17	12	15	12	6	5	9	11	6	11	22
Education																		
Primary	-	-	-	52	49	44	-	-	-	15	10	6	-	-	-	8	13	20
Secondary	-	-	-	42	38	33	-	-	-	19	12	4	-	-	-	7	14	25
University or College	-	-	-	39	29	24	-	-	-	17	12	3	-	-	-	9	17	25
Place of Residence																		
Large cities	37	43	57	31	31	22	43	21	12	18	11	3	15	22	21	13	18	33
Medium cities (100,000+)	44	40	57	41	35	28	34	24	13	18	12	4	10	22	16	9	16	26
Small cities (100,000-)	48	47	62	50	36	34	35	28	16	16	14	5	6	14	12	6	13	18
Towns and villages	48	52	61	54	52	47	30	23	17	15	9	4	7	14	11	3	10	18

Source: 1965-86: *Asahi shinbun* according to Curtis 1988: 204f. 1990 and 1994: Surveys of the *Akarui senkyo suishin kyōkai* 1990: 36 and 1994: 36. Note: The figures for 1965 represent an average of the results of all polls taken in 1964, 1965 and 1966. Similarly the figures for 1976 are an average of poll data collected in 1975, 1976 and 1977. The figures for 1986 are from one poll conducted in May 1986 and the data for 1990 and 1994 are also from only one survey. Since the data are based on different surveys, one should rather endeavour interpret the tendencies than the figures themselves. Large cities: the seven largest cities in 1965-70; the ten largest cities in 1975-86; the 12 largest cities in 1990; the 13 largest cities in 1994. Figures marked with „⊗” represent the age-group 20-34 years. Figures marked with „\*” represent the age group 30-39 years.

TABLE 2. CONSERVATIVE VS. PROGRESSIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS POLITICS

	Conservative	Largely conservative	Not applicable/ don't know	Largely progressive	Progressive
1990	20	23	38	15	4
1994	17	24	42	14	4
1996	15	21	49	12	3
2000	15	23	45	14	4

Source: *Akarui senkyo suishin kyōkai* 2000: 44.

conservative. Eighteen per cent stated that they had progressive or largely progressive attitudes towards politics, with only 4% classifying themselves as progressive. The vast majority of the surveyed persons over the past decade (in 2000: 45%) claimed to be neither progressive nor

TABLE 3. SOCIAL STRUCTURAL COMPOSITION OF POLITICAL  
NON SUPPORTERS 1966-2000 (in %)

Year	1966	1987	1990	1994	2000
Overall	16	40	31	36	40
<b>Age</b>					
20-24	21	61	59	59	76
25-29	14	61	47	53	56
30-39	12	45	44	42	53
40-49	11	37	31	38	45
50-59	15	35	27	31	37
60+	30	31	21	28	26
<b>Education</b>					
Primary	19	35	26	29	29
Secondary	11	40	32	35	39
University/College	8	46	36	43	47
<b>Occupation</b>					
Employees	12	43	-	-	-
Managers	-	-	24	32	38
Office workers	-	-	35	46	50
Industrial workers/other workers	-	-	32	34	44
Service workers	-	-	38	39	48
Self employed (industry, trade, service industry)	14	30	23	34	35
Fishery/forestry/agriculture	18	15	16	21	19
Others	-	-	35	35	36
<b>Place of Residence</b>					
Large cities	-	-	38	40	43
Medium cities (100,000+)	-	-	32	37	42
Small cities (100,000-)	-	-	28	37	43
Towns and villages	-	-	28	30	31

Source: 1966 and 87: *Akarui senkyo suishin kyōkai* 1987: 26ff; 1990, 1994 and 2000: *Akarui senkyo suishin kyōkai* 1990: 36, 1994: 36 and 2000: 43. Note: Large cities: The 12 largest cities in 1990; the 13 largest cities in 1994 and 2000.

conservative. These data clearly show that the cleavage caused by differences in value systems has largely collapsed. Currently there is a polarization between the conservatives and the voters with neither conservative nor progressive attitudes.

These findings suggest that dealignment is an almost entirely leftist phenomenon, while the alignment of the conservative supporter groups with the LDP has remained stable. It further highlights the fact that dealignment from the SDPJ has not resulted in an alignment with the LDP. This clarifies why the LDP could not transform itself into a catch-all party as was often foreseen in the 80s (see, for example, Curtis 1988: 236).

What has become of those voters who formerly voted for the leftist parties? Table 3 provides data on unaffiliated voters (*seitō shiji nashi sō/mutōha sō*). As it is shown, the social structural attributes of unaffiliated voters have changed markedly. In the 60s, non-partisans

were numerous among the older, less educated workers in fishery, forestry or agriculture and the self-employed. In the 80s and 90s, this group was conversely chiefly comprised of younger, better-educated employees living in large cities. They were thus those citizens who had tended to vote for the leftist in the 60s and 70s. As in other industrialized nations, we find a distinct shift from so-called “apolitical non supporters” to “cognitively mobilized non supporters” (see Inglehart 1990: 363). There has not only been a shift in the composition of the non-supporters, but also a distinct tendency for a large portion of the electorate to refrain from commitment to any political party. In the year 2000, 40% of the eligible voters belonged to this category.

The unaffiliated voters, who take a strong anti-establishment stance, not only refuse to vote at all, but also increasingly find expression through candidates who are not affiliated with any party. This tendency can be clearly seen in local elections where the number of elected independent candidates has grown from 622 in the 1995 prefectural elections to a post-war high in 1999 when 698 independents were successful (Pohl 1998a: 23). In 1995, e.g., a TV personality and a comedian respectively won the governorships of Tokyo and Osaka, and the 1999 election of the former LDP Member of Parliament and author, Ishihara Shintarô (\*1932), as the governor of Tokyo can be interpreted as an anti-establishmentarian vote as well.

## VI. *Conclusion*

As the application of the cleavage theory in the case of Japan clearly illustrates, it makes sense to interpret the cleavage theory as a dynamic model of “freezing” and “unfreezing” of party systems and voter alignment. It thus not only helps to explain the formation of party systems in the wake of the extension of suffrage, but also provides a useful framework with which to understand the development of established party systems over the course of time.

The post-war party system and the voter alignments in Japan were mainly based upon two social cleavages: The first was an economic one, which was rooted in the conflict between the social classes, while the second was a cultural one, which was founded on the conflict between different value orientations. The LDP organized the interests of the old middle class and of the older, less educated rural population who showed a tendency to hold traditional Japanese values. The SDPJ (former JSP) represented the interests of the unionized blue- and white-collar workers and of young, well-educated voters living in cities who tended to hold modern, industrial values. The quantitative weakness of the industrial labor force, which was a result of the relatively weak development of the secondary sector, caused a poor embedding of the labor and working class movement in Japanese society. This fact limited the influence of leftist parties and favored the persistence of traditional power structures.

From the end of the 60s, the cleavages, which defined the 1955 system, started weakening and electoral volatility grew. Two different developments were of distinct importance: First, changes in the occupational structure had the effect of shrinking the traditional LDP supporter groups. Likewise, the decreasing number of labor union members caused a shrinking of the leftist partisans as well. Second, the rapid pace of socio-economic development weakened the perception of the conflict between capital and labor and the increasing numbers of the “welfare generation” in the electorate also weakened the cultural cleavage between the pre- and the post-war generation.

Similar to other industrialized countries, these developments caused an unfreezing of the party system and voter alignment. Neither the LDP nor the SDPJ succeeded in transforming into catch-all parties, which meant that the number of non-party supporters and floating voters, who cast their ballots without traditional loyalties, increased dramatically. These non-supporters, who take a strong anti-establishment stance, increasingly find expression in unaffiliated candidates. Moreover, this dealignment brought about the instability of the party system and permanent changes within the opposition camp.

These tendencies of unfreezing and dealignment affected only the Left and caused the decline of the SDPJ. Non-supporters are numerous, especially among those social groups who supported the political Left in the 50s and 60s. The LDP is, conversely, unaffected by such trends, even if its traditional supporter groups too are dramatically decreasing because of the changes in the labor force. The party profits immensely from the voting system and the fact that oppositional voters refrain from voting at all, which explains why it is still dominant.

The rapid increase of non-party supporters since the early 70s indicates that the interests of large parts of the society are increasingly less organized by and integrated into the political system. The present system more or less exclusively represents traditional structures and corporate interests as embodied by the LDP. The new opposition parties, which were formed in the late 90s, too seem unable to organize the unaffiliated voters. The present system appears to be based on conflicts within the established elite rather than on social cleavages. A huge gap seems to exist between the present political system and the society's interest structure. The system's further untying from the social structure could cause a further weakening of its acceptance and, in the long run, threaten Japanese democracy.

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