

## Voter Reactions to ‘Strange Bedfellows’: The Japanese Voter Faces a Kaleidoscope of Changing Coalitions

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**Abstract** On 30 June 1994 the Social Democratic Party of Japan (SDPJ, formerly the Japan Socialist Party) joined its historic enemy, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), to form a coalition government in a Japanese equivalent of Italy’s ‘historic compromise’. Competition between the conservative LDP and the progressive socialists had defined the Japanese party system since 1955. In this paper we analyze voter reactions to this and other confusing events surrounding the end of the LDP’s 38-year dominance. We find, first, that the Japanese electorate was able to make sense of these events. The political space reflected in public opinion mapped the political space reflected in the mass media remarkably well. Secondly, our findings support the idea that attitudes toward political parties are endogenous to the political process: strategic moves by political actors alter the political space within which they maneuver. Coalitions of strange bedfellows force voters to revise their perceptions of political space and reevaluate their attitudes toward the actors involved. Strange bedfellows seemed less strange, friendlier after they had been seen in bed together.

On 30 June 1994 the Social Democratic Party of Japan (SDPJ, formerly the Japan Socialist Party) joined its historic enemy, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and

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the New Party Harbinger (*Sakigake*, a small offshoot of the LDP) to form a coalition government. This coalition represented the Japanese equivalent of Italy's historic compromise between the communists and the Christian Democrats. Though the distance between the LDP and SDPJ was not as great as that between the two Italian rivals, competition between the LDP and the socialists had defined the Japanese party system since 1955.

The LDP was formed in 1955 as a broad anti-socialist, anti-communist alliance. The socialists were deeply divided over ideology but united in their determination to prevent conservatives from revising the 'peace constitution' and pursuing a policy of military rearmament. Not only was the '1955 system' based on competition between the socialists and the LDP, but the cleavage that most divided the electorate pitted defenders of the 'peace constitution' against defenders of the US–Japan Security Treaty (*Ampou*). This *Ampou* cleavage was consolidated in massive demonstrations against Security Treaty revision in 1960 (Packard 1966). While Japan has been undergoing dealignment since that time (Flanagan 1984) and though the cleavage had attenuated over time, it was still the single best predictor of the vote as late as 1976 (Flanagan 1991: 117).

That these two traditional enemies should form a coalition was a shock to political observers at the time. Imagine the confusion of the average voter suddenly deprived of what had been the single most reliable fact about Japanese politics, that the LDP and SDPJ are enemies. Supporters of the traditional rivals were virtually forced to revise their attitudes toward either their enemy or their own party or both.

In this article we address the question of how the electorate reacted to these and other confusing events surrounding the end of 38 years of LDP dominance. We find, first of all, that the Japanese public was able to make sense of the confusing events. We thus join the growing body of literature that argues that, even though most individual voters may not be able to pass either a basic civics test or a simple quiz on current events, the electorate in the aggregate reacts in sensible ways to political events (Popkin 1991; Page and Shapiro 1992). The reactions of the Japanese electorate made good sense even under these most confusing of circumstances. More specifically, the political space reflected in public opinion mapped the political space reflected in the mass media and political commentary remarkably well, accurately registering even the most bizarre and subtle twists of elite maneuvering.

We also find strong support for the idea that attitudes toward political parties and political figures are endogenous to the political process (Gerber and Jackson 1993). Voters update their evaluations of political actors based on cues from trusted sources of political information (Lodge *et al.* 1995). Though individual-level change is complex, the resulting aggregate attitude configurations tend to move towards congruence with the actual political situation. Thus, for example, socialist supporters tended to have a higher opinion of the LDP, and LDP supporters tended to have a higher opinion of the SDPJ after the coalition was formed than they had before. In

general, coalitions of strange bedfellows were re-evaluated to make them seem less strange.

### **Aggregate voter response to changing coalition patterns**

We began by searching the comparative literature for evidence of voter responses to changing coalition patterns. We were unable to find relevant analyses of voter attitudes but did find considerable evidence that, in the aggregate, French, Irish, and German voters changed their voting behavior in response to shifts in coalition patterns. Each of these nations utilize electoral systems which allow voters to make multiple choices, thus producing aggregate data on voter preferences with respect to more than one party. We find evidence of voters shifting their behavior in response to changing coalition patterns in each of the countries where such data are available.

In France socialist voters tended to follow their party's lead in either cooperating with or competing against the Communist party. The French electoral system is based on single-member districts with a run-off if no candidate gets a majority in the first round (Rochon and Pierce 1985; Tsebelis 1988). This system has promoted electoral cooperation between traditional rivals within each camp, left and right. In order to defeat the right, socialists and communists, traditional enemies, must cooperate. Thus, electoral agreements commit the socialists to withdraw in those districts where the communists have a better chance of beating the right in return for a communist promise to do the same when the socialists are leading in the first round. It also allows us to examine the degree of cooperation within camp by analyzing the flow of the vote in the run-off elections under different circumstances.

The translation of the communist votes into seats has depended heavily upon the willingness of socialist voters to vote communist in run-off elections where the socialist candidate withdrew in favor of the communist (Hayward and Wright 1973: 284). For example, in 1967, 'Although the share of the vote on the first ballot was little more than in 1962, they nearly doubled their seats, thanks to left-wing discipline on the second ballot' (Larkin 1988: 302). However, the dramatic events of May 1968 produced a different result: 'The Communists' loss of the popular vote was dramatically compounded in their loss of seats, where the breakdown of left-wing cooperation on the second ballot reflected the bitterness and accusations of mutual betrayal that had characterized the opposition parties in the last week of May' (Larkin 1988: 327). Thus, French socialist voters knew whether the communists were currently friends or enemies and tended to vote accordingly. However, we also know that, even at its peak in 1967, cooperation was not perfect. Whereas 86 per cent of communist voters followed their party's instructions and voted socialist in those districts where the left was represented by socialists in the second round, only 63 per cent of socialists voted communist when the left was represented by the communists in the second round (Converse and Pierce 1986: 365).

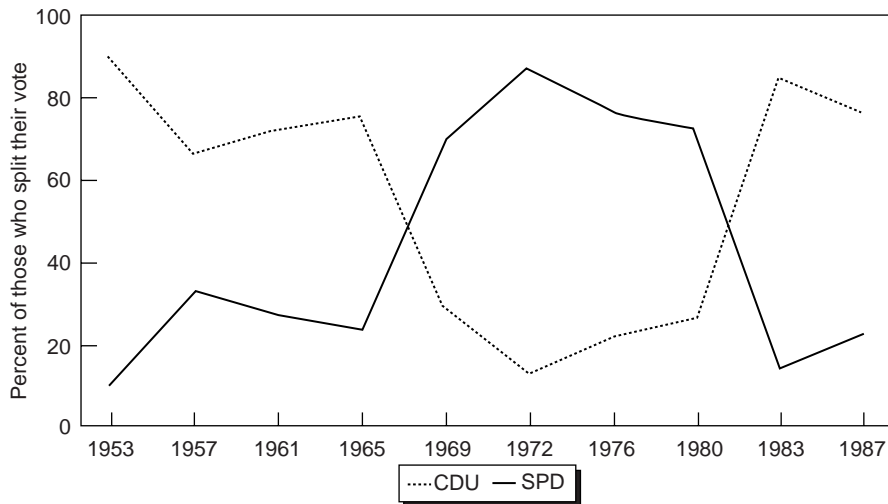
Irish voters have also been able to distinguish between friends and enemies under their complex voting system that allows voters to rank candidates in order of

preference. In this case, the rivals who were forced to cooperate in order to defeat the dominant Fianna Fail party were Fine Gael and Labour. They accomplished this in 1973 when 'Fianna Fail achieved a slight increase in the first-preference vote but lost the election . . . due to a considerable change in the pattern of transfer votes, a change resulting from the coalition arrangement between Fine Gael and Labour. . . . transfers between the two parties doubled to 70.91 per cent in the case of Fine Gael to Labour and 71.47 per cent in the case of Labour to Fine Gael' (Sinnott 1978: 63). When the Fine Gael–Labour coalition broke up in 1987, with a great many vagaries in between, voters also reacted appropriately: 'the transfers from Fine Gael to Labour dropped to less than 40 per cent, and from Labour to Fine Gael to less than 33 per cent. Labour voters transferred all over the place. Fine Gael voters followed their leader's advice and more than 60 per cent of them . . . transferred to the Progressive Democrats' (Farrell and Farrell 1987: 240)

Finally, in Germany we find that voters know which party is in coalition with their favored party and act accordingly. The German electoral system gives voters two ballots, the first for a candidate in a single-member district and the second for a party in a proportional representation district. Confusingly, the second vote is the most important, determining the number of seats allocated to each party. The big party on the right is the Christian democratic CDU/CSU and the big party on the left is the democratic socialist SPD, but neither has commanded a majority of the seats during most of the postwar period. The smaller third party, the liberal FDP, has served as the coalition partner for one of the large parties in most of the postwar coalition governments. From the end of the war until December 1966, the FDP was in coalition with the CDU/CSU. After a brief period of grand coalition between the two large parties, the FDP was in coalition with the SPD from 1969 to 1982. Thereafter the FDP switched back to the CDU/CSU. These changes are clearly visible in Figure 1 which traces the first votes of those FDP voters who split their votes between the FDP and another party.

Most voters gave both of their votes to the same party, but of those who split their votes, most followed the current coalition patterns. The FDP case is the clearest with large majorities of vote-splitters choosing the CDU/CSU between 1953 and 1965, the SPD from 1969 through 1980, and the CDU/CSU again after 1983. SPD voters display a similar pattern, though not as clearly, and the pattern for CDU/CSU voters is more complex (analysis not shown). The findings are less clear for the two larger parties because so few of their supporters split their votes. However, German voters appear aware of current coalition patterns and adjust their voting behavior accordingly.

The LDP–SPDJ government was much more of a coalition of strange bedfellows than any of the above cases but the comparative evidence leads us to expect a change in attitudes after coalition shifts. Our data will, however, be data on changes in individual voter attitudes rather than changes in aggregate voting behavior.



**Figure 1** FDP voters use of their 'first vote'  
*Source:* Adapted from Jesse 1990: 90.

### The data

The data for this analysis comes from the Japanese Electoral Survey II (JES II). Using a two-stage stratified area probability sampling method, Central Research Services targeted 3,000 eligible voters who were at least 20 years old at the time of the first wave. Of the target sample, 75.2 per cent (2,255 cases) responded to the first wave conducted through face-to-face interviews in July 1993. This analysis will utilize the first wave before the 1993 election, the third wave conducted by mail questionnaire in February of 1994 during the Hosokawa coalition government, the fourth wave conducted by mail questionnaire in February of 1995 during the LDP–SDPJ–Sakigake coalition government, and the fifth wave conducted through face-to-face interviews in July 1995 after the upper house election of that year.

The bulk of the analysis will analyze each wave separately, thus focusing on the state of public opinion at the time of the survey. In this paper we are primarily interested in how political space, as reflected in public opinion changed in response to the myriad alliance shifts, formations of new parties, and coalitions of strange bedfellows. As we have come to expect from survey research, individual level change is more complex. We will exploit the panel data by following groups of supporters from one wave to the next in order to establish that reactions to strange bedfellows involved both some voters changing their attitudes toward their traditional enemies and other voters changing their attitudes toward their own party. We have not, however, tried to analyze the causes of individual level change because, once the data are divided into groups of party supporters, the numbers within panels soon fall too low to support much multivariate analysis.

### The Hosokawa 'strange bedfellows' coalition

The general election of July 1993 ended the 38-year rule of the LDP. The LDP was suffering from one of its periodic corruption scandals and was challenged by three new conservative parties clamoring for reform, as well as by the traditional left-wing opposition.

The Japan New Party (JNP) was led by former LDP member and governor of Kumamoto prefecture Morihiro Hosokawa (Nakai 1997). The JNP entered the 1993 election with no incumbents but many of its candidates came from the ranks of previous or potential LDP candidates. The other two new parties originated in splits from the LDP. First, the *Shintou Sakigake* (New Party Harbinger, hereafter Sakigake) was formed from a group of reformers within the LDP led by Masayoshi Takemura, ex-governor of Shiga prefecture and incumbent LDP Dietman (Otake 1997). Takemura led a small group out of the LDP and picked up several other potential LDP candidates. The most complex case is the *Shinseitou* (New Life or Renewal Party, hereafter Shinsei). It was formed from the split of the largest faction within the LDP, officially led by Tsutomu Hata, a leading reformer, but also less formally led by Ichiro Ozawa, a former power-broker within the LDP with an ambiguous attitude toward reform (Otake 1997).

These three new parties represented 'change' to the electorate and their candidates benefited greatly from a 'new party boom' (Reed 1996). The single most powerful predictor of a vote for one of the new parties was the desire for a change of government (Kabashima 1994: 20). However, the parties and the individuals within them also encompassed a variety of different, often incompatible, agendas for what that change should be.

The new parties 'won' the 1993 election both in the sense that they enjoyed the biggest gains, whether calculated in seats or in votes, and in the sense that the LDP was denied any chance of retaining its majority by the combination of losses due to the new party boom and losses due to defections. The biggest loser, however, was not the LDP but the SDPJ. The SDPJ had experienced a boom of its own in 1989 and 1990. In 1989 the socialists, led by a Takako Doi, the first woman to lead a major party, running against corruption and the new consumption tax defeated the LDP in the less powerful upper house. They also did well in the 1990 general election but not well enough to unseat the LDP. However, they proved unable to capitalize on these gains and by 1993 had lost the mantle of being 'the alternative to the LDP' to the new parties, their vote returning to its pre-1990 pattern of slow but continuous decline (Reed 1994). The other traditional opposition parties held their own. The Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) was the right-wing of the socialist movement which had split from the Japan Socialist Party (the precursors of the SDPJ) in 1960. The Social Democratic Federation (SDF, *Shaminren*) was an even smaller socialist splinter. Finally, the Clean Government Party (CGP, *Koumeitou*) was based on the *Souka Gakkai* Buddhist sect, a disciplined but disliked religious party.

When the votes were counted, the LDP had lost its majority and a coalition

excluding both the LDP and the Japan Communist Party (JCP) became numerically possible, but few predicted such an outcome. Several different coalitions centered on the LDP would have made more sense both numerically and in terms of policy distances. This was true even of the issue of political reform, though a commitment to some type of political reform was the only issue that united the coalition partners. However, in the event, the chance to unseat the LDP after so many years overrode all other considerations and a broad non-LDP, non-communist reform coalition was formed under the prime ministership of Hosokawa, the leader of the JNP. The LDP attacked this coalition as a coalition of strange bedfellows (*yagou*) and was clearly justified in doing so.

In each of the four waves examined here, voters were asked to rate political parties on a thermometer from 0 as most disliked to 100 as most liked, with 50 being neutral. The results of these ratings for members of the Hosokawa coalition are presented in Table 1, both before and after the coalition was formed. Look first at the first column, the ratings before the coalition was formed in the pre-election survey of July 1993. Supporters of the three new parties tended to have warm feelings about each of the other new parties, all the ratings averaging above 50. However, supporters of the traditional opposition parties were not so enthusiastic about the new parties, rating them in the high 30s ranging to the high 40s. In the bottom half of the table, however, it is clear that supporters of the traditional opposition parties did not like each other and that supporters of the new parties did not like the traditional opposition. Only CGP feelings toward the DSP rose above a cool 40.

How did the voters react to this coalition of strange bedfellows? Before proceeding, we should note that the February 1994 wave was conducted well after the coalition honeymoon had ended and tensions among the partners had begun to show. Nevertheless, of the 30 thermometers, 24 moved up and only six down. Two of the positive changes are essentially zero and one of the negative moved only a single point, so if we categorize these three as 'no change' 22 of 30 (73 per cent) supporters felt more warmly toward the other parties in the coalition and only five (17 per cent) were more negative after the coalition was formed and three did not change (10 per cent).

The new parties were unfamiliar political objects and attitudes toward them could shift dramatically. DSP and CGP supporters tended to view the new parties negatively before the coalition but quite positively afterwards. The new parties were the key to getting their preferred party into power for the first time. Ratings went up by over ten points in all but one case (DSP attitudes toward Shinsei) and almost 20 points in another case (CGP attitudes toward the JNP).

Ratings for the new parties fell in only four cases. First, Sakigake supporters grew less warm toward the JNP. During the elections the two parties supported each other in each district where only one of them was running. At this point Sakigake supporters like the JNP almost as much as they like their own party, so we should not be surprised that their attitude dropped slightly once the coalition formed.

**Table 1.** *Changes in attitudes among the parties in the Hosokawa coalition government*

	<b>Before the coalition</b>	<b>After the coalition</b>	<b>Difference</b>
<i>JNP thermometer ratings</i>			
<b>Sakigake supporters</b>	68.1	60.2	−7.9
<b>Shinsei supporters</b>	58.1	62.4	+4.3
<b>SDPJ supporters</b>	46.0	49.1	+3.1
<b>DSP supporters</b>	48.1	60.3	+12.2
<b>CGP supporters</b>	38.9	58.1	+19.2
<i>Sakigake thermometer ratings</i>			
<b>JNP Supporters</b>	54.0	61.8	+7.8
<b>Shinsei supporters</b>	58.4	57.4	−1.0
<b>SDPJ supporters</b>	43.7	51.7	+8.0
<b>DSP supporters</b>	45.3	57.8	+12.6
<b>CGP supporters</b>	37.1	53.2	+16.1
<i>Shinsei thermometer ratings</i>			
<b>Sakigake supporters</b>	50.0	44.0	−6.0
<b>JNP supporters</b>	50.7	53.8	+3.1
<b>SDPJ supporters</b>	44.1	39.6	−4.4
<b>DSP supporters</b>	48.1	55.0	+6.9
<b>CGP supporters</b>	45.0	61.5	+16.5
<i>SDPJ thermometer ratings</i>			
<b>Sakigake supporters</b>	30.0	39.6	+9.6
<b>Shinsei supporters</b>	36.6	28.2	−8.5
<b>JNP supporters</b>	32.6	32.8	+0.2
<b>DSP supporters</b>	35.4	35.5	+0.1
<b>CGP supporters</b>	30.3	37.9	+7.6
<i>DSP thermometer ratings</i>			
<b>Sakigake supporters</b>	33.0	40.1	+5.9
<b>Shinsei supporters</b>	37.0	42.5	+5.5
<b>JNP supporters</b>	34.5	43.6	+9.1
<b>SDPJ supporters</b>	34.2	40.1	+5.9
<b>CGP supporters</b>	41.3	49.6	+8.3
<i>CGP thermometer ratings</i>			
<b>Sakigake supporters</b>	26.3	31.9	+5.6
<b>Shinsei supporters</b>	35.0	40.4	+5.5
<b>JNP supporters</b>	30.3	32.7	+2.4
<b>SDPJ supporters</b>	32.3	29.6	−2.7
<b>DSP supporters</b>	31.7	40.0	+8.3



Four of the six negative changes can be explained by specific strains within the coalition. Shinsei, and particularly one of its leaders, Ichiro Ozawa, was pushing hard to amalgamate as many parties as possible into a large new alternative to the LDP. He was widely criticized for his strong-arm tactics and the coalition finally broke up primarily over his leadership style. The two parties which got fed up and left, later winding up in coalition with the LDP, were the SDPJ and Sakigake. At the time of this survey, mutual attitudes between Shinsei and Sakigake and between Shinsei and the SDPJ had cooled considerably. It would make perfect sense if these attitudes warmed right after the coalition was formed and cooled thereafter but we will probably never know for sure. In any case, four of the six negative changes can be explained by the timing of the survey and coalition strains.

The only other negative change was the attitude of SDPJ supporters toward the CGP, from bad to even worse. The CGP was closely associated with the Shinsei at this time but CGP supporters did not reciprocate in their feelings toward the SDPJ. With this single exception, attitudes toward the two smaller parties of the former opposition improved significantly. Attitudes toward the DSP rose from the mid 30s to the low 40s. In many ways the figures for the CGP are the most interesting. The CGP is one of Japan's least-liked parties, a pariah on a par with the communists. It had a solid 10 per cent of the vote and could not be ignored, but no one except their own supporters felt warmly towards it. Most coalition party supporters rated it in the low 30s before the coalition, with only Shinsei supporters getting up to 35 despite widespread reports about links between the leaders of these two parties. After the coalition, feelings toward the CGP, while still negative, had warmed for all party supporters except those who supported the SDPJ.

The Hosokawa coalition government was indeed a coalition of strange bedfellows, but after it came into existence, supporters of one coalition partner tended to warm towards the other parties in the coalition. The strange bedfellows seemed friendlier once they had been seen in bed together.

When the coalition fell apart, attitudes shifted again. We cannot estimate attitudes towards the parties that remained in the Hosokawa/Hata coalition government because they ceased to exist as they merged to form the New Frontier Party (NFP). We can, however, exploit the panel aspect of our data and measure changes in the attitudes of the former supporters of these parties toward the two defectors, the SDPJ and Sakigake. Table 2 presents the data on the changing attitudes of supporters of the parties that remained in the coalition toward those parties which left.

Attitudes toward the SDPJ did not drop much lower. Only CGP supporters appear particularly angered at the SDPJ and DSP supporters even appear to have responded somewhat positively to the SDPJ's actions. Attitudes toward a well-established party seem less subject to rapid change, and attitudes toward the SDPJ, was already quite cool and may have had already fallen as far as they were going to. On the other hand, supporters of the remaining coalition parties were upset with Sakigake. Only DSP supporters remained warm toward Sakigake. All three other

**Table 2.** *Changing attitudes toward the coalition 'defectors'*

	During coalition	After breakup	Change
<i>SDPJ thermometer ratings</i>			
<b>JNP supporters</b>	35.56	35.78	+0.22
<b>Shinsei supporters</b>	33.05	30.56	-2.49
<b>DSP supporters</b>	35.41	39.68	+4.27
<b>CGP supporters</b>	38.57	28.25	-10.32
<i>Sakigake thermometer ratings</i>			
<b>JNP supporters</b>	60.88	46.22	-14.66
<b>Shinsei supporters</b>	56.32	40.00	-16.32
<b>DSP supporters</b>	61.11	54.31	-6.80
<b>CGP supporters</b>	54.93	28.00	-26.93

Note: All 'supporters' are those who supported the party during the coalition.

parties' supporters moved from positive to negative attitudes and dropped over ten degrees, the most extreme case being CGP supporters dropping over 25 degrees. Just as attitudes tended to warm when strange bedfellows were seen in bed together, attitudes cooled toward parties that broke up the coalition.

### **The Japanese 'historic compromise'**

That the Hosokawa coalition did not last long came as no particular surprise. The big shock was what followed it: a coalition among the LDP, the SDPJ and Sakigake. However, the voters proved able to follow this twist as well. Table 3 shows the changes in mutual thermometer ratings before and after Japan's historic compromise.

First note the substantial improvement in the attitudes of SDPJ supporters toward the LDP, from a negative rating of less than 29 to a little over 42 points. While SDPJ supporters were on average still somewhat negative toward the LDP (below 50), a jump of over 13 points represents a significant warming. A similar jump appeared in socialist attitudes toward LDP leaders, as LDP party president Kohno's thermometer ratings jumped from 34 to 46. Moreover, much of this change was due to individual socialist supporters re-evaluating the LDP. SDPJ supporters in February 1994 rated the LDP at 28.8 and those same individuals rated the LDP at 42.0 after the coalition had formed. Many socialist supporters seem to have decided that, if their party could ally itself with the LDP, the LDP must not be such a bad party after all.

Surprisingly, the SDPJ seems to have suffered no serious backlash from among their own supporters for having joined the enemy. Both the SDPJ and Sakigake, the LDP's two coalition partners, lost badly in the 1996 election, but if socialist voters abandoned their party, the hemorrhaging began well after the SDPJ had allied itself with the LDP and had abandoned virtually all of its historic policy positions. Moreover, their defeat cannot simply be attributed to their changing issue positions

**Table 3.** *Changes in thermometer ratings before and after the coalition*

	<b>LDP Supporters</b>	<b>SDPJ Supporters</b>	<b>Sakigake Supporters</b>
<i>LDP thermometer ratings</i>			
<b>July 1993</b>	56.7	32.3	35.5
<b>February 1994</b>	67.2	28.8	38.9
<b>February 1995</b>	68.6	42.1	47.5
<b>July 1995</b>	67.6	45.6	51.6
<i>LDP Leaders' thermometer ratings</i>			
<b>Miyazawa, July 1993</b>	42.9	30.4	30.0
<b>Kohno, February 1994</b>	55.7	34.1	44.0
<b>Kohno February 1995</b>	59.2	46.0	54.3
<b>Kohno, July 1995</b>	55.1	51.1	50.3
<b>Hashimoto, July 1995</b>	62.3	49.6	57.5
<i>SDPJ thermometer ratings</i>			
<b>July 1993</b>	34.7	54.0	30.0
<b>February 1994</b>	31.5	62.9	40.0
<b>February 1995</b>	39.0	59.4	42.5
<b>July 1995</b>	38.1	60.9	44.2
<i>Sakigake thermometer ratings</i>			
<b>July 1993</b>	43.3	43.7	72.7
<b>February 1994</b>	47.8	51.7	76.7
<b>February 1995</b>	45.2	48.7	70.0
<b>July 1995</b>	37.3	45.2	67.8

because the New Socialist Party, a splinter that retained those traditional issue positions analogous to the Refounded Communists in Italy, fared even worse at the polls. In any case, SDPJ thermometer ratings from their own supporters went up when they joined the Hosokawa coalition government. After joining the LDP, socialist supporters may have cooled somewhat toward their own party, but not back to the low levels they had experienced during the 1993 election. It may make sense to think that some socialists would be upset by their party's actions but, in fact, the attitude of the average socialist supporter did not reflect any anger over joining the enemy.

The story for Sakigake supporters is much the same. Average thermometer ratings for the LDP rose from a little under 39 points to over 47, later rising to positive feelings above 50. Sakigake supporters attitudes toward LDP party president Kohno rose even more, from 44 to 54 points. On the other hand, Sakigake seems to have paid a higher price for joining the LDP than did the SDPJ, dropping over six points among their own supporters and falling even further thereafter. The drop was even more striking when following Sakigake supporters from one panel to the next: Sakigake supporters in 1994 were extremely pleased with their party, giving it a 76.7

**Table 4.** *The relationship between ideology and attitude shifts*

	<b>Ideology</b>	<b>Change in SDPJ thermometer</b>	<b>Change in LDP thermometer</b>
<b>Ideology</b>	1.00	−0.0055	−0.0600
<b>Change in SDPJ thermometer</b>	−0.0536	1.00	0.2181*
<b>Change in LDP thermometer</b>	−0.0727	0.2486*	1.00

Notes: (\* = significant at .01 level).

Dependent variable = change in thermometer ratings before and after the coalition.

LDP supporters in the upper right quadrant and SDPJ supporters in the lower left quadrant.

rating, but those individuals re-evaluated their party support after the coalition and their thermometer ratings fell over 20 points to 56.1. Early supporters of Sakigake had high expectations of their own party and did not like the LDP, giving them thermometer ratings in the 30s. When Sakigake joined the LDP, these early supporters were seriously disappointed and stopped supporting Sakigake but they were replaced by new supporters more favorably disposed toward the LDP. This result highlights the danger of inferring individual-level change from aggregate figures. Sakigake support was extremely volatile during this period. No voter consistently supported Sakigake across all seven waves of the panel (Kabashima and Ishio 1998: 159). When Sakigake joined the LDP, some supporters re-evaluated the LDP while others re-evaluated Sakigake.

Party supporters are influenced by the actions of their party, but the party cannot expect their voters to follow wherever the party leads. The attitude of LDP supporters toward their traditional socialist enemies warmed significantly, but only from the low 30s to the high 30s. Most of this was due to individual conservatives re-evaluating their attitude toward the SDPJ. However, conservatives changed their minds less and retained more negative feelings toward the socialists than did socialist supporters toward the LDP. LDP supporters' attitudes toward Sakigake cooled slightly after the two parties became coalition partners. Finally, like the SDPJ, the LDP suffered no backlash from its own supporters from its decision to join the enemy. LDP supporters were not particularly happy with their own party during the 1993 elections. Once their support rebounded, however, it was unaffected by the LDP's choice of coalition partners.

If we were dealing with a Downsean policy space, we would expect those on the right of the SDPJ and those on the left of the LDP, those nearer the center of the overall political spectrum to be more pleased with the coalition than those at the extremes. We tested this possibility by correlating ideological left-right self-placement with changing attitudes toward the two parties in the coalition. The results are reported in Table 4. In fact, we find no relationship between ideology and attitude shifts. There is a slight, statistically insignificant, tendency for those on the left of both parties to warm up to their new coalition partner more than those on the right. The only statistically significant relationship indicates that those who approved of the

**Table 5.** *Factor analysis of thermometer ratings before the 1993 election*

	Factor one	Factor two	Factor three
LDP	0.10	-0.02	0.86
Miyazawa	0.06	0.17	0.68
SDPJ	0.13	0.78	0.19
Yamahana	0.29	0.69	0.09
CGP	0.25	0.49	0.09
DSP	0.36	0.56	0.20
SDF	0.47	0.62	-0.04
Shinsei	0.77	0.30	0.07
Hata	0.60	0.30	0.15
JNP	0.80	0.14	0.06
Sakigake	0.86	0.22	0.07
JCP	0.07	0.57	-0.05
Eigenvalue	4.60	1.18	1.06
Variance	38.3%	9.9%	8.8%
Cumulative	38.3%	48.2%	57.0%

Note: (Varimax rotation).

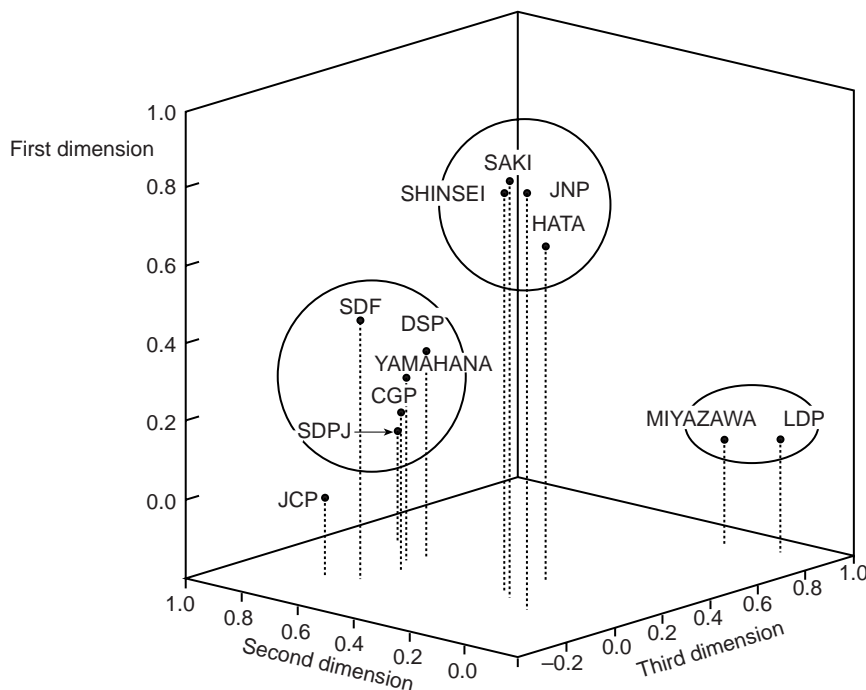
coalition tended to warm to both parties. The affective political space tapped by the thermometers is clearly not a Downsean policy space.

Voters reacted to Japan's 'historic compromise' by adjusting their attitudes to the new reality. At the individual level, this process involved, to varying degrees, both revising attitudes toward traditional enemies and toward their own party. The aggregate result of these individual re-evaluations was an accurate mapping of current political space as reflected in the mass media. Bizarre elite maneuvering did not produce mass confusion; rather, it was absorbed into revised public perceptions of political space.

### **The changing political space as reflected in the electorate**

Finally, let us analyze the way voters structure the party system using a factor analysis of the thermometer ratings. Do voters tend to group parties and leaders with their current coalition partners? Do they accurately perceive the current political situation despite a series of bewildering changes?

The results for the 1993 election are displayed in Table 5 and Figure 2. Three clear



**Figure 2** Japanese political space during the 1993 election

factors emerge which together explain 57 per cent of the variance. Each factor has a clear and meaningful interpretation. Factor one is the new party factor, with the JNP, Shinsei, and Sakigake thermometers loading strongly. The second factor gathers together all of the traditional opposition parties and the third factor represents the traditional governing party. The three groupings, traditional governing party, traditional opposition (with the communists somewhat isolated), and new parties, are clearly visible in Figure 2.

The factor analysis even reflects some rather subtle facts about politics at the time. That the SDPJ should rank low on the new party dimension but Yamahana, their leader, should rank relatively high makes perfect sense. Yamahana was trying to lead the socialists, or some part of them, into a new party formation. Similarly, the CGP, DSP and SDF were all cooperating with the new parties more than were the socialists. Similarly, the relatively high ratings of the Shinsei and Sakigake parties on the traditional opposition dimension, especially when compared to the JNP, may reflect the fact that the former parties were formed by splitting from the LDP in dramatic fashion.

Turning to Table 6 and Figure 3, voters' feelings during the Hosokawa coalition, we find that people were somewhat more confused in 1994. It takes four factors to explain over half of the variance and the solution is less satisfactory overall. Despite

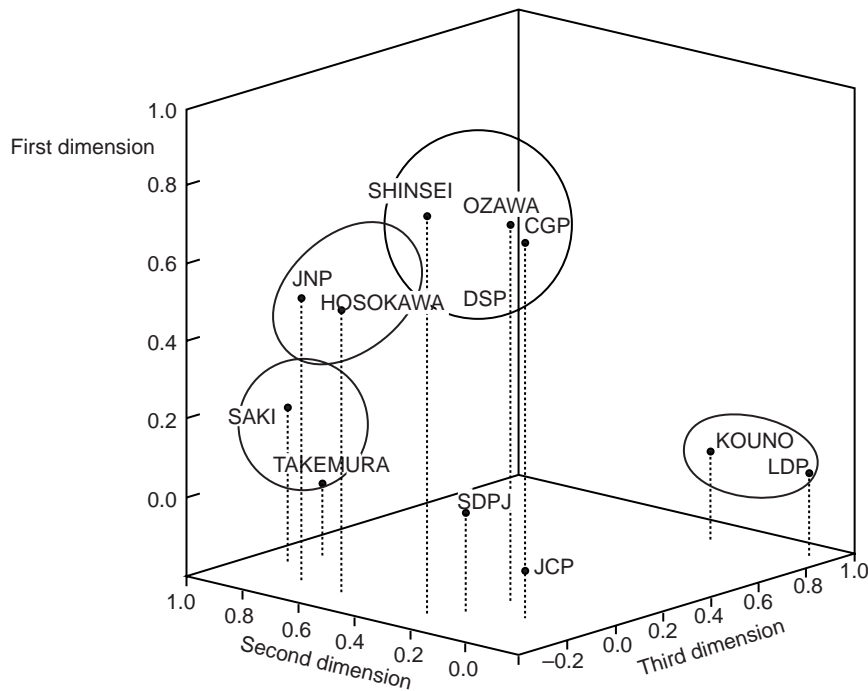
**Table 6.** Factor analysis of thermometer ratings during the Hosokawa Coalition government (February 1994)

	Factor one	Factor two	Factor three	Factor four
LDP	0.02	-0.10	0.79	-0.05
Kohno	0.04	0.20	0.78	0.01
SDPJ	0.07	0.15	-0.01	0.59
DSP	0.47	0.23	0.16	0.38
CGP	0.65	0.01	0.01	0.32
Shinsei	0.80	0.24	-0.06	-0.03
Ozawa	0.67	0.15	0.12	-0.07
JNP	0.57	0.66	-0.07	-0.07
Hosokawa	0.54	0.52	-0.03	-0.17
Sakigake	0.24	0.84	0.02	0.15
Takemura	0.06	0.75	0.12	0.16
JCP	-0.04	-0.03	-0.03	0.49
Eigenvalue	3.68	1.29	0.98	0.87
Variance	30.6%	10.7%	8.2%	7.3%
Cumulative	30.6%	41.4%	49.5%	56.8%

Note: (Varimax rotation)

this relative confusion, however, the resulting pattern makes good sense. First, factor three represents the LDP and factor four represents the traditional opposition. The political space is dominated, however, by competition within the coalition between Ozawa of Shinsei and Takemura of Sakigake, with Prime Minister Hosokawa and his Japan New Party in between. The socialists are now almost as isolated as the communists. Although one might question the accuracy with which this pattern represents political reality behind the scenes, it certainly does reflect the political reporting at the time. The electorate appears no more confused than were the political commentators.

After the LDP-SDPJ-Sakigake coalition was formed, voters grouped the coalition partners firmly together, recognized that the main opposition was now formed by the New Frontier Party (NFP, formed from the merger of Shinsei, JNP, DSP, CGP and a few further defections from the LDP) as shown in Table 7 and Figure 4. Voters recognized that the SDPJ was in coalition with the LDP but also remembered that they used to belong to the traditional opposition now dominated by the communists. The factor solution is again clear, meaningful, and explains over half of the variance.



**Figure 3** Japanese political space during the Hosokawa coalition government

Finally, we would like to present a particularly elegant figure that illustrates how accurately the political space mapped by the thermometers reflected the tensions within the Hosokawa coalition government. In Figure 5, JNP and Sakigake were seen as almost identical during the election, with Shinsei as the somewhat different new party. Once the coalition was formed, the press depicted the tensions within the coalition as a competition between Ozawa of Shinsei and Takemura of Sakigake with Hosokawa in the middle trying to maintain a balance. In the end, Hosokawa chose to align himself with Ozawa and enter the NFP while Takemura led his party into coalition with the LDP. All of this elite maneuvering is neatly tracked by our thermometers. Had we asked informed political observers to draw a chart of the paths followed by the major actors in the Hosokawa coalition government between 1993 and 1995, they could not have done a much better job than that presented in Figure 5.

Finally, we should note once again that we are analyzing *affective* space, not *policy* space. Respondents were asked to place the political parties and major political actors on a left–right continuum in only one wave so we cannot perform an analogous analysis of change over time, but we can report that the factor analysis of ideological placement of that single wave does not resemble the factor analytic solution of the feeling thermometers.



**Table 7.** Factor analysis of thermometer ratings during the LDP-SDPJ-Sakigake coalition government (February 1995)

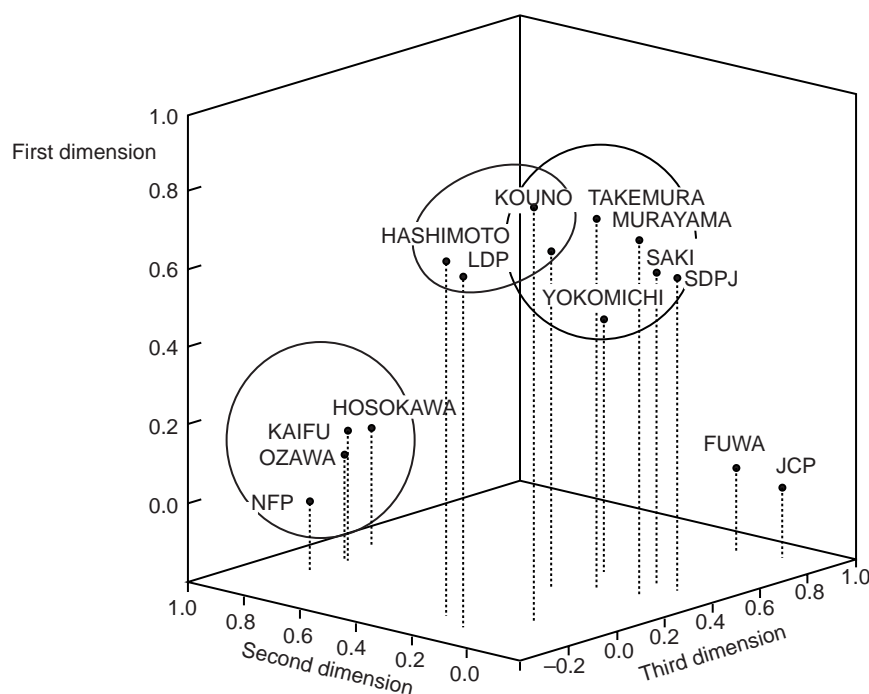
	Factor one	Factor two	Factor three
LDP	0.62	0.12	-0.22
Kohno	0.84	0.07	0.00
Hashimoto	0.65	0.25	-0.10
SDPJ	0.55	-0.05	0.38
Murayama	0.68	-0.05	0.29
Yokomichi	0.43	0.22	0.42
Sakigake	0.56	0.06	0.43
Takemura	0.73	0.12	0.30
NFP	0.00	0.79	-0.06
Kaifu	0.16	0.80	0.08
Ozawa	0.08	0.80	0.08
Hosokawa	0.14	0.76	0.15
JCP	0.01	-0.07	0.78
Fuwa	0.05	0.06	0.79
Independents	0.11	0.18	0.57
Eigenvalue	4.38	2.27	1.71
Variance	29.2%	15.1%	11.4%
Cumulative	29.2%	44.3%	55.7%

Note: (Varimax rotation)

## Discussion

The Japanese electorate proved as capable of following shifting coalition patterns as have the electorates of France, Ireland, and Germany. We would suggest (postdict) that if panel data for these countries were analyzed, they would find similar shifts in attitudes toward coalition partners. The changes in voting behavior were not simply a matter of obeying directions from the party leaders but also involved changing attitudes toward coalition partners.

The Japanese case was a tougher test of voter perceptions because the changes were so rapid and because the coalition between the socialists and the LDP violated the very foundations of the political system throughout most of the postwar period. Even though few individual voters were able to follow all the twists and turns of elite maneuvering during this tumultuous period, the aggregate impressions of the electorate mapped the political space presented in the mass media reports with amazing accuracy. The electorate knew which actors were currently friends and

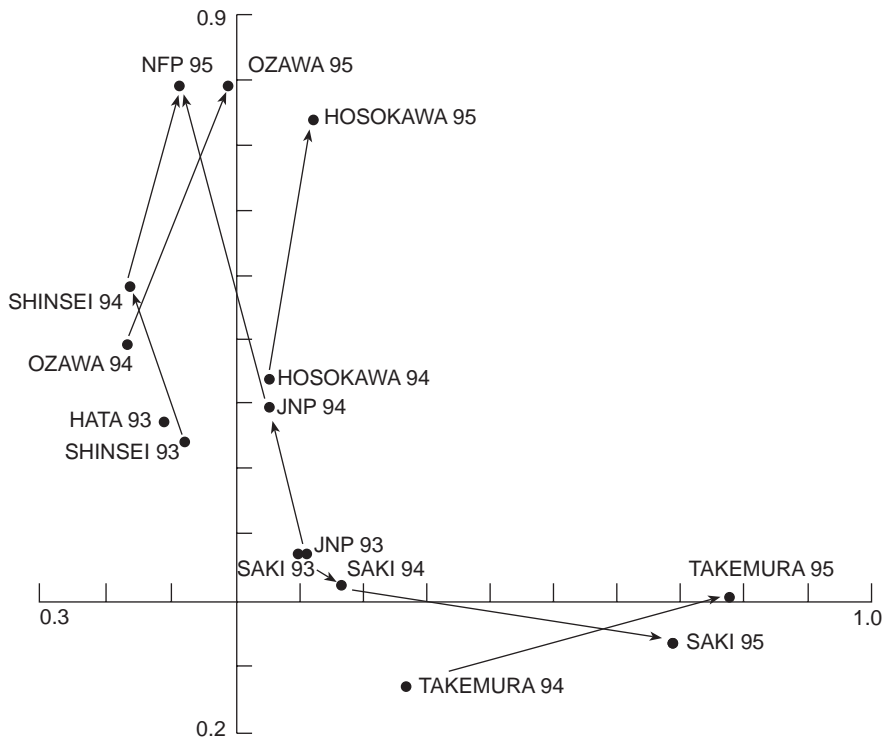


**Figure 4** Japanese political space during the LDP-SDPJ-Sakigake coalition government

which were currently enemies. Though much work remains to be done explaining individual attitude change, these results tend to support the idea of a group basis for political reasoning (Brady and Sniderman 1985). People need not be particularly sophisticated to have a pretty good idea of who are friends with whom at any given time. Indeed, we may need to re-conceptualize the idea of political sophistication: voters may be much more capable of keeping track of complex interrelationships among political actors than they are of understanding ideological debates among elites, policy debates among experts, or lectures on politics by academics.

We also find that attitudes toward political parties are endogenous to the political process. When parties do something unexpected, like ally themselves with traditional enemies, party supporters adapt to the new reality. Many take their party's action as an important cue, follow the party's lead to some degree, and re-evaluate their traditional enemy. Most LDP and SDPJ supporters seem to have reasoned something along the lines of, 'If my party is allied with those guys, they must not be quite as bad as I had thought.' Other voters change their opinion of their own party, but all voters take the new information into account in revising their perceptions of political space.

Finally, we would like to suggest that the affective political space we have analyzed may well tell us more about politics than do analyses of policy space. Voters



**Figure 5** The new parties in changing political space

used a variety of cues, including both policy positions and coalition partners, to decide who is 'one of us' and 'who is one of them' with many subtly nuanced positions in between. We find that Japanese voters in the aggregate were able to follow a complex series of political maneuvers and that they changed their attitudes accordingly. Japanese voters were able to make sense of politics even under these difficult circumstances but the process by which they did so had little to do with party policies. Japanese democracy worked even when party behavior made little policy sense.

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