

## Between Pork and People: An Analysis of the Policy Balance in the LDP's Election Platforms

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*In this article I examine changes in the election manifestos of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party. While the existing literature agrees that the LDP's policy platform has changed considerably since the introduction of the new election system in the 1990s, their analysis focuses on material policies such as pork barrel and welfare. Postmaterialist policies such as environmental protection have hardly been discussed, even though they have been relevant since pollution swept progressive mayors into power in the 1960s. I examine election platforms from 1956 through 2013, and argue that the LDP has carefully adjusted its policy mix by putting a greater emphasis on postmaterialist policies. My analysis also shows that while electoral reform has had an impact on the policy balance between postmaterialist and materialist policies as well as clientelist and programmatic policies, these changes are not linear, but vary from decade to decade. **KEYWORDS:** Japanese politics, party politics, LDP, postmaterialism, CMP, manifesto research*

IN DECEMBER 2012, JAPAN'S LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (LDP) celebrated a triumphant victory in the House of Representatives (HoR) elections, winning 294 out of 480 contested seats. Since the party's foundation in 1955 nineteen HoR elections have been held; in fourteen the LDP has managed to win an absolute majority of seats. With the exception of the previous HoR election in 2009, it had never won less than 45 percent of HoR seats. This remarkable dominance has always fascinated political scientists who sought to explain how the LDP has been so successful in appealing to voters. During the period of the LDP's single-party rule from 1955 through 1993, organized voters residing primarily in rural areas were more important than the votes of the underrepresented urban electorate and

therefore the party successfully employed clientelist redistribution schemes to cater to the former.

Following considerable demographic, economic, and institutional change—in particular the 1994 electoral reform—urban voters became more important. The standard interpretation cites that the LDP reacted by adjusting its policy mix, emphasizing materialist, but programmatic—as opposed to clientelist—policies to reach these urban voters. This explanation ignores another significant change that has happened since the 1970s, namely, the rise of postmaterialism.<sup>1</sup> In spite of the undeniable importance of postmaterialist policies such as environmental protection, they are not discussed in the literature. This is curious, seeing how the LDP's policy appeals should have reflected such a fundamental shift in public preferences toward postmaterialism at least to some degree.

In this article, I argue that postmaterialist policy appeals have indeed become an important aspect of the party's election manifestos. While this is especially true for the post-electoral reform period, postmaterialist policy appeals had already found their way into LDP manifestos as early as the late 1960s. This study shows that while electoral reform is important in explaining these shifts, the focus on comparing pre- and postreform periods marginalizes significant changes that have occurred independently from demographic, economic, and institutional change. The analysis of LDP manifestos since 1956 shows that changes are not necessarily linear, and considerable variations can be observed within both the pre-electoral reform and postreform periods. In the context of comparative manifesto research, this analysis also enables us to paint a precise picture of a major party's policy platform that goes beyond changes on a simplistic left-right scale. In that sense, this research can also serve as a foundation for future comparative policy analysis.

### **Literature Review**

As mentioned above, the existing literature focuses on materialist policy appeals, first clientelist and second programmatic. The former centers around the acquisition of votes in exchange for material kick-backs provided by the vote recipient, while the latter are “universally distributed, collective-goods policy programs” (Scheiner 2006, 14). Clientelism involved buying the organized votes of special interest groups in exchange for material benefits provided by the government. As Ramseyer and Rosenbluth (1997, 8–9) put it, “Precisely

because the party controls the government, LDP legislators can target pork-barrel items (such as highways, bridges or profitable contracts) to their supporters.” Key among these support groups were construction, agriculture, as well as small and medium-sized businesses. Their electoral support afforded them with government contracts, subsidies, favorable tax conditions, and so forth. Construction companies could count on the LDP to lobby for budget allocation and to award specific projects, while the party could in return expect rich donations and the votes of 6 million construction workers (Woodall 1996, 111, 117). The Central Union of Agricultural Co-operatives (Japan Agriculture or JA) has also enjoyed a particularly cozy relationship with the LDP: “The LDP has long allocated huge subsidies to Japanese farming interests; in return, farmers have been some of the LDP’s strongest supporters” (Scheiner 2006, 70; see also Pempel 1998, 63–73 or George Mulgan 2005, 119, 150, 151). Meanwhile, “the LDP grants lenient tax provisions, ignores large-scale tax evasion and provides no-collateral, low-interest loans” to small and medium-sized businesses (Okimoto 1989, quoted in Scheiner 2006, 69; see also Rosenbluth and Thies 2010, 92–93). These policies were key manifestations of the party’s tending to materialist needs of a clientele residing primarily on the countryside (Woodall 1996, 134–135). Unlike in urban areas, materialist needs had not been met there yet. Accordingly, references to the necessity to narrow the gap between living standards in urban and rural areas have been a mainstay in LDP manifestos throughout the decades (LDP 1962, 7; 1977, 41; 1986, 52–53).

However, as Ramseyer and Rosenbluth (1997, 183) mention, “In more recent decades demographic and economic changes forced the LDP to shift its policy mix toward policies that favor the urban voter.” A key facilitator of this change was the introduction of the new election system in 1994. This reform resulted in a more competitive political landscape, by doing away with the HoR’s multimember districts (MMDs) and replacing them with 300 single-member districts (SMDs) augmented by proportional representation. Under the old system, second and third place candidates also won seats; the introduction of the SMD meant the transition to a far more competitive “winner-take-all” system. Meanwhile, MMDs were retained for House of Councilors’ (HoC) elections. As the SMD system favors large parties such as the LDP, an additional 180 seats are being awarded to parties based on proportional vote. The second effect of this reform was that the previously prevalent malapportionment of

the LDP's rural strongholds decreased, making it more essential than before to appeal to urban floating voters (Mori McElwain 2012). They make up more than half of the electorate (Reed 2003, 198), but are more difficult to target with pork-barrel items. The existing literature suggests that taken together these changes presented the LDP with sufficient incentive to alter the content and audience of its appeals. As Rosenbluth and Thies (2010, 177) note, "The majoritarian pull of the single-seat districts was sufficiently strong to create . . . a large party competitor, and the LDP did its best to remake itself as a party of urban consumers and competitive businesses." Noble (2010, 262) reaches a similar conclusion upon reviewing budget spending on various policy areas. Examining the manifestos, we should thus be able to observe a decline in the mentions of clientelist policies, accompanied by an increase in programmatic policies. This change should be particularly visible when comparing the pre- and post-electoral reform period.

There is another significant change that the literature does not discuss, though: namely, the rise of postmaterialist policy preferences since the 1970s (see Inglehart 1977). As the negative side effects of the single-minded quest for economic growth such as pollution became evident, the recognition that economic growth and material wealth alone did not make people happy quickly gained traction. In 1972 a narrow majority (40 to 37 percent) still favored further increases in material wealth to a more slow-paced lifestyle; support for the latter, postmaterialist position has risen to 50 percent by the 1980s and to above 60 percent by the 2000s.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, according to annual opinion polls, environmental protection has consistently registered as one of the two most important issues in the debate over an amendment of the sixty-seven-year old Constitution of Japan.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the relevance of postmaterialist policy preferences, in particular of environmental protection, is hard to dismiss.

That being said, the old election system and the malapportionment of LDP strongholds eased pressure to enact postmaterialist policies favored by urban voters (Pempel 1982, 38–39). Hence, one could conclude that only the introduction of the more competitive, current election system in the 1990s forced the LDP to include postmaterialist appeals in its manifestos. Mentions of postmaterialist policies should thus increase from the 1990s onward. Some evidence suggests that even equipped with the advantages offered by the old election system, the LDP could ill afford to ignore the policy preferences of urban voters entirely, though. As shall be discussed below,

voters amply punished the party for its initial lack of response in regional elections. In fact, the LDP had heeded this wakeup call and “successfully” implemented policies designed to combat pollution in the 1970s (Pempel 1982). Pempel talks about government policies and not appeals made in manifestos, but there is episodic evidence that the manifestos also advertised this policy shift (*Yomiuri Shimbun* 1971a). This would suggest that the appearance of postmaterialist appeals was not—at least not entirely—a consequence of electoral reform, but in line with a long-term shift in public preferences toward postmaterialism since the 1970s, as described by Inglehart. For Japan, Kobayashi (1997, 175) has noted such an increase in postmaterialist policy preferences, but did not examine them in the context of party policy appeals. Comparative manifesto research (see Adams 2012, 406; Green 2011) has demonstrated that at least major parties in Europe adjust their appeals to ensure that they are in tune with changing public preferences. Taken together these cues suggest that the LDP’s appeals should have changed already before electoral reform. As we shall see below, the data support this hypothesis, as appeals did indeed increase after electoral reform, but had initially found their way into the policy platform several decades earlier.

### Methodology

The next question is how to reliably measure changes in the LDP’s policy appeals since the party’s foundation in 1955. Manifesto research has generally relied on expert surveys (e.g., Kato and Laver 2003) or individual candidates’ manifestos (*kōyaku*) (e.g., Shinada 2010, 2012) rather than the official party documents. Recently, Uekami and Tsutsumi’s (2011) and the Rebuild Japan Initiative Foundation’s (2013) volumes on the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) each include a chapter on party manifestos, but the analysis is limited to the 2003, 2005, and 2009 HoR election manifestos. Precisely for this reason, the existing literature is of little use to our inquiry, which is concerned with long-term developments. The only exception is Kobayashi’s (1997) volume on the 1955 regime, which covers eight HoR elections from 1955 through 1990 and uses official party documents. However, Kobayashi, like Uekami and Tsutsumi after him, does divide the documents based on realms of administrative responsibility. This is an advantage when combining the manifesto data with ministerial budget figures, but this clustering is of lit-

tle help to our inquiry, because it does not allow for the tracking of key postmaterialist policies such as environmental protection or upholding fundamental human rights, which are not discussed by Kobayashi.

One method that allows for long-time series analysis including the aforementioned policy fields is the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) with its standardized coding scheme. The present research is based on the coding of thirty-six manifestos published by the LDP since 1956.<sup>4</sup> These documents, unlike annually published party guidelines, are published only when a national election is held. It should be noted here that the LDP—unlike its rivals—has never called its election platforms “manifestos”; instead, it has consistently used the term *kōyaku* (campaign pledge). That being said, the election platforms have undergone significant changes throughout the decades. While early documents were short (up to several hundred sentences) their size grew steadily to over 1,000 sentences in the 1980s and early 1990s, before declining again. Until the 1990s, media coverage of these often lengthy documents was limited. The media jumped onto the manifesto bandwagon only after the DPJ decided to import UK-style manifestos to Japan. What followed was a “manifesto boom,” culminating in the phrase winning the “word of the year” award in 2003.<sup>5</sup> The successful UK import eventually came back to haunt the DPJ, though, as the LDP and the media kept attacking the party over allegedly breaking promises made in the 2009 manifesto. This episode speaks to the manifestos’ considerable importance.

I have newly coded these manifestos, because the present data in the CMP’s database consist primarily of coded interviews with party executives. As Proksch, Slapin, and Thies (2011, 115) point out, “Because they were so short, and because the selection of topics was truncated and selected by the interviewer, these text statements are very different from election manifestos, in which parties can freely choose to emphasize any issues they want.” This has an adverse effect on the coding results and therefore scholars of Japanese politics have barely used the CMP data. Second, the aforementioned comparative research primarily examines how parties’ positions change on a predetermined left-right scale, but do not track developments of specific policy fields. This scale’s universal applicability is questionable, though. For instance, the support for constitutional status quo is one component of the “right” side (Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994, 38–40). However, in the Japanese case, the

constitution's most vocal critics, including the LDP, have come from the right wing of the political spectrum (Winkler 2010, xvi). Most importantly, the interest of this study lies with the balance between materialist and postmaterialist policies. Therefore, specific codes are grouped in the following three clusters: materialist-clientelist, materialist-programmatic, and postmaterialist-programmatic.<sup>6</sup> Considering the aforementioned extremely close relationship between the LDP and organized interests in the fields of agriculture, construction, as well as small and medium-sized businesses, policies pertaining to those sectors will be used as a measure for the emphasis the LDP has put on clientelist policies in any given manifesto. The postmaterialist cluster is made up of the following policy codes: decentralization, environmental protection, equality, democracy, and rights. Income, welfare, and domestic security comprise the materialist programmatic cluster. This clustering is in line with the definitions provided by Inglehart (1977, 42) and Noble (2010, 242).

The percentage given for each code represents its share of a given manifesto. The CMP knows more than fifty codes, therefore the total aggregate of the aforementioned codes (see Figures 1–3) never reaches 100 percent, as LDP manifestos obviously also touch on many issues that are not relevant to the inquiry at hand.

## Testing Hypotheses

### *The Electoral Reform Effect*

If the effect of electoral reform is as significant as described by Rosenbluth and Thies (2010, 177) we should see a considerable decline in references to clientelist policies accompanied by an increase in programmatic appeals, both materialist and postmaterialist since the mid-1990s. After all, the LDP tried to reinvent itself as the political ally of urban voters whose set of policy preferences differed considerably from the primarily rural, organized vote that has formed the traditional backbone of the LDP's mighty election machine. And indeed, the importance attached to the three clientelist policies has decreased significantly, from an average 37 percent prior to reform to an average 25 percent postreform. If the literature on electoral reform (e.g., Rosenbluth and Thies 2010) is to be believed, programmatic policy appeals should have gained in importance. However, the importance of references to materialist programmatic policies has, in fact, declined slightly. Prior to 1996, they made up on



average roughly 14 percent of a manifesto; since 1996, this figure has declined to 11 percent. If one examines only HoR elections, which had been the main subject of the 1994 reforms, the decline (from 14.6 percent to 10.7 percent) is even more evident. Instead of materialist programmatic policies, the LDP has put a greater emphasis on postmaterialist policies, a fact that has been widely ignored by the existing literature. Their relative mentions increased by 50 percent from 9.3 percent to 14.7 percent. As a result, the imbalance in favor of clientelist (versus programmatic) appeals prior to electoral reform (a ratio of 1.7:1) turned into an even balance postreform. The same is true for materialist versus postmaterialist policies. Prereform the former outnumbered the latter by a ratio of 6:1; postreform, the gap narrowed to 2.7:1. Two things can be inferred from these changes: first, our results back the observations made by the electoral reform literature in as far as the LDP has reduced the relative importance of clientelist policies; and second, in line with public preferences, the LDP has paid greater attention to postmaterialist policies.

At first glance, these findings may seem to run counter to the aforementioned expectation of an increase in postmaterialist appeals already since the 1970s. However, it is important to remember that these figures are average values over the entire prereform period dating back to the 1950s. This highlights one problem associated with pre- and postreform comparisons: they gloss over important developments that have occurred within each period. Economic and political conditions have changed quite considerably over the course of both periods. For instance, the political pressure from progressive mayors in the late 1960s and 1970s may have forced the hand of the LDP on postmaterialist policies such as environmental protection and materialist, yet programmatic, policies such as welfare; however, this pressure eased considerably after the party temporarily strengthened its grip on power again in the 1980s, as evidenced by the landslide victory of the 1986 HoR election. That could lead to the assumption that the LDP returned to its old mode of operation, that is, emphasizing above all the material needs of particular groups and sectors during that period of time. As we shall see below, that was not necessarily the case.

### *Economic Influences*

In addition to long-term trends, be they driven by electoral reform or changing public preferences, we can assume that short-term influences such as economic conditions also play a role in formulating



policy appeals. Several studies (Haupt 2010; Ward, Ezrow, and Dorussen 2011) have shown that manifestos are being influenced by the state of the economy. If Ramseyer and Rosenbluth (1997) are correct in arguing that the LDP could afford to pay more attention to the material well-being of its clientelist core supporters than programmatic policies, we can expect to see an increase in positive references to clientelist policies in the event of an economic downturn. After electoral reform, we should be able to observe a shift toward material, yet programmatic, policies, namely, welfare-related appeals. The results confirm this hypothesis only partially, though. When the unemployment rate increased in the year before an election, the party emphasized clientelist appeals more strongly (compared to the previous election) in ten manifestos and showed increased references to welfare in seven out of seventeen cases. The probability that an LDP manifesto will include a higher percentage of positive references to welfare during a year that saw a higher per annum unemployment rate than the previous year has actually increased from 30 percent prior to reform to 57.1 percent after reform. However, the probability that the percentage of clientelist policy mentions will increase under the same circumstances has remained stable (60 percent to 57.1 percent), albeit on a much lower aggregate level than prior to 1995, as discussed above. The findings suggest that after electoral reform the LDP has tried to appeal to both its core constituencies and urban voters, while prior to reform there was a bias toward the former. These results essentially confirm the arguments made by the electoral reform literature.

While these trends are noteworthy, the fixation on the pre- and post-electoral reform comparison glosses over several significant alterations that occurred in the four decades prior to the reforms and the two decades that have passed since. In particular, the prereform period saw Japan's political economy evolve from the heydays of the economic miracle in the 1950s and 1960s to a period with modest growth rates, growing budget deficits and pollution, and eventually the bursting of the bubble in 1989. Against this backdrop, there was a 50 percent probability that a manifesto published after a year in which unemployment had risen would feature a higher percentage of pledges related to welfare during the decade from 1967 through 1977. Meanwhile, during the following fifteen years (i.e., until the end of the 1955 regime in 1993), that probability declined to 20 percent. This could be interpreted as evidence in support of the hypothesis that the LDP returned to its "clientelism first" mode of operation

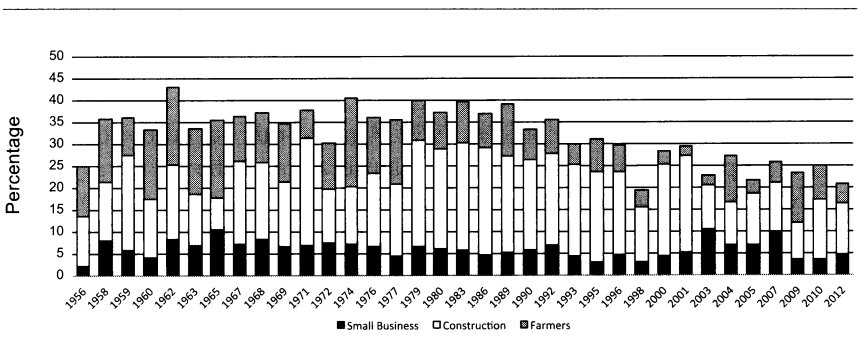
after pressure from progressive local municipalities had waned by the late 1970s. At the same time, however, long-term social trends, in particular urbanization, dealignment of the electorate, and the rise of postmaterialism, were not reversed. Therefore, one would expect that the LDP was unable to ignore them. Against this backdrop, it makes sense to analyze the development of the three policy clusters more closely by breaking up the pre- and post-electoral reform period into shorter sections that exhibit considerable change.

Figures 1, 2, and 3 show the share of each policy appeal in each of the thirty-six manifestos. In order to highlight the quite different development of each appeal over time, they are arranged in three figures, each showing changes of one of the three aforementioned policy clusters and the appeals that make up the respective cluster.

*1956–1965: The Quest for Material Wealth*

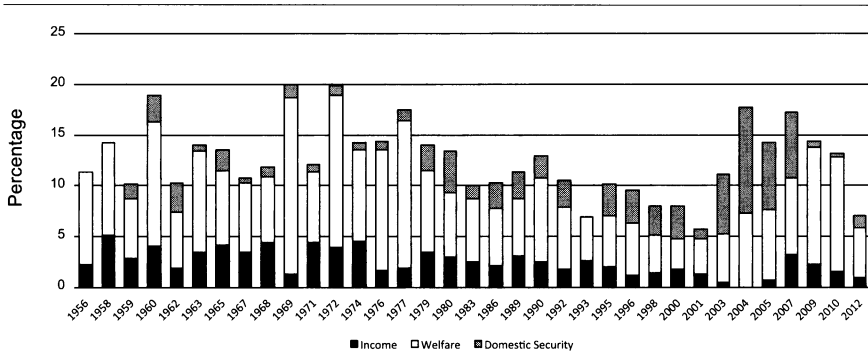
During the first decade of the LDP's existence, postmaterialist policies were hardly on the party's agenda. From 1956 through 1965, the postmaterialist policy cluster accounted for only 6 percent of the party's platforms. In particular, environmental protection was still a nonissue at that point, averaging only 0.3 percent. The second peculiarity of this period is the comparatively high number of mentions of democracy and rights, which, at 3 percent, made up half of the post-materialist mentions in this period. This may come as a surprise. After all, the early LDP had been known for an authoritarian under-

**Figure 1** Materialist, Clientelist Policy Cluster (as percentage of total policy appeals)



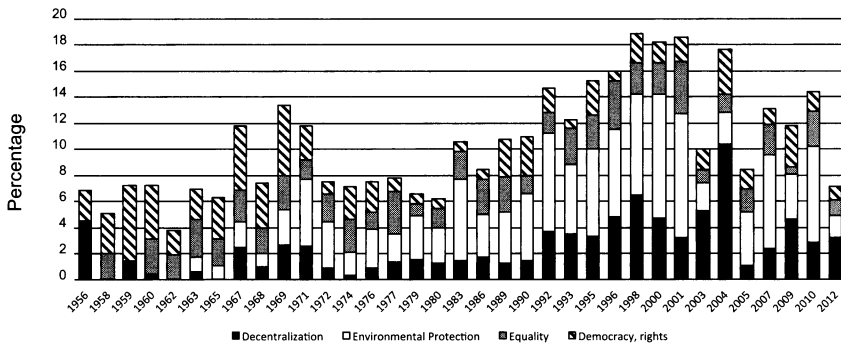
Source: The dataset that serves as the basis of this graph comprises thirty-six election manifestos.

**Figure 2 Materialist, Programmatic Policy Cluster (as percentage of total policy appeals)**



Source: The dataset that serves as the basis of this graph comprises thirty-six election manifestos.

**Figure 3 Postmaterialist, Programmatic Policy Cluster (as percentage of total policy appeals)**



standing of government, as exemplified by the Kishi administration's heavy-handed attempts to crack down on those protesting against the revision and extension of the Mutual Security Assistance Treaty (*anpo*) with the United States in 1960 (Winkler 2012, 62–65). The LDP's emphasis on democracy and rights, which peaked in the manifestos of the years 1958, 1959, and 1960, resulted from the party's attempts to portray itself as the sole defender of a liberal, democratic

postwar Japan against the sinister attacks by an evil leftist empire of socialists, communists, unions, and students who thought to turn Japan into a communist country (e.g., LDP 1959, 4; 1963, 22–23).

Meanwhile, programmatic, materialist policy appeals averaged 13 percent. The majority of these mentions (about 9 percent) were related to welfare, as national health insurance and unemployment benefits took shape. While references to workers' conditions and benefits did not enjoy a high priority, the average of 3.4 percent was still the highest during this early phase.

Far more important than the two aforementioned policy clusters, however, were policy pledges aimed at clientelist interests. They accounted for 35 percent of all mentions, which is a reflection of the LDP's close connections to and dependence on vested interests described above. In fact, despite the LDP's relatively strong (when compared to later periods) emphasis on welfare, clientelist appeals outnumbered programmatic (materialist and postmaterialist) ones by a factor of almost 2:1. Among the clientelist mentions, positive references to agriculture peaked at an average of almost 15 percent during this period. This makes sense as agriculture then was relatively more important than during the later periods, more people still lived in rural areas, and the LDP still was a party primarily representing these (overrepresented) rural districts. Taken together, materialist policies were mentioned eight times as often as postmaterialist policies during that period, as the quest for the people's well-being was framed in GDP growth rates and material wealth, as evidenced by Ikeda's doubling of the income plan. These findings are very much in line with the notion of strong clientelist ties between the LDP and vested interests during the pre-electoral reform period, as described by Scheiner (2006) and Ramseyer and Rosenbluth (1997). They do not refute the postmaterialism thesis, since we would only expect to see an increase in postmaterialist appeals after the negative side effects of Japan's rapid economic growth, such as pollution, became a major problem in the late 1960s and 1970s.

### *1967–1977: Between Change and Stability*

As already explained above, this decade posed a series of serious challenges for the LDP. For one, economic growth began to slow following the first oil shock in 1973. Already before the oil shock and the Lockheed scandal (which would unseat Prime Minister Tanaka in 1974), progressive candidates used public anger over the LDP's inaction on pollution to successfully wrestle control over city council

halls in urban areas from LDP-backed candidates. In 1971, defeats in local elections in major urban areas including all large cities around the Bay of Tokyo convinced the LDP to put a greater emphasis on addressing environmental pollution, which by then had become a major problem in urban areas, in its policy mix. The unified local elections of the same year had produced 114 progressive mayors, a substantial increase from 63 and 92 in the previous two election rounds.<sup>7</sup> Opinion polls showed that many voters cast their ballot in favor of candidates backed by the progressive opposition because of the importance voters attached to the pollution issue.<sup>8</sup> The mayoral election in the city of Kawasaki, one of the most badly polluted cities at that time, is an instructive example of this backlash. Despite being a relatively unknown union leader, the successful progressive candidate Itō Saburō defeated Kanasashi Fujitarō, an LDP-backed six-term incumbent. The key to Itō's surprise victory was his promise to let citizens see "beautiful white clouds" again instead of grey smog (*Mainichi Shimbun* 1971). As a reaction to the defeats in the local elections, the LDP decided to put a particular emphasis on antipollution and environmental protection measures in its 1971 manifesto (*Yomiuri Shimbun* 1971a, 1971b, 1971c).<sup>9</sup>

That being said, the party did not alter its mode of operation completely, as the changes of the 1960s and 1970s did not necessitate as radical a shift as the ones in the 1990s. Instead, it carefully adjusted its policy mix by putting greater emphasis on postmaterialist policies and welfare, albeit not (yet) at the expense of clientelist policies. For the decade 1967–1977, mentions of environmental protections rose to 2.7 percent from 0.3 percent during the previous period. The postmaterialist cluster in total rose from 6.2 percent to 9.3 percent, and, accordingly, the ratio between materialist and post-materialist policies decreased from 7.7:1 to 5.5:1.

The second initiative aimed at quelling growing discontent in urban areas was related to programmatic, materialist policies. They received slightly more attention in the manifestos, on average 15.1 percent up from 13.2 percent. In particular, welfare was emphasized and accounted for 11 percent of an average manifesto during the period (up from 8.4 percent). Key welfare-related initiatives were the pledge to introduce a 20,000 yen pension scheme and improve livelihood protection benefits (*seikatsu hogo*) in 1969 (LDP 1969, 11) as well as the declaration of year one of the welfare state (*fukushi gannen*) under Tanaka three years later. Accordingly, these two manifestos featured the highest relative number of welfare-related appeals

(17 percent and 15 percent, respectively). As a result, the gap between references to clientelist policies and programmatic policies temporarily closed from 1.8:1 to 1.5:1, as the combined mentions of clientelist policies had increased only slightly from 34.6 percent to 36.1 percent.

This shows that following pressure from the growing ranks of discontent urban voters the LDP did in fact adjust its policy slightly in favor of postmaterialism and at the same time at least temporarily emphasized materialist programmatic policies such as welfare. These results fit well with Pempel's (1982) observations about the LDP's reaction to environmental pollution. They also confirm that (materialist) programmatic and postmaterialist policy preferences were sufficiently strong to force the LDP into adjusting its policy appeals during the 1970s, in spite of the advantages offered by the old electoral system. In other words, the inclusion of such appeals was not exclusively a function of the new electoral system, but rather an independent development, as Inglehart had noted.

#### *1979–1993: Between Change and Stability*

The last period of the 1955 regime during which the LDP was the sole party in power saw two major developments. For one, the gap between references to materialist and postmaterialist policies continued to narrow (from a ratio of 5.5:1 to 4.7:1), while remaining significant. At the same time, however, the gap between clientelist and programmatic policy pledges widened again, from a ratio to 1.5:1 to 1.7:1.

For the first time, postmaterialist policy appeals reached double-digit figures, 10 percent on average. In particular, environmental protection saw another robust increase from 2.7 percent to 4.7 percent. This helped to more than offset the sharp decline (from 2.9 percent to 1.4 percent) of references to democracy and rights, which was the result of declining tensions with the political left and the subsequent lack of an urge to portray the party as the sole defender of liberty and freedom against "communist" parties, unions, and student activists.

The same rationale could be used to explain the rebalancing of the policy mix in favor of clientelist appeals. The LDP had managed to survive the anger of urban area citizens, who had voted en masse for progressive candidates at the local and regional levels. The end of this progressive interlude in urban areas such as Tokyo (Pempel 1982, 310) and strong showings of the LDP in the 1980 and 1986 national elections allowed the party to reverse course and again pay

more attention to its core supporters at the expense of urban voters. Welfare appeals decreased substantially from 11 percent during the previous period to 6 percent, while infrastructure became the single most frequently mentioned policy field (on average 22.5 percent per manifesto; up from 16.7 percent) under the watch of Tanaka and his successors Takeshita and Kanemaru.<sup>10</sup> However, at the same time, positive references to small and medium-sized businesses and more significantly agriculture (12.5 percent to 8.3 percent) declined. Accordingly, references to clientelist policies remained unchanged at around 36 percent. Meanwhile, the continuing trend toward a greater emphasis of postmaterialist appeals suggests that the LDP did not turn back the clock, but had actually continued to adapt to altered public preferences. As Pempel (1982, 302) argues, the LDP had acted “so vigorously and decisively, not only quashing the political threat [posed by progressive local municipalities], but also dealing quite effectively with the problem [that is, environmental pollution].” Meanwhile, the sharp decline in references to welfare policies was one of several initiatives to cope with the growing budget deficit. This explanation also fits the widely observed shift away from Tanaka’s big government toward the Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher–inspired neoliberal attempts by the Nakasone cabinets to create a small government.

On one hand, these results back the standard view of the pre–electoral reform LDP as the clientelist party in power. However, at the same time, the manifestos also reflect the electorate’s increasingly strong postmaterialist policy preferences, in line with altered public preferences and thus Inglehart’s argument. This is further evidence that the postmaterialist trend was a development that preceded and hence was independent from electoral reform.

#### *1995–2005: The Neoliberal Phase*

During the decade from 1995 through 2005, the LDP’s manifesto underwent arguably the most drastic change. Under Prime Ministers Hashimoto (1995–1998) and Koizumi (2001–2006) the LDP aggressively set a neoliberal reform agenda. The party manifestos reflect this new agenda very clearly. The importance of clientelist, materialist appeals was greatly deemphasized, as the party tried to win over unaffiliated urban voters. While mentions of agriculture, small and medium-sized businesses, as well as infrastructure had made up more than one-third of a manifesto during the previous phase, this value dropped to an average of one-fourth during 1995–2005. Mentions of



agriculture dropped from approximately 8 percent to 5 percent, and mentions of infrastructure from 23 percent to 16 percent. Against this trend, the comparatively high number of mentions of agriculture in the 2004 House of Councilors elections manifestos may seem like a strange artifact. It can be explained by the Koizumi administration's attempts to encourage farmers to double exports of agricultural goods under the slogan *seme no nōgyō* (agriculture on the offense) (*Asahi Shimbun* 2004; LDP 2004). This is of course a completely different approach to agricultural policy than the protectionist policies of the 1955 regime.

The same is true for the development of references to small and medium-sized businesses. These remained unchanged at 6 percent. This may come as a surprise considering the neoliberal reform agenda outlined above; yet this development is a function of the respective code, which does not only include positive references to small and medium-sized businesses, but also consumer protection and government action to increase economic competition, for example, by taking action against monopolies. The unexpected stability of mentions of this particular code since 1998 can be attributed to the latter two issues, as the LDP promised to address the problem of bad loans that Japan's financial sector had amassed after the bursting of the bubble and the Asian financial crisis. Moreover, following numerous food scandals, loan sharks charging consumers excessively for loans, and medical errors, consumer protection had emerged as an issue in the early 2000s. In the 2003 manifesto, for instance, only every second mention of this code was related to small and medium-sized businesses. The remaining 50 percent pledged to deal with bad loans, improve food safety, and fight loan sharks. From these facts we can infer that the support for the particular interests of small and medium-sized business owners is following the declining trend that could be observed in the cases of agriculture and infrastructure.

The neoliberal agenda also helps to explain why the mentions of materialist, programmatic policies did not increase. During the period from 1995 through 2005, pledges related to the three policies of this cluster accounted for about 10 percent of an LDP manifesto on average. In fact, references to two of the three policies—welfare and income—continued to decline, to under 1 percent and to under 5 percent, respectively, very much in line with the neoliberal strategy emphasizing small government and competition. The decline of these two policies is offset by a doubling in the mentions of domestic security. These increased considerably as the LDP reacted to public anx-

ity in the wake of the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995 and the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States. Particularly, the latter resulted in a robust temporary increase to 6 percent in 2003 and then 11 percent in 2004. This development is broadly in line with (1) opinion polls suggesting growing support for measures aimed at protecting domestic security since the mid-1990s<sup>11</sup> and (2) increases in spending on public order, which Noble (2010, 253) had observed.

Arguably, the most important development of this period is the rise of postmaterialism. While the policy fields grouped in the two materialist clusters were mentioned five times as often as postmaterialist policies in the previous period, this ratio declined to an average of 2.4:1 from 1995 through 2005. Decentralization, environmental protection, and equality all recorded the highest relative number of mentions during this period. Mentions of decentralization made up 5 percent during this period. They peaked at almost 10 percent in 2004, when the Koizumi administration most forcefully emphasized its structural reforms. The manifesto touted the establishment of a regional revitalization headquarters (*chiiki saisei honbu*) and argued that local communities should come up with plans to achieve revitalization. The central government would merely act as a supporting entity. To accomplish the goal of greater regional independence, national subsidies to local municipalities would be reduced and in exchange municipalities' financial means and decisionmaking capabilities increased. One concrete measure to further the regions' political and financial independence was the idea to replace the existing prefectures with larger states (*dōshūsei*). While this idea has quite a long history dating back to the early postwar period, it has become a mainstay of LDP election platforms only since 2003. Mentions of environmental protection also reached their climax in the second half of the 1990s and the early 2000s, as the Kyoto Protocol on climate change was agreed on in 1997 and ratified by the Diet in 2002. Correspondingly, the election platforms of the 2000 lower house election and the 2001 upper house election feature the highest total mentions of policies aimed at environmental protection, almost 10 percent of the documents' total content, respectively. For the entire period, the average figure stood at 6 percent. Similarly, mentions of equality peaked during the neoliberal period, albeit at 2.5 percent on a much lower (absolute) level than environmental protection or decentralization. This was a result of a push for gender equality during the 1990s that culminated in the creation of the Basic Law for a Gender Equal

Society in 1999. Second, against the backdrop of a rapidly aging society, the party has promised to improve easy, barrier-free access to train stations and other public facilities as well as Internet for elderly citizens or handicapped people. Such pledges were most prominently featured in the 2001 manifesto.

In summary, we can conclude that the decade between 1995 and 2005 marked the period during which the LDP's policy appeals underwent the single most radical transformation in the party's long history. For one, the analysis underscores the drastic shift away from clientelist to programmatic (materialist and postmaterialist) policies. For the first and only time in the party's history there was parity between these two clusters. Within this shift toward programmatic policies, the strong emphasis of postmaterialist appeals is particularly noteworthy. As noted above, the appearance of these appeals clearly predates the electoral reforms of the 1990s, but the further increase in postmaterialist references during the first postreform decade indicates that the LDP's decision to reinvent itself as the ally of the urban voter served as an accelerator. In that sense, the findings are compatible with both the postmaterialism thesis as well as the electoral reform influence argument.

#### *2006–2013: Back to the Future?*

A key feature of the post-Koizumi period has been instability. The economic side saw the global financial crisis in the aftermath of the Lehmann shock, the great eastern Japan earthquake, and "Abenomics." On the political front, the LDP went through three prime ministers within three years, lost two national elections and eventually the government, before returning to power in 2012. Critics accused the party of abandoning Koizumi's reform course and to some degree returning to its old clientelist ways (*Asahi Shimbun* 2009, 2). The prime example for this reverse course was the party's "land strengthening plan" (*kokudo kyōjin keikaku*) aimed at improving infrastructure to better resist future natural catastrophes (LDP 2012, 17). In fact, however, the mentions of the three clientelist policies have declined by another percentage point to under 25 percent. While positive mentions of agricultural policies have increased again, mentions of infrastructure as well as small and medium-sized businesses declined. Therefore, it would be hard to argue that the LDP had gone back to its clientelist former self.

Instead, the party adjusted its mix of policy appeals with regard to the other two clusters, deemphasizing postmaterialist policies in

favor of materialist, programmatic policies, most notably welfare. The 2009 and 2010 manifestos featured the highest relative number of references to welfare (more than 11 percent) since the late 1970s. The same alternation can be observed for the mentions of workers' benefits, which rebounded to levels of the preneoliberal phase. These changes can be interpreted as a reaction to the widespread criticism of the party's neoliberal policies' having led to more inequality or a measure to counter the economic hardship as a result of the world financial crisis.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, the lack of major terror attacks resulted in mentions of domestic security returning to pre-1995 levels.

At the same time, the combined mentions of postmaterialist policies declined from 15 percent to 11 percent. This was especially true for environmental protection (6.1 percent to 4.3 percent) and federalism (4.9 percent to 3.6 percent). As a result, the ratio between materialist and postmaterialist policies widened again. While it had narrowed to 2:1 from 1995 through 2005, it widened again to 3:1 during the following period. As already hinted on above, this shift, however, is not a return to 1955 regime-era clientelist policies but rather the LDP's attempt to target a large portion of the electorate with materialist but programmatic policies by temporarily (in 2009 and 2010) appealing on welfare for the first time in three decades. Therefore, the balance between clientelist and programmatic policies remained unchanged. The continued importance of the latter lends further weight to the thesis emphasizing the influence of electoral reform. Meanwhile, the decline in postmaterialist appeals deviates from the expectations we had derived from Inglehart's thesis, since support for postmaterialist values remained high throughout the period.<sup>13</sup> The LDP's reorientation toward its materialist past could be interpreted as a prioritization of voters' material needs over postmaterialist values after the Japanese economy and employees had suffered from the effects of the Lehmann shock.

## Conclusion

My analysis highlights two trends: the decline of clientelism and the rise of postmaterialism. The former trend has been well studied and the manifesto data confirm that electoral reform and economic changes forced the LDP to readjust its policy mix in favor of programmatic policies. More importantly, the study shines light on the thus far widely ignored, longer-term trend toward a greater emphasis on postmaterialist programmatic policies such as environmental pro-

tection and decentralization. These appeals reached their peak during the years of the LDP's neoliberal phase from 1995 through 2005, and could thus be viewed as a result of electoral reform in line with arguments made in the existing literature. However, their roots predate the influential reform of the 1990s. After the party had concerned itself almost exclusively with increasing the people's material wealth, especially that of its core supporters, the negative aspects of this mode of operation, such as pollution, led to strong discontent in the sprawling urban areas. In the late 1960s and the 1970s, the LDP addressed this criticism by emphasizing programmatic policy appeals of the materialist and postmaterialist kind. This shift did not affect the clientelist policy cluster, though, which continued to make up almost four out of ten statements in any given election platform, before it eventually began to decline in the 1990s. While the decline of clientelism has continued to the present day, the development of the two programmatic policy clusters has not been as linear. In fact, budgetary constraints and the party's neoliberal agenda resulted in a substantial decline in mentions of welfare since the late 1970s. Only after the world financial crisis did the LDP reemphasize welfare policy again. Meanwhile, postmaterialist policies were deemphasized in the post-neoliberal area. Irrespective of this recent decline in postmaterialist appeals, the general trend toward a slow but steady increase in references to postmaterialism already prior to the 1990s is significant: first, because it demonstrates that postmaterialism in line with Inglehart has exerted considerable influence on the LDP's manifestos long before electoral reform; and second, it shows that despite its clientelist nature, the LDP, like mainstream parties in Europe, did adjust its policy appeals to align them with changing public preferences.

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## Notes

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1. *Postmaterialism* as used in this article refers to Inglehart's concept (1977, 42).

2. According to the Cabinet Office's annual survey on lifestyle preferences (*seikatsu ni kansuru yoron chōsa*).

3. According to the *Yomiuri Shimbun*'s annual opinion poll on the constitution ("*kenpō*" *ni kansuru ishiki chōsa*).

4. The average number of codes for LDP "manifestos" from 1990 to 2003 (only lower house elections) as listed by the CMP was thirty-eight. The average count for the actual manifestos is approximately 450.

5. For a detailed account of the "manifesto boom," see Nishio and Iio (2004).

6. The three clusters are made up of the following policy fields and the corresponding codes within the CMP's coding framework: postmaterialism: democracy (202), human rights (201), decentralization (301), environmental protection (501), and equality (503); programmatic, materialism: welfare (504), domestic security (605), and workers' benefits (701); clientelism: infrastructure (411), small and medium-sized businesses (403), and agriculture (703).

7. Based on data from Zenkoku kakushin Shichōkai and Chihō Jichi Sentaa (1990).

8. A *Yomiuri Shimbun* (1971b) poll conducted in Tokyo prefecture prior to the 1971 upper house election found that pollution (41.2 percent) was the second-largest issue on respondents' minds behind only (commodity) prices (64.5 percent); 40.5 percent stated that pollution was the policy issue they regarded as most important when voting.

9. For a detailed account of environmental protection initiatives as a public policy issue in the 1960s and 1970s, see Pempel (1982, 218–238).

10. Takeshita and Kanemaru were among the most influential members of the construction tribe (Woodall 1996, 104–114).

11. According to an NHK (2010) poll, the number of respondents asking the government to do more to protect domestic security has increased from 11 percent in 1998 to over 17.1 percent in 2003 to 21.4 percent by 2008.

12. Polls show that inequality was the second most important policy issue based upon which people cast their ballot in 2007 (Winkler 2013, 203).

13. According to the Cabinet Office's annual survey on lifestyle preferences and Institute of Statistical Mathematics (2008).

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