

Changing Media, Changing Politics in Japan¹

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Abstract

This paper demonstrates that recent changes in the mass media, especially TV programs, change democratic practice. I argue that this theory is applicable not only to the US, but also to Japan after the 1990s. This paper is organized as follows: the first section confirms that the increase in TV news after the 1980s is driven by an increase in ‘soft’ or ‘infotaining’ political news. The second section describes the changes in political practice – elections, policy processes, and party organization brought about by this change in the mass media, using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Much time has passed since Francis Fukuyama declared the end of ideology.

In Japan, the Liberal Democratic Party’s (LDP) one-party dominance is a distant memory and critics have repeatedly pointed to the absence of a policy confrontation axis. Today, existing paradigms fail to adequately explain individual issue concerns; it is hard to predict people’s reactions to various topics. Instead, the mass media takes an active part in processing political issues. But at the same time, the media grope their way to represent many people or to gain public support. In unsettled times, politicians and the mass media monitor people’s feelings more carefully than is usual (Entman, 2004).

This paper demonstrates that recent changes in the mass media, especially TV programs, change democratic practice. I argue that this theory is applicable not only to the US, but also to Japan after the 1990s. This paper is organized as follows: the first section confirms that the increase in TV news after the 1980s is driven by an increase in ‘soft’ or ‘infotaining’ political news. The second section describes the changes in

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Table 1. *The best ten news stories of News Station*

1	Professional baseball: Lions vs. Giants (26 October 1994)	34.8%
2	Professional baseball: Swallows vs. Blue Waves (24 October 1995)	31.9%
3	Professional baseball: Orions vs. Buffaloes (19 October 1988)	30.9%
4	Religious cult Aum Shinrikyo: Hideo Murai was stabbed (24 April 1995)	28.2%
5	Religious cult Aum Shinrikyo: Interview with Fumihiko Joyu (8 May 1995)	27.6%
6	Entertainer: Hibari Misora died. (26 June 1989)	26.7%
7	Kidnap: Mari Konno's case (13 February 1989)	25.3%
8–10	(tied). Religious Cult Aum Shinrikyo:	26.3%

Source: Mitazono (2003: 113–115).

political practice – elections, policy processes, and party organization brought about by this change in the mass media, using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Changing media: the era of infotainment

Softened news programs

Concepts such as soft news and infotainment derive from analyses of the US media (for example, Baum, 2003; Prior, 2003; Hamilton, 2004). But there is a clear distinction between each type of program, from the 'hard' news programs (e.g. NBC Nightly News), weekend 'hard' talk shows (e.g. Meet the Press), daytime talk shows (e.g. Oprah) to late night shows (e.g. The Late Show with David Letterman). On the contrary, such divisions among Japanese TV programs are comparatively vague.

News Station (TV Asahi, 1985–2004) changed the history of Japanese news programs. On 25 August 2003, at a press conference to announce the retirement of anchorperson, Hiroshi Kume, TV Asahi praised Kume's achievements as follows:

Kume's accomplishment is notable, not only in the world of TV news, but also in the 50 years of Japanese television history. His incisive analysis of current issues, witty talk, and casual style led to the huge success of the first attempt at a prime time news program.

Though I am not sure if *News Station* had a monopoly on the incisive analysis of current issues, Kume's witty talk and casual style were undoubtedly causes for its popularity. Table 1 shows the best ten news stories of *News Station* by audience rating.

The news that attracted people's attention most was the live coverage of the Japan Series baseball games and the league championship, murder cases like the *Aum Shinrikyo* case, the kidnapping, and entertainment news. On the other hand, the most popular political news was the establishment of Hosokawa's non-LDP coalition cabinet on 9 August 1993, which was ranked 17th, with an audience rating of 25.6%.

Kume brought his 'witty talk and casual style' to political news stories. The following is the transcript of *News Station* on 12 January 1994, when he commented on the rejection of the Political Reform Act in the House of Councilors (Yokota, 1996: 183–184).

Kume: ‘The Hosokawa Cabinet will be over sooner than we thought’, that beautiful female CNN correspondent reported from the city of Tokyo. After the commercials, we will continue to cover this news tonight. Please stay tuned.

[He sighed and turned away as if he were in the sulks.]

According to Yokota (1996), this is his body language saying, ‘Hosokawa is our hope. It might end soon. What a terrible situation this is.’ After gaining popularity on a quiz show and on some popular song programs, Kume became the anchor on *News Station* and succeeded in winning many viewers by bringing his entertainment skills into the news program.

This merging of entertainment and news is not limited to Kume. Stimulated by *News Station’s* success, other TV stations began new style news programs one after another. The staff of these programs do not always come from News Departments. One anchor person from one of these programs points out that since variety show specialists often produce news programs, the proper character of a hard news program is often diluted (Torigoe, 2001).² In fact Kazutaka Hasumi, a producer at the *Houdou Station*, which succeeded *News Station* in 2003, did not come from the News Department. He seldom watches other news programs and reads more than one newspaper. He says that his strong point is his understanding of ‘regular Joes’ who ask, ‘Is this news interesting?’ (*Asahi Shimbun*, 1 June 2004). The increase in the number of news programs after *News Station* is supported by the change in news production policies to import the skills of variety shows.

The politicization of entertainment programs

My source of political information is not limited to TV news. According to Marukusu, Sakata, and Yamashita (2004), a variety of media that contain politics, such as comedy dramas, comics, journal articles, and ‘understandable’ talk shows, find hidden political interest among younger generations.

In Japan the so-called *wide shows* are on air mainly in the mornings and afternoons. Targeting housewives, the retired, and self-employed, entertainment is their main focus. However, it is said that even *wide shows* began to take up more political topics in recent years. *Broadcaster* (TBS, 1991–) tallies up the airtime of each topic in all *wide show* programs. Tables 2 and 3 are the annual rankings in 1992/93 and 2002/03. In 1993, politics ranked third and at that time it was said that the two greatest topics of wide shows – entertainment and criminal cases – began to totter. However, even though there were big political events in 1993, such as the first overseas dispatch of the Japanese self-defense force for the UN peace-keeping operation in Cambodia, the no confidence resolution against the Miyazawa Cabinet, and the end of LDP government after its 43-year rule, politics was still behind the royal family and a religious cult in the *wide*

² Shuntaro Torigoe worked as a correspondent and an editor-in-chief of the *Sunday Mainichi* at the *Mainichi Shimbun*. He then became an anchor on *The Scoop* (TV Asahi, 1989–) and a commentator on *Super Morning* (TV Asahi, 1993–).

Table 2.1. *The 1992 airtime ranking in all wide shows*

1	Religious cult: the Unification Church.	75:05'48
2	Romance: Sumo champion Takanohana and actress Rie Miyazawa.	67:18'34
3	Sports: Barcelona Olympic Games.	31:39'32
4	Royal family: Princess Diana.	23:06'19
5	100 years old twins: Kin and Gin.	22:06'32
6	Politics: Sagawa scandal.	19:05'10
7	Royal family: Akishinonomiya family.	16:56'52
8	Actress: Keiko Matsuzaka's family trouble.	16:42'13
9	Singer: Yutaka Ozaki died.	13:27'28
10	Religious cult: <i>Ai no Kazoku</i> .	12:54'36

Source: *Sankei Shimbun*, 24 December 1992.

Table 2.2. *The 1993 airtime ranking in all wide shows*

1	Royal Family: Prince Hironomiya's marriage.	282:30'59
2	Religious cult: Actress Hiroko Yamazaki quit the Unification Church.	174:47'06
3	Politics: Hosokawa Cabinet.	110:13'27
4	Royal family: the Emperor and the Empress.	82:15'40
5	Romance: Takanohana and Rie Miyazawa.	44:34'34
6	TV star: Masataka Itsumi acknowledges his disease.	44:11'48
7	Murder: Kofu Shinkin clerk case.	37:47'34
8	Sports: Wrestler Antonio Inoki's scandal.	34:51'56
9	Royal family: Akishinonomiya family.	23:27'50
10	Earthquake: Southwest Hokkaido Earthquake.	18:00'49

Source: *Asahi Shimbun*, 28 December 1993.

Table 3.1. *The 2002 airtime ranking in all wide shows*

1	Politics: Domestic politics.	215:47'19
2	Politics: North Korea.	207:54'44
3	Sports: World Cup Soccer.	84:26'11
4	Actor: Motoya Izumi's family trouble.	34:21'08
5	Royal family: Akishinonomiya family.	29:23'20
6	Health: Falsely labeled domestic beef.	15:54'20
7	Politics: Afghanistan.	15:54'28
8	Noble Prize: Koshiba and Tanaka.	13:14'12
9	Sports: Salt Lake City Olympic Games.	12:31'49
10	Animals: the seal Tama-chan.	11:59'36

Source: Project Corp. <http://www.tvdatbank.com>

shows. On the other hand, political topics such as domestic politics, the Iraq War, and North Korea dominated the rankings in 2002–03. Now politics has joined these as one of the most frequent topics in *wide show* programming.

Table 3.2. *The 2003 airtime ranking in all wide shows*

1	Politics: North Korea.	193:00'39
2	Politics: Iraq.	141:17'12
3	Politics: Domestic politics.	78:50'30
4	Royal Family.	31:05'06
5	Health: SARS.	23:53'33
6	Murder: the boy in Nagasaki.	21:21'07
7	Animals: the seal Tama-chan.	18:17'35
8	Religious cult: Panawave.	17:30'40
9	Sports: Sumo.	13:20'22
10	Sports: Major League Baseball.	11:42'45

Source: Project Corp. <http://www.tvdatabank.com>

Using these *wide shows*, Makiko Tanaka blazed to stardom during the 1990s. As a daughter of former Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka, she speaks crisply and clearly, even to veteran politicians. *Wide shows* often favorably reported her comments, boosted her popularity, and finally helped her gain appointment as Foreign Minister. Even though she was involved in much conflict with the LDP and the bureaucrats, her popularity allowed her resistance. When Prime Minister Koizumi finally dismissed her, the Cabinet's approval rate plunged. Senator Ichita Yamamoto (LDP) said:

Since Foreign Minister Tanaka created so many problems, the four major newspapers [Yomiuri, Asahi, Mainichi, and Nihon Keizai] criticized her on their front pages. If it had been five years or ten years ago, such a minister would have been dismissed immediately. But Makiko was not. One of my best friends, a correspondent of Nihon Keizai said, 'She was supported by the *wide shows*.' As for Makiko, *wide shows* were much more influential than the front page of the largest newspapers.³

Figures 1 and 2 show the average ratings on feeling thermometers for Tanaka and Koizumi among people who read newspapers, watched TV news, or wide shows during the 2003 general election and people who did not⁴. People who read newspapers evaluated Tanaka more negatively than those who did not ($F = 3.834$). However, viewers of *wide shows* saw Tanaka in a friendly way ($F = 5.711$). A significant difference does not exist in the same analysis for Koizumi.⁵ Also from here, the role of the wide shows in creating a positive image for Makiko Tanaka is conspicuous.

³ Interviewed on 26 May 2004.

⁴ University of Tokyo/Asahi Shimbun Opinion Poll. Data will be available at <http://politics.j.u-tokyo.ac.jp>. See Kabashima, Taniguchi, and Sugawara (2005) for details.

⁵ No significant difference was observed for the feeling thermometer scores for the LDP, the DPJ, and Naoto Kan (the DPJ leader) by exposure to *wide shows*.

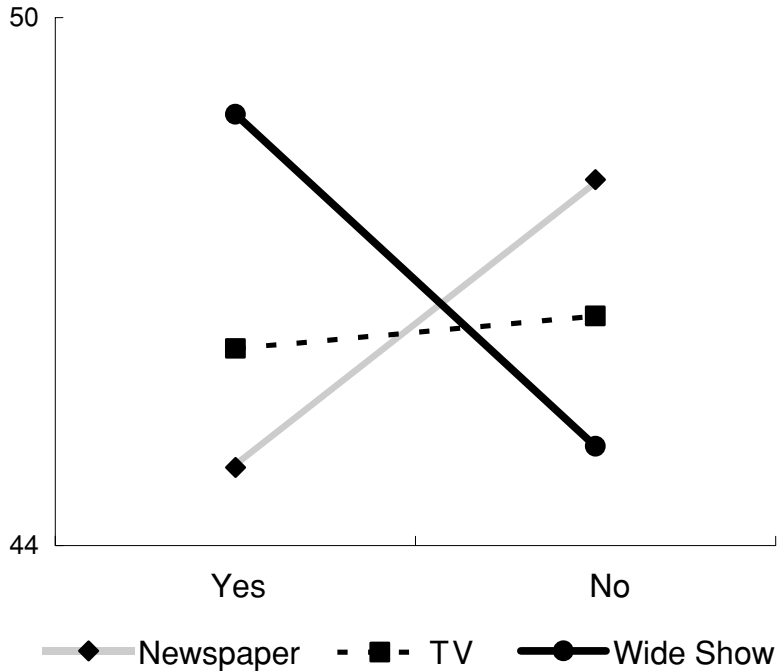


Figure 1 The public's feelings toward Tanaka

The rise of infotainment

The first Japanese wide show was the *Morning Show with Norio Kijima* (NET/TV Asahi, 1964–).⁶ Modeled on NBC's *Today*, Kijima hosted the program ad lib without a detailed time schedule. In the 1970s, however, *wide shows* began to take up human interest stories such as gossip and crime, but people got bored with these stories. In the 1980s, news programs such as *News Station* found a niche outside the *wide shows* by turning their experience to their advantage.

On the other hand, *wide shows* countered with new programs by (re)entering political reporting. Although a politician's remarks may be reported verbatim by news programs as an objective fact, people want to hear comments or analysis, not just repetition of the remarks (Hara, 1997).⁷ To meet this demand by exposing the real intention (*hon'ne*) behind a political event, the *wide shows* changed their character.

Sunday Project (TV Asahi) represents this change in the *wide shows*. It might be considered as a hard talk show program today, but it started as a *wide show*. Its presenter was Shinsuke Shimada, a famous comedian, and it took up sports and entertainment news as well. Among the various topics was a 15 minute small talk show hosted by

⁶ I referred to NHK (2003) for this paragraph.

⁷ Toshio Hara, former President of Kyodo News.

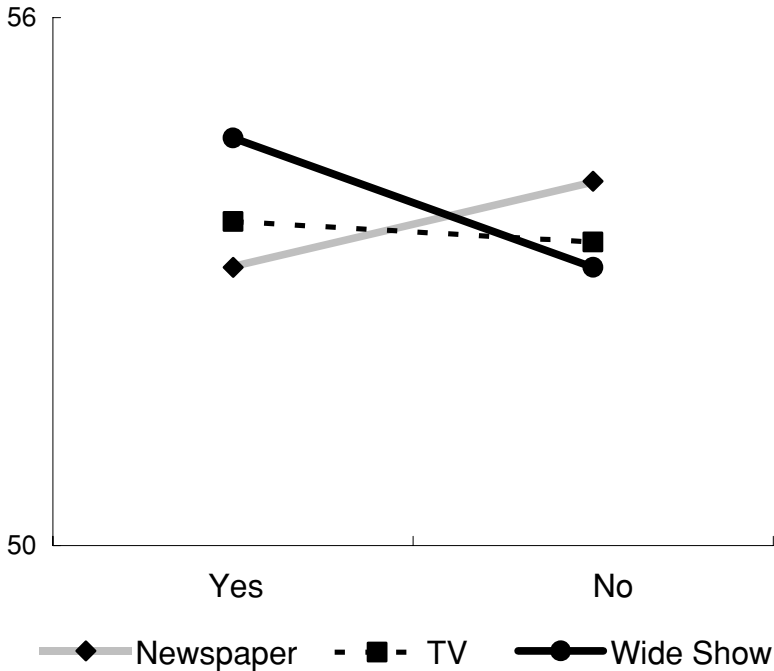


Figure 2 The public's feelings toward Koizumi

Soichiro Tahara. The guests were not limited to politicians in the beginning. Today, however, Tahara's corner has been lengthened to one hour and most of the guests are politicians. Speeches on *Sunday Project* have frequently changed political situations.

According to Tahara, this change in the *Sunday Project* was brought about by the changing world in the 1990s. After they began the *Sunday Project* in 1989, many important political events occurred: the Tiananmen Incident, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Gulf War, and the Recruit Scandals in Japan. Living rooms turned into box seats to watch these historical events. People realized that politics is much more interesting than dramas and sports, and political news was able to earn ratings (Tahara, 1993, 1997).

It is true that, as Tahara points out, the political situation in the 1990s supported the change in the *wide shows*, but the bottom line of this era of infotainment – softened hard news programs and politicized entertainment programs – is not driven by vocationally based journalist practice, but by business considerations; in other words, audience ratings (Hamilton, 2004). Even if the quantity of political information increases, the consequences will be quite different when the content of TV programs is determined by business rationality (Onizuka, 1997; Baum, 2003). The invisible part of politics – lobbying, majority maneuvers, and persuasion – is a necessary evil to manage problems effectively. But if people consider politics only as attractive and enjoyable events and ignore the invisible parts, democracy will lose its essence (Suzuki, 2000).

Such a sense of crisis is shared by TV journalists, too. Misuzu Tamaru⁸ and Tetsuya Chikushi⁹ state:

Though there is no plan to cut off our program, Houdou Tokushu, we are not immune to ratings. The number of news programs is decreasing and I have not heard a plan to begin a new one. So we must continue our program. Early evening news programs seldom feature investigative reports. Most of their topics are food and health to earn ratings. Maybe we are putting ourselves in a nasty hole by competing with each other. (Hoshi and Tamaru, 2003: 17–18)

There is ‘the eternal dilemma’ of the news program. What a journalist wants to show and what an audience wants to watch are not always consistent. If we concentrate only on the former, our program will not be able to survive. However, if we follow only the latter, we cannot maintain our motivation as journalists. It is really difficult to overcome this dilemma (Chikushi, 2002: 213–214)

‘Entertainer-ized’ politicians

In spite of, or because of the era of infotainment, politicians appear on TV programs more frequently. Getting short comments from politicians in front of portable TV cameras has become common. Smart comments will be broadcast repeatedly, especially on *wide shows*. Otake names such politicians who often give these sound bites ‘entertainer-ized politicians’ (Otake, 2003). They are not only interviewed, but also appear on the infotainment programs. For example, six politicians appeared on *Quiz Millionaire* (Who Wants to Be a Millionaire, Fuji TV) between April 2000 and August 2004.¹⁰

It might be natural for young politicians who grew up with television to accept telepolitics, but many older generation politicians acknowledge the influence of infotainment programs and attempt to use them (Hishiyama, 1991; Suzuki, 2000).¹¹ Figure 3 shows the frequency of Prime Ministers’ television/video appearances by the *Shusho Dousei* [The Comings and Goings at Prime Minister’s Office] column in the *Asahi Shimbun*.¹² Prime Ministers after the 1990s, including Keizo Obuchi whose sober impression was called ‘cold pizza’ and Yoshiro Mori who often caused confrontations with the mass media, increased their exposure. Osaka (2003) demonstrates that other politicians also enjoyed this increased exposure.

⁸ Misuzu Tamaru worked as an announcer on Fuji TV and then became an anchor at Houdou Tokushu (TBS, 1980–).

⁹ Tetsuya Chikushi worked as a correspondent and an editor-in-chief of the *Asahi Shimbun’s Asahi Journal*. Then he became an anchor on *News 23* (TBS, 1989–).

¹⁰ They are Nobuaki Ishihara (Rep.), Daijiro Hashimoto (Gov. of Kochi), Shigefumi Matsuzawa (Gov. of Kanagawa), Hiroshi Kawauchi (Rep.), Ichita Yamamoto (Sen.), and Katsuei Hirasawa (Rep.). Celebrity lawmakers are not included. (Source: <http://www.syu-ta.jp>)

¹¹ Ikuro Hishiyama. Former Director of Politics Division at Nihon TV.

¹² *Kikuzo*, the online database of the *Asahi Shimbun* was used for this analysis. The author expresses appreciation to Iwao Osaka and Kaoru Iida for their suggestions.

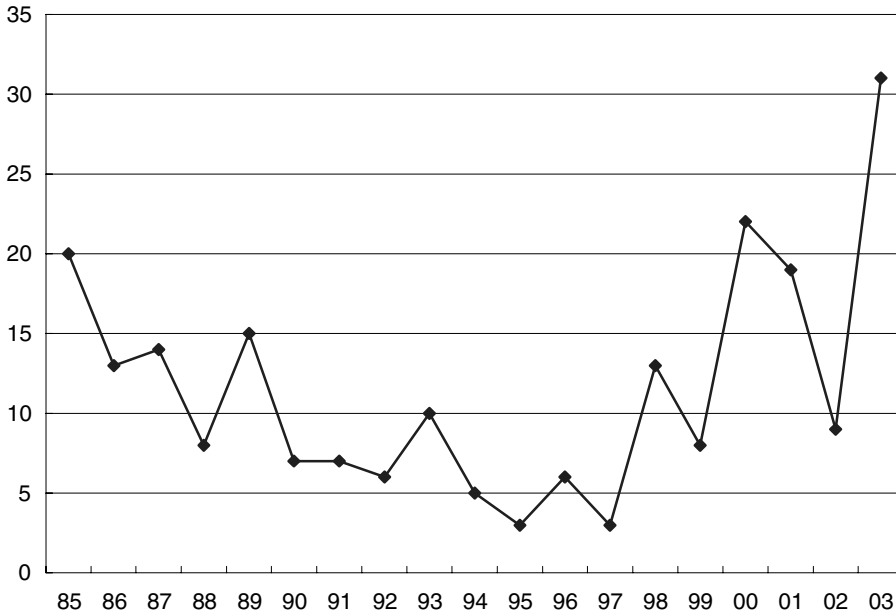


Figure 3 Prime ministers' television/video appearances

The most typical case is Prime Minister Koizumi. On 27 May 2001, Koizumi attended the Sumo awards ceremony, praised the wrestler Takanohana, who overcame a serious injury and won the championship, 'You endured the pain and hung in there. It was moving. Congratulations!' and drew applause from the audience.¹³

On 8 July 2001, when he appeared in the studio of *Houdou 2001* (Fuji TV), Koizumi used a Queen's song as background music and tore a paper on which was written '*Teikou Seiryoku*' [resistance of vested interests]. In NNN News Plus on 11 July 2001, he talked about his fashion sense and ate his favorite Chinese noodles surrounded by a female audience. His approval rate at the beginning was over 80% for his daring policies, as well as such skillful media strategy.

Such actions of Koizumi were based on his media strategy, and were not accidental. His secretary, Isao Iijima said, 'TV news must cover all genres of reports such as politics, economy, social problem, and foreign affairs. As a result they usually air only one phrase of a speech. In front of TV cameras, politicians need to provide a sound-bite and a picture.'¹⁴

¹³ Before the awards ceremony, he gave an interview to sports newspapers. Since they could not meet with the Prime Minister frequently, their articles were favorable to Koizumi. This is another example of his skillful media strategy (Ishizawa, 2002).

¹⁴ An interview by *Nagano Nippo* (a local newspaper of Iizima's hometown. <http://www.nagano-np.co.jp/modules/xfsection/article.php?articleid=12>).

Changing politics: elections, policy making, and parties

How do the changing media discussed above lead to changes in politics? According to Fujitake (2002: 188–189):

There are two types of politicians who appear on TV. One is politicians who appear on TV because of their position, and the other is ‘frequenters’ most of whom belong to the younger generations. The frequenters took an active role in the political process of political reform. They might not influence political change directly, but they created the mood that they could not win the election unless they somehow support political reform. . . . One of the highly popular TV frequenters became Prime Minister. His name is Jun’ichiro Koizumi. I cannot imagine his prime ministership without the role of TV.

Fujitake notes that TV had two points of influence on actual political practices: the policy process of the political reforms and the changing power balance in the ruling party. To these I add the influence on each politician’s reelection strategy, and in this section sketch the changing political practices in accordance with the changing political media.

Media use in reelection efforts

First, let us observe the influence of TV on reelection. The TV industry seems to consider that politicians’ frequent appearances have both positive and negative effects on the possibility of their election, even if they are not criticized on a program. While giving examples of politicians who might lose in the 1993 election without their appearance on TV, Tahara (1993) points out that many politicians who often appeared on TV unexpectedly were defeated in the election.¹⁵ He claims that these politicians overestimated the effects of their publicity and failed to make efforts to mend fences.

On the other hand, politicians’ views are generally positive without regard for seniority or parties. The following are interviews with Rep. Kaoru Yosano¹⁶ (former Chairman of the Policy Research Council of the LDP, Minister of Education and Minister of International Trade and Industries), Sen. Ichita Yamamoto (aforesaid), and Kiyomi Tsujimo¹⁷ (former Chairperson of Policy Affairs Research Council of the SDP).

Yosano: ‘Though I do not like *Sun-Pro* [*Sunday Project*], my constituents are pleased when I appear on it. This is a self-contradiction. That is the reason an LDP politician wants to appear on TV.’

Yamamoto: ‘The influence of TV is so awesome that only thirty minutes’ appearance has more impact than a hundred newspaper articles. The LDP politicians with exposure are overwhelmingly strong electorally.’

Tsujimoto: ‘Complaining that we do not want to appear on such a program, politicians do appear on *TV Tackle* [a variety show on TV Asahi]. This is

¹⁵ Also see TV Asahi (2004).

¹⁶ Interviewed on 20 April 2004.

¹⁷ Interviewed on 8 June 2004.

because the TV appearance operates to our advantage in a close election under the single member district system. Our policy is clear: we will not appear on a program if it is not aired in our district.’

These comments seem to be based on the logic that a politician’s TV exposure increases the possibility of his/her reelection by providing publicity. In order to assess the effect of TV exposure on elections, I will analyze some data on the 2003 general election. However, the party executives such as a minister or a secretary general of each party, who are strong enough to be reelected, appear on TV whether they want to or not, so I exclude representatives who served more than five terms.¹⁸ By excluding them, I obtain 264 observations.

The dependent variable is the public’s placement on a feeling thermometer of each politician in the 2003 University of Tokyo/Asahi Shimbun Survey Data. Regrettably, there are no data that measure every politician’s appearance on TV programs. So I substitute TV exposure by the frequency with which they appeared in newspaper articles.¹⁹ More specifically, I include two independent variables: (1) the frequency of appearance in four major national newspapers and (2) the frequency they appeared in *Nikkan Sports*, the largest sports newspaper, between the two most recent general elections (August 2000/September 2003). I expect a high correlation between exposure on television and in the sports newspaper because both are considered soft and infotainment types of media.

Figure 4 shows the average temperature towards an incumbent representative in the district of each respondent categorized by frequency of their newspaper appearance.

It is natural that the LDP supporters rate LDP politicians more highly than do non-supporters, but regardless of party support, the more frequently an LDP representative appears in the mass media, the higher evaluations they tend to receive from their constituents (Figure 4.1). DPJ politicians with frequent media exposure were more favorably perceived than were others, although the effect is not so drastic as the LDP effect (Figure 4.2).

Next, I estimate logit regression models. The dependent variable is whether the politician concerned won the 2003 election in their district.²⁰ Key independent variables are the same as in previous analysis.²¹ To control for other effects, I include dummy variables for a successful candidate in the same district in the last election, a candidate

¹⁸ Rep. Kenshiro Matsunami (New Conservative Party) is also excluded because his exposure in the media was due to scandal cause by companionship with a gangster. But the result is robust even if he is included in the analysis.

¹⁹ *Nikkei Telecom 21*, the online database of newspaper articles was used for this analysis.

²⁰ Politicians who failed to be elected in the district portion of the side-by-side system, but were reelected in the PR portion are coded zero.

²¹ The data were converted to logarithms. For *Nikkan Sports* I add one to every observation before the logarithmic conversion, since there are some politicians who did not appear.

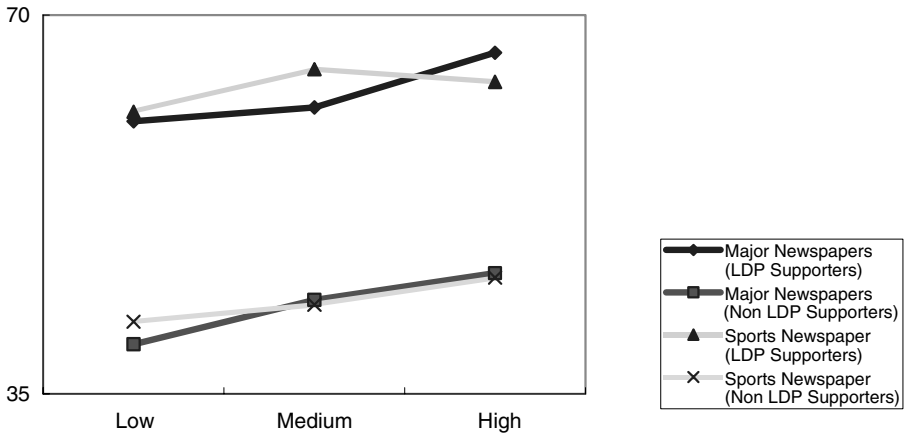


Figure 4.1 The constituents' feelings toward the LDP representatives by level of media exposure

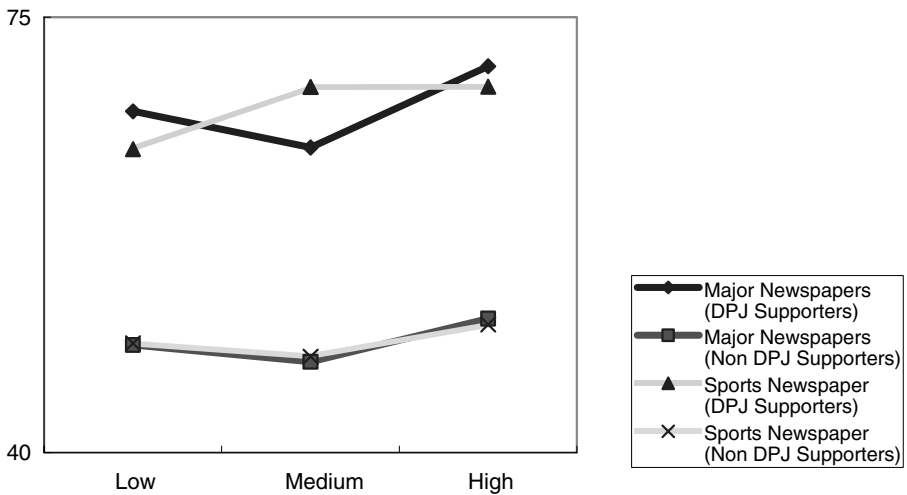


Figure 4.2 The constituents' feelings toward the DPJ representatives by level of media exposure

whose opponent is also an incumbent, and parties (LDP, DPJ, and *Komeito*).²² The number of terms is also included.

The estimates are shown in the Appendix. I simulate the probability of reelection for a first term LDP incumbent competing with a challenger without experience as a member of the Diet, and who appeared 68 times (the average for LDP representatives who have served less than five terms) in the major four national newspapers between

²² No candidate of any other parties (except some independents) won a seat in the single-member districts.

1 August 2000 and 30 September 2003. The probability of his reelection in 2003 was 92.0%. If his exposure increased to 215 times (the average plus one standard deviation), the probability of reelection rises to 96.6%. The probability of reelection was 89.4/93.6% if he appeared in a soft news sports newspaper for 10 (the average)/44 (plus one standard deviation) times respectively during the same period. The higher the number of appearances in national newspaper articles, the greater the possibility of reelection. The same positive influence is observed for the sports newspaper.

With some exceptional cases as Tahata points out, *ceteris paribus* a politician who appears on infotainment TV programs as well as in sports newspapers has a fair chance of being elected, even if s/he is despised as an entertainer-ized politician. If this tendency progresses further, it might lead to the decline of traditional organizational mobilization in electoral campaigns (Taniguchi, 2004, 2005).

Another diet?

Let us turn to how the influence of TV appearances, including on infotainment programs, changes the policy-making process. Kaoru Yosano who has held important posts such as Minister of Education, Minister of International Trade and Industry, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary and the Chairman of Policy Research Council of the LDP negatively evaluates talk shows:

Talk shows such as *Sunday Project*, *Houdou 2001*, and *Nichiyou Touron* (NHK) show just a superficial understanding of problems. I do not think it is good for politics. Young politicians who frequently appear on TV do not have any influence on the policy process. Capable persons do their jobs inconspicuously.

To achieve great results, you have to pile small bricks one on top of another. If you are reluctant to do such invisible tasks, you will be shot down in the LDP.

However, Makiko Tanaka disclosed the insider trading of information among bureaucrats and using the *wide shows* deterred this practice (Ishizawa, 2002). Unlike Yosano, Koichi Kato, the former Secretary General of the LDP, the Chief Cabinet Secretary, and the Secretary of Defense, admits the influence of the *wide shows* on diplomacy:²³

Since Makiko Tanaka confused the personnel transfers using the *wide shows*, Ryozo Kato,²⁴ who was a prospective vice-minister, was forced to move to the Ambassadorship of the United States. If he had stayed in Japan, Japanese diplomacy would have got better with his sound judgment.

He further stresses the negative influence of *wide shows*, using policy towards North Korea as an example:

The influence of *wide shows* is strong. They fixed the course of Japanese policy towards North Korea. Negotiations for the normalization of relations between Japan and North Korea could not progress since the *wide shows* opposed this

²³ Interviewed on 18 May 2004.

²⁴ Not related to Koichi Kato.

in the absence of a solution to the abduction problem. Because of this delay Japan lost an opportunity to host the six-nation talks on North Korea's nuclear capability. It was held in Beijing and the Japanese Government failed to take the initiative. Diplomacy is limited if the mass media, especially the *wide shows* form public opinion.

Rep. Katsuei Hirasawa²⁵ (LDP, former Secretary of the League of Diet Members to Save Victims Abducted by North Korea), who shaped public opinion on the North Korea issue and appeared on wide shows repeatedly, comments:

The main target of the wide shows is the housewife . . . Though male society is limited to his company, his wife has a wide circle of friends through the PTA, hobby circles, and community service. Her companionship is horizontal and expands rapidly. If housewives have an interest and take action, politicians also have to move . . . As a politician, I want to bring my policy to fruition. I cannot do it without making people understand via the mass media. The abduction case is not an exception. A five minute appearance on TV equals a hundred thousand posters in my district.

Such television use for diplomacy is not restricted to the case of North Korea. Tsujimoto (SDP) also says:

By giving a true voice of the Afghan on the *wide shows* watched by women, I tried to form public opinion against the war.

Today, politicians make use of television to influence the foreign policy process, even if it is remote from people's daily lives. Especially for the young or opposition party members of the Diet, whose opinions are seldom taken up either in the party because of the seniority system, or in the Diet which is dominated by the ruling majority, exposure on TV, including infotainment, is their best chance to express their opinions effectively. Sen. Yamamoto appears on TV frequently, clearly explains:

The *Sunday Project* is the place to argue the portion which cannot be covered in the Diet, to send our message, and to have our party evaluated by audiences. In the world of politics, I am a minor-leaguer and unable to obtain any influential post under the rule of a boss like Darth Vader. I have not been a minister or a vice minister. However, someone said that my ability to send messages to people equals that of ministers when I appear on *Sun-Pro*. The voice of such programs has as much power as party leaders or ministers.

In 1998, a group of young politicians called *Seisaku Shin-Jinrui* [the new policy-oriented breed] took the initiative in drafting the Financial Reconstruction Law over the heads of party executives and bureaucrats.²⁶ They appeared on TV repeatedly, appealed to the public and succeeded in obtaining their support. One of the *Seisaku Shin-Jinrui*, Rep. Yasuhisa Shiozaki²⁷ (LDP) recounts:

²⁵ Interviewed on 8 July 2004.

²⁶ See Shiozaki (2002) for details.

²⁷ Interviewed on 12 July 2004. He was appointed as the Chief Cabinet Secretary in 2006.

Table 4. *Seisaku Shin-Jinrui's exposure in newspapers*

	Seisaku Shin-Jinrui	Non-Seisaku Shin-Jinrui	(N)
LDP	134	44	(117)
DPJ	124	56	(40)
(N)	(7)	(150)	(157)

In the policy formulation process that led to the Financial Reconstruction Law, the policy was modified following discussions on TV programs. By using television, politicians can increase people's understandings of a policy.

I evaluate the power of the *Seisaku Shin-Jinrui* in sending messages by counting their exposure in newspapers.²⁸ The names of the seven representatives who were called *Seisaku Shin-Jinrui* – Nobuteru Ishihara, Yasuhisa Shiozaki, Yoshimi Watanabe, Takumi Nemoto (LDP), Yosito Sengoku, Yukio Edano, and Motohisa Furukawa (DPJ) – appeared in articles in the major newspapers and in headlines²⁹ 129.7 times on average from July 1998 (the formation of the Obuchi Cabinet) to September 1999 (the formation of the LDP/*Komeito* Coalition). They appeared much more frequently than did their colleagues,³⁰ who appeared 47.4 times on average ($F = 55.363$) (Table 4). There is a significant difference between the *Seisaku Shin-Jinrui* and their colleagues, even after I control for other influences such as party and seniority. They took the initiative in the policy process by making use of the mass media as another Diet.

The result of the general election on 11 September 2005 will be remembered as a typical example of a prime minister changing policy through the use of the mass media. After Koizumi's postal privatization bill was voted down, he dissolved the House of Representatives and ran an aggressive media campaign. Incorporating the advice of the 'Communication Strategy Team', Koizumi canvassed for votes on the single issue of postal privatization. For example, he refused to endorse the LDP incumbents who had opposed the postal privatization bill and sent 'assassins' (celebrity candidates endorsed by the LDP) to challenge them. For the first time he ranked female candidates first in all PR lists of the LDP. TV programs, especially *wide shows* criticized, as if they were press agents of the LDP, kept covering Koizumi's dramatic performance intensively, helping Koizumi to gain a landslide victory.³¹ After the election, the postal privatization bill

²⁸ Based on *Nikkei Telecom* 21.

²⁹ *Yomiuri, Asahi, Mainichi, Nihon Keizai, Nikkan Sports, and Sports Nippon*.

³⁰ From the first to third term representatives and the first term senators in the LDP and the DPJ. The following politicians were excluded (the reason is in parenthesis): Shin'ichiro Kurimoto (Tokyo gubernatorial election), Makiko Tanaka (Tokyo gubernatorial election), Hiroshi Sumi (died), Seiko Noda (appointed as the youngest minister in the history), Mayumi Moriyama (switched from senator to representative), Yojiro Nakajima (arrested), Minoru Noda (invalidation of his election), Akira Ohno, and Yoshitada Kohnoike (switched from representative to senator).

³¹ *Mainichi Shimbun*, September 8, evening edition and 13 September 2005; Seko (2005). Senator Hirotsige Seko was a director of the LDP Communication Strategy Team.

passed the Diet in only six days. Koizumi succeeded in overriding the Diet through his performance on TV.

Transformation of party organization

In addition, the changes in the mass media led to a transformation in party organization. Newspaper correspondents are getting confused about young politicians' frequent exposure on TV programs. Youichi Serikawa,³² former Director of Politics Section at the Nihon Keizai Shimbun, and Hiroshi Hoshi,³³ a political columnist at the Asahi Shimbun, comment:

Serikawa: 'The way of politics used to be negotiation among the bosses. For a newspaper correspondent the only thing to do was close reporting of these bosses. But today, the rank-and-file play a part in the decision making process. One way to do so is through TV. We are at a loss as to how to cover the rank-and-file.'

Hoshi: 'In political coverage, newspapers, news agencies, and NHK were the first-stringers. But in featuring Makiko Tanaka, the second-stringers like weekly magazines and *wide shows* covered her first and the first-stringers followed. This feature also applies to Yasuo Tanaka,³⁴ Governor of Nagano Prefecture. The relationship between the mass media and politicians is changing.'

Once, for politicians, association with the mass media was a means of information exchange (not just imparting information) with the *ban-kisya* (correspondents who deal with certain politicians or organizations) of national newspapers and correspondents of local newspapers (Feldman, 1993). But today, 'the survival of a politician depends on his performance on TV'.³⁵ This does not just apply to individual politicians, but to party organizations, too.

Since s/he has a lot of opportunities to appear on talk shows, the most important qualities for a secretary general of a party are not administrative skills as it used to be, but the art of TV debate. If a person is appointed to the position of secretary general for his administrative skills, another telegenic person will be the deputy secretary general.

This was said by Tsujimoto, who gained fame in an infotainment debate program, *Asa Made Nama-Terebi* [Midnight Live Debate] (TV Asahi, 1987–). Tsujimoto was subsequently elected as a representative, and finally became part of the executive of the Social Democratic Party. Since the number of television appearances cannot be gauged

³² Interviewed on 26 May 2004.

³³ Interviewed on 27 April 2004.

³⁴ Not related to Makiko Tanaka. He is a writer and won the gubernatorial election as an independent candidate.

³⁵ Interview with Shiozaki.

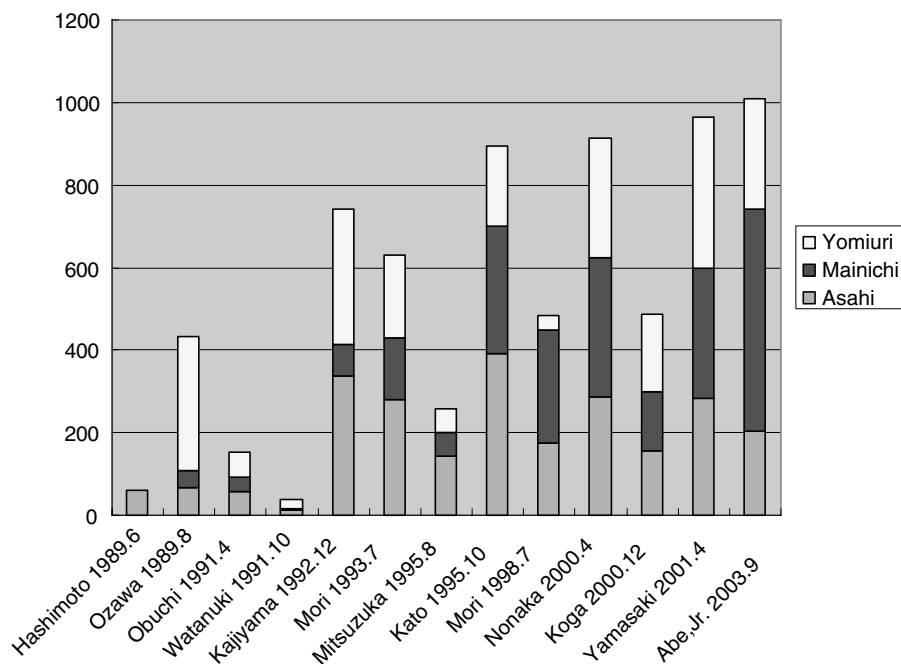


Figure 5 The LDP Secretary Generals' exposure in newspapers BEFORE their appointments

correctly, I will ascertain testimony by equating 'a telegenic person' with 'a person frequently covered by newspapers' using the *Nikkei Telecom 21* database.

Figure 5 shows the frequency of national newspaper coverage (Yomiuri, Asahi, and Mainichi) of newly appointed Secretary Generals of the LDP for the year BEFORE their appointment. Though the importance of the post of Secretary General has not increased, since the 1990s, politicians who enjoy popularity in the mass media have been appointed as Secretary Generals.

Since the number of cases is small for the post of Secretary General of the LDP, I have conducted the same analysis with the four national newspapers for newly appointed ministers in LDP cabinets and the results are reported in Figure 6.³⁶ After recovering the prime ministership in 1996, the LDP started to appoint people with high degrees of mass media exposure as ministers. Since occasions for party executives to appear on talk shows and to respond to criticism of the opposition parties has been increasing, being telegenic is one of the requirements for becoming a party executive.

³⁶ Prime ministers, ministers remaining in office from the previous cabinet, ministers from reshuffled cabinets, and leaders of factions are excluded. But there is one exception: since most of ministers remained in office from the first Mori Cabinet formed after the sudden death of former Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi, I include the second Mori Cabinet instead.

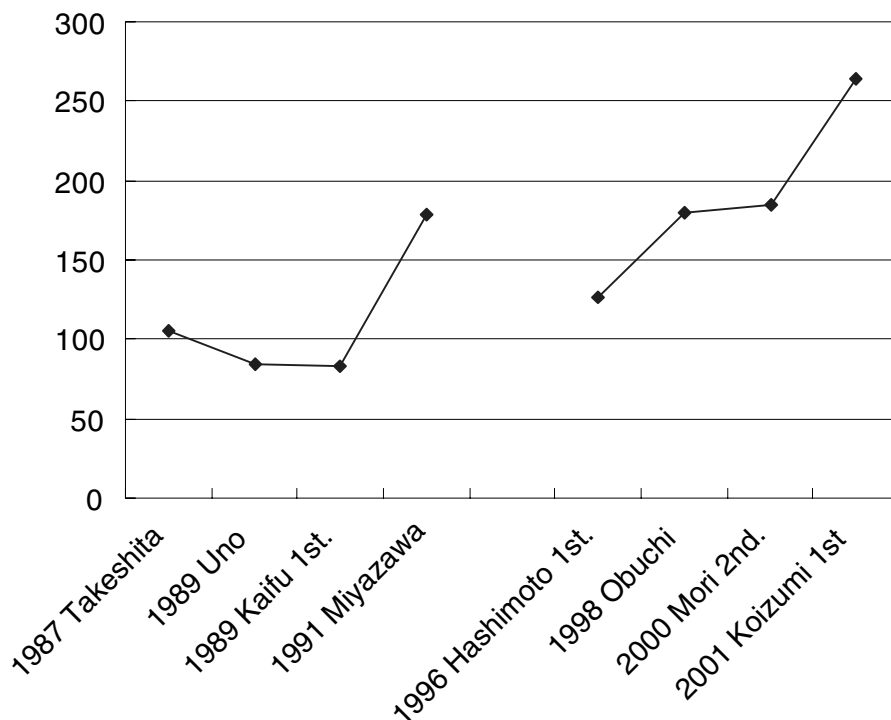


Figure 6 New ministers' exposure to newspapers BEFORE their appointment

Discussion

In this paper I examined the changes in political reportage and practical politics. The increase in TV news after the 1980s does not mean that an increase in straight news occurred. News programs adopted the techniques of the wide shows, while soft news programs frequently began taking up political issues. As a whole, political reports are 'infotainment-izing'.

The increase in political information circulated by the mass media entails a greater exposure of politicians on TV, including on infotainment programs. They want to appear on TV since it may benefit their election prospects and influence the policy process by rousing public support. Party organization is also changing in the sense that being telegenic has become one of the requirements of being a party executive.

What will occur next in practical politics if the infotainment-ization of political reports continues? With the spread of television, Mander (1977) points out that social movements have radicalized. To attract attention from TV, social movements prefer marches to press conferences, demonstrations to marches, sit-ins to demonstrations, and violence to sit-ins. In other words, TV covered more radical movements to obtain better ratings. For the same reason, politicians may adopt a strategy in which

they neglect persuasion on policy issues, instead they radicalize superficial political confrontation such as negative ads and personal attacks in front of TV cameras (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997).

Political scientists have conducted studies about the influence that the mass media has on people's political awareness or behavior. Research on the direct influence of the mass media on political practice is quite limited, such as research on the third person effect (e.g. Yasuno, 1996). This is also the case in the infotainmentization of political reports (Taniguchi, 2002; Baum, 2004). Now we need to consider the direct correlation between the mass media and the polity or the separation of power between politics and the mass media, the 'fourth estate' in our democracy.

Appendix: Influence of media exposure on the 2003 Election

	Model 1		Model 2	
Major newspapers	0.775	(0.293)		
Sports newspaper			0.372	(0.184)
Successful in 2000	1.805	(0.344)	1.742	(0.342)
vs. incumbent	-0.764	(0.368)	-0.747	(0.366)
LDP	3.465	(1.088)	3.439	(1.089)
DPJ	3.841	(1.089)	3.851	(1.094)
Komeito	5.259	(1.546)	5.278	(1.557)
Num of terms	-0.149	(0.178)	0.018	(0.159)
Constant	-5.949	(1.519)	-3.923	(1.207)
R-squared	0.345		0.337	

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