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Japan's Multimember SNTV System and Strategic Voting: The '*M* + 1 Rule' and Beyond*

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Abstract Since the early 1990s, Steven Reed and Gary Cox have changed our understanding of Japan's multimember SNTV electoral system, by highlighting its institutional effects similar to what is known as Duverger's law in the Anglo-American context. While we offer some additional evidence to consolidate their findings, we also address an issue left unexplored in these studies, namely the role of partisan information. Under Japan's system, party labels matter in elections. We show that, while Japanese voters are generally willing to abandon the candidates without affiliation with established parties, the partisan effects produce constraints for strategic coordination.

Introduction

Since the publication of Downs' classic work, the importance of information in influencing political choices under democracy has been widely recognized by the students of elections, political parties, legislative politics, and public policy (Downs 1957; Ferejohn and Kuklinski 1990; Popkin 1991; Krehbiel 1991; Grofman 1993; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995). In the study of strategic voting, in particular, informational distribution is now generally treated as the key that underpins the strategic coordination among voters, which in turns affects the nomination strategy at the elite level, and, hence, the nature of party systems (Cox 1997). Despite the increasing interest in the topic, however, the varying patterns with which political information promotes voters' strategic behavior under different electoral institutions is relatively understudied. The institutional specifics of each electoral system and of

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campaign regulation are likely to interact with informational distribution in a complex manner. It is even possible to think of circumstances under which certain kinds of information rather hinder strategic voting.

In this paper, we focus on Japan's electoral system used from 1947 to 1993 to examine the interactions between the system's institutional attributes, the nature of political information, and the pattern of voters' strategic behavior. Under this system, a voter cast a single non-transferable vote (SNTV) to elect typically three to five representatives for the more important lower house of Japan's national parliament. For the past several years, remarkable progress has been made in our understanding of this Japanese system. Owing to the scholarly contribution made by two prominent scholars, Steven Reed (1990) and Gary Cox (1994, 1997), we now know that voters' strategic behavior led Japan's M-member districts to produce competition among $M+1$ candidates, and thus that a generalization of Duverger's law, called the '$M+1$ rule', exists and applies to the Japanese case. In our view, however, both Reed and Cox failed to incorporate an important informational dimension that affects the electoral process in Japan: the role of partisan labels. Under a multiparty system like Japan, party labels matter in elections and, thus, any analysis of Japanese strategic voting remains incomplete without taking into account this aspect of electoral competition.

Our findings suggest that, while Japanese voters are generally willing to abandon the candidates without affiliation to the established parties, partisan information produces some important constraining effects on voters' coordination at least in two ways. First, precisely because the party labels send signals to the voters that the candidates with these labels are serious contenders, they disrupt voters' ability to coordinate strategically. Second, because voters are likely to switch their voting decisions only when they can find alternatives who are close enough ideologically to their ideal points, the stickiness of partisan ideologies often offsets some voters' incentives to vote strategically. In short, in the Japanese context, partisan labels carry important information about candidates' credibility and ideology, which has the effect of hindering, rather than promoting, strategic voting.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. We first review the existing study of Japan's electoral system, particularly paying attention to Reed's and Cox's important work on the subject. Because they differ in their theoretical arguments and methods, our task is to consolidate Reed's and Cox's findings systematically and re-evaluate their implications. We then move on to our own agenda, to highlight the informational effects of partisan labels in Japanese electoral competition. The last section concludes with some caveats for interpreting our results.

Previous and recent research on Japan's electoral system: consolidating Reed's and Cox's approaches

Previously, Japan's electoral system has attracted only scant attention in the studies of comparative electoral institutions and of comparative politics generally.

When reference was made to Japan's system in the literature, it was categorized as an 'intermediate' system that combined features of plurality and proportional representation elections (e.g. Lakeman 1970; Lijphart, Pintor, and Sone 1986). Since the early 1990s, however, two pioneering scholars, Steven Reed (1990) and Gary Cox (1994, 1997), have generated an entirely new perspective on the Japanese system, highlighting its institutional effects similar to what is known as Duverger's law in the Anglo-American context (Duverger 1954). They have argued that the Japanese system should be characterized as '*M*th-past-the-post' system (where *M* is the district magnitude) in precisely the same sense that British and American plurality systems are the 'first-past-the-post' systems. They both presented some evidence to show that Japan's *M*-member districts tended to produce competition among $M+1$ candidates, and hence their claim about the '$M+1$ rule'.

Not only did Reed and Cox revise the way we classify Japan's electoral system, they also changed the agenda of Japanese voting research with their emphasis on strategic voting. For decades, most students of Japanese voting behavior were so influenced by the social-psychology/survey-analysis tradition of the Michigan school that they completely ignored the subject of strategic voting. For example, the book entitled *The Japanese Voter* (Flanagan *et al.* 1991), which claims to be the 'first major comprehensive study of the attitudes and voting choices of the Japanese electorate in any Western language' (p. 45), fails even to mention the concept of strategic voting, let alone to analyze the nature of such voting under the above electoral system. It is only recently that a new generation of researchers finally began to incorporate Reed's and Cox's insights in explaining and predicting electoral outcomes and in exploring various political consequences of such behavior more generally (Christensen and Johnson 1995; Christensen 1996; Wada 1996; Kohno 1997a; Cox and Thies, 2000; Cox, Rosenbluth, and Thies 1998; Kohno and Fournier n.d.).

While we do not question the validity of either of these two pioneering studies, in our view, their findings need to be consolidated systematically, since they differ in their approaches in some important respects. Not only do they employ different methods, they present different theoretical arguments.

Conventionally, it is understood that the logic behind Duverger's law consists of two mechanisms, one that works at the level of electorate and the other at the level of the elite. What Duverger himself called the 'psychological factor' refers to voters' tendency to abandon candidates likely to lose and instead to vote for alternative candidates who have a reasonable chance of winning seats. The 'mechanical effect', alternatively, is concerned with how votes are translated into seats, which affects the politicians' incentives to abandon underrepresented parties. Hence, as Riker (1982: 761) summarized, '[b]oth these reasons derive (implicitly) from a view of both politicians and voters as rational actors', pointing to their strategic behavior as the source of the equilibrating force at work.

Unlike this conventional interpretation of Duverger's law, Reed emphasizes in the Japanese context how slowly the $M+1$ equilibria were actually reached in Japan,

pointing to 'learning', as opposed to rationality, as the causal link between the structural features of the electoral system and the behavioral outcomes. Cox's model, however, is built upon the assumption of rationality and strategic behavior, although, as elaborated below, informational limits to voters' rational expectation also play an important role in his modelling and empirical analysis. Further, because of his emphasis on learning and 'trial and error', Reed's method of analysis is longitudinal. More specifically, Reed uses the Laakso–Taagepera index, the standard formula to calculate the number of competing parties/candidates (L–T index hereafter), in order to identify the declining trend in the number of Japanese candidates over time. Cox's method, by contrast, has no temporal component. He focuses, instead, on the so-called 'S–F ratio', the second-to-first losers' vote ratio, based on the aggregate data pooled across all elections.

In addition, while Reed's longitudinal analysis shows that the Duvergerian equilibrating process took place rather smoothly (though slowly) over time, Cox's model and his S–F ratio analysis imply more complications. Cox argues that the pure Duvergerian process occurs if there is an expectation of a clear gap separating the first loser from the second loser in the election. However, according to Cox, non-Duvergerian equilibria also exist under the situations where it is not clear *ex ante* who trails whom and voters are thus unable to coordinate their voting choices fully. In the former situations, the S–F ratio approaches 0; in the latter, the ratio is expected to be near 1 because voters do not know which candidate to abandon and which to prop up, leaving two (or perhaps even more) losers nearly tied. Cox's empirical analysis, thus, is centered on the 'bimodality hypothesis', predicting S–F ratios of 0 and 1.

Can one reconcile Reed's and Cox's approaches and consolidate their findings in some systematic fashion? One of the differences between the two previous studies, as summarized above, is Reed's emphasis on learning, as opposed to Cox's reliance on the notion of strategic voting. Reed explicitly rejects the purely mechanistic interpretation of Duverger's law (c.f. Reed 1993). It is important to re-emphasize, however, that Cox also stresses the 'noise' in the real world which distorts the working of Duverger's law, as he anticipates non-Duvergerian equilibria in which the voters do not fully coordinate their strategies due to informational constraints. Hence, to the extent that they both recognize the limits to voters' rational behavior, the two studies do not seem to be so far apart theoretically.

The problem lies, in our view, in their empirical findings, or the lack thereof. Neither Reed nor Cox provides sufficient evidence to show the link between the constraints on voters' rational expectations and their behavior. Reed's longitudinal analysis of the declining trends in the L–T indices shows some differences in the speed at which the $M+1$ equilibrium was actually achieved across varying-sized districts (i.e. fastest in three-member and slowest in five-member districts), but he fails to explore thoroughly the cause or implications of this observed variation.

The difference across varying-sized districts is even more clearly borne out in Cox's S–F ratio analysis in the shape of the hypothesized bimodality. Consistent with

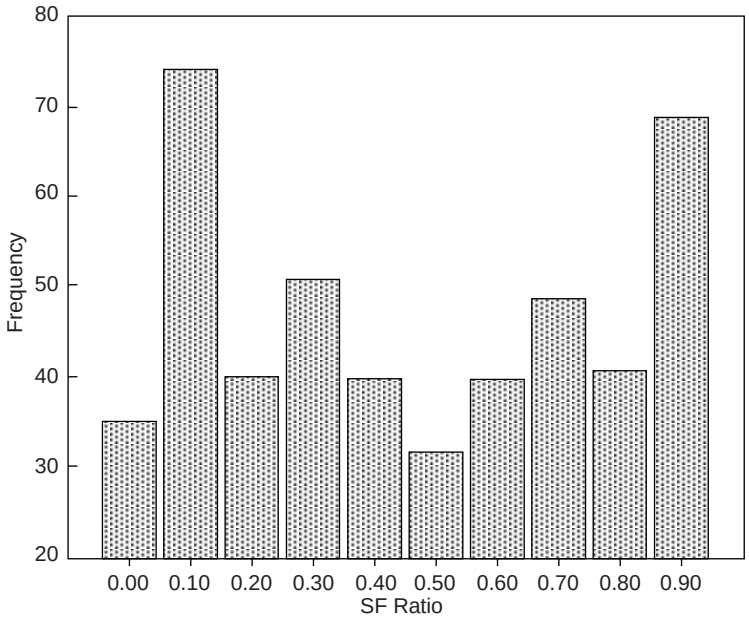

Figure 1a S–F ratio: 3-member districts

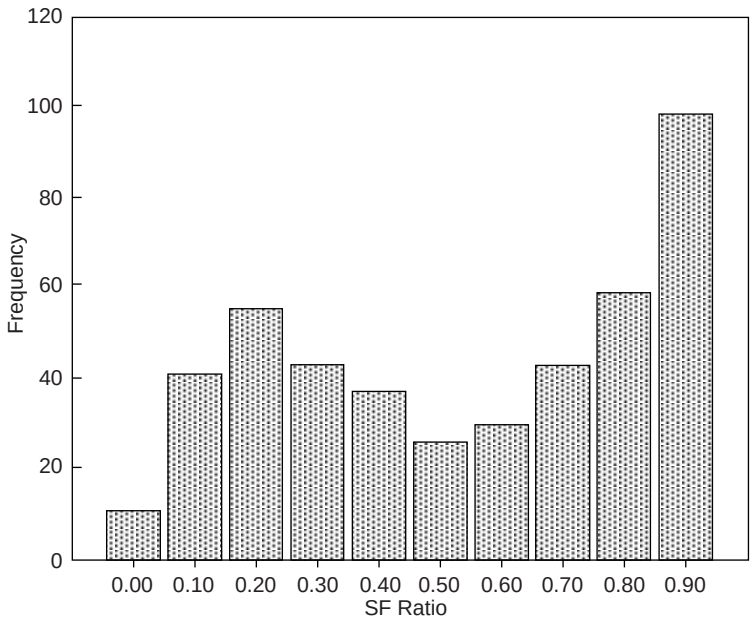

Figure 1b S–F ratio: 4-member districts

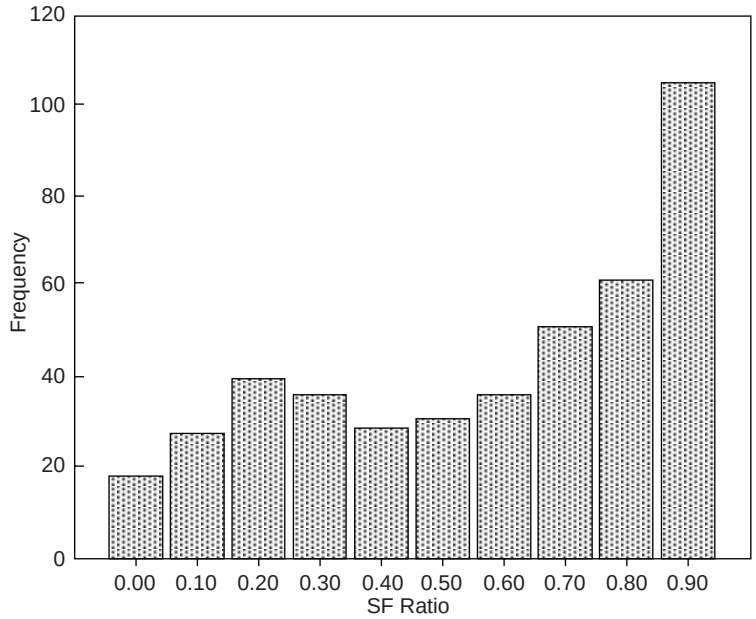

Figure 1c S–F ratio: 5-member districts

Reed's observations, Cox reveals that the tendency to cluster around S–F ratio equals 0 is strongest in the three-member district competitions, whereas, in the five-member districts, the frequency of S–F values near 1 increases substantially, as shown in Figure 1, which we reproduced from Cox's original data. Cox interprets this as follows:

> [The] quality of voter information regarding candidate chances declines with district magnitude. In particular, it is harder to be sure who is trailing in a more crowded field in which small vote percentages can win a seat . . . Thus, large magnitude systems should in general depress the level of strategic voting, by destroying the primary informational prerequisite of such voting (Cox 1997: 105–106).

This interpretation, however, requires some caveats, because the S–F ratio statistics can be deceiving. As Gaines (1997) has argued, the S–F ratio does not directly reveal voters' ability to distinguish who is trailing whom, because whether the first and second losers finish close together or far apart says nothing about how close they are to the winner of the last (Mth) seat. It is possible that the cases near S–F ratio equals 1 represent not those races too close to call in advance, but rather predetermined races where most voters know *ex ante* that the first and second losers are both inconsequential candidates.

To consolidate Cox's claim about the effect of informational constraints, we need to investigate whether the varying district size affects the competitiveness of the

Table 1. *Average competitiveness by district magnitude and S–F ratio (1957–1990)*

District magnitude	All cases	S–F ratio < .2	S–F ratio > .9
3	3.21	2.63	1.75
4	1.78	1.34	1.19
5	1.09	0.86	0.77

Note: Competitiveness index = [margin between last winner and first loser / number of eligible voters] * 100 (Cox and Munger 1989).

race, which in turn affects the voters' ability to coordinate their voting decisions. Using the standard index of electoral competitiveness, Table 1 confirms that, on average, the competitiveness indeed increases as the district magnitude increases in the Japanese case.[1] Furthermore, the contrast in competitiveness between the S–F ratio equals 1 cases and all other cases seems to diminish as the district magnitude increases. In other words, after accounting for the discrepancies across different sized districts, the non-Duvergerian equilibria cases represent closer races in three-seat than in five-seat districts (compared to all cases of the same district size). Hence, as Cox conjectured above, larger districts do experience greater informational constraints for voters' strategic behavior.

In exploring the compatibility between the two previous studies, perhaps a more critical contradiction lies between Cox's findings about non-Duvergerian outcomes and the seemingly linear equilibrating pattern identified by Reed. Here again, neither the evidence presented by Reed nor by Cox resolves the apparent inconsistency. On the one hand, the absence of a dynamic perspective reduces the persuasiveness of Cox's empirical demonstration. If Reed is correct about the slow process of optimization, reporting a single S–F ratio distribution which summarizes all cases in a static form is bound to misrepresent reality. On the other hand, Reed's usage of the L–T index also suffers from its own problems. Because Reed uses this index to calculate the mean of the number of competing candidates (for three-member, four-member and five-member districts, respectively), it is not clear whether the observed aggregate decline indeed represents a smooth and gradual Duvergerian process at a district level.

Recognizing these shortcomings, we have conducted some additional empirical analyses. First, we have calculated the S–F ratio distribution for one election at a time to see how the hypothesized bimodality changes over these years, thus adding a time horizon to Cox's original analysis. Because of the limited space, we do not report the results here, but they are consistent with our expectation. The summary figure which plots the changes in the frequency of cases near the S–F ratio equals 0 and near the S–F ratio equals 1 shows that the number of cases near the former increases, whereas the number of cases near the latter decreases over time. These dynamics are parallel

[1] Our closeness measure is the margin between the last winning candidate and the first losing candidate divided by the numbers of eligible voters and multiplied by 100 (Cox and Munger 1989).

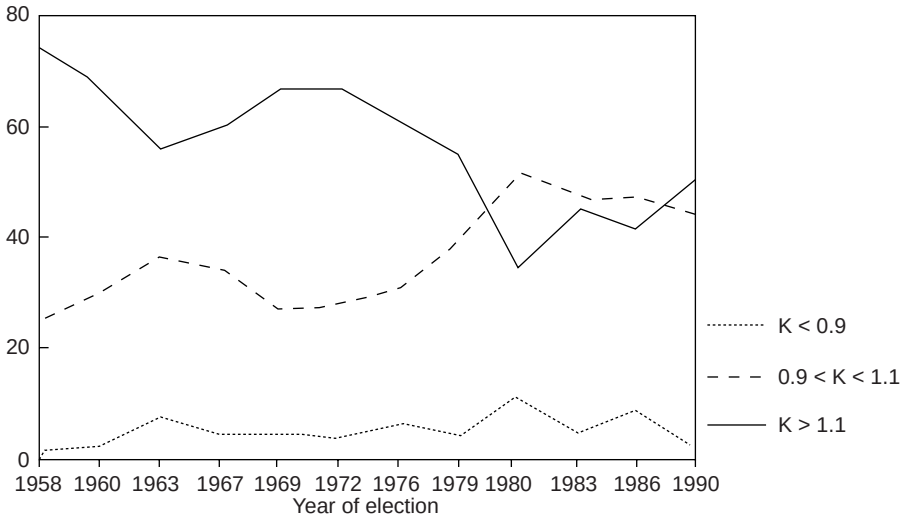

Figure 2 K quotient: all districts (%)

to the patterns found in Reed's analysis. At the same time, the results also show that the temporal S–F ratio trends are far from smooth or linear, suggesting that there are fluctuations, to which Reed's treatment of the L–T index is somehow insensitive.

This last point led us to conduct further temporal analyses. Instead of simply focusing on the mean, we have investigated the density of candidates per district, calculated as the L–T index/$M+1$, which we call the 'K quotient', and its changing distribution over time. This alternative index has the advantage of enabling us to analyze all cases universally (i.e. regardless of their district size) and to categorize them into three subsets of outcomes: 1 Duvergerian outcomes ($K=1$), which correspond to districts with $M+1$ candidates; 2 non-Duvergerian outcomes ($K>1$), which correspond to districts with more than $M+1$ candidates; and 3 supra-Duvergerian outcomes ($K<1$), which correspond to districts with fewer than $M+1$ candidates. Using this measure, we have analyzed the temporal patterns of change in the percentage of cases for $K=1$, $K<1$, and $K>1$ respectively. Figure 2 confirms Reed's aggregate observation that the frequency of Duvergerian outcomes increases over time, as well as the decline in the frequency of non-Duvergerian outcomes. It should be noted that the movement in the number of Duvergerian and non-Duvergerian outcomes is not smooth or linear; in fact it mirrors the fluctuations displayed by the two modes of the S–F ratio distributions. The comparison of trends of K values across three-member, four-member, and five-member district cases also support Cox's claim about the relationship between the district magnitude and competitiveness, as the percentages of non-competitive districts, i.e., supra-Duvergerian outcomes are generally lowest among five-member districts (not reported).

Based on these additional results, we conclude that Reed's and Cox's findings are

Table 2. *Combinations of first and second losers: all districts*

Second loser	First loser						
	LDP	Conservative independent	JSP or related independent	CGP/DSP or related independent	JCP or related independent	Other	*Row total*
LDP	81	13	49	30	15	3	191
Conservative independent	72	12	40	21	23	1	169
JSP or related independent	81	15	40	37	28	6	207
CGP/DSP or related independent	67	10	48	10	15	6	156
JCP or related independent	205	28	160	124	6	16	539
Other	23	3	16	7	20	4	73
Column total	529	81	353	229	107	36	1,335

reconcilable. These two previous studies, while recognizing the informational constraints, both point to the applicability of the $M+1$ rule to the Japanese case, which can be seen as an extension of Duverger's original insights.

Adding partisan dimension to the *M*+1 rule: informational constraints on strategic voting

The analogy between Duverger' law and the $M+1$ rule must stop here, however. Unlike the Anglo-American context, where two candidates from the same two parties compete in most districts, the Japanese general elections under the multimember SNTV electoral system took place between various types of candidates. Some of them were from major parties, while others ran from smaller parties or as independents; some candidates were affiliated with the conservative camp, some saw themselves as middle-of-the-road, and others were leftists. Obviously, under a multiparty system, party labels matter in elections and thus any analysis of the nature of strategic voting in Japan must take into account this aspect of electoral competition. In his extension of Duverger's law, Reed does discuss partisan effects, but his treatment of this issue is *ad hoc* and sporadic at best (Reed 1990: 348, 350–351). In Cox's case, though he surely recognizes the importance of party labels generally (Cox 1997), the partisan aspect of electoral competition is not considered in his analyses of Japanese data.

We emphasize the importance of the partisan dimension in the Japanese electoral process, because party labels are perhaps the least costly and yet the most widely available political information which voters are likely to consider in deciding

their voting choices. Official posters of candidates readily advertise their partisan affiliations, which in turn are reported in national and local newspapers. Under the multimember seat contest, which took place during the period from 1947 to 1993, we assume that party labels carried consequential information.

To address how partisan information affects the pattern of strategic voting, we begin our analysis by identifying the partisan affiliations of the first and second losers in all elections covered by Cox's data. After merging some insignificant categories, Table 2 summarizes the frequency of various 'S–F combinations'. This table is indicative of the two opposite directions in which party labels actually affected Japanese voters' strategic behavior.

On the one hand, the party labels seem to have positive effects in facilitating the strategic abandonment of minor candidates. The cell entries for the category 'Others' are all so small, even along the second loser column. This does not mean that minor candidates did not exist in Japan, but that they did not finish even as second losers in most elections. It is worthy to note that the category 'Other' includes independent candidates who were not affiliated with major parties and candidates from small parties such as the New Liberal Club and Social Democratic Front, and, therefore, if anything, these cell entries are inflated as a measure of the strengths of non-partisan candidates. It is thus fair to conclude that, generally, Japanese voters were prepared to abandon candidates who ran without affiliation with the established parties.

The party labels, on the other hand, also have constraining effects on voters' strategic coordination, precisely because they send signals to the voters that the candidates with these labels are serious contenders for the seats. The above table shows, for example, that in some districts two candidates from the same party ended up as the first and second losers. While it is possible to interpret these cases as reflecting either the failure of coordination at the elite level (in candidate nomination process) or simply 'personalized votes', they must also reflect at least in part the limits of voters' strategic coordination, because, if the second losers' votes had been added to the first losers' votes, the latter might have clinched the last available seats in those districts. Understandably, there are more of these cases when the two candidates were from the larger parties, like the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the Japan Socialist Party (JSP). The two smaller centrist parties, the Clean Government Party (CGP) and the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), as well as the Japan Communist Party (JCP), rarely nominated more than one candidate in a district. Hence, Japan's multimember SNTV system had the effect of impeding voters' strategic coordination, to the extent that this electoral system forced larger parties to nominate more than one candidate (for the purpose of seeking a legislative majority), and this made it further difficult for voters to distinguish which of the co-partisan candidates to abandon.

To highlight such 'size effects' of political parties more systematically, we have chosen to analyze, out of Cox's entire sample, two groups of cases in particular, one in which the second losers were either LDP or JSP candidates and the other in which

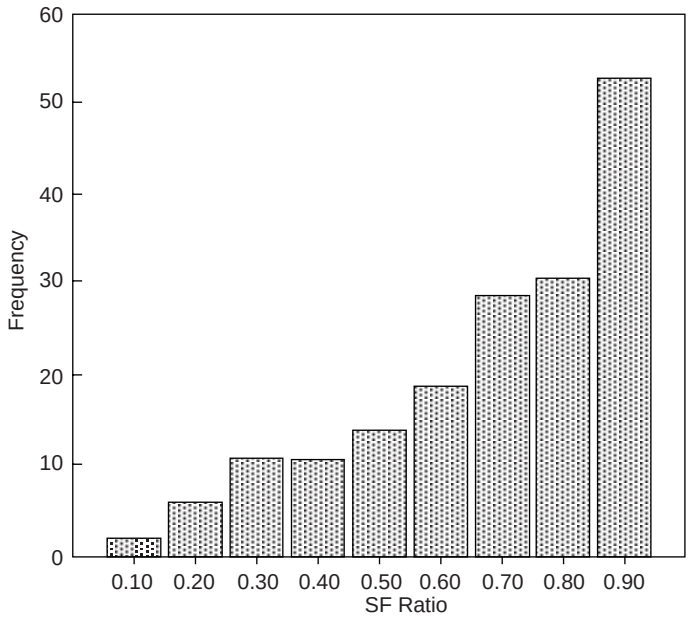

Figure 3a LDP/JSP second losers: 3-member districts

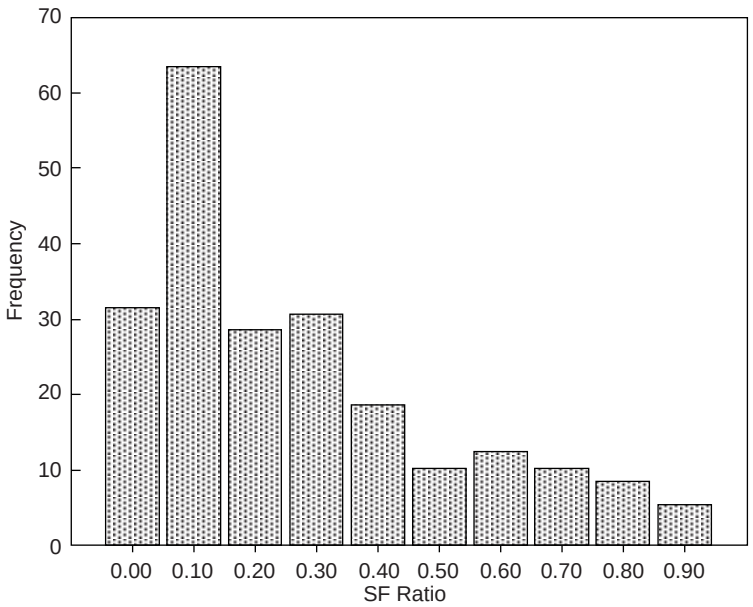

Figure 3b JCP second losers: 3-member districts

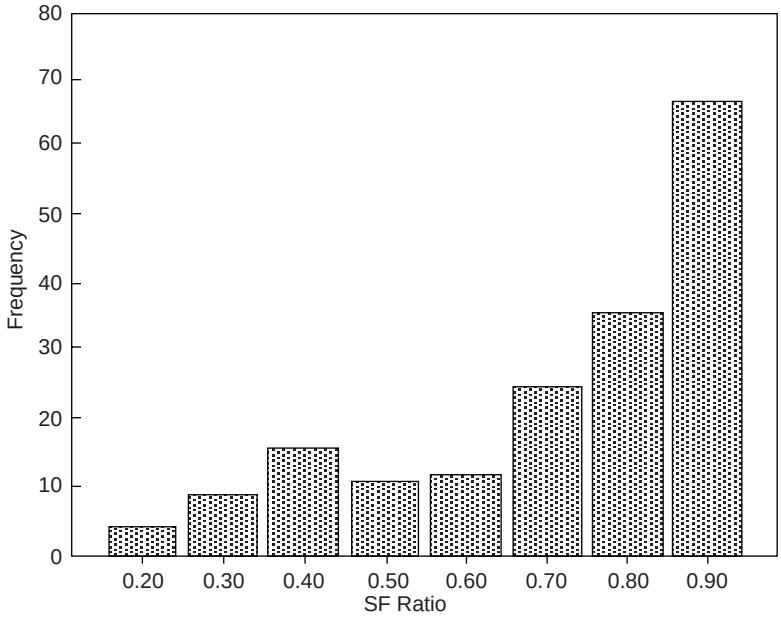

Figure 3c LDP/JSP second losers: 4-member districts

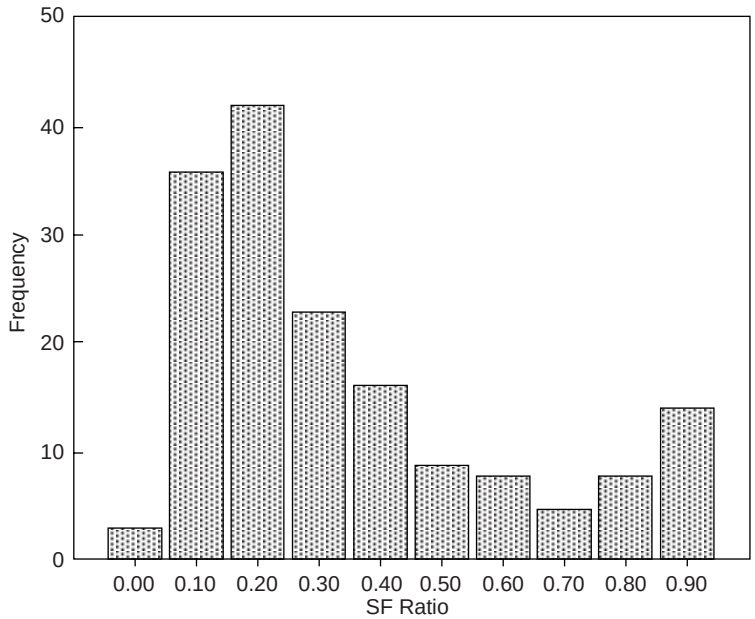

Figure 3d JCP second losers: 4-member districts

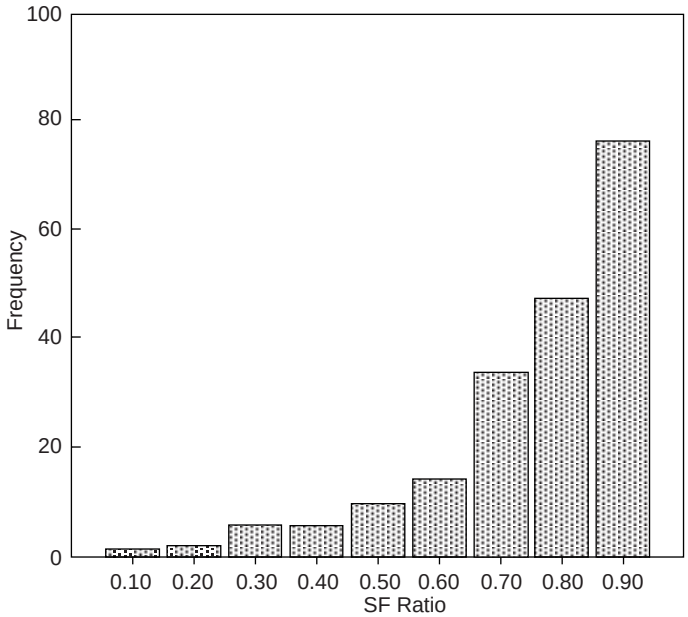

Figure 3e LDP/JSP second losers: 5-member districts

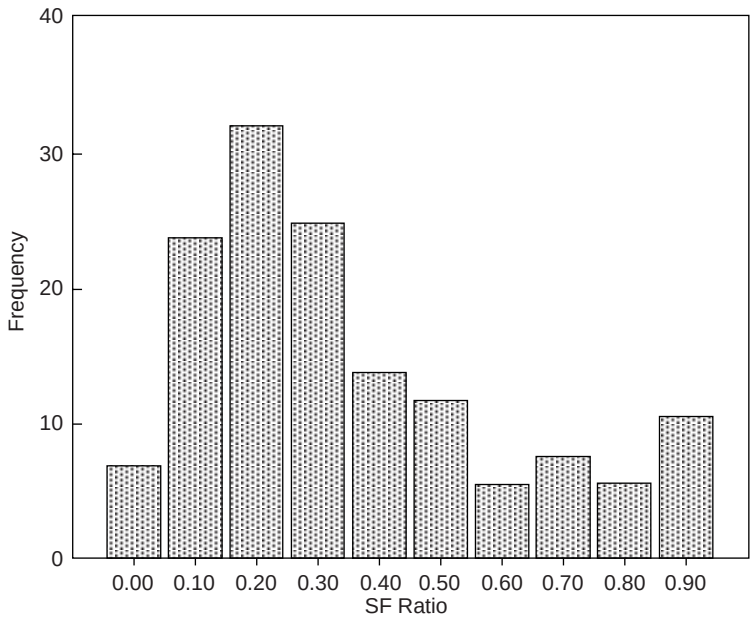

Figure 3f JCP second losers: 5-member districts

the second losers were JCP candidates. As Reed (1990: 350) noted, the JCP 'takes elections as propaganda opportunities and therefore runs candidates in all districts regardless of their chances of winning'. Thus, it is fair to assume that Japanese voters did not necessarily regard the JCP's partisan labels as signals of them being serious contenders, as compared to the LDP and JSP labels. Figure 3 compares the S–F ratio distributions between these two groups of cases, and their contrast is striking.

In the cases where the JCP candidates were the second losers, the S–F ratio distribution is consistently unimodal, concentrating in the Duvergerian outcomes even among the five-member districts in which informational constraints were said to be greatest. In contrast, in the cases where the LDP and JSP candidates were the second losers, the distribution is unimodal at the opposite pole which reflects non-Duvergerian equilibria, suggesting that voters had much harder time abandoning the candidates from the larger parties, presumably because their affiliation with these parties increase their credibility as serious candidates. Hence, Cox's bimodality hypothesis does not seem to hold, once the partisan dimension is appropriately taken into account. In fact, the above result suggests that the bimodality observed by Cox may simply be an artifact of summing up entirely different distributions which are separable based on the partisan contents of S–F combinations.

Party labels carry information, not only about candidates' credibility, but also about their ideologies. The second constraining context in which Japanese voters coordinate their voting strategies is the relative locations of political parties in the underlying ideological space. Even if Japanese voters are prepared to abandon the losing candidates, it is likely that they will switch their voting decisions only to a candidate who is considered close enough ideologically to their own ideal preference. A conservative voter, for example, may be willing to abandon his most preferred LDP candidate with no chance of winning a seat to vote for another conservative candidate, but he is unlikely to do so to vote for a socialist or communist alternative. Similarly, a JCP supporter may be willing to vote strategically for a JSP candidate, but not for a centrist or LDP candidate. Thus, under a multiparty system, each voter faces a serious tradeoff between the incentives to avoid wasting her ballot and the incentives not to compromise her own ideological stance. If their 'second-best' candidates are so far apart ideologically from their own ideal point, voters may vote sincerely to manifest their protest.

The pattern of strategic behavior among the Japanese electorate must reflect such an ideological constraint. While the lack of survey data makes it difficult for us to pursue this issue thoroughly, we can illustrate the same point with the available electoral data, by further focusing on those cases where the JCP candidates were the second losers. Assuming that the Japanese political space is unidimensional (cf: Kabashima 1986), this set of cases provides a convenient vehicle for analysis, because the JCP is located at the ideological periphery and there is thus only one direction in which voters can move strategically, namely to the right to vote for a JSP alternative. For the sake of simplicity, we have chosen to analyze the three-member districts

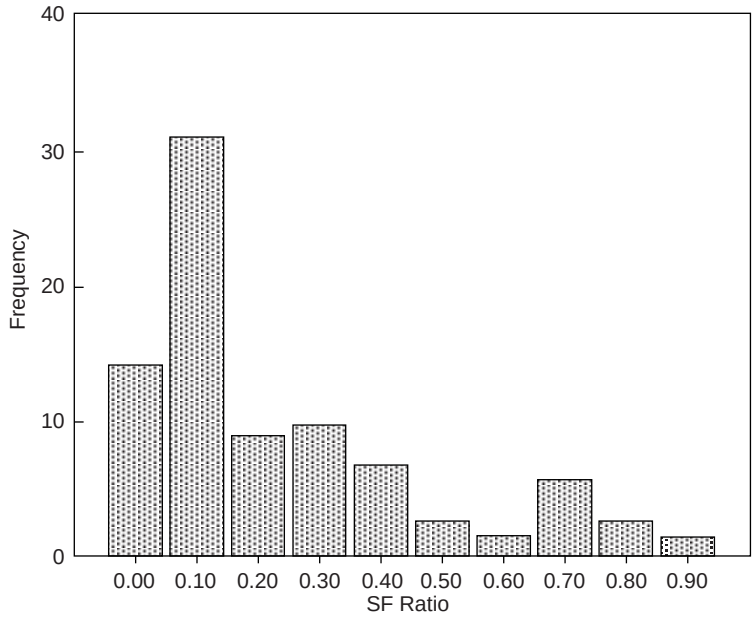

Figure 4a JCP trailing a LDP first loser

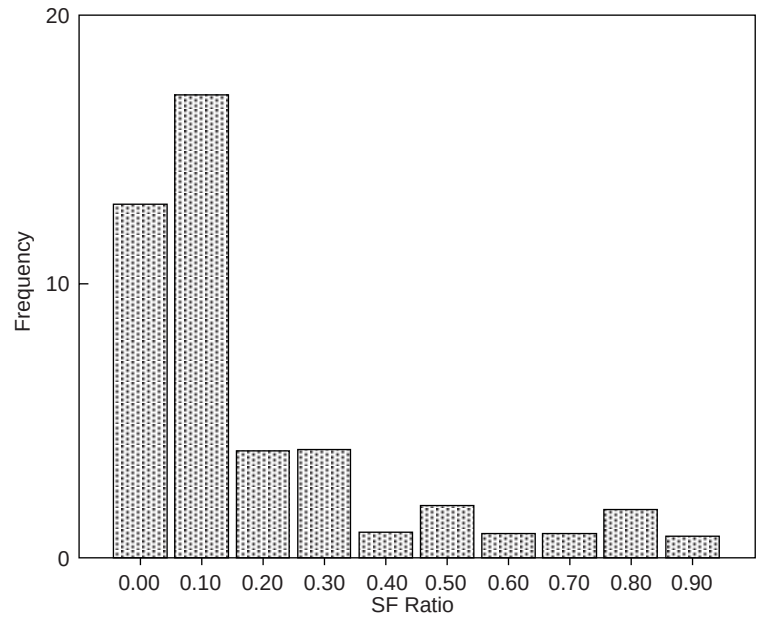

Figure 4b JCP trailing a JSP first loser

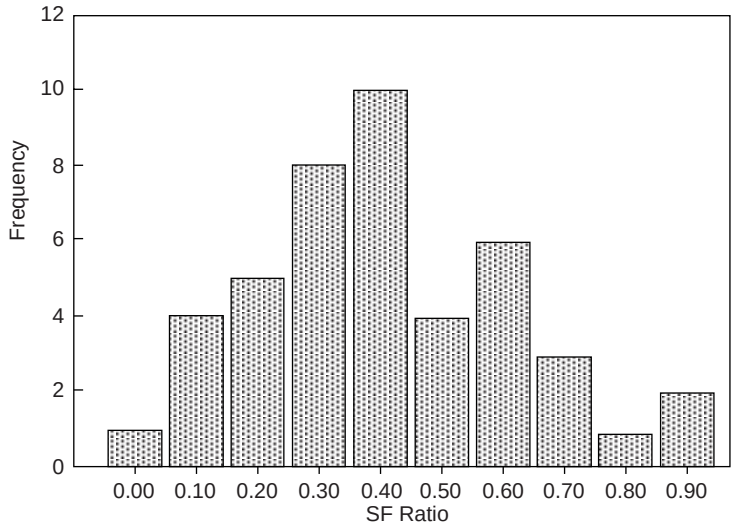

Figure 4c JCP trailing a centrist first loser

where the JSP nominated only one candidate. Figure 4 contrasts the S-F distributions between the three subsets of such cases: Type A in which a JCP candidate was trailing a conservative first loser; Type B in which a JCP candidate was trailing a JSP first loser; and Type C in which a JCP candidate was trailing a centrist first loser.

These results are consistent with our expectation that the partisan ideologies are indeed sticky and that they often offset some voters' incentives to vote strategically. If there is no ideological effect, we should observe no stark difference in S–F ratio distributions across the three types of districts. Figure 4, however, confirms that there are indeed such differences. More specifically, we interpret the unimodal S–F distributions in Type A and Type B districts as reflecting the JCP supporters' willingness to abandon their most-preferred communist candidates. In those districts, the JSP candidates were credible alternatives, and the JCP supporters seem to have given extra support to them in their competition with formidable LDP rivals. In Type C districts, by contrast, in which the first losers were neither the LDP nor JSP contenders, the single-peakedness is not centered near S-F ratio equals 0. We interpret this as reflecting that communist supporters' were reluctant to trade their ideological preference for centrist alternatives, and they instead stuck with their first choice candidate.[2]

In sum, voters do take seriously the informational content of party labels. At least under the multimember seat electoral contest, as was the case in Japan from

[2] The absence of strategic deserting of the JCP against Centrists could also have stemmed from the fact that both candidates were obvious losers who had no chance of catching the last winner. However, an examination of the margin between the last winner and the first loser reveals that the Centrist/JCP races were as competitive as the JSP/JCP races.

1947 to 1993, political parties do matter in affecting the pattern of strategic voting among the electorate, as the party labels carry important information about the credibility and ideology of competing candidates. A mechanistic extension of Duverger's law to the $M+1$ rule overlooks this important dimension of electoral competition.

Discussion and conclusion

Steven Reed's and Gary Cox's works on Japan's electoral system have altered, in many ways, the scholarly agenda of Japanese political studies. Built upon and extending Duverger's original insights, their arguments and empirical findings have led us to understand how Japan's multimember SNTV system shaped some fundamental behavioral patterns of Japanese politics and to integrate the research on Japan into a comparative perspective. Their contribution was significant, especially given that in the past Japanologists stressed, as the main determinants of Japanese politics, macro-structural factors, such as Japan's political culture and historical tradition, which were said to be unique and thus difficult to understand outside the Japanese context. Reed's and Cox's contribution was also timely because Japan undertook an electoral reform in 1993–94; their works prepared the students of Japanese politics for the analysis of the effects of this important institutional change (Kohno 1997b, 2000; Reed 1999; Suzuki 1999).

As is with any pioneering studies, however, Reed's and Cox's works were not devoid of ambiguities and shortcomings. As we clarified in this paper, there are some apparent inconsistencies between these two studies. Our own additional analyses suggest that, despite the differences in their arguments and findings, these two studies are reconcilable, pointing to the same pattern of strategic voting among the Japanese electorate under the multimember SNTV electoral system. There is no question that Reed and Cox have made a gigantic step forward in integrating Japanese research into the mainstream literature of comparative politics. Our clarification and corrective of these two pioneering studies, we thus hope, will fine-tune the direction of future research and further enhance the opportunities to compare Japanese politics with other countries.

Beyond simply consolidating the previous research, we have highlighted in this paper one important dimension of Japan's electoral competition which has not been given a thorough treatment: the informational salience of party labels. Our findings suggest that the party labels do affect the incentives for and against strategic voting under the multiparty system like Japan's. Because different types of candidates compete under the multimember seat contest, voters are likely to take seriously the informational content of party labels most readily available to them. Hence, it is wrong to extend Duverger's law to the $M+1$ rule mechanistically.

One last caveat before closing. Although we started our analysis based on the assumption of voters' rationality and strategic behavior, the evidence presented here, which suggests the importance of party labels, can also be interpreted as illustrating

the importance of the traditional social-psychological process and hence the factors emphasized by the traditional Michigan school of voting studies. Do voters take party labels as informational cues for strategic coordination, or do they actually take the labels as banners representing their party identification and support? The precise implications of our findings, seemingly pointing to the possibility that voters' strategic coordination are disrupted by partisan affiliations, are still open to debates between these two interpretations. It is our hope that such debates will guide future research on Japanese elections.

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