How Junichiro Koizumi seized the leadership of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party

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Abstract

In this paper, we examine some of the ways in which Koizumi Junichiro took advantage of changes in television news to win the 2001 Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) presidential election and become prime minister of Japan. Koizumi adopted a strategy of political populism to increase his exposure in the media and develop a public reputation. Changes in the LDP selection procedure, in combination with long-term social and economic change and political reform, meant that the media mattered more to his campaign than had previously been the case. We use data from the Japan Election Study II (JES II) to show that the effects of Koizumi's media-driven popularity and style of politics reversed the LDP's electoral fortunes in the Upper House Election in 2001.

Introduction

In the normal scheme of things, Junichiro Koizumi would not have become leader of the LDP. Usually, either the candidate from the biggest faction within the LDP becomes the leader or faction leaders negotiate to decide upon the leader. But Koizumi lacked an organized Diet support base within his own party. He was not even a member, let alone a head of a faction. LDP members nicknamed him *henjin*, or 'the freak', for his policy preferences, antipathy toward his own party, and his forceful personality.

Koizumi had run unsuccessfully for Presidency of the LDP twice (in 1995 and 1998). Yet in 2001 he won the presidency.

We examine some of the ways in which Koizumi took advantage of changes in television news to win the 2001 presidential election, and why the newspapers and television were so important in this case. Television stations had transformed the style and content of their news programs, the number of softer news programs had grown, and the public increasingly relied on the news as an important source of political information. Koizumi took advantage of these changes by adopting a strategy of political populism to increase his exposure in the media and develop a public reputation. He provided the softer news outlets with a compelling story of conflict and human interest (Osaka, 2006; Popkin, 2006). Koizumi's relationship with the media was a two-way process: the media were willing to publicize Koizumi and he was adept at manipulating the media.

In this paper we proceed as follows: we first summarize how television news has changed, we then outline previous conceptualizations of the media, and discuss why the media mattered so much in this case. We also outline some of the ways in which the media have changed and how Koizumi exploited these changes. We use data from the Japan Election Study II (JES II) to show that the effects of Koizumi's media-driven popularity and style of politics reversed the LDP's electoral fortunes in the Upper House Election in 2001.

Changing media

NHK once dominated television political reporting, providing news that was 'dry, scrupulously non-interpretive, and visually staid' (Krauss, 2000, 2002: 7). By the mid-1980s, however, the number of news programs on other stations had increased and their format was dramatically different to NHK news. In 1985, 'News Station' (TV Asahi, 1985–2004), anchored by Hiroshi Kume, a former quiz and pop music show host, became the most popular news program (see Taniguchi, 2004). This program broke with news conventions; in contrast to the NHK anchors, Kume did not simply review events, he analyzed the news and often added sarcastic or humorous comments.

Other stations introduced their own more relaxed-style news programs to compete with 'News Station'. The 'wide shows' (the largely day-time soft news programs) then countered by increasing their political coverage, adding interpretation and analysis to report political events in an accessible way.

Thus television stations broadcast more political news after the 1980s. This increase was due both to mainstream news programs adopting wide show techniques and also to wide shows increasingly reporting on politics. Simultaneously, and probably not coincidentally, the percentage of voters who find television useful in making vote decisions increased (Krauss and Nyblade, 2004). In turn, the public expect politicians, particularly party leaders, to appear on television, and politicians do so to accrue expected electoral benefit (see Taniguchi, 2004). These changes have led to one crucial political development: it is no longer enough to be an intra-party operative: party

leaders have to be telegenic, to have the ability to get their message across in a powerful way (*hasshinryoku*).

Koizumi's media strategy

The more relaxed format of the wide shows were an ideal stage for Koizumi, since, fairly unusually among Japanese politicians, he can communicate in a dramatic and entertaining manner. Although personalized media-oriented politics pre-date Koizumi, he represents a quantum leap in this long-term trend (see Figure 2),[1] and the strategies he used to become leader are dramatically different from previous political practice.

To be popular among the rank-and-file, Koizumi needed to distance himself from his own unpopular party. Party members were dismayed by the prospect of another unpopular president leading the party to defeat in the upcoming election. Koizumi presented himself as a beleaguered champion of change and reform, fighting the 'old guard' of his own party. Old-style politicians, those who were resistant to Koizumi's proposed neoliberal economic reforms and who tended to rely on distributing largesse, were demonized as the 'forces of resistance'. He portrayed himself as engaged in a 'civil war' with the anti-reformists (Osaka, 2006).[2] The mass media, particularly the wide shows, consider war and conflict to be commodities that interest the viewer (or consumer), as measured by ratings (or sales) (Osaka, 2006). News programs eagerly reported on this drama, which in turn mobilized popular support for Koizumi. Crucially, as we discuss later, Koizumi portrayed this conflict in an accessible way. He provided the media with a ready-made image – the underdog battling entrenched interests – for people who prefer a personal connection and human interest in politics.[3]

In stressing national-level reform, Koizumi moved Japan from a focus on constituency-level politics, in which representatives relied on providing 'pork' for their constituents, toward centrally driven leader-led politics.

The media and politics

Not enough research exists on media effects in Japan.[4] Some commentators expressed concern over the media being the 'fourth estate' (*daiyon no kenryoku*, or 'fourth authority'). But until recently, with a few notable exceptions (Feldman,

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[1] Previous work demonstrates that the importance of the prime minister has been increasing for two decades and at the same time citizens are increasingly reliant on the mass media for political information (Krauss and Nyblade, 2004).

[2] Although Osaka is describing the 2005 election, the same could be said of the 2001 selection process.

[3] Popkin (2006) describes how US news was tailored for people who prefer these kinds of personal connections.

[4] De Vos states that, 'The interaction between mass media and protest movements and subsequent political or legal responses is a topic that needs further consideration.' In a commentary on the volume's articles, Ellis Krauss adds, 'one weak point . . . in . . . almost every . . . study of protest in post-war Japan – the lack of attention to the role of the mass media . . .. The media are the crucial "silent partner" . . . transmit[ting] the facts that a "problem" exists . . . Much more could be done' (de Vos, 1984, 4: 172).

2002; Hoshi and Osaka, 2006; Pharr and Krauss, 1996), most scholars considered the importance of the mass media in Japanese politics to be negligible, so little systematic measurement and explanation of media effects exists. We add to the small, but growing body of research that considers that the mass media influence the style and content of politics (Hoshi and Osaka, 2006; Ikeda, 2004; Osaka, 2006; Takenaka, 2003, 2003: 206–218; Taniguchi, 2004; Yamada, 2004).

Those scholars who do focus primarily on the media, debate whether or not the media are neutral. Some argue that the institutionalized system of reporting fosters dependence among reporters on official sources and promotes self-censorship. Van Wolferen, for example, strongly argues that newspapers uniformly disseminate pro-state information (Wolferen, 1989: 93–100). Critics frequently argue that the system of Press/Reporters' Clubs, in which reporters are assigned to specific 'beats' that allow them to develop close, institutionalized relationships with their sources, contribute to bias in their reportage. These criticisms not only underestimate the changes that have occurred in the television news programming, but also underestimate the critical faculties of journalists. Krauss, for example, argues that until the mid-1980s the newspapers were not consistently supportive of the state, much less so, in fact, than was television (Krauss, 1996). And, as we discussed earlier, television news programs now include a plethora of hard and soft news programs. Critics also ignore the different ideologies of the newspapers and the existence of a substantial non-press club newspaper section.[5] In contrast, other studies present the media as a force for change: as early as the 1970s, most elites in Japan believed that the media were the most influential group (Kabashima and Broadbent, 1981). Although this survey documents elites' perceptions of which groups are influential, rather than influence itself, many other studies demonstrate how the media publicize non-mainstream social movements and in doing so have contributed to change.[6]

Various authors in the Pharr and Krauss volume *Media and Politics in Japan* (1996) demonstrate that the media have both supported and criticized the state, that is, they are neither consistently a watchdog nor a government lapdog.[7] Pharr argues that the media combine criticism with support, synthesizing seemingly contradictory elements and acting as a 'trickster' (Pharr, 1996: 35).[8] Freeman argues that the watchdog, servant or

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[5] Content analysis confirms what is blindingly obvious to laypeople: of the large circulation dailies, the *Asahi* is the most critical of the government, followed by the *Mainichi*, the *Yomiuri*, the *Nihon Keizai*, and the *Sankei*. The latter two are usually supportive of the government (see Feldman, 1993: 28–29). In addition, sports newspapers are tabloid-style mass circulation papers that constitute more than 10% of all newspapers (NSK, 2002), and are not part of the institutionalized system of politician–journalist relationships.

[6] See for example, Kabashima and Broadbent (1986); Groth (1996); and Reich (1984). Other prominent cases include the agitation by some television journalists for a non-LDP government in 1993.

[7] Until the mid-1980s television was much more consistently supportive of the state than were the newspapers (Krauss, 1996).

[8] This ambiguity is reflected in the attitudes of some journalists: on the one hand, journalists believe that they should confront the regime, and see journalism as affecting the function of government (see

spectator metaphors do not fully describe the media. Instead, they are a 'co-conspirators' with the state, benefiting from close ties with official news sources (Freeman, 2000: 21).

Krauss, on the other hand, argues that the media's criticism of the state has helped maintain LDP dominance: criticism ensures that the LDP responds to changing public opinion, as expressed through the media, even if the response is sometimes belated (1996: 360). The media legitimize LDP dominance, because they give prominence to subordinate social and political groups, informing and mobilizing public opinion within the established conservative framework. The government is then forced to respond to the demands of the public, for fear of being punished electorally. The resulting policy output then contributes to public satisfaction. As we discuss later, the media were explicit in stating that the public were dissatisfied with the LDP and that the LDP needed to listen to the rank-and-file (and select Koizumi).

The media are not a single entity, but having said that, newspapers and commercial television stations are businesses, motivated by economic concerns. As Hamilton (2004) demonstrates in his analysis of US news, news content is a commodity, driven by the interests of viewers and readers, and the value of those consumers to advertisers. Product differentiation means that the news content depends not only on the audience, but also on what other news outlets are producing. Hoshi and Osaka (2006) argue wide show producers consider the economic value of stories in their decision making. They suggest that the wide shows are responsible for Koizumi's popularity (Hoshi and Osaka, 2006).

Koizumi seems to understand that the media are composed of competing businesses. He provided a dramatic story of intra-party conflict that the media would be more likely to report. The story appealed to the public and almost all newspapers and news programs were eager to cover the same story in the same way. In this case, 'pack journalism', in which all publishers and producers ensure that they are covering the same stories as everyone else, prevailed. The tendency toward pack journalism – or *toku ochi kyofusho* [the phobia of missing out on pack-covered stories] is strong, and some researchers criticize the tendency and condemn the similarity of reporting it produces (see Feldman, 1993: 28). The thematic similarity between the newspapers is tempered by their different ideological positions, but in this case newspapers and wide shows reported the compelling story of conflict within the LDP and the public's desire for change.

Why did the media matter so much?

Long-term trends

Economic growth and the concomitant increasing levels of affluence, higher levels of education, greater geographic mobility, and urbanization have transformed Japan. Images of a village postmaster successfully 'gathering' votes from the whole village for

Kim, 1981); while, on the other hand, newspapers are ostensibly committed to the policy of *fuhen futo, churitsu koisei* (impartiality, political neutrality, and fairness) (Feldman, 1993: 16–18).

the LDP do not aptly describe contemporary Japan. Even residents in the remotest village can access information from various sources, are connected by communication and transportation networks, and enjoy more open lifestyles, drastically reducing the importance of the political recommendations and information from local notables. Flanagan suggests that the rise of the mass media has directly undermined patron-client models of politics and brought Japan closer to the democratic ideal (1996: 281).

Short-term system change

To these long-term fundamental changes, the electoral system introduced in January 1994 increased the importance of citizens' evaluations of party leaders in the vote choice.[9] The new 'side-by-side' system encourages voters and parties to focus more on parties, and less on individual candidates.[10] Proponents of electoral reform argued that in the single member district (SMD) portion of the system, candidates would run for election in larger constituencies and no longer compete against members of their own party; they would neither need, nor be able to rely only on a personal vote. In the proportional representation (PR) portion, the country is divided into 11 regional blocs, so the size of each bloc necessitates an electoral base beyond the *koenkai* (candidates' personal support networks). In addition, voters can opt to vote for a party, which again may focus voters' attention on party and national- rather than local-level politics. We expect that as voters become used to the system, they will focus less on individual politicians and more on parties and party leadership.[11]

Elections under this system demonstrate the increasing importance of citizens' evaluations of party leaders; voters' antipathy toward former Prime Minister Mori Yoshiro clearly affected the way they voted and the subsequent result for Koizumi (Kabashima and Imai, 2001).

The party system

The party system itself further heightens media impact. Opposition parties typically have had very little prospect of forming governments, so their criticism of government policies, pursuit of scandal and so forth was largely unsuccessful – 'their sniping seemed fruitless and ineffective', as Krauss succinctly puts it (Krauss, 1996: 360). In this situation, media criticism of the government became important. Some analysts and politicians see the media as firmly anti-establishment, and believe that

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[9] The electoral system that has been described in detail elsewhere (see, for example, Christensen, 1994).

[10] The new system combines 300 single member first-past-the-post single-member districts (SMD) with 200 (later reduced to 180) proportional representation (PR) seats from 11 regional blocks. The system also provides unsuccessful candidates with a much-criticized 'second chance': candidates who fail to be elected in their SMD race can be transferred to their party's PR listing (the so-called 'zombie' or 'resurrected' winners).

[11] In contrast, McKean and Scheiner (2000) argue that the technicalities of the system will transform the PR representatives into locally based politicians who will rely on the personal vote, rather than on party- or policy-based politics.

they persistently criticize the government. As Krauss points out, the media act as a 'watchdog' in other democracies, but where one party dominates the political system, this is more important (Krauss, 1996: 360). In this case, some of the newspapers criticized 'bad government' and constantly reminded the public that reform was necessary, that selecting a pro-establishment leader would not bring about reform, and that Koizumi, on the other hand, was a reformist.

Selection rules

Koizumi took advantage of changes in the selection rules for the LDP president, which increased the voting power of the prefectural chapters of the party. Accordingly, he appealed directly to the rank and file members, thus increasing the importance of publicity.

In the past, the LDP had used some variation of a backroom decision by the leadership, a contested Diet Caucus election, or a primary to select their president. The process is often just an exercise in public relations, since the Diet members have more votes than do the prefectural chapters and assuming that faction members vote according to direction of factions leaders, the leader of the biggest faction is then able to select the leader, often after inter-factional consultation.[12] The LDP changes the rules instrumentally since the party executives (*shikkoubu*) choose which rules to follow. Both prefectural chapters and newspaper editorials pressured the LDP to reform itself because of losses. In 1998, the leaders bowed to this pressure and changed the rules so that both Diet members and party representatives from the 47 prefectures voted, but Diet members still had most votes, so the faction leaders could control the process.

In 2001, the prefectural chapters, responding to the public's antipathy toward Mori,[13] and anticipating a loss in the coming election, demanded and won more say in the procedure.[14]

Although Diet members still had more votes than did the prefectural chapters, Diet members would now know the prefectural results when they voted. That means a Diet member's vote choice could be swayed if a candidate won the prefectures, instead of faction leaders completely controlling the process. The primary electorate includes groups like the Nurses Association, for all of whom dues are paid by their association, in addition to local activists, heightening the importance of being able to appeal to the general public.

Newspapers pressured the LDP to be more open and accessible, such as the explicit caution from the *Asahi* at the beginning of the 2001 campaign period:

Diet members should vote in line with the primary elections. A leader who lacks popular support cannot exercise full leadership, let alone prevail in the July

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[12]   Stephen Reed argues that the primaries were really just extensions of factional voting.
[13]   The executives who selected Mori opposed the primaries.
[14]   Three hundred and forty six votes were assigned to LDP members of the Diet and 141 votes were assigned to the prefectural chapters (three votes per prefecture).

election . . . The public will be watching closely to see how the LDP picks its leader. Approval ratings for the LDP have already fallen below the 30% level. To continue the conduct of politics with the same inward-looking mindset that prevailed when the LDP ran everything alone is a recipe for self-destruction (Asahi News Service, 11 April 2001).

The party executives subsequently changed the rules so that Diet members would not know the prefectural results when they voted in 2006. This meant that Diet members could vote according to factional allegiance not prefectural preferences, and avoid criticism from the media.

The LDP presidential race, 2001

Koizumi bypassed the party network and communicated directly with the public through the media. He earned coverage by crafting an unconventional, yet politically plausible personality. In 1995, the newspapers framed him as a sacrificial candidate, running only so that the shoo-in winner would have someone to run against. In 1998, they framed him as a neoliberal 'lone wolf' trying to win over his colleagues.

Koizumi and Hashimoto Ryutaro were the two main contenders for leader. Initially, Hashimoto seemed likely to win because he was head of the party's biggest faction and had organizational clout with the rank-and-file members. But the press began to portray Koizumi in favorable terms. The newspapers, for example, often referred to Koizumi as the 'Reformer Koizumi', an advantageous label when the same newspapers implicitly considered reform a necessity, with little debate over the appropriate kind of reform. Zaller describes such representations as 'frames of reference' – news stereotypes – that the media present to the public with no alternative visions of the issues (Zaller, 1992: 9). The necessity for reform became virtually a consensus issue: to be popular, politicians had to be reformist. By connecting Koizumi to these aspects of national life, the media *primed* citizens of the necessity for a reform-minded leader.[15] Koizumi argued for a new approach to intransigent political and economic problems that only a 'reformist' could handle. The press agreed, portraying him as someone who could bridge the gap between the public and the LDP and re-invigorate its popular support.

The media also buttressed Koizumi's strategy in the ways that they chose to describe the other contenders. Hashimoto also advocated reform, but some of the newspapers continually reminded their readership of his disastrous previous tenure. Newspapers could equally – and accurately – have described Hashimoto as a former prime minister who achieved a number of significant reforms during his tenure, and who was brave enough to lose office after introducing a necessary – but unpopular – tax. But this was not the story the media chose, instead they framed Koizumi as the more interesting story and portrayed his proposals and eccentricities in a favorable way for the first time. Newspaper coverage of Koizumi emphasized that he 'stood apart from other

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[15]   We expect broad similarities between the Japanese and US public, in the way elite cues are internalized.

candidates by pressing for immediate fiscal and administrative reforms' (Maejima, 19 April 2001).

In the debates between the contenders for LDP president, Koizumi's soundbite descriptions of his proposals such as 'reliance on government spending is tantamount to addiction to drugs' earned widespread coverage in newspapers. Koizumi's pithy presentation claimed his proposals were the only solution to the country's woes, regardless of the pain they would cause the populace, or the LDP. Of the candidates, Koizumi was the most fired up by the party's plummeting popularity and was the most outspoken in calling for change in the party: his sense of crisis resonated with party members.

In sum, Japanese media framed what should have been an open-and-shut Hashimoto victory as a newsworthy 'horse race'; an exciting event, with a clear frontrunner, two ideologically indistinguishable also-rans, and an outsider with ideas. The Jiji Press service gave a strong boost to Koizumi right at the beginning of the campaign in setting the agenda that described Koizumi as a winner before there was any clear evidence that this was the case. Jiji reported the results of its survey of secretaries-general and other senior officials of the LDP's 47 prefectural chapters on 12 April under the headline 'Koizumi in slight lead among LDP local chapters'. In fact, as the report stated, only eight chapters preferred Koizumi, and six Hashimoto, whereas a majority – 28 prefectures – did not respond to the survey.

Not only did the newspapers report on Koizumi in a positive light, they also reported on him slightly more often than they did on the other contenders. We use data mainly from the Asahi group; this group includes the *Asahi Shinbun*, Japan's second largest-circulation newspaper, the *Asahi Shukan*, and *Aera*, two news magazines, but as we discussed earlier, most newspapers and news programs chose to discuss the race in similar terms. From the beginning of April to the day before the Diet members' vote, Koizumi averaged over ten mentions a day in the Asahi Group newspapers and newsmagazines, whereas Hashimoto averaged nine. We would expect the official posts held by the other two at that time to inflate their average mentions in the news, but Kamei, Chair of the LDP Policy Research Council averaged eight, and Aso, then State Minister for Economic Policy, averaged six (see Figure 1).

To become popular, Koizumi presented a difference between himself and his opponents.[16] Local party members believed that 'politics as usual' was discredited and no party insider could win. Koizumi earned favorable coverage at a time when the LDP's survival was threatened. He succeeded in positioning himself in the media as the solution to the LDP's declining popularity. To do so, he portrayed himself as anti-powerful, anti-wealth, and anti-selfish elites. For his rhetoric to be plausible, he needed to seem to be powerless, ordinary, and virtuous.[17]

[16] Bernard Manin argues that in contemporary 'audience democracies' it is crucial for leaders to do this (Manin, 1997).
[17] Otake (2003) describes Koizumi in these terms, claiming that they are elements of Koizumi's populism.
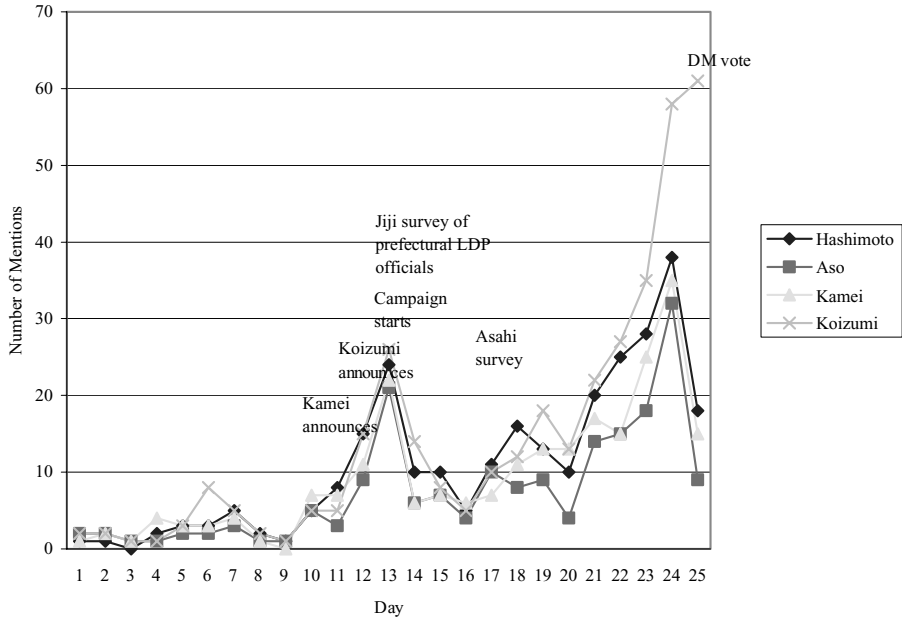
Figure 1 Number of Times Asahi Group Articles Mention the LDP Presidential Candidates, April 2001
Source: *Kikuzo* data base.

Koizumi's personalization of politics fits well with Weyland's (1999; Weyland, 2001) definition of 'populism' in Latin America and Eastern Europe (Yamada, 2004). Weyland defines *political* populism as a strategy by which personal leaders appeal to a heterogeneous mass of followers who feel left out; leaders reach followers in a direct, quasi-personal manner that bypasses established intermediary organizations (particularly via television); and use parties as 'personal vehicles' (Weyland, 1999: 381–382). Furthermore, in contrast to established notions of economic populism that embrace excessive government spending, Weyland argues that political populism and neoliberalism are compatible in that they both have anti-status quo orientations: some interest groups have considerable political influence, and populist-neoliberalism condemns such groups, that include established politicians and government bureaucrats as serving 'special interests'. Such denunciations of group egotism provide a powerful ideological justification for neoliberal reforms that 'initially have fairly obvious losers, but unclear, uncertain winners' (1999: 382).

Koizumi ably combines populism and neoliberalism, an ideological combination that makes painful measures politically viable. Koizumi's proposed reforms stem from his opposition to what he perceives as big government – inefficiency and waste became important targets for the proponents of reform and eliminating them became important components of populism. Furthermore, as Otake (2003) describes, Koizumi
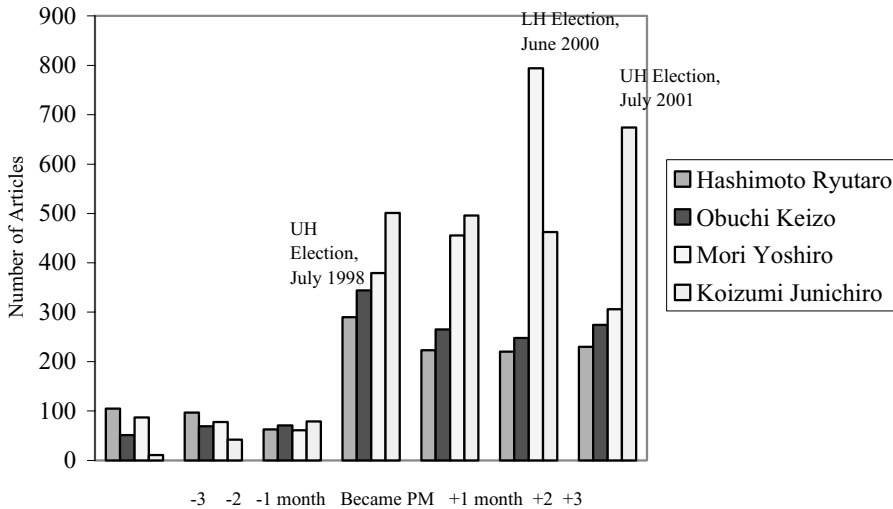
Figure 2 Koizumi's Media Honeymoon: Number of Ashi Articles on Koizumi and his Predecessors
Source: *Kikuzo* data base.

used television to appeal directly to people, but Koizumi's television appearances are less professionalized and less calculated than classic populists such as Reagan. Koizumi deliberately uses fresh, ordinary language, in contrast with the language usually favored by politicians and bureaucrats (see Otake, 2003: 110–131). In addition, as Yamada points out, some sectors of the electorate may not know the details of Koizumi's neoliberal reform policies, but they can use their own anti-status quo sentiments as voting cues (2004: 4).

Koizumi, as the outside candidate, scored a landslide victory in the local primaries, coming out with about 90% of the electoral votes assigned to the prefectures. It was difficult for party leaders to reject the rank-and-file position, particularly in the light of the overt media pressure on the LDP to listen to prefectural demands. Despite the fact that the public could not participate, the sheer amount of media coverage of the race ensured that the race was held under public scrutiny. The newspapers, in particular, framed the election as a way for the LDP to regain the trust of the public, by being open and free from factional control, putting pressure on the Diet members not to go against the choice of the prefectures. Koizumi gained support, as Aso Taro commented after losing, 'because he was the antithesis of the traditional LDP politician' (*The Japan Times*, 25 April 2001). Koizumi gained momentum from taking the prefectures: the Diet members, left to their own factional allegiances, might have chosen Hashimoto. But the Diet members knew the overall trend of the prefectural results and many of them were then forced to go with the choice of the prefectures. Koizumi was formally confirmed prime minister two days after winning the Presidency of the LDP on 24 April 2001.

Some commentators criticized the media coverage of Koizumi as excessive, complaining that it helped increase both his, and the LDP's popularity. The public could not vote in the primaries, but the candidates were able to convey their messages to the prefectural party representatives and the Diet members from the streets during a 12-day campaign period through the ever-present media. According to Nomura, the candidates appeared on more than 20 talk shows (*The Washington Times*, 27 July 2001). Nomura quotes Kawada Etsuko, an independent Lower House DM as saying, 'I was startled to see the massive coverage of the LDP race, in which the public couldn't participate. That coverage was an anomaly. It seems that television programs [during the LDP race in April] were created to make Mr Koizumi a leader.'

At the end of the LDP election, Representative Eita Yashiro, from the LDP's Public Relations Department, expressed his gratitude on national television for the media coverage of the LDP's presidential election.

Koizumi's strategy paid off in terms of the media coverage he earned. A comparison of newspaper articles demonstrates the extent of Koizumi's media 'honeymoon'. A straightforward comparison of the press coverage of Koizumi with his three predecessors in the three months before and after they became prime minister shows that Koizumi fared worse than the three others until he became prime minister. But in the month of the primaries, and the three subsequent months, the aggregate volume of information in the media exceeded that of his predecessors (see Figure 2), with the exception of the month in which Lower House Elections were held.

Media portrayals of Koizumi as prime minister

Koizumi had to cement his position as leader, and the first major challenge he faced was a mere three months after his selection as prime minister – 29 July Upper House Election. Prior to Koizumi taking the helm of the LDP, the LDP's electoral strength had plunged in Upper House elections during the previous decade, taking a particularly bad pummeling in the 1989 Upper House Election (following the introduction of the unpopular Consumption Tax), to the point where the party could only garner 45–46 seats.

Japan, in common with a number of Western societies, has no socioeconomic or cultural cleavage that is more important and stable than others. Under these circumstances, leaders may be able to mobilize the electorate around a number of different policy issues (Manin, 1997). Politicians have to decide which of the issues will be more effective and advantageous to them. Koizumi chose a seemingly unorthodox issue; namely, that Japan should carry out the necessary structural reforms even if this caused negative economic growth in the short run – the public would have to suffer 'pain' for 'gain'. But at the same time, he stressed that the LDP, and the LDP's support base, would not be spared: he was widely quoted as advocating 'reforms sparing no sacred cow' (*seiiki naki kozo kaikaku*). This was a stunning pledge from the leader of a party that suckled on the udders of sacred cows before riding them to market.
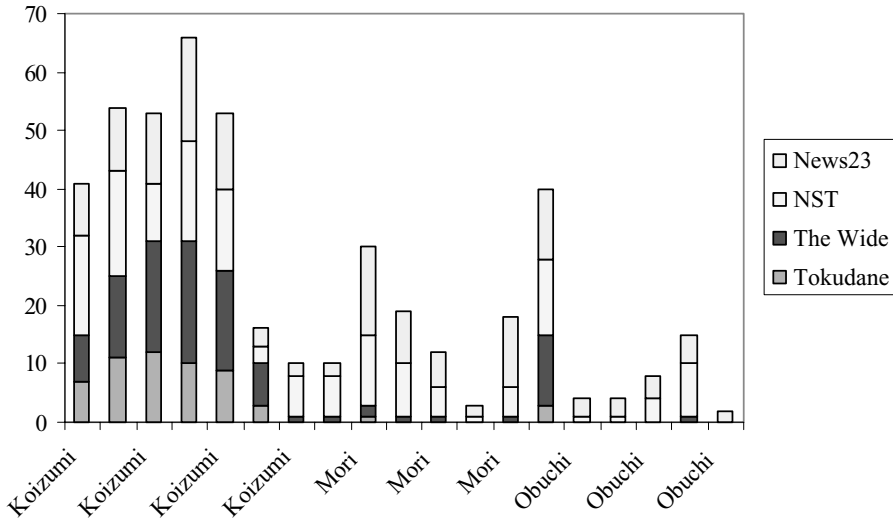
Figure 3 The Television Honeymoons of Koizumi, Mori and Obuchi (First Six Months of Administration)
Source: Kabashima Zemi.

In 2001 alone, the Asahi newsgroup reported Koizumi's catch phrase 422 times, and selected it as one of the year's top phrases (see Figure 4).[18] Again, this was a case of mutual manipulation: Koizumi repeatedly used the phrase in the campaign, but the newspapers chose to go along with, and repeat this phrase, rather than report on other aspects of the campaign.

Stringent restrictions severely limit candidates' paid access to advertising on television and in newspapers.[19] One way around these laws is for candidates and politicians to appear on chat shows, particularly the wide-shows. From the beginning of his tenure as prime minister, Koizumi repeatedly appeared on television (see Figure 3), and at one stage his cabinet was dubbed the 'Wide-show Cabinet.' Through the media, Koizumi continued to present his policies and relationship with the LDP in sometimes astonishing, but highly popularizing ways. Feldman (2002) details the ways in which Koizumi as a performer appealed to the public: he introduced daily press briefings in May 2001 and he is an accomplished speaker, using humor and a direct, personal speaking style to bridge the gap between himself and his audience.

In the run up to the 29 July Upper House Election, Koizumi continued to barrage viewers with appearances on soft news programs. On 8 July 2001, combining entertainment with easily digestible policy intent, Koizumi appeared on *Hodo 2001* (Fuji TV), where he talked about music and tore up a piece of paper that had *Teikou Seiryoku*

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[18] *Kikuzo* database.
[19] These restrictions led commentators to conclude that the media in Japan had minimal impact on election campaigning (Curtis, 1988: 167).
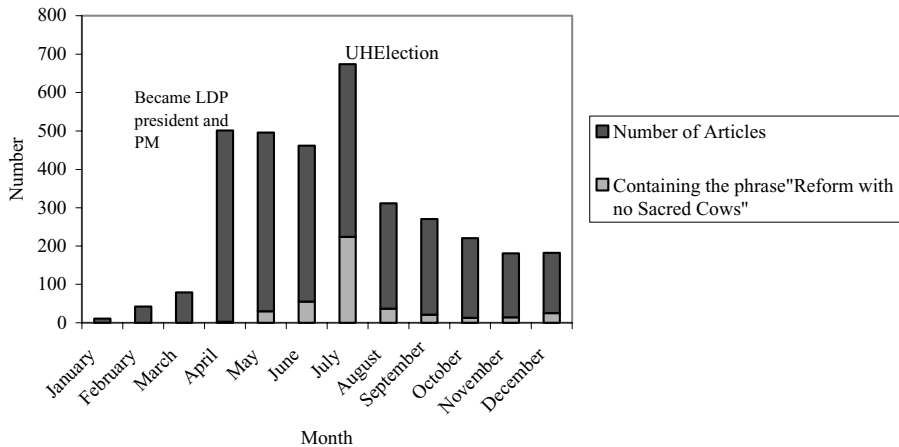
Figure 4 Number of Asahi Articles on Koizumi Junichiro, 2001
Source: *Kikuzo* data base.

[the resistance of vested interests] written on it: an astonishing act for the leader of a party whose support base is those very same vested interests.[20] But again, another example of Koizumi defining – and dramatizing – a policy issue that conveniently pitted himself against his party.

Koizumi broadened his appeal beyond the party faithful by appearing on chat shows, at televised sports ceremonies and giving interviews to sports newspapers (Taniguchi, 2004). Sports newspapers rarely meet with Prime Ministers, so the journalists all wrote positive articles about Koizumi. Ishizawa cites this ability to increase his exposure among sports fans as one example of Koizumi's mastery of media strategy; that is, the ability to reach beyond the readership of articles on politics in the mainstream press (Ishizawa, 2002; quoted in Taniguchi, 2004). Koizumi's long-term secretary, Iijima Isao, was willing to bypass the official press club attached to the prime minister's office to court non-press club tabloids and soft-news magazines. Iijima also broke with tradition and began allowing television cameras into the Prime Minister's Official Residence to cover Koizumi's meetings with reporters (*Asahi News Service*, 20 July 2001).

Through the media Koizumi crafted a personality (in contrast to most of his predecessors). He was a character, and the public in turn responded to the media portrayals of this new-style prime minister who loved karaoke, noodles, and had permed hair. He carefully cultivated an 'I don't play by the rules image' that allowed him to take risks to court the soft news media and their audience, risks that previous prime ministers would not have considered. The hard news outlets, too, could easily increase their coverage, given the increased access Koizumi gave. As a result, Koizumi

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[20]   See Taniguchi (2004) for further descriptions of Koizumi's performances on television.

enjoyed a much more extensive television honeymoon in the first six months of his administration than did his predecessors (see Figure 3).

The electoral effects of Koizumi's popularity

The LDP was able to reverse its decline and emerge victorious in the 2001 election, representing a major resurgence for a party whose popularity had plummeted. The prime minister's tremendous popularity and the terms in which he chose to present the divisions within his own party – the reformer vs. the resistance forces – contributed greatly to the LDP's victory at the polls. The results strengthened Koizumi's support base within his own party.[21]

During the recession, successive cabinets proposed stimulus packages or structural reform plans: Koizumi's reform package was nothing new. But the way he presented his policies in dramatic sound bites through the media was new. In his famous forthright manner, Koizumi was able to mobilize popular support for his reforms, and he did not hedge in directly stating that pain would be forthcoming.

We can gauge Koizumi's impact through examining 'fixed-point' observations – repeated responses from the same voters – on their opinions and voting preferences using data from the Japan Election Survey II (JES II), the most comprehensive panel survey data available on contemporary Japanese political attitudes and behavior. This survey is a nine-wave nationwide panel survey that began before the 1993 LH Election. Central Research Services collected the data between 1993 and 1996 for the JES II Research Group.[22] Using a two-stage stratified area probability sampling method, the survey targeted 3,000 eligible voters at the time of the first wave. Of the target sample, 75.2% (2,255 cases) responded to the first wave of the panel survey conducted in July 1993. As with other panel studies, some respondents did not complete all waves of the survey. Of the 2,255 respondents participating in the first wave, 589 respondents completed seven waves of the survey.

Koizumi's popularity influenced the vote choice not only of LDP supporters, but also the supporters of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). In Table 1, we present the breakdown of the vote in the 2001 Upper House Election among three groups of voters: those who voted for the LDP in the 2000 Lower House Election, those who voted for the DPJ on that occasion, and those who abstained from voting. The LDP had a high support-retention rate; more than four-fifths of those who voted for the party in the 2000 Lower House Election did so again the following year in the Upper House Election. By contrast, the DPJ's support-retention rate was a mere 45%, and a full quarter of those

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[21] Of the 121 seats to be filled, the LDP won 65 (including one candidate officially endorsed by the party after the election), winning 41.0% of the votes cast for candidates running in the prefectural districts (up from 30.5% in 1998) and 38.6% of the votes in the nationwide proportional-representation balloting (25.2% in 1998). It was highly significant that the final tally exceeded 61; increasing the size of the LDP's contingent in the House of Councilors was a necessity for Koizumi to firm up his base within the party.

[22] Members of the research group include Ikuo Kabashima, Ichiro Miyake, Joii Watanuki, Yoshiaki Kobayashi, and Kenichi Ikeda. We would like to thank them for allowing us to use this dataset.

Table 1. *Voters' party choice, 2000 Lower House and 2001 Upper House elections*

Party voted for in 2001 (Upper House election)	Party voted for in 2000 (Lower House election, PR Portion)		
	LDP	DPJ	Abstained
LDP	81.8	25.0	22.7
DPJ	4.7	44.9	13.6
Komeito	1.6	4.0	0
JCP	0.5	5.1	0
SDP	0.5	5.1	4.5
Liberal	2.6	6.8	0
Other	2.1	2.8	9.0
Abstained/no answer	6.3	6.2	50.0

Source: JES II.

who voted DJP in 2000 switched to the LDP in 2001. The LDP could have capitalized further on the 'Koizumi Effect' had they fielded more candidates: to avoid splitting their vote in multi-seat constituencies, as they had in the 1998 Upper House Election, the LDP decided in general to field only one candidate (this decision was taken during Mori's unpopular tenure as prime minister). This conservative strategy lost the LDP at least six seats (Kabashima, 2001: 24–25).

In recent years, independent voters have had a major impact on election results. The pie charts in Figure 5 show the percentages of independents who voted for each party in the elections of 2000 and 2001. The LDP's vote share surged from 14% in 2000 to 25% in 2001, while the DPJ's vote fell from 37% to 28%. However, a number of independents who voted DJP in 2000 switched to the LDP in 2001, presumably because they approved of Koizumi.

In earlier research, Kabashima presents a simple model analyzing the vote choice of people who voted for one of the opposition parties, or who abstained in the 2000 Lower House Election but switched to the LDP in the 2001 Upper House Election. The research shows that they did so because their approval of Prime Minister Koizumi was higher than their approval of Mori (the prime minister at the time of the previous election). The model suggests that the probability of voters switching to the LDP depended not just on greater approval for the prime minister, but also on changes in feelings toward the LDP and the DPJ and on voters' ideologies. The big change between the two elections was the influence of voters' sentiments toward the prime minister; it is clear that the shift from opposition votes or abstentions to votes for the LDP was largely due to Koizumi's personal popularity (Kabashima, 2004: 362; see also Ikeda, 2004).
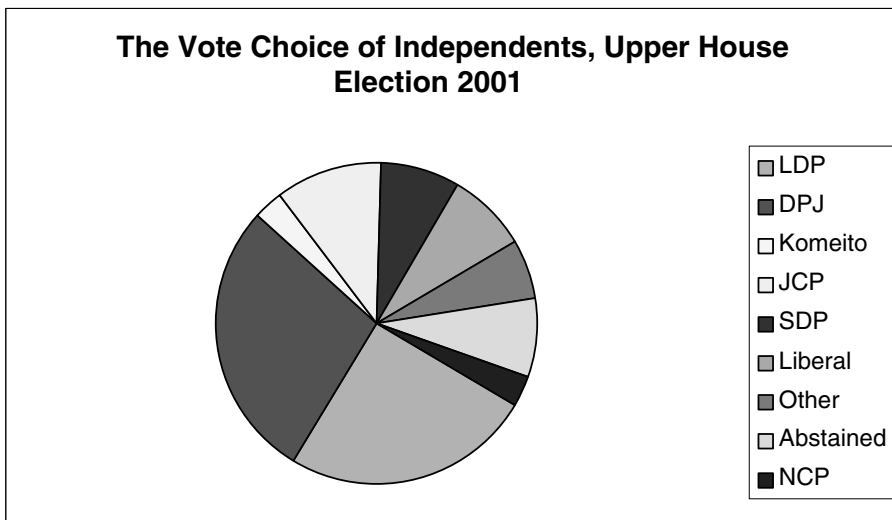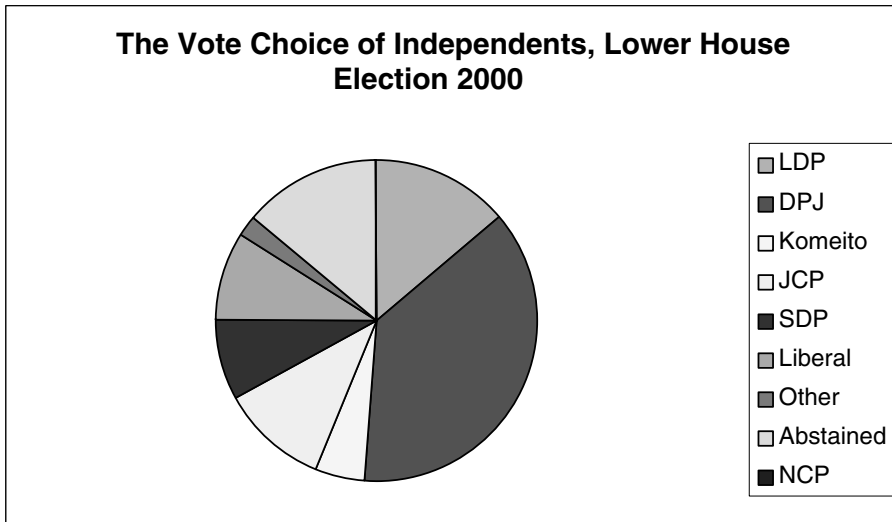
Figure 5 The Vote Choice of Independents in the Lower House Election 2000 and the Upper House Election 2001
Note: Figures are vote shares from the PR portion.
Source: JES II.

Conclusion

In this paper, we sought to explain how Koizumi seized the leadership of the LDP. The media had changed and Koizumi exploited those changes, adopting a populist strategy that would appeal to the softer news outlets. Koizumi increased the access he

allowed the media, diversified his approach, and targeted not just the hard news outlets, but also courted the soft news outlets. He provided the media with a human interest angle on politics: he was an approachable politician, an outsider who was battling against entrenched interests.

Media portrayals of Koizumi mattered so much because Koizumi took advantage of changes in the selection process for the LDP leader, changes that party executives mistakenly thought would be cosmetic. In the 2001 race, popularity with the public was more important than it had previously been because the Dietmembers knew how the prefectural chapters voted before they themselves did, and were then under pressure to go with the choice of the prefectures. Dietmembers who know the prefectural primary results are in a very different position than when they do not know the results. But this is only important when there is a candidate who can appeal to the prefectures and is not the choice of the faction leaders.

The media criticized the LDP, encouraging it to transform itself and its decreasingly popular politics, but they were positive about Koizumi. Voters could then choose the LDP, rather than the opposition, assured that new policies were at hand, thus helping to maintain the overall status quo (LDP dominance). The media were neither a lapdog, which implies full support, nor a watchdog, since they had the effect of warding off, rather than building up the opposition, but instead provided the LDP with 'supportive criticism'.

Our findings indicate that approval of Koizumi influenced voting behavior, directly contributing to the LDP's electoral success: the prime minister did matter. It is unlikely that successful future party leaders will be selected without considering their media skills and their popularity among the public, since the 'Koizumi effect' worked on crucial subgroups of voters – the increasingly important independent sector, and also on supporters of the opposition.

Koizumi, however, had to rely on public support for political capital. Relying solely on a critical public is a risky proposition for a leader, especially for leaders who lack the usual sources of factional intra-party support. Policy platforms proposed by leaders will not necessarily mobilize the public or guarantee long-term support. Koizumi was fortunate in selecting and dramatizing policy issues to which the public responded.

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Data base

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