

***The Electoral Power of Japanese  
Interest Groups:  
An Organizational Perspective***

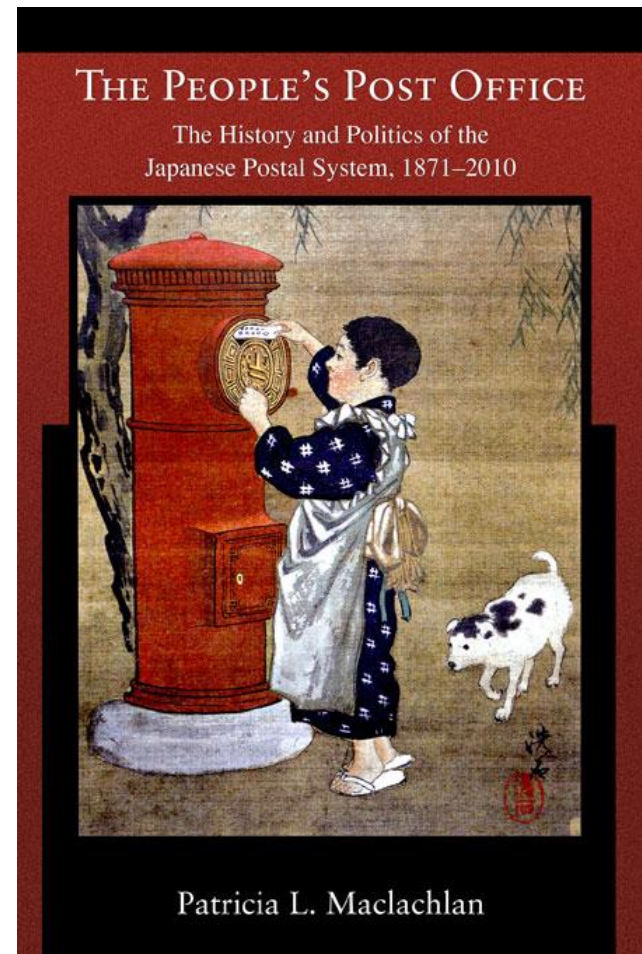
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# Impetus Behind Project

- Past research on postmasters associations
- Growing skepticism about electoral theories. . . .



# 2013 Upper House Election

- Small but significant upsurge in vote yields of interest groups representing non-competitive sectors of the economy
  - Of LDP's 18 "individual candidates" who were elected in PR tier, top, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> place finishers were official representatives of large, organized interests.
  - Two of those groups actually mobilized *more* votes than in 2010 . . . .

# 2013 Vote Yields, Upper House PR District

	POSTMASTERS			FARMERS		
<i>Year</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Yield</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Yield</i>	<i>Rank</i>
<b>2001</b>	LDP	478,985	2/20	LDP	166,070	13/20
<b>2004</b>	LDP	282,919	3/14	LDP	118,540	Lost
<b>2007</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	LDP	449,183	2/14
<b>2010</b>	PNP	406,587	Lost (1/7)	LDP	80,381	Lost
<b>2013</b>	LDP	429,002	1/18	LDP	338,485	2/18

Source: ザ選挙

# Puzzle

- From mid-1990s, scholars cautiously predicted gradual decline in electoral power of organized vote in wake of electoral reforms
  - These predictions partially fulfilled. . . .
- BUT: after years of decline, many interest groups are demonstrating significant electoral “staying power”. WHY?

# Argument

- 1. Electoral Incentives
  - Continue to shape party *demand* for the organized vote (short campaign periods/ SMD system/ malapportionment/ winner-takes-all SMD system/ PR/ dual candidacies, etc.)
  - But electoral theories can't explain: 1) why most influential "vote mobilizers" are *economically non-competitive interest groups*; and 2) why the vote yields of such groups can fluctuate under constant electoral rules
- 2. **Interest Group *Organization***
  - Several of Japan's large, economically non-competitive groups remain organizationally positioned to carry out a number of vote-gathering functions that the parties are still not fully equipped to effectively carry out themselves
    - Source of organization: historical ties to bureaucracy

# Significance of Study

- 1. Focus on the dynamics of organizational complementarities btw economically non-competitive groups and the parties
- 2. Highlight some of the shortcomings of electoral explanations of the electoral resilience of non-competitive groups
  - I see complementarities between electoral and organizational explanations

# Significance of Study

- 3. Highlight implications of interest group-bureaucracy relationship not only for patterns of interest representation and policymaking, but also for *elections*
- 4. Contribute to growing comparative politics literature on significance of interest group organization
  - e.g., Hacker and Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics* (2010)



# Plan of Paper

- 1. History: organizational legacy of prewar corporatist interest group formation and implications for elections under LDP dominance
  - Cases: postmasters, farmers
- 2. Sources of groups' relative decline from 1990s
- 3. Fluctuations in group power under conditions of 2-party competition
- 4. Interest groups in wake of LDP's return to power in 2012

# Pre-1945 Corporatist Relationships btw Bureaucracy and Interest Groups

- Prewar groups contracted to carry out gov't functions developed multi-tiered, hierarchical organizations stretching from national level to grassroots of society
  - Mirrored bureaucratic structures
  - Mechanisms for prewar bureaucratic interference into affairs of groups
  - After WWII: bureaucratic control declines but organizational structures remain

# Under LDP Dominance:

- **Postmasters' and coops' electoral functions**
  - 1) *Mobilizational*: vote gathering, recruiting party members (党員集め) and kōenkai members (後援会会員集め)
  - 2) *Coordinating* vote-gathering across constituency boundaries
  - 3) *Self-monitoring*



# Interest Groups in Decline: 1990s-2005

- 1. Electoral reform and weakening party demand for organized vote
- 2. Deterioration of quality of interest group organization
  - Demographic trends
  - Internal conflicts of economic interest (e.g., full- vs. part-time farmers); aggravated by political-economic reforms
  - Weakening linkages with bureaucracy
- 3. Koizumi's 2005 attack



# Interest Groups in Decline

- Koizumi's marginalization of interest groups in 2005 proved temporary
  - Failed to eliminate electoral incentives that shaped party demand for the organized vote
  - Did nothing to weaken organizational structures of interest groups that are at the heart of their electoral clout
- What Koizumi *did* do was. . .
  - 1. Exacerbate partisan divisions among rank-and-file members (e.g., coops)
  - 2. Weaken group loyalties toward the LDP, which helped set the stage for. . . .

# Inter-Party Competition for the Support of Interest Groups

- Even while LDP still in power, more and more groups begin diversifying their partisan contacts (2007 JIGS survey)
- From 2007: parties engage in “policy one-upmanship” for support of organized vote.

# Inter-Party Competition for the Support of Interest Groups

Noda courts Zentoku

And then so does Ishiba!



# 2013: Back to the Status Quo Ante?

- UH election: LDP woos organized vote back into its electoral orbit with promises of particularistic favors
  - But the party's old exchange relationships have changed:
    - Groups far less loyal to the LDP, willing to play parties off against one another



# What's in the Future?

- Interest groups' electoral future is uncertain:
  - Demography + Reform: int grps will shrink and become internally more diverse. Group capacity to perform key electoral functions will weaken
- But for now, groups still provide an important electoral service to weakly organized parties.

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Arrow/TPP



# Future Research

- Applicability to other groups?
- Implications for median voter theories
- Comparative dimension
  - Do corporatist relationships between bureaucracies and interest groups give rise to organizational advantages in elections in other countries? Labor unions in Brazil?