Party Control and its Effects on Factions, Media and Citizens: The Case of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party under the Second Abe Administration

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Abstract

Successive reforms since the 1990s have moved Japan's government and its ruling Liberal Democratic Party towards more centralised, top-down organisational structures. The continuation of these reforms under the second Abe Administration (2012-2020) came alongside claims of a rightward turn and increasing polarisation in Japan's political system, and rising antagonism between the LDP and the media which led to claims that the administration was threatening press freedom. The administration proved highly stable, bucking the trend of short-lived prime ministers in prior years and reopening discussion on the "Westminsterisation", or even "presidentialisation", of Japan's system of governance.

This thesis proposes that party polarisation and media antagonism both reflect an ongoing process of adaptation to the centralisation of power in the party and in government, with politicians and media actors alike adjusting their positions and behaviours in rational response to new incentive structures. This claim is explored through empirical examination of polarisation and party control in the LDP, diversity in the media, and public perceptions of partisan alignment. The institutional process of centralisation is shown to have been accompanied by a narrowing of the LDP's preference distribution, causing the party to move away from formerly overlapping positions with centrist and centre-left opposition parties and media, both of which are increasingly polarised from the LDP's positions. Empirical text analysis of LDP politicians' Twitter posts shows that while message discipline increased overall under Abe, message diversity reappears at times when the leadership appears weak, showing the individual factors remain important despite institutional reforms. Finally, network analysis of the following of media and political social media accounts confirms that the public now perceives partisan divisions which cut across the political and media spheres, with the mainstream media perceived to be more aligned with the opposition than the LDP.

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Chapter 1

Introduction — Questions and Methods

1.1 The Second Abe Administration

Between the return to power of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in 2012 under the leadership of Abe Shinzō, and his eventual resignation from the leadership in 2020, the party won five national elections — two in the Lower House (2014 and 2017) and three in the Upper House (2013, 2016 and 2019). Such a streak of electoral victories looked far from certain when the LDP won its first election under Abe in 2012. The renewal of the party's grip on power came after a crushing electoral loss in 2009 — the first time since the LDP's founding in 1955 that the party had slipped to second place in an election in terms of Lower House seats — and an unprecedented three-year period in opposition. The 2009 electoral defeat had been preceded by a series of short-term, weak prime ministers — the first brief term of Abe Shinzō (2006-2007) being followed in rapid succession by Fukuda Yasuo (2007-2008) and Asō Tarō (2008-2009). Each of these served for a year or less, and there was little to suggest that the new LDP administration would not return to this kind of "revolving door" Prime Ministerial politics. Moreover, the fact of the opposition Democratic Party

of Japan having defeated the LDP in 2009 (and in the preceding 2007 Upper House election) showed that even if the DPJ was wounded for now, the LDP's electoral dominance was no longer unassailable and a two-party system was at least possible. That the LDP was once again being led by Abe Shinzō also seemed to bode poorly for the administration's future prospects. His earlier tenure as Prime Minister had been ended by his ill health, but had first seen his party lose control of the Upper House, and a "breakdown of the internal structure of administration" that rendered the Prime Minister's office, the *Kantei*, "dysfunctional" (George Mulgan 2017b, p.32). The DPJ administration of the previous three years may have been largely a failure — leading Funabashi (2017, p.166) to conclude that "there have been few political parties so inept at exercising authority while in power as the DPJ" — but the prospects for stable, effective LDP governance did not look especially positive either.

By the time of his resignation in mid-2020 — again due to concerns over his health — Abe Shinzō had defied these low expectations to become Japan's longest-serving Prime Minister, the LDP having even reformed its internal leadership rules to allow him to serve an extra term. The prospects of a rapid turnaround for the defeated opposition in 2012 evaporated quickly as the DPJ was consumed by a series of party mergers and splits which severely limited its electoral efficacy throughout the Abe administration. The hypothesis that Abe's second tenure would be as volatile and short-lived as his first, meanwhile, had been fully disproved. As early as 2014 it was apparent that the LDP under Abe had once again consolidated its grip on power, perhaps to an extent not seen since the mid-1980s (Endo and Pekkanen 2018, p.41), and subsequent election results and opinion polling only confirmed the party's continued dominance.

No single factor can provide a complete or satisfactory accounting for this sequence of events or the LDP's remarkable turnaround. The weakness and fragmentation of the opposition has undoubtedly played an important role, and it may be argued that the perception of political instability resulting from the rise of pop-

ulist forces in other advanced democracies — notably in the USA and the UK, post-2016 — also fuelled a desire for stability and certainty among Japanese voters. However, two key factors may be key to understanding the re-establishment of LDP dominance. The first of these is the concentration and focusing of power and decision-making, both political and bureaucratic, around the Kantei and the Prime Minister's inner circle. This has been described as "the most striking characteristic of the second Abe administration... the Kantei has never been as strong as it is now" (Mikuriya 2015, p.42), with Abe "exerting greater control over the policy-making process than any of his predecessors" (George Mulgan 2017b, p.34). This centralisation of power was a continuation of a process dating back to the electoral reforms of the 1990s and beyond, and saw Abe take up the reins of the so-called "Kantei leadership" (Ōtake 2006; Shimizu 2005) or "prime ministerial dominance" (Takenaka 2006) which had been instituted under the Koizumi Administration and was seen as a major departure for the Japanese system of governance — one which moved the country in the direction of a more Westminster-like system (Estévez-Abe 2006; Machidori 2008), or even a more "presidential" style of politics (Jou and Endo 2015; Krauss and Nyblade 2005; Machidori 2006).

The second factor is the alleged exertion of control over Japan's media by the Abe administration, described by George Mulgan (2017a) as "media-muzzling" and encompassing a range of behaviours including labelling critical reporting as biased or unfair, pressuring media organisations either directly or via their advertisers to comply with the government line, denying access to critical media and overt threats to regulate or even shut down commercial broadcasters (George Mulgan 2017a, pp.17-18; see also Nishida 2015). Just as the process of centralising power and authority within the party was inherited and continued by the second Abe Administration, rather than being invented from whole cloth, the evolution of the party's relationship with the media had also been in motion for some time — factors such as the increasing use of "wide shows" and other non-news programming by politicians, a strategy strongly associated with Koizumi (Taniguchi 2007), the increasing fragmen-

tation of the media and the declining circulation of the major newspapers, and the new possibilities of online communication had all been changing the landscape upon which the relationship between the party and the media was built for many years. Nonetheless, Abe's return to power in 2012 seemed to correspond with a rapid rise in antagonism with the media, leading to Japan's position in the *Reporters sans Frontieres* Press Freedom rankings declining sharply from 2013 onwards.

1.1.1 Counter-narratives and gaps in the evidence

Taken together, the two factors outlined above paint a picture of a leader who enjoyed an unprecedented degree of control and authority over his party and the apparatus of government, and who employed that power to control the narrative presented in the nation's media and suppress critical reporting. While this is a compelling story, it is far from being fully substantiated or universally accepted, and there are some significant unanswered questions and gaps in the evidence supporting this narrative. It is worth acknowledging at the outset that while individual aspects of the Abe Administration's centralisation of authority over spheres such as LDP party institutions and the bureaucracy have been well-detailed, the claim that the sum of these parts amounts to a form of democratic authoritarianism is highly contested and was primarily advanced by the most strident critics of Abe and his government. In subsequent chapters the claims and counter-claims regarding Abe's centralisation of power will be discussed in more depth — those relating to the LDP and its institutions in Chapter 2, and those relating to Japan's media in Chapter 4 — but even in terms of the centralisation of control over the bureaucracy using the new Cabinet Bureau of Personnel Affairs, which Harris (2020, p.214) describes as "an unmistakable step in [Abe's] consolidation of power", Mishima (2017, p.1111) argues that Abe and his cabinet were "actually very reluctant to influence bureaucratic postings using the new selection mechanism", that the LDP overall was "[hesitant] to use augmented power over bureaucratic placements", and that LDP backbenchers in particular found "little merit in the new arrangement". This description of the

cautious, gradual exercise of such seemingly sweeping new powers does not fit well with the narrative of a leadership and a party keen to grasp and consolidate as much institutional authority as possible.

Similar misgivings and contradictions can be found in the literature surrounding intra-party centralisation and media control. George Mulgan (2017b, p.68) notes that despite Abe's drive to strengthen the executive power of the Kantei, in some regards he actually paid more attention to the LDP's policy decision-making systems than his predecessor, Koizumi Junichiro, with the party "[participating] in policymaking as a unit that is separate and independent from the prime ministerial executive... Abe and the Kantei can still not impose policies on the party over its strong opposition". Moreover, the LDP's internal factions — whose decline and even demise had been predicted as a consequence of the 1994 reform of Japan's electoral system (Cox et al. 1999, p.41; Krauss and Pekkanen 2011, p.128), and whose stature and influence was considered to be significantly diminished by the end of Koizumi's tenure in 2005, with Krauss and Pekkanen (2011, p.148) noting "the decline of factional unity, loyalty and influence" — continued not only to exist, but to play an important role in the LDP. The continuing relevance of the factions could be seen when Abe's most persistent rival within the LDP over the course of the administration, Ishiba Shigeru, created his own faction (the *Suigetsukai*) in 2015 with the explicit intention of challenging for the party leadership. Horse trading among factions to secure support for Abe's historic third-term leadership bid in 2018 was also the subject of significant media attention. The factional system of the LDP, though weakened by its reduced institutional role and perhaps restricted by the Abe administration's centralisation of power, remains a site of potential dissent and resistance to the party leadership.

Some of the complexity related to these issues can be understood in the context of the competing "individualist" and "institutionalist" accounts of the legacy of the Koizumi administration which emerged in the late 2000s, and tackled the question of whether Koizumi's administration represented a true turning point for

Japan's governance, having permanently shifted the institutions of the party and the government towards a more top-down model with a powerful prime minister; or whether factors specific to Koizumi's personality and circumstances had made him into a uniquely powerful leader in spite of continuing institutional limits on the authority of the prime minister (Estévez-Abe 2006; Machidori 2008, 2010; Takenaka 2015). The succession of weak, short-lived administrations which followed Koizumi seemed to tip the balance temporarily in favour of the individualist argument; the eight-year duration of the Abe administration and its clearly powerful, top-down structure creates a need to further re-evaluate the progress of Japan's institutional change.

In the realm of media control, too, there is dissent over both the extent to which Abe and his government attempted to exert authority over the media, and the extent to which any such attempts were successful. Cucek (2017, p.77) notes that the Abe administration's behaviour *vis a vis* the media was not necessarily out of line with the actions of previous administrations and that "there is no demonstrable case of consequences that can be unequivocally attributed to intimidation or threats by the Abe government", while Harris (2020, p.253) acknowledges that there "had never been much love between Abe and the media establishment" but describes the claims that he was an enemy of the press as "overstated", noting that Abe was unable to suppress widespread and damaging press coverage of corruption allegations involving himself and his wife.

1.2 Research Questions

The conflicting and occasionally contradictory narratives and evidence outlined above (and explored in more depth in Chapters 2 and 4) demand new analytical approaches and sources of data in order to reconcile them and, ideally, to pin them to key points of observable reality. A great deal of qualitative analysis and narrative description of the political events of this era has been written, but most of the empirical data that has been incorporated into such analyses and narratives

relates exclusively to political outcomes — electoral results, the economic and socio-demographic successes and failures of Abenomics, opinion polling, and so on. While these data tell us a great deal, they cannot offer insight into two of the most crucial areas for understanding the evolution of Japan's political and media spheres during this period: firstly, the internal structure of the LDP — the balance of power between factions and central leadership, the degree of authority and discipline imposed by the party institutions, and the extent to which lawmakers felt themselves bound, by loyalty or authority, to competing interests in their political lives such as the party leadership, their faction grouping, and their local obligations to support networks (*kōenkai*) or influential voter groups — and secondly, the actual extent to which the media has been restrained by attempts to exert political control over reporting, and hence the degree to which the space for political discourse and dissent in the mainstream media has narrowed.

This thesis sets out to use a number of different sources of data — elite surveys, social media texts, newspaper articles, and social network graphs — to investigate three substantive questions whose answers help to fill in, at least to some extent, these gaps in the existing literature. The thesis is broadly structured into two parts; in the first, a pair of questions related to the supply side of politics, and to the media which connects political supply to consumers (i.e. the communications formulated by political and media actors for consumption by their audience, the electorate), are investigated; in the second, the results of this investigation are contextualised by an exploration of the demand side (i.e. how people perceive and respond to those communications), providing a contrasting view of the Japanese political and media spectrum as seen by its electorate, rather than its primary actors.

> *RQ1. How did the centralisation of party authority in the LDP impact the polarisation of the political system and the dynamics of intra-party competition?*

This first supply-side question aims to provide empirical insights into the effects which centralising reforms — and the strength of top-down leadership under the

second Abe Administration in particular — had on intra-party competition and internal diversity within the LDP and, consequently, on the broader polarisation of the Japanese party system. Two different kinds of data are used to explore this question. Politicians' responses from the University of Tokyo / Asahi Shimbun elite survey are used to examine the distribution of the LDP's policy preference diversity as measured at elections between 2003 to 2019, showing both changes to internal diversity and movement relative to the main opposition party. Next, the extent to which party control enabled message discipline in political communication is investigated, with the communicative independence of the intra-party factions in the LDP across a series of time periods during the Abe Administration being investigated through a text analysis approach of their members' social media behaviours, showing the extent to which members' communications hew closely to the central leadership and whether there are points when factions diverged more freely in their communicative style and content.

> *RQ2. To what extent did "media-muzzling" efforts by the Abe Administration narrow the scope of reporting on political issues in Japan's mainstream media?*

The second question turns to the media sphere and the question of whether it was "muzzled", or restricted in its capacity to interrogate and critique the LDP and government, over the course of the Abe Administration. In prior literature on this topic significant attention has been paid to Reporters Without Borders' Press Freedom index, which is largely based on an expert survey methodology, and hence depends upon self-reporting by people involved in each nation's media sphere. While the perspective of journalists on the degree of pressure from government they encounter in their work is an extremely important consideration, this thesis proposes instead analysing the final product of their work — the published content of news reports and editorials – to uncover whether that pressure has actually had any effect on the media reporting that is ultimately available to the Japanese electorate.

RQ3. How have the changes in the political and media spheres located in RQ1 and RQ2 altered the public's perception of the relationship between politics and media?

The final major question of the thesis turns to the demand side of politics and media, and seeks to understand, from the point of view of the broader electorate, the results of the processes of supply-side change explored in the prior two questions. Specifically, the study seeks to place the political and media actors which have up until this point been analysed separately into the same analytical frame, using the perspective of ordinary citizens to place media and political actors relative to one another within a single sphere. By doing so, it is possible to see the end result of the processes of polarisation (or convergence) in terms of actual political competition and the alignment of media actors with that competition.

1.3 Major Hypotheses

The underlying hypothesis of this thesis is that all of the trends explained above — in terms of the LDP's internal dynamics, its relationships with the media, and the emergence of polarisation in the public sphere — are a consequence of a long-term process of centralisation in the structure of the LDP and the Japanese system of government, which has converted a party that was formerly a broad coalition of different interest groups and factions with ideologies spanning the centre, centre-right and right-wing space, into a more externally homogeneous party with tight message discipline, controlled top-down by a powerful executive. This process of centralisation dates back for many decades in some forms, but was kick-started in earnest by the 1994 electoral reforms, moved forward by major reform initiatives introduced by Hashimoto Ryūtarō (Prime Minister 1996-1998) and Koizumi Junichiro (2001-2006), and continued by the 2012-2020 Abe Administration.

The consequences of this centralisation are illustrated in rough form in Figure 1.1, which shows how Japan's political spectrum looked prior to the LDP's centralisation

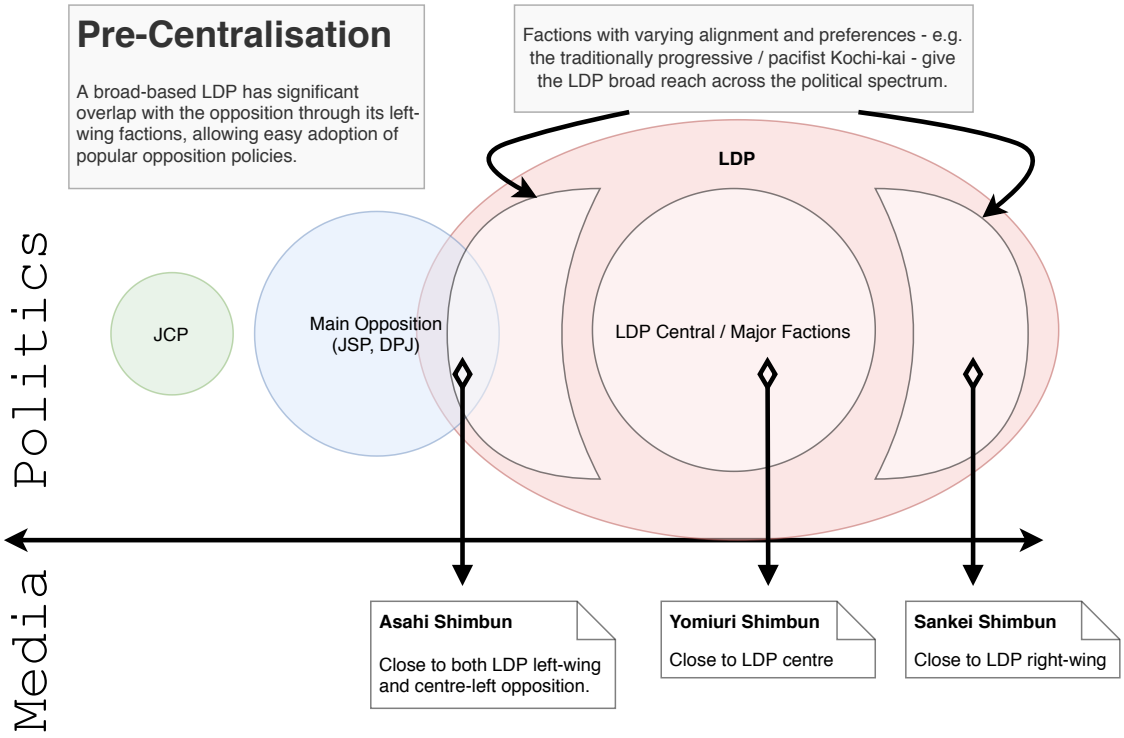


Figure 1.1: Japanese Political Spectrum, Pre-Centralisation

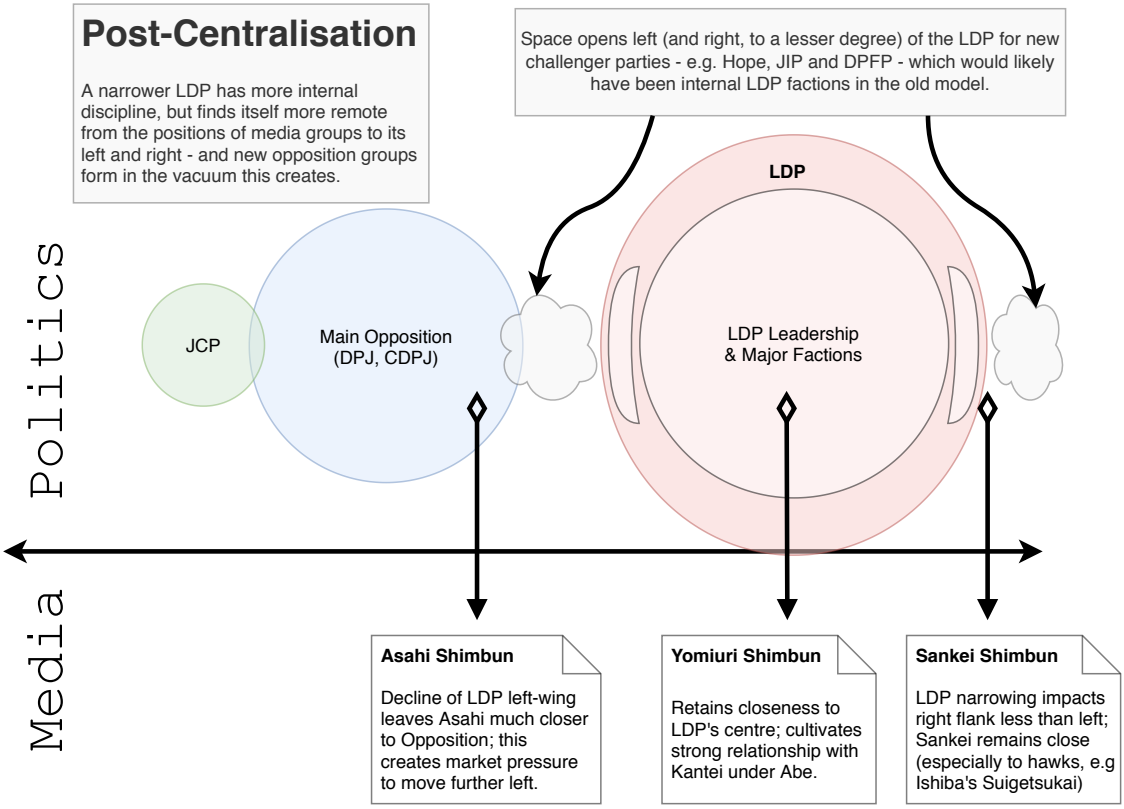


Figure 1.2: Japanese Political Spectrum, Post-Centralisation

process taking hold, and Figure 1.2, which shows broadly how it is hypothesised to look under the Abe Administration. The LDP's organisational changes mean that it now occupies a tighter, more polarised ideological space. Internal to the party, this has led to a reduced sphere for dissent and competition among factions or other groupings; external to the party, it has created a degree of polarisation, moving the LDP away from the positions of centrist opposition and media groups with whom it formerly shared overlapping space thanks to its own internal diversity. This has led to heightened antagonism between the LDP and those groups — one expression of which is the more hostile relationship with parts of the mainstream media — and has also opened up new spaces for competition around the LDP, which have been filled (with limited success) by challenger parties such as the Party of Hope, Democratic Party for the People, and Nippon Ishin no Kai, all of which have to some extent challenged the LDP from positions that factions within the LDP itself at one time occupied.

Based on this broad underlying hypothesis, the thesis proposes four more concrete hypotheses which will be tested in turn across the chapters that follow.

> *H1. Institutional centralisation in the LDP and government has created incentives for party members to align their expressed ideological preferences with the leadership, resulting in a narrowing preference space for the LDP and increased polarisation in the broader political system.*

> *H2. This process has also imposed increased message discipline on the LDP, which should see members' communicative choices being increasingly brought in line with the central leadership as Abe consolidated his power over the party.*

> *H3. Rising antagonism between the LDP and the media is a consequence of increased polarisation, not a cause of increased convergence: analysis of media texts will therefore reveal divergence between ideological poles.*

H4. The parallel processes of political and media polarisation will lead citizens to perceive strong partisan alignments that cut across these spheres.

1.4 Data and Methods

1.4.1 Spatial Models of Political Position

In order to investigate the research questions and hypotheses outlined above, this study employs a spatial analysis approach — estimating the positions within a latent preference space of each of the actors being examined. Spatial approaches have been used particularly extensively since Anthony Downs' enormously influential "An Economic Theory of Democracy" (Downs 1957), but the motivating insight of this approach — that political preferences can be expressed and modelled as points in Euclidean spaces — is a much earlier one, which can be seen, for example, in the existence of the *Côté Droit* and *Côté Gauche* in the revolutionary French National Assembly of 1789, whereby like-minded representatives sat next to one another and organised themselves in physical space such that the royalist members were seated to the right of the president, and the revolutionary members to his left. This spontaneous self-organisation gave rise to the Left-Right spatial terminology of political ideology, and serves as a powerful illustration of the potential of spatial analysis — just as the members of the National Assembly moved physically closer together in accordance to their preferences and allegiances, the goal of effective spatial analysis is to use data revealing political actors' preferences to estimate their positions in a latent preference space and see what kinds of clusters or groupings emerge.

A major challenge to this kind of study, however, is that there is no straightforward source of empirical data that may be used to model the "true" individual policy positions of politicians (which would ideally be required to examine phenomena such as intra-party competition) or of media actors (which would allow us to examine the impact of threats to press freedom). As Laver (2001, p.68) observes, the

true or ideal position of an actor is "an unobservable construct buried somewhere deep in [their] brain", estimates of which are "always subject to uncertainty and error"; the key problem being that almost all of the acts (words or deeds) which we might use to create empirical data pointing to an actor's preferences can have a strategic component that disguises their true preference. This issue is, however, true of some forms of data more than others. The use of data such as roll-call votes (which have been used to estimate the positions of political actors using methods such as Nominate, e.g. Hix (2001)) and expert surveys (such as the aforementioned Reporters Without Borders ranking of press freedom, or various expert survey data for politicians and parties), for example, are each subject to significant potential for actors' ideal preferences being obscured by strategic decision making. In both cases, the data involved are actually the outcomes of complex processes — roll-call votes, for example, are the outcome of a process of discussion, negotiation, and compromise among legislators which is designed in most instances to create a consistent result and a show of party unity (indeed, Miwa (2017) notes that roll-call votes are essentially useless for exploring politicians' preferences in Japan, as party discipline on roll-call voting is extremely high). As they are an output of this process, analysing them as an input to explain behaviours (i.e. treating the politician's eventual vote as a reflection of their original policy preference or some other input factor, such as factional loyalty) is logically backwards. Similarly, expert surveys reflect the outcome of a complex process involving both the actors being studied and the experts offering their analysis. As Mair (2001, p.25) notes, expert surveys are "a crude synthesis of... other approaches... They are less an alternative than a short-cut." Using either roll-call votes or expert survey results to explain behaviour can result in a kind of circular logic — *Actor A chose Action B because he holds Preference C; we know he holds Preference C because he chose Action B* — which can undermine the conclusions of any serious analysis (see also Budge 2000).

In estimating the policy positions of political parties, rather than individual politicians, the use of manifesto data — such as the extensive archive of human-

annotated manifestos maintained by the Comparative Manifestos Project (Burst et al. 2021) — and of other text documents expressing policy preferences has become an extremely popular and effective approach. The use of texts as a source of empirical data on preferences does not in and of itself avoid the above-mentioned problem: texts such as manifestos and legislative speeches are also the outcome of a complex process with a significant strategic component, rather than a pure indicator of a party's true position. However, in so much as we are forced to accept some degree of strategic influence over any item of preference-indicating data, texts offer some significant advantages. They are primary sources generated by the subjects of interest, unlike expert surveys; they can be nuanced and address multiple topics in significant detail, unlike a simple roll-call vote; and by looking at the amount of text devoted to the discussion of each issue or the type of language used to describe them, we can make judgements not only on the policy preference of the party, but on the salience of that particular policy to them — something that can be impossible to glean from voting records (politicians routinely vote on issues of relatively low salience to them or their party) or from expert surveys (which often ask experts to make a judgement on issue salience, but make inherently *a priori* judgements in the choice of topics in the survey).

Moving the unit of analysis from the party level to the level of individual politicians creates new challenges, since documents such as manifestos are generally produced at a party level, while party whips exist precisely in order to regulate the voting behaviour of individual legislators. Unsurprisingly, then, it has been much more common for spatial modelling approaches to focus on parties rather than individual politicians or candidates. Candidate surveys — such as the University of Tokyo / Asahi Shimbun (UTAS) Politician survey, which has been conducted at national elections in Japan since 2003 (Taniguchi 2021) — offer one possible solution, giving a clear source of data on politicians' stated preferences across a wide range of policy issues. Of course, politicians respond to these surveys in the knowledge that their results will be made public (in the case of UTAS, they will be published

in a major national newspaper ahead of an upcoming election), and will be seen by the party leadership as well as by the electorate, so answers to these surveys can be assumed to include a significant strategic component. In this thesis, UTAS data is used to model the ideal points of politicians, and thus to show the changing diversity and polarisation of the LDP and the party system, over a long time period.

Text based approaches, too, offer the ability to focus on individuals rather than parties. Just as political parties produce texts for public consumption in the form of manifestos and major legislative speeches, individual politicians also produce texts that reveal their preferences — be they leaflets, editorials, speeches made in parliaments or at campaign events, published electoral pledges, or increasingly, social media posts. These personal texts produced by politicians are especially promising in terms of revealing their preferences, because while some strategic calculation is unquestionably involved in their creation, this strategy is generally specific to that politician (e.g., a consideration of their likely audience's preferences) rather than being an external strategic calculation imposed by a party whip or other disciplinary mechanism. Ceron (2017) observes that "talk is cheap... heterogeneous declarations are less damaging to the party compared to the cost of non-cohesive behaviour", while Giannetti and Benoit (2008, p.233) note that "politicians may often toe the party line while at the same time generating texts that show far less subservience to the mechanisms of party discipline". Consequently, several recent studies of intra-party behaviour have often focused on politicians' declared preferences (what they say in various mediums) rather than on their actions, such as votes or other behaviour, which are more likely to be policed by the party apparatus.

Among these various types of preference-revealing texts produced by politicians, legislative speeches, intra-party debates and social media posts are arguably the most promising in terms of establishing political actors' preferences. Proksch and Slapin (2012, p.521), however, showed that parliamentary speeches by lawmakers were subject to significant strategic considerations that, depending on the context, could result in the under-representation of heterogeneity among a party's lawmak-

ers. Texts generated by intra-party debates such as those which occur at party conferences should theoretically be less subject to control from the party leadership (Giannetti and Laver 2008, p.154); however, the extent to which such speeches will be truly free of leadership influence and control depends heavily upon the rules, traditions and social customs of the individual party (all, or aspects, of which may be unobservable to researchers), as is the actual availability of such data in the first place. Social media data, by comparison, is by its nature widely available, and is a direct and unmediated channel between politicians and their constituents in which the politician has free rein to choose the topics and content of their updates. Ceron (2017) argues that these "unsolicited (and sometimes impulsive) statements" are less impacted by strategic considerations than politicians' statements in other contexts; "the extent of strategic behaviour on-line should be lower if compared to what happens off-line in more formal environments"[1]. Moreover, social media data is generated on an ongoing basis and at a relatively high volume, unlike legislative speeches (which many politicians, especially back-benchers, make relatively rarely) or intra-party debates (which generally only occur in public at annual party conferences, if at all). This means that social media data can potentially be used to observe the change in politicians' positions over time at a relatively fine-grained level, or even to predict shifts in allegiance or position which may occur at events such as election campaigns or party conferences. Ceron (2017), for example, showed that Italian politicians' Twitter activity could be used to model intra-party divergences which explained behaviours such as the endorsement of leadership candidates, defection to different parliamentary groupings or being appointed as a minister.

1.4.2 "Text as Data"

While the potential benefits of using politicians' social media posts to model their positions in latent space in this manner are clear, carrying out this kind of analysis in practice presents significant challenges — not least of which is the inherently unstructured and partially stochastic nature of text data itself. When working with

data of relatively limited volume, such as party manifestos (of which there is generally only one published document per party, per election, although the document itself may be anywhere from just a few pages long up to hundreds of pages in certain cases), it is possible to overcome this problem with a carefully designed "human coding" text analysis, meaning that the text is read and its properties encoded in a set of variables by human analysts[2]. This approach, however, rapidly reaches practical limits as the volume of text to be analysed increases. Analysing newspaper articles even from a single country's media about a significant topic over a period of a few years can involve thousands or even tens of thousands of articles; social media analysis routinely deals with millions or tens of millions of posts. Human annotation of data on this scale is impractical even for the most well-resourced researchers.

Instead, computer-assisted / automated text analysis approaches have become the standard tool of researchers working with large-scale text data. A full summary of automated text analysis methods is beyond the scope of this thesis, but Grimmer and Stewart (2013) offers a good overview of the field's major advantages and potential pitfalls (see also Lucas et al. 2015). At a basic level, most automated text analysis methodologies use a similar pre-processing pipeline: text data (the "corpus") is converted into a vector representation through a process of splitting it into "tokens" (individual pieces of vocabulary, often simplified to their most basic form) and counting their incidence in each document. This approach is sometimes referred to as the "bag of words" method, since it effectively jumbles all the words in a document into an unsorted vector. This discards most of the information about words' location within sentences or relative to one another which, intuitively, we might expect to be extremely important to understanding meaning. However, the resulting "document-term matrix" has proved to be an extremely useful and versatile representation of text despite this shortcoming, and has been successfully used as the basis for text analysis approaches ranging from relatively simple statistical identification of representative keywords (such as the Zeta measurement introduced by Craig and Kinney 2009), via sentiment analysis (Curini and Fahey 2020; Pang and

Lee 2008), to automated topic detection (see for example Blei et al. 2003; Roberts et al. 2016, 2014) and a wide range of machine learning approaches to document classification.

Similarly, automated text analysis methods for locating documents (or their authors) in latent space have proven very effective and have found broad applications across the social science and digital humanities fields. Wordscores (Laver et al. 2003) and Wordfish (Slapin and Proksch 2008), a pair of related methods[3] which scale a set of documents over a single axis, have been especially popular in applications to political texts. Correspondence Analysis (CA, introduced by Hirschfeld 1935; for a more up-to-date exploration of the methodology see also Beh and Lombardo 2014), meanwhile, has also proven effective for scaling documents in latent space — most notably being widely employed in the digital humanities sphere. This approach shares many similarities with Principal Component Analysis (PCA), but where PCA works on continuous data, CA is designed to work with categorical data — making it ideal for handling contingency tables structured like the document-term matrix described above, in which each document and vocabulary term represents a discrete category. Like PCA, CA is often used to generate two-dimensional plots of the major dimensions in complex data sets, but this is simply common practice for ease of visualisation; for more complex or noisy data, these methods can and often do generate a larger number of relevant dimensions. This aspect of CA is a major reason for its use at several points in this thesis — while the use of a single dimension to represent political positions is common (the Left-Right axis being the best-known), both social media posts and newspaper articles might reasonably be expected to address a variety of different topics and thus present a position that is more accurately represented in multiple dimensions than on a single axis.

1.4.3 Network Analysis and the Social Graph

Finally, the thesis uses network data gathered from the Twitter social network to carry out demand-side analysis of Japanese citizens' perception of the relative posi-

tions of political and media actors. Network analysis techniques have a long history in the social sciences (originating with Moreno 1934) and have developed rapidly in recent decades, especially as social networks and other electronic communication systems have begun to offer researchers previously unimaginable volumes of network data. Unsurprisingly given the quite "physical" nature of the network analysis paradigm (which imagines actors as "nodes" connected by "edges" which run between them), latent space models have become popular in social network analysis (Hoff et al. 2002). Networks are often analysed using physics-based simulations which treat edges as lines of force acting upon nodes and "solve" the network by moving the nodes around in search of an equilibrium position — a process which can help to reveal significant aspects of the network's topography such as its overall structure and the clusters or communities it contains, all of which is arranged within a multi-dimensional virtual space.

Twitter has quite a distinctive network pattern among social networks, since its following relationships are not reciprocal — it is possible for User A to follow User B, without User B in turn following User A[4]. One major advantage of this structure, from a researcher's perspective, is that it allows us to analyse the extent to which the Twitter audiences of large accounts (e.g., celebrities, brands, popular politicians or media organisations) overlap with one another by downloading their follower lists. Since popular accounts often have millions or even tens of millions of followers, the data that must be accessed, stored and processed for this analysis is very large-scale, and analysing a network on this scale using conventional network analysis techniques (such as the physics-based simulations mentioned above) can be prohibitively time-consuming even for researchers with access to supercomputer resources. A highly effective solution to this problem is presented by Barberá (2015), which constructs a latent space model of political and media actors in the United States using Twitter network data, but does so by treating the following relationships between ordinary Twitter users and the study's target users (politicians and media organisations) as a binary contingency table, rather than constructing a network graph from the data.

Like the document-term matrix which results from automated text analysis pre-processing, the resulting contingency table can be analysed using Correspondence Analysis (Barberá et al. 2015) to create a latent space model in which the positions of the actors being analysed are determined by the overlap between their audiences — i.e., the extent to which a large population of ordinary Twitter users (potentially millions or tens of millions of users) perceives these accounts to be similar, or in latent space terms, close, to one another.

This type of data and analysis effectively gives us the ability not only to model the relative positions of actors according to the totality of their audiences, but also to combine actors of different sorts into a single analysis — in this case, political and media actors. Accomplishing this with an approach like text analysis is difficult, if not impossible, since the types of text produced by politicians and media organisations are very different: the use of vocabulary in a political speech or manifesto is different from that found in a newspaper report or op-ed. Even the tweets sent by these two different types of actor are very different in character, especially since Japanese media organisations' Twitter accounts generally tweet headlines (which have a very specific and fragmented pattern of word usage) while politicians mostly tweet full sentences written by (or drafted to appear written by) a private individual. Attempting to combine these very different texts in a single automated analysis will have a predictable outcome: the algorithm will focus on the most substantial difference between them (the different use of language) to the detriment of any attempt to explore the actual differences in policy preference expressed within the text. Network analysis of audiences' following behaviour, by contrast, faces no such issue — the decision to follow a politician and the decision to follow a media organisation each generate a simple binary data point which can be directly compared and analysed together in an appropriate model, thus bridging the divide between the analysis of these two spheres.

1.5 Thesis Structure

This thesis is broadly structured in three sections, in line with the three research questions outlined in 1.2 above. **Chapter 2** establishes the historical context to the second Abe Administration with a particular focus on the LDP's centralisation process throughout the 1990s and 2000s, discussing in more depth the narratives of centralisation and polarisation and introducing a Bayesian ideal point model of politicians' political preferences based on the UTAS survey data. **Chapter 3** goes on to examine the intra-party structure of the LDP during these years using a latent space model derived from the full corpus of Twitter communications sent by LDP politicians during the Abe Administration.

Chapter 4 turns its attention to the relationship between the LDP government and the media during this period, and introduces some historical context to this relationship before presenting a second latent space analysis — this time using a large corpus of newspaper articles related to key ongoing policy debates of the 2010s (constitutional revision and the "Abenomics" economic policies) to build latent space models and examine the extent to which Japan's newspapers diverged or converged in their coverage of these topics over time.

Chapter 5 bridges the two spheres of analysis — politics and media — by turning to a demand-side analysis of how users of Twitter, Japan's most popular social network platform, perceive the positions of both types of actor. Follower data for all elected politicians and major media organisations is combined to create a single model which shows their relative positions, as well as providing an insight into affective polarisation by revealing the extent to which following given political or media accounts impacts the probability of following other accounts, especially those that may be ideologically opposed.

Finally, **Chapter 6** provides a discussion of the findings of the prior chapters and places them in the context of ongoing discourses regarding the LDP and the Japanese political and media systems more broadly. This chapter returns to the

hypotheses outlined in this introduction and synthesises the findings of the thesis as they relate to those hypotheses and to the broader underlying narrative outlined herein. Finally, this chapter explains how these findings build upon and contribute to existing literature in this sphere, as well as suggesting some likely future implications of these findings and some possibilities for future research on this topic.

Notes (Chapter 1)

[1]It is possible that the online text medium itself is more conducive to the expression of users' true preferences; Schober et al. (2015) found that respondents using text messages gave more differentiated answers and disclosed more personal information compared to respondents interviewed over the phone using the same questions, for example. It is not certain, however, that this finding (which related to a question-and-response format survey) is generalisable to social media, despite the format similarity of a platform like Twitter — although it bears noting that the high levels of personal information which many social media users disclose has been commented upon widely in recent years, and if such a platform effect does exist there is no reason to expect politicians to be immune.

[2]This is not to dismiss the enormous amount of effort involved in the process of generating reliable, consistent human annotations for a large set of manifesto data — the archive of the Manifesto Project (Burst et al. 2021) represents many thousands of hours of cumulative effort — but simply to say that this problem can be, and has been, solved with a sufficient application of skilled labour, as distinct from "big data" type problems which defy human analysis even with enormous resources.

[3]The major difference between Wordscores and Wordfish is that the former relies upon the two extremes of the scale being "anchored" by telling the algorithm which two documents to use as the endpoints, while the latter is an entirely unsupervised method which generates its scale by calculating word- and document-level fixed effects.

[4]This network property, non-reciprocity, sets Twitter apart from social networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn, where "friend" relationships are necessarily reciprocal. It effectively makes Twitter into a sort of broadcast network, in that there are certain accounts — like those operated by celebrities or media organisations —

which have orders of magnitude more people following them than they themselves follow, and thus send vastly more information than they receive, while the accounts of ordinary users generally receive much more information than they send.

Chapter 2

Polarisation and Structural Change in the LDP

2.1 Introduction

Polarisation is, by definition, a process of transformation — a transition from a system state in which actors' preferences are broad, closely grouped, and thus overlapping, towards one in which their preferences have retreated towards an ideological or organisational pole, in the process reducing or eliminating overlap with other actors' positions. Among bodies such as political parties or media institutions, polarisation can occur because parties move away from the centre ground towards more extreme positions on the ideological spectrum[1], or because bodies which previously occupied a broad swathe of the political spectrum — such as "broad tent" parties — have become more ideologically homogeneous and centralised. Sasada et al. (2013) describe polarisation as "a situation in which two parties take extreme policy positions, and there is little diversity among the policy positions of each party's members" — a bipartite definition which highlights that polarisation has both an *external* component, in the form of the division between two parties, and an *internal* component, in the form of the shrinking diversity among the party's members. They argue that in

the case of Japan, party polarisation has been driven through a top-down process, as a function of the centralisation of party organisation — as distinct from bottom-up polarisation, which would emerge from divisions among voters.

If we are to discuss the polarisation of the LDP or of Japan's political spectrum more broadly, then, it is important to understand both polarisation itself, and the centralisation of party organisation which has either driven, or at least accompanied, it, as processes. This requires us to first make clear the starting point of those processes and the events which have driven them. This chapter will therefore attempt to place the — supposedly highly polarised — Abe Administration into the appropriate historical context, and to understand not only the structure of the party organisation which Abe brought back to power in late 2012 and how he subsequently changed it, but also the steps leading up to that point and thus, the extent to which the Abe Administration represented a departure from, or a continuation of, past trends. Following this historical account of the various reforms to the institutions of party and government, data from the University of Tokyo / Asahi Shimbun surveys of Japan's elected politicians conducted between 2003 and 2019 will be used to empirically examine the claim that the centralisation of organisation and authority under the Prime Minister has been paralleled with a narrowing of the LDP's ideological breadth and a deepening polarisation in Japan's party system.

2.2 The Abe Administration in Historical Context

The second Abe Administration was remarkable in a number of ways, but perhaps the most notable of all was its sheer longevity. By the time Abe Shinzō stepped down on September 16, 2020, his administration had lasted for 7 years and 266 days, besting the record for consecutive time in office that had formerly been held by his grand-uncle, Satō Eisaku (Prime Minister from 1964 to 1972). Such longevity defied low expectations for Abe's leadership that had been set by his poor performance as

Prime Minister during his previous short-lived administration (2006-2007), and shot down the idea that the Democratic Party of Japan's historic 2009 electoral victory signalled the establishment of a stable two-party system with regular handovers of power. Prior to Abe, Japan had experienced six Prime Ministers in a row (three from the LDP, including Abe's own first attempt, and three from the Democratic Party of Japan) who had served only around a year apiece; Abe so thoroughly broke this pattern that the LDP's own internal rules had to be revised in late 2018 in order to permit him to serve as party president, and thus as Prime Minister, for an historic third term.

As the introductory chapter of this thesis briefly outlined, a number of reasons for this success and longevity have been proposed. Some of these reasons are external to the LDP, in particular the fragmentation of the opposition, whose major parties repeatedly split and merged into new configurations during Abe's time in power, meaning that the LDP never really faced a unified and credible electoral threat during this era. At a more fine-grained level, Abe also simply enjoyed good fortune at certain key points in his tenure. The success of Tokyo's Olympic bid in September 2013 gave his government an international boost and a (mostly) feel-good national project to work towards in the subsequent years; the signature "Abenomics" program was boosted by an era in which global stock markets, still rebounding from the 2008 Financial Crisis, soared; and just when Abe faced his most serious pre-pandemic crisis in 2017, when a pair of corruption scandals in which both he and his wife were personally implicated created a vicious cycle of negative headlines and declining public support, North Korea test-fired a series of missiles which approached or overflew the Japanese archipelago, abruptly refocusing the media discourse onto issues of national security — comfortable ground for LDP hawks.

Other reasons for Abe's longevity and electoral success, however, relate to the structure of the LDP itself, and of its relationships with institutions of government. The Abe Administration was both the culmination and continuation of a process of reform and adaptation that had been ongoing for two decades by the time he re-

entered the Prime Minister's office in late 2012. Though far from being a smooth or linear process of centralisation, these changes had ultimately diminished the authority and independence of the LDP's internal factions in favour of a more top-down structure under a powerful central leadership — and while the influence of factions or of powerful party grandees was by no means entirely gone, this new structure placed at Abe's fingertips the tools required to enforce a higher degree of discipline over his formerly highly heterogeneous party. He in turn continued the process of reform, mirroring the LDP's new more top-down and centralised structure in institutional reforms to the structure of government that placed the Prime Minister's office, the Kantei, at the heart of ministerial decision-making and brought the senior levels of government bureaucracy under his direct authority. The key consequences of these reforms were, at least in theory, a reduction in the space for dissent that existed both within the LDP, and within the institutions of government; the imposition of a more centralised, top-down structure for decision-making; and an increased value placed on loyalty to the top leadership, both for LDP members and for government bureaucrats.

These reforms did not start with Abe — the processes of the LDP's reform predate Abe's tenures as Prime Minister, and even his time as a lawmaker — nor, as this thesis will show, were they completed under his leadership. The party's evolution remains a work-in-progress, albeit one with an endpoint that remains unclear — but by examining the earlier trajectories which have led the LDP to this point, we may shed some light on the direction of travel and on how far the party has come in its transformation.

2.2.1 The 1955 System and the Factions

The LDP was formed in 1955 by the merging of Japan's two major post-war conservative parties, the Liberal Party (formerly led by Yoshida Shigeru, then by Ogata Taketora following Yoshida's resignation) and the Democratic Party (led by Hatoyama Ichirō). One of the key motivations for the merger was preventing the Japan

Socialist Party from becoming the largest party in the House of Representatives; the JSP had won 17 additional seats in the 1955 House of Representatives election, taking it to 156 seats in total, only 29 fewer than the ruling Democratic Party with 185. By merging the two conservative parties into a larger bloc, the JSP could be prevented from entering government. The strategy proved more wildly successful than its originators could possibly have hoped — the JSP could never challenge the LDP's electoral dominance, leading to a "one-and-a-half party system" (Masumi 1985) that saw the LDP hold power uninterrupted for the next 38 years.

The combination of political, electoral, and institutional factors which led to this long-term dominance are known collectively as the "1955 System" (Masumi 1964). A key feature of this system was large amounts of pork barrel spending (see for e.g. Catalinac 2016, pp.33-37), often mediated through powerful constituency support networks, called *koenkai* (Cox and Thies 2000; Iwai 1990); another was the electoral system itself, Single Nontransferable Vote in Multi-Member Districts (SNTV-MMD), in which citizens cast a single vote for a candidate, and the top n candidates (depending on the district magnitude) are elected. Most districts elected between three and five members, meaning that to win a majority, a party would need to run several candidates in each district — and, crucially, must find some way to avoid a single popular candidate from absorbing too much of the party's vote share, leaving the party's other candidates with insufficient support to win seats despite the party overall having plenty of votes to spare. The LDP's solution to this problem was to field candidates who focused on different sectors within their constituencies — sometimes different geographic regions within the constituency, but often different industrial sectors such as agriculture, heavy industry, construction, and so on — so that each could appeal to a different group of voters, often by promising pork-barrel spending on that sector specifically (Ramseyer and Rosenbluth 1993; Tatebayashi 2004). This approach was designed to minimise competition between LDP candidates within a district fielding candidates who focused on different sectors would remove much of the need for candidates to differentiate themselves from

one another on ideological grounds, creating conflicts that might continue past the election and threaten party unity.

This approach did not entirely remove or replace ideological competition within the LDP, but rather "defanged" it to some extent, making ideology secondary to the pragmatic concerns of the different sectors targeted by the LDP's lawmakers. Ideological differences were removed from constituency campaigning — where they might become a source of party disunity — and instead expressed in the party structure through the differing alignments of its internal factions. These factions has been a feature of the LDP from the outset, the party being formed as it was from a merger of two parties that, while both firmly conservative, nonetheless had somewhat different ideological characteristics. In fact, to say that the LDP was formed in a two-party merger is arguably an oversimplification; Watanabe (1958, pp.48-49) lists no fewer than 18 small- to mid-sized parties and groupings which, through a complex process of mergers and splits, ultimately came to form the LDP in 1955, and notes that while the party's overall ideology was conservative, these groups brought with them a very high diversity of ideology — and ambition. Many of the parties brought with them into the merger an ambitious political leader who hoped to rise to lead the new LDP, and the competition between eight candidates for the LDP presidency in 1957 was the genesis of the set of eight factions that would persist until the late 1960s. After this point the number of factions reduced, stabilising at five major factions until the 1990s — a number which likely reflects the maximum district magnitude under the SNTV-MMD system (Kohno 1992).

Watanabe (1958) describes three core functions which were performed by the factions — the electoral function, consisting of control over candidate nominations and the provision of various forms of electoral support; the financial function, consisting of the cooperative mobilisation of political and campaign funds; and the appointment function, consisting of collective negotiation on faction members' behalf for portfolio positions in cabinet. Satō and Matsuzaki (1986) reiterates this list, while adding a fourth function — the petition function, whereby factions also played a

role in handling the promotion of members' interests and the advancement of their concerns through various connections within the government. Having started out largely as groupings around charismatic leaders, the formalisation of these various functions throughout the 1960s and 1970s effectively turned the factions into miniature political parties with internal structures and institutions of their own (Iseri 1988; Satō and Matsuzaki 1986). The LDP in this era has been described as a "coalition of factions rather than a unitary party" (Cox and Rosenbluth 1993), maintaining its balance and vitality through a process of internal competition and "regime change" among its factions (Machidori 2012, p.53).

Various cultural or historical explanations have been advanced for the LDP's factional structure; both Watanabe (1958) and Satō and Matsuzaki (1986) open their account of the LDP with a statement that "if you gather three people, you can make two factions" (a quote attributed to Ōhira Masayoshi, prime minister 1978-1980), and advance the idea that factionalism is intrinsic to Japanese culture. Satō and Matsuzaki (1986) alludes to the importance of hierarchical relations in Japanese society, arguing that the patron-client relationships this creates naturally led to the development of factions. Other accounts — which are more convincing in light of both later developments and international comparisons — discard any suggestion of cultural exceptionalism and suggest that factionalism was the most effective and rational way for the party to systematise the management of the competing interests of its lawmakers, interest groups, and voters within the context of the multi-member district electoral system (Fukui 1978; Okimoto 1988; Kohno 1992; Cox and Rosenbluth 1993; Ramseyer and Rosenbluth 1993; Kohno 1997). The factions became central to the LDP's strategy for maximising its returns from the SNTV-MMD electoral system and managing intra-party competition: functions such as candidate recruitment and selection, as well as many aspects of campaigning and campaign finance, were delegated to the factions, with their operation as a "party within a party" being the most effective way to marshal the party's ener-

gies towards productive internal competition rather than risking splits or damaging public feuds.

Ideological differences between factions were not necessarily as important as the competitive advantages they offered to lawmakers and candidates, but such differences did persist. The key divide was between the conservative mainstream (*hoshu honryū*) factions that descended from the Liberal Party and largely adopted more centrist, liberal internationalist positions, and the conservative anti-mainstream (*hoshu bōryū*, literally "conservative branch / tributary") factions that descended from the Democratic Party and tended to be more right-wing, especially on topics such as constitutional reform, rearmament, and during the Cold War, anti-communism. While the most distinctive ideological differences between the two sides concerned foreign policy, Machidori (2017) argues that this reflected deeper philosophical differences: the conservative mainstream genuinely embraced liberal modernism, and their reasons for supporting something like the US-Japan Alliance were based in liberal, modernist values, in contrast with anti-mainstream politicians such as Kishi Nobusuke whose support for the alliance was purely instrumental and based on its ability to strengthen the nation. Combined with the party's pragmatism and economic focus, this internal ideological heterogeneity gave the LDP the flexibility required to quickly adopt opposition policy positions that were gaining public traction, and while the party's targeting of pork-barrel spending on different sectors was designed to discourage ideological competition between its district-level candidates, the ideological diversity of its candidate slates made it extremely difficult for any challenge to the party to emerge from either the centre or the right.

Conflict between the LDP's ideological wings was not always well-contained; for example, the party's poor showing in the 1979 lower house election inflamed inter-faction tensions and led to the "Forty-Day Dispute" (*yonjyūnichi kōsō*), which saw the party come close to a major split between the mainstream and anti-mainstream groupings (Baerwald and Hashimoto 1983). Such conflicts, however, were generally less to do with ideological difference and more to do with clashes of personality — the

1970s in particular having been largely defined by a long-running animosity between Tanaka Kakuei and Fukuda Takeo, with Tanaka's continuing background influence over the mainstream factions despite his implication in the Lockheed corruption scandal in 1976 being a key source of ongoing conflict. Iseri (1988, p.150) notes that while various factions within the party were seen to have clear ideological identities — as "dove" or "hawk" factions, for example, or as being pro-engagement with China versus being committed to the relationship with Taiwan — in some cases the factions' associations with such ideologies the result of a faction leader or other high-profile figure being strong proponents of a certain position, rather than an indication that all of the faction's members were steeped in this ideology.

Along with ideological differences and clashes of personality, a further site of conflict among the factions arose from their relationships with the LDP's so-called "policy tribes" — the *zoku giin*, politicians who were highly specialised and experienced in policymaking for specific industrial or economic sectors (Inoguchi and Iwai 1987). The *zoku giin* were key to the LDP's policymaking processes, often serving for many years in policy roles related to their specific industries; both Inoguchi and Iwai (1987) and Satō and Matsuzaki (1986) note that the party lacked an effective mechanism for coordinating policymaking more broadly, instead relying heavily on somewhat balkanised and sector-specific policymaking by specialised bureaucrats and *zoku giin*. Iseri (1988, pp.155-156) notes that factions often found themselves closely aligned with a specific industrial sector or "policy tribe" simply due to having a large number of influential *zoku giin* from that group as members, which could result in complex policy disputes being turned into factional power struggles; he cites the example of the long-running "beef and oranges" trade dispute with the United States in the 1980s as an internal policy issue that was likely exacerbated by major factions taking sides in the dispute according to their "policy tribe" alignments.

2.2.2 The Electoral Reforms of 1994

While factional politics had been a site of conflict, it had also helped to manage the LDP's internal heterogeneity and given the party uninterrupted electoral victories since the mid-1950s — but by the early 1990s both internal and external dissatisfaction with the party's factional structure had mounted. On one hand, competition between the LDP's factions had been severely eroded throughout the 1980s, as the Tanaka (later Takeshita) faction had grown massively to the point where it overwhelmed other factions, with its dominance effectively suppressing intra-party competition (Machidori 2012, p.53; Iseri 1988, p.153). Tanaka had promoted the idea that the factions should not be specialised or focused groups, but should rather be akin to "general hospitals", broad tents encompassing specialists from across many fields; Satō and Matsuzaki (1986, p.61-62) note that this made the Tanaka faction especially capable in terms of the "petition function", as its members could use the expertise and influence of specialists in many different fields to pursue their objectives, but Iseri (1988, p.153) adds that this had contributed to the reduction in salience of factional ideology and identity. Cox and Rosenbluth (1993) showed the effect this had had on voters: where factions' electoral fortunes had moved somewhat independently of one another prior to the 1980s, following the resolution of the mainstream / anti-mainstream split the factions' electoral performance began to move in lockstep, suggesting that voters increasingly perceived the LDP as a single political entity.

Alongside the decline in factional identity and the LDP's intra-party competition, dissatisfaction with the SNTV-MMD electoral system itself had reached a breaking point. Public anger with the government over two major corruption scandals — the Recruit scandal of 1988 and the Sagawa Kyubin scandal of 1992 — had found a target in the electoral system, which was blamed for everything from "forcing" LDP politicians into corruption in order to fund pork, to failing to incentivise opposition politicians to form a coherent party to oppose the LDP (Catalinac 2016, p.48). Meanwhile, dissatisfaction with the system had also arisen among LDP lawmakers.

While the prospect of changing the electoral system was unappealing to many in the LDP, especially those who won their seats comfortably under SNTV-MMD and might face a tougher challenge in a single-member district system (McElwain 2008), a growing group of LDP politicians felt that the current electoral system relegated them to the role of simply supplying pork to their home districts, leaving them in thrall to special interests and preventing them from actually engaging in the business of policy-making. Among those articulating this position was Ozawa Ichirō, who argued that the current political system prevented the government from taking decisive action and called for a shift to single-member districts, which would allow LDP candidates to properly articulate the party's positions on important issues (Nakakita 2014; Ozawa 1993).

In July 1993, Ozawa instructed his allies in the LDP to vote with the opposition parties in a motion of no confidence against the government of Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa, which the opposition had tabled in response to Miyazawa's failure to pass electoral reform measures, and the following day, he and his supporters were among two groups of lawmakers who left the LDP and formed new parties. This left the LDP without a majority, causing Miyazawa to dissolve the Diet and call elections. In this 1993 election, the LDP — deprived of the lawmakers who had defected with Ozawa — failed to win an overall majority for the first time since 1955, allowing seven opposition parties (including the two made up of LDP defectees) to form a coalition government under Japan New Party leader Hosokawa Morihiro. This coalition shared little common ground other than its support for electoral reform, and collapsed shortly after the passage of an electoral reform bill in January 1994, allowing the LDP to return to power in a grand coalition with the party it had originally been created to keep from power, the Japan Socialist Party.

The new electoral system created by the 1994 reform removed multi-member districts from the House of Representatives entirely, replacing them with a combination of single-member districts with plurality voting ("First Past the Post") along with 11 larger block districts which elected members through party list proportional

representation. Despite being introduced by a coalition of opposition parties, the reform was not specifically targeted at undermining the LDP's electoral advantages — in fact, after some concessions were made (largely on the subject of corporate donations to candidates), the law passed with the LDP voting in favour. In the first House of Representatives election to take place under the new system in 1996, the LDP actually gained 28 seats despite losing 3.9% of its share of the popular vote. Instead, the reforms were explicitly designed to push the Japanese political system away from its focus on providing pork for special interests within electoral districts, and towards a more programmatic kind of politics. Candidates in single-member districts would campaign on their party's policy platform, with voters also directly choosing among the parties in the PR ballot, all of which would serve to make policy and ideology more central to the nation's politics. This intention was directly articulated by Ozawa (1993), and echoed in Ishiba Shigeru's later comments on the electoral reform, which he saw as necessary to overturn the old system in which Diet members were exclusively focused on local issues, leaving politicians unable or unwilling to pay proper attention to national-level issues (Ishiba 2005)[2].

The reforms would also have a major impact on the LDP's factions, since the end of the multi-member districts meant that — in the more powerful House of Representatives at least — LDP candidates would no longer compete against one another in elections. The factions' former role in selecting candidates for the MMDs was therefore ended, as overall control of candidate selection passed to the party leadership. At a constituency level, the multiple LDP support groups (*koenkai*) that had existed in each constituency, generally aligned with some combination of a candidate, faction, and economic sector, now all needed to work together to support the single LDP candidate that would stand in the new, smaller constituencies — meaning that factions no longer had a significant role to play in constituency organising. Moreover, new laws on funding passed alongside the reforms to the electoral system placed strict caps on donations to individual politicians, marking an end to the practice of senior faction members taking in huge donations and then disburs-

ing them as campaign funds for the faction's new or junior members. Now, large donations could only be made to the party itself, with public funds for election campaigning also being made available via the party — meaning that both candidate selection and campaign finance functions had been removed from the factions and moved to the central leadership. It had been predicted since the 1960s that the move to single-member districts would spell the end of the LDP's factions (e.g. Thayer 1969): with the new funding rules being another potential nail in the coffin, it became the conventional wisdom in the years immediately after the electoral reform that the factions would wind down and ultimately disappear. This was by no means an unanticipated or unwelcome side effect of the reforms, as calls to eliminate the LDP's faction system had been a long-running theme of LDP reformers for many years. Iseri (1988, pp.4-5) states that the LDP's new generation of leaders in the 1980s saw the factions as a "necessary evil" — echoing the phrase Watanabe (1958, p.46) used to describe them some thirty years previously — which were required due to the nature of the electoral system, but should ideally be done away with.

The success of the 1994 reforms, measured against the expectations of those who initiated them — such as Ozawa Ichirō — was decidedly mixed. Catalinac (2016) shows that LDP candidates began to pay significantly more attention to policy issues (specifically to security policy) in their campaign materials from the late 1990s onwards, and argues that this was a direct consequence of the electoral reforms. Pork-barrel politics had not been eliminated entirely, though, with many candidates still running on promises to bring investment into their constituency — although the nature of these promises had become more broad, and pork strategies had shifted to appeal more to the increasingly important urban constituencies (Catalinac 2016, pp.130-132). The factions, on the other hand, proved far more robust than anticipated and continued to play an important role in the LDP even after losing their candidate selection and campaign finance functions. Much of their continued importance was down to the ongoing role they played in the allocation of party and Diet positions (Krauss and Pekkanen 2004), and the factions — through marshaling the

votes of their members — also played a central role in selecting the LDP's president and thus, the Prime Minister.

2.2.3 Centralising Reforms Under Hashimoto and Koizumi

The 1994 electoral reforms were not the starting point of change in the LDP — indeed, the reforms could not have taken place had the LDP not already changed significantly, allowing something formerly unthinkable like Ozawa's defection and the collapse of the 1955 System to occur. Neither were they the endpoint. Following the LDP's victory in the 1996 House of Representatives election, Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro (1996-1998) set out to explore ways to take advantage of the increased centralisation of power afforded by the electoral reforms (Asano 2006) by establishing the Administrative Reform Council, an advisory body with the explicit goal of strengthening the roles of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet in the policy-making process (George Mulgan 2017b, p.10-11) — although Hashimoto himself was primarily interested in reforms to strengthen the role of the Prime Minister and the Kantei alone, not the Cabinet (Shimizu 2005, p.226). Perhaps the most notable of the proposed reforms was a major expansion of the Cabinet Secretariat, which had formerly been a small unit consisting of the Chief Cabinet Secretary and the Prime Minister's secretaries, tasked merely with coordinating between other policymaking units. Under Hashimoto's proposed reforms, it would gain authority and personnel, becoming the government's highest-ranked policymaking unit and giving the Prime Minister direct authority over the policymaking process. Hashimoto's other proposed reforms included the creation of a more powerful and well-staffed Cabinet Office (replacing the Prime Minister's Office) which would serve largely as a policy research division for the Prime Minister, and setting up councils on important policy areas which were independent of both the party and the bureaucracy and reported directly to the Prime Minister (George Mulgan 2017b, pp.12-14). These reforms for Kantei-led policymaking would ultimately be implemented after Hashimoto's tenure, in early 2001.

The nature of Hashimoto's reforms speaks to the fact that the LDP's centralising reformers were actually fighting battles on two fronts. They sought to centralise the party itself, replacing the "necessary evil" of the factional structure (Iseri 1988; Watanabe 1958) with a more powerful, top-down leadership, but the changes to the party were to be carried out in parallel with changes to the government, which would reduce the independence of the bureaucracy and the powerful ministries in favour of concentrating policymaking and executive power in the Kantei. As Hashimoto's reform agenda took shape and in the following years, there was also some evidence that the position of the factions within the party structure was gradually weakening: rank and file members were less likely to fall in line with their factional leadership in LDP presidential elections (Cox et al. 1999), and there was some evidence that appointments to senior positions were being decided based on factors other than factional membership, such as maximising electoral benefit or improving public perception of the party overall (Pekkanen et al. 2006).

Hashimoto resigned after the LDP lost seats in the House of Councillors election of 1998. His immediate successor, Obuchi Keizō (1998-2000), formed a short-lived coalition with Ozawa's Liberal Party in 1999, under which Ozawa pushed through reforms that abolished "government committee members" — bureaucrats who stood in for ministers to answer questioning in the Diet — and replaced them with 48 new junior minister positions (Estévez-Abe 2006). Obuchi also introduced regular Prime Minister's Question Time sessions to the Diet schedule in January 2000, modelled after the weekly sessions in the UK's House of Commons, a move which was significant in increasing the public profile of the prime minister. Hashimoto's revisions to the Cabinet Law eventually passed towards the end of the tenure of Obuchi's successor, Mori Yoshirō (2000-2001), leaving the torch of centralising reforms to be picked up by Koizumi Junichiro (2001-2006), who defeated Hashimoto himself in the 2001 leadership election. Koizumi would thus be the first Prime Minister to truly take advantage of both the new executive powers of the Kantei and the increased authority of the LDP leadership over the party.

Koizumi sought to implement a neoliberal reform agenda that was far from unanimously supported within either the LDP or the government bureaucracy, and the tools provided to him by the Hashimoto reforms gave him the authority to do so even in the face of extensive dissent. The Council for Economic and Fiscal Policy (*Keizai Zaisei Shimon Kaigi*, or CEFP), one of the four independent policy advisory councils created in the Hashimoto reforms, became one of Koizumi's preferred vehicles for driving forward his agenda, with Koizumi himself chairing the council and using it to bypass traditional routes of policy formation such as the LDP's Policy Affairs Research Council (PARC), which he considered to be too beholden to factions and special interest groups in the party (Ōtake 2006, p.96; Estévez-Abe 2006; George Mulgan 2017b, pp.16-17). Koizumi also further undermined the role of the factions by shaking up the party's policies for appointments to senior positions, placing less emphasis on both faction membership and seniority, and appointing to some important positions younger and less experienced lawmakers who had earned the Prime Minister's favour — including the appointment of Abe Shinzō, who then had only three terms of House of Representative experience, as Secretary-General of the LDP, a position traditionally held by the party's most senior lawmakers (Nemoto et al. 2008).

Koizumi's aggressive efforts to use the Kantei's newfound authority and his own popularity with the general public to force through reforms that were unpopular with many in his party came to a head with his plan to privatise Japan Post. The post office and its enormous workforce were closely tied to the LDP's postal *zoku giin*, and were moreover considered to be one of the LDP's most reliable sources of votes. Its gigantic postal savings deposit book, meanwhile, was a key source of the pork spending on public works programs that the LDP had historically relied upon. In 2004, Koizumi used CEFP to draft a privatisation bill for Japan Post and submitted it directly to the Diet, bypassing the LDP's usual processes for policy scrutiny. The postal *zoku giin* allied with faction leaders concerned about the impact privatisation would have on pork spending to oppose the bill, and it passed the House

of Representatives by only a narrow margin. Koizumi threatened that if it failed to pass the House of Councillors, he treat this as a vote of confidence and dissolve the lower house, triggering a general election in which LDP lawmakers who had voted against the bill would be sanctioned. The bill was voted down in the House of Councillors, and Koizumi made good on his threat, forcing a general election and refusing to extend LDP endorsement to lawmakers who had defected — even going so far as to send "assassin" candidates to run as official LDP candidates against the defectors (Maeda 2006; Nemoto et al. 2008; George Mulgan 2017b, p.17).

Nemoto et al. (2008) argue that the defectors were likely aware of the possible consequences of their actions — the dissolution of the Diet, the withdrawal of the LDP's endorsement from their reelection bids, and even the sending of "assassin" candidates — but it also seems clear that the *zoku giin* and the faction leaders had massively overestimated their own ability to challenge the Kantei and the party leadership, especially given the huge personal popularity which Koizumi enjoyed. In the subsequent election, the LDP won a landslide victory, gaining 56 seats to reach a total of 296 — the largest majority in the Lower House in the post-war era, and the first time since 1990 that the LDP had held an overall majority without a coalition partner. While some of the defectors managed to hold their seats as independents or in new small parties, in total 83 new first-term lawmakers joined the LDP benches in this election — owing their seats, and thus their allegiance, directly to Koizumi and the central leadership.

While the factions still held certain power — including the ability to marshal votes in the selection of the LDP's leader, although this had also been eroded by the introduction of US-style primaries for the leadership in 2001, which reduced the influence of Diet members' votes — Koizumi had shown decisively that the Prime Minister, empowered by the new electoral system and the Hashimoto reforms, could bypass the factions and the party's formerly powerful policymaking organs, face down a well-supported party rebellion, and come out with a thumping victory. In the wake of his 2005 electoral victory, terms such as "kantei leadership" (*kantei shudō*)

(Shimizu 2005; Ōtake 2006) and "prime ministerial dominance" (*shushō shihai*) (Takenaka 2006) were coined to describe the new system of governance Koizumi had just demonstrated. As Machidori (2008, pp.22-23) points out, this presentation of Koizumi as a powerful and independent leader represented a reversal of the view which had existed prior to the election, when he had often been criticised for being too heavily influenced by the Finance Ministry and was only seen to have exerted true political leadership in the field of foreign policy (Shinoda 2004). Attention also turned to Koizumi's unprecedented use of the media, especially television, to make his policy appeals directly to the public — painting his opponents, whether they were bureaucrats or factions in his own party, as obstacles to enacting popular reforms (Ōtake 2006; see also Fahey et al. 2021). Koizumi's use of the media gave him a personal profile quite unlike that of previous Japanese Prime Ministers (Taniguchi 2007), leading to contemporaneous discussions about the "presidentialisation" of Japanese politics (Machidori 2006; Krauss and Nyblade 2005; also Jou and Endo 2015). The process of centralising the LDP's power structures and empowering the Kantei to oversee government policymaking more directly had transformed the role of the Prime Minister itself in the public eye.

Koizumi was not the only LDP figure who was focused on party and governmental reform during this era. Abe Shinzō, who had effectively "skipped the queue" when Koizumi appointed him as Secretary-General of the LDP in spite of his lack of seniority in the party, joined with a group of like-minded "new conservative" lawmakers in late 2003 to create a research group aimed at thinking about the next stages of the LDP's reform. Called the Party Reform Investigation and Promotion Committee (*Tōkaikaku Kenshō/Suishin Iinkai*), the group focused on coming up with new ways to strengthen the party's core institutions — in essence, creating party institutions that would be independent of powerful influence from the factions or the *zoku giin* — and to reform and update its communications strategy (Seko 2006). Key members of this group, including Seko Hiroshige and Suga Yoshihide,

would later form the inner circle around Abe who planned and executed the reforms of his post-2012 administration.

2.2.4 Abe, Fukuda, Aso — and the LDP in Opposition

Koizumi stepped down at the end of his second term as LDP president in 2006, and effectively anointed Abe Shinzō as his successor. Abe's short-lived first term as Prime Minister immediately demonstrated some limits to the new powers of the Kantei that Koizumi had used so deftly. He filled many positions in his Cabinet with fellow-travellers in the "new conservative" movement, a hawkish ideological group largely made up of younger lawmakers who were ostensibly in the anti-mainstream tradition of the party but chose to focus on what can be described as "culture war" issues — historical revisionism, constitutional reform (especially of the pacifist Article 9), making Japanese education more "patriotic", and so on. This much-derided "cabinet of friends" lacked the experience and authority to effectively wield executive power; it "reinforced the Prime Minister's ideological preoccupations and generally struggled to read the public mood, maintain message discipline, and control the LDP's backbenches" (Harris 2020, p.124). Abe's truncated first term would ultimately see a steady stream of ministers being forced to resign due to gaffes and scandals, a series of mishandled issues (including the deeply unpopular decision to readmit the postal privatisation rebels, some of whom had been among Abe's new conservative colleagues, to the LDP (Takenaka 2015, pp.57-58)), and a completely premature focus on the ideological obsessions of the new conservatives, such as constitutional reform, that alienated the public at a time when the resurgent Democratic Party of Japan was campaigning on popular quality-of-life issues. Abe resigned due to health issues some months after the House of Councillors election of 2007, in which the LDP won only 37 seats to the DPJ's 60 and lost its position as the largest party in the Upper House.

Abe was followed by two further short-term Prime Ministers, Fukuda Yasuo and Asō Tarō, each of whom also served only about a year in office. In the 2009 House

of Representatives election, the LDP lost in a landslide defeat for the first time since its formation in 1955: the party lost 181 seats, leaving it with only 119, while the DPJ held 308 seats, the largest House of Representatives majority to be held by any party in the post-war era. The DPJ, which was led until the eve of the election by Ozawa Ichirō, entered government with a plan for political reforms which went further than anything implemented by Hashimoto or Koizumi, while still remaining firmly on the same broad tracks; copying more aspects of the Westminster system of government, it would place policymaking under even more direct political control, centralise management of bureaucratic personnel within the Kantei, and build upon the reforms Ozawa had pushed Ōbuchi Keizo to introduce in the late 1990s (Estévez-Abe 2006) by creating a large number of new political positions within the existing ministries that would involve young lawmakers in policymaking processes from early in their careers (Shiozaki 2017). Almost none of these desired reforms actually came to pass, however, since the DPJ would ultimately fare no better than the short-term LDP administrations that had preceded the historic transfer of power. Ozawa Ichirō was forced to step down just before the election by a financial scandal, and was replaced by Hatoyama Yukio. In the face of a sharp decline in public approval for the new administration, Hatoyama stepped down after less than a year and was replaced by Kan Naoto, who in turn resigned after just over a year in office. His replacement, Noda Yoshihiko, similarly lasted around a year in office before dissolving the Diet, triggering the 2012 House of Representatives election at which the LDP reversed the DPJ's 2009 landslide and returned to power.

Between the LDP and DPJ administrations, Japan had now experienced six short-lived prime ministers in the space of six years, and Koizumi's ability to exercise top-down authority over both the LDP and the government — which had been seen as a transformation of Japan's system of governance at the time — now increasingly looked like a one-off. In the immediate aftermath of the Koizumi administration, there had been some debate over the extent to which Koizumi had changed the underlying structures of government in permanent ways, as against the

extent to which his own personality and factors specific to him had been crucial to his success (Estévez-Abe 2006; Machidori 2008). Estévez-Abe (2006) points out that this tension between institutionalist and individualist readings of Koizumi's legacy is not a pure dichotomy — the interplay between personal agency and institutional structure is important — while Takenaka (2015) noted that the succession of weak, short-lived prime ministers after Koizumi posed tough questions for both the institutionalist and individualist interpretations, since having six such administrations in a row seemed to imply an institutional problem in itself. Takenaka concluded that the "Westminsterisation" of Japanese politics was an incomplete project whose current status saw the Diet, and especially the House of Councilors, enjoying a high degree of independence from the Cabinet. This interpretation concurred to some extent with Machidori (2010), but Machidori argued that there was also an institutional failure within the parties to choose appropriate individuals to lead them. He claimed that the political parties had failed to adapt and find effective ways to identify leaders who could take advantage of the newfound powers and public profile of the prime minister's office, leaving the LDP stuck in a system of factional horse-trading that chose ineffective leaders and then rapidly replaced them once public opinion dipped, creating an image of instability and incompetence, while the DPJ simply rotated senior positions among its founding members.

Nyblade (2011) also noted that lawmakers had become quick to remove leaders when public opinion dipped, arguing that the Prime Minister's office was a victim of its own newly elevated status, as the high profile of this "presidentialised" office meant that many lawmakers relied on the Prime Minister's popularity to win their seats, thus creating an incentive for them to rapidly remove a Prime Minister whose support ratings declined. Other commentators argued that the transformations ongoing in Japan itself had outpaced the LDP's reforms; Rosenbluth et al. (2011) pointed out that the median voter was now an urban consumer, a group the LDP had traditionally struggled to engage, while Shimizu and Miyagawa (2011) suggested that long-term trends such as rising inequality had been quietly undermining LDP

support for many years before their catastrophic 2009 electoral loss. The consensus appeared to be that when the LDP returned from the wilderness of the opposition benches, it would need to be a far more thoroughly transformed party — or the cycle of short-term prime ministers and rising public dissatisfaction would simply begin anew. Crucially, Machidori (2010) observed that a future successful prime minister would need to maintain their authority over both the government and their own party: for all that the office of the prime minister had become more powerful and high-profile, its authority flowed from the occupant's position as leader of the ruling party, and a leader who was not seen to be in firm control of that party would struggle to wield the Kantei's authority effectively.

2.3 The LDP under Abe Shinzō

Backed by key former allies including Suga and Seko, Abe put himself forward in the party leadership election triggered by the resignation of LDP president Tanigaki Sadakazu in 2012. He won a narrow victory against Ishiba Shigeru, becoming the first LDP president to resign and then return to the office, and a few months later struck a bargain with the embattled Noda Yoshihiko to support certain DPJ bills in return for a rapid dissolution of the Diet. In the House of Representatives election that followed, the LDP returned to power in a landslide, with Abe's party winning 294 seats — just two short of the historic number it had won in Koizumi's 2005 snap election.

The conditions of the LDP's return to power are key to any understanding of how the party proceeded both to govern and to reform itself in subsequent years. The LDP had experienced a crushing loss in 2009, an event quite incomparable to the narrow loss it suffered as a result of strategic defections in 1993. It was electorally vulnerable — and moreover, some of the conditions that created that vulnerability persisted even despite 2012's landslide reversal. The years leading up to 2009 had marked a turning point in party identification among Japanese voters, with the LDP's share of party ID declining dramatically — a situation that remained the

status quo even as the LDP won a growing string of electoral victories from 2010 onwards. "Non-support" voters who did not identify as supporters of any specific party were the plurality in almost every poll conducted over the duration of the Abe Administration — and all of the LDP's electoral victories came on depressed turnout numbers. Abe's 2012 landslide victory was won with two million fewer actual votes than the party had received in its 2009 crushing defeat. Opinion polling data throughout the administration seemed to confirm this picture of highly conditional, and not entirely enthusiastic, support for the LDP government; generally strong support numbers for the Cabinet were tempered by very high numbers of respondents answering that they supported the Cabinet "because there is no other good option" in follow-up questions, while most of the government's individual policies had far, far lower support ratings than the government itself did overall.

This sense that the LDP's support numbers were something of a paper tiger — that following the failure of the DPJ administration millions of voters had simply stopped turning out to the polls, rather than returning to the LDP fold, and could potentially be reactivated by a mishandled major disaster, a competent opposition, or a perception of weakness, indecisiveness or disunity in the LDP itself — created a strong incentive for lawmakers to unite behind popular leadership, an incentive which was only strengthened as Abe's string of electoral victories continued. Abe, for his part, approached his second term in the leadership very differently to his disastrous first attempt. While his policy program was in many ways even more of a departure from Koizumi's administration than previously[3], his program for party and governmental reform was a direct continuation of the line of reforms that ran from Hashimoto through Koizumi.

Abe had been ineffective in using the tools available to him as Prime Minister during his first tenure, a mistake some commentators believe he had taken to heart: "Kantei leadership in his first administration had been merely superficial... Abe must have felt this painfully" (Mikuriya 2015, p.44). By the time he returned to office in 2012, Abe and his allies had a much more clear plan for using the

resources of the Kantei — and expanding upon them. The Cabinet Secretariat grew in size, becoming a large, dedicated bureaucracy for the Kantei, while the independent policy councils created by the Hashimoto reforms proliferated, with 15 policy councils being created within the first three months after Abe's return to power (George Mulgan 2017b, p.35). Just as Koizumi had done, Abe used these policy councils to effectively bypass the LDP's own PARC, but he also went further in undermining the role of PARC, creating a group of special policymaking units within the LDP under his direct command as party president. The function of these units is to examine and research specific areas of policy, but they operate completely independently from the party's traditional policy examination structure.

Abe was far more circumspect about ideology in his second administration than he had been in his first, appointing an initial Cabinet which "showed his new political savvy in striking a balance between ideological allies and LDP heavyweights in the distribution of government and party leadership posts" (Harris 2020, p.189), and including a variety of experts and experienced bureaucrats in his advisory councils and inner circles. His instinct to reward loyalty and promote his allies did come to the fore on certain occasions, notably in his promotion of members of the new conservative Japan Rebirth (*Sōsei Nippon*) group which he had chaired since 2010 (following the death of Nakagawa Shōichi, who had founded the group as the True Conservative Study Policy Group in 2007), but senior positions were also awarded regularly to people who did not share Abe's new conservative leanings, such as Kishida (who served as Minister for Foreign Affairs for five years), Onodera Itsunori (who twice served as Minister of Defense), and Kōno Tarō (who served as both Minister for Foreign Affairs after Kishida, and Minister of Defense shortly after Onodera).

Just as important to the functioning of the Abe Administration as the formal structures of party and government was the informal leadership structure which Abe created at the outset of his second tenure. Suga, as Chief Cabinet Secretary, functioned as Abe's second in command and a gatekeeper to the Prime Minister,

while under Suga was a small, informal council of senior figures who took direct control of the government's decision-making process. This council, which had been proposed by Seko Hiroshige, met in daily meetings that included the Prime Minister himself, the Chief Cabinet Secretary, the Deputy Cabinet Secretaries (including Seko himself) and the Prime Minister's private secretary. This group's meetings "[set] the daily agenda for the entire administration... Abe's Kantei would speak with one voice" (Harris 2020, p.189).

One of Suga's major ambitions for the new administration was an overhaul of the management of bureaucratic personnel, which would further tighten the Kantei's control of the government by bringing key personnel decisions under the purview of the Prime Minister. Harris (2020, p.180) describes Suga as "an astute student of how to wield power effectively, especially the bureaucracy"; in a book Suga published in 2012, he argues from the outset that the failure of the DPJ's administration was down to a fundamental misunderstanding of the relationship between the government and the bureaucracy (Suga 2012, p.2). His prescription for improving management of the bureaucracy was taking control of personnel appointments (Suga 2012, p.133) — a goal which the Abe Administration achieved in 2014 with the passage of reforms creating a Cabinet Bureau of Personnel Affairs, a new, powerful unit with authority over all appointments and promotions in the top levels of the bureaucracy across every ministry (Mishima 2017).

The end result of these reforms and reorganisations was that Abe became, in effect, the most powerful Prime Minister of the post-war era, commanding a Kantei whose policymaking authority and resources far surpassed those of previous administrations, and holding unprecedented authority over government ministries, the bureaucracy, and his own party. The majorities — often super-majorities — won by the LDP / Komeito coalition in both houses of the Diet during Abe's tenure effectively diminished the independence of the Diet pointed out by Takenaka (2015), allowing Abe to avoid many of the problems created for his predecessors by the Cabinet's lack of direct control over parliamentary business and the progress of legislation

through parliament; while the diminished role of the LDP itself in the processes of policymaking and governing is described by Mikuriya (2015, p.129), who states that under Abe, "the Kantei alone is unusually elevated, while the party's presence has almost disappeared".

2.3.1 The Narrowing of the LDP's "Broad Tent"

None of the elements of the centralisation processes discussed thus far were overtly ideological in nature. The reforms were administrative and organisational: strengthening the role of political parties and their leadership, establishing broader executive powers for the Prime Minister, and granting a greater policymaking role for the Kantei. While the early architects of this process hoped that it would bring policy and ideology to the fore in Japan's politics, the reforms themselves were agnostic as to the nature of that policy or ideology. A left-wing or progressive party could just as readily use the post-reform powers of the Kantei and the Prime Minister's office to their ends as a right-wing or conservative party.

The reforms did, however, create a set of powerful incentives for party polarisation. The electoral reforms of the 1990s were designed in part to give political parties a unitary identity, and as well as centralising the power structure of the parties (Asano 2006), they also created an incentive for parties to present a united front on key policy issues. This was reinforced by Koizumi's introduction of party manifestos for elections in 2003 (Estévez-Abe 2006), which committed the party to a set of formal campaign promises and created a single platform upon which, in theory at least, all LDP candidates would campaign. The 2005 lower house election created real consequences for LDP members who defected from the party line on key issues, significantly changing the balance in lawmakers' calculations on expressing dissent. Machidori (2010) points out this significantly raised cost to internal criticism, noting that where defections as overt as rival factions openly calling for a prime minister's resignation had once been a standard procedure for leadership change, now disgruntled party members considering open protest against the leadership had to consider

potential costs in terms of losing party endorsements and political funding. Moreover, following the LDP's unprecedented electoral defeats in 2007 and 2009, and its period in the wilderness of opposition between 2009 and 2012, these structural incentives to present a unified front were further reinforced; George Mulgan (2017b, pp.51-54) observes that Abe's post-2012 electoral successes effectively suppressed dissent within the party due to lawmakers' fear that public perceptions of party disunity or instability might see the LDP forced back into opposition.

In light of these reforms and changes, some degree of ideological polarisation was inevitable, with lawmakers facing a series of disincentives to defection from the central party line (both in terms of potential disciplinary costs and the electoral costs of perceived disunity) along with a strong career incentive to align their publicly-expressed views with those of the leadership. Ceron (2019, p.6) notes that perceived party cohesion can be achieved in different ways — "through cooperation (consensual agreement) or through enforced discipline (even in the presence of heterogeneous views) or internalized loyalty" — and that even when no conflict is visible in public, it may simply "have been resolved before it produces visible negative consequences, or it might remain hidden because internal dissent is too weak to openly defy the leadership". Each of these factors played a role in the growing cohesion of the LDP. Party discipline had been raised by Koizumi's actions in 2005, while loyalty was earned (and dissent weakened) through Abe's steady string of electoral victories — especially among younger lawmakers who owed their candidacies to his Abe and his allies from the outset.

Consequently, Abe was able to pursue ostensibly controversial policy agendas such as major quantitative easing and reinterpretation of the constitution's pacifist clauses without appearing to face any significant resistance from within his own party. Factions which were ostensibly opposed to Abe's objectives, such as the rump of the pacifist, anti-revision Kōchikai led by Kishida Fumio, stayed largely silent as Abe reinterpreted the constitution and tried to drum up public support for a referendum on revision. This process may have been assisted by the ideological flexibility

of many LDP lawmakers: in between his tenures in office, in 2009, Abe had observed "within the LDP, about 20% are conservatives, 12% or 13% are liberals along the lines of Kato Koichi, and the rest just go with the trend" (Nakakita 2014). By his rough calculations, some two-thirds of the party's lawmakers could comfortably fit themselves with the policy preferences and ideologies of any strong leader of the party. Koizumi even commented on how moribund the LDP's internal space for discussion and dissent had become, telling monthly magazine *Bungei Shunjyū* in late 2015 that "LDP members formerly had the freedom to say anything at all to the Prime Minister. Now, even before things are decided, they say nothing about the Prime Minister's wishes, which is strange" (Asahi Shimbun 2015).

The ideological narrowing of the LDP — which now found itself more-or-less quietly united behind policy platforms that would once have riven the party into warring factions, just as Koizumi's postal privatisation reforms had — therefore came about not through purges or expulsions of those with dissenting ideological views or preferences, but rather as a consequence of organisational changes which reduced both the scope for meaningful dissent against the Kantei's policy programs, and the incentives for lawmakers to voice such dissent. The relatively non-dramatic nature of this realignment — compared at least to the high drama of Koizumi's showdown with postal reform rebels in 2005, or Ozawa's defection in 1993 — can actually make it difficult to quantify the extent of its impact on Japan's political sphere. While some scholars have pointed to a "rightward turn" (*ukeika*) in Japanese politics in this era (e.g. Nakano 2015), such claims have rarely been quantified and it is difficult to say to what extent any such rightward turn might indicate an actual shift towards right-wing views. In the last section of this chapter, therefore, I will examine some empirical data on Diet members' ideologies and policy preferences, and provide some empirical insights into the process of preference polarisation that has accompanied the institutional centralisation processes described thus far.

2.4 Measuring Political Polarisation

As discussed in Chapter 1, many different types of data have been used to create spatial models of political preference and thus to observe phenomena such as polarisation or fragmentation among political actors. Later chapters in this thesis, for example, will employ social media text data (Chapter 3) and network data (Chapter 5) for these purposes. In this chapter, however, the evolving preference distributions of Japanese lawmakers will be observed using survey data from the University of Tokyo / Asahi Shimbun Politician Survey (UTAS), a survey of political candidates conducted before each national election since 2003 and therefore now encompassing a total of 12 elections — six each in the House of Representatives and House of Councillors (Taniguchi 2021).

A number of studies over the past decade have used various aspects of the UTAS data to explore the extent of polarisation and party cohesion. Sasada et al. (2013) estimate the positions of LDP and DPJ legislators on two policy fields — foreign and defence policies, and economic and fiscal policies — over the 2003, 2005 and 2009 elections, and find that while both the position and standard deviation of the DPJ's lawmakers remains stable across all three elections, LDP lawmakers show a significant divergence from the DPJ's position (interpretable as a rightward or conservative turn) and a significant reduction in standard deviation between 2005 and 2009. They offer the explanation that the LDP's defeat in 2009 returned a smaller, core group of lawmakers with more conservative views, but this trend would also be consistent with ideological narrowing due to institutional change in the wake of the landmark 2005 election. Taniguchi (2015) focused mainly on questions related to national security, utilising a set of consistent questions asked in surveys between 2003 and 2014, and found that the LDP had indeed moved to the right on these issues (with the DPJ also beginning to move leftwards from 2012, increasing the degree of polarisation between the parties). Notably, Taniguchi also examined the responses of voters to the same set of questions, and found that the LDP's rightward move

occurred even when their supporters' positions showed no matching movement — LDP supporters did eventually start to move rightwards on security issues in 2009, but the party's movement prior to this point appears to support the claim of Sasada et al. (2013) that polarisation in Japan is driven by top-down processes within the parties rather than bottom-up processes from the voters.

Miwa (2018) focuses on a set of questions on low-level value preferences which were asked in the UTAS survey prior to the 2016 House of Councillors election, rather than those on specific policy preferences utilised in the other studies, and finds a very high degree of heterogeneity among LDP lawmakers. He observes that "some combinations of individual LDP candidates had diametrically opposed value preferences to other LDP candidates... Compared to other parties, the LDP was the least cohesive in terms of value orientations" (Miwa 2018, p.79), which contrasts with the findings of Taniguchi (2015) showing that the LDP was more cohesive in its policy preferences than the DPJ. This disconnect between values and policies may hint at the rational processes underpinning the LDP's cohesion and ideological narrowing, since lawmakers can follow a clearly-defined party line in terms of policy preferences but generally face no such constraints in their answers regarding more abstract values.

2.4.1 Data and Method

For this analysis, the full set of UTAS politician surveys from 2003 to 2019 is used (12 elections in total), necessitating the selection of consistent or comparable questions which occur in every wave of the survey. A set of ten questions — four related to national security, three to economic and fiscal policies, two to social issues and one to constitutional reform — which appeared across almost every wave of the survey were identified, along with two further questions — one on economic deregulation, and one on the US-Japan alliance — which could be constructed from conceptually similar items in different waves. A summary of these questions can be seen in Table 2.1, and further details on the items used from each survey and a robustness check

for the constructed question on the US-Japan alliance can be found in the appendix to this chapter.

Table 2.1: UTAS Questions used for Ideal Point Estimation

Item	Description	Missing (HOR)
Q_SEC_DEFENSE	Defense capabilities should be strengthened	–
Q_SEC_PREEMPT	Permit a preemptive strike if an attack is expected	–
Q_SEC_NKOREA	Prefer pressure over dialogue with North Korea	–
Q_SEC_COLLECTI[1]	Exercise the right to collective defense	2017
Q_ECO_SMALLGOV	Prefer small government, even if social services suffer	–
Q_ECO_PUBLICEN	Public works should be used to provide employment	–
Q_ECO_KEYNES	Prefer stimulus spending over fiscal austerity	–
Q_SOC_SAFETY	Restrict freedoms and privacy for greater safety	–
Q_SOC_FOREIGN	Allow foreign residents to vote in local elections	2017
Q_GEN_CONSTITU	The Constitution should be amended	–
Q_GRP_DEREG[2]	Prefer protecting citizens to economic deregulation	2012
Q_GRP_USALLY[3]	The US alliance should be strengthened	2017

[1] For 2014 only, a question on the passage of the collective self-defense bill is used.
[2] Pre-2012, a question on maintaining the lifetime employment system is used.
[3] From 2012, a question on the importance of the US alliance to foreign policy is used.

Eliminating Diet members in each wave of the survey who did not respond to any of the question items yields a data set of 3829 observations spread over the 12 elections. In order to estimate one-dimensional preference positions from these items, a Bayesian item response theory model using Markov chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) ordinal factor analysis is employed, adapted from the method used by Miwa (2017) to estimate positions over a single wave of the survey (and also similar to the one used in Hirano et al. (2011) to examine intra-party divergence from UTAS data). The model estimated positions using the item loadings shown in Figure 2.1; in this diagram, negatively loaded items are indicated with a triangle in the left-hand column. Notably, the three economic items (along with the deregulation item) had a relatively low loading, which matches the finding in Hirano et al. (2011) that the major parties' positions were seemingly converging on the economic dimension, while the security and constitution related items have the highest loading — mirroring Sasada et al. (2013)'s finding of growing polarisation on security-related issues.

Having calculated the ideal points for each lawmaker at each election, the overall distribution of preferences for each party was calculated and plotted. Figure 2.2 shows the preference distributions of DPJ and LDP members at every House of

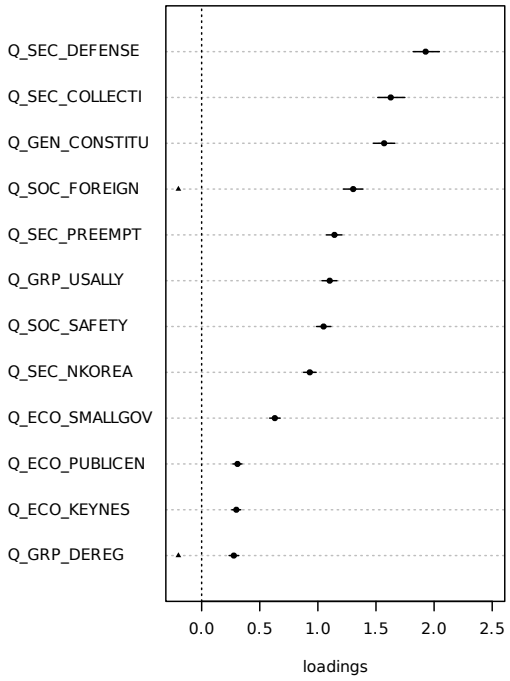


Figure 2.1: Item loadings for UTAS data IRT modelling

Representatives election from 2003 to 2019. Due to the much smaller number of representatives being elected at House of Councillors elections (half of the house, or c.120 members, every three years), directly comparing the distributions in these elections to the House of Representatives elections (in which c.465 members are elected every time) may be misleading; a graph showing the full set of elections is included in the appendix to this chapter for reference purposes (Figure 2.5). Finally, as a point of interest, the preference distributions of the LDP's factions at the 2017 election are also calculated, and shown in Figure 2.3, in which the vertical black line indicates the position of Abe Shinzō according to his survey response.

2.4.2 Results

The most striking result from this analysis is the clear progression of polarisation between the LDP and the DPJ (latterly the DP and CDPJ), exacerbated by a significant rightward shift in the LDP in 2012. The focus of this study is on the LDP, and the specific position of the DPJ should not be over-interpreted — in 2017, for example, the party's seeming leftward lurch is a consequence of the sudden split

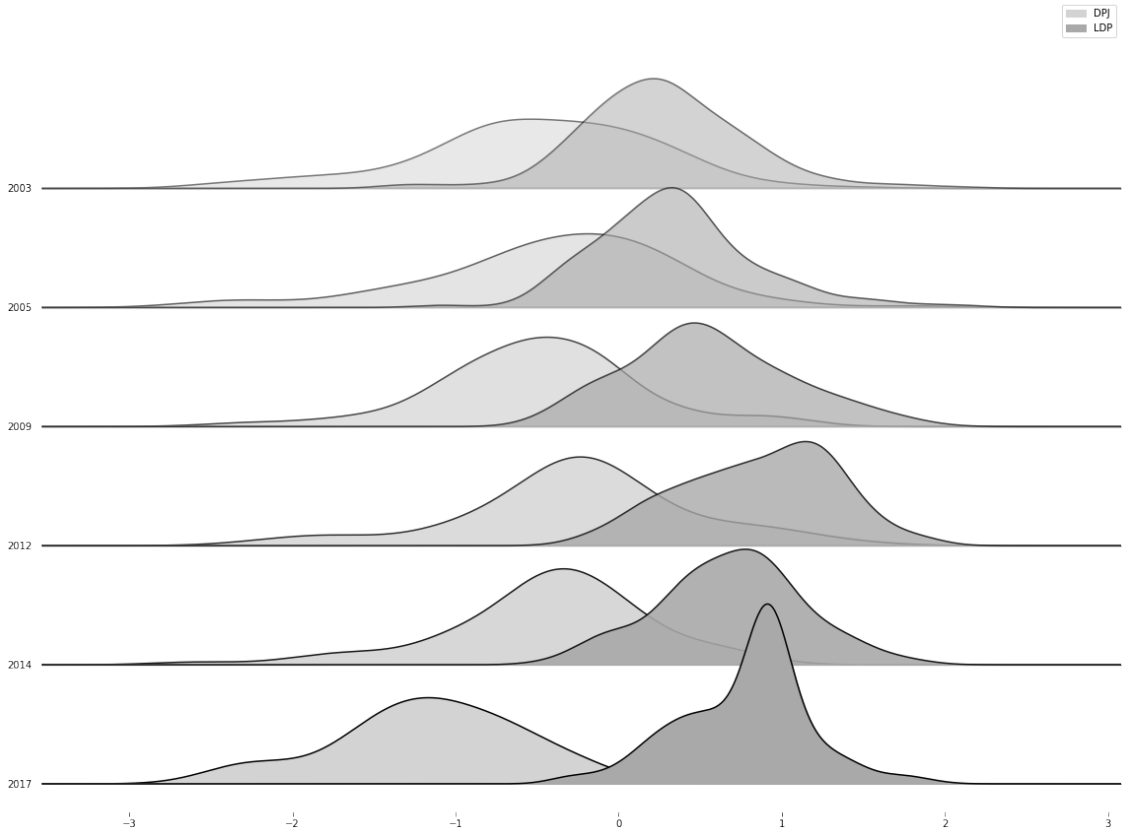


Figure 2.2: Preference Distributions for LDP and DPJ, HOR Elections 2003-2017

between the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (shown in this graph) and the Party of Hope (not shown, but occupying a more centrist position between the CDPJ and the LDP). However, even were the DPJ's position to be held steady from year to year, movement in the LDP alone would constitute a significant degree of advancing polarisation.

Two key movements can be seen in the LDP across this set of elections, with both of them accelerating as the party returned to power under Abe in 2012. Firstly, there is an overall rightward shift in the party's centre of gravity; the median LDP member in 2017 is very significantly to the right of the median LDP member in 2003. Secondly, the distribution of the party's preferences has narrowed, with the left side of the party — its more centrist wing — almost entirely disappearing after 2012, and the bunching of preferences around a central point becoming increasingly pronounced over time.

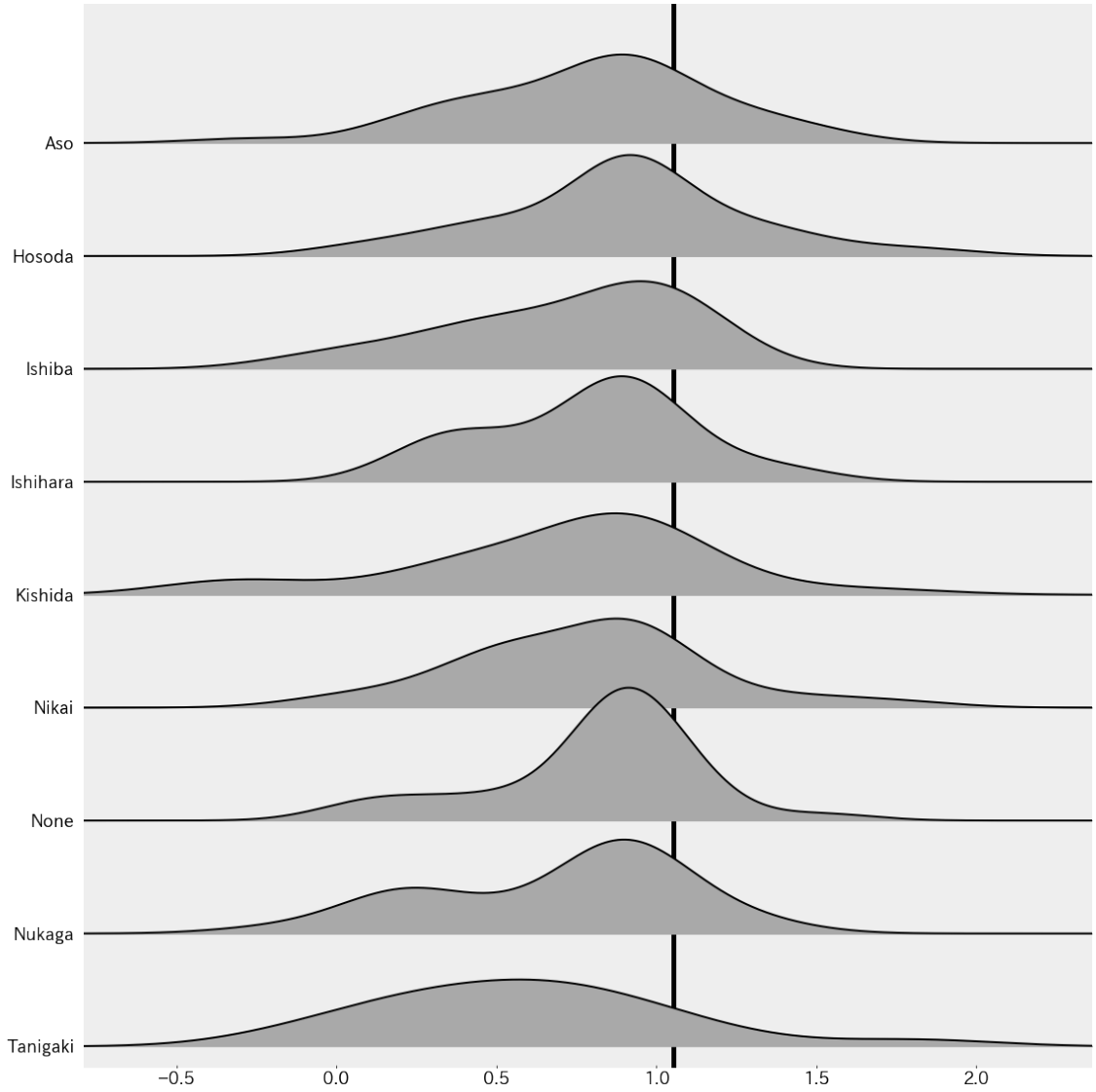


Figure 2.3: Preference Distributions for LDP factions, 2017 HOR Election

Looking to the distribution of preferences among factions in 2017 shown in Figure 2.3, the most notable result is the preference consistency between factions, with the high point of almost all the factions' distributions being closely aligned. The Kishida faction has a small tail to the left of its distribution which reflects its heritage as the remnant of the LDP's most notably liberal faction, the *Kōchikai*, but otherwise this graph appears to show that LDP members leaned strongly towards the positions of Abe Shinzō in their responses to policy-related questions, regardless of factional membership. Only the small Tanigaki faction is an outlier to some extent; even the Ishiba faction, created in 2015 with the express purpose of building a challenge

to Abe's leadership, shows no particularly distinctive distribution of preferences on these key policy questions.

2.5 Conclusions

The long-running process of reforming Japan's system of governance and the structure of its ruling party may well be incomplete, as Takenaka (2015) suggests, and important debates remain over the extent to which leaders' individual characteristics and the effects of institutional change balance and interact with one another (Machidori 2010). Under the second Abe Administration, however, the effects of the various reforms that had centralised the party structure, empowered the Kantei and its various offices, raised the profile and authority of the prime minister, and increased party discipline and the costs of defection, could be seen clearly; the transformation may be incomplete, but the LDP is no longer a low-discipline conglomerate of powerful factions and special interest groups, and instead now resembles the party Ozawa Ichirō envisaged almost three decades previously — a top-down, centralised party taking its messaging and its marching orders from a powerful leadership (Ozawa 1993).

Some of the costs of this process also became more clear. One example is the scandals which dogged the latter years of the Abe Administration, and introduced a new term to Japan's political lexicon — *sontaku*, referring to acts carried out by officials without direct orders, but under the assumption that a person in authority would prefer or desire this course of action (Sieg 2018). The centralisation of authority and top-down nature of power in the Abe Administration arguably underpins such scandals; the understanding that acting in ways which would be seen as desirable by the Prime Minister and his allies was the most important way to advance one's career either within the party or the bureaucracy gave rise to a number of instances in which special treatment — up to and including corrupt or illegal actions — was given to matters involving important individuals in the administration, including Abe himself.

The concept of *sontaku* may also be helpful in considering what happened to ideology and policy preferences in the LDP as the centralising reforms advanced. One of the aspects of the Westminster system which Japan has not replicated is the party whip system (Takenaka 2015), but even in the absence of such an overt method of imposing discipline over issues of policy and legislation, a clear understanding of the costs of defection and the benefits of falling in line with the preferences of the leadership can exert a powerful force on party cohesion — especially when the leadership is also popular with the public and effective at winning elections. The effects of this process can be seen in the quantitative analysis of policy preference distributions presented at the end of this chapter; as the LDP's centralising reforms proceeded, the party's lawmakers' publicly expressed policy preferences increasingly moved towards the position of the party leader, creating the effect of rightward drift for the LDP and polarisation in Japan's party system.

However, as Ceron (2019) states, the external perception of party cohesion — which certainly existed for the LDP through most of the second Abe Administration — does not necessarily imply that the party is truly internally homogeneous. A lawmaker's decision to align their public preferences with the party leadership may reflect a number of strategic calculations based on loyalty, discipline, compromise, and various other factors, rather than an actual alignment of their true preferences. In this sense, the shrinking of the LDP's ideological space and internal dissent under Abe's leadership may reflect better command of the factors that play a role in those strategic decisions, not the actual disappearance of the party's internal diversity. Just as the leaders who followed Koizumi were unable to effectively copy his strategies for managing the government and the party, those who follow Abe will not necessarily possess the traits or the skill to manage the LDP's internal diversity. Miwa (2018)'s finding that the LDP is far less cohesive than other parties in terms of its members' values, rather than their policy positions, may hint at that underlying diversity. The next chapter of this thesis will consider this question in a different way, observing the LDP's internal diversity and message discipline us-

ing an automated text analysis approach to reveal the extent to which the party's external messaging was truly cohesive under Abe's leadership, and whether specific events or points in the political cycle changed politicians' strategic decision-making on expressing views that diverged from the party line.

Notes (Chapter 2)

[1]While major parties moving from the centre ground towards a more extreme position is a seeming violation of the median voter theorem (Black 1948; Downs 1957), precisely this behaviour has been observed frequently in recent decades as parties have shifted their ideology to perceived electoral threats from more radical populist groups. These groups may take the form either of challenger parties, as in the case of the British Conservative Party's rightward movement in response to the challenge of UKIP and later The Brexit Party, or of aggressive internal factions, as was seen in the in the U.S. Republican Party's growing adoption of hardline positions in response to internal challenges from the "Tea Party" and later from loyalists of President Donald Trump.

[2]Notably, both Ozawa and Ishiba were especially concerned with the national security implications of this problem, especially in light of what they perceived as the government's failure to take decisive action during the first Gulf War, which had created strain in Japan's relationship with the United States. Ozawa in particular noted that the end of the Cold War had created a new security climate in which Japan's conservative politicians would need to react more quickly and decisively, something which he saw as impossible if their primary role continued to be winning pork contracts and investments for their districts.

[3]The Abenomics program of expansionist monetary policy and stimulus spending is almost a direct repudiation of Koizumi's neoliberal policies, which is especially notable since Abe had a seat on the CEFP during the Koizumi Administration.

2.A Appendix A: Additional Material on Party Preference Distributions

Table 2.2 contains a full list of the questions from the 12 University of Tokyo / Asahi Shimbun surveys that were used to construct the scale utilised in this chapter. See Table 2.1 in the main text for short descriptions of each item. The survey codebooks for the 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2007 elections can be found in the references (Kabashima and Yamamoto 2005, 2008a,b; Taniguchi and Okawa 2008), while the codebooks for the elections from 2009 onwards are available from the UTAS website (Taniguchi 2021).

Table 2.2: Full Details of UTAS Items for Ideal Point Estimation

Item	2003 HOR	2003 HOC	2005 HOR	2007 HOC	2008 HOR	2010 HOC	2012 HOR	2013 HOC	2014 HOR	2016 HOC	2017 HOR	2019 HOC
Q_SEC_DEFENSE	defense	defence	defence	defence	Q9_2	Q7_2	Q5_2	Q4_1	Q6_1	Q3_1	Q4_1	Q4_1
Q_SEC_PREEMPT	attack	attack	attack	attack	Q9_4		Q5_3	Q4_2	Q6_2	Q3_2	Q4_2	Q4_2
Q_SEC_NKOREA	nkorea	nkorea	nkorea	nkorea	Q9_6	Q7_6	Q5_5	Q4_4	Q6_3	Q3_3	Q4_3	Q4_3
Q_SEC_COLLECTI	collecti	collecti	collecti	collecti	Q9_7	Q7_7	Q5_6	Q4_5	Q10[1]			
Q_ECO_SMALLGOV	smallgov	smallgov	smallgov	smallgov	Q9_9	Q7_9	Q5_7	Q4_7	Q6_5	Q3_5	Q4_6	Q4_4
Q_ECO_PUBLICEN	publicen	publicen	publecen	publicen	Q9_11	Q7_13	Q5_8	Q4_8	Q6_6	Q3_6	Q4_7	Q4_5
Q_ECO_KEYNES	keynes	keynes	keynes	keynes	Q9_12	Q7_14	Q5_9	Q4_9	Q6_7	Q3_7	Q4_8	Q4_6
Q_SOC_SAFETY	safety		safety	safety	Q9_18	Q7_22	Q5_15	Q4_14	Q6_11	Q3_13	Q4_11	Q4_9
Q_SOC_FOREIGN	foreign	foreign	foreign		Q9_16	Q7_20	Q5_16	Q4_15	Q6_12	Q3_14		
Q_GEN_CONSTITU	constitu		constitu	constitu	Q9_1	Q7_1	Q5_1	Q6	Q8	Q5	Q7	Q7
Q_GRP_DEREG	lifetime	lifetime	lifetime	lifetime	Q9_10	Q7_11			Q7_10*	Q4_7*	Q5_5*	Q5_6*
Q_GRP_USALLY	treaty	treaty	treaty	treaty	Q10_1	Q9_6[2]	Q6_1	Q5_1	Q7_1	Q4_1		Q5_1

* The polarities of these items are reversed compared to the other items in this row.
[1] As the collective defence bill had now passed, this question asks for views on its passage.
[2] Q7_4 in this survey contains the wording related to strengthening the US alliance, as found in 2003, 2004, 2005, 2007, and 2019, while Q9_6 (which is used in the model) asks about the importance of the US alliance compared to relations with Asia, as found in all other years. The correlation between these two items is shown in Figure 2.4 below.

Two of the items used in the model (Q_GRP_DEREG and Q_GRP_USALLY) are constructed by combining differently-worded items that encapsulate the same core concept. In the case of Q_GRP_USALLY, an item measuring respondents' views on the US-Japan alliance, the two different items that are used (one asking whether the alliance should be strengthened, and one asking whether Japan should prioritise its relationship with the US or with Asia) actually appear together in the 2010 survey, allowing the validity of combining them between waves to be checked with a simple correlation test, the results of which are shown in Figure 2.4.

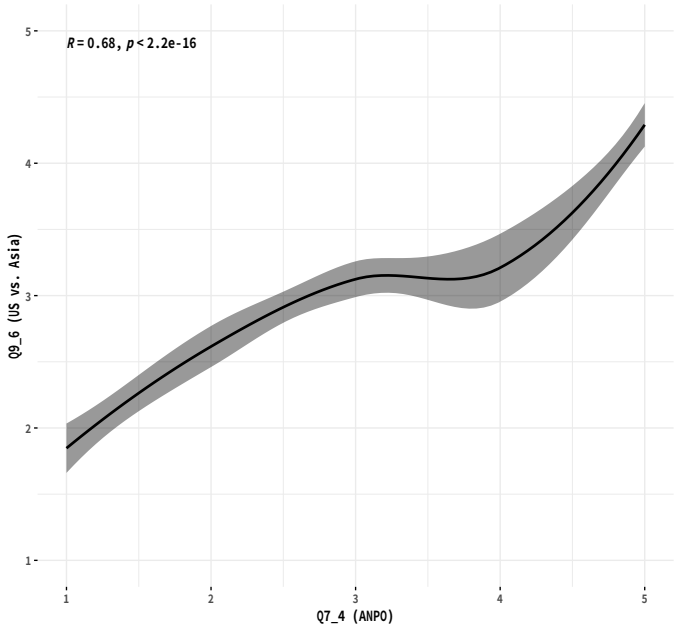


Figure 2.4: 2010 UTAS Data - LOESS relationship between Q9_6 and Q7_4

Although the model was developed using the full set of elections, the graphs in the main text focus only on the House of Representatives, excluding the results from the House of Councillors. This is due to concerns about the comparability of the two types of election, and the fact that the surveys for the House of Councillors cover far fewer lawmakers. A graph showing the distribution in both types of election is shown for reference purposes in Figure 2.5. While the overall trend seen in the House of Representatives elections in Figure 2.2 in the main text is preserved, the House of Councillors elections introduce more noise to the trend. Notably, the distribution in 2007 is very unusual compared to other years — this highlights the much smaller number of lawmakers being surveyed for House of Councillors elections, as in 2007 the LDP distribution was based on just 37 lawmakers, meaning that individual responses led to significant changes in the distribution.

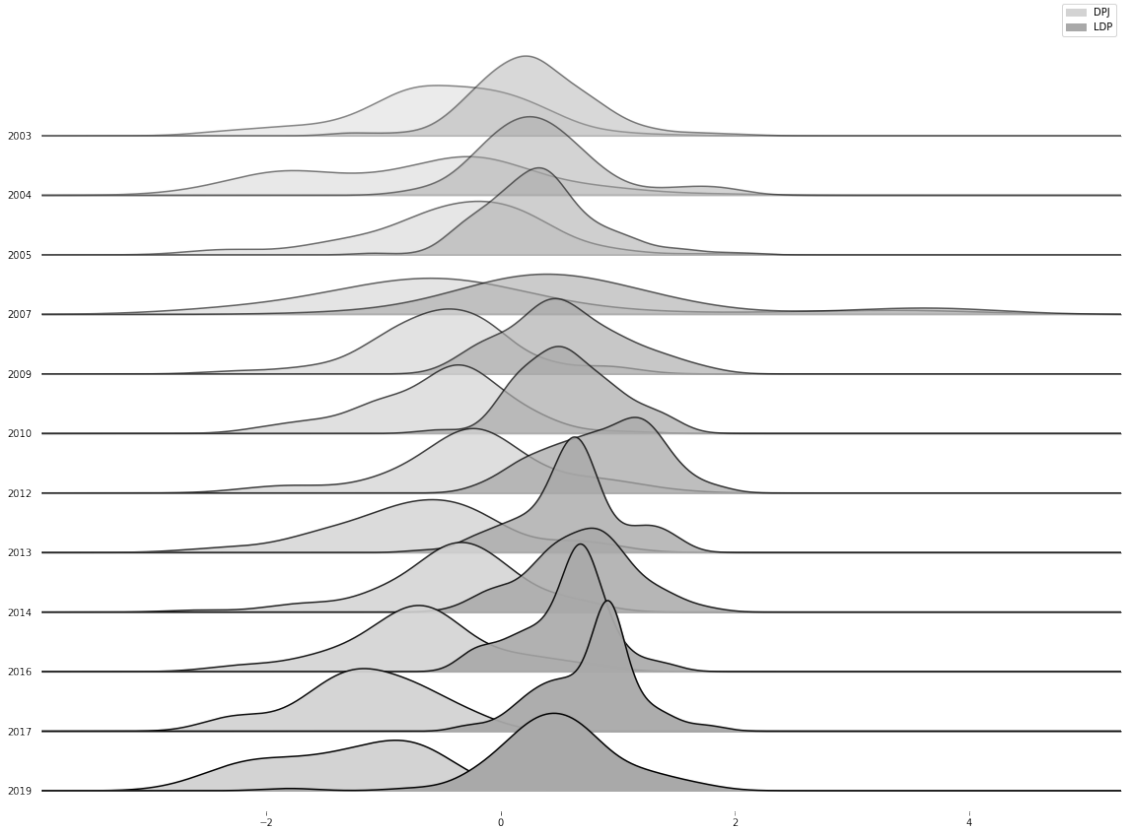


Figure 2.5: Preference Distributions for LDP and DPJ, All Elections 2003-2019

Chapter 3

Observing Intra-Party Behaviour in the LDP using Twitter Posts

3.1 Introduction

This chapter uses social media data — specifically, the full set of tweets sent by elected LDP lawmakers - to model intra-party alignments and interactions during the course of the Abe Administration. As outlined in Chapter 1, there is quite well-established literature around the use of "text as data" (Grimmer and Stewart 2013) approaches to analysing political texts, with a variety of different automated analysis methods being employed by researchers to discover the ideological alignment of texts or their authors — either through locating them within a latent preference space using methods such as Wordscores (Laver et al. 2003) and Wordfish (Slapin and Proksch 2008), or simply through the use of classification methods to assign them to a specific ideological category or political grouping. Both of these approaches can be considered to be a kind of clustering method through which texts with higher similarity (as measured through the incidence of certain automatically identified keywords or patterns of vocabulary) are placed more closely together and ultimately

judged to be members of the same grouping, be that a political party or faction, or simply an ideological alignment.

These approaches have been shown to be highly effective when applied to traditional sources of political texts — legislative speeches, manifestos and so on — in a variety of languages. Yu et al. (2008), for example, trained classification models which predicted the political alignments of U.S. politicians to a high degree of accuracy based on the texts of their speeches in Congress[1]; Proksch and Slapin (2009) accurately located German parties on an ideological scale using automated analysis of their manifesto documents; and Proksch et al. (2011) demonstrates a similar analysis of Japanese political parties' positions based on their published electoral pledges.

That it is possible to accurately derive political positions from lengthy and overtly political texts such as speeches and manifestos, however, does not necessarily mean that similar results might be obtained using social media data. Data from social media platforms such as Twitter present unique challenges: posts are typically very short (Twitter restricted posts to 140 characters until September 2017; since then the limit has been 280 characters) and may cover a wide variety of topics, some of which may have no direct relationship to politics. It would, however, be wrong to assume that politicians are unsophisticated in their use of social media platforms, or that their messaging on such platforms does not reflect a careful consideration of their political preferences and positions. Political use of social media and of the Internet more generally is not universal, but is nonetheless very well established; although President Barack Obama's online campaign in the United States' 2008 presidential election is often cited as a watershed moment for online political engagement and the change to Japan's electoral laws that permitted engagement on social media during election campaigns only dates to 2013, some Japanese politicians were communicating with constituents online more than twenty years ago (Tkach-Kawasaki 2003). Studies in the early 2010s such as Graham et al. (2013)'s analysis of the UK's 2010 general election and Vergeer et al. (2013)'s analysis of the European

Parliament elections in the Netherlands showed a wide variety of different styles in how politicians engaged in online campaigning on platforms like Twitter, but noted that many politicians treated the platform as a one-way broadcast medium — a way to send campaign messages to constituents, rather than a two-way communication or a space for discourse. While social media aficionados (or those who hold out hope for these platforms as a location for discursive democracy to take root) may bemoan this approach, it highlights that politicians often view social media platforms as a location for marketing themselves, their party and their policy positions — another venue for political marketing and campaigning, and thus a space in which we might expect to see politicians express themselves in ways that make their preferences and positions clear.

Automated text analyses of political messages on Twitter have borne out this assertion. Conover et al. (2011), for example, predicted Twitter users' political alignment from their posts with 91% accuracy (using a relatively straightforward Support Vector Machine classification model), showing that the length of the messages does not create an insurmountable obstacle to establishing political positions. Sylwester and Purver (2015) examined the Twitter posts of Republicans and Democrats in the U.S. and found significant differences in language usage that went beyond simply expressing different policy positions, leading the authors to posit that these language choices may actually reflect psychological differences that underlie users' political preferences — a finding suggesting that social media texts may, at least to some extent, reflect users' positions and preferences even when political topics are not being directly discussed. This would imply that social media texts contain a mixture of both deliberately broadcast preferences and unconsciously revealed preferences, making them into a rich and nuanced source of information despite their relatively short length. This would go some way to explaining how, for example, Ceron (2017) was able to use distances between Italian politicians derived from a Wordfish analysis of their Twitter and Facebook posts to predict even preferences that a politician might prefer to conceal, such as their intention to defect from a par-

liamentary group — thus illustrating the potential of social media data for analysing intra-party competition and conflict that is often hard to observe using other text sources.

Building upon this prior literature, this chapter uses the Twitter posts sent by elected members of the Japanese Diet during the course of the second Abe Administration to create a latent space model of their political positions. To allow for analysis of changing positions over time and avoid the problem of topic drift (whereby the natural progression of salient issues in the political sphere results in the differences in vocabulary usage between time periods being greater than the differences between politicians within those time periods), the period under observation (January 2013 to August 2020) is divided up into 17 time slices of roughly equal length — the small differences in length being dictated by the need for national elections to always serve as a boundary between two time slices. The validity of the latent space model is first tested by using it to observe the relative positions of political parties (a reasonably well-understood question in the Japanese context), thus confirming that the Twitter data is actually yielding a spatial model with salient political features. Next, the model is used to investigate intra-party relationships in the LDP by observing the extent to which the party's internal factions cluster around the LDP's central leadership (indicating a high degree of message coherence and discipline among party members) or move away from the leadership (indicating more independent or undisciplined messaging by individual factions and their members) during different points in the administration's history.

3.2 Data Collection

A common challenge encountered when analysing social media data is that accessing a complete data set — or even a properly representative sample — can be difficult or even impossible. While Twitter is the most "open" of the popular social media platforms, providing a public API (Application Programming Interface) through which a large volume of data about users and their posts can be collected, there

are a number of limitations to data collection including restrictions on access to historical data (for example, standard keyword searches will only return posts from the last seven days), "black box" sampling which does not guarantee a representative sample of posts, and rate limits that only permit data collection to proceed at a certain pace (for a summary of some of these limitations see Stieglitz et al. 2018). In order to carry out the analysis in this chapter, a complete data set of every post on Twitter by elected members of the Diet between 2013 and 2020 was required: gaps in that data caused by limits on historical access, or unrepresentative sampling caused by Twitter's API algorithms, could create significant bias in the results which would be difficult if not impossible to account for. To avoid this problem, data was collected using Twitter's user timeline API, which instead of conducting a search or providing sampled results simply gives a chronological set of the tweets sent by an individual user[2]. The only notable limitations to this approach are that only the 3200 most recent tweets sent by each user can be accessed (which creates an uneven level of historical access depending on how prolific each user's tweeting behaviour is), and tweets cannot be accessed if their sender has later chosen to delete the tweet, delete their account, or set their account to be private, i.e., hidden from public view. These limitations are potentially relevant to this research project since the period covered (2013-2020) is long enough that many users will have sent more than 3200 tweets, and also because politicians who leave the Diet (especially those who lose elections) sometimes delete their Twitter accounts, thus (deliberately or unintentionally) removing the record of their public statements while in office. To circumvent these problems, a script which collected new tweets sent from the accounts of elected Diet members was run on a regular schedule, starting with an initial collection in 2015 with new tweets being subsequently gathered on a weekly basis.

The list of target accounts (i.e., the Twitter accounts of every elected Diet member) was compiled from a variety of sources, as no authoritative list of these accounts existed at the outset of this project. For each member of the Diet, Twitter account

details were searched for on their official websites, in the candidate information published on newspapers' election websites, on their Wikipedia pages and using Twitter's own search function. The resulting list of accounts was examined manually to ensure that no impostor or parody accounts were included (this step was required as not all Japanese politicians' accounts are "verified" by Twitter, which would in theory guarantee their authenticity). This process was then repeated at each election — both for the new cohort of elected politicians and for the Diet members from the previous cohort who had not operated Twitter accounts at the prior election.

One notable finding that was apparent simply from observing this list of Twitter accounts was that the extent to which politicians use Twitter differed significantly among parties. This can be seen from the data summarised in Table 3.1, which shows the percentage of politicians from each of the major parties who had an active Twitter account during the Abe Administration. Broadly speaking, lawmakers from smaller parties were much more likely to use Twitter, with almost 90% of JCP and Ishin lawmakers, and over three quarters of Komeito lawmakers, being active on the platform — a number which falls to around 65% for the Democratic Party (in its various incarnations) and just under 54% for the LDP. This finding suggests that the trend of small opposition groups being more engaged with online campaigning that was noted by Tkach-Kawasaki (2003) almost twenty years ago continues to be relevant today: politicians from the larger and more dominant parties, who have greater access to traditional media and more resources for traditional campaigning, see less value or benefit in being active online, whereas those from smaller parties embrace social media as an opportunity to reach constituents directly and compensate for their lack of visibility in traditional media.

Collecting the tweets sent by the identified accounts — and excluding any sent by lawmakers who were not in office at the time, i.e., only counting those sent by politicians who were in the Diet at the time the tweet was sent — yielded 1,285,740 tweets in total, of which 463,084 were sent by LDP politicians. An addi-

Table 3.1: Percentage of Diet Members with Twitter Accounts, by Party

	Diet Members	**with Twitter**	**%**
LDP	422	226	53.6 %
Komeito	60	46	76.7 %
DP[1]	172	112	65.1 %
Ishin[2]	26	23	88.5 %
JCP	35	31	88.6 %

[1] Includes DPJ, CDPJ, and other parties that merged into the DP grouping.
[2] Includes only Nippon Ishin no Kai members who never joined the DP group.

tional 137,074 tweets were sent by Diet members belonging to the LDP's coalition partner, Komeito, meaning that government politicians accounted for slightly less than half of the total tweets sent — 600,158 tweets, or 46.68% of the total volume of posts. Figure 3.1 shows the monthly volume of Twitter posts across the course of the administration, broken down by political party (with the LDP and Komeito highlighted at the bottom of each stacked bar). There was an overall rising trend in Twitter usage across this seven-year time frame, supporting the idea that social media communication has increased in importance for political actors during this period. Election campaign periods are clearly visible as spikes in the graph, but it's also notable that there is a relatively consistent pattern of tweet volumes rising as an election approaches and then dropping back significantly after each election. In part this may be due to a changing cohort effect — if newly-elected politicians are less prolific users of Twitter than the outgoing Diet members they replace, for example, we would expect to see this pattern to some extent — but it is also likely that this reflects something about politicians' mindset regarding Twitter, specifically that they view it as a tool for political marketing and campaign (or pre-campaign) communication, and thus focus less attention on the platform when an election period is distant.

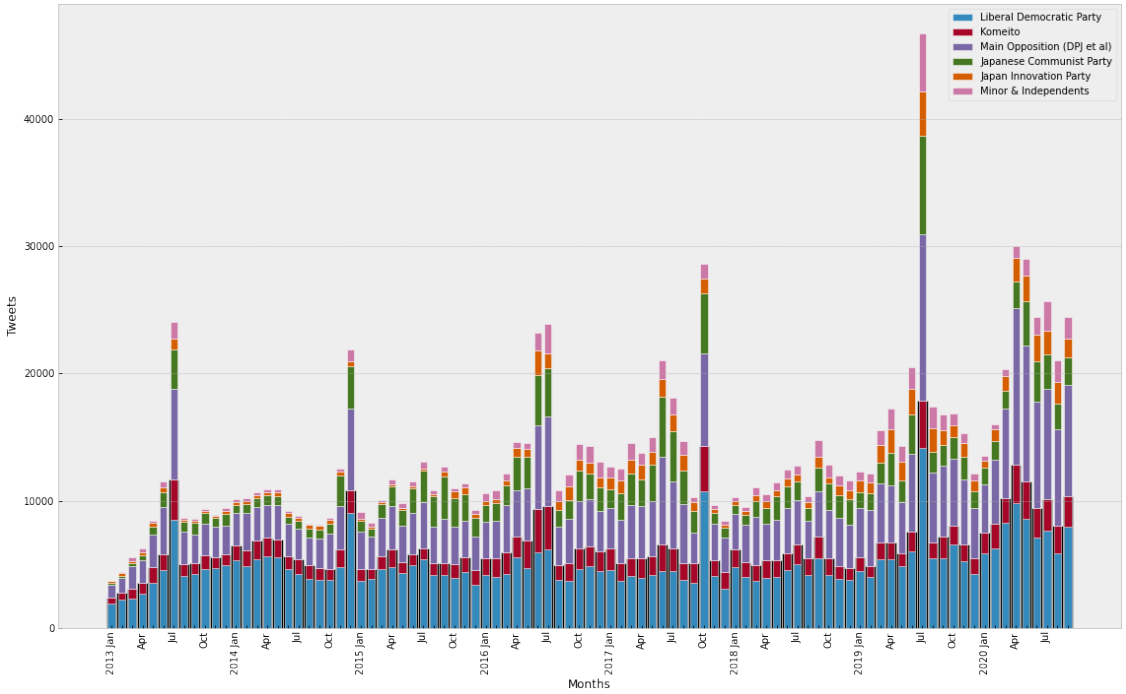


Figure 3.1: Twitter Posts by Japanese Diet Members, 2013-2020

3.2.1 Use of Twitter by LDP Lawmakers

While the first analysis conducted in this chapter involves validating the construction of a latent space model from Twitter data by observing the positions of all parties — government and opposition — in the space, the primary focus of the chapter is on the internal positions of politicians within the LDP, thus excluding data for opposition politicians. Figure 3.2 uses the same data as Figure 3.1 but shows only the tweets sent by LDP politicians. This reveals that LDP Diet members' Twitter behaviour, in terms of volume at least, followed a broadly similar pattern to that of politicians overall — there is an overall rising pattern, with elections demarcated by significant spikes in volume[3] while post-election periods generally see a fall-off in Twitter activity before a rising pattern re-establishes itself. This pattern suggests that LDP Diet members, like Diet members more generally, treat Twitter as a political communication and campaigning tool — using the platform more extensively as elections approach, with their usage dropping off in the immediately post-election period as the value of engaging in campaigning behaviour reduces.

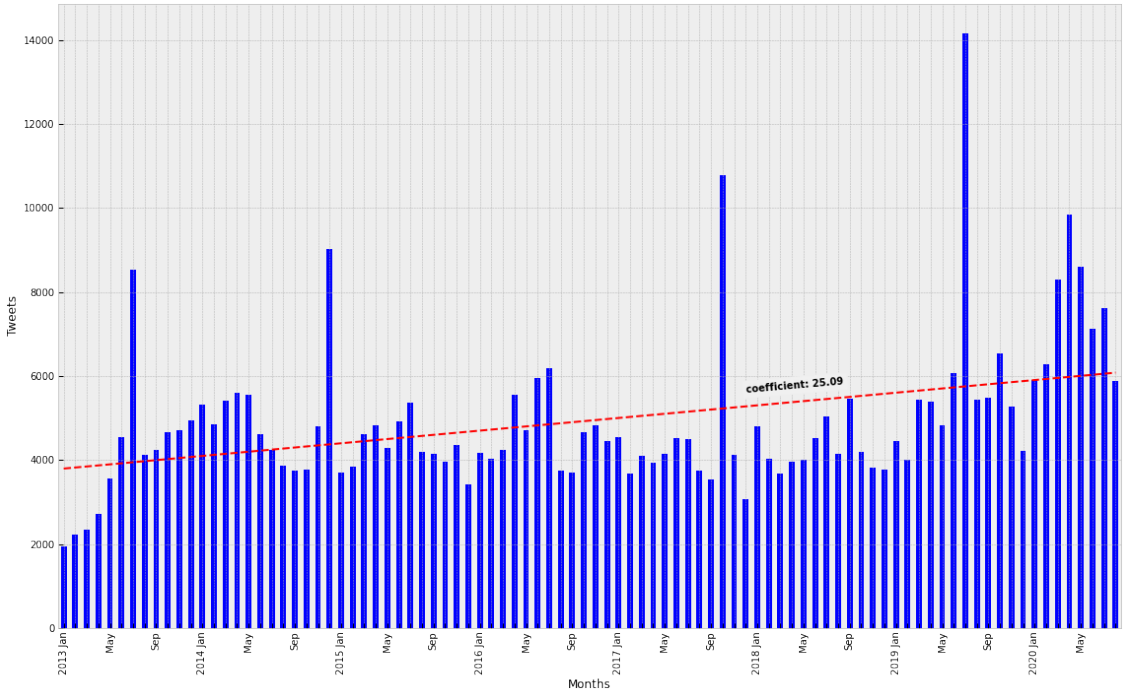


Figure 3.2: Twitter Posts by LDP Diet Members, 2013-2020

Since the use of Twitter as a political communication platform is far from universal among Japanese politicians — and as shown in Table 3.1 above, LDP lawmakers were less likely overall to use Twitter than lawmakers in smaller and opposition parties — one concern about using politicians' Twitter accounts as a source of data is that there may be an inherent bias, a form of self-selection, created by politicans' use or non-use of the platform. Figures 3.3 and 3.4 display the demographic and political characteristics of LDP members on Twitter over the course of the Abe administration, with Figure 3.3 showing which proportion of each group (based on divisions of gender, age, upper or lower house membership, and election through a district race or proportional representation) had an active Twitter account. These data are based on each member's last period in the Diet — the final term of the Abe administration for those who remained until the end, or the last term before their departure for those who left the Diet during the administration. The differences within these categories are all relatively minor, with one notable exception — the Over 70 age group, which is the only group across all categories to fall below 50% usage of Twitter, with only 36.5% of Diet members aged over 70 using the medium.

Twitter usage was also relatively low among lawmakers in their 60s compared to younger groups, though over half of this group (54.7%) used the platform.

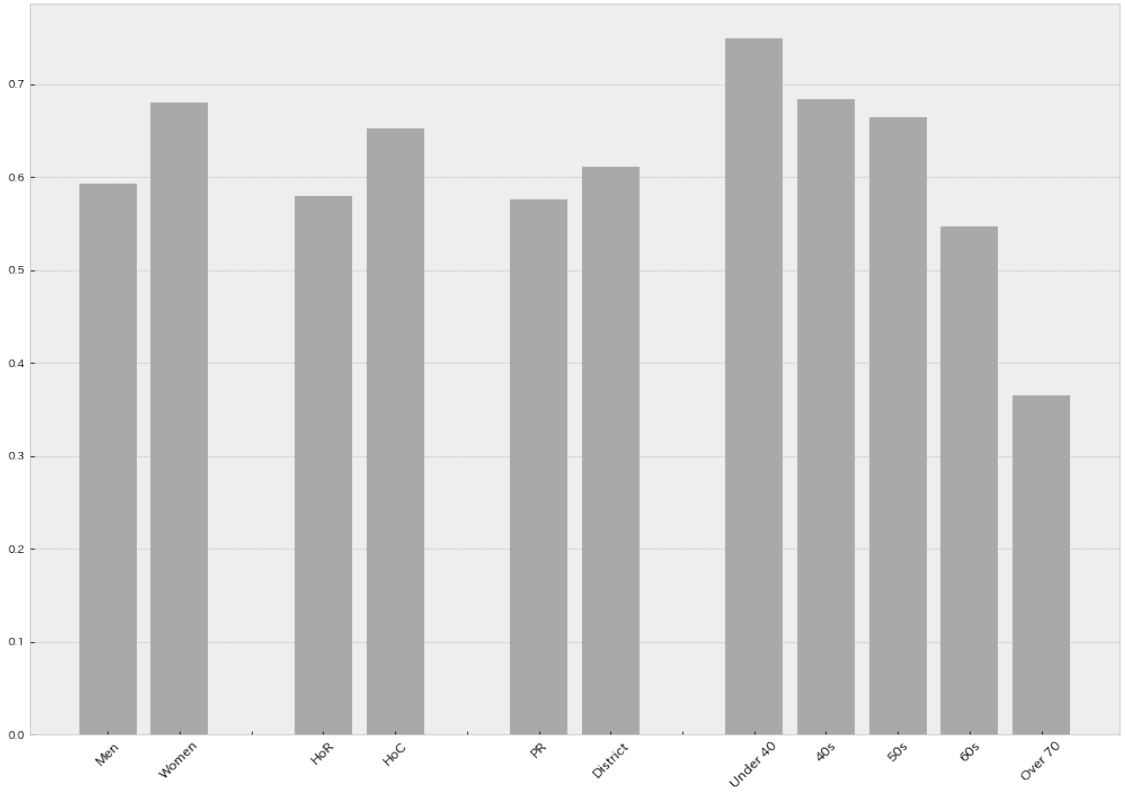


Figure 3.3: Use of Twitter by LDP Lawmakers - Demographic Groups

A logistic regression testing the effects of a variety of demographic and political factors on the probability of Twitter use, shown in Figure 3.4, revealed similar results. The factors in the model were those mentioned above (gender, age, upper or lower house membership, and election in a district or by PR) along with dummies for faction membership and being first elected during either the Koizumi (2001-2006) or Abe II (2012-2020) administrations (cohorts often referred to as the "Koizumi Children" and "Abe Children"). None of them were especially significant to the probability of Twitter use, with the exception of the older age groups, confirming that those in their 60s are slightly less likely to use Twitter, while those over 70 are significantly less likely. Apart from the lower probability of usage among older lawmakers, however, the use of Twitter appears to be fairly evenly distributed over lawmakers regardless of gender or of political factors such as faction membership or belonging to specific cohorts in the Diet.

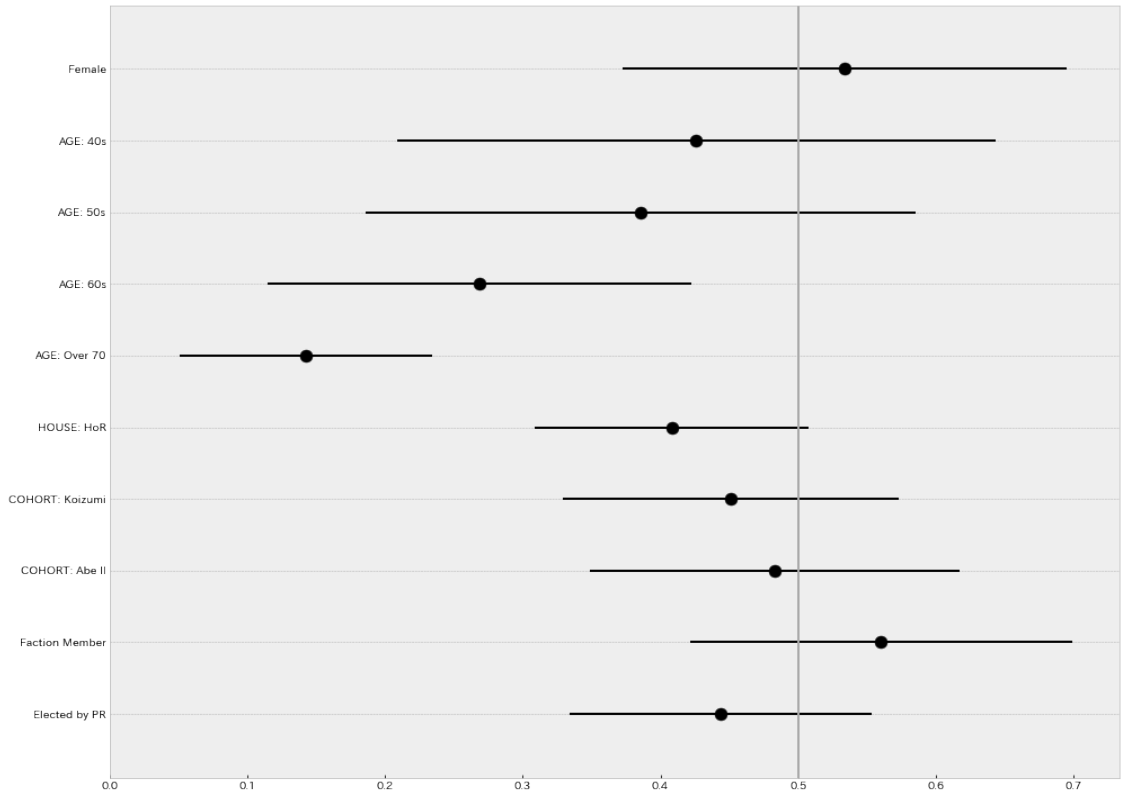


Figure 3.4: Use of Twitter by LDP Lawmakers - Logistic Regression

3.3 Methodology

After collecting the complete set of Diet members' tweets as outlined above, the text of the Twitter posts was pre-processed to divide them into tokens (units of vocabulary) which may be used to create a contingency table (sometimes called a "bag of words" representation, or a document-term matrix) suitable for the application of statistical methods such as correspondence analysis. A pre-filter was applied to the text to separate out features unique to Twitter data such as emoji, "kaomoji" (emoticons made up of text components), URLs and hashtags (see Fahey 2017), after which the Japanese language text was tokenised using *mecab* (Kudo 2016) and the *mecab-ipadic-neologd* dictionary (Sato et al. 2017), which allows the tokenisation process to correctly capture common neologisms including the names of political parties and well-known politicians.

In the next step, a number of contingency tables were constructed from the tokenised data, representing different time periods in the data. To validate the

methodology, a time slice of the midpoint of the data was taken (the first half of 2017 was used for this purpose) and a table containing the tweets of politicians of all parties was constructed. By grouping their tweets according to party (i.e., setting the unit of analysis to the party level), it was then possible to use a correspondence analysis to create a spatial model of Japan's political parties during this time period. This model is analysed in the Results section below. Additionally, for the purposes of comparison the Wordfish algorithm was used to analyse the same data set, both on an individual level (replicating the methodology of Ceron (2017)) and on an aggregated party level.

The main analysis focused exclusively on LDP Diet members' tweets (n=463,084), which were grouped according to their LDP faction membership and further sub-grouped according to the time period in which they were sent. The tweets were divided into 17 roughly equally sized time periods in order to avoid problems with topic drift and permit time series analysis of their latent space positions. The time periods chosen, which were constrained by the need for elections (and their attendant changes in the Twitter account cohort) to lie on the boundaries of the time slices, can be seen in Table 3.2. Consequently, the level of observation in this analysis (i.e., the "documents" being used in the correspondence analysis contingency table) is on a per-faction, per-time period basis. It is important to keep all of the time periods together in a single correspondence analysis, since carrying out individual per-period analyses would make it impossible to directly compare the latent space distances across time periods (a distance of 1.0 in one set of analysis results may not have the same substantive meaning as a distance of 1.0 in a completely different analysis result set). By running a single analysis of the full time span, it is possible to make comparisons between different time periods — seeing whether the factions are more spread out or more tightly clustered in one time period as compared to another — and also to observe the movement of individual factions over time, for example seeing whether the Kishida faction moved towards or away from the Hosoda faction as the time periods advanced.

Table 3.2: Time Periods used for Analysis

	Begin	**End**	**Election**[1]
1	01-01-2013	21-07-2013	HoC
2	22-07-2013	31-12-2013	—
3	01-01-2014	30-06-2014	—
4	01-07-2014	14-12-2014	HoR
5	15-12-2014	30-06-2015	—
6	01-07-2015	31-12-2015	—
7	01-01-2016	10-07-2016	HoC
8	11-07-2016	31-12-2016	—
9	01-01-2017	31-05-2017	—
10	01-06-2017	22-10-2017	HoR
11	23-10-2017	31-03-2018	—
12	01-04-2018	31-08-2018	—
13	01-09-2018	31-01-2019	—
14	01-02-2019	21-07-2019	HoC
15	22-07-2019	30-11-2019	—
16	01-12-2019	31-03-2020	—
17	01-04-2020	28-08-2020	—[2]

[1] The Election column indicates whether a period ends in an election for either the House of Representatives (HoR) or House of Councillors (HoC).
[2] Prime Minister Abe resigned on this date.

Having created this latent space model containing ideal points for each faction in each time period, it is then relatively straightforward to calculate the mean distances between the factions. Rather than constraining the analysis to the top two dimensions identified by correspondence analysis — which is common practice, but largely only because of the ease of visualising two-dimensional data — the latent distance between factions is measured across the full set of dimensions, with each dimension's contribution to the distance weighted according to the eigenvalue associated with it. These distances are measured in two ways: firstly, the pairwise distance between all of the factions is calculated, and secondly, the position of the Hosoda faction is treated as a reference point and the mean distance of other factions from that point is calculated. The reason for using the Hosoda faction as a reference point in this secondary measurement is that this was Prime Minister Abe's faction, and throughout the Abe Administration there were no notable reports of any dissension or dissatisfaction with the Prime Minister from within this faction. It is therefore reasonable to assume that Hosoda faction members would be as loyal to Abe's leadership as anyone within the party might be expected to be, and thus to treat this faction's latent position as an approximation of that of the leadership itself.

3.4 Results

This section will present the results of the above-outlined methodology, looking firstly at the verification of the approach conducted by creating a model of the Japanese political party space, before turning to the central examination of the LDP's intra-party competition and the evolving positions of its factions over time.

3.4.1 Political Parties' Latent Positions

The first analysis step verified the effectiveness of this methodology by using it to generate a latent space model of a relatively well-understood space — the political

spectrum of Japan's major parties. For the purposes of this analysis, the midpoint of the data was used as a sample, i.e., the first half of 2017 (a time period which also has the advantage from an interpretation point of view of being prior to the major split in Japan's opposition which occurred later that year, and thus not including new parties such as *Kibō no Tō*, the Party of Hope, whose actual political positions were not especially well-defined).

The results of correspondence analysis performed on a contingency table that clustered tweets by party affiliation can be see in Figure 3.5. The positions of the parties on this graph are relatively easy to interpret, especially on the primary (horizontal) axis, which shows the government parties (the LDP and Komeito) on the left, and the opposition parties on the right; there is also some nuance in the distribution of opposition parties on this axis, with the Japanese Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party being notably further to the left than the more centrist Democratic Party. The secondary (vertical) axis is a little less straightforward to interpret, but appears to be a representation of the distance between the LDP and Komeito on one hand, and the mainstream opposition and the JCP on the other, likely related to the strong focus of both Komeito and the JCP on employment, social welfare and "family pocketbook" issues that are of high salience to the suburban family voters for whom both parties increasingly compete.

Analysis of the vocabulary words that are associated with each axis (rendered on this graph in grey behind the party position markers) confirms these interpretations, as well as offering some insights into the logic underlying the algorithm's placement of each party. The horizontal axis is not in fact, as first glance might suggest, a straightforward axis based on left-right, or progressive-conservative, policy positions: rather, the "opposition" side of this axis is strongly linked with terms related either to LDP scandals or to opposition itself. *Kake* and *Moritomo*, the names of two schools which embroiled the Prime Minister and his wife in separate corruption scandals, both feature prominently, as does the word *gakuen* ("school"); *hantai* ("oppose"), *hihan* ("criticise") and *kenpō* ("constitution") are also prominent. The

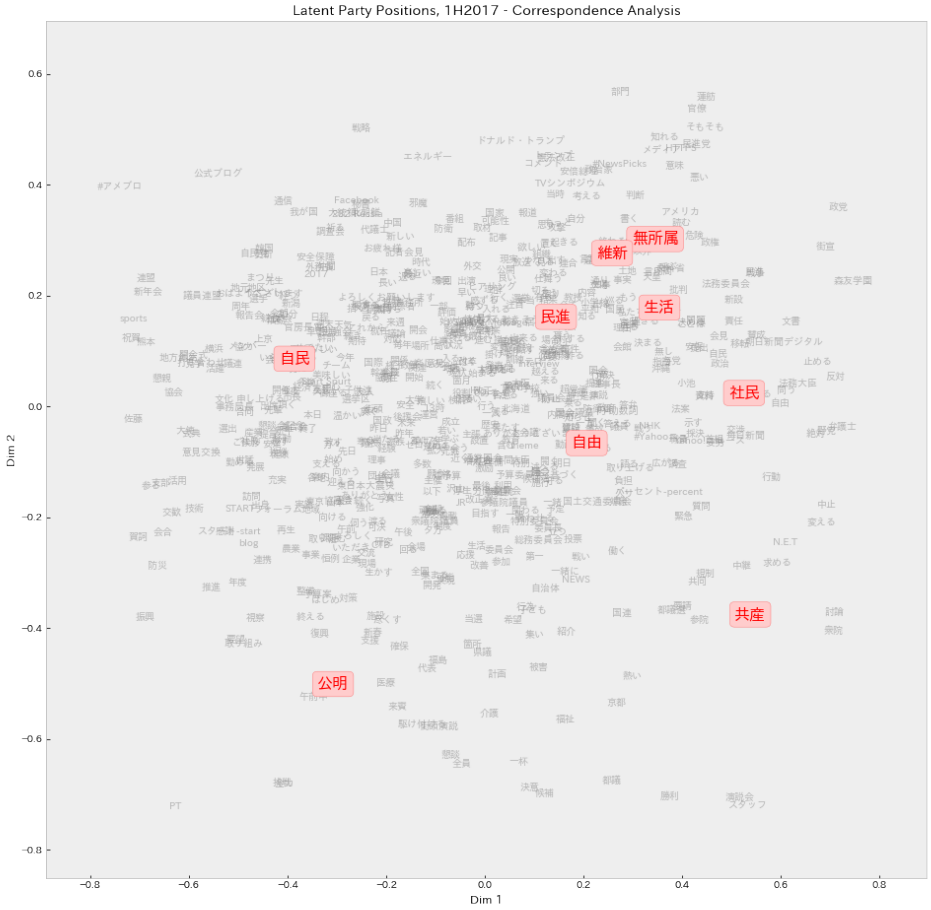


Figure 3.5: Latent Party Positions, 1H2017

other end of the axis, in contrast, seems largely focused on vocabulary related to local retail politics — *matsuri* ("festival"), *supo-tsu* ("sports"), *kaigō* ("assembly, or association"), and *jimoto* ("local area") all feature prominently. This axis therefore seems to be encoding a key difference in how LDP politicians and opposition politicians approach Twitter, with the former being heavily focused on local issues and on promoting their engagement with local communities, while the latter focus on criticism of the government over national-level issues such as corruption scandals and the Constitution.

A similar analysis of vocabulary words in the secondary axis confirms that the basis of the separation between Komeito and the JCP at the bottom of the graph

and the other parties near the top is indeed based on the policy priorities of those parties. The top of the graph — occupied by the LDP, the Democratic Party and Nippon Ishin no Kai, among some others — sees a preponderance of terms seemingly related to national security issues, with *chūgoku* ("China"), *kitachōsen* ("North Korea"), *misairu* ("missile") and *toranpu* ("Trump") all appearing here. The lower end of the axis, in contrast, features terms such as *kōsei* ("public welfare"), *nenkin* ("pensions"), *rōdō* ("labour"), *hōken* ("insurance"), and *kodomo* ("children") — all terms strongly related to social welfare and family-related issues that are key to the voting constituencies for which Komeito and the JCP compete most strongly (for discussion of Komeito's policy priorities see Ehrhardt 2014; see also Lindgren 2016).

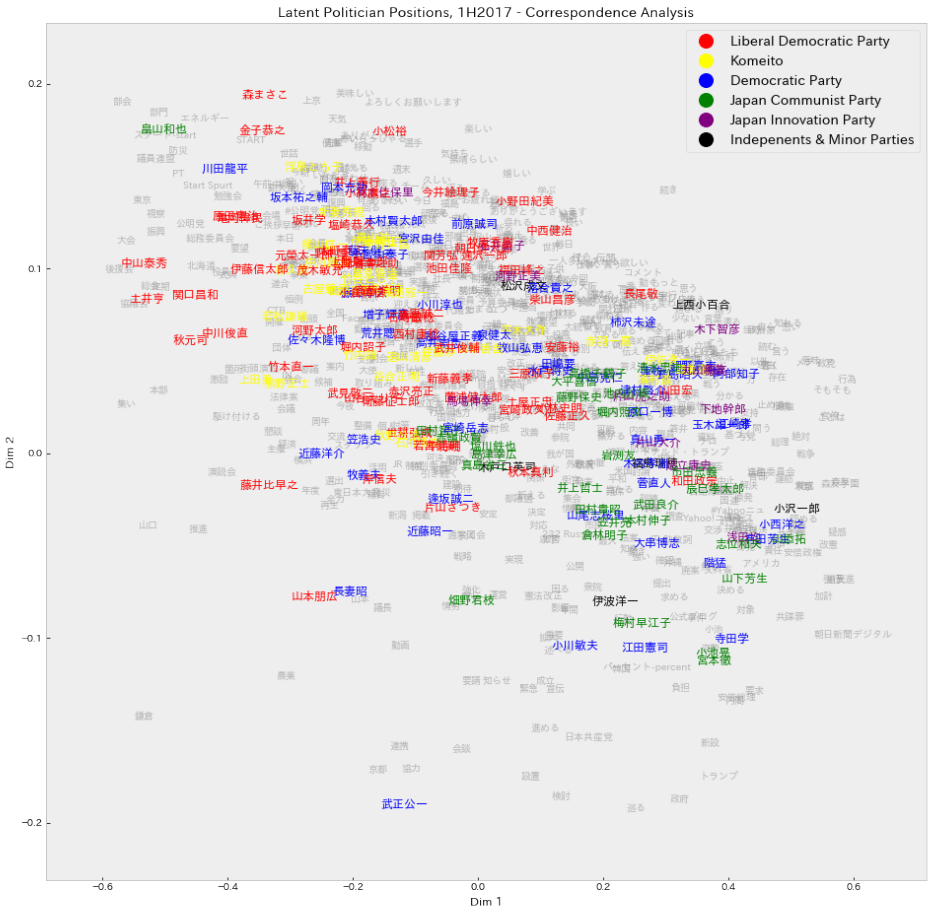


Figure 3.6: Latent Diet Member Positions, 1H2017

Figure 3.6 presents an alternative analysis of the same data (i.e., the first half of 2017), in which the unit of analysis is shifted to individual politicians (colour-coded according to party affiliation) rather than political parties. As we might expect, individual differences among politicians — both in terms of their actual political preferences and their communication styles — result in more overlap between the positions of politicians of different parties, but the broad outline of the Japanese political spectrum remains clear, with LDP and Komeito politicians (in red and yellow) being largely clustered towards the top left of the graph, while Democratic Party and JCP politicians are largely clustered on the bottom right. The JCP is especially clearly delineated from the ruling parties, while a number of DP lawmakers overlap with the LDP area of the graph — notably, the data upon which this graph is based dates from the period before the DP underwent a sudden and acrimonious split between a more left-wing faction, which became the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, and a more centrist or centre-right faction that sought more cooperation with the government on issues such as constitutional reform, which became the Party of Hope (and latterly the Democratic Party for the People). It is possible that the highly distributed nature of DP members in this analysis — overlapping both the positions of the centre-right LDP and the far-left JCP — is indicative of the tensions leading to this split, similar to the finding of Ceron (2017) that latent space analysis of Twitter data could predict defection from intra-party groups.

3.4.2 Comparing Correspondence Analysis and Wordfish

While this study relies primarily on correspondence analysis, which outputs multiple dimensions ranked by their eigenvalues and is therefore very effective at handling complex data (in this case, large volumes of tweets covering a wide variety of topics over an eight-year timespan), similar studies in the past have effectively used the Wordfish algorithm to analyse social media text data (notably Ceron 2017, which provides much of the theoretical underpinning for the present study). For the purposes of comparison, therefore, the same data used to generate Figures 3.5 and 3.6

was also analysed using Wordfish, and the results can be seen in Figure 3.7 (for analysis at the aggregated party level) and Figure 3.8 (analysis at the individual politician level).

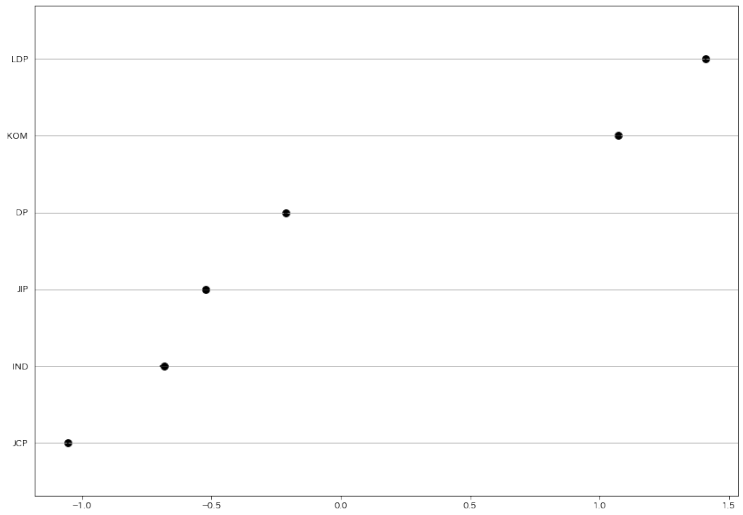


Figure 3.7: Wordfish positioning of Twitter texts, aggregated to party level, 2017

Aggregated to the party level, Wordfish produces a very similar result to the primary dimension (horizontal axis) seen in Figure 3.5 — the government coalition of the LDP and Komeito are on one side, with the opposition parties grouped on the other side, the Democratic Party being closer to the centre and the JCP being furthest to the left. This axis is flipped in the correspondence analysis chart, but otherwise matches very closely. In terms of this primary axis of political competition, both algorithms perform equally well. However, the one-dimensional output of the Wordfish algorithm means that the information encoded in subsequent dimensions of the correspondence analysis output is lost entirely: for example, the vertical axis of Figure 3.5 shows the distance between the parties which focus strongly on welfare-related topics (Komeito and the JCP) and those which focus more on national security and foreign policy (the LDP and the mainstream opposition parties), but there is no way to observe or allow for this separation in the Wordfish output. This illustrates a key reason for choosing correspondence analysis as the primary method

for text analysis in this chapter — we can reasonably expect political differences to have emerged over a variety of different topics in the course of eight years of data, but in seeking to scale these positions onto a single axis, Wordfish is likely to discard certain topics entirely. One way to minimise this problem would be to restrict the vocabulary used in the analysis to terms that appear across all time periods, but this would prevent the effective analysis of topics which emerged during the course of the administration, such as various named scandals (Kake, Moritomo, *sontaku* scandals etc.), issues around the Tokyo Olympics, or the COVID-19 pandemic. An alternative approach, and the one employed here, is to use an algorithm which scales documents across multiple dimensions, allowing the distribution of certain dimensions to simply shrink towards zero in time periods when that dimension's heavily weighted vocabulary terms were not in use.

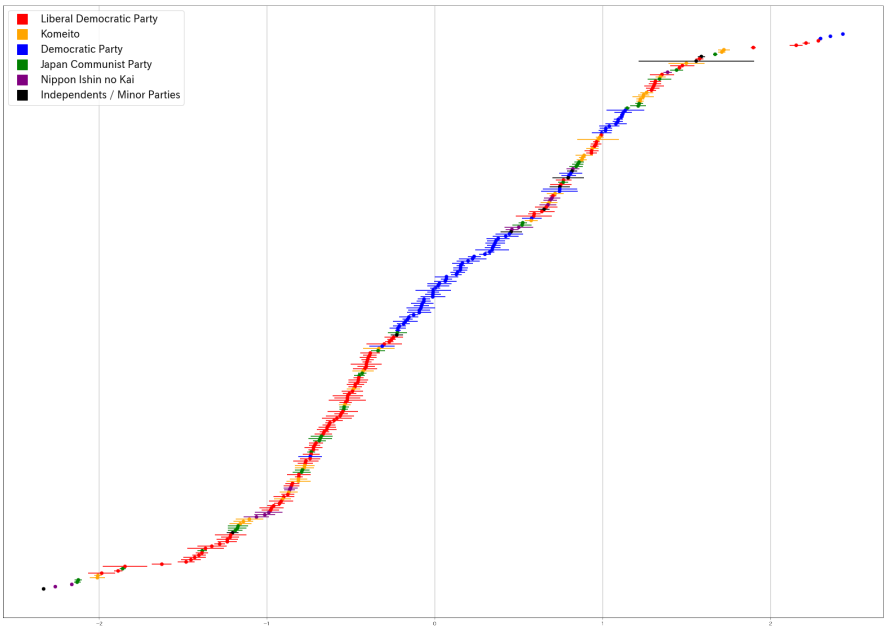


Figure 3.8: Wordfish positioning of politicians' Twitter accounts, 2017

Using the Wordfish algorithm at the level of individual politicians produces a distinctive separation between LDP and DP lawmakers, but increasing the number and diversity of documents to be scaled in this way also illustrates a weakness of

using Wordfish for this form of data, with many lawmakers appearing in nonsensical positions on the graph — such as JCP members (in green) appearing on both the far right and far left of the LDP cluster. Correspondence analysis also failed to produce a clean and easily interpretable primary axis of political competition in this case (see Figure 3.6), with significant outliers appearing along the axis. This is due to the high diversity in the topics addressed by individual politicians; while an aggregated group of politicians such as a party or a faction are likely to touch upon most key topics between them, allowing their effective positioning on a single axis of competition, a single politician may simply never have posted anything regarding the subjects that the model has selected as important for the primary axis of competition, resulting in their position on this axis being poorly estimated.

Neither Wordfish nor correspondence analysis can fully overcome this problem, which is fundamental to this form of data. One possible approach to addressing the issue is the Wordshoal algorithm (Lauderdale and Herzog 2016), which first creates a labelled topic model and then runs Wordfish across the data sets for each topic; this has proved especially effective with data types which are amenable to the creation of accurate, interpretable topic models such as legislative speeches and newspaper editorials (Kaneko et al. 2020). Correspondence analysis is innately less susceptible to the problem, however, since it will position actors across multiple dimensions independently, meaning that even if an actor's position in the primary dimension is poorly estimated (due to lack of engagement with the topics it encodes), their positions in secondary dimensions will remain measurable and interpretable.

3.4.3 Comparing Correspondence Analysis with Ideal Points from UTAS Data

While significant divergence between the results in this chapter (drawn from social media texts) and those in Chapter 2 (based on ideal point estimation from the University of Tokyo / Asahi Shimbun politician surveys) is expected, there ought nonetheless to be some degree of correlation observable between the two sets of

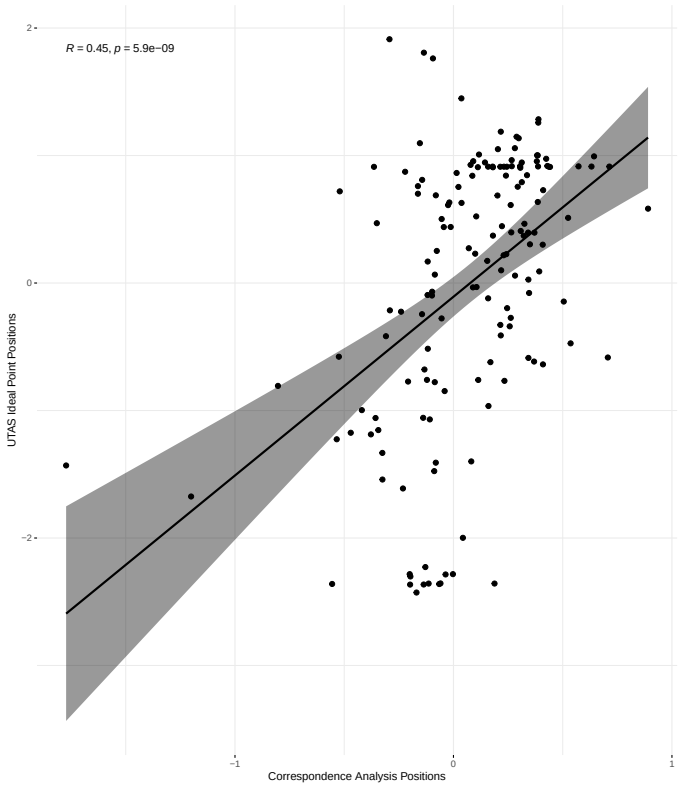


Figure 3.9: Correlation between UTAS ideal points and primary CA dimension, 2017 HOR Election

results. If the calculation of politicians' latent space positions from their Twitter posts yields points that are completely unrelated to the policy positions they express through the UTAS survey, after all, we might reasonably interpret this to mean that their Twitter posts simply do not reflect their policy preferences in any meaningful way. The fact that a recognisable primary axis of party competition can easily be generated from the Twitter data (either through correspondence analysis, as in Figure 3.5, or through Wordfish, as in Figure 3.7) already disproves this null hypothesis; further confirmation, however, can be found through the comparison of individual politicians' positions on the primary axis of competition identified through correspondence analysis in Figure 3.5, and the ideal points identified for the same politicians through Bayesian item response theory modelling in Chapter 2, using the UTAS data for the nearest election (the 2017 House of Representatives election). The results of this analysis are seen in Figure 3.9. While there is a high degree of scattering, there is also a robust ($p < 0.001$) if relatively small ($R = 0.45$)

correlation between the two sets of points, despite their creation from very different types of data using entirely different methodologies.

From a methodological standpoint, the figures presented above demonstrate that it is possible, through the application of correspondence analysis to the Twitter posts sent by politicians, to construct latent spaces in which politicians' positions show clearly recognisable features of the political space. These multi-dimensional spaces (of which only two dimensions are shown in these sample analyses) encode not only the primary axis of competition — which is also possible using alternative methods such as Wordfish — but also represent more subtle differences among actors, such as the divide between the government coalition partners, the LDP and Komeito, over the extent of their focus on public welfare policies versus national security issues, or the scattered nature of the pre-split Democratic Party. It is also important to note that this methodology functions effectively at both individual and aggregate levels: comprehensible latent space models are created both when the unit of analysis is an individual politician (i.e., a single politician's tweets during the time period are treated as a single "document" in the contingency table) and when it is a political party (i.e., all tweets from politicians from a given party are combined into one "document"). This means that political positions are neither obscured by the stochastic nature of individual politicians' posting style on Twitter, nor do they disappear or get smoothed over when politicians are grouped together according to their group affiliations.

3.4.4 Evolving Positions of the LDP's Internal Factions

The next step for the analysis is to focus on the LDP's intra-party political space by grouping politicians according to their declared faction membership, while also expanding the temporal scope of the analysis to cover the full duration of the Abe Administration (using the time periods shown in Table 3.2). As explained in the Methods section above, this analysis groups politicians' tweets by faction within each discrete time period and creates a single latent space model that would permit

observation of a faction's movement over time as well as cross-sectional observation of the relative positions of factions within each time period — this latter being the main aspect of interest to the analysis performed in this chapter.

Unlike the sample analyses of the full political spectrum performed above, the objective here is not to create a two-dimensional graph that can be manually interpreted. The problem of topic drift (whereby the topics under discussion in different time periods will naturally differ from one another significantly) means that simplifying the latent space to two dimensions would almost inevitably be vastly over-reductive given the range of different topics we can expect politicians to have taken positions on over the seven-year period of the Abe Administration. Figure 3.10 shows the top two dimensions of the correspondence analysis result: while making it clear that visual interpretation of these results is unrealistic, this chart does strongly suggest that topic drift over time is a major factor in the results, with all of the factions' positions in the first few time periods being found on the left of the chart, and their positions in the last few time periods being found on the right. To interpret the results of this analysis, therefore, requires focusing on the relative positions of factions within time periods (thus excluding the effects of topic drift) as well as expanding from two dimensions to consider the existence of other significant dimensions within the space.

This expectation is confirmed by observing the eigenvalues of the dimensions produced by the correspondence analysis: rather than having one or two dominant dimensions, the most significant dimension's eigenvalue equates to only 10.77%, with the next most significant being 8.5%. There is a significant drop-off in the eigenvalues after six dimensions, and the top six dimensions sum to 38.58%, which is a reasonably good degree of explanatory power for a model based on highly stochastic Twitter data. Consequently, the measurements of intra-faction distance employed in this analysis are based on the city-block distance between them over the top six dimensions, with each dimension's contribution to the distance being weighted according to that dimension's eigenvalue.

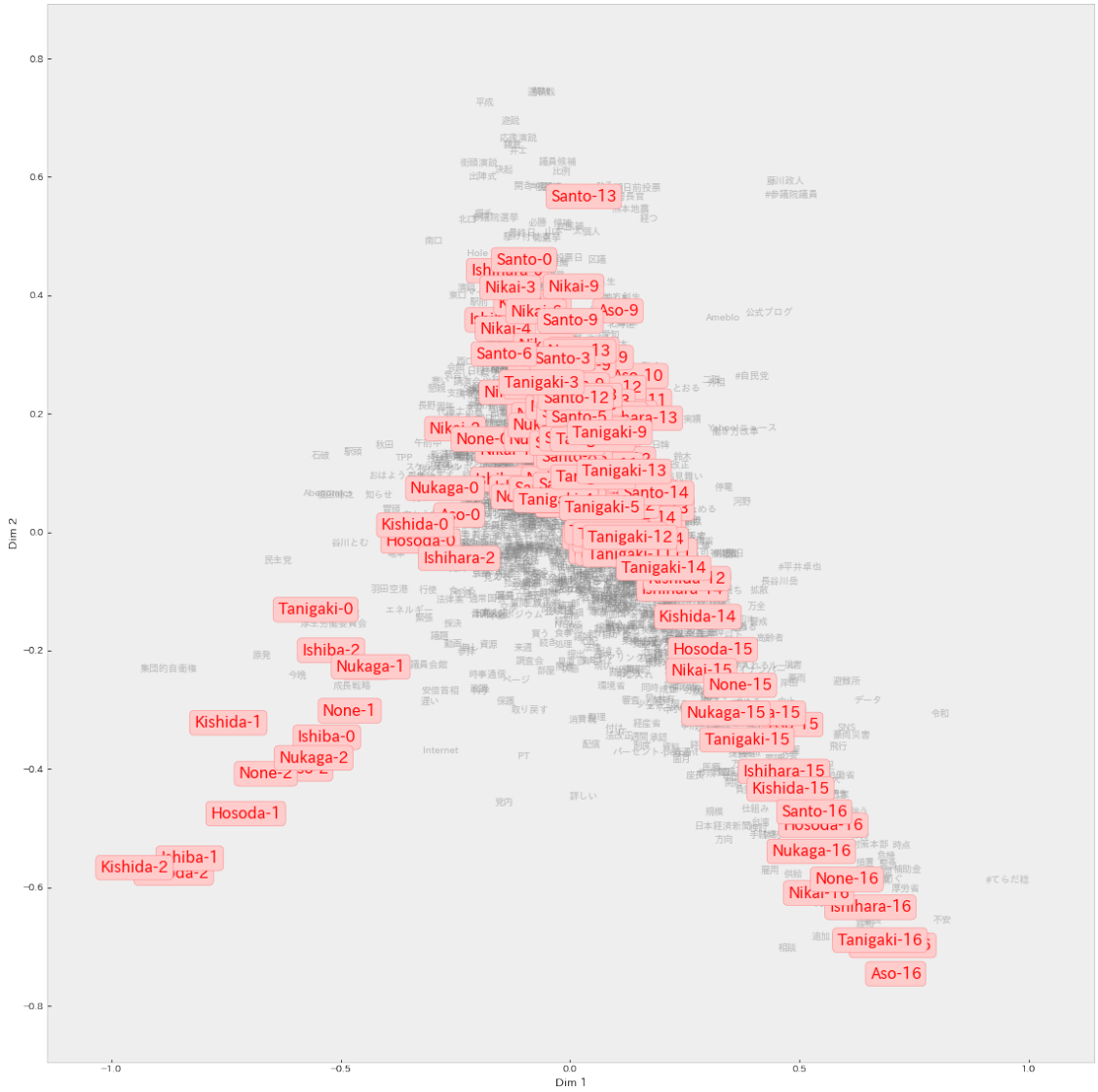


Figure 3.10: Sample of Latent Faction Positions, 2013-2020

The resulting distances between the various factions on a pairwise basis are shown in Figure 3.11, while a secondary measurement which treats the position of the Hosoda faction as a central reference point and measures the other factions' distance from this point alone is shown in Figure 3.12. Apart from some minor differences, the two graphs follow largely the same pattern — which serves to confirm the centrality of the Hosoda faction throughout the period observed, with the clustering or scattering of the other factions largely occurring in the form of movement towards or away from the Hosoda faction's position.

Table 3.3 provides some additional detail about the positioning of the factions during the time periods used in this analysis, listing the factions that were nearest

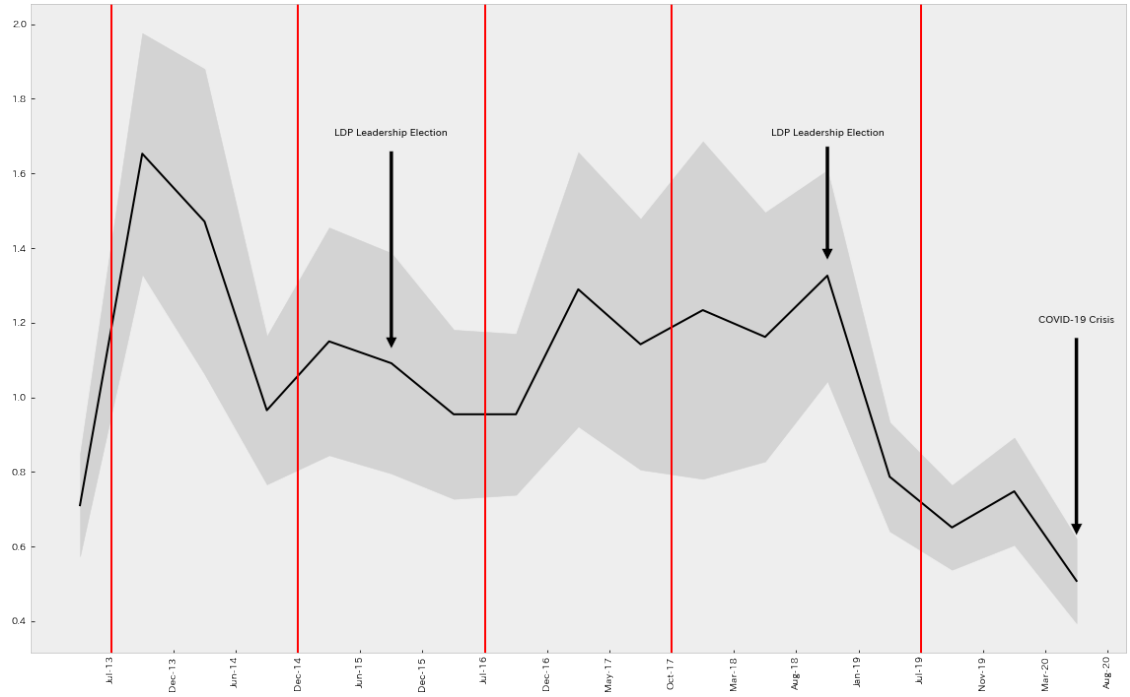


Figure 3.11: Fluctuations in mean inter-faction distances, 2013-2020

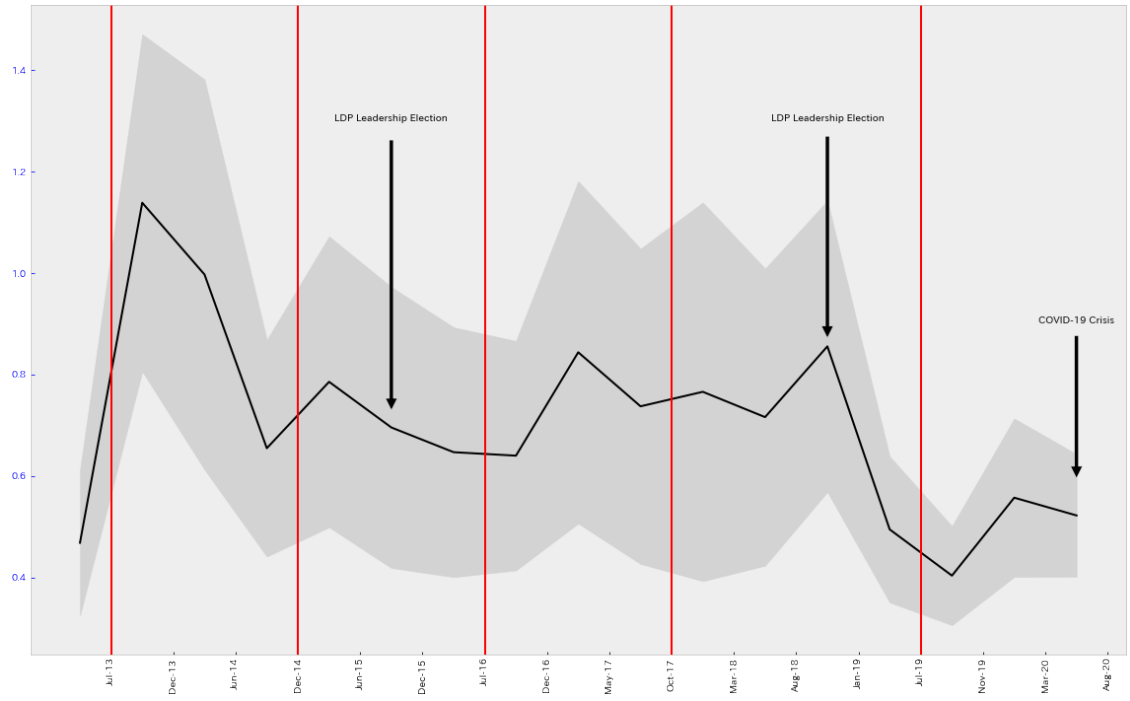


Figure 3.12: Fluctuations in mean distances to the Hosoda faction, 2013-2020

to and furthest from the Hosoda faction in each period, as well as showing the mean distance during that period for reference. It is notable that there is a significant degree of stability in these relative positions across adjacent periods (for example, the Nikai and Aso factions maintain the greatest distance from the Hosoda faction

for five successive periods apiece), despite them being treated as entirely separate documents in the correspondence analysis contingency table. This can be taken as a further indication that the results are based on consistent and relatively stable political preference positions, rather than irrelevant or even purely stochastic aspects of politicians' Twitter usage.

Table 3.3: Closest and Furthest Factions from Hosoda Faction, 2013-2020

		Closest	Furthest	Mean Distance
1		Kishida	No Faction	0.468
2		Nukaga	Nikai	1.139
3		Kishida	Nikai	0.997
4		Nukaga	Nikai	0.655
5		Nukaga	Nikai	0.786
6	[1]	Nukaga	Nikai	0.696
7		Ishiba	No Faction	0.647
8		Nukaga	Aso	0.640
9		Nukaga	Aso	0.844
10	[2]	Nukaga	Aso	0.737
11		Kishida	Aso	0.766
12	[3]	Tanigaki	Aso	0.716
13		Tanigaki	Ishiba	0.856
14		Ishiba	No Faction	0.495
15		Ishiba	Aso	0.404
16		Nikai	Aso	0.557
17		No Faction	Ishiba	0.522

[1] The Ishiba faction was formed during this period, in September 2015.
[2] The Santo faction merged into the Aso faction during this period, in July 2017.
[3] The Nukaga faction became the Takeshita faction during this period, in April 2018.

3.5 Conclusions

A number of features are apparent in Figure 3.11 (and largely mirrored in the alternative measurement in Figure 3.12) which have significant relevance for our understanding of intra-party competition and the role of factions in the LDP. Firstly, while there is a slight downward trend overall in the data — meaning that factions

are becoming more centralised around the LDP leadership in their political communication and messaging choices, and suggesting the imposition an increasing degree of message discipline — this trend is uneven and is strongly influenced by current events. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the last time period is especially notable in this regard, as the crisis situation forced a high degree of unity and message discipline in the social media communications of the various LDP factions. Equally, however, we can see that there was a significant rise in the degree of fragmentation from early 2017 through to the LDP leadership election that confirmed Abe's historic third term in late 2018 — a period during which the leadership, especially Abe himself, was assailed by a number of high-profile scandals that lingered in the media for well over a year, most notably the two corruption scandals regarding Kake Gakuen and Moritomo Gakuen. During this scandal-hit period, LDP factions were more heterogeneous in their communicative strategy — as shown by both the rising mean distance and the increase in the standard deviation — than they had been since Abe was initially consolidating his power in 2013. This heterogeneity only came to an end, likely reflecting factions falling back in line with a more top-down messaging strategy, after Abe won his historic third term in late 2018, and message discipline continued to be strong through the House of Councillors election of 2019.

A secondary pattern that can be seen in this data relates to elections — every national election is preceded by a drop in inter-faction distance, or to put it another way, a rise in the homogeneity of Twitter communication by LDP Diet members. This finding is unsurprising: it stands to reason that message discipline would be more closely observed during these times, since voters generally prefer parties that appear united and thus there is a strong disincentive for politicians to dissent from the party line during a pre-election period. The consistent pattern throughout the Abe Administration was that communicative heterogeneity fell before each election and then rose again at some point after the election (usually but not always in the period immediately following the election). This pattern is a direct mirror of the pattern found by Curini et al. (2020, pp.193-194), which used text analysis of leg-

islative speeches to measure the intensity of the government-opposition divide in the Japanese Diet; when plotted over the electoral cycle, this produced a distinctive U-shape, indicating that the divide was at its widest directly before and after elections (when parties benefited from making their differences clear to the electorate) but dropped off during the midpoint of the cycle (when, with no election on the horizon, parties could engage more openly in cooperative behaviour). The present analysis of Twitter data shows the intra-party parallel to that process, with distances among internal factions increasing during the cycle midpoint, when divergence from the party line is least risky, and then decreasing as elections approach, bringing with them an incentive to demonstrate party unity.

Considering the impact of these three factors on the observed heterogeneity of factions' Twitter communication — elections, party leadership scandals, and the COVID-19 pandemic — a picture emerges of a party faction system which, while no doubt diminished in power and influence since its heyday, continues to exert a significant influence over lawmakers' positions and communicative approaches even in the face of increasing top-down message discipline and centralisation. The points at which factional influence is exerted, however, are chosen strategically — heterogeneity among factions is seen at times when elections are distant, and emerges most clearly at times when the leadership seems weakened, such as the period when Prime Minister Abe was dogged by ongoing scandals. Homogeneity and message discipline, on the other hand, is imposed as elections approach, or at times of genuine crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. It is interesting to speculate about how the final data point on this graph might have looked without the influence of COVID-19; the high degree of party unity seen after Prime Minister Abe's third term victory in 2018 is likely attributable in part to this period being seen as something of a "victory lap" for Abe and his party, with the Prime Minister's final term in office set to be marked by celebratory events such as the coronation of a new Emperor and the hosting of the Tokyo Olympics. However, with the 2019 House of Councillors election past and speculation beginning to mount about potential contenders for the Prime

Minister's job following Abe's scheduled retirement in September 2021, we might have expected to see factional heterogeneity climbing once again as various groups jostled for position and influence ahead of the transition of power. Ultimately, of course, COVID-19 rendered this moot — and the resurgence of his chronic illness ended Abe's tenure in office slightly more than a year ahead of schedule — but in the process it provides a strong example of just how disciplined and centralised the LDP's messaging can be in a time of exogenous crisis.

The picture that emerges from this analysis, then, is a mixed one. Despite the largely uniform distribution of their policy preferences as exposed through the UTAS data analysed in Chapter 2, some heterogeneity remains among the LDP's factions which is seen through the divergence in the communicative strategies of their members. Their influence, however, does appear to be in a continuing decline, and is seen most clearly in periods when the party's central leadership is weakened by scandal or in-fighting. The analysis confirms that message discipline, including on social media, has been a part of the process of party centralisation that continued under the Abe Administration — but also shows that this process remains a work in progress. The rise in heterogeneity seen when Abe faced personal scandals, for example, suggests that the strength of the central leadership remains a key factor in imposing this discipline. If the LDP returns to its former pattern of weak, revolving-door Prime Ministers, the ability to impose message discipline over the party's faction may be severely diminished, and the potential seems to remain for the party's centralisation project — in terms of its leaders' top-down control over the factions and individual members — to be stalled or even to go into reverse.

Notes (Chapter 3)

[1]This classification approach proved to be susceptible to an increasing rate of failure as language used in Congress evolved away from the training baseline due to the natural drift in the topics being discussed over time, which highlights a significant concern about any classification based approach to political texts. One way to avoid this problem, which is the one utilised throughout this thesis, is treating texts from shorter time periods as cross-sectional samples rather than trying to directly compare texts from different time periods.

[2]This approach of using the Twitter user timeline API to avoid the data collection problems created by the platform's non-random sampling of search results is similar to the one employed by Hino and Fahey (2019), which successfully tested an approach to creating a representative database of historical Twitter posts by randomly sampling user accounts and then downloading their full tweet timelines.

[3]The reason that the peak for the 2016 House of Councillors election appears more muted than the peak seen for other elections in Figure 3.2 is that this election was held on July 10$^{\text{th}}$, meaning that its campaign period was split over both June and July and so, in turn, was the corresponding increase in tweet volumes.

Chapter 4

Analysing Media Diversity under the Abe Administration

4.1 A New Antagonistic Status Quo?

The preceding two chapters explored the processes of centralisation in the LDP and the government, and how they have led to polarisation in the stated policy preferences and communicative behaviour of politicians in the ruling party. We now turn to the second major question which this thesis aims to investigate — the impact of this polarisation on the relationship between the party and the media, which under the second Abe Administration was characterised by many commentators both in Japan and overseas as being defined by the government's increasing application of untoward pressure to media organisations and journalists in an effort to influence their output.

This narrative is widespread in discussion of the contemporary LDP and of the Abe administrations in particular. George Mulgan (2017a) describes the phenomenon as "media muzzling", McNeill (2014, pp.59-60) claims that "a string of illiberal laws (and accusations of media intimidation) under the Liberal Democratic Party has... dented Japan's reputation for free media inquiry", Kingston (2015)

laments the Japanese government's "intolerance of criticism", and Nishida (2015, p.37) categorises the relationship between the LDP and the media during the second Abe administration as an "era of antagonism and control" (*tairitsu / kontorōru-ki*). With regard to the national broadcaster NHK in particular, Krauss (2017, p.73) argues that Abe attempted to "directly and overtly intimidate the broadcaster". Even a United Nations Human Rights Council report, by the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, referred to "widespread concern about the independence of the media" (Kaye 2017, p.5). Japan's falling ranking in the *Reporters sans Frontières* annual Press Freedom Index is often cited as evidence of this pressure on the media: as Figure 4.1 shows[1], Japan was in 22nd place in 2012, the last year before Abe's return to power, but fell to 53rd place in 2013 and continued to decline for several years, eventually bottoming out in 72nd place in 2016 and 2017, the lowest ranking of any of the G7 nations.

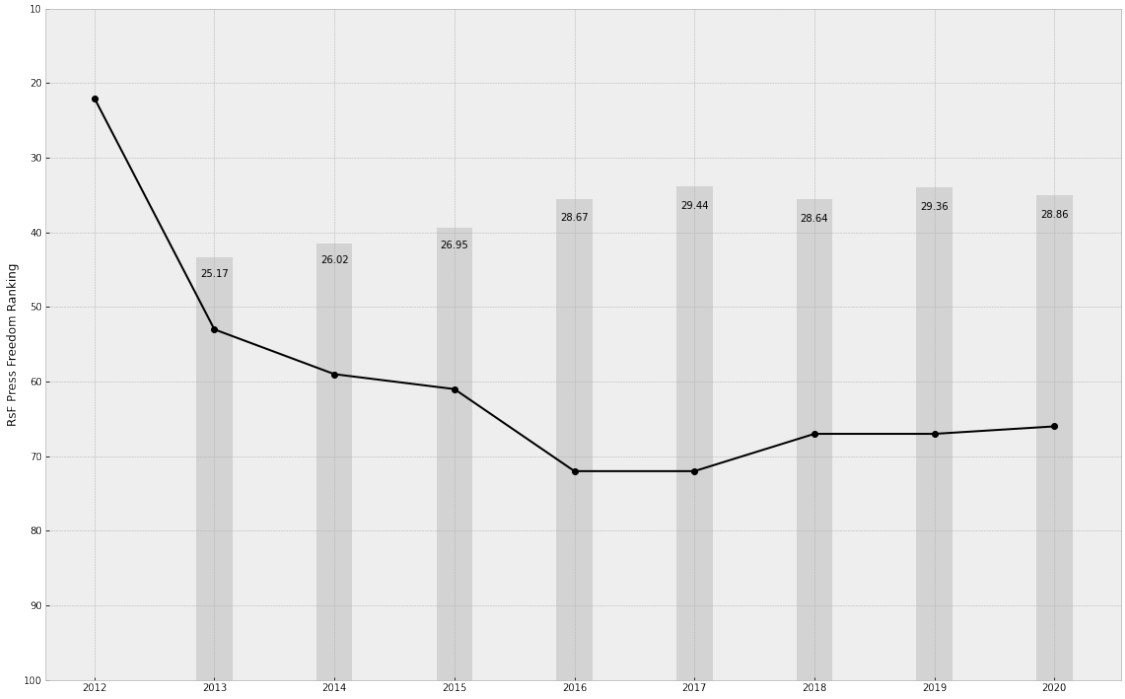


Figure 4.1: Japan in the RsF Press Freedom Rankings, 2012-2020

Source: *Reporters sans Frontières*

While this narrative is widespread and is often cited uncritically in media coverage of Japan, it is not unchallenged. Though almost all accounts accept that the relationship between the media and the Abe administration was antagonistic

in many regards, Harris (2020, p.253) describes claims that Abe was an enemy of the press as "overblown". Cucek (2017, p.77) is critical of the methodology behind the RsF ranking — an expert survey whose participants are mostly journalists and media professionals, and thus certainly not objective observers — and notes that for all the claims of background intimidation, "there is no demonstrable case of consequences that can be unequivocally attributed to intimidation or threats by the Abe government". Nishida (2015) describes the evolution of the LDP's relationship with the media as being not merely an escalation in antagonism but, at least in part, a process of the LDP adopting professional PR, marketing and media management strategies which Japan's media was ill-equipped to cope with, a characterisation which is echoed in part by Fackler (2016, p.46) who, while highly critical of the administration's approach to the media, also notes that the media itself seemed unable to keep up with the government's growing sophistication in using its ability to control access as part of a broad evolution in communications strategy.

We can see here the emergence of an alternative and rather different narrative about the relationship between Japan's government and its media during the years of Abe Administration. In this alternative narrative, the increased antagonism between the two sides has resulted at least partially from rapid evolution in the LDP's strategies for managing the media and controlling its messaging, which — combined with the higher degree of party message discipline and narrower ideological space occupied by the LDP during this era — overturned an older system of more friendly and trusting relationships between the government and the major media institutions. If this account is accurate, we could perhaps even characterise this process as a normalisation of government-media relations: major political parties carefully controlling their messaging and professionalising their PR and marketing strategies is the norm in most advanced democracies, as is the existence of an antagonistic relationship between a government and media organisations that are clearly located on opposite sides of an ideological divide. While this narrative does not eliminate the possibility, or indeed likelihood, that some of the ways in which the Abe Ad-

ministration pursued that antagonism were underhanded or constituted untoward pressure being placed on journalists and media organisations, we should also question to what extent any of those government strategies were actually new — and of course, to what extent this new antagonistic status quo has actually had an effect on the diversity and variety of media viewpoints presented to the Japanese public.

4.1.1 A History of Antagonism and Cooperation

Nishida (2015, p.37) characterises the pre-2000 era in government-media relations as "the era of friendliness" (*nareshitashimi no jidai*), describing it as a period in which the government and the media constructed long-term relationships of mutual trust based on an almost symbiotic connection in which the government provided the media with information and access, and the media, in turn, provided the government with a channel to reach the electorate. These "friendly" relations were often described much more negatively by commentators — the institutional structure of day-to-day relations between government and media, the "press clubs" (*kisha kurabu*), has been a lightning rod for criticism for decades, with Lange (1997) describing the clubs (which effectively formalised a process of regular private briefings for preferred media organisations) as an "anachronism". Freeman (2000) describes instances in which media organisations and journalists whose reporting strayed from what were considered to be the agreed-upon rules of the club faced consequences in terms of access and privileges, even when that reporting was clearly in the public interest. The existence of such rules and consequences within the press club system makes it clear that while this relationship may have been "friendly" from some perspectives, in reality it constituted a highly transactional relationship between two groups — the LDP / government, and the media / journalists — who had found in this arrangement a reasonably solid equilibrium in their mutual pursuit of self-interest. The press clubs gave Japan's major media organisations a near-monopoly on government access and information, while the LDP in return gained a degree of control over certain aspects of how the media reported about politics — generally

not sufficient control to suppress reporting of a major scandal, for instance, but enough to allow it some influence over things like how that reporting was framed, who was quoted, and whether quotes were attributed to an individual or to an unnamed source[2].

While Nishida (2015) emphasises the role played by the emergence of digital media and the Internet in the early 2000s in ending this "era of friendliness" (see section 4.1.3 below), the LDP's internal factions also played a significant role in managing the party's relationships with the press — and consequently, changes to the factions' structure and status in recent decades have also changed the nature of the party's relationship with the media. Major media organisations historically maintained direct ties to the factions themselves as well as to the umbrella apparatus of the party leadership and the government, with political reporters even being directly assigned as correspondents covering individual factions. The ideological and issue diversity of the factions meant that on many key issues, even media organisations that were ostensibly opposed to the LDP's position could find ideological fellow travelers within the party — especially during the pre-electoral reform era (see Chapter 2) when LDP candidates from different factions competed directly with one another in multi-member districts, creating an incentive for factions to use the media to emphasise their differences on various policy issues.

An especially important connection, in terms of maintaining the LDP's "broad tent" and its cordial relationships with the media, was the one between the Kōchikai faction and the more liberal media organisations, notably the Asahi group. The Kōchikai was founded in 1957 by future Prime Minister Ikeda Hayato and was directly descended from the Liberal Party of Yoshida Shigeru, Japan's first post-war Prime Minister, which in 1955 merged with the Japan Democratic Party led by Hatoyama Ichirō to create the LDP. The Kōchikai was to become the main faction of the so-called "conservative mainstream" (*hoshū-honryū*) tendency within the party. The key ideological pillar of the faction was its adherence to the "Yoshida Doctrine", a term coined in the late 1970s (by Nishihara 1978; for a recent commentary

see Sugita 2016) to describe Yoshida Shigeru's post-war strategy for the nation — comprising a strong alliance with the United States, reliance on the U.S. military for national security, a relentless focus on economic growth, and a foreign policy centred on economic diplomacy. The pursuit of this doctrine placed the Kōchikai ideologically on the side of constitutionalism (with the faction generally opposing amendment, especially of the pacifist Article 9) and liberal internationalism, including being generally inclined towards closer relationships, both diplomatic and economic, with China and South Korea (Watanabe 1958; Satō and Matsuzaki 1986; Iseri 1988). These positions overlapped, albeit imperfectly, with those of Japan's more liberal media organisations, such as the Asahi group — but alongside the more general decline in independence and influence of the LDP's factions, the Kōchikai in particular underwent a series of fractious splits from the mid-1990s onwards, beginning with the departure of Kono Yohei and his followers in 1995 to form what is now the more right-wing Aso faction, and followed by further splits and mergers in the 2000s that have resulted in the rump of the Kōchikai, the current Kishida faction, being both less influential and less distinct in its ideology than it was in previous decades (Zakowski 2011; see also Tsuchiya 2000).

The diminished role of the factions in general, and of the Kōchikai in particular, eroded the ideological overlap between the LDP and the more liberal media organisations, while also allowing the party to effectively centralise its communications strategy and media relations — creating an environment in which a higher degree of antagonism with media organisations that diverged from the LDP's party lines was inevitable. Seko Hiroshige, a former NTT PR executive and close ally of Abe Shinzō who served as Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry during the second Abe Administration, wrote a book on LDP reform published just months before Abe's first term (2006-2007), in which he would serve as the Prime Minister's PR chief. In it discusses the reform committee he had worked with Abe to create in 2003 (the Party Reform Investigation and Promotion Committee, *Tōkaikaku Kenshō Suishin Iinkai*) with a stated goal, among several others, of reforming the party's communication

strategy (Seko 2006, p.13-14) — a process which he argues was not aimed at doing away with the party's factions, but which would have certainly involved replacing their role in communications and media relations with the party's own central PR apparatus, which Seko himself would take charge of later in 2006. Seko's background in corporate communications at NTT is notable here, as it connects to the claim that some of the friction between the LDP and Japan's media can be explained by the increasing sophistication and professionalism of the party's communications strategy in recent decades — ultimately replacing the "era of friendliness" with the "era of antagonism and control" that now persists (Nishida 2015, p.37).

4.1.2 "Media muzzling" and Self-Censorship

The brief account of developments in the relationship between the LDP and the media prior to the second Abe Administration given above raises a question which is perhaps obvious: if control of information and access via the press clubs dates back many decades, and increasing antagonism in LDP-media relations has been a factor since the 1990s, what, if anything, was actually new or different about the Abe Administration's handling of the media? Indeed, many of the substantive claims regarding the LDP's exercise of control or interference in media reporting made in accounts such as McNeill (2014), Fackler (2016) and George Mulgan (2017a) relate to aspects of the LDP-media relationship that existed long before the Abe Administration. Cucek (2017) notes this problem with the broadly accepted narrative — that far from being new and unique attacks on a formerly free press, much of the media strategy employed by Abe and his government was merely a continuation of the long-standing status quo between the LDP and the media.

This is not to say that there were no notable incidents or milestones in the relationship between the media and the LDP during the Abe Administration. The passage of the Specially Designated Secrets Law in December 2013, for example, controversially created legal penalties for journalists who published leaked information that had been designated as state secrets: the government argued that this was

required to bring Japan in line with the state secrets protections of allied nations and thus to benefit fully from security information sharing, but critics pointed to the law's failure to narrowly define state secrets and voiced fears that it would have a chilling effect on investigative reporting. Abe's direct attacks on the *Asahi Shimbun* from the floor of the Diet over its 2014 retraction of some old (and since discredited) reporting on the wartime Comfort Women was an unusually aggressive step for a Prime Minister. Even more aggressive was the threat by Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications Takaichi Sanae to withdraw broadcast licenses from media groups which were judged to be insufficiently impartial in their political coverage (Yamaguchi 2016). Takaichi's comments drew rare rebukes not only from the opposition and the media, but also from the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression (Kaye 2017) and the U.S. State Department (United States Department of State 2016, p.8); the government doubled down on the comments, arguing that she was merely restating the facts of the broadcast law.

While much criticism of the Abe Administration's handling of the media focuses on the indirect effect that incidents such as these had on the climate surrounding journalists and media organisations, arguing that the LDP's pressure on the media pushed journalists to self-censor their output, a far more direct example of the government's ambitions regarding media control can be found in its handling of the national broadcaster, NHK. The independence of NHK, and especially its commissioning of programming that disagreed with the historical revisionist positions of the LDP's right-wing, had been a bugbear for Abe since long before his return to power in 2012. Krauss (2017, p.71) notes that Abe — who was then Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary — held a meeting with NHK ahead of its broadcast of a documentary on the Comfort Women in 2001, potentially violating the Broadcast Law's rules on political interference. As Prime Minister in 2006 he reportedly ordered the broadcaster to focus more on the issue of North Korean abductions of Japanese citizens. Krauss states that on his return to power in 2012, Abe proceeded to "directly and overtly intimidate the broadcaster through the unprecedented appointment of

a political crony as president, by blatantly threatening it, and even by forcing the ouster of offending journalists" (Krauss 2017, p.73). The "political crony" to whom Krauss refers was Momii Katsuto, a businessman and Abe ally who was appointed as Director-General of NHK in late 2013. He almost immediately caused controversy by downplaying the Comfort Women issue in interviews and publicly stating that NHK should follow and support the government's official line in its reporting. His term as Director-General, which ended in 2017, seemed to deliver far more of these kinds of controversial soundbites than it did actual change or reform at NHK, however; while of course claims that a culture of self-censorship developed under his leadership are difficult to substantiate, he failed to achieve his major policy initiative — a reduction in NHK's license fee. Another Abe ally and staunch right-wing historical revisionist, novelist Hyakuta Naoki, was appointed to NHK's board of governors in 2013, but resigned without seeking reappointment at the end of his term in 2015 — pointing out on Twitter that the role had not given him the ability to "influence programming or intervene in personnel decisions" (Japan Times 2015). Notably, subsequent appointments to NHK's senior positions by the Abe Administration were largely uncontroversial.

The trajectory of the Abe Administration's approach to NHK — an aggressive early attempt to exert control which ran aground in the realities of bureaucratic systems, checks and balances, and institutional opposition, resulting in a rapid loss of interest on the part of Abe's inner circle and a reversion to the status quo — may be a microcosm of the administration's overall approach to the media (and might also be seen reflected in the trajectory of how the administration approached other major issues, such as constitutional reform). Abe had never enjoyed good relations with the media establishment, courting conflict with it right from the outset of his career, especially over historical issues — but this appears to have come to a head after his 2007 resignation, which he believed was partially a consequence of media bias against him Harris (2020, p.253). On his return to power in 2012, he was belligerent in his approach to the press — restricting his on-camera briefings (a

role which he would eventually largely cede to his Chief Cabinet Secretary, future Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide), attacking the *Asahi Shimbun* in the Diet, acting in a pugnacious and even short-tempered way with reporters whose questions he disliked, and for a time even lashing out directly at critics on Facebook. Most of the more aggressive aspects of his relationship with the media, however, softened or disappeared over the course of his second administration, and while Abe never seemed to learn to enjoy being on camera in the manner of his telegenic predecessor, Koizumi Junichiro, he largely seemed to step back from direct confrontation with the media in favour of allowing the LDP's media management strategy to perform its function in a more professional way.

Neither Abe's early attempts to brow-beat the media into submission, nor the LDP's more centralised attempts to manage media relations and control messaging, seem to have been especially successful. While fears of self-censorship and threats to press freedom were voiced frequently, by 2017 Japan's media could still pass the most fundamental and important test of press freedom — reporting extensively, and enormously damagingly, on corruption scandals which involved Prime Minister Abe personally and directly, along with his wife. The Kake Gakuen and Moritomo Gakuen scandals rolled on for well over a year, generating front page headlines for new developments on a regular basis; later in Abe's tenure, the media would also give major prominence to reporting of a scandal over a taxpayer-funded *hanami* (cherry-blossom viewing) party to which Abe had reportedly invited private supporters, and records of which had been improperly destroyed. Whatever impact on media freedom the Abe Administration had — whether through self-censorship or some other mechanism — it was certainly not sufficient to prevent scandals damaging to the Prime Minister from being widely reported by mainstream media outlets of all stripes.

4.1.3 Media Fragmentation

Another factor which deserves attention with regard to the evolving relationship between the LDP, the media and the Japanese citizenry is the growing fragmentation of Japan's media market. The rapid growth in popularity of the Internet and social media has opened up opportunities for politicians to communicate directly with their electorate as well as lowering the bar for new publications and media outlets to emerge and reach extensive audiences. As Figure 4.2 demonstrates, however, traditional mediafaces waning influence: although Japan's newspapers remain among the highest-circulation in the world, their distribution has been dropping steadily, with a slow decline through the 2000s accelerating significantly in the 2010s (see Hayashi 2020).

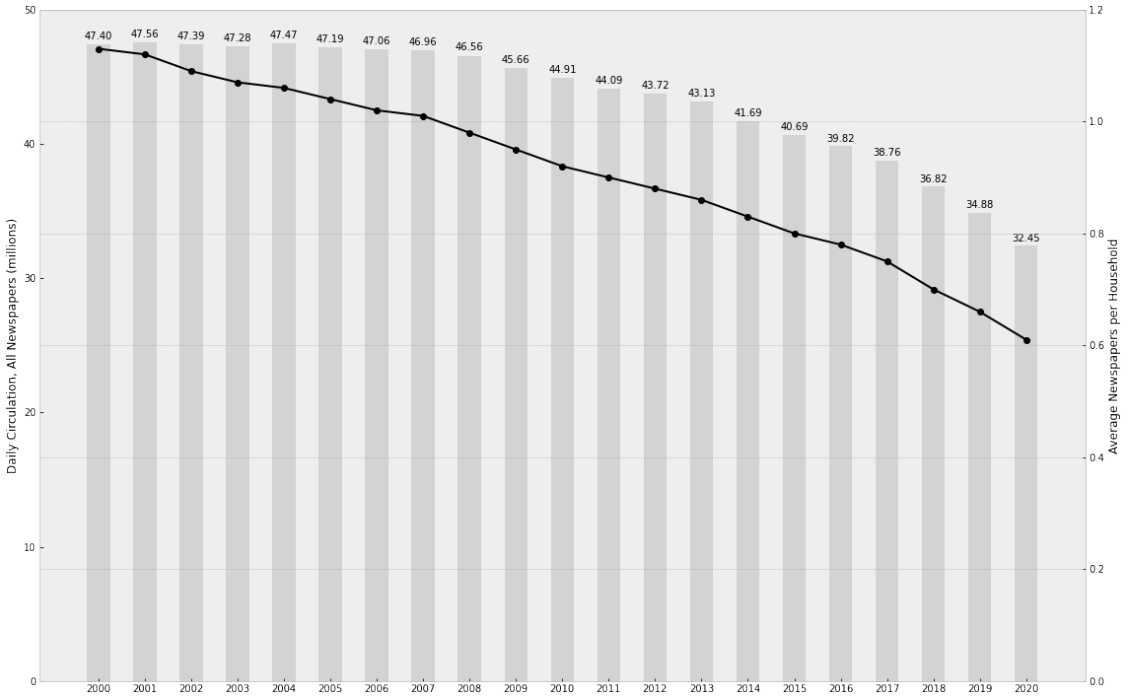


Figure 4.2: Circulation of Newspapers in Japan, 2000-2020

Source: *Nihon Shimbun Kyokai*

Any discussion of the changing relationship between the LDP and the media cannot ignore this reality — that the media landscape itself was shifting dramatically during this era. The effective monopoly on delivering information to the Japanese public which had been held by the major media organisations (most of

which ran a daily newspaper and a national TV station, along with various other media properties such as magazines, radio stations, and book publishing companies, all under an umbrella parent company) was being eroded by the proliferation of Internet-connected devices and social media platforms. This change — and what it meant for the relationship between the traditional media and the government — was far from lost upon the LDP. While opposition and niche parties may have been among the first to recognise the potential of the nascent Internet as a political medium (Tkach-Kawasaki 2003), it was the LDP that moved first and most effectively to capitalise upon the political potential of social media, just as they had been the first party to capitalise on the potential of "wide shows" and infotainment television a decade previously (Taniguchi 2007). Nishida (2015) highlights experimentation with political engagement on social media as a significant change to the LDP's media strategy that came about during the party's time in opposition (2009-2012), arguing that developing an effective online media strategy was one of the approaches to achieving the party's comeback that was pursued by a circle of allies around Abe Shinzō which included Seko Hiroshige, Suga Yoshihide, and LDP Senior Acting Secretary-General Endō Toshiaki. "It may seem slow compared to the public sense of the Internet, but the LDP was the first in the political realm to focus on the Internet. Unlike other political parties, the LDP was searching for methods and strategies to handle online public opinion and expand its support base." (Nishida 2015, pp.143-144) It would ultimately be the LDP, not the opposition, that led the push to reform Japan's electoral laws to permit online campaigning in 2013 — and while certain opposition figures made effective use of the Internet, none garnered as much attention as Abe's direct engagement with supporters and critics on his Facebook page.

A simple demographic calculus meant that the LDP could not rely too heavily on the Internet for its media strategy — many of the voters upon whom it relied, especially in rural constituencies, were in older demographics that were much less likely to use the Internet at all, let alone social media websites — but nonetheless,

the opening of a direct channel to large swathes of the electorate which bypassed the traditional media entirely signalled a fundamental shift in the relationship between the LDP and the media. Politicians unhappy with their framing in the media could now appeal to the public either directly on their own social media, or through a more sympathetic airing of their views on one of the websites, blogs and YouTube channels that proliferated through the 2010s — and many who chose this route, including Abe himself, also took side-swipes at the "biased" traditional media coverage on the way. While this situation has some echoes in the extremely hostile relationship that developed between the Trump Administration and the U.S. media in the latter half of the decade, as Harris (2020, p.253) says, "[Abe's] relationship with the media was more nuanced than Donald Trump's attacks on the 'fake news' media." Harris goes on to note that "he used the Japanese news media establishment's coziness with power to reward favored outlets and reporters with access" — showing that for all that online and social media was a major new factor in the relationship, the old "carrot and stick" approach, mediated through the press clubs, remained at the centre of the LDP's media management strategy.

The fragmentation of the media landscape further enabled the trend of ideological centralisation and polarisation, by creating a means for politicians to focus increasingly on media outlets (traditional or social) sympathetic to their positions, rather than being forced to maintain friendly relations with all of the mainstream media organisations in order to gain access to their audiences. On the other side of this divide, it is also possible that the shrinking circulation of Japan's newspapers created pressure for them to narrow and focus their ideology in order to appeal more effectively to their remaining audiences. Curini (2020) found this effect among Italian newspapers, in effect demonstrating that falling circulation incentivised them to optimise their ideological position into a local maximum containing their most dedicated readers, rather than taking on a broader ideology in the hope of attracting a wider group of readers. Similar conditions existed in Japan, and may in fact have been even more conducive to this effect than in Italy — as Hayashi (2020) points out,

the portion of newspapers' revenue coming from subscriptions was always higher in Japan than in most nations, and this portion has declined more slowly than their advertising revenue, creating an increased incentive for newspapers focus on their core readers — their subscriber base. This would suggest that newspapers were pushed to adopt increasingly polarised ideological stances at the same time that the LDP was also narrowing its range of ideological and policy preferences — meaning that both sides may have played a role in creating polarisation within the political and media spheres.

4.2 Using Newspaper Data to Measure Media Heterogeneity

In considering accounts of the LDP's relationship with the media during the Abe Administration, a key question to consider is what actual, quantifiable impact these developments — the increasing antagonism between the two sides, and possible pressure placed on reporters and media organisations to conform with the LDP's party lines — had on the diversity of content within Japan's mainstream media. This is of significant importance for two major reasons: firstly, this question is central to understanding the extent to which the LDP's attempts to exert tighter control over media messaging were successful, versus the extent to which they were frustrated by the structural resilience of the media, in the form of push-back from journalists, media organisations, and the public. The LDP's strategy certainly did not manage to restrain the media from highly critical and prominent reporting of scandals involving Prime Minister Abe; this does not, however, preclude the possibility that the media buckled to political pressure in more subtle ways, especially in its framing of important policy issues (as distinct from personal scandals). Secondly, this question offers an understanding of how the development of the LDP-media relationship outlined above has actually had an impact on a key actor that is largely missing from most accounts thus far — the Japanese electorate, and media audience, to whom the

question of antagonism between the LDP and the media is so much "inside baseball" until and unless it actually influences the quality and diversity of media coverage itself.

Newspaper data is popularly used in analyses of these questions — including the analysis conducted in this chapter — in part because of its accessibility (all of the major Japanese newspapers provide databases of their past issues) and the ease of carrying out analysis on this kind of text data, but also because the structure of Japan's media market makes it possible to use newspapers' editorial positions as a proxy for the diversity of opinion across other forms of mass media. This is because each of the major national newspapers is a central part of a conglomerate (or *keiretsu*) of media companies which also includes a major television station and a television news syndication network that supplies news reporting packages to local stations around the country (see Table 4.1). While the editorial positions of the newspapers and the other media organisations within the conglomerate may not always be perfectly aligned, they generally take broadly similar ideological stances on key issues, making it possible to extrapolate the positions of newspapers to gain a rough understanding of a wider media sphere that also includes television news (as well as radio news and various magazine publications not listed in Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Japan's Major News Media Conglomerates

Media Group	**Newspaper**	**TV Station**	**News Network**
Yomiuri Group	Yomiuri Shimbun	Nippon TV	Nippon News Network (NNN)
Asahi Group	Asahi Shimbun	Asahi TV	All-Nippon News Network (ANN)
Mainichi/TBS	Mainichi Shimbun	TBS	Japan News Network (JNN)

Various different methods have been applied to newspaper articles in order to estimate latent space positions indicating their relative ideological positions or the diversity of their coverage, including some recent examples focused on the Japanese case. Chiba (2020) combined a topic model text analysis approach to observe diversity within and between Japanese newspapers in their coverage of national elections,

finding that although there was a high variation between elections based on the different topics that were salient during each campaign, the range of topics addressed in media coverage of elections had declined overall in the 2000s. This finding gives context to Machidori (2015)'s claim that Japan's media had failed to keep up to date with developments in both the country's system of governance and the LDP's strategies for media management, in the process effectively yielding agenda setting power to the LDP — in the specific case of the 2014 lower house election, allowing Abe to define the election as a referendum on the Abenomics policy program and uncritically reporting on it as such, despite the fact that Abenomics had yet to have any concrete impact on the lives or circumstances of Japanese voters. Chiba (2020) also examined the diversity of topics in coverage of the second Abe Administration, finding that coverage of ministerial scandals was more prominent than coverage of policy issues, while a sentiment analysis of the various newspapers' coverage showed increasing polarisation over time, with the centre-left newspapers (the *Asahi Shimbun* and *Mainichi Shimbun*) becoming more distant from the centre-right newspapers (the *Yomiuri Shimbun* and *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*).

A different methodology was employed by Kaneko et al. (2020), which used Lauderdale and Herzog (2016)'s Wordshoal approach to estimate the ideal points of newspapers across a range of topics. While this study focused primarily on Japan's local newspapers, it also included the *Asahi*, *Mainichi*, *Yomiuri*, and *Nikkei*, and reconfirmed their positioning at opposite poles of the media spectrum. This strong division between the two groups of newspapers is a persistent feature of the Japanese media landscape which appears across many different topics — or, as Merklejn and Wiślicki (2020) observe in a study of the coverage of hate speech legislation, "the Japanese daily press gravitates towards two parallel mainstreams without a robust centre".

4.3 Data and Methods

Similarly to the prior studies described above, the target of the analysis presented in this chapter is newspaper articles in the country's major national newspapers. Data was collected from the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, *Asahi Shimbun* and *Mainichi Shimbun*; the fourth national newspaper, the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, was excluded from the analysis on the grounds of being an economic / business newspaper, similar to the UK's Financial Times or the US' Wall Street Journal, and thus having a different reporting style and focus to the other three.

Since the intention of this analysis is to establish the extent to which the heterogeneity of coverage among newspapers increased or decreased in response to the deteriorating relationship between the LDP government and the media during the Abe Administration, it was important to focus on coverage of topics which met two criteria: (a) being present in news coverage across the entire span of the Abe Administration, and (b) being of sufficient salience to the government that one might reasonably expect them to push newspapers to frame them in a more positive or amenable fashion. Two key topics which fit this criteria were chosen for analysis - "Abenomics", the signature package of economic and regulatory reforms introduced by the LDP almost immediately after its return to power in 2012, and constitutional reform, which has been a policy objective of the LDP for many years and was put forward as one of Abe's key goals in his second administration. Each of these topics was discussed throughout the existence of the Abe Administration (albeit with significant variation in coverage volume at different times), and each of them was a major policy objective for Abe and the LDP, meaning that the party would be strongly incentivised to use whatever influence it had over the media to push for a positive framing of its preferred messaging on these topics.

Articles containing vocabulary clearly related to these topics (*abenomikusu* for Abenomics, and both *kenpō-kaisei* and its short form, *kaiken*, for constitutional reform) published between 2013 and 2020 were located in online databases of the

three target national newspapers using a keyword search. While these databases all use slightly different search settings, these were normalised as much as possible (for example by excluding duplicate articles from regional editions of the newspapers) to allow direct comparison between the different publications. This process yielded 11,407 articles in total related to Abenomics, and 16,715 related to constitutional reform. The full break-down of articles which were gathered and used in the analysis, by newspaper and by year, can be seen in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Articles Containing Target Keywords, by Newspaper

	"*Abenomics*"			"*Kaiken / Kenpō-kaisei*"		
	Yomiuri	**Asahi**	**Mainichi**	**Yomiuri**	**Asahi**	**Mainichi**
2013	1193	1304	913	663	964	807
2014	887	793	915	323	720	561
2015	375	331	367	343	634	495
2016	668	623	655	787	1087	986
2017	310	294	263	1014	1049	982
2018	167	164	184	861	803	716
2019	172	198	189	670	578	564
2020	127	157	158	468	354	286
Total	3899	3864	3644	5129	6189	5397

In the first analysis step, the monthly frequency of articles was compared across the three newspapers, giving an estimate of the attention paid by each newspaper to each topic over time. The cosine similarity of the resulting vectors was calculated to give a sense of the extent to which the newspapers' issue attention moved in parallel: as newspaper coverage is generally event-driven one would expect to see a high level of similarity, but differences in specific periods could indicate that newspapers were making notably different choices about issue saliency as well as about issue framing.

Next, the articles were pre-processed by using *mecab* (Kudo 2016) and *mecab-ipadic-neologd* (Sato et al. 2017) to split the texts into vocabulary tokens, and then employing the Gensim software (Řehůřek and Sojka 2010) to convert each article into a row in a contingency table (document-term matrix) representation. These

contingency tables were aggregated on a per-newspaper, per-year basis, and correspondence analysis was used to estimate the latent positions of each newspaper in each year. Similarly to the analysis presented in Chapter 3, this model was not constrained to two dimensions — which would have excluded potentially important positioning information, given the wide range of different sub-topics the media might be expected to have engaged with over this long time-frame — but instead the top six dimensions were extracted, a number chosen based on examination of the eigenvalues of the results, and latent distances between the newspapers were calculated using a city-block measurement, weighted according to each dimension's eigenvalue.

One limitation of this approach is that it is not possible to include the government's own latent position in the analysis, as there are no texts produced by the government on these topics that would be directly comparable to newspaper articles — any attempt to mix official government position statements with newspaper reports would result in the text analysis highlighting the significant differences between the linguistic style and vocabulary choices of these two types of document, obscuring the actual differences in policy position and preference. Among the three newspapers being analysed, however, the centre-right *Yomiuri Shimbun* is much more sympathetic to the LDP and closer to the official government position than either of its centre-left rivals, and has been described as being especially close to the Abe Administration. One example of this close alignment is given by Higuchi (2020), who notes that during the debate over the introduction of anti-hate speech legislation, the *Yomiuri* echoed the objections of LDP lawmakers regarding freedom of speech, but swiftly dropped its concerns on these topics once the LDP pivoted to supporting a version of the proposed bill (see also Merklejn and Wiślicki 2020). It's therefore reasonable to assume that the *Yomiuri Shimbun*'s position would be the closest to the government of these three newspapers, and thus to treat it as an anchor point on the latent scale, even if not as an actual proxy for the government's position. Therefore, the distance between the *Yomiuri Shimbun* and each of the

Asahi Shimbun and *Mainichi Shimbun* is measured in each time period to show the divergence or convergence of newspaper coverage on these issues over time.

Finally, to investigate what kinds of terminology are especially polarising between the newspapers, the Craig's Zeta measurement (Craig and Kinney 2009) is applied to the full span of data from each newspaper, giving a ranking of which terms are especially strongly associated with both the centre-right *Yomiuri* and its centre-left rival newspapers. This analysis largely serves to confirm that the prior analysis results were based on substantive differences between the newspapers rather than picking up on spurious differences in the house styles of the different media companies, although it does also provide some additional insight into the nature of those substantive differences.

4.4 Results

The results of the methodology outlined above will be presented separately for the two topics chosen: first looking at how coverage of constitutional reform evolved over the course of the Abe Adminstration, and then moving on to look at the evolution of coverage of the Abenomics policies.

4.4.1 Newspaper Positions on Constitutional Revision

Although he was ultimately unable to achieve it during his time in office, constitutional revision was one of the most consistent planks of Abe Shinzō's policy platform — and as such, discussion of this topic was widespread in the media all throughout his Administration. As Figure 4.3 shows, there was a high degree of variance in the volume of articles on this topic at different times, with many of the peaks in coverage corresponding with election campaigns and post-election discussions of whether the new LDP majority would be sufficient to move the amendment process forward. The average cosine similarity[3] between the three newspapers is high (0.972 ± 0.024), demonstrating the highly event-led nature of the issue salience of this topic, but one

distinctive feature of this time series is that the *Yomiuri Shimbun* has by far the lowest volume of coverage in the early sections of the graph (especially through 2014 and 2015), before rising to become the newspaper with the highest volume of coverage in many of the months in the second half of the graph. This difference likely reflects the fact that the LDP itself, although open about its intention to amend the Constitution, did not campaign directly on this issue in elections until the latter half of the Administration's tenure. Moreover, the party's focus in 2014 and 2015 was on a controversial bill reinterpreting the Constitution's pacifist Article 9 to permit collective self-defense: this led it to temporarily deprioritise discussions around constitutional amendment in order to avoid the question of why, if the Japanese public truly supported this change, the LDP did not simply hold an amendment referendum rather than attempting to reinterpret the existing document.

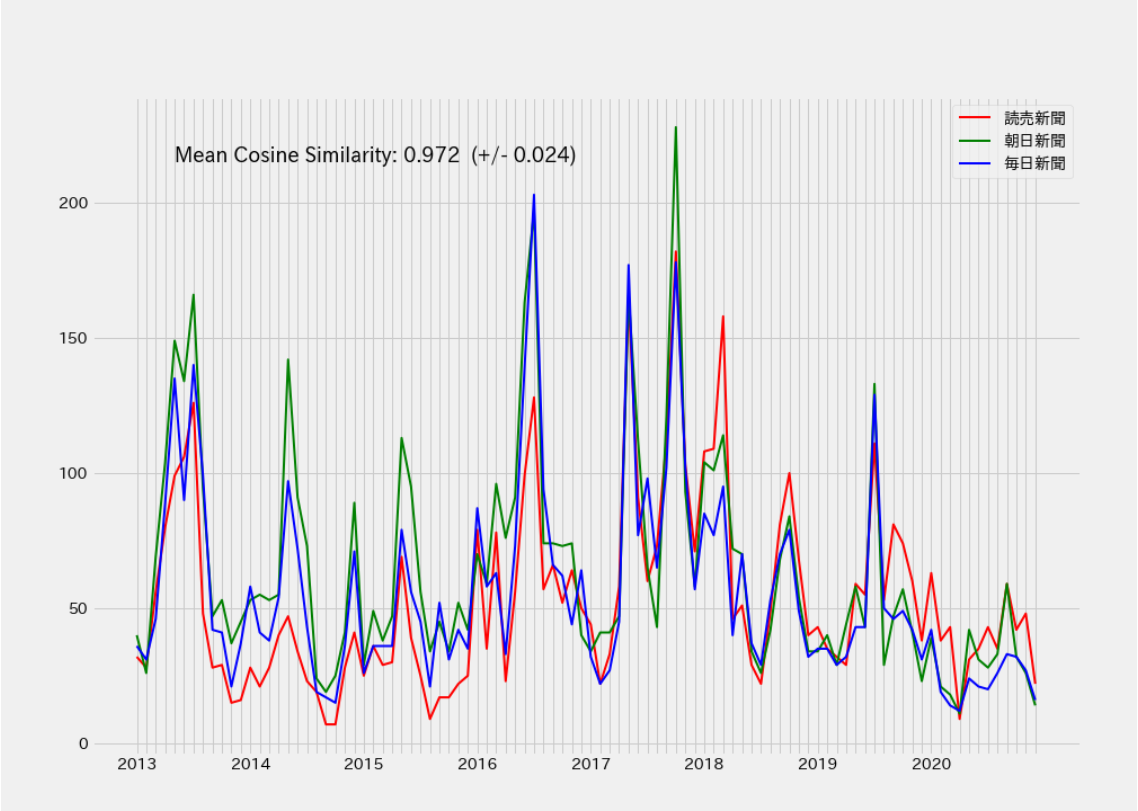
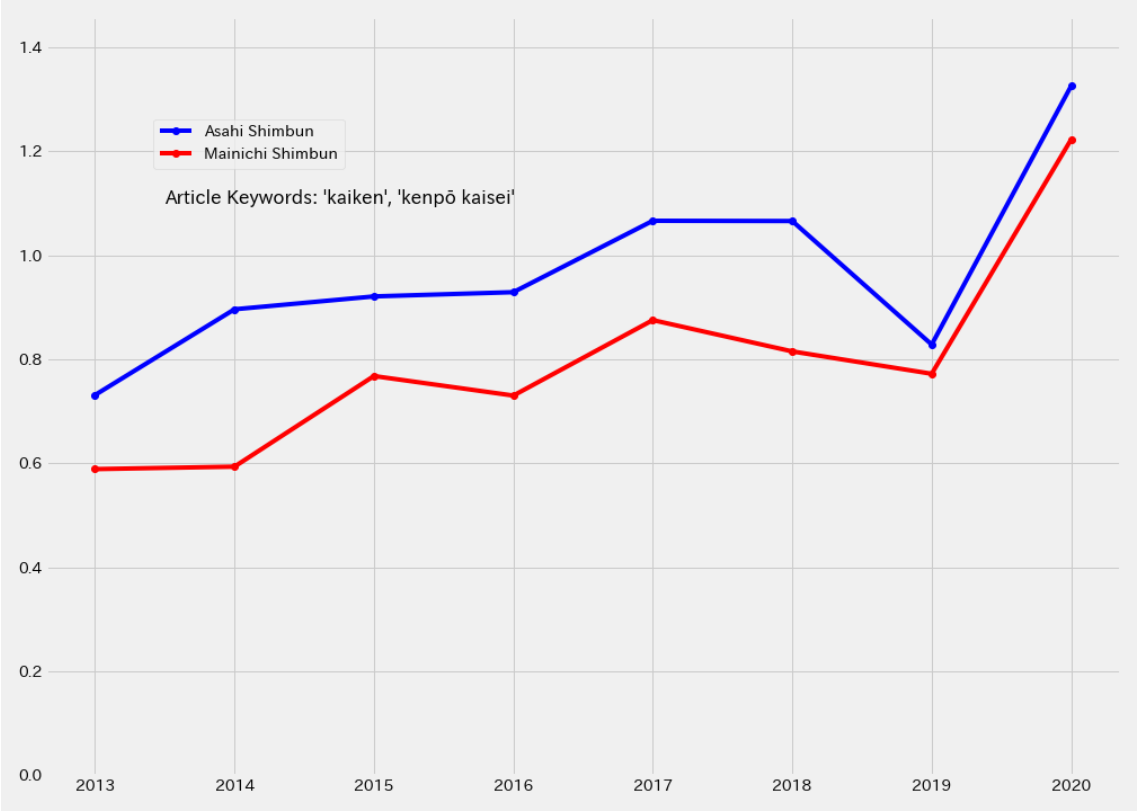


Figure 4.3: Monthly Frequency of Constitutional Reform Articles, 2013-2020

The measurement of the latent distances between the two centre-left newspapers (*Asahi* and *Mainichi*) and the centre-right *Yomiuri* is shown in Figure 4.4. Higher points on these lines represent a higher degree of heterogeneity and diver-

sity in the coverage, in the sense that the phrasing and vocabulary being employed by the newspapers in regard to these topics is different from one another. There is a slight upward trend in this overall — indicating that the *Asahi* and *Mainichi* were gradually diverging from the *Yomiuri* in their stances on constitutional reform — and a sharp upwards movement in 2020, which likely indicates very divergent positions taken on the question of whether the government's seeming lack of appropriate emergency powers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic implied a need for constitutional amendment.



Note: The position of the Yomiuri Shimbun is the baseline of this graph, which therefore measures the other newspapers' divergence from the Yomiuri Shimbun.

Figure 4.4: Latent Heterogeneity in Constitutional Reform Articles, 2013-2020

4.4.2 Newspaper Positions on Abenomics

We next turn to the topic of Abenomics — the signature economic and regulatory reform package put forward by the LDP during the early months of the Abe Administration and continued, with occasional changes and refocuses, throughout the full duration of Abe's tenure as Prime Minister (and, in fact, into the subsequent Suga

Administration). Abenomics was initially comprised of three "arrows" — reflationary monetary policy from the Bank of Japan, fiscal stimulus through government spending, and structural and regulatory reforms — designed to end the stagnation of the Japanese economy that had begun in the 1990s. Assessments of the success or failure of the Abenomics policies vary widely, although the monetary and fiscal policy aspects are generally considered to have been a success in restarting the nation's GDP growth and improving the performance of its stock markets, while the structural reform "arrow" is more often criticised for failing to create major change in the business and regulatory environment.

As Figure 4.5 shows, the volume of articles discussing Abenomics largely moved in lock-step (with an average cosine similarity of 0.984 ± 0.013) between the three major newspapers, with especially high interest around elections and in the first half of the Administration's tenure, which gradually trailed off (apart from occasional event-driven peaks) after 2017. Unlike the graph of constitutional reform articles, this one shows no significant difference between the three newspapers' long-term coverage trends, with peaks and troughs in their article volume matching almost perfectly and no newspaper being notably ahead of or behind its fellows in overall coverage volume during any time period. This suggests that coverage of Abenomics was almost entirely event-driven and that there was broad consensus within the media on the degree of salience of these policies.

The latent distances between the newspapers' coverage of Abenomics can be seen in Figure 4.6, with higher points on these lines once again representing a higher degree of heterogeneity or divergence between the centre-left newspapers and the centre-right *Yomiuri*. For much of the duration of the Abe Administration these graphs are largely flat with a slight downwards trend, indicating that the newspapers' positions were staying largely stable relative to one another with only minor convergence. More dramatic movement is seen in last few years observed, although it should be cautioned that the volume of articles featuring the Abenomics keyword was quite low in these years, which can potentially have the effect of amplifying

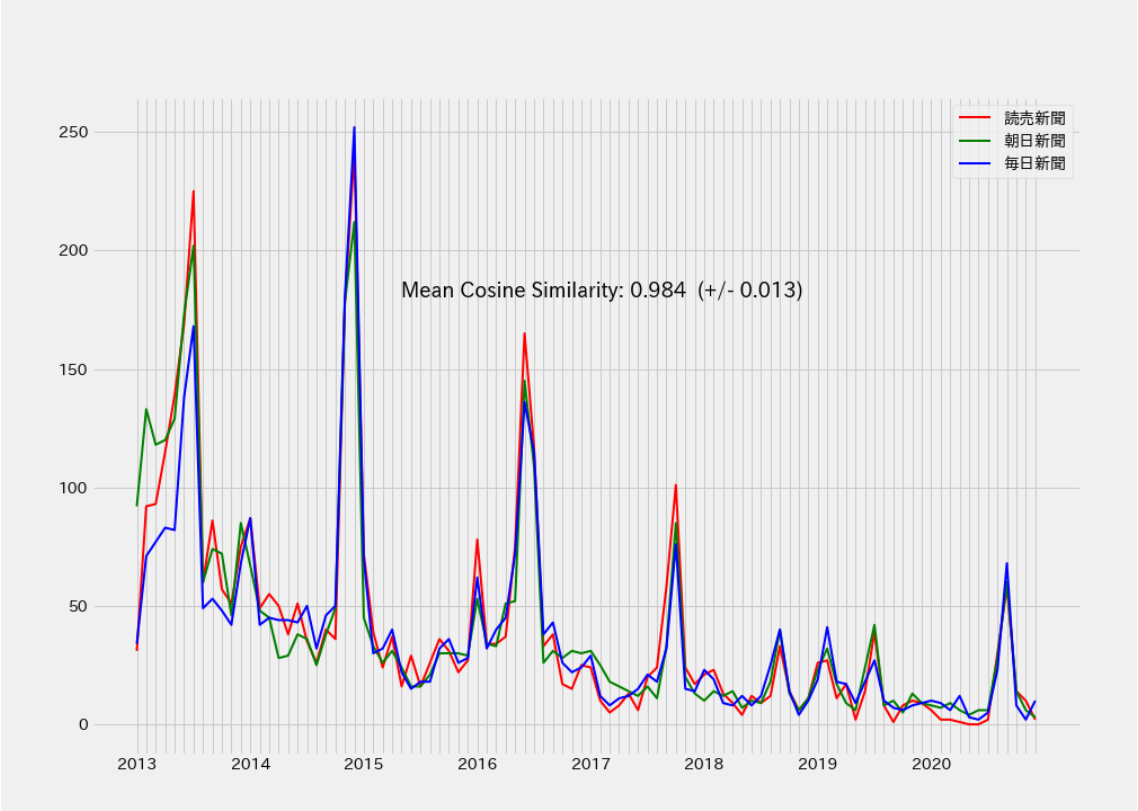
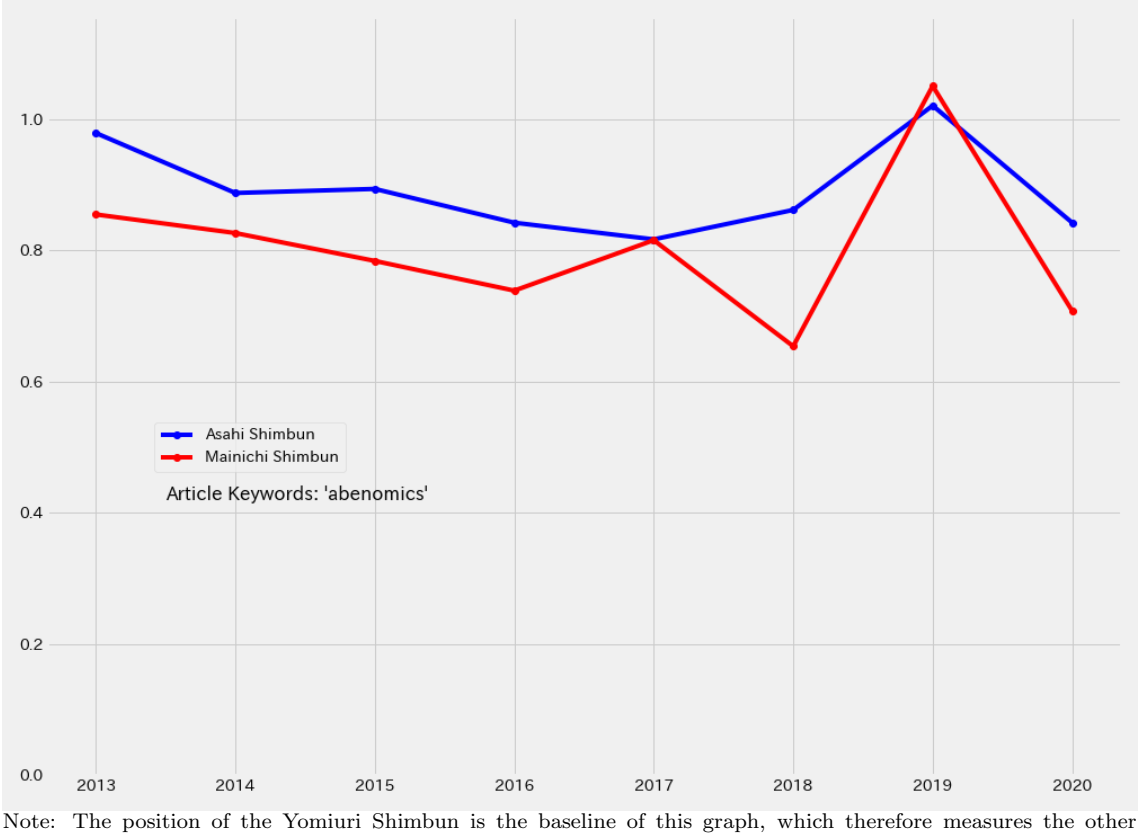


Figure 4.5: Monthly Frequency of Abenomics Articles, 2013-2020

changes in a handful of articles into larger movements in inter-newspaper distance. Generally speaking, however, these time series suggest that there was no especially notable divergence or convergence between newspapers over the period of the Abe Administration: some movement trends are apparent, but overall the distances between the newspapers are quite stable, suggesting that a similar level of heterogeneity of coverage persisted throughout the full period.

4.4.3 Zeta Analysis of Vocabulary

Finally, Craig's Zeta is applied to both sets of data in order to see which vocabulary terms are most polarising between them: i.e., which words and phrases are strongly associated with the *Yomiuri Shimbun*'s coverage while being far less common in the coverage of the *Asahi* and *Mainichi*, and vice versa. Craig's Zeta is an algorithm originally developed for use in the digital humanities, where it was used to provide insight into debates on the authorship of Shakespeare plays, among others, but it is



Note: The position of the Yomiuri Shimbun is the baseline of this graph, which therefore measures the other newspapers' divergence from the Yomiuri Shimbun.

Figure 4.6: Latent Heterogeneity in Abenomics Articles, 2013-2020

also highly useful for uncovering significant differences in vocabulary use across any kind of text corpus.

The Zeta results for constitutional reform articles shown in 4.7 demonstrate a clear difference in the approach to this topic taken in the *Yomiuri* versus its rival newspapers. The *Asahi* and *Mainichi* seem focused on substantive aspects and outcomes of constitutional amendment, especially with regard to the Constitution's pacifist clauses. They prominently used phrases like "war" (*sensō*) and "operational approval (e.g., of a troop deployment)" (*kōshiyōnin*), and directly connected the 2015 bill reinterpreting the Constitution to the larger question of amendment, using phrases such as "right to collective self-defence" (*shūdanteki-jieiken*) and "de-facto constitutional change through reinterpretation" (*kaishaku-kaiken*). The practicality of reform efforts is also discussed here, with mention of "elections" (*senkyō*) and of the "majority required to initiate constitutional reform" (*kaiken-seiryoku*).

By contrast, the *Yomiuri*'s coverage appears to be much more focused on the concept of constitutional reform as a topic of ongoing discussion and argumentation — with its prominent keywords including "debate" (*giron*), "provision" (*kitei*), "promotion" (*suishin*) and "proposal" (*hatsugi*). Another notable difference is that while the *Asahi/Mainichi* keywords include several which are focused directly on Abe Shinzō — including "Abe Administration" (*abe-seiken*) and "Prime Minister Abe" (*abe-shushō*) — the *Yomiuri* frames the reform less as a personal intitative of the Prime Minister and more as a broad goal of the party and government as a whole, using terms like "LDP" (*jimintō*), "leadership / headquarters" (*honbu*), "National Diet" (*kokkai*) and "Constitution Research Council" (*kenpō-shinsakai*).

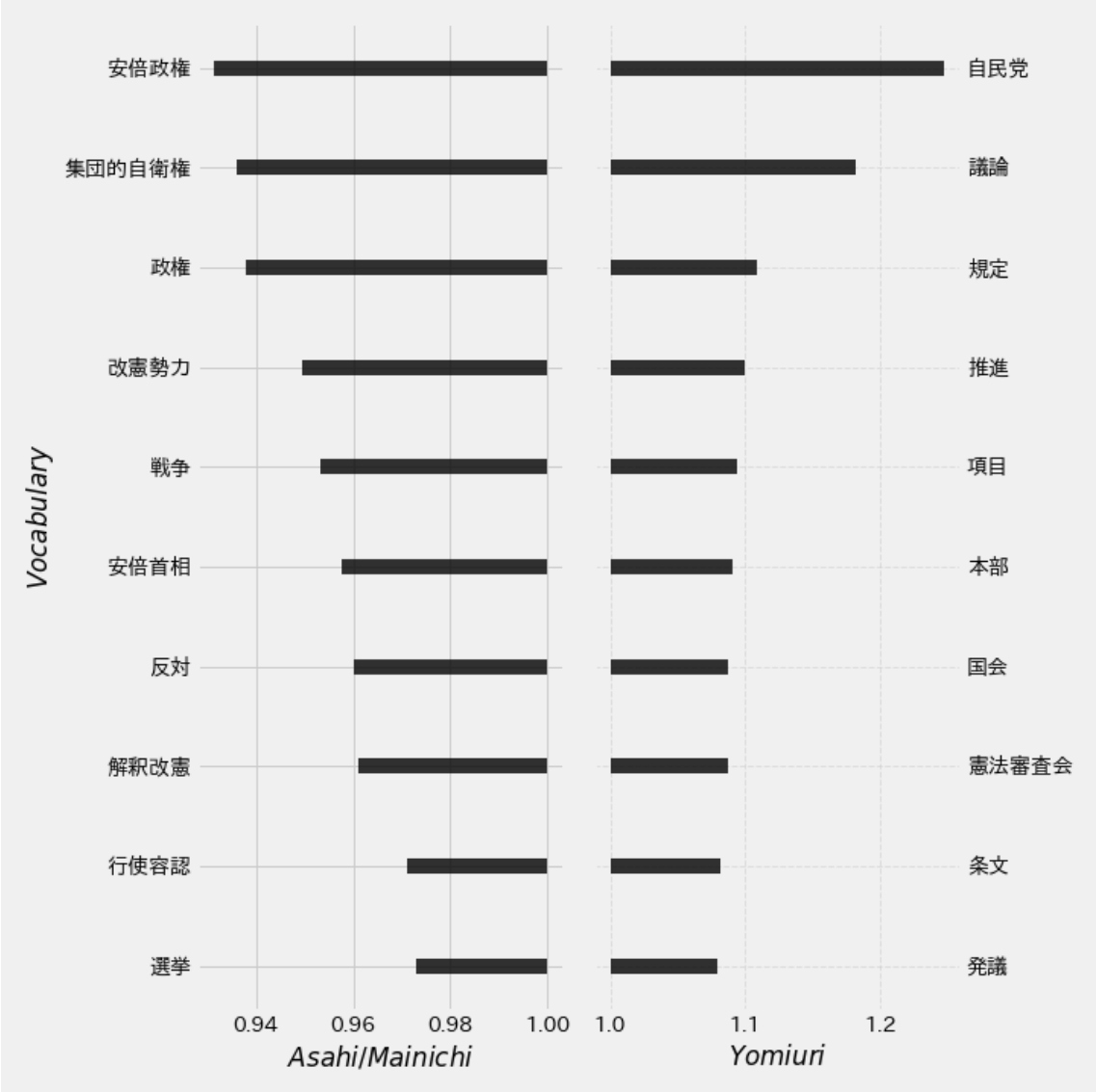


Figure 4.7: Distinctive Vocabulary in Constitutional Reform Articles

The Zeta results for the Abenomics articles, shown in Figure 4.8, reveal a similarly divergent pattern. The *Asahi* and *Mainichi* appear to engage directly with substantive critique of the policies, with words related to the stock market and financial institutions being especially prominent — "stock market" (*sōba, ichiba*), "monetary easing" (*kinyū-kanwa*), "Bank of Japan" (*nihon-ginkō*), "investment" (*tōshi*) and "weak Yen" (*enyasu*) all feature prominently.

On the other hand, some of the *Yomiuri*'s most distinctive vocabulary suggests that its coverage framed the issues around Abenomics in terms of horse-race politics. Its keywords include "Democratic Party of Japan" (*minshūto*) — notably, this is the name the Democratic Party had used during its 2009-2012 period in power, not any of the new names it adopted during the actual course of the Abe Administration — "House of Representatives election" (*shūinsen*) and "ruling party" (*yotō*). In contrast to the *Yomiuri*'s downplaying of direct references to Abe Shinzō with regard to constitutional reform, here the opposite pattern is seen, with the keywords for the *Yomiuri* including "Abe Cabinet" (*abe-naikaku*), "Abe Administration" (*abe-seiken*) and "Prime Minister Abe" (*abe-shushō*). This implies that the newspapers are making strategic decisions with regard to how they identify the main players behind different policies — with the *Yomiuri* keen to frame Abenomics as a policy directly connected to the Prime Minister, while downplaying his agency with regard to constitutional reform, and the centre-left newspapers taking exactly the opposite approach.

4.5 Conclusions

Extensive concerns were raised about the trajectory of press freedom and independence under the Abe Administration, and there were many well-documented instances both of antagonism between the LDP and the media, and of apparent attempts to exert pressure on media reporting and framing. However, the question of how successful the LDP was in reining in the media's freedom or pressuring it to comply with the party's preferred narratives and framing has remained open and

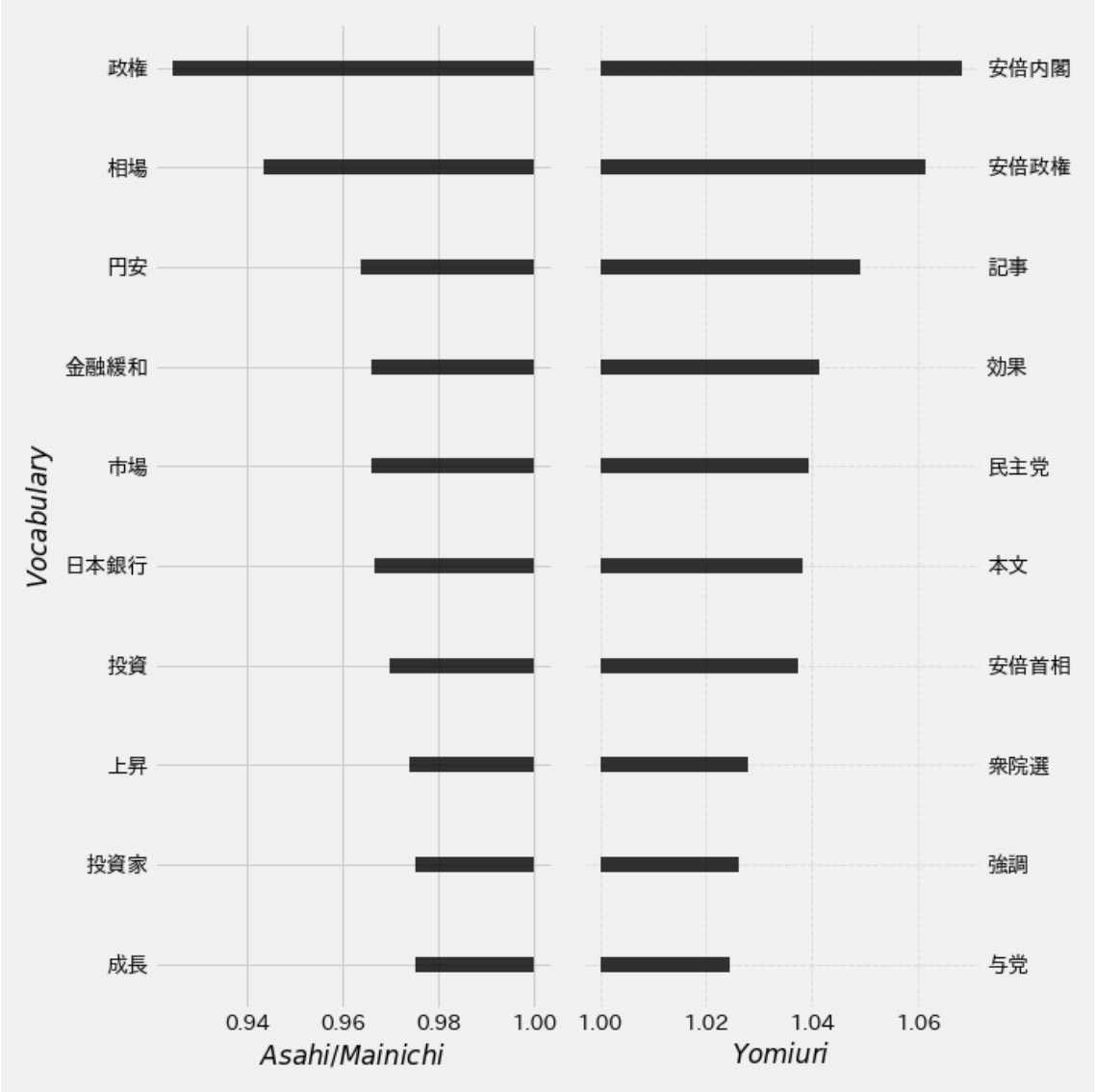


Figure 4.8: Distinctive Vocabulary in Abenomics Articles

contested. Certainly, the LDP was unable to prevent the media from reporting negative and damaging stories — the latter half of the Abe Administration featured near-constant reporting of scandals which directly involved either Prime Minister Abe (the *Moritomo* and *Kake Gakuen* scandals, as well as the later scandal over the Prime Minister's *hanami* party) or people in his inner circle (such as the vote-buying scandal which forced the resignation of former Justice Minister and Abe ally Kawai Katsuyuki). However, the fact that the media remained free to investigate and report on these personal scandals does not preclude the possibility that the LDP's antagonistic and highly strategic approach to media relations may have had an effect on how the mainstream media reported on and framed significant policy

issues. If that were the case, it would have the effect of reducing the diversity and heterogeneity of media coverage of those issues — effectively reducing the range of different opinions, approaches and frames that Japanese media consumers would be exposed to on important political issues, and having a *chilling effect* on opinions and frames that diverged too far from the government's preferred lines.

However, text analysis of newspaper coverage of two of the Abe Administration's most important policy areas — the "Abenomics" economic reforms, and constitutional revision — failed to find evidence of this narrowing actually occurring. On the contrary, with regard to constitutional revision — one of Prime Minister Abe's often-stated personal objectives for his time in office — the diversity between newspaper texts on the subject actually grew gradually from 2013 to 2020 (Figure 4.4), suggesting that the framing of this issue in the government-aligned *Yomiuri Shimbun* and the more centre-left *Asahi Shimbun* and *Mainichi Shimbun* was actually diverging, rather than converging, as we might expect in response to government pressure. With regard to Abenomics, which was Abe's signature policy — literally, in the sense of bearing the Prime Minister's name — the trend in diversity of newspaper texts is broadly flat (Figure 4.6), again showing no evidence of the convergent trend we might expect in the face of strong government pressure to conform to its preferred narratives or framing. These findings broadly agree with and reinforce the findings of Chiba (2020) on the diversity of newspaper coverage of the Abe Administration; while Chiba's study used a very different method, focused on a positive / negative sentiment analysis of the coverage, the conclusion that newspapers' positions had diverged rather than converged is broadly mirrored by the results of the analysis in this chapter.

Examining the use of vocabulary in these two data sets (Figures 4.7 and 4.8) confirms that the differences between the newspapers are actually substantive and represent different positions and framing, rather than simply being a measurement of some nuance of house style at different publications. The *Asahi* and *Mainichi Shimbun* framed the issues around constitutional reform in terms of issues of war,

conflict and military engagement, whereas the *Yomiuri Shimbun* focused on details of the LDP's consideration and debate on the constitution; with regard to Abenomics, meanwhile, the *Yomiuri* tended to frame the economic strategy in terms of horse-race politics, while the *Asahi* and *Mainichi* were more concerned with substantive discussion of its effects, more frequently using terms associated with the economy, the stock market, and financial institutions.

None of this is to say that the concerns raised by journalists regarding government pressure on their work, the accounts of growing conflict between the LDP and the media, or even Nishida (2015)'s classification of the government-media relationship during this era as being one of "antagonism and control", are unfounded. Instances such as 2014 Prime Minister Abe's attack on the *Asahi Shimbun* from the floor of the Diet and Takaichi Sanae's 2016 threat to withdraw broadcast licenses from "insufficiently impartial" media organisations are well-documented, as are the appointments of Abe's ideological fellow-travellers Momii Katsuto and Hyakuta Naoki to senior positions at NHK. It is also important to note that this chapter's analysis focused exclusively on newspaper texts, despite the fact that much of the administration's energy with regard to media control was directed towards NHK; it's possible that analysing the content of TV programs on NHK and other broadcasters would yield different results and conclusions.

The era of the LDP maintaining friendly relations with the mainstream media even across ideological lines, with more liberal LDP factions such as the Kōchikai serving as a bridge to liberal media groups like the Asahi Group, is clearly over. That so-called "friendly" era was, however, carefully managed via the systems of media control that critics of the current antagonistic relationship often decry, such as the tight restrictions on access to government briefings and interviews via the "press club" system. If, as the empirical analysis results in this chapter suggest, the friction between the LDP and the media has not actually led to a reduction in the diversity in coverage of key policy issues in the mainstream press, and in the absence of any evidence of major stories or scandals actually being suppressed or

kept from the public, then we might well ask if the current, more openly antagonistic relationship is not actually more honest and more fair to the Japanese public than the former system.

Notes (Chapter 4)

[1]The scoring methodology employed by the RsF ranking appears to have changed in 2013, meaning that the 2012 score cannot be directly compared to later years.

[2]A detailed example of how conventions around the naming of sources were enforced not only by the LDP but also by other media organisations within the press clubs, even to the detriment of the public interest, is presented by Freeman (1996), which describes a 1990 incident in which the *Asahi Shimbun* and one of its reporters faced censure and consequences for the decision to defy press club rules and — accurately — name Ichiro Ozawa as the source of a quote for an important story.

[3]Note that the cosine similarity calculation referred to in this chapter is exclusively used to compare the article frequency — i.e. the changing coverage volume — across the newspapers, and is not used as a measurement of similarity between the actual texts of the articles.

Chapter 5

Citizens' Perception of Political and Media Polarisation

5.1 Turning from "Supply" to "Demand"

The previous chapters evaluated the political positions of politicians and political factions (Chapters 2 & 3), and of major newspapers (Chapter 4), over the course of the Abe Administration, using automated analysis of the texts generated by those actors to locate them within a latent space. In conventional political science terms, these constitute analyses of both the supply side (the politicians and parties) and of the mediating layer between supply and demand sides (the media who transmit messages from political actors to their constituencies), although this definition rather ignores the actual agency and political role of the media actors themselves. It is more useful, perhaps, to think of this in broad communicative terms — both of these analyses can be seen as focusing on different aspects of the supply side, looking at the broadcasting rather than the receiving side of the communicative function, with the data upon which they are based being the actors' speech acts and texts which they have chosen to broadcast to their constituencies and audiences. The final empirical analysis step in this thesis seeks to combine analysis of both types of actor

— political and media — into a single model, so that we can observe their relative positions. For this, however, we need to turn to a *demand*-side analysis — using as a data source not the texts created by the actors themselves, but rather the data footprint created by these actors' audiences on social media.

The reason for turning away from text analysis at this point is simple: automated text analysis functions by searching for similarities and differences between text corpuses, and therefore applying these techniques to texts which are generated in very different ways or through different processes will highlight not a substantive difference in political position or preference, but rather a practical difference in the nature of the text being examined. For this reason, while we can usefully compare editorials from different newspapers (which may have a different house style in their writing, but are still essentially the same kind of document with the same kind of vocabulary and structure), or manifestoes from different parties, or even political speeches from different politicians, comparing these documents cross-realm — comparing a speech to an editorial, or a manifesto to a speech, or an editorial to a Facebook post, for example — will highlight structural and medium-related differences in the texts, obscuring the political differences that we are interested in[1].

The solution presented here involves turning to a different source of data from which to construct a latent space model — the social graph, or rather, the network of following relationships that makes up the structure of an online social network. As seen in Chapter 3, many Japanese politicians have accounts on the Twitter social network, which is Japan's most popular social media platform; naturally, all mainstream media organisations also have accounts on this network. By using data from Twitter's social graph about the followers of both types of account, political and media, it is therefore possible to observe from the "demand" side — the perspective of the consumer, or average Twitter-using citizen — where these actors are located relative to one another in a latent space model.

The importance of this analysis' results lies in the arguments about relationships between the LDP government and the media that were presented at the outset of

this thesis, in Chapter 1, and explored at length in Chapter 4. While there is significant evidence of rising levels of antagonism between the LDP and the media — significantly predating the second Abe Administration but certainly intensifying during that era — the empirical analysis of media texts in Chapter 4 found no support for the idea that this increasingly hostile relationship has actually diminished the diversity of opinion or framing on key policy issues in Japan's mainstream media. One potential reason for the perception of increased hostility is that the LDP's polarisation around a more focused ideological position, a change that has come hand-in-hand with the diminished role of the party's internal factions (especially the more liberal-internationalist Kōchikai), has effectively pulled the LDP away from the ideological space occupied by centrist or centre-left media organisations in Japan — a loss in overlapping values and preferences which would lead to an increasingly antagonistic relationship between the LDP and these media outlets. Following Curini et al. (2020) we might also speculate that falling newspaper circulation may have pushed the media organisations through their own process of polarisation around a focused ideological point, namely that of their most dedicated readership. In the absence of comparable texts which might allow us to see where the LDP and other political parties sit relative to the media in latent space, we can instead turn to the massed perceptions of individual citizens to perform this task on our behalf — using the judgements made by millions of ordinary Twitter users to measure the similarity or difference of media and political accounts, and from this constructing a latent preference space very similar to the ones used for analysis in Chapters 3 and 4.

5.1.1 The Social Graph and Latent Political Spaces

Using social graph (i.e., social network) data to construct latent spaces is well-established — modelling interpersonal and inter-group networks in a latent space using concepts such as distance and closeness has been a core part of network analysis since its earliest origins in Moreno (1934), but more recently Barberá (2015),

building on earlier work by Hoff et al. (2002), developed a methodology for this kind of network analysis that works effectively for the very large volumes of network data available from social networks like Twitter — not only overcoming the challenges of working with this kind of "Big Data", but actually using the volume advantageously by treating the (potentially) millions of followers of political and media Twitter accounts as individual observations. Barberá's insight was that individuals are more likely to follow the Twitter accounts of politicians or media with whom they agree to some extent, and less likely to follow the accounts of those with whom they disagree — while following the account of someone with whom they disagree (a "hate-follow") is certainly possible, it is generally less likely (as the "cost" of following a disagreeable account is higher, in terms of consistently having to see the posts they make in your social media timeline, than the cost of following an account you like and agree with). Taken to an extreme, this preference for following social media accounts we agree with ends up constructing so-called "filter bubbles" (Pariser 2011), which hide dissenting opinions and views or information the user may find uncomfortable and have been implicated in the rise of affective polarisation across many countries. However, all social media users — indeed, probably all human beings — practice some degree of "filtering" in their networks, both online and offline, selecting to spend time with, stay close to, and follow the updates of people with whom they agree and, by extension, find agreeable. This trait is in fact the very basis of the earliest concepts of spatial modelling in politics, with the choices of the royalists and republicans in the French National Assembly to sit next to their like-minded compatriots, to the right and left of the president respectively.

Barberá's method, which is used with slight adaptation in this chapter, involves therefore treating a *mutual* following of two target figures (for example, two politicians who are both followed by the same individual, or a politician and a media organisation both followed by the same individual) as an indication that those two accounts are closer together in latent space. Calculated across the full set of accounts which follow all of the actors being observed — potentially millions of anonymous

accounts belonging to private citizens — this creates a latent space in which politicians and media with a lot of followers in common are grouped more closely together than politicians and media who have very few or no followers in common. In substantive terms, these latent space positions can be thought of as the summation of the judgements of a very large number of ordinary citizens, whose actions in choosing to follow or not to follow each of these accounts has created the data set from which the actors' positions are calculated. Barberá (2015) carried out this analysis on the political spectrum of the United States during the candidate primaries ahead of the 2016 Presidential Election, ultimately creating a very easily interpretable left-right spectrum on which major political figures from each party, and major U.S. media outlets, were placed in positions that closely match the known facts of the U.S. political and media spheres.

Kobayashi and Ichifuji (2015) used a combination of Twitter data analysis and survey research to show that the assumption that users tend to follow accounts they are closer to ideologically also holds true for the Japanese case, and in subsequent years, a number of studies based on this approach have been published, mostly adapting the methodology introduced in Barberá (2015). Miwa (2017) located the positions for a broad set of political actors — 70 members of the House of Representatives, 47 members of the House of Councillors, 10 parties or political organisations, six newspaper companies, 39 local or former politicians, and 41 media personalities — from the network of 50,000 randomly sampled users who followed at least ten of the target accounts, using a version of Barberá's method which substituted the variational expectation maximisation algorithm (Imai et al. 2016) for the Markov chain Monte Carlo model used in the original paper. Miwa tested the validity of this approach in the Japanese case by showing a robust match between the politician positions predicted from the Twitter data and those calculated from the UTAS Politician survey data (using the ideal point calculation method adapted in Chapter 2 of this thesis).

Kaneko et al. (2020) also adapted the Barberá (2015) method to locate the positions of Twitter accounts operated by national and local newspapers, building on the work of Kobayashi et al. (2019) which had used a different method — training a classification model based on both the text of users' tweets and their following networks — to estimate the ideology of Twitter users and thus, using a Jaccard coefficient calculation, the ideal points of media accounts they follow. Despite the different methods employed, both of these studies found quite similar results, with the majority of media accounts on Twitter being relatively tightly clustered around a central point on the axis. Only the left-wing *Tokyo Shimbun* and the right-wing *Sankei Shimbun* stood out as outliers from this cluster (along with two seemingly left-leaning local newspapers, the *Nishinippon Shimbun* and the *Hokkaido Shimbun*, which were included in Kaneko et al. (2020)'s analysis).

This chapter builds on this prior research in two key ways. Firstly, it includes both politicians and media groups in the analysis, unlike Kobayashi et al. (2019) and Kaneko et al. (2020) which focused exclusively on media accounts, allowing the media "cluster" found in their respective analyses (and, as shall be shown shortly, in this chapter's analysis) to be located in terms of the positions of political actors — which is key to understanding the relationship between political and media actors. Secondly, it involves a much larger and more comprehensive group of political and media accounts than the prior studies, encompassing the Twitter accounts of all Diet members who were active on the social network in 2019 ($n = 454$) and a large cross-section of 30 media accounts including not only the mainstream media organisations but also popular news and politics blogs, magazines, portal news sites, and the Japanese-language accounts of foreign news outlets.

5.2 Data and Methods

To carry out this analysis, a list of Japan's most popular media accounts on Twitter was compiled (see Table 5.1), in addition to the list of Japanese politicians' Twitter accounts which had previously compiled for the analysis in Chapter 3. In addition

to the most popular accounts by follower count, a number of less popular accounts belonging to significant media organisations were also identified and added to the list — most notably the *Chunichi Shimbun*, a major regional newspaper from central Japan in the same group as the *Tokyo Shimbun*, which has a very large circulation but only a few thousand followers on Twitter.

Table 5.1: Japanese Media Accounts on Twitter

	Twitter	**Followers**[1]	**Media Group**
Nikkei Online	*@nikkei*	3,006,840	Nikkei
NHK News	*@nhk_news*	2,697,505	NHK
Asahi Shimbun	*@asahi*	1,215,449	Asahi
Wall Street Journal Japan	*@WSJJapan*	924,465	
Mainichi Shimbun	*@mainichi*	845,351	Mainichi/TBS
Yomiuri Shimbun	*@Yomiuri_Online*	710,582	Yomiuri
Reuters Japan	*@Reuters_co_jp*	693,832	
Yahoo! News	*@YahooNewsTopics*	568,793	
BBC News Japan	*@bbcnewsjapan*	386,784	
Mainichi Fast News	*@mainichijpnews*	358,390	Mainichi/TBS
Sankei Shimbun	*@Sankei_news*	356,064	Sankei/Fuji
Newsweek Japan	*@Newsweek_JAPAN*	355,245	
Nikkan Sports	*@nikkansports*	313,212	Asahi
HuffPost Japan	*@HuffPostJapan*	301,073	
CNN Japan	*@cnn_co_jp*	285,264	
Kyodo News	*@kyodo_official*	177,085	
AFP Japan	*@afpbbcom*	175,511	
Jiji News	*@jijicom*	141,929	
TBS News	*@tbs_news*	119,542	Mainichi/TBS
NTV News24	*@news24ntv*	112,793	Yomiuri
FNN News	*@FNN_News*	100,626	Sankei/Fuji
Asahi Kantei	*@asahi_kantei*	94,117	Asahi
Nikkan Gendai	*@nikkan_gendai*	89,671	
Yomiuri Politics	*@YOL_politics*	77,380	Yomiuri
Hoshu Sokuhō	*@hoshusokuhou*	74,005	
TV Asahi News	*@tv_asahi_news*	59,657	Asahi
Tokyo Shimbun	*@tokyo_shimbun*	58,328	
Asahi Digital	*@asahicom*	44,554	Asahi
Shimbun Akahata	*@akahata_PR*	37,669	
Chunichi Shimbun	*@chunichi_denhen*	5,268	

[1] Data compiled in September 2019.

Using the Twitter API, the full list of followers of each of these accounts was downloaded and stored in September 2019[2], yielding a set of 14,425,798 following

relationships for the 30 media accounts that had been identified (6,337,223 unique users) and 6,812,259 following relationships for the 454 active politicians' accounts (2,425,046 unique users). In order to focus on users whose political leaning or preferences could be determined, only those accounts who followed a minimum of five political Twitter accounts were included, yielding 304,345 target accounts — which we might think of as being the population of "politically engaged" users on Twitter. This group was then randomly sampled down to 100,000 accounts in order to allow the analysis to be performed without a need for supercomputer resources, and a contingency table was constructed representing each political and media Twitter account as a 100,000-length binary vector consisting of the following or non-following choices of each of the randomly sampled users. A secondary contingency table was also constructed in which all of the accounts related to each political party with aggregated, giving a count of how many accounts associated with that party were followed by each user; this table was used to calculate "party leaning" labels for the users, with any user whose followed political accounts came largely from a single party (defined as more than 40%, with no other party exceeding that level) being recorded as having that party ID.

The first analysis performed on this data was a series of logistic regressions, using media account following as dependent variables and the number of political accounts from each major party (LDP, DP, Komeito, JCP and Ishin) followed as the independent variable. The results of these regressions show how the probability of following a given media account changes conditional on following an account associated with a political party — i.e., the extent to which the followers of a political party appear to favour or disfavour following a given media account.

Next, the contingency tables were used to construct two latent space models — one with individual politicians, and one with the political parties represented in aggregate — using a correspondence analysis method (as demonstrated in Barberá et al. 2015). This approach was demonstrated to produce results matching very closely to those of the much more computationally intensive Markov Chain Monte

Carlo sampling originally used in Barberá (2015). As in Barberá's study, the primary dimension here clearly reflects the primary axis of political competition; diverging slightly from Barberá's method, however, the present study also looks at the latent space in two dimensions where relevant, since the Japanese political system has more parties than the United States' two-party system and can therefore be more amenable to interpretation in a two-or-higher dimensional representation. A series of graphs was generated using the top dimensions from the correspondence analysis, showing the positions of politicians and parties as perceived by Twitter users, as well as the positions of media organisations, and permitting an analysis of polarisation between political and media actors.

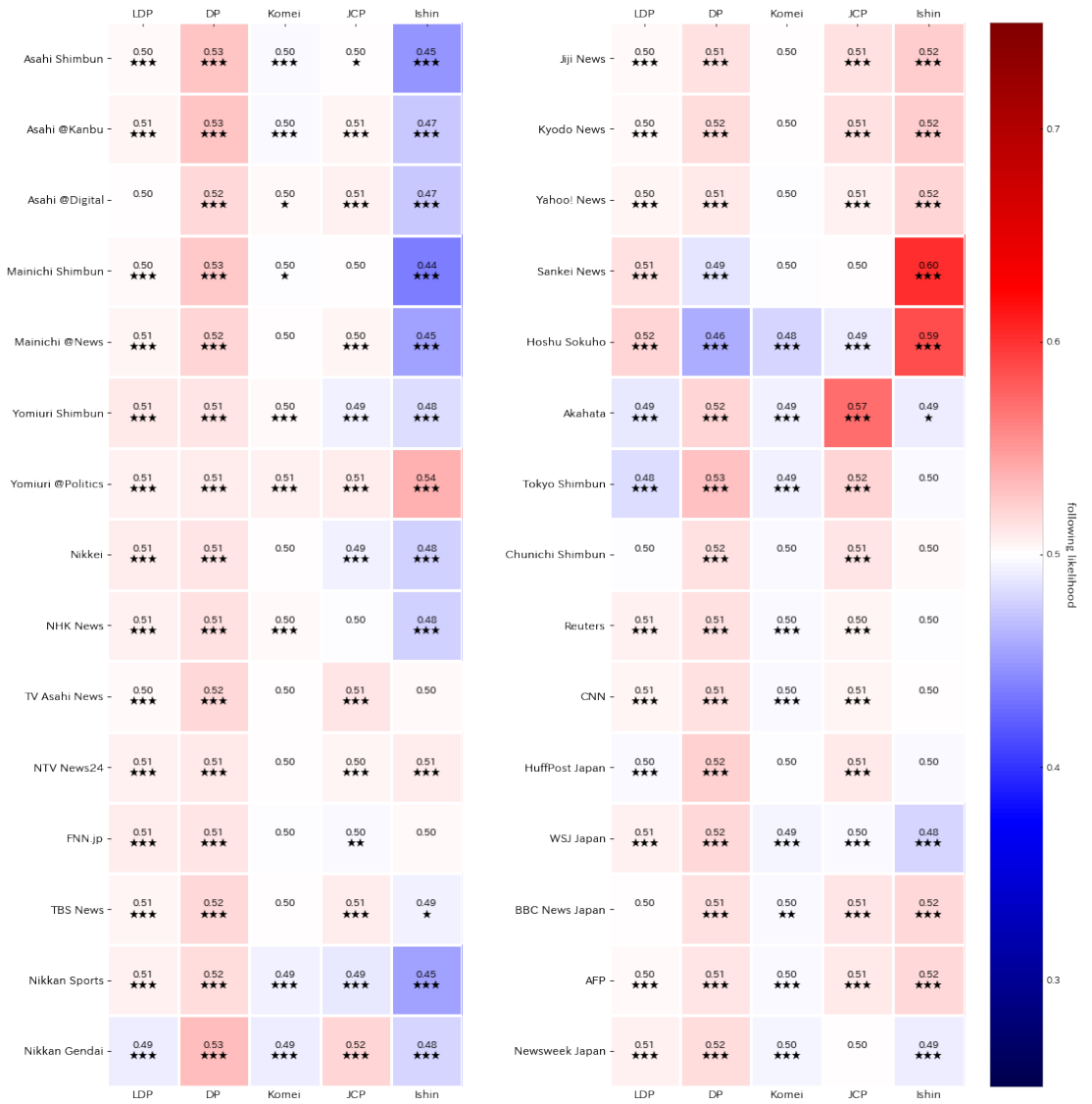
Finally, as a point of reference, the political leanings of each user in the sample were used to calculate what percentage of Twitter users of each party identification followed each of the major media Twitter accounts — for example, what percentage of LDP-identified Twitter users follow the *Yomiuri Shimbun*'s accounts, or what percentage of Democratic Party leaning users follow NHK's accounts, and so on.

5.3 Results

This section will present the results of the analyses outlined above in order, starting with the logistic regressions to observe the probability of following media accounts conditional on following political party affiliated accounts, before moving on to the latent space analysis and finally the analysis of the media accounts followed by individuals of various political leanings.

5.3.1 Relationships between Media and Political Accounts

The results of the logistic regressions of media account following conditional on political account following are shown in Figure 5.1, with blue shades representing negative relationships (i.e., following an account from the political party in that vertical column makes a user *less* likely to follow the media account in the horizontal



Note: The numbers in each cell are the logistic regression probabilities — in the range from 0 to 1 — of following a given media account conditional on following a single account associated with a given political party.

Figure 5.1: Media and Political Account Following Probabilities (Logit Regression)

row, indicated by a probability value below 0.5), while red shades represent positive relationships. The stars in each cell are indicative of statistical significance at the $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$ and $p < 0.001$ levels (one to three stars, respectively). Notably, most of the cells are a red shade — this is unsurprising, since we might reasonably expect that following the accounts of politicians in general (regardless of party affiliation) indicates an interest in politics and current affairs and thus makes an individual more likely to follow media accounts. The two major exceptions to this rule are Komeito followers — who do not appear to have a particularly strong positive following relationship with any news media — and followers of Nippon Ishin no Kai, who

have strongly negative following relationships with almost all of the mass media outlets on Twitter, with the exceptions of the *Yomiuri Shimbun*'s politics account and the right-wing *Sankei Shimbun*'s account. Ishin followers were also much more likely to follow the far-right blog site *Hoshu Sokuhō*, which is one of the most strongly polarised accounts in the analysis in terms of the political alignments of its followers.

An interesting finding which is suggested by these results — and further confirmed in the latent space analysis below — is that followers of the Democratic Party are significantly more likely than LDP followers to follow almost all of the media accounts on Twitter, even being equally as likely to follow the the supposedly government-aligned *Yomiuri Shimbun*'s accounts. The only accounts which LDP supporters are more likely to follow than DP supporters are the right-wing *Sankei Shimbun* and the far-right *Hoshu Sokuhō*. The largest differences in the other direction (accounts DP supporters are more likely to follow than LDP supporters), meanwhile, are for the *Nikkan Gendai* tabloid newspaper, the Japan Communist Party's newspaper *Akahata*, and the left-wing *Tokyo Shimbun*.

5.3.2 Comparing Latent Positions of Media and Political Actors

In order to test the validity of the latent space model being constructed from Twitter network data, it was first used to provide a visualisation of the positions of politicians' accounts in the top two dimensions — effectively a two-dimensional replica of the one-dimensional methodology used in Barberá (2015). The results of this analysis are shown in Figure 5.2. The primary left-right (or progressive-conservative) dimension of Japan's political system is clearly seen along the horizontal axis of this diagram, running from the accounts of politicians belonging to the Japan Communist Party on the far left (green) via the mainstream opposition Constitutional Democratic Party (blue) and Democratic Party for the People (sky blue) in the centre, and then to the LDP on the right (red). Independents and lawmakers from smaller parties (black) are distributed over this axis, while politicians from the Japan

Innovation Party / Nippon Ishin no Kai (purple) are generally distributed on the right-hand side of the LDP's cluster. Note that these results are a close match to those found by Miwa (2017), whose point estimations also showed that the LDP cluster was much more tightly packed than the more widely distributed Democratic Party cluster.

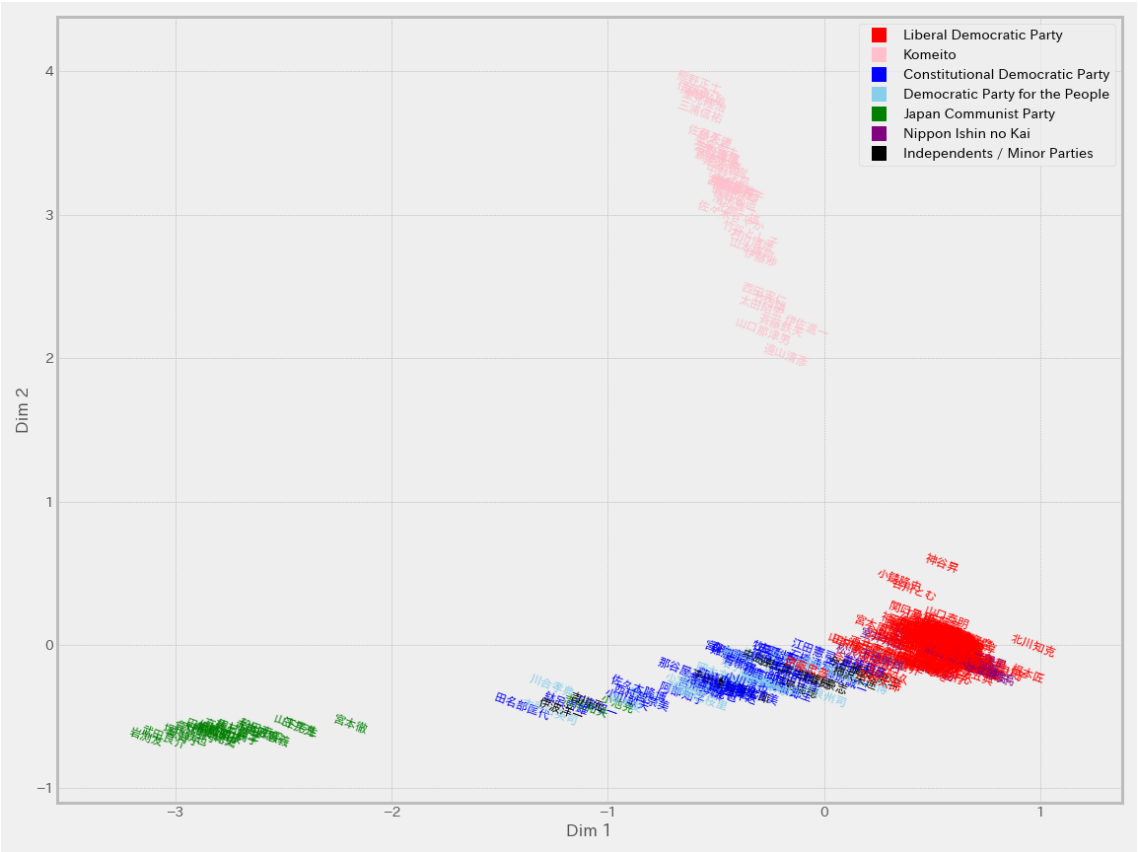


Figure 5.2: Politician Latent Positions, from Twitter Follower Data

The vertical axis of this chart largely encapsulates the separation between Komeito, the LDP's minority coalition partner, and the rest of the parties in the model — a separation which likely arises due to the network reflecting the unique social identity of Komeito, which is the only one of Japan's major parties to have a strongly religious identity due to its connection to the lay Buddhist organisation, Soka Gakkai. If Komeito's position on the horizontal axis is considered, its members would occupy a space overlapping with the left of the LDP cluster and the right of the mainstream opposition cluster, which is a reasonable position for the party given the social democratic, welfare-focused priorities and pacifist approach to constitutional

reform issues that the party has mostly represented in coalition. Overall, this graph comfortably passes face validity checks in terms of its representation of well-known and understood features of the Japanese political spectrum, showing that the latent space model generated from the Twitter follower networks of these accounts is indeed effectively representing the positions of political actors.

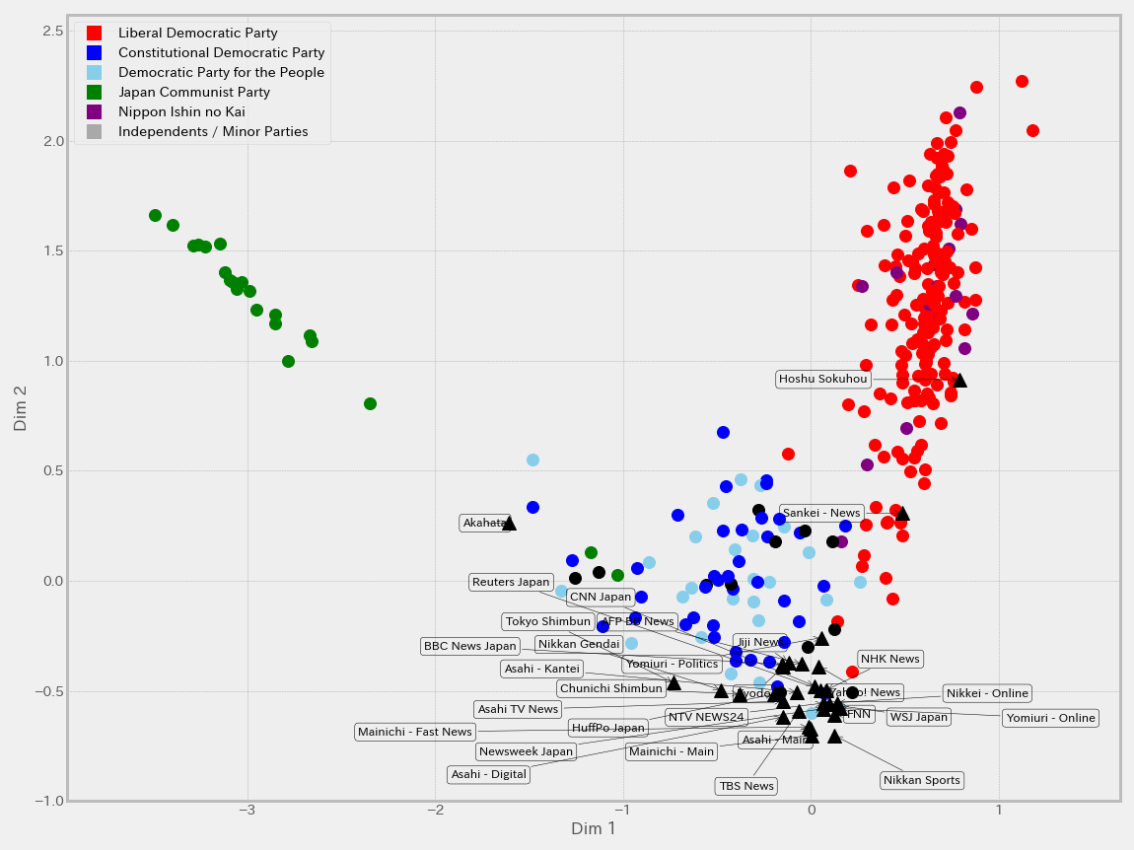


Figure 5.3: Political and Media Positions, All Parties

The next step in the analysis is to add the media accounts from Table 5.1 to the model, in order to observe their positions relative to the political actors. By withholding certain political parties from the model, it is possible to generate different views of the same underlying data — effectively "zooming in" on parties or areas of interest in the latent space. The first graph of media and political actors, Figure 5.3, includes all of the parties except Komeito, whose followers are not especially close to any of the media organisations being observed (as was already seen from the logistic regression analysis in Figure 5.1). Removing Komeito and adding in the media organisations creates a chart in which the horizontal axis essentially mirrors

the left-right / progressive-conservative axis (also seen on the horizontal axis of Figure 5.2), with the JCP at the far left and the LDP and Ishin at the right of the graph. The vertical axis, meanwhile, appears to encapsulate distance from the large cluster of media organisations in the lower right quadrant of the graph, with parties that are strongly ideologically opposed (like the JCP and LDP) overlapping on this axis due to being similarly "distant" from the media cluster.

The media organisations in this graph appear to be quite tightly clustered in an area which overlaps primarily with the Democratic Party's ideological space (in the horizontal axis). There are a few exceptions; *Shimbun Akahata*, the official newspaper of the JCP, is unsurprisingly the most far-left publication on the horizontal axis, and the closest to its associated political party overall. The left-wing *Tokyo Shimbun* also appears slightly removed and off to the left of the main media cluster, though remaining closer to the opposition politicians than the JCP. On the other side of the cluster, *Hoshu Sokuhō* and the *Sankei Shimbun* are the most right-wing and second most right-wing publications respectively, and are also at a significant remove from the mainstream media cluster — making them the only publications which directly overlap with the core of the cluster of LDP politicians in this graph.

Another way of viewing this data, which is more similar to the one-dimensional analysis method used by Barberá (2015), Kaneko et al. (2020), and Miwa (2017), is presented in Figure 5.4. This chart represents the primary axis (the left-right / progressive-conservative axis) in histogram form, showing where the accounts associated with each party are most strongly clustered. The bottom part of the graph shows the positions of media organisations along the same axis. This graph makes it easy to see the left-wing outliers (*Shimbun Akahata*, the *Tokyo Shimbun*, *Nikkan Gendai* and the *Chunichi Shimbun*, from left to right) and the corresponding right-wing outliers (*Hoshu Sokuhō* and the *Sankei Shimbun*, from right to left), but also makes it very clear that with the remainder of the media is tightly clustered in a space that largely aligns with the right-hand side of the Democratic Party cluster.

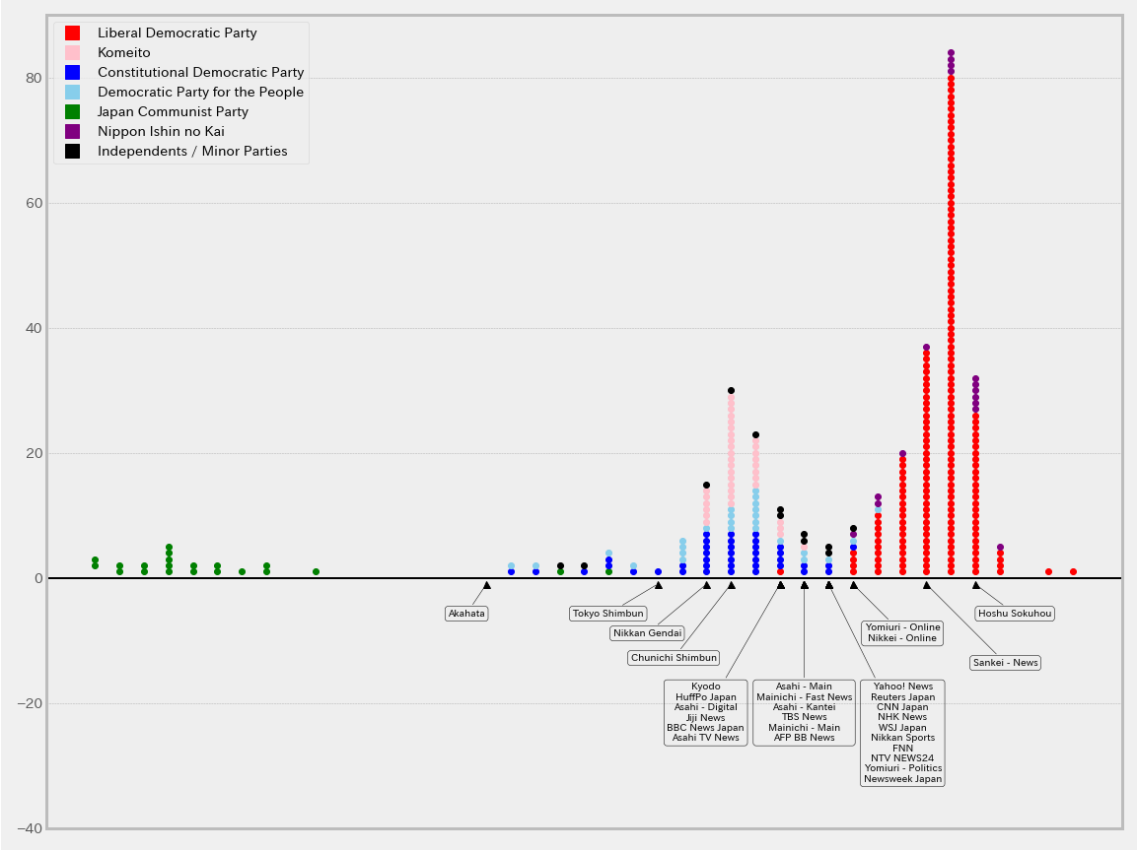


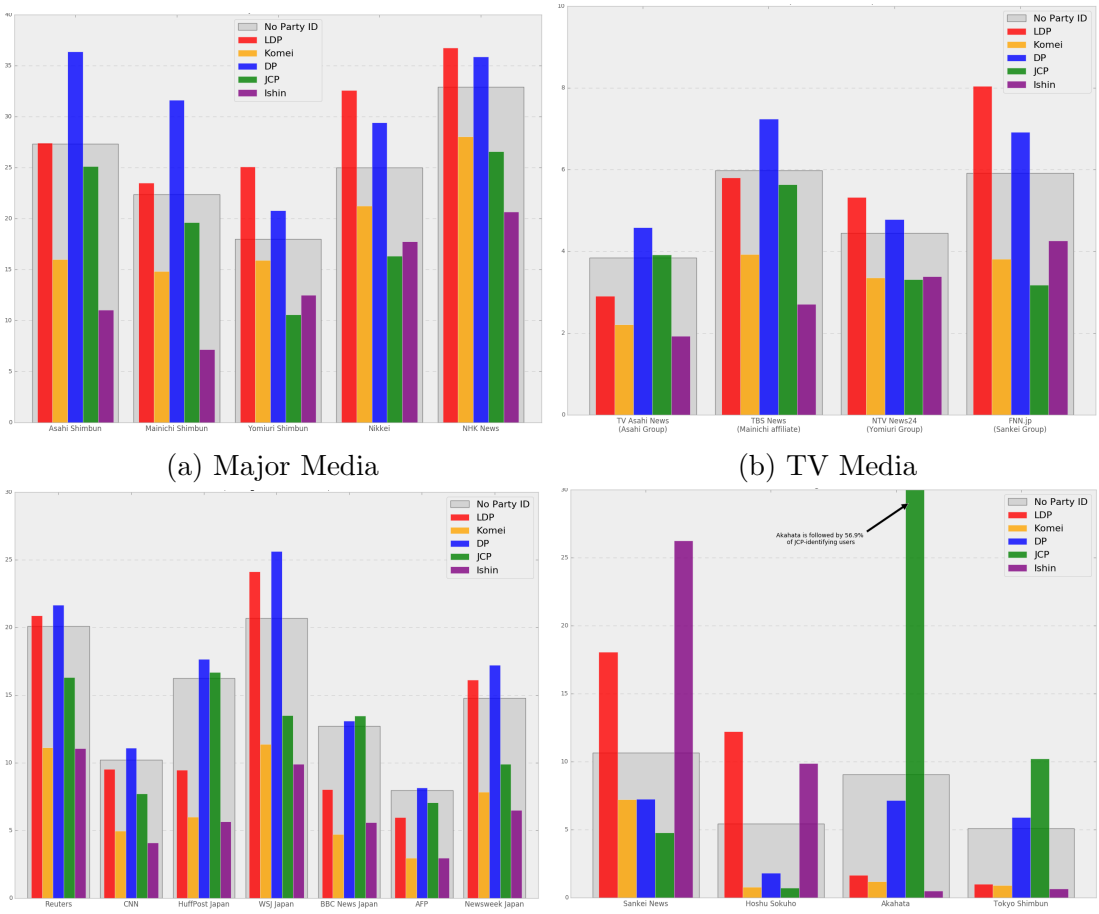
Figure 5.4: Political and Media Positions (Single Dimension)

There is also some degree of left-to-right ideological sorting within this large cluster, with the Asahi Group and Mainichi / TBS Group outlets appearing to the left (closer to the opposition), alongside BBC News Japan and the left-wing Huff Post Japan, while the right-hand side of the cluster includes some Yomiuri Group outlets, NHK, and the Japanese editions of more centre-right overseas media such as Newsweek and the Wall Street Journal. Only a small right-hand fringe of this cluster actually overlaps with the LDP cluster to any degree, and contains the main *Yomiuri Shimbun* account along with the account of major business newspaper the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*. These results align closely with those found by Kaneko et al. (2020) and Kobayashi et al. (2019), but reveal some new outliers at the ideological fringes (*Akahata* and *Hoshu Sokuhō*) while also showing that the mainstream media cluster found in these studies is located closer to the main opposition parties than to the centre of the LDP's cluster.

5.3.3 Which Media Accounts do each Party's Supporters Follow?

The final quantitative analysis carried out in this chapter returns to the political leanings calculated for users who follow multiple political accounts (allocated based on more than 40% of the political accounts they follow being from a single political party), and shows which of the various media accounts users with specific political IDs follow. The results of this analysis are shown in Figure 5.5, and are broadly divided up into four groups: Japan's major media outlets (the four national daily newspapers and NHK), the private TV news networks (each affiliated with a large newspaper as explained in Chapter 4, and seen in Table 5.1), the Japanese-language editions of foreign media companies, and finally, "extreme" media — outlets with especially strong left- or right-wing stances, which are labelled as such based on both common knowledge of the Japanese media environment and the results of the analysis shown in Figure 5.4 above. For each media outlet, the percentage of LDP, Komeito, Democratic Party (including both CDPJ and DPFP followers, as followers of these two parties were not meaningfully separated in previous analyses), JCP and Ishin followers who follow that media outlet is shown, and for comparison, a grey background is plotted showing the average percentage of users in the overall sample (including those for whom no political leaning could be calculated) who follow the account.

There are few surprises in these results: DP and JCP followers are more likely to follow the more left-wing news outlets, and LDP and Ishin followers are more likely to follow the right-wing news outlets, with by far the most dramatic separation between the groups being found in the "extreme" news media accounts. While this separation supports the idea that politically-engaged Twitter users in Japan are creating a kind of media "filter bubble" around themselves, it is important to note that the degree of polarisation seen here is actually quite low, with large numbers of LDP-leaning accounts following supposedly centre-left news outlets such as the



(a) Major Media

(b) TV Media

(c) Foreign Media

(d) "Extreme" Media

Figure 5.5: Followers of Media Twitter Accounts, by Political Leaning

Asahi and *Mainichi Shimbun*, and a lot of DP-leaning accounts also following the supposedly centre-right *Yomiuri Shimbun*. The news account operated by NHK, meanwhile, has almost no notable partisan lean, being followed by around 36-37% of both LDP and DP leaning accounts. The polarisation is much more evident for followers of Nippon Ishin no Kai, who as noted above have a low proclivity to follow media accounts in general, the exceptions being the *Sankei Shimbun* (which was the most popular account among Ishin followers) and *Hoshu Sokuhō*, which was followed by around 12% of LDP followers and around 10% of Ishin followers despite being followed by less than 2% of the followers of any other parties. Komeito followers also have consistently low proclivity to follow media accounts across the board, suggesting that this group may have a low overall tendency regarding media consumption.

5.4 Conclusions

The analysis presented in this chapter in many regards constitutes an alternative look at the questions posed in this thesis: it considers those questions from the perspective of ordinary Japanese citizens (the "demand" side of the political communication system), and uses their social media activity to integrate both political and media actors into a single latent space model, something that was not possible with the survey analysis in Chapter 2 or the text analysis used in Chapters 3 and 4. A combination of the fundamental nature of network graph data (which is much more static and less responsive to events than social media text data, as the majority of Twitter users only very gradually update their following networks) and the limitations of the Twitter API, which does not provide any timestamps for users' following or unfollowing actions, means that this analysis is also constrained to being a snapshot of Twitter users' perception of the latent political space towards the end of the Abe Administration, unlike the previous chapters which used timestamped text data to produce time-series analyses.

This snapshot, however, tells quite a compelling story about the relative positions of the parties and the media organisations. By the closing years of the Abe Administration (this snapshot is of September 2019, just under one year before Abe's resignation), Japanese social media users viewed the majority of the country's major media outlets as being clustered together in a relatively narrow ideological space — a space which overlaps with the more centre-right elements of the mainstream opposition, and has only a very minimal overlap with the most centrist fringe of the LDP cluster (Figures 5.3 and 5.4). The antagonism that has risen between the LDP and the media is therefore reflected in the perceptions of ordinary citizens, who view Japan's media, on the whole, to be closer to the position of the mainstream opposition than to the position of the LDP. Only the *Yomiuri Shimbun* and *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* appear to effectively bridge this divide, occupying an actual centre-point between the LDP and opposition clusters.

While the mainstream media outlets are viewed as being more aligned with the opposition, the network analysis places two news outlets firmly within the LDP's ideological space, both of which can be considered "extreme" to some degree — the right-wing *Sankei Shimbun* and the hard-right blog *Hoshu Sokuhō*. The *Sankei Shimbun* was Japan's fifth national newspaper until recently, when falling circulation figures forced it to cease distribution outside the Tokyo and Osaka metropolitan areas, and has taken hard-right stances on a number of issues, especially those related to wartime history; *Hoshu Sokuhō* is an extreme-right blog that's somewhat comparable, in terms of its extremist positions and inflammatory rhetoric, to the United States' controversial Breitbart, and which was successfully sued for hate speech in Japan's courts in 2018 by Japanese resident of Korean origin (Hatano 2021, p.87).

While the relatively low degree of political polarisation in the readership of major media outlets seen in Figure 5.5a is a much more positive finding, it ought to be troubling that Japan's social media users view almost the entire mainstream media establishment as being removed from the LDP's positions, instead associating the ruling party more closely with more extreme or hardline media outlets. The implication of this finding is that rather than bringing Japan's media "to heel" — or succeeding in "muzzling" them — the actual outcome of seven years of antagonistic media relations and attempts at control has been, perhaps unsurprisingly, to convince Japanese citizens that the LDP and the media establishment are indeed at odds with one another. This worldview has, in turn, pushed some LDP supporters to distrust the motives and methods of the mainstream media, driving them to seek news and information in more far-right outlets which they perceive as being closer to the LDP's true positions. This pattern has been repeated in other nations in recent years, perhaps most famously in the rift between the U.S. Republican Party under Donald Trump and the country's mainstream media (with the exception of far-right outlets such as Fox News and the aforementioned Breitbart), but the relative strength and reach of Japan's traditional mainstream media outlets appear

to have prevented this situation from reaching that extent of polarisation thus far — but this remains an ongoing process, and the attitudes of Japanese citizens towards their mainstream and fringe media outlets should be observed carefully in the coming years for signs of further deepening polarisation.

Notes (Chapter 5)

[1]An extreme example of this problem in comparing texts from different realms would be the difficulty of comparing texts originally produced in different languages using any automated method — while some researchers have attempted to use machine translation tools to this end, the problem remains largely intractable. Less apparent but arguably even more problematic is the difficulty for automated text analysis created by the evolution of language itself, with the introduction of new vocabulary, disappearance of old terminology, and gradual drift in the usage of various terms and phrases all creating significant challenges for any automated text analysis over a long time-scale.

[2]While the original intention was to update the data in 2020, it seemed likely that the COVID-19 pandemic would have an impact on the data that would be hard to quantify or account for, so the 2019 data is used as-is. This is therefore effectively a snapshot of how Twitter users viewed the positions of politicians and media organisations directly before the outbreak of the pandemic.

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Implications

6.1 Key Findings

This thesis set out to empirically analyse the political and media spheres of Japan under the Abe Administration using a variety of different data, methodologies, and techniques, in order to answer some key questions arising from existing literature on these topics — specifically, to what extent the process of the LDP's centralisation under a more powerful central executive has progressed; to what extent, if at all, the LDP's attempts to control media narratives and framing during this era actually influenced the media's coverage of important topics; and finally, to what extent these processes of centralisation and exertion of control have contributed to polarisation in the public sphere.

After outlining the history and background to the LDP's processes of centralisation, Chapter 2 constructed a model of the preference distributions of Japan's politicians using University of Tokyo / Asahi Shimbun survey data spanning 12 elections over 16 years. This model showed that the LDP underwent a gradual process of narrowing and rightward drift in its preference distribution throughout the 2000s, which accelerated and became more pronounced following the party's return to power under Abe Shinzō in 2012. Analysis of the preference distributions of individual factions at the time of the last House of Representatives election in 2017

also showed that despite some differences at the margins, for the most part there was no difference in the preference distribution among factions, with the peak of the distribution for each of them being just slightly to the left of Abe's own position in the data.

Chapter 3 used a complete set of Twitter posts sent by LDP lawmakers between 2013 and 2020 to estimate the ideal points of the LDP's internal factions over time, and thus calculate the extent to which the external communication of the party's factions diverged from, or converged towards, the communication strategy of the leadership. The results of the analysis show that while there has been an overall reduction in the heterogeneity of the factions' communication over the course of the Abe Administration, this process has been very uneven: diversity among the factions declines as elections approach (or in times of crisis, such as the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020), but rises when elections are distant and when the LDP's leadership is weakened by ongoing scandals, which strongly suggests that factions and lawmakers are making strategic decisions about when to comply with the leadership's messaging, and when to diverge from it. These results support the claim that the centralisation of the LDP remains an ongoing and unfinished process, with lawmakers still able to demonstrate greater independence when it is strategically opportune to do so, but the overall space for dissent and diversity of position within the party continuing the decline that has been noted by observers for more than two decades.

Chapter 4 turned its focus to Japan's mainstream media and, after exploring some of the history of the relationship between the LDP and the major media outlets, carried out an automated text analysis on newspaper articles about key policy issues ("Abenomics" and constitutional reform) over the course of the Abe Administration to discover whether the level of diversity and heterogeneity in newspaper coverage on these topics had risen or fallen in response to pressure on the media created by an increasingly antagonistic and controlling relationship with the LDP. Using a similar ideal point estimation strategy to Chapter 3, the results of this analysis

showed no evidence that the positions of Japan's centre-left newspapers — the *Asahi Shimbun* and *Mainichi Shimbun* — had converged with the position of the government-aligned, centre-right newspaper, the *Yomuri Shimbun*, over the course of the administration. If anything, the relative positions of the newspapers actually diverged over time on the question of constitutional reform, while remaining more-or-less stable on the topic of Abenomics. Taken alongside the fact that Japan's mainstream media continued to report extensively on damaging scandals related to Prime Minister Abe and his close allies over the course of the administration, this finding shows that the LDP's efforts to exert control over the media ultimately had minimal effect on the actual freedom of the press or the diversity of reporting available to Japanese citizens.

Finally, Chapter 5 turned its attention to the perceptions of those Japanese citizens, using large-scale network data gathered from Twitter in late 2019 to construct a latent space model showing the relative positions of both politicians and media outlets, as those positions are understood by a large (c.100,000) sample of politically engaged Twitter users. The results of this analysis showed that the large majority of Japanese mainstream media outlets are clustered in a space that overlaps with the rightward fringe of the mainstream opposition cluster, with only two more far-right outlets — the very right-wing *Sankei Shimbun* and the extreme right *Hoshu Sokuhō* blog — actually holding positions that overlap with the main body of the LDP's cluster. This finding is tempered by other analysis in this chapter which confirmed that the mainstream media organisations, especially NHK, continue to have a broad reach across supporters of both the LDP and the mainstream opposition, meaning that the polarisation of the media sphere in Japan remains relatively low. However, it is clear that a significant group of LDP supporters have come to see the LDP and the bulk of the mainstream media as being at odds with one another, and view the more extreme right-wing media outlets as more reliably aligned with the LDP's positions, a situation which is probably a consequence of years of high-profile an-

tagonism between the Abe Administration and much of the media, especially the centre-left press.

6.1.1 Examining the Hypotheses

Chapter 1 introduced an underlying hypothesis for the whole thesis — more of a proposed narrative than a hypothesis in the strictest sense — and four more concrete and testable hypotheses which emerge from that basic narrative.

> *H1. Institutional centralisation in the LDP and government has created incentives for party members to align their expressed ideological preferences with the leadership, resulting in a narrowing preference space for the LDP and increased polarisation in the broader political system.*

The analysis results presented in Chapter 2 support this hypothesis, showing that the LDP's members have indeed increasingly aligned their expressed preferences in the UTAS data sets. This process predates the second Abe Administration but accelerated from 2012 onwards. Moreover, in moving the party's centre of gravity to the right, the distance from the main opposition parties has been increased and the overlap in policy preferences — and thus potential room for cooperation — has been reduced. This empirical demonstration of polarisation and the explanation of the incentives which have created this situation both extend and help to explain Sasada et al. (2013)'s finding that cooperation between the LDP and DPJ in Diet voting had declined during the 2000s.

> *H2. This process has also imposed increased message discipline on the LDP, which should see members' communicative choices being increasingly brought in line with the central leadership as Abe consolidated his power over the party.*

The analysis of social media posts presented in Chapter 3 suggests that message discipline (operationalised as the alignment of members' communicative choices with

those of the leadership faction) did increase overall over the course of the second Abe Administration. However, the results do not fully support the hypothesis, as there was evidence that members were choosing to follow message discipline based on strategic calculations separate to the progress of Abe's consolidation of power: the electoral cycle played a significant role (with members demonstrating more communicative diversity distant from elections, likely reflecting similar strategic choices to those measured in legislative speeches by Curini et al. (2020)), while an uptick in communicative diversity was also seen during the period when Abe was personally embroiled in a number of corruption scandals.

> *H3. Rising antagonism between the LDP and the media is a consequence of increased polarisation, not a cause of increased convergence: analysis of media texts will therefore reveal divergence between ideological poles.*

The analysis of newspaper texts in Chapter 4 provided some evidence of divergence between the positions of the major media outlets, at least with regard to the topic of constitutional reform. No sign of convergence in media positions — as might be expected if attempts to impose "self-censorship" or other forms of "muzzling" on the media had been successful — was found in the analysis. These results largely agree with the findings of Chiba (2020), who also found growing divergence between the centre-left and centre-right newspapers in their coverage of the Abe Administration. While none of this evidence can support a causal claim — we can hypothesise that antagonism has been caused by polarisation and not vice-versa, but cannot prove it with this type of evidence and analysis — the finding of divergence, rather than convergence, in media positions and diversity fits with the overall narrative and allows us to reject certain claims of media silencing or control.

> *H4. The parallel processes of political and media polarisation will lead citizens to perceive strong partisan alignments that cut across these spheres.*

Finally, the analysis of social media graph data in Chapter 5 built upon the results of similar research by Kaneko et al. (2020), Kobayashi et al. (2019), and

Miwa (2017), and showed that citizens — or at least, politically-engaged, Twitter-using citizens — do indeed perceive partisan alignments between political parties and media organisations. Notably, most of the mainstream media falls into a core cluster that is perceived by citizens as being closer to the opposition than to the LDP, while the centre of gravity of the LDP cluster is aligned only with relatively "extreme" media outlets — the *Sankei Shimbun* and *Hoshu Sokuhō*. This perception of the bulk of the media being in partisan alignment with the opposition, assuming it is generalisable beyond Twitter users (which is a topic for future research), raises a troubling prospect that Japan's political and media spheres may be moving towards the kind of antagonistic and fragmented situation that exists, for example, between the Republican party and the mainstream media in the United States.

6.1.2 The LDP as a "Normal Party"

Taken as a whole, and in context with prior research on the LDP and the Japanese media, these findings are consistent with the narrative of a party that has reduced its space for internal dissent, increased its message discipline, and generally become more homogeneous and polarised — leading to increased hostility with media outlets that find themselves increasingly distant from the positions of a party that was once a far "broader tent".

The process of establishing a more powerful executive and top-down structure in the LDP has been ongoing for decades, and while the analysis presented in this thesis shows that the process is not complete — factions continue to strategically express independent identities at certain points in the political cycle — it can certainly be argued that the longevity of the Abe Administration represents a pay-off of that process. This is all relative, of course: the LDP under Abe was more centralised, more homogeneous and thus more polarised in its positions and messaging than it had been in the past, but the LDP of the past was, in comparative terms, an unusually diverse, undisciplined and fractious party. Prior to the electoral reforms of the 1990s — and even more so prior to the dominance of the Tanaka-Takeshita

faction in the 1980s — it was in effect a "party of parties" or a "coalition of factions" (Cox and Rosenbluth 1993), a democracy within a democracy where factions fought internal battles for status and authority. As Chapter 4 discussed, this high level of internal heterogeneity and competition helped the LDP to maintain good relationships across the spectrum of the mainstream media, with the LDP's more liberal factions, notably the Kōchikai, free to cultivate connections with the more centre-left media groups.

By comparison, the LDP whch currently exists — the current result of the processes of centralisation and polarisation that have been ongoing since the 1990s — is a party whose structure and culture looks much more similar to mass parties in other advanced democracies. The factions continue to exist, but their diminished role within the party is now more directly comparable to the caucuses, factions and other intra-party groupings seen in mass parties elsewhere, rather than to the powerful "party within a party" organisations they once were. A powerful executive and top-down message discipline is a common feature of major political parties — as is the willingness of individuals or groups to act more independently when the executive is weakened or when an election is not on the horizon (and thus the negative consequences of party disunity are minimised). Even the LDP's antagonistic relationship with the media doesn't look so unusual when compared to major parties in other countries: it's fairly common for newspapers and media organisations to have a clear preference (explicit or implicit) for one party or another, and for the political parties in turn to favour friendly media with access and information (see for example Reeves et al. 2016). While some aspects of the hostility between the LDP and the media are more troubling (notably incidents such as Abe's attack in the Diet on the *Asahi Shimbun* over its reporting on comfort women, which led to harassment of *Asahi* journalists and others by far-right groups and individuals, or attempts to influence NHK programming and reporting through the appointment of right-wing Abe allies to senior positions), the overall situation of a party in government favouring its ideological allies in the media, while regularly being at

loggerheads with ideological foes, is the norm in most countries with a multi-party system.

One might reasonably ask, then, if the processes which have led the LDP to this point could best be described not just as centralisation or polarisation, but as *normalisation* — changes which have led the party to a point where its internal structures and external relationships, and even its ideological breadth and diversity, are largely similar to those of major parties in other advanced democracies. Certainly, today's LDP is much closer in form and structure to parties like the U.S. Republican Party, British Conservative Party or German Christian Democratic Union than it was in the 1990s and prior. It's also important to note that saying that the party has "normalised" is not a value judgement; "normal" parties of this kind do not necessarily deliver better results in terms of quality of democracy or governance, and indeed both the U.S. Republican and British Conservative parties have in recent years struggled with challenges from more extreme internal groups, faced increasingly hostile relationships with the media (leading to the coining of the now-ubiquitous term, "fake news") and even been accused of enacting voter suppression measures of various kinds. The process which the LDP has followed since the electoral reforms of the 1990s has led it to a position of being much more like a normal party in an international comparative context, but the actual value of that form of "normality" from a democratic and governance perspective has never been quite so strongly questioned as it is today.

6.1.3 Institutional Capture, Interrupted?

Another pattern which can be considered in light of the findings in this thesis is that the LDP's efforts at exerting increased top-down control over decision-making and messaging were largely focused in the early years of the Abe Administration. These measures showed few if any discernible results in these analyses (especially with regard to media control), and appear to have been largely abandoned in the latter half of the administration's tenure. 2013, for example, brought the controversial

appointments of Momii Katsuto and Hyakuta Naoki to senior positions of NHK; their replacements when their terms at the broadcaster expired a few years later were much more low-profile and uncontroversial. 2014 saw the passage of major reforms that placed control of the top levels of the bureaucracy directly in the hands of the Kantei, but as Mishima (2017, p.1111) notes, the leadership seemed reluctant to actually use the new powers they had granted themselves — and by the time the COVID-19 pandemic struck Japan in early 2020, there was little evidence of the kind of decisive executive control the reform more than half a decade previously had seemed to point towards. Even the antagonism with the press seemed to calm down after the early years of the administration; Abe's direct attack on the *Asahi Shimbun* in the Diet in 2014 remains noteworthy precisely because it was effectively a low point in relations between Abe and the media, and his early use of Facebook to bypass the media entirely and directly lash out at his critics and opponents also ceased after the first couple of years in office.

While individual aspects of the above can be taken as a sign of Abe "mellowing" as he settled into the office (and perhaps came to realise that his second tenure would be much more stable than his first had been), taken as a whole these events are suggestive of a strategic shift by Abe and his leadership team. The behaviour of the LDP leadership immediately after returning to office in late 2012 — following only the second period in which the party had been forced out of office since 1955, and the first time that it had ever been supplanted as the largest party in a House of Representatives election — could be described as an attempt at institutional capture, with the party seeking to expand its control over the institutions of government and media in order to secure its electoral future. Various forms of institutional capture have been described in many different democracies: changing the rules governing elections to be more favourable to the incumbent party is one common approach (Boix 1999), but media capture, either through assuming more direct control of state media, suppressing independent media, or both, is also well-documented (Prat and Strömberg 2013). While institutional capture strategies have

been linked with populist parties in government in recent years[1], the incentives to engage in these behaviours also exist for non-populist parties; as Chesterley and Roberti (2018) shows, the key challenge to institutional capture is not so much the nature of the party in power as the robustness of the independence of the institutions being targeted for capture, which increases the costs of capture. Populist parties may generally have stronger incentives to engage in capture, but the LDP's incentives in the early years of the Abe Administration are also quite obvious: there was a widespread sense that the DPJ's electoral victories in 2007 and 2009 heralded a future in which Japan would have true two-party politics and regular changes of power, ending the LDP's lengthy hegemony. Abe's belief that the "biased" press had been partially responsible for the collapse of his first administration in 2007 (Harris 2020, p.253) may also have given him, and his close allies, a further incentive to pursue media capture policies.

That this attempt at media capture does not seem to have worked (as shown in the analysis results in Chapter 4), and that the LDP appears to have quietly abandoned its more egregious attempts at institutional capture, is likely attributable to two factors: unexpectedly high costs associated with capture, and on the other side of the equation, a reduced incentive for capture in the later years of the administration. The costs of capture are largely determined by how robustly institutions can resist these efforts (Chesterley and Roberti 2018), and the Abe Administration's early attempts at institutional capture appear to have met with strong resistance from a number of sources. Mishima (2017), for example, states that the 2014 reforms to the bureaucracy were far less effective than anticipated not least because of resistance from within the LDP itself to the changes. Abe's senior appointees at NHK departed on the expiry of their terms of office without seeking re-selection, with Hyakuta Naoki noting that the position had afforded him little influence over programming at the organisation (Japan Times 2015). The independent media, for its part, fought back hard against the Abe Administration's attacks, including weaponising the country's falling position in the *Reporters sans Frontières* rankings

in order to mobilise national and international sentiment against the government's approach to the press. Japan's independent media was never going to be an easy target for capture: the country's media market, which is dominated by enormous competing conglomerates, is a far cry from that of countries like Hungary, where allies of the populist leader Viktor Orban were able to purchase or otherwise take control of all of the nation's major media outlets. Congolomerates like the Asahi Group, the Mainichi / TBS group, or even *Nikkan Gendai* publisher Kodansha, are simply far too big for any LDP ally to consider buying them in order to curry favour with the Prime Minister. Meanwhile, the string of electoral victories won by the LDP under Abe, and the continuing shambolic state of the opposition — which reached a nadir in 2017 when the main opposition party went through a bitterly contentious split only weeks before a general election — significantly reduced the incentive for the LDP to engage in such costly efforts at institutional capture.

Some of the reforms introduced in the early years of the Abe Administration have outlasted the administration itself and will continue to have an impact on Japanese politics and governance for years to come — the Kantei holds more executive power than previously, the Prime Minister's relationship with the media has been redefined by the switch to conducting interviews and briefings with preferred outlets rather than holding daily on-camera briefings, and as Chapter 5 showed, the Japanese public has come to view the LDP and the mainstream media as hostile to one another, a factor which may have far-reaching consequences in the years to come. However, the more aggressive attempts at institutional capture were not realised and appear, ultimately, to have been abandoned in the face of significant resistance, diminished incentive, and perhaps an acknowledgement that certain objectives — such as improving the party's grasp of media messaging — might be better accomplished through more nuanced means.

6.2 Implications for the LDP and its Rivals

This thesis has largely focused on two key institutional players, the LDP and the media. The next sections will focus on each of these in turns, asking what implications the findings herein have for these institutions and their future prospects. We turn first to the LDP, and to Japan's political party system more broadly.

6.2.1 A Narrowing Scope for Party Recruitment

The findings of this thesis and the arguments made in other literature support the idea that the LDP's formerly broad tend has narrowed significantly, with the party now being far more polarised around a top-down organisational structure than it has been in the past. This reorganisation has not been explicitly ideological in nature — there has been no purge or exodus of lawmakers with dissenting ideologies — with the focus instead being on loyalty to the party's leadership and willingness to accept its authority. This was seen in the most "purge-like" event of the reorganisation process, the 2005 House of Representatives election, at which Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro ran "assassin" candidates against members of his own party who had refused to back his proposal to part-privatise Japan Post — a dispute which, although it had some ideological dimensions, was largely over concerns (chiefly from lawmakers with strong connections to the construction industry) about the potential impact privatisation might have on Japan Post's ability to provide funding for pork-barrel projects. However, even if loyalty to the leadership may have been a much more important currency than shared ideology, especially over the course of the Abe Administration, the end result has still been a compression of the LDP's ideological breadth. Many of Abe's closest allies had been his ideological fellow-travellers in the "new conservative" movement (Harris 2020, p.50) since the 1990s, and in rewarding their loyalty with senior party and cabinet positions, Abe implicitly also elevated that ideology to being, if not the LDP's official position, then certainly a position that was privileged within the party.

It is impossible to know to what extent LDP lawmakers — especially those more established lawmakers who did not owe their Diet seats to Abe's influence and electoral success — actually adopted the new conservative ideology, and to what extent they merely paid lip service to it (for example, by joining the nationalist lobbying group *Nippon Kaigi*, membership of which among Diet members surged during the Abe Administration to the point that a large majority of LDP lawmakers are members of the controversial group). However, it is certainly the case that the LDP's ideological position is more right-leaning than before, and this has included a public embrace of nationalism and historical revisionism — aspects which have always been associated with certain elements of the party, but which were formerly balanced by other elements such as the embrace of the Yoshida Doctrine by the party's conservative mainstream (*hoshu-honryū*) factions. The shrinking of this broad ideological tent has had consequences for the LDP's relationship with the media, as explored in Chapters 4 and 5, but it may also have a lasting consequence on one of the party's understated sources of long-term electoral power — its dominance of candidate recruitment.

The LDP's near-hegemony on government power has naturally made it into the most logical option for ambitious young politicians seeking to join a party — and the party's broad ideology and diverse internal factions made the calculation even easier, since a candidate of almost any political persuasion (other than communist or hard-left) could fit relatively comfortably into one of the LDP's groupings. As a consequence, the LDP enjoyed a clear advantage in candidate recruitment; while this is hard to quantify, one notable statistic is that almost 40% of all LDP lawmakers who held office between 1996 and 2016 were "dynastic politicians", meaning that their candidacy would have come with built-in name recognition and, in many cases, a powerful inherited local support network (*kōenkai*). By comparison, less than 20% of the DPJ's lawmakers in the same era had enjoyed this advantage (Smith 2018, p.47).

Absent further transitions of power and the true emergence of a two-party system, the LDP will likely continue to enjoy its advantage in terms of being the best party for young politicians with ambitions of one day holding high office — but its narrowed ideological scope, and especially its resulting retreat from the positions of the conservative mainstream groupings, will also narrow its scope for candidate recruitment and may become somewhat self-fulfilling, as the party ends up primarily attracting candidates with strongly right-wing or nationalist ideologies. Perhaps more problematic than the issue of top-level candidate recruitment, however, is the potential difficulty this creates with recruitment of LDP activists and volunteers at a local level: while some of these may of course be energised over issues such as historical revisionism, many supporters are likely to be discouraged if they feel that the party's ideology has drifted away from its pragmatic, economy-focused roots. It may ultimately prove difficult for a party whose ideological span has narrowed to command the kind of broad appeal that kept the LDP consistently in power for so many decades.

6.2.2 New Opportunities for Challenger Parties

A further consequence of the narrowing of the LDP's ideological space, and of the distance this has created between the LDP and some mainstream media outlets, is the opening up of potential new sites from which to challenge the party's dominance. Several parties formed during the course of the Abe Administration sought to challenge the LDP electorally by taking up positions which would formerly have overlapped almost entirely with the LDP's own wide-ranging positions. Some of these, such as the right-wing Party for Future Generations (*jisedai no tō*) and its successor party, the Party for Japanese Kokoro (*nihon no kokoro wo daiji ni suru tō*), never enjoyed any significant electoral success. A more serious challenge — though also unsuccessful — was mounted by the Party of Hope (*kibō no tō*), which was hastily formed following the collapse of the Democratic Party prior to the 2017 House of Representatives election and sought to leverage the popularity of Tokyo

Governor Koike Yuriko, a former LDP lawmaker who had held senior ministerial portfolios under Koizumi Junichiro and under Abe Shinzō's first administration and had defected from the party to contest and win the Tokyo Gubernatorial election. The Party of Hope, and its successor the Democratic Party for the People (*kokumin minshūtō*), sought to challenge the LDP from a position similar to the one that had brought Koike victory in Tokyo — a broadly centre-right position with a strong reformist message and liberal internationalist tendencies, very similar to the one that the LDP's conservative mainstream factions would once have effectively covered.

Perhaps the most successful challenge to the LDP during this era, however, came from *Nippon Ishin no Kai*, which was initially founded as a regional party for Osaka by charismatic populist politician Hashimoto Tōru. Despite going through a complex series of splits, mergers and rebrandings, the party has been the most successful of Japan's various regional parties on the national stage, and is currently the second-largest opposition party with 16 members in the House of Councillors and 11 members in the House of Representatives (as of May 2021), in addition to controlling both the Governor and Mayor's offices in Osaka. The party's ideology is more overtly populist and neoliberal than that of the LDP, and it is in many ways a direct ideological inheritor of the approach to neoliberal reform pursued by Koizumi Junichiro and later largely dropped under Abe's leadership. While the relationship between the LDP and Ishin is cooperative in some regards — the parties share similar views on constitutional reform, for example, leading to thus-far unfounded speculation that the LDP could partner with Ishin instead of the more reluctant Komeito in pursuit of this end — the success of Ishin in national politics can also be attributed to some extent to the LDP's movement away from an ideological space which it had originally carved out under Koizumi.

6.3 Implications for the Media

Despite the lack of overt censorship and the rich diversity of publications available, Japan's mainstream news media has been the subject of significant criticism

for decades, especially in regard to what critics viewed as its friendly and overly-controlled relationships with the government authorities, and the inability or unwillingness of publications to stand up to pressures from advertisers regarding their reporting. As a consequence, the media has often been derided for failing to perform its "watchdog" function, with major stories that ought to have been the subject of serious investigation by the major newspapers instead being uncovered by small tabloid papers or even by reporting in the foreign press (McNeill 2014). Against this background, the decline in the relationship between the LDP and the media during the Abe Administration is certainly notable, and even worrying — but the findings of the research in this thesis have suggested a more complex and perhaps less troubling situation than the common narrative of undue pressure, self-censorship and growing control.

6.3.1 "Media Muzzling": Perception vs. Reality

The so-called "muzzling" of Japan's media (George Mulgan 2017a), to put it bluntly, does not seem to have happened — or at least, the media was able to slip the muzzle with relative ease. That the LDP under Abe, guided largely by Seko Hiroshige, attempted to shift its media management strateg ies to exert greater control over messaging is clear; that Abe and his close allies were antagonistic to parts of the media they viewed as hostile to the LDP, and that they sought to bring NHK in particular under more direct control through the appointment of political allies to senior positions, is also undeniable. However, the measurable effect of these things on the diversity of views presented in the media does not appear to have been meaningful. The mainstream media reported for — quite literally — years on end about scandals involving the Prime Minister, his closest allies, and even his wife, and while the effects of these scandals on the Abe's approval ratings were not especially notable (to the chagrin of his political opponents), this was certainly not a result of a lack of attention to the issues from the media, which regularly made new developments in these scandals into front-page news. Meanwhile, as shown in

Chapter 4, newspaper coverage of what were arguably the most important policy issues to the government — the Abenomics economic program and constitutional reform — showed no evidence of converging towards the government's preferred positions, and may even have diversified over time.

Even if the reality of "media muzzling" is significantly less dramatic than Japan's tumbling position in the *Reporters sans Frontières* Press Freedom Rankings would suggest, however, the *perception* of antagonism and hostility between the LDP and the mainstream media appears to have had a significant impact. The analysis of social network data in Chapter 5 revealed that politically engaged Japanese citizens viewed almost all of the country's mainstream media outlets as being closer to the opposition parties than to the LDP by the closing years of the Abe Administration — instead perceiving far-right outlets like the *Sankei Shimbun* and *Hoshu Sokuhō* as being close to the LDP's core positions. It is hard not to draw comparisons with the strained relationship between the U.S. Republican Party under Donald Trump and the country's media, which led to the Republicans being more closely aligned with right-wing outlets like Fox News and Breitbart than to any more traditional outlet in the mainstream media — but it is important to note that the wide reach of Japan's major media outlets means that the media market here is far less polarised than in the U.S., at least for the time being.

The perception that the mainstream media and the LDP no longer occupy overlapping ideological spaces, however, is likely to lead to creeping polarisation and the erosion of trust in the media as a whole, especially among LDP supporters — and if it pushes LDP supporters to increasingly seek news from more publications with more extreme political positions, such as *Hoshu Sokuhō*, it could also lead to a surge of misinformation and targeted propaganda that will further fuel polarisation. This pattern of audiences moving to increasingly extreme media outlets in a vicious cycle of rising polarisation has been seen in a number of developed countries, and while Japan has been somewhat insulated from it by the enduring popularity of centrist

media outlets such as NHK, it is far from impossible that it will be repeated here in time.

6.3.2 Audience Fragmentation and Demographic Change

Even as its relationship with the LDP has declined, the media has faced its own challenges, especially in terms of the falling circulation of major newspapers and the difficulty of adapting print and broadcast strategies to the new reality of smart devices, social media and streaming. All of Japan's leading newspapers lost readership steadily during the years of the Abe Administration, while the usage of social media and streaming video platforms has boomed. While audiences figures for broadcast television largely appear to have held up thus far, the success of streaming video platforms — especially with younger audiences — makes their eventual decline almost inevitable, and it is notable that much of the advertising on commercial television already seems to be aimed at elderly audiences. Just as in every other developed country around the world, Japanese citizens increasingly receive their news and information through smartphone applications, social media, and streaming video platforms, which are gradually replacing newspapers, magazines, radio, and television as the dominant sources of news.

This massive shift in the news consumption habits of the Japanese public creates a significant risk of audience fragmentation, as the new mediums — social media, streaming video and so on — can readily support a very wide variety of media outlets of various sizes and political orientations. Traditional print or broadcast mediums have high barriers to entry and high ongoing operating costs, which mean that they have to pursue strategies that maximise their potential market reach; online mediums, by contrast, are extremely low-cost to enter and operate, meaning that media outlets targeting very specific market segments — including extreme political ideologies — can thrive. This creates audience fragmentation which is exacerbated by the "filter bubble" effect of social media, and may also be accelerated by social media companies' use of algorithms which more aggressively promote content that

provokes strong reactions from users, effectively pushing people towards increasingly extreme versions of their preferred views and ideologies.

Some of the results seen in Chapter 5 may be explained, at least in part, by this process. Social media users who support the LDP and read centre-right media could easily have found themselves being pushed, through algorithmic selections and shares / retweets from more mainstream accounts, towards increasingly hard-right accounts such as the *Sankei Shimbun* and *Hoshu Sokuhō*; equally, there is likely an effect whereby centre-left users whose original media preference is for Asahi or Mainichi / TBS group publications find themselves pushed towards the JCP's *Akahata* newspaper or the left-wing *Tokyo Shimbun*. In either case, the structure of social media itself plays a key role in the process: in an earlier age where these users primarily consumed news via newspapers or TV, there would have been no such mechanism (short of an insistent friend or colleague, perhaps) for "stumbling upon" content from a more extreme source, let alone having it pushed towards the user alongside their chosen content.

It is not yet entirely clear how Japan's media companies intend to respond to these changes in the marketplace, but the question will only become more urgent as the demographic cohorts who rely heavily on social media and streaming video become older and replace consumers who still prefer more traditional media. A possibility raised by Curini (2020) is that newspapers may become more focused in their ideological appeal, essentially doubling down on their core readership — in fact, the analysis seen in Chapter 5 may hint at this already occurring, since the distance between the LDP and the mainstream media can be equally easily explained by the contraction of the LDP's ideological breadth, the contraction of the media's ideological breadth, or both happening at the same time. Meanwhile, political parties will not be passive actors as this change occurs. Senior figures within the LDP identified social media and online campaigning strategy as a key to its future success more than a decade ago (Nishida 2015; for very early evidence of this, see also Seko 2006), and the party has been overtly conscious of the fact

that increasing fragmentation of the media and its audiences creates new ways for politicians and parties to reach their electorate — including direct routes that bypass media involvement entirely — and thus dramatically changes the balance of power between the party and the media.

6.4 Contributions of the Research

This thesis makes a number of substantive and methodological contributions to research on these topics. On the substantive side, the thesis builds on the work of the UTAS survey team and of prior research such as Miwa (2018) and Taniguchi (2015) to provide empirical evidence of the narrowing and rightward shift of the LDP's preference distribution over a period spanning 16 years. The thesis builds upon this finding by following Ceron (2017) in examining the social media posts of politicians — a source of data that has not been used in this kind of analysis before in Japan — to provide more detailed insights into party control and message discipline in the LDP during the second Abe Administration. The finding that message discipline fell when the prime minister was weakened by personal scandals provides evidence of the continuing value of the "individualist" interpretation of the successful administrations of Koizumi and Abe (Estévez-Abe 2006; Machidori 2010).

Turning to the media, in using different data and methods to reach a similar conclusion of divergence and polarisation in media coverage of the Abe Administration, this thesis provides robust support for the findings of Chiba (2020); the combined findings of these two studies can provide empirical underpinning for future discussions of media control and party-media relations during this era. Moreover, the thesis builds significantly on the work of Kaneko et al. (2020), Kobayashi et al. (2019), and Miwa (2017) in analysing media positions using social graph data; by constructing the most large-scale and comprehensive model to date of media and politician positions in Japan, the thesis shows that perceptions of partisanship that cut across media and political spheres are embedded in the preferences of Japanese citizens as expressed through Twitter, revealing that the mainstream media is per-

ceived as being more aligned with the opposition, while the core of the LDP is seen as most closely aligned with right-wing media outlets.

Taken as a whole, these findings contribute to our understanding of political and media polarisation in Japan, showing how phenomena that have often been described seperately — the institutional reform of the LDP and the governance system, the ideological polarisation and rightward shift of the LDP, and the rise in antagonism in the relationship between the government and an increasingly polarised media — can all be understood as part of the same process, driven by a set of rational incentives and strategic calculations within the political and media systems.

From a methodological standpoint, the thesis promotes the use of correspondence analysis as a highly effective statistical method for handling ideal point estimation from complex text data that is not readily or sensibly reducible to a single dimension. While Wordfish remains the standard tool for point estimation from text data in political science, and the Wordshoal algorithm can be effective in extending Wordfish to handle multi-topic scaling in certain types of data, the often messy and sparse nature of social media text data can defy analysis with this kind of algorithm, especially when dealing with a long timespan. Measuring the distances between points in multiple dimensions of a correspondence analysis output — the method implemented in Chapter 3 of this thesis — proved very effective and flexible in calculating relative movement between documents / actors across time periods. Further development of this method on different data types, and experimentation with substituting other forms of document scaling, should yield a robust tool for latent point estimation from complex text data.

6.5 Future Research Agendas and Possibilities

While the research in this thesis covers a relatively lengthy seven-year period, its focus is on one administration and, to a lesser extent, on the history and context leading up to that administration. The results presented herein may allow us to contextualise events in future administrations or even to make some predictions about

the future of the LDP and the media in Japan, but the limitations of a study of a single political administration should be clear — the personalities involved and the specific historical period being observed constitute a unique set of circumstances and effects, and we can only speculate at counter-factuals where the LDP had different leadership, or where the administration had been shaped by different external events. Were the longevity and stability of this administration a result of attributes specific to Abe, or a culmination of processes and events which would have occurred even had Ishiba Shigeru won the LDP presidency in 2012, or had Tanigaki Sadakazu remained as party leader? Were the developments in Japan's political and media spheres outlined here an inevitable consequence of the paths upon which they had been set — by institutional, technological, and other large-scale changes to the environments in which they operate — or might they have played out differently had North Korea not test-fired missiles near the country in 2017, had Donald Trump not been elected President of the U.S. in 2016, or had the COVID-19 pandemic never happened? These questions are important because without somehow disentangling the personality- and event-specific aspects of developments under the Abe Administration, it is difficult to say with full confidence how these developments will continue into the future, under new leadership and in the face of different events.

To this end, the most important future extension of this research will be continuing it beyond the end of the Abe Administration and observing how the behaviour of media and political actors develops under future Prime Ministers and Cabinets. The Suga Administration which has directly succeeded Abe's 2020 resignation is already diverging from the legacy of the prior administration in key ways, albeit in highly unusual circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic: despite his long experience as Abe's Chief Cabinet Secretary and his "profound ability to manipulate the Japanese system of government", especially the bureaucracy (Harris 2020, p.180), Suga's lack of a personal power base — he is the first non-dynastic, non-faction member leader of the LDP — has meant he has struggled to maintain party unity in the face of public dissatisfaction with the the handling of the pandemic. This fits

with the finding in Chapter 3 that factions express more independent identities and defect further from the party leadership during times when the leadership appears weakened (such as when Abe became emroiled in scandals), but further observation of factional behaviour under different leaders is required to fully understand how this dynamic works, and how it is changing.

Similarly, the analysis presented in Chapter 5 uses snapshot data from September 2019 largely because of technical and practical limitations: Twitter does not timestamp the creation of follower relationships in its network (so it is not possible, after the fact, to observe how networks evolved over time) and the evolution of follower networks is a very slow process compared, for example, to the change in text traffic over a social network in response to current events. There would be significant value in returning to the networks identified in this study and repeating data collection after two or three years have elapsed, permitting enough time for the follower network to evolve and for the resulting latent positions of the actors being studied to shift. Naturally, repeating this process several times over a decade or more would create a very valuable data set and permit observation of the evolving relationships between political and media groups over a lengthy timescale.

Finally, perhaps the most ambitious and difficult agenda for future research which emerges from this thesis concerns the analysis of newspapers' latent positions conducted in Chapter 4. As previously observed, newspapers still have unusually high circulation numbers in Japan compared to other developed countries, but the decline in those numbers is rapid and accelerating, and newspaper consumption is especially uncommon in younger demographic groups. Future research into understanding the diversity of Japan's media — and whether that diversity is expanding or contracting in response to commercial, political, and technological pressures — will ultimately need to look beyond newspapers and consider the content of television news broadcasts, websites, social media posts, streaming videos, and perhaps even other emerging platforms like collaborative live audio streams. Each of these presents a host of technical and theoretical challenges of their own, which are only compli-

cated further by the potential need to evaluate diversity not just within-medium but across multiple kinds of media with very different characteristics. Eventually, any analysis of media diversity which does not take into account the rapid expansion of new mediums will significantly underestimate the actual heterogeneity of opinions and perspectives which the Japanese public are offered. Equally, the focus on newspapers may disguise important trends related to more "extreme" media and, through granting outsized importance to the centrist media groups' reporting, create a false sense of security regarding trends in polarisation or extremism. For now, the newspaper analysis approach still has significant value — in part because of the conglomerate nature of Japan's major media groups — but future research on this topic will face increasing need to expand its focus to other forms of media.

Notes (Chapter 6)

[1]The LDP, as discussed briefly in Chapter 2, exhibits certain aspects of populist rhetoric but does not meet the most widely accepted criteria for labelling the party itself, or Abe Shinzō personally, as a populist; see also Fahey et al. (2021).

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