

# Electoral Systems and Election Results-The Case of Japan-

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# **Electoral Systems and Election Results: The Case of Japan**

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## ***Introduction***

In the 2009 Japanese general election, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) suffered an unprecedented, overwhelming defeat, and the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) acquired administrative power for the first time since it was established in 1996. Since it was formed in 1955, the LDP had retained its power for 38 years. In the 1993 general election, the LDP lost its majority in the Lower House, and as a result it lost administrative power for the first time since it was founded. Even during the period that the LDP was the out party, from August 1993 to June 1994, the LDP kept its status as the first party. The second party at that time was the Japan Socialist Party (JSP), which was established in 1945, but the party held only about one third of the seats that the LDP held.

At the end of June 1994, the LDP returned to power, mainly because of a split among coalition parties in power. At that time, the LDP formed a coalition government with the JSP and the NPH (New Party Harbinger; in Japanese, Shinto Sakigake), which was founded in 1993. The prime minister of that coalition government was Tomiichi Murayama, the party leader of JSP at that time. Since then, the LDP had remained in power. The DPJ was established in 1996. Its main purpose was to acquire administrative power by defeating the LDP, and it had gradually expanded its support among Japanese voters. At last, the purpose of the DPJ was accomplished in the general election of 2009.

The electoral change was a consequence of electoral reform in the Lower House election in 1994. The centerpiece of the electoral reform was the abolition of the Multi-Member District system and the introduction of the Mixed System. Therefore, we need to examine these electoral systems and election results. In this paper, I will examine these matters in the Japanese case.

## ***1. Electoral systems and party systems (in general)***

### ***1.1. The relationship between electoral systems and party systems***

An electoral system and a party system are strongly related. An electoral system is an influential determinant factor on a party system. According to a proposition by the French political scientist Maurice Duverger (1954), the single member plurality system (SMP) favors two-party systems and one-party governments, and the proportional

representation (PR) system favors multi-party systems and coalition governments. In addition, he asserted two effects of electoral systems, the mechanical effect and the psychological effect. In the mechanical effect, for instance, SMP systems are bound to result in fewer parties in parliament. In contrast, the psychological effect is seen in the fact that a vote for a smaller party is a wasted vote and therefore people are less inclined to bother voting for them. As a result, the vote share of smaller parties is reduced.

However, the party system also influences the electoral system. In general, countries with a two-party system tend to prefer the single-member plurality system, and countries with a multi-party system favor the proportional system or mixed systems. The USA and the UK, which have traditional two-party systems, have thus retained these systems for a long time. In the UK, a referendum for or against introducing a new electoral system-called the alternative vote system- was conducted in May 2011. The top two parties, the Conservative party and the Labour party, objected to the electoral reforms and wanted to keep the SMP. The result of the referendum was to reject the new system, so the SMP is maintained in the UK.<sup>(1)</sup>

It can be asserted that the SMP promotes the two-party system, but it cannot be said that it inevitably brings about a two-party system. In fact, several countries that have adopted it cannot be classified as having a two-party system. In the former India, one-party dominant system had been retained for a long time. The determinants for the party system are not only the electoral system but also the social structure, political culture, and so on. In addition, distortion of the votes-seats ratio can occur in the SMP. In the UK after World War II, the top parties have always been advantaged by the SMP, and third parties have always been disadvantaged by it. For instance, in the 2001 UK election, the top party, the Labour party, acquired 62.7 percent of the total seats, while it gained just 40.7 percent of the total votes and a third party, the Liberal Democrats, acquired only 7.9 percent of the total seats, while it gained 18.3 percent of the total votes. A hung parliament occurred in the elections of February 1974 and Labour won with minority in the parliament. As a result, the Wilson cabinet was remarkably unstable. Therefore, the SMP does not guarantee government stability.

As in the UK and India, if there are powerful third parties and local parties, there can be many parties in the parliament. In the UK, about ten parties acquired seats in the parliament in the recent elections. In contemporary India, about forty parties acquired seats in the parliament. Anthony Heath, Siana Glouharoba, and Oliver Heath characterized the party system of contemporary India as “Two-Party Contests within a Multiparty System”(Heath, Glouharoba, and Heath 2005). In contrast, there are no powerful third parties or local parties in the USA, and therefore only the Democratic Party and the Republican Party could acquire seats in Congress for a long time.

The Single-Member-District (SMD) system is composed of the SMP and majoritarian electoral systems. Majoritarian electoral systems include the two-round systems and the alternative vote system adopted in Australia. Two-round systems requires

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(1) As Hague and Harrop wrote, “Despite its antiquity and simplicity, the plurality system is becoming less common. It survives principally in Britain and British-influenced states such as Canada, various Caribbean islands, India and the United States.” (Hague and Harrop, 2010, 182).

voters to vote on two separate occasions. If no candidate gains the required number of votes in the first round, then a second round of voting occurs. France uses this system in both the parliamentary and the presidential elections. In the first part of the twentieth century, many European countries passed a two-round stage for parliamentary elections. The system has gained a certain popularity in a number of post-Soviet bloc states ; Belarus, Kyrgystan, Tajikistan, and so on. Albania, Hungary, and Lithuania have incorporated two-round systems as a part of their mixed systems. Of the countries that have adopted the presidential system, many countries use the two-round system in the presidential elections. The idea that the presidency requires a majority of votes lies in this fact. Evidence from the two-round system suggests electoral trends that are strikingly similar to those for SMP.

On the whole, the systemic consequences of two-round systems are similar to those of the SMP. Smaller parties are disadvantaged by the highly disproportional results of the system. For instance, in the 1997 French election, the vote share of the National Front was 14.9 percent, but it gained just one seat. Parties with a good geographical concentration in support tend to do better. However, it is not apparent that the two-round system favors the two-party system because many parties tend to run candidates in the first round, so that may obstruct the two-party system. The systemic consequence of the alternative vote system is similar to that of the two-round systems.

Proportional Representation tends to lead to a multi-party system. The degree of party fragmentation depends on the social structure and the specific variation of the PR system. The elements of the variations of the PR system are minimum electoral thresholds, electoral formulas, and district magnitudes. An electoral threshold is a cut-off point designed to reduce the number of tiny, splinter parties in a PR tier. As David M. Farrell pointed out, “The list systems often contain features which give an in-built advantage to larger parties. It is common for the electoral law to include a legal threshold below which parties are not awarded any seats”(Farrell, 2001,81). The higher the cut-off point, the more difficult it is for small parties to acquire a seat. It is well-known that a threshold of 5 percent has prevented smaller parties from acquiring seats and has contributed to maintaining a moderate pluralism in (West) Germany. For other countries, explicit thresholds are as follows; Turkey, 10 percent; Russia, 7 percent; Moldova, 6 percent; Czech Republic and Poland, 5 percent; Hungary, Norway and Sweden, 4 percent; Ukraine, 3 percent; Denmark and Israel, 2 percent; Netherlands, 0.67 percent (Hague and Harrop 2010, 185). As Gallagher pointed out, “Thresholds in the range of 3 to 5 per cent are common” (Gallagher, 2008,186). The threshold is unusually low in the Netherlands and unusually high in Russia and Turkey. In addition, electoral thresholds may also operate to protect the parliament from extremists.

Proportionality also depends on the district magnitude. As the size of constituencies increases, so the prospects for a proportional result increases. The best way to maximize proportionality is to have the entire country as one vast constituency, since the smaller the constituency, the more often disproportional results can occur. In addition, the electoral formulas used for the calculations influence the degree of party fragmentation. For instance, smaller parties can more easily gain a seat by the Sainte-Laguë system of calculation than by the d’Hondt system.

Of the countries using PR, the proportionality of election results in new democracies is usually lower than that in old democracies. The reason is the lack of previous elections in recently established democracies. The lack derives party leaders of any realistic prospect for gaining seats, so that many small parties run in the elections and many of them are unsuccessful (Farrell, 2001, 165).

Both the SMD and the PR systems have serious defects. A serious defect of the SMD is the distortion between vote share and seat share, while that of the PR is the lack of constituency representation. In response, a mixed system was designed to offset the defects of both. As Farrell described it, "For a long time, this category of electoral system was associated with just one country—(West)Germany" (Farrell, 2001, 97). In the 1990s, the mixed system was introduced in many countries, including Italy, New Zealand, and Japan. According to Ferrara, Herron and Nishikawa, 40 states used the system at the national level during the period from 1990 to 2004; this figure constitutes more than 20 percent of the world (Ferrara, Herron and Nishikawa, 2005). Many of the "New Democracies" also adopted the mixed system. We can thus say that an "explosion of the mixed system" occurred in the 1990s (see Table 1). Almost all of the mixed systems are composed of the SMD and the PR. By definition, a mixed-member electoral system incorporates the composition of different systems, so the mix of the MMD and PR is also classified as a mixed system. Still, almost all of the mixed systems are composed of the SMD and PR systems. Therefore, the existence of the SMD tier tends to promote the generation of two major parties or two blocs of parties.

As mentioned above, in general, distortion between vote share and seat share is fairly high in the SMD system and extremely low in the PR system. Therefore, the proportionality of the mixed system mainly depends on the proportion of the elected members who are in the PR tier. The higher that proportion, the higher the degree of proportionality. That proportion differs greatly by country. For instance, the proportion of the PR tier comprises half of the total seats in Russia, but it is only fifteen percent in South Korea. Generally speaking, the lower the proportion of the PR tier, the more difficult it is for smaller parties to acquire seats in parliament.

In Germany, New Zealand and Bolivia, the mixed system in use may actually be classified as a PR system, because the partisan compositions of the entire parliaments in these countries is basically determined by the vote share in the PR tier. Therefore, the proportionality is fairly high in these countries. Reynolds and Reilly called this a "Mixed-Member Proportional System (MMP)" (Reynolds and Reilly 1997). The parallel system for seats allocated separately in two tiers was called a "Mixed-Member Majority System (MMM)" (Shugart and Wattenberg, 2005). MMP and MMM have different natures in regard to the proportionality of the vote-seat ratio.

## ***1. 2. Disproportionality and effective number of parties by electoral systems***

In Table 2, disproportionality refers to the index of disproportionality designed by Michael Gallagher. The Gallagher index is derived as follows: square the vote-seat differences for each party (ignoring 'others'), sum the results, divide the total by two, and

**Table 1 Mixed systems**

Country	Year	Percent		Dual candidacy
	Introduced	PR	Two-votes ?	allowed ?
Albania	1997	26	Yes	Yes
Andorra	1993	50	Yes	?
Armenia	1995	21	Yes	Yes
Azerbaijan	1995	20	Yes	No
Bolivia	1996	48	Yes	Yes
Croatia	1995	63	Yes	?
Ecuador	1979	90	Yes	No
Georgia	1992	64	Yes	Yes
Germany	1949	50	Yes	Yes
Guinea	1991	67	Yes	No
Hungary	1990	54	Yes	Yes
Italy	1993	25	Yes	Yes
Japan	1994	37.5	Yes	Yes
Lithuania	1992	50	Yes	Yes
Mexico	1963	40	Yes	Yes
New Zealand	1993	46	Yes	Yes
Philippines	1995	20	Yes	No
Russia	1993	50	Yes	No
Senegal	1992	58	No	?
Seyshell	1993	26	No	?
South Korea	1994	15	No	No
Taiwan	1992	30	No	No
Thailand	1997	20	Yes	No
Tunisia	1993	12	No	Yes
Ukraine	1997	50	Yes	Yes
Venezuela	1993	50	Yes	Yes

Source: Rose (2000). Percent PR in Japan was updated by the author.

take the square root. The higher the figure the greater the disproportionality, or in other words, the lower the figure the greater the proportionality. For instance, suppose that the vote share of each party is Green 40 percent, Red 30 percent, Blue 20 percent, and Orange 10 percent, and that the seat share is Green 60 percent, Red 30 percent, Blue 10 percent, and Orange 0 percent. In this case, the figure of disproportionality is 17.32. If all parties have a seat share equal to their vote share, then the figure of disproportionality is zero.

Naturally enough, the average figure of the SMD countries was the highest of the

**Table 2 Disproportionality by electoral systems**

	mean	median	max	min	st dev	case N
SMD	13.24	13.97	26.27	2.00	6.98	10
PR <sup>b</sup>	4.09	3.72	9.86	0.24	2.53	30
MIXED	9.95	10.31	14.19	7.00	2.45	6

Source: Farrell (2001) p.157–159, Table 7.1.

<sup>a</sup> Gallagher index of disproportionality.

<sup>b</sup> Germany , Bolivia and New Zealand were classified as PR countries.

**Table 3 Effective number of parties by electoral systems**

	mean	median	max	min	stdev	N
SMD	2.59	2.46	4.72	1.31	0.97	13
PR <sup>a</sup>	4.58	4.10	10.83	2.10	2.04	34
MIXED	4.36	3.43	9.10	2.46	2.09	9

Source: Farrell (2001) p.157–159, Table 7.1.

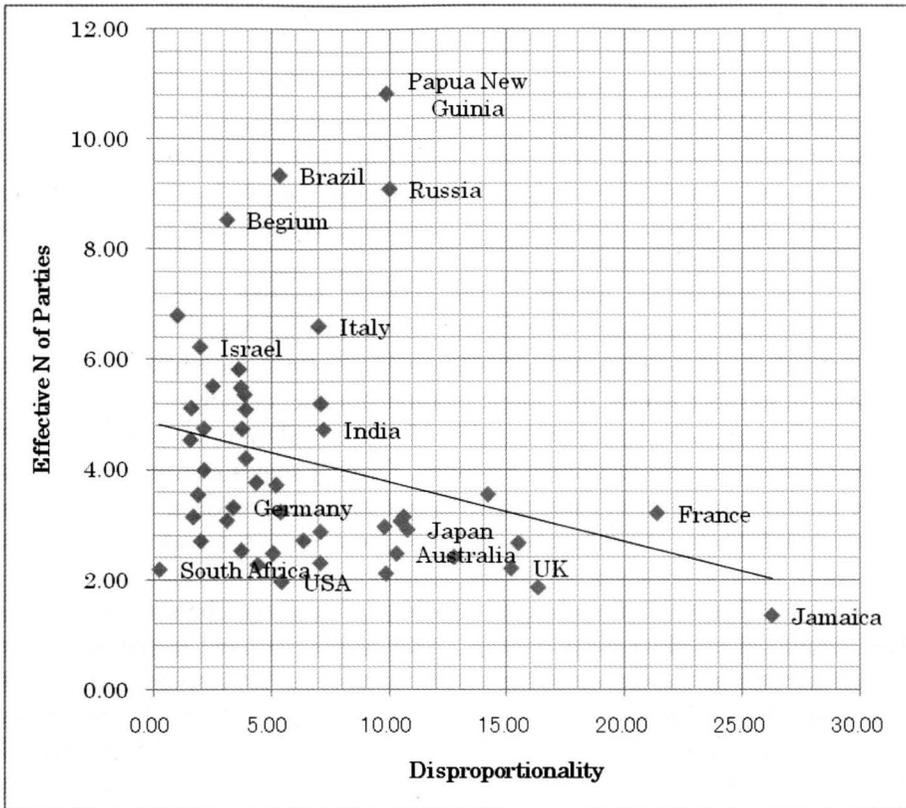
<sup>a</sup> Germany, Bolivia and New Zealand are classified as PR countries.

three categories, and therefore a characteristic of the SMD system was low proportionality. In addition, the standard deviation was relatively high. In contrast, the figures for the PR countries was low, and therefore the high proportionality of the PR system was recognized here. Of the electoral formula of PR, the largest remainder Hare system of calculation has relatively high proportionality, but the d'Hondt system indicates relatively low proportionality. According to Farrell, the mean values of disproportionality are 2.13 in LR Hare countries and 4.96 in d'Hondt countries (Farrell, 2001, 161). The disproportionality of the mixed system was in between the SMD and the PR. In general, the proportionality of the mixed systems was not high.

Evaluating the number of parties is a difficult task, but an index of the effective number of parties designed by Laakso and Taagepera is useful. The index is derived as follows : one divided by the sum of the squared percentage of seats for each party represented in parliament. Table 3 lists the effective number of parties by electoral system. In the SMD countries, the effective number of parties and the standard deviation were relatively small. It is thus supposed that SMDs control the fragmentation of parties. Of the thirteen SMD countries, the maximum figure is for India (4.72) and the minimum figure is for Mali (1.31), which has adopted the two-round system. For other countries using majoritarian electoral systems, the figure was relatively low (Australia 2.46, France 3.20). The nature of a majoritarian system is therefore similar to that of the SMP with regard to the effective number of parties.

The countries that used the PR system tend to have a high figure for the effective number of parties (mean 4.58). The PR electoral system favors a multi-party system, generally speaking. However, there is a broad range of figures. The mean for countries

**Figure 1 Disproportionality and effective number of parties**



Source: Farrell (2001) p.157–159, Table 7.1.

that use mixed systems was similar to that of the PR countries. This results can be understood as a consequence of the electoral system. However, we can say that the countries with multi-party systems favor mixed electoral systems, so the effective number of parties in these countries was relative high. The mixed- system countries, were moderate with regard to disproportionality, although they were similar to the PR countries.

Figure 1 plots the 48 liberal democratic countries by the index of disproportionality and the effective number of parties. The correlation coefficient between the two is  $-0.281$ , so the correlation between disproportionality and effective number of parties was weak. On the whole, the degree of disproportionality is only a weak determinant of the effective number of parties. However, every countries with an index of disproportionality above 10.00 was below 4.00 for the effective number of parties.

I think that the power alternation between the two major parties in the 2009 Japanese election was a cosequence of electoral reform excecuted in 1994. One of the electoral reforms was to introduce a mixed system as the Lower House electoral system. Thus, I will now attempt to examine the relationship between the electoral system and election results in contemporary Japan.

## ***2. Brief history of the Japanese electoral systems (the Lower House)***

Japan has adopted the parliamentary system, not the presidential system. The Japanese parliamentary system adopts a bicameral system composed of the Upper House (the House of Councilors) and the Lower House (the House of Representatives). Every member of the two chambers was elected by voters. As a whole, the Lower House is superior to the Upper House. Therefore, the most important national election in Japan is the Lower House General Election.

Here, I will explain the history of the electoral systems used for Lower House elections. Japanese national elections began in 1890 under the Meiji Constitution. At that time, the main electoral system was the SMD system. In 1900, the Multi-Member district system (MMD), in other words, the Single Nontransferable Vote System, and the Large-Sized District System, were introduced, and in 1919 the SMD was adopted once again. In 1925, Japan introduced non-restrictive elections, for only males and the MMD, in other words, the middle-sized district system. It was primarily composed of from three to five member-elected districts. The theoretical baseline for acquiring a seat was calculated as follow.

Theoretical baseline =  $N$  of total votes  $\div$  ( $N$  of elected members + one)

The theoretical baseline for acquiring a seat was 25 percent in the three-member districts, 20 percent in the four-member districts, and 16.7 percent in the five-member districts. In reality, the minimum baseline to win is lower than the theoretical figure. Smaller parties can acquire seats in this system, but acquiring a seat is more difficult for smaller parties than in the PR system. Therefore, the MMD system may be characterized as a “semi-proportional system.”

In the 1993 election, the last election that was executed under this system, the total number of Lower house members was 511 and there were 129 constituencies. Of the 129 constituencies, two were 6-member districts, 47 were 5-member districts, 33 were 4-member districts, 39 were 3-member districts, and eight were 2-member districts. The larger parties, especially the LDP, therefore ran multiple candidates in a district. As a result, the competition is between candidates of the same party in many constituencies.

Table 4 presents a summary of the 1990 election results. In this case, the LDP ran four candidates and the JSP ran two candidates. The four candidates from the LDP belonged to different factions. For the LDP, a party-centered campaign was difficult in that system because of the existence of multiple candidates from one party. Therefore, the electoral support of factions (in Japanese, “Habatsu”) was necessary for each candidates. It has been broadly emphasized that the influential cause of the factionalism in the LDP was the electoral system.

The MMD was a system unique to Japan, and the degree of proportionality was much higher than that of the SMD. Japanese general elections had been executed under this electoral system for nearly 70 years (from 1928 to the 1993 general elections). The consequences of the MMD system were as follows.

- ① Expensive electoral campaigns
- ② Political corruption

**Table 4 Results of the 1990 elections in the Yamanashi district**

Name	Party	Faction	Votes	Vote share	
Kanemaru Shin	LDP	Tekeshita	101,756	19.7	Elected
Ueda Risei	JSP		94,390	18.3	Elected
Koshiishi Azuma	JSP		80,311	15.5	Elected
Nakao Eiichi	LDP	Nakasone	77,282	15.0	Elected
Tanabe Kunio	LDP	Abe	75,412	14.6	Elected
Horiuchi Mitsuo	LDP	Miyazawa	70,606	13.7	Not elected
Asakura Shinsaku	JCP		17,130	3.3	Not elected

Source : *The Asahi Shimbun*, election returns.

- ③ Factionalism
- ④ Absence of power alternation
- ⑤ Increase in the number of parties in the parliament

Power alternation had never occurred under the electoral system since the 1955 system was established, so the party system of Japan was classified as a dominant-party system by Giovanni Sartori (Sartori, 1977). Except for the 1958 election, the LDP ran candidates for a majority of the total seats. Therefore, to acquire power, non-LDP forces had to form coalitions, but they had never succeeded in designing a coalition government before the general elections.

In the 1993 election, however, a power alternation occurred, and a coalition government of non-LDP forces was formed. Many parties participated in the coalition government. It was composed of the JSP, the JRP (Japan Renewal Party), the CGP (Clean Government Party, *Komeito* in Japanese), the JNP (Japan New Party), the SDL (Social Democratic League), the DSP (Democratic Socialist Party), the NPH, and the DRL (Democratic Reform League). Three of the eight parties, the JNP, JRP and NPH, were new parties that were established in 1992 or 1993. The prime minister of the coalition government was Morihiro Hosokawa who was the party leader of the JNP, which acquired thirty-five seats in the 1993 general election.

In 1994, a new electoral system was introduced under the Hosokawa administration. The 511 members of the Lower house were reduced to 500. Of the 500, 300 were to be elected from single-member constituencies (SMP), while 200 were to be elected by the proportional representation tier in 11 regional constituencies, according to the d'Hondt system of calculation. Therefore, the proportion of elected members in the PR tier was 40 percent at first. The adoption of a mixed system was a product of compromise between a major party (the LDP) and many minor parties. As was pointed out earlier, the party systems influence the electoral systems. We can say that the electoral reform in 1994 was such a case.

The main purposes of the electoral reform were as follows.

- ① To shift from expensive electoral campaigns to inexpensive campaigns. As a result, the amount of political corruptions would be reduced.

**Table 5 Allocation of seats to the 11 regions**

Regional bloc	Seats	Theoretical Baseline
Hokkaido	8	11.1
Tohoku	14	6.7
Kita Kanto	20	4.8
Minami Kanto	21	4.5
Tokyo	17	5.6
Hokuriku-Shin`etsu	11	8.3
Tokai	21	4.5
Kinki	30	3.2
Chugoku	11	8.3
Shikoku	6	14.3
Kyusyu	21	4.5
Total	180	

② To shift from candidate-centered campaigns to party-centered campaigns. As a result, elections would be more policy-based and voting behavior would shift from “candidate voting” to “party voting.”

③ To shift from a dominant-party system to a two-party system.

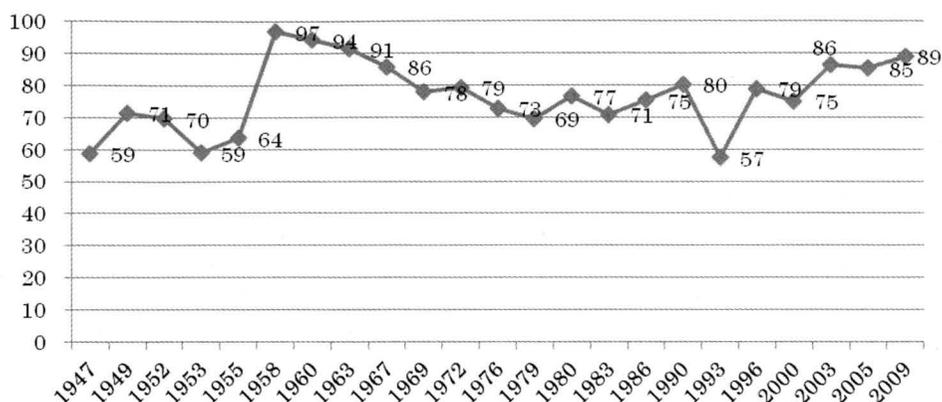
By the elections of 2000, the number of seats in the PR tier had been cut to 180, and therefore the total number of Lower house members had been cut to 480. Three hundred seats were elected by the SMD, and 180 seats were elected by the PR tier. There is no threshold in the PR. As we mentioned, there are eleven constituencies in the PR, Hokkaido, Tohoku, Kita Kanto, Minami Kanto, Tokyo, Tokai, Hokuriku-Shin’etsu, Kinki, Chugoku, Shikoku, and Kyusyu. We can thus say that there are actual thresholds in each constituency.

Table 5 presents the allocation of seats to the 11 PR blocs and the theoretical baselines for gaining a seat since the 2000 election. In the Kinki bloc, the theoretical baseline is 3.2 percent, so it is relatively easy for smaller parties to gain a seat in the constituency. In contrast, it is difficult for smaller parties to gain a seat in the Shikoku region. On the whole, the possibility of tiny parties gaining seats in the new system is higher than that in the old system, in theory.

Since the 2000 election, the proportion of elected seats in the PR tier has been 37.5 percent and that in the SMD has been 62.5 percent. One of the aims of introducing the mixed system was to realize a two-party system and to enhance the possibility of power alternations. In fact, I think that the Japanese party system has effectively been a two-party system since 2003. In the 2009 election, a power alternation from the LDP to the DPJ occurred.

The Japanese electoral system allows dual candidacy as Germany does (see Table 1), so the candidates who lose in the SMD tier may be able to acquire a seat in the PR tier. We call this “the Revival Win” (in Japanese, *Fukkatsu Tosen*). The dual candidacy may

**Figure 2** Seat share of top two parties, 1947-2009



Source: Shugiin Jimukyoku (2009).

contribute to increasing the re-election rates of incumbents and to the existence of a multiple-members of the Diet in a SMD. In the case of the 2009 election, there were three constituencies that had three winners because of the dual candidacy system (the seventh district of Ibaraki, the eighth district of Saitama, and the first district of Kyoto). In addition, there are many constituencies that have two members of the Diet.

### ***3. Results of the mixed system in Japan***

#### ***3.1. Toward a two-party system***

After the new electoral system was introduced in 1994, the Japanese party system gradually shifted from a multi-party system to a two-party system. The new electoral system is a mixed system composed of a single-member district system and a proportional representation system. In the 1996 election, the total number of seats in the Lower House was 500. Three hundred members were elected in the SMD tier, and 200 members were elected in the PR tier. Since the 2000 election, the total number of Lower House members decreased from 500 to 480. The number of elected members in the SMD tier remained constant. The number of PR-elected member was reduced from 200 to 180. As a result, the proportion of members in the SMD tier increased and the proportion of members in the PR tier decreased. In theory, the reduction in the Lower House members put minor parties at a disadvantage.

Figure 2 illustrates the sum of the seat share of the top two parties in the general elections from 1947 to 2009. From 1947 to 1955, before the 1955 system was established, the average seat share of the top two parties was 65 percent. In the 1958 election, the first general election after the 1955 system was established, the seat share increased sharply to 97 percent. Of the 97 percent, 62 percent was for the LDP and 36 percent was for the JSP. From 1960 to 1979, the seat share of the top two parties declined gradually. In the 1979 election, it was approximately seven-tenths (69 percent). Gerald L. Curtis characterized this change as moving “From a two-party to a multi-party System” (Curtis 1999, 33-35).

The systemic factors for this change involved the MMD system. As mentioned above, the MMD was a semi-proportional electoral system, and maintaining the domination by two parties was difficult under this system. In the late 1970s, there were those who said that the 1955 system had already collapsed, however this judgment was premature. The trend toward a multi-party system was halted in the 1980s. The average seat share of the top two parties from 1980 to 1990 was 76 percent.

In the general election of 1993, immediately after the LDP was split, the sum of the seat shares of the top two parties plummeted from 80 to 57 percent, the lowest figure since 1947. In this election, a boom of new parties occurred. The sum of the seats acquired by three new parties, JNP, JRP and NPH, was over 100 seats. In addition, the number of seats acquired by the JSP plummeted from 136 seats in 1990 to 70, the lowest since the 1955 system was established. After the mixed system was introduced in 1994, the tendency to move toward a two-party system was recognized.

In September 2003, the Liberal Party, founded in 1998 by some of former members of the NFP (the New Frontier Party, founded in December 1994 and dissolved in December 1997), merged into the DPJ. An influential factor in the merger was the existence of the SMD in the electoral system. The SMD was thus successful in promoting two-party competition. After the merger, the average of the top two parties' total seat share in the next three elections was 87 percent. This percentage was the same level as the UK which has been recognized for a long time as a state with a typical two-party system (see Table 9 below). In the three British elections from 1997 to 2005, the average seat share of the top two parties, the Labor and Conservative party, was 87 percent (calculated from Kavanagh and Cowley, 2010, 350-351). The year from 1993 to 2003 in Japan may be characterized as "the era of party realignment," and we may call it "the 2003 system" which is essentially a two-party system. We can say that one of the aims of electoral reform in 1994 was almost achieved in 2003.

Table 6 lists the sum of the seat shares of the two major parties in the SMD and the PR tier separately. Since the 2003 election, the seat share of the top two parties in the SMD has been above 90 percent. In particular, the seat share was 95 percent in the last election. The prospect for smaller parties to win in the SMD was very small. However, the seat share of the top two parties in the PR has been lower though the difference between the two systems has dropped to below 20 percent since 2003. A trend toward a two party system was thus recognized even in the PR tier.

Figure 3 plots the sum of the vote share of top two parties. From 1947 to 1955, before the 1955 system was established, the average sum of the vote share of the top two parties was 60 percent. In the first three elections after the 1955 system was established, the percentage increased to above 80 percent, but in the 1960s and 1970s, the vote share gradually declined. In the 1969 election under the Sato administration, the percentage decreased to below 70 percent. From the 1969 elections through the 1986 elections, the rate was always below 70 percent.

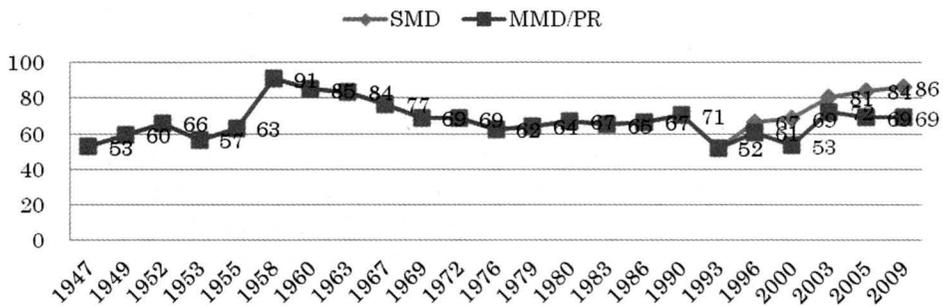
In the 1990 election results, the vote share of the two major parties increased to 71 percent because of the remarkable progress of the JSP in that election. The JSP won the Upper House election in July 1989, mainly because of the introduction of a consumer tax and a political money scandal (the Recruit Scandal) under the LDP government. As a

**Table 6 Seat share of top two parties in the SMD and the PR, 1996-2009**

year	SMD	PR	Difference
1996	88.3	65.0	23.3
2000	85.7	57.2	28.4
2003	91.0	78.3	12.7
2005	90.3	76.7	13.7
2009	95.0	78.9	16.1

Source: Shugiin Jimukyoku (2009).

**Figure 3 Vote share of top two parties, 1947-2009**



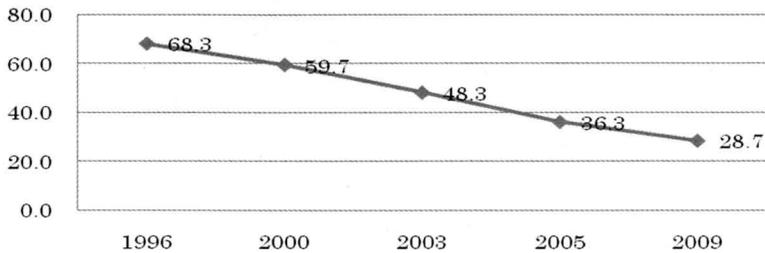
Source: Shugiin Jimukyoku (2009).

result, one of the issues in the 1990 general election was to allocate administrative power between the LDP and the JSP, and voters were inclined to vote for one of the top two parties. However, the figure plummeted from 71 percent to 52 percent in the 1993 general election. Namely, approximately half of voters did not vote for either of the top two parties in that election.

As mentioned above, after the electoral system for the Lower House election replaced the MMD with the MMM, an important merging of parties occurred. In December 1994, the New Frontier Party was founded and the NFP had the status of second force in the Diet. The NFP was a merger of the JRP, the CGP, the JNP, and the DSP. In the 1996 election, the two major parties were the LDP and the NFP. The seat and vote shares of the top two parties were restored to the level seen before the 1993 election. As mentioned above, however, the NFP was dissolved in December 1994.

In the 2000 general election, the LDP and the DPJ together shared 73 percent of the total seats. The total seat share of the two major parties increased to 85.4 percent in the 2003 general election. That percentage was almost equal to that of the contemporary UK, which is characterized as a traditional two-party-system country. The total seats share of the two major parties was 85 percent in the 2005 election, and 89 percent in the 2009 election. The main cause of the high percentage of the seat share held by the two major parties was the existence of the SMD tier. The seat share of the two major parties of SMDs

**Figure 4 The percentage of winners in the SMD gained less than 50% of the vote, 1996-2009**



Source: *The Yomiuri Shinbun* election returns.

in the 2009 election was extremely high (93.7 percent).

From the viewpoint of the electoral system, the DPJ domination in the 2009 general election appears to be chiefly the effect of a sudden change in the SMDs. When a strong wind blows upon them, SMDs often experience either a leap or a great decrease in seats. For instance, it is often quoted that the Progressive Conservative Party in Canada acquired 169 seats, a working majority, in the 1990 general election, but its share decreased sharply to only two seats in the 1993 general election. In Japan, sudden changes in the SMD occurred in 2005 and 2009. These phenomena indicate that the top two parties are almost equal in electoral strength.

The vote share of the DPJ in the SMD tier was 47.4 percent and its seat share was 73.7 percent, so the DPJ had representation 1.55 times in excess of what it should have had. The vote share of the LDP in SMD's was 38.7 percent, and its seat share was 20.0 percent. The difference of vote share between the DPJ and the LDP was 8.7 points. However, the difference in seat share reached 52.3 percent. In general, the top party takes advantage of SMD. In the 2005 general election, the LDP vote share was 48.4 percent, and its seat share was 73.0 percent. The LDP was thus over-represented by a factor of 1.51 times in 2005.

This sudden change in SMDs was especially evident in urban areas because of the many floating voters there. For instance, in Tokyo, the capital, the LDP won 23 of the 25 districts in 2005, but it won only two districts in the 2009 election. In contrast, the DPJ won only one district in 2005, but it won 23 districts in 2009.

Under the plurality systems, the requirement to be elected is to gain more votes than any other candidates. Candidates may therefore be elected with less than 50 percent of the vote at the district level. For a candidate elected with less than 50 percent of the vote, the sum of the wasted votes is more than the number of votes for the winner. In the first election under the new electoral system, about two-thirds of the winners in the SMD gained less than half of the total votes (Fig. 4). Among the winners in the SMD tier in that election, there was one candidate elected with only 21.5 percent of the vote (in the first district of Shizuoka). The percentage of candidates elected with a minority vote, however, had been gradually decreasing, reaching 28.7 percent in the 2009 election. The percentage of winners elected with a majority of the vote had thus increased.

One of the causes of this outcome in the 2009 election was the reduction of the

number of the candidates from the Japanese Communist Party (JCP). The JCP ran for almost all districts from the 1996 to the 2003 general elections, but there were 275 JCP candidates in the SMD tier in the 2005 election and 152 in the 2009 election. The JCP only won two districts in the 1996 election, and it failed to win any district since the 2000 election.

The main reason for this reduction in the 2005 and 2009 elections was the financial burden for the JCP. According to Japanese electoral law (in Japanese, '*Kosyoku Senkyo Ho*'), each candidate must pay a deposit to run (in Japanese, this deposit is called '*Kyotakukin*'). For the Lower House election, each candidate must pay a deposit of 3 million yen to run in a single-member constituency. If he or she fails to gain more than 10 percent of the total votes, this deposit is forfeited. In fact, a majority of the JCP candidates lost this deposit in the 2003 and 2005 elections. In the 2003 election, 235 JCP candidates in the SMD lost this deposit, and 223 candidates lost it in the 2005 election. These lost deposits of JCP candidates damaged the finances of the JCP, so that it could not avoid reducing the number of candidates in the SMD tier. As a result, the cut in the number of the JCP candidates in the SMDs contributed to the evolution of a bipolar competition (the LDP versus the DPJ) and the reduction of wasted votes at the district level.

While the sum of the seat shares of the top two parties had increased since the mixed system was introduced, the number of parties in parliament was not reduced (Table 7). As already noted, it is easier for tiny parties to gain a seat in the new system than it was in the old system. As a result, the new system could not control party splitting and the formation of new parties. Still, the effective number of parties has tended to decrease recently. The figure for 2009 (2.10) was the lowest since 1960. This figure is smaller than that of the 2010 UK general election. (The effective number of parties in the 2010 UK election was 2.57.) We can therefore say that Japan is more of a two-party-system country than is the UK nowadays. The tendency toward a two-party system is recognized in regard to the effective number of parties. In conclusion, the new electoral system did not reduce the number of parties in parliament, but brought to reduce the effective number of parties and movement toward a two-party system.

The higher the disproportionality index, the greater the disproportionality. The average figure for the eighteen general elections held under the MMD systems from 1947 to 1993 was 5.81. This figure is close to the average for the PR countries (4.09, see Table 2). Therefore, the MMD system can be characterized as a variation of the proportional system. In contrast, the average figure for the disproportionality in the five elections held under the mixed system from 1996 to 2009 (12.36) is much higher than that of the MMD. The electoral reform of 1994 brought a great change in disproportionality. The resulting distortion of the mixed system brought with it the trend toward a two-party system seen in recent Japan.

The disproportionality index of the SMD tier was 15.78 in 1996, 15.57 in 2000, 10.62 in 2003, 22.99 in 2005, and 22.45 in 2009 and the average figure for the five elections was 17.48. In contrast, the index of the PR tier was 2.96 in 1996, 2.47 in 2000, 4.00 in 2003, 4.65 in 2005, and 5.87 in 2009, and the average figure for the five elections was 3.99. Naturally enough, the figures for the SMD are much higher than those for the PR. As we have seen in Fig.4, while the proportion of candidates elected with a minority vote in the

SMDs had gradually decreased from 1996 to 2009, the distortion between vote share and seat share in the SMDs was enhanced in the last two elections. These elections both resulted in landslide victories for one of the two major parties. The disproportionality in the SMD tier is especially high in an election in which one party wins an overwhelming victory. We can say that the degree of disproportionality in the SMD tier of those two elections was at a fairly high level in comparison to the other SMP countries. In addition, the index of disproportionality also increased in the PR tier in the 2005 and 2009 elections.

### ***3.2 Decline of incumbent success***

As stated above, one of the aims of the electoral reform of 1994 was to engender a shift from candidate-centered election campaigns to party-centered campaigns. As a result, it was supposed that the criteria used for vote choice would shift from candidate to party. Party voting has been broadly recognized as a characteristic of British voters. We can therefore suppose that the SMD system promotes party voting. In the USA, however, candidate voting can be recognized in the Congressional elections. For instance, Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina introduced the concept of the “Personal Vote”. They theorized that one cause of the incumbent advantage in US congressional elections was the personal vote (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987).

Figure 5 plots the success rates of incumbents seeking re-election in the general elections from 1969 through 2009. Generally speaking, the personal vote, or candidate voting, has the potential to increase the re-election rates of incumbents, but at the same time, party voting has the potential to reduce that rate. In the MMD, the personal vote has the potential to reduce the re-election rate. In fact, exchanges of winners between the incumbent and the challenger or former representative have been occurred in the MMD due to candidate-centered campaigns.

From 1979 to 1990, re-election rates were above 80 percent. Since the 1990s, though, parties split and realigned in Japan, so the success rates of incumbents has decreased since the 1993 election. The re-election rate of incumbents decreased somewhat under the new electoral system from 1996 to 2005, but the dual-candidacy system prevented a sharp decline in the re-election rate because a loser in the SMD tier could be re-elected in the PR tier. However, the rate declined sharply in the 2009 election mainly because many LDP incumbents could not retain their seats, not only in the SMD tier but also in the PR tier.

## ***4. A change in Japanese voting behavior***

In this section, we examine voting behavior by using public opinion data. We will use post-election survey data collected by Akarui- Senkyo-Suishin-Kyokai (The Association For Promoting Fair Elections).

One of the purposes of introducing the SMD was to bring about a shift from candidate-centered campaigns to party-centered campaigns and from candidate voting to party voting, because candidate-centered electoral campaigns in multi-member constituencies are quite expensive. Since the 1996 general election, Japanese voters have cast two votes, one in the SMD tier and the other in the PR tier. In the SMD vote, voters

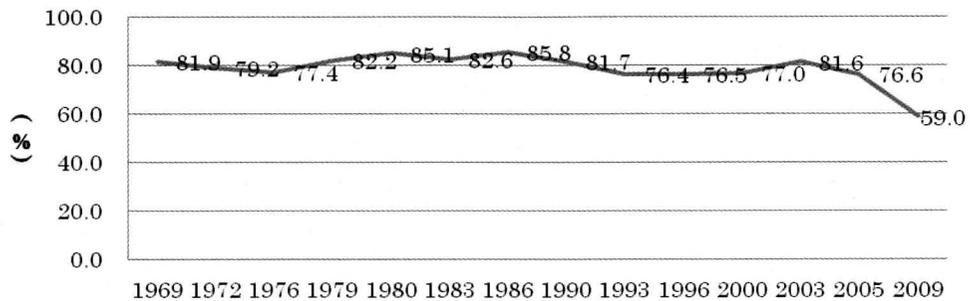
**Table 7** Number of parties, effective number of parties<sup>a</sup> and level of disproportionality<sup>b</sup>

year	Number of parties in parliament	Effective number of parties	level of disproportionality
1947	5	3.99	3.91
1949	9	2.77	9.53
1952	7	3.06	3.42
1953	7	3.87	3.70
1955	6	3.68	4.04
1958	3	1.98	3.58
1960	4	2.00	6.23
1963	4	2.15	5.15
1967	5	2.41	6.46
1969	5	2.50	9.02
1972	5	2.68	7.00
1976	6	3.20	7.44
1979	7	3.31	3.99
1980	7	2.74	6.57
1983	7	3.24	4.25
1986	7	2.58	7.17
1990	7	2.71	6.73
1993	9	4.20	6.35
1996	7	2.94	10.65
2000	9	3.17	10.66
2003	8	2.59	8.14
2005	8	2.27	16.11
2009	9	2.10	16.23
average in the MMD	6.11	2.95	5.81
average in the Mixed System	8.20	2.61	12.36

<sup>a</sup> The Laakso/Taagepera index of the effective number of parties.

<sup>b</sup> The Gallagher index of disproportionality.

**Figure 5 Success rates of incumbents seeking reelection, 1969-2009**



Source: *The Asahi Shimbun*, election returns.

**Table 8 Criterion of vote choice, 1986-2009**

	1986	1990	1993	1996	2000	2003	2005	2009
Party (A)	45.1	51.2	40.6	43.4	46.1	47.0	50.3	61.2
Candidate (B)	42.5	37.3	49.1	43.8	42.8	36.5	35.0	29.0
(A)-(B)	2.6	13.9	-8.5	-0.4	3.3	10.5	15.3	32.2

Source ; Akarui Senkyo Suishin Kyokai Post Election Polls.

write in a candidate's name, and in the PR vote, voters write in a party name. In the old system (MMD), voters casted a single vote by writing in a candidate's name.

Table 8 presents the transition of the criterion for vote choice in the MMD and the SMD in the last eight general elections. Of these eight elections, the first three were executed by the MMD, and the last five, by the mixed system. In this survey, there is a question regarding the criterion for voting. According to the response to this question, respondents were classified as "party voters" or "candidate voters." In general, the number of party voters and that of candidate voters were almost equal under the old system, but in the 1990 election the proportion of party voters was much greater than that of candidate voters. One of the characteristics of the 1990 election was the renewed competition between the LDP and the JSP. The JSP had won the 1989 Upper House election, and in the 1990 general election it substantially increased the number of acquired seats. We can say that stiff competition between two major parties promotes to the party voting.

In the 1996 election, the first election under the new electoral system, 43.4 percent of the respondents attached greater importance to a party rather than to a candidate. That proportion gradually increased after the 1996 election. In a 2005 post-election poll, half of the voters were party voters. In the 2009 poll, that proportion greatly increased. At the same time, the percentage of voters who attached greater importance to a candidate than to a party gradually decreased after the new electoral system was introduced.

The proportion of candidate voters was 43.8 percent in the 1996 poll, but this dropped to below 30 percent in the 2009 poll. In contrast, while the proportion of party

voters was almost equal to that of candidate voter in the 1996 poll, the proportion of party voters was twice that of candidate voters in the 2009 poll. It can be supposed that changes in the voting criterion brought about a decline in the success rate of incumbents (Fig.5), because the incumbents' advantage in elections was a result of candidate or personal voting.

As was pointed out, one of the aims of the electoral reform of 1994 was to encourage a shift from candidate voting to party voting, because under the old electoral system (the MMD), candidate-centered campaigns and candidate voting led to expensive electoral campaigns and political corruption. According to the polls, one of the aims of electoral reform was in fact accomplished in the 2009 election. The change in Japanese voting behavior was one cause of the power alternation in the 2009 election.

## ***5. Summary and conclusion***

In this paper, we examined the relationship between electoral systems and election results. In the last two decades, the number of countries that have adopted mixed-member electoral systems has been increasing, so we can say that the mixed system is the worldwide fashion at present. Japan is one of these cases, having introduced a mixed system in 1994. To examine the consequences of electoral reforms in Japan is, therefore, a meaningful task for evaluating the effect of mixed systems on party systems. The consequences of introducing a mixed system in Japan were as follows.

- (1) The existence of SMD in the mixed system promoted competition between two major parties. As a result, a trend toward a two-party system has occurred in recent Japan.
- (2) The number of parties in the parliament was not reduced, and the number of smaller parties increased. The mixed system therefore did not promote a reduction in the number of parties in the parliament. However, the new system did contribute to reducing the effective number of parties.
- (3) The percentage of candidates elected with a minority vote in the SMD tier decreased. The SMD system therefore promoted bipolar competitions in Japan.
- (4) Japanese voting behavior became more party-based in the recent elections, especially in the 2009 election. The increase of party voting contributed to the power alternation that occurred in 2009.
- (5) The success rate of incumbents seeking re-election was reduced under the new electoral system. It thus became more difficult for Lower House members to attain successive wins.

We can say that the aims of the electoral reform of the 1990s were almost accomplished, as a whole. Still, we cannot avoid observing that the new electoral system did not bring stability to Japanese politics. Rather, the increase in the possibility of power alternation under the new electoral system might be a factor promoting governmental instability. The probability of sudden changes in the SMD tier heightened the impact of the approval rating for the cabinet at that specific time on the electoral result. In fact, a change of Japanese prime ministers occurred every year from 2006 to 2011. It is broadly asserted that one of the advantages of a two-party system is government stability, but the Japanese party system has transitioned from a dominant-party system or a multi-party

system to an “unstable” two-party system.

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