The Japanese Prime Minister and Public Support

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Working Paper No.12
August 1999

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Public Opinion Counts

The popularity of the prime minister and politicians in general plays an increasingly important role in Japanese politics. Members of both the ruling and opposition parties find it difficult to openly attack a popular prime minister's policies which are strongly supported by the public. On the other hand, ruling party Diet members are reluctant to run their elections under an unpopular party leader. The lack of public support may force an unpopular prime minister out of office.

In September 1998, public outcry resulted in the ouster of a newly appointed cabinet minister from his position within two weeks. After his reappointment to the presidency of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) for his second term, Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro (premier from 1996-98) took a bold political gamble by naming Sato Koko to the cabinet as head of the Management and Coordination Agency. It was a key position for Hashimoto's top priority issue of administrative reform to streamline Japan's unwieldy bureaucracy.

Sato had an appropriate career record to serve the post. He was a veteran ruling party politician who had helped Hashimoto's reform efforts as chairman of LDP's Headquarters Administrative Reform. Sato had the muscle to do the job. He represented the LDP establishment and could exert influence over the bureaucracy which was sure to oppose reform. The public, however, raised the red flag. Sato had a criminal record.

Sato was tainted by the Lockheed scandal, a highly publicized case. The scandal came to light in 1976 during the U.S. Senate investigation into the aircraft company's behavior in bribing foreign governments to win contracts. Sato was convicted for taking a bribe of two million yen as Vice Minister of the Ministry of Transportation to help select Lockheed planes for a major Japanese airline. He was fined and given a three-year suspended prison sentence. Because of this criminal record, the previous LDP prime ministers, including Kaifu Toshiki, avoided Sato's appointment to a cabinet post.

Hashimoto's appointment of Sato was a political gift to the conservative wing of the LDP led by former Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro. Prime Minister Hashimoto did not have a strong power base within his own party. The LDP was split into wings; one which supported the existing coalition with the socialists and *Sakigake,* and the other which called for a conservative coalition with the New Frontier Party (NFP). Hashimoto was running the government on this delicate balance between the two factions. By reappointing the leaders of the pro-coalition faction, such as Secretary-General Kato Koichi, into LDP leadership positions Hashimoto had to appease the conservative wing.

Sensitive to public opinion, Hashimoto was hesitant to appoint Sato. LDP Secretary-General Kato revealed Hashimoto's agony, stating in a television discussion program that, "until the final moment, the prime minister was torn between Mr. Nakasone's pressure and public opinion." In the same program, Kato also suggested that the prime minister preferred Sato to stay in his party position for another year rather than assume a cabinet post.[1] The LDP's coalition partner, the Socialist Democratic Party and its leader, Doi Takako, warned the prime minister not to appoint Sato to a cabinet position.

At the same time, Hashimoto desperately needed the support of the conservatives for the success of the fiscal, administrative and defense reforms on which he staked his political life. In a one-on-one private meeting shortly before the cabinet reshuffling, Nakasone successfully persuaded Hashimoto, reportedly with his tears. Hashimoto told reporters after the announcement of Sato's appointment to the position of director-general of the Management and Coordination Agency, "I realize there is strong criticism.... I hope Mr. Sato will, and I'm sure he can, actively become engaged in his duties to blow away such voices of criticism."[2]

The public reaction, however, was much stronger than Hashimoto expected. According to a Kyodo News poll, 74% of the respondents said that they were against Sato's appointment. The Prime Minister's Official Residence

received about 100 e-mail messages the day after the reshuffle, criticizing Sato's appointment. Hashimoto's popularity rating dropped dramatically from 60% to 28%.[3]

Backed by public opinion, the socialist leader heavily criticized Hashimoto, and threatened to leave the coalition unless Sato resigned. Although the LDP had achieved a majority in the lower house because of defections from other parties who joined the ruling party, it was still short of a majority in the upper house. Without support from the socialists, Hashimoto's government would face difficulty enacting major bills. LDP Secretary-General Kato met with Sato, and asked for his resignation in order to maintain the three-party coalition. Even Nakasone, Sato's mentor who pressured Hashimoto for the appointment, told Sato that he had better step down.

On September 22, after a week of turmoil, Sato "voluntarily" resigned. At a press conference Hashimoto bowed deeply and expressed his apology to the public that he "did not consider public opinion enough." Hashimoto, who had no strong power base within his party, desperately needed public support for his administrative reform. In order to reestablish public trust, the prime minister had to remove Sato from his cabinet.

The worsening recession additionally weakened Hashimoto's leadership. The media blamed Hashimoto who had introduced a tight fiscal policy for slowing down the economy. As Hashimoto's popularity and leadership weakened, the LDP's *zoku* members took the opportunity to attack the prime minister's administrative reform plan. In addition to the postal services *zoku* members, other *zoku* members joined the movement against Hashimoto's reform plan. As the political opposition grew, Hashimoto began to avoid making decisive statements on controversial issues. While Hashimoto managed to keep the framework of 13 ministries and agencies in the final report, there were major setbacks, including the abandonment of the privatization of postal services.

For his administrative reform, Hashimoto desperately needed public

support which he lost before the reforms could be approved and as a result his reform effort came up short. Public support became important especially after the breakup of the long predominant LDP in 1993. No one faction in the ruling party is a dominant power on the political scene, and the prime minister's power base within the ruling party has been subsequently weakened. With a weaker power base, a prime minister must attract considerable public and media support. Hashimoto lost it by making a fatal mistake in the cabinet reshuffling in an attempt to pay a political favor to the conservative wing of the LDP. This tilted the power balance within his party against himself.

Hashimoto' leadership was seen as weak, and LDP members felt free to destroy Hashimoto's reform plan for which the prime minister had promised to stake his political life. The final reform plan was full of political compromises and disappointed voters expressed their disapproval of the LDP in the 1998 upper house elections. The LDP won only 46 seats, leaving it 23 short of a majority in the upper house. This historic loss forced Prime Minister Hashimoto to resign.

This event clearly showed that public opinion could have a strong impact on Japan's political scene unlike the arguments of some Japan observers. Karel van Wolferen, for example, describes the Japanese political mechanism as "The System," which is made up of elites in the political, bureaucratic, and business world who as a unit somehow make decisions. According to Wolferen, Japan's middle class or public plays a submissive role and has very little influence on the political scene.[4] The Japanese public, on the contrary, can alter government decision on appointments and policy decisions.

Public support can make a difference for Japan's political leaders. What Richard E. Neustadt wrote about the American president applies to the Japanese prime minister in that, public support for Japan's national leader is also "strategically important to his power."[5] Public support (or the lack of it) has affected several outstanding Japanese prime ministers in this respect.

Public Support and Elections

The prime minister, whether effective or not, is the most visible political figure. At a macro level, popular support for his administration and for him personally can affect his support within the party. Anthony King explains the relationship between a British prime minister's popularity and his influence:

> The greater a prime minister's public prestige -- or, more precisely, the greater a prime minister's public prestige is thought to be by his cabinet colleagues -- the greater is likely to be his capacity to bend those colleagues to his will. A prime minister thought to be leading his party to electoral disaster is likely to find that his colleagues increasingly question his judgment and reluctant to acknowledge his authority. By contrast, a prime minister believed to be an election winner will almost certainly find that outside prestige can be translated into inside influence.[6]

This can be applied to the Japanese prime minister. His high popularity may add votes crucial to a ruling party candidate who runs a close race.[7] A high degree of public support for Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro's (1982-87) reform efforts, for example, won the LDP its largest majority ever; 304 out of 512 seats in the 1986 lower house election. This helped Nakasone to pursue administrative reforms and to maintain his administration for five years despite the relative lack of support from within his own party.

On the other hand, when the level of public support for the prime minister and his cabinet is low, Diet members of the ruling party are uneasy in running an election campaign under his leadership. This causes internal unrest within the ruling party which erodes the leadership of the national leaders. Low popularity, in fact, forced out of office prime ministers who commanded a stable power base within the ruling party, such as Tanaka Kakuei (1972-74) and Takeshita Noboru (1987-89).

At the micro level, the campaign support received by individual members through the personal involvement of a popular prime minister can help their

re-election efforts. The prime minister's campaign visit as a show of support for a candidate was, in the 1950s and early 1960s, very important because people in the countryside usually did not see famous politicians and were impressed by their visits. Because it is understood that the prime minister's time is limited, his visit in an election campaign showed that a candidate is well-connected to the most powerful political figure.[8]

However, when public support for the existing administration is weak, the prime minister's personal involvement is not welcomed by individual candidates. In April 1974, for example, high inflation after the oil shock was still hurting the pocket books of Japanese households. Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei and his policy of restructuring the Japanese archipelago were seen as at least partially responsible for the hyperinflation rate. The anti-LDP mood was so strong that the LDP-affiliated incumbent mayor of a major Japanese city, who was running for re-election, asked the LDP not to support him in a visible manner and refused Prime Minister Tanaka's participation in his campaign. The mayor could not totally erase his pro-LDP image and he lost the election.[9] This is a typical example of how an economic recession can negatively affect the popularity of the prime minister in both the public eye and among his party members.

Tanaka was not the only prime minister who was uninvited. In the 1987 local elections, all the gubernatorial and mayoral candidates of the LDP refused the visit of Prime Minister Nakasone because his proposal for a new value added tax was so unpopular. Two years later, all the upper house candidates declined campaign support from Prime Minister Uno Sosuke (1989) whose *geisha* scandal was highly publicized. An unpopular national leader who is not welcomed by his colleagues often ends up losing control over the ruling party. Both Nakasone and Uno found themselves in a lame-duck stage which they lost popularity.

Ikeda's Public Relations

Without public support, a prime minister often has difficulty acquiring enough internal party or coalition support to be effective, and he thus pays particular attention to public relations. As Robert C. Tucker suggests: "Whatever the system of government, people do not normally give their active support to a policy unless they are persuaded."[10] Therefore, the prime minister must communicate with the public and the media. Several prime ministers have even employed journalists in the top personal assistant post to advise them on media relations -- how to use the media to build a positive public image.[11] Different prime ministers have established their public image in this way.

Prime Minister Ikeda Hayato (1960-64) was probably the first prime minister who was active in public relations. He learned the importance of public opinion from his predecessor, Kishi Nobusuke who failed to achieve public understanding and support in handling the revision of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty in Spring 1960. When Ikeda became prime minister, there was still considerable public resentment to the effect that the government was too arrogant in making a critical national decision without considering the voice of the people.

In an attempt to change the gloomy mood created by the turmoil national attention was diverted to an optimistic economic policy. Ikeda introduced the "income-doubling plan" to double the national income within 10 years. In October 1960, Prime Minister Ikeda dissolved the lower house, thus calling an election. He then traveled throughout the country on the campaign trail to explain his economic policy.

Ikeda's strategy was a populist approach. Journalist Watanabe Tsuneo recalls Ikeda's campaign:

> [Ikeda] was illustrating the prices of tofu as well as tomato, cabbage, mackerel and sardines in order to explain the income doubling policy. He avoided intellectual discussion on foreign

> and defense policies and tried to overlap the image of the prime minister and the housekeeping book. By doing so, he seemed to try to close the distance between the public and him, to grasp their hearts, and to win popularity.[12]

Ikeda's strategy was successful. The LDP won 296 seats, the greatest number to that date. The election victory was the go-ahead sign for the implementation of Ikeda's income-doubling plan. The plan doubled national income in five years, a more successful result than even the most optimistic forecast had predicted. Throughout his term, Prime Minister Ikeda enjoyed continued public support resulting from his personal public relations efforts that were enhanced by his successful economic policy.

Tanaka and the Media

Ikeda's successor, Sato Eisaku, did not enjoy dealing with the media nor did he personally promote public support. Instead, Sato hired a journalist as his top personal assistant to handle media relations for him. The assistant remembers that "I had to devote most of my energy to keeping a fierce tiger named Sato Eisaku in his cage. Fortunately, with the support of friends from my journalism days, there was no major trouble with the media during much of his term."[13] However, during the course of Sato's long administration, criticism did arise in the media. When the newspapers strongly attacked him, Sato began openly expressing his dislike of the press. In his final act as prime minister, he held a press conference to announce his resignation and requested that all newspaper reporters leave the conference room. His ex-journalist assistant lamented "the tiger regained its wild nature, broke the cage rather effortlessly, and roared on the free land."[14]

After seeing Sato's troubled relationship with the press, the new Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei stated at his first press meeting that he would respect the media since avoiding the media would lead to "closed door" politics. The

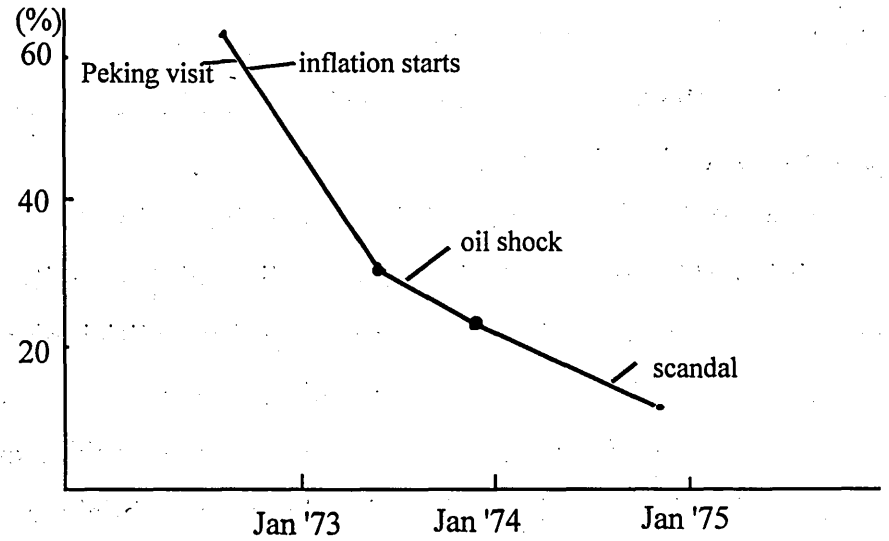
media welcomed his statement and portrayed this youngest-ever prime minister who had no formal higher education as a success story. The public also felt close to him, the Tanaka Cabinet received the highest approval record to date just two months into its term.[15]

Public support for the prime minister also helps in the policy area. When Prime Minister Tanaka was trying to normalize relations with China, for example, he faced strong opposition from conservative politicians within the party who were in a position to block his policy. However, the opposition parties, big business, partisan promotional groups, and public opinion all supported the basic direction in which Tanaka was publicly committed.[16] Tanaka took advantage of the public climate and successfully normalized relations despite the opposition of right-wingers within the party.

Tanaka had considerable influence over television stations and their affiliated newspaper companies. When Tanaka was minister of posts and communications, he issued broadcasting licenses for major newspaper companies, permitting them to open television stations. As prime minister, he took advantage of these connections, by reportedly threatening journalists covering him not to write negative reports on him.[17] Although Tanaka was confident of his control over the media, his financial scandal was exposed by media coverage. The story first broke not in a newspaper or in television coverage, but in a magazine article not affiliated with those under his influence.

Tanaka experienced a significant decline in public support. Upon assuming office, he enjoyed a high popularity rating. Backed by public support, he successfully normalized relations with China in 1972, then inflation and the oil shock later hit Japan. Tanaka's popularity declined with the public feeling that his economic policy was exacerbating hyperinflation. The financial scandal further lowered his popularity that forced him out of office (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Support Rate for the Tanaka Cabinet (July 1972 - Dec 1974)



Source: Asahi Shimbun, October 23, 1991

Miki's Pursuit of the Lockheed Scandal

Tanaka further suffered from criticism and from negative public opinion against the Lockheed scandal in which he was involved as prime minister. Public support strongly encouraged Tanaka's successor, Prime Minister Miki Takeo (1974-76), a leader of the smallest LDP faction, to investigate the scandal, despite strong opposition from within the ruling party. Miki failed to obtain information acquired by the U.S. Congress on the Lockheed scandal through diplomatic channels. On February 23, 1976, Miki announced at a Diet meeting that he would send a request directly to President Gerald Ford asking for the desired information without first consulting any other LDP leader.[18] This upset the LDP leaders outside the Miki faction. Many LDP members saw Miki's action as purely self-promoting and began to form a coalition against him.

Miki was firmly determined to pursue the scandal despite the strong reaction of his opponents in the party. He told a political critic, "I have to get

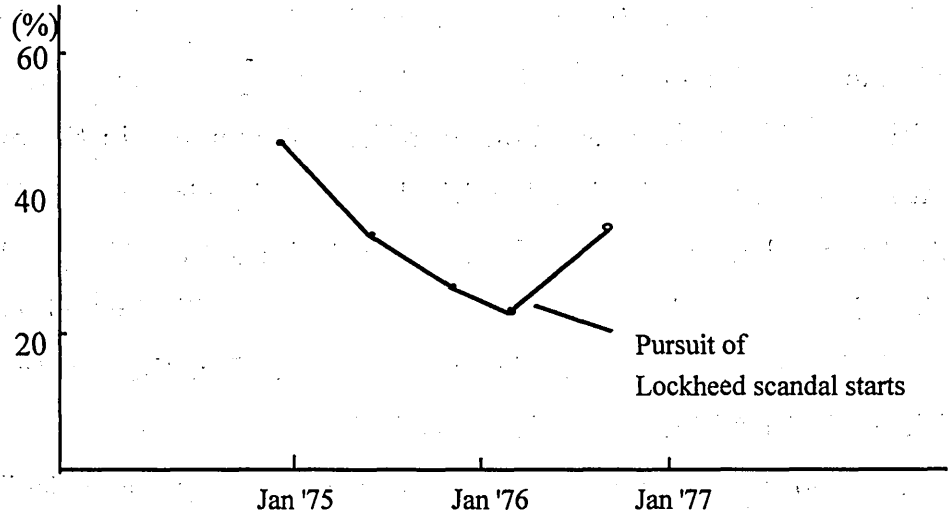
this through. I must do so even if it leads to my death."[19] Despite the pressure from within the ruling party against Miki, the public and the media continued to support his efforts.[20] Due to this strong public support, the anti-Miki coalition could not force Miki out of office. A member in the anti-Miki movement recalls: "The professional political community viewed Mr. Miki as an incompetent party leader [and could have forced him out of office]. But such action might have created a strong public reaction."[21] Miki himself stated: "I did not think that I would receive this much support. It is the first time in my long political life [that I have experienced this]."[22]

Miki Takeo tried to maximize his political power by strategically using the mass media. Miki's media advisor notes how much attention Miki paid to television appearances:

> Mr. Miki was very picky about his TV appearances. He strongly requested to appear on television stations at 8:30 PM [the time of the highest viewing rate among an adult audience]. Prime Minister Miki even requested interviewers whom he liked.[23]

Miki's use of the media proved effective and public support jumped (see Figure 2). This helped the prime minister pursue the Lockheed scandal incident. Although the anti-Miki coalition was a huge majority within the ruling party, it could not force Miki out of office until the LDP's defeat six months later in the November 1976 election. Miki's efforts eventually resulted in the arrest of the powerful former Prime Minister Tanaka.

Figure 2 Support Rate for the Miki Cabinet (Dec 1974 - Dec 1976)



Source: Asahi Shimbun, October 23, 1991

Nakasone and his performances

Public support gives a prime minister strong leverage in pursuing his policies. Nakasone Yasuhiro was a prime minister who was keen on the power of public support. Administrative reform under his administration was politically difficult to pursue. The prime minister met opposition from all directions within the political circles, from within the LDP, the bureaucracy, as well as from the opposition parties. Along with the support of the business community came strong public support. Nakasone once compared his efforts to a glider, saying that "as long as the winds of public and mass-media support continue to blow, it can fly. If the wind of support diminishes, the glider will stall and crash." Nakasone was well aware of the importance of public support and successfully attracted public attention to his administration. He eventually achieved significant administrative reform that cut wasteful governmental spending.

Nakasone Yasuhiro attempted to maximize the effect of public relations. He became famous for his "performances." Nakasone himself said at an LDP seminar "I have made performances acceptable to the new generation that is

growing in size. Since today is a visual age, the image of a party leader is important."[24] On April 9, 1985, Nakasone held a television conference to discuss his external economic policies. The conference was unique in that Nakasone used extensive graphs to explain exports and imports, and appealed to the public to buy more imported goods. His performance was well received by the foreign community, especially the United States. Two weeks later, the prime minister visited a department store in downtown Tokyo and bought imported goods, an event carried by the mass media worldwide.

Nakasone relied on public relations to pursue his policies. One area Nakasone emphasized was the creation of an internationalist image. In his first visit to the United States in January 1983, Nakasone at a joint press conference with President Ronald Reagan made a brief statement in English. Although he made several obvious mistakes, his effort to directly communicate with Americans was well received. Four months later, at the Williamsburg summit in May 1983, Nakasone aggressively supported President Reagan's effort to unite the Western countries against the Soviet Union. At a photographic session with G-7 leaders, Nakasone stood next to Reagan, a move significant to the Japanese people as it indicated equality. This situation was a fresh surprise for the Japanese people who were used to seeing their leader standing at the end of the lineup.[25] The photograph and the news report that described Nakasone's effort at the summit established a public image of Nakasone as a leader in the international community. In a survey by Mainichi Shimbun, the approval rate for the Nakasone Cabinet increased to 40%. The prime reason for this support was his foreign policy stance.[26] His cabinet approval rate rose further as Nakasone established his international image. A survey by NHK in September 1985, for example, recorded a 65.7% approval rate for the Nakasone Cabinet. This public support helped Nakasone to promote his Action Plan to lower tariffs on many different products and the internationalization of the Japanese economy.

The public supports Hosokawa

Another prime minister who paid special attention to public relations was Hosokawa Morihiro (1993-94), the first non-LDP politician to reach the premiership since 1955 when the LDP first took control. Hosokawa emerged, after unprecedented deliberations, as the leader of a fragile coalition of eight different political groups. For Hosokawa who represented only the fourth largest political group among the eight, it was essential to capture and maintain public support in order to tackle difficult political issues, including the conclusion of the GATT Uruguay Round and political reform at home. He had to do this while trying to lead a coalition of eight political groups with a wide range of conflicting political ideas.

Prime Minister Hosokawa personally placed the highest priority on the conclusion of the GATT Uruguay Round. To put it in his words "Japan is in the world system, and I thought that we must show leadership by contributing to the successful conclusion of the Uruguay Round."[27] In order to contribute to the success of the multi-lateral trade agreement, Japan needed to open up its rice market against strong pressure from the politically powerful agricultural interest groups and politicians who represented rural areas.

Consensus for opening the rice market had been developing under the Administration of Miyazawa Kiichi (1991-93). Japan, as the second largest economy and an export superpower, would not be able to maintain a position for which it would later draw blame as the cause of the Uruguay Round's failure. Years of foreign pressure, especially from the United States, had created a mood favorable to the internationalization of Japan's agricultural market. The political leaders were hesitant to make the final decision as they did not want to bring down the wrath of farmers on their administration. Hosokawa, who happened to take the office during the final round of the agricultural negotiations, had to make and announce a politically risky decision.

After an agreement was reached between Europe and the United States,

Hosokawa announced that his government was ready to accept a compromise on the issue of opening Japan's rice market. Strong opposition, as expected, came from the agricultural interests and LDP politicians who took advantage of being in the opposition to blame the Hosokawa government for damaging Japan's agriculture. A more severe headache to Hosokawa was a rebellion that erupted within his fragile eight-party coalition government. The Socialist Party, the biggest among the eight parties, with many members elected from rural agricultural areas, threatened to leave the coalition.

Hosokawa, however, did not yield knowing that the public was backing him. Every national poll taken in the months just prior to his announcement showed that most Japanese agreed that the time had come to import at least some rice. "It is a role of a leader to present a limited goal. If the goal was right, I believed the people would support me," said Hosokawa, expressing his feeling during that time.[28] The Socialist Party held a 12-hour meeting to dramatize its opposition. In the end, the party decided that breaking with the popular prime minister and bearing the blame for the collapse of the world trade system would be much more dangerous politically than protecting rice farmers. Hosokawa made a pre-dawn announcement on December 14 that Japan must accept rice imports "for our sake and the world's sake."

After this announcement, political and public interest in Japan swiftly shifted to the political reform issue which had been at the center of Japan's political revolution. Prime Minister Hosokawa declared that he would stake his political career on achieving this objective. The public, which had been disappointed by the failure of LDP Prime Ministers Toshiki Kaifu and Kiichi Miyazawa to deliver a similar reform because of intraparty conflicts, strongly supported Hosokawa. He received an unprecedented 70% public support rating.

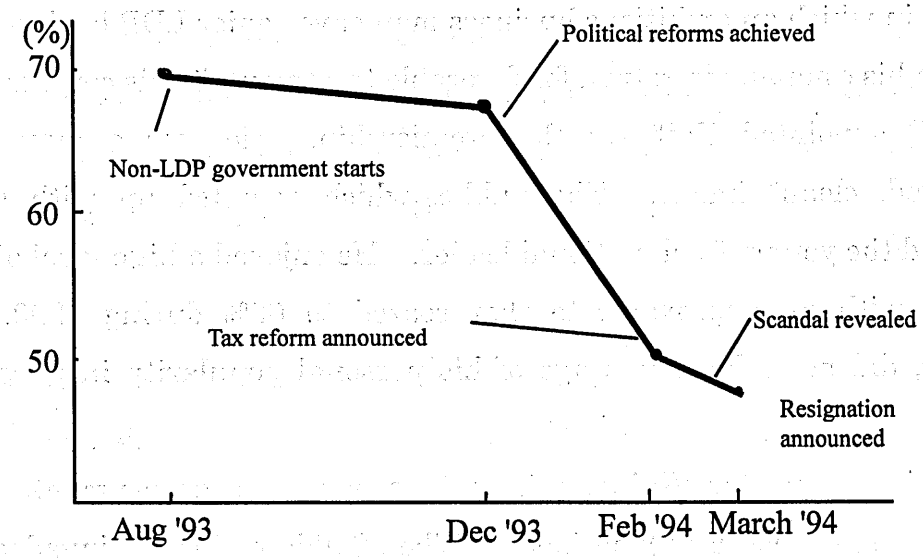
Even with this enormous popularity, it was not easy for Hosokawa to pass the political reform bills, which were controversial within the political community. Although the Council of the Representatives accepted the

political reform package, some members of the coalition parties covertly implemented plan for rebellion. On January 21, 1994, the leftist faction of the Japan Socialist Party effectively killed the political reform bills by voting against them in the upper house, thereby breaking the agreement reached among the party leaders in the coalition government. Negotiations in the joint committee between the upper and lower house representatives broke up. This meant that Hosokawa had only two more days to achieve political reform in the 128th extraordinary session.

Prime Minister Hosokawa publicly restated his willingness to sacrifice his post for political reform, and he called for a meeting with LDP President Kono Yohei. In his negotiations with the LDP leader, Hosokawa accepted the LDP's requests to change the number of electoral districts and to ease the reporting requirements for political finance. Although many LDP members opposed political reform, they did not want to be blamed for blocking bills that were popular with the public. This compromise enabled the Hosokawa coalition government to pass the political reform bills in both the upper and lower houses on January 29, 1994.

Hosokawa emphasized the need for change and tried to create a different image by taking off his Diet member pin and handling, by himself, questions at press conferences. The Japanese public liked the new leadership style, and the public support rate for the Hosokawa Cabinet soared to 70% at the beginning of his term, the highest level recorded by a single cabinet in postwar history.

Figure 3 Support Rate for the Hosokawa Cabinet (Aug 1993 - April 1994)



(source: Nihon Keizai Shimbun March 29, 1994)

While Hosokawa's popularity significantly helped to achieve political reforms, the eventual decline in popularity over the course of eight months significantly weakened the prime minister's political power, and eventually led to his resignation. Hosokawa's public support significantly declined with the abrupt announcement of an unpopular proposal to raise the consumption tax. Later, in March 1994, the Liberal Democratic Party persistently attacked Prime Minister Hosokawa in the Diet citing his financial scandals. These attacks held up deliberations on the government budget proposal. Hosokawa's popularity, owing to his clean image, further declined as these scandals were revealed. Surprising to many, on April 8, Prime Minister Hosokawa announced his resignation in order to take responsibility for the political disaster.

Popular Leader with Poor Professional Reputation

As noted, popularity can help, but it alone cannot make policy. Prime Minister Kaifu Toshiki, for example, maintained a high public support rate for

his cabinet throughout his administration. In the aftermath of the Recruit scandal, in which an ambitious business man gave senior LDP leaders unlisted stocks in his company in return for favorable treatment for his corporate group, the LDP appointed Kaifu to the premiership. He was a man with an "untainted, clean" image. The public, which was fed up with scandals, welcomed the young, fresh national leader. He enjoyed a high level of popular support, with an approval rate that soared to 63% during 1990. Kaifu, however, did not take advantage of his personal popularity in pursuing his policies.

Prime Minister Kaifu managed to run the government until an emergency revealed his inexperience. When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, Kaifu failed to identify the incident as a crisis. His indecision resulted in delays in the response of the Japanese government and this drew both domestic and international criticism. To contribute to the multinational forces in the Gulf crisis, the Kaifu Cabinet eventually introduced legislation that included the dispatch of the Self Defense Force (SDF) overseas. At the Diet debate in October 1990, however, the ideologically dovish prime minister denied the possibility that the SDF might placed put in combat situations. When the opposition parties found that the wording of the bill would indeed allow the SDF to enter a combat situation, they accused the prime minister of misleading them and forced the LDP to withdraw the bill.

Kaifu, who had become prime minister because the leading candidates had been involved in scandals, had repeatedly stated that as the last effort for his administration, he would stake the life of his cabinet on reforming the electoral and campaign finance systems. This reform was highly encouraged by a public tired of corruption. When the opposition within the ruling party brought an end to the reform bills, Kaifu expressed the possibility of dissolving the lower house. However, his supporters within the ruling party did not favor such an action. Kaifu had to give up on the dissolution. Three weeks later, he announced his resignation despite his high public popularity.

To summarize, as a result of his mishandling of various political issues, an inexperienced national leader upset the leaders of the ruling party. Despite Kaifu's publicly popular image, his poor reputation in the political community was responsible for his ousting. Kaifu failed to utilize his popular support to develop support within the ruling party.

Conclusion

Popularity has become increasingly important for the effectiveness of a premier's leadership. The high economic growth created by Ikeda Hayato's policy, for example, significantly helped him to maintain stability, allowing him to run the government. On the other hand, ruling party Diet members are reluctant to run their election under a publicly unpopular party leader and the lack of public support may force him out of office. Further, scandals involving the prime minister or the ruling party often erode the popularity of the prime minister. On the other hand, a clean or non corrupt image helps build public support, as in the cases of Miki Takeo and Kaifu Toshiki.

As public support became more important to their tenure and pursuit of their policies, prime ministers have sought to establish better relations with the media. Media coverage creates momentum for many political activities. When the media is supportive of the prime minister's policies, it is more difficult for his political rivals in the ruling party and in the opposition parties to openly attack him. For prime ministers with weaker party control, such as Miki Takeo and Nakasone Yasuhiro, public support was one of their most powerful tools.

In the television age, a major part of public image is formulated by appearance and eloquence on the air. Prime Minister Miki Takeo, Nakasone Yasuhiro and Kaifu Toshiki used their eloquence to their advantage. Hosokawa Morihiro extensively took advantage of this medium, using television in much in the same way as an American president. An effective

prime minister knows how to maximize the impact of public relations in his favor.

Public support became especially important under the coalition governments after the breakup of the LDP in 1993. No one faction in the ruling party is a dominant power on the political scene. Although the LDP regained a majority in the lower house in September 1997, because defectors from the other party joined the ruling party, it is still short of a majority in the upper house. As seen in the case of Hashimoto's appointment of Sato, the coalition partners' threat of breakup can be very effective. The prime minister's power base in the ruling party is weakened.

With a weaker power base within the ruling party, a prime minister must attract considerable public and media support to effectively maintain a fractious coalition government. A popular prime minister can achieve his goal. The prime minister's will and ability to attract public support are the determining factors for his policy outcomes.

Endnotes

[1] Kato Koichi, statement on television, *Hodo 2001*, Fuji Television, September 14, 1997.

[2] Yvonne Chang, "Japan PM Defends Naming of Cabinet Ex-Con," Reuters, September 12, 1997.

[3] Kyodo News, September 28,1997. The poll was conducted among 1,000 male and female voters nationwide.

[4] Karel G. van Wolferen, *The Enigma of Japanese Power*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1989.

[5] Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan,* Free Press, New York, 1990, p.78.

[6] Anthony King, "Margaret Thatcher: The Style of a Prime Minister," in *The British Prime Minister,* ed. Anthony King, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 1985, p.109.

[7] A 1991 study suggests that the prime minister's popularity was one of the factors which made a difference in outcome between the 1989 upper house election and the 1990 election. Kobayashi Yoshiaki, *Gendai Nihon no Senkyo* [Contemporary Japanese elections], Tokyo Daigaku Shuppan-kai, Tokyo, 1991, pp.141-47.

[8] In the 1953 general election, for example, competition for then ruling Liberal Party was so difficult that half of the new candidates lost. Ohira Masayoshi (prime minister, 1978-80) was one of the candidates who ran the difficult race. In his memoir, Ohira explains that he could win his first election because of the election campaign support of Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru (1946-47, 48-54) who visited his district in Shikoku. Ohira Masayoshi, *Watashi no Rerekisho* [My Personal History], Nihon Keizai Shinbunsha, Tokyo, pp.90-91. One the other hand, Ihara Kishitaka who boasted of his personal ties with Prime Minister Sato Eisaku (1964-72) lost in the 1969 election because the cancellation of Sato's visit lost voters' confidence. Yomiuri Shinbun Seijibu, *Sori Daijin* [The Prime Minister], Yomiuri Shinbunsha, Tokyo, 1971, pp.125-27.

[9] Nakano Shiro, *Tanaka Seiken 886 nichi* [The Tanaka Administration: 886 days], Gyosei Mondai Kenkyusho, Tokyo, 1982, p.331.

[10] Robert C. Tucker, *Political Leadership* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1981), p.62.

[11] Journalists who served as personal secretary to the prime minister include: Ito Masaya (Nishi Nihon Shimbun) served for Ikeda Hayato; Kusuda Minoru (Sankei Shimbun) for Sato Eisaku; Fumoto Kuniaki (Kyodo News Service) and Hayasaka Shigeo (Tokyo Times) for Tanaka Kakuei; Nakamura Keiichiro (Yomiuri Shimbun) for Miki Takeo. Abe Shintaro, son-in-law of Kishi Nobusuke who served as a personal secretary to Kishi, was also a journalist.

[12] Watanabe Tsuneo, *Habatsu to Tatoka Jidai* [Factions and the multi-party era], Sekka-sha, Tokyo, 1967, p.103.

[13] Kusuda Minoru, ed., *Sato Seiken: 2797 nichi* [The Sato Administration: 2797 days] vol. 2, Gyosei Mondai Kenkyusho, Tokyo, 1983, p.391.

[14] Ibid.

[15] According to a survey conducted by Asahi Shimbun at the end of August 1972, the approval rate for the Tanaka administration was 62% with 10% disapproving.

[16] Haruhiro Fukui, "Tanaka Goes to Peking," *Policymaking in Contemporary Japan,* ed. T.J. Pempel, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1977, p.97.

[17] Niimura Masashi, *Desk Memo 3,* 1973, 245-48, quoted in Tanaka Zen'ichiro, "Daiichiji Tanaka Naikaku," Shiratori Rei, (editor), *Nihon no Naikaku* [The Japanese Cabinet], Shin Hyôron-sha, Tokyo, 1981, pp.240-41.

[18] Nakamura Keiichiro, *Miki Seiken 747 days* [The Miki Administration 747 days], Gyosei Mondai Kenkyusho, Tokyo, 1981, p.186. Also see an interview with former Chief Cabinet Secretary Ide Yoichiro by Suzuki Kenji, in Suzuki Kenji, *Rekidai Sori Sokkin no Kokuhaku* [Confessions by close associates of prime ministers], Mainichi Shimbun-sha, Tokyo, 1991,

pp.111-12.
According to Nakamura Keiichiro, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was hesitant to provide information to Japan, knowing that the political impact would be tremendous for America's ally. Nakamura, pp.184-85.

[19] Miki's conversation with Fujiwara Kotatsu quoted in Miki Mutsuko, *Shin Nakuba Tatazu: Otto Miki Takeo to no Gojunen* [To stand with conviction: fifty years with my husband, Miki Takeo], Kodan-sha, Tokyo, 1989, p.280.

[20] Miki's wife looks back: "There were enormous numbers of letters and phone calls to Miki from around the nation every day. The three phones [at the prime minister's official residence] were always ringing, and [the phone calls] were to encourage Miki with sincerity. Every day, we were moved [by such encouragement]. . . . At that time the public interest was so significant. Politics went into the average household. Everybody was observing and emotionally involved with the proceedings of the incident. I think that such energy of the people supported Miki throughout this ordeal." Ibid., p.284.

[21] Kurihara Yuko, *Ohira Moto Sori to Watashi* [Former Prime Minister Ohira and me], Kosai-do, Tokyo, 1990, p.52.

[22] Nakamura, *Miki Seiken,* p.230.

[23] Nakamura Keiichiro, interview by author, Tokyo, December 17, 1992.

[24] The speech took place in Karuizawa on August 30, 1986. Quoted in Maki Taro, *Nakasone Seiken 1806 nichi* [The Nakasone Administration: 1806 days] vol. 2, Gyosei Mondai Kenkyusho, Tokyo, 1988, p.229.

[25] Nakasone states in his memoirs that he did not plan to stand by Reagan. Nakasone Yasuhiro, *Seiji to Jinsei* [Politics and life], Kodansha, Tokyo, 1992, p.317.

[26] Mainichi survey announced on June 9, 1983. The second reason was his effort for administrative reform, and the third was his leadership.

[27] Ibid. Hosokawa told the author that, compared to the conclusion of the Uruguay Round, his push for the political reform, which is generally seen as his biggest political achievement, was merely a "side job." The main reason why Hosokawa's Japan New Party did not merge with another new conservative party, Sakigake, as originally planned was the rice issue. Masayoshi Takemura, Sakigake's leader from the rice-rich prefecture of Shiga, refused to include in their joint policy platform a commitment to open the rice market for the success of the Uruguay Round.

[28] Ibid.