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Executive Turnovers in 2003

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Executive turnovers during the second Koizumi cabinet (September 2002-present, as of August 2003) register the lowest of all the cabinets since the Miyazawa cabinet (November 1991–August 1993). This is predictable from Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's pledge when he first became Prime Minister in April 2001. He promised to appoint one cabinet minister (not two ministers or more) for one agency during the tenure of one cabinet. Furthermore, he pledged that he would do so without receiving a recommendation from factions of the governing Liberal Democratic Party. His first pledge reflects primarily Koizumi's belief that his appointments should last the full tenure of the cabinet as they are presumably the best for the task. His second pledge reflects his belief that LDP factions should cease, and, as a matter of fact, they have recently ceased to be a major factor determining Koizumi's politics. Both factors are related to each other.

During the 38-year old LDP's one party dominance (1955–1993) the egalitarian portfolio allocation scheme by factions and by career ranks permeated every corner of LDP politics to an extreme degree (Inoguchi and Iwai 1987; Inoguchi 1993). Factional balance is one form of egalitarianism. Balance in ministerial appointment was a sine qua non for building and sustaining a prime ministerial coalition. Thus the LDP's key calculus was to form a minimum-winning-coalition focusing on factions (Leiserson, 197X). The other form is the formula of career ranking. In former Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita's (r.1987–1989) formula, for example, one should have at least 15 points to be seriously considered as a prime ministerial candidate. Three points are given to those who have experience as the LDP's secretary general; two points to those with experience as the LDP's General Affairs Council Chairman. One point is given to those who have experience as other cabinet ministers: Chairman of the LDP's Legislative Affairs Committee, and Chairman of the LDP's Parliamentary Management Committee. To satisfy the desire of the LDP parliamentarians to increase their scores, fairly regular cabinet reshuffling took place during the heydays of LDP one party rule.

With the end to LDP one party rule in 1993, this practice was weakened and almost ceased to play a major role in LDP politics. Instead, Prime Minister Koizumi appointed those who would be most damaging to the lingering influence of factions. Two key social policy portfolios were given to two coalition partners: i.e., Health, Labor and Welfare Minister to the Komei Party and Land and Transport Minister to the New

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Conservative Party; three portfolios to non-parliamentary members, one academic (economics and finance) and two former bureaucrats (education and science, and land and transport); and four female ministers(justice, foreign affairs, education and science, land and transport). It was natural that he wanted to weaken the power basis of factions as his position is not based on a factional coalition and as he wants to de-cartelize and de-regulate the whole range of business–bureaucratic–political arrangements that are what he sees as the enemy of his structural reform policy line.

Electoral Law reform legislated in late 1993 under a reformist Hosokawa cabinet, introduced a small district system (one person per district) for electrons to the House of Representatives, and also a proportional representation system. The former small district system replaced the medium-sized district system, according to which multiple candidates could be elected from one district (Reed 2002). Factional dynamics have ceased to drive LDP politics to such an extent since then. The competition and co-operation engendered by the medium-sized district system and the process of founding cabinets on the premise of constructing factional coalitions, were gone forever. One of the consequences of this 1993 legislation on electoral reform might be as Duverger's law suggests, that the one person-one district system is most likely to produce a system with two major parties. Not only has the share of votes for the LDP been steadily decreasing, but also its *de facto* coalition partner since 1993, the Komei party, has been gradually loosing its vote-winning power precisely because of the introduction of the one-person-from-one-district system, and the Komei party has difficulty representing itself in many districts. The change in the election of an LDP President is no less important. Its electoral base changed from the scheme of parliamentary members only to the system of parliamentary members (368 as of August 2003) plus 300 local chapter representatives. Local chapter representatives are far less predictable in their support patterns than parliamentary members in the presidential election.

A well-known slogan propagated by Prime Minister Koizumi during LDP's Presidential election in 2001 to 'destroy the LDP' by carrying out 'structural reform'. Much of the inertia was that he would engendered by factionalist balancing and careerist point-scoring has evaporated. Hence the very low executive turnover during the Koizumi cabinets. Nevertheless, two cabinet ministers have resigned from the first and second Koizumi cabinets: Foreign Minister Makiko Tanaka from the first Koizumi Cabinet and Agricultural Minister Risen Oshima from the second Koizumi cabinet. Makiko Tanaka's outspoken character and her lucid message were helpful in adding popularity to Koizumi's new 'destroy the LDP' campaign; but inexperienced and arbitrary, she was forced to resign as Foreign Minister in 2002. Risen Oshima was forced to resign when his secretary was arrested on a corruption charge in 2003. Until recently, a cabinet minister's resignation was often used by opposing factions to force a prime minister to overhaul the cabinet rather than just replacing one with another. But nothing happened as a result of two resignations. Koizumi won these two battles without giving opponents within the LDP an opportunity to take advantage of the resignations.

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Looking forward, in September 2003 the LDP's Presidential election is to take place. The general election is likely to take place in November 2003. The two large opposition parties, the Democrats and the Liberals, are to merge in September 2003 in an attempt to co-ordinate an opposition manifesto and program with which to challenge the LDP. In response to this, Koizumi responded that, once re-elected as LDP President, his presidential election manifesto would also become the LDP's manifesto in any forthcoming general election. This new practice may be leading Japanese politics along the Duverger path, in that the issuing of a manifesto clearly illustrates the differences between the governing and opposition parties. Furthermore, that would enhance popular awareness of the difference between election pledges and policy performance. Until 2003 political parties announced their election pledges mostly in response to major newspapers' questionnaires (Inoguchi 1987).

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