**Regional Variation in Duverger:**

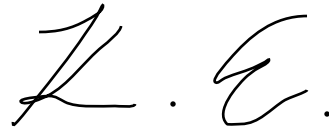**Two-party Competitions in Japanese Elections**

By

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Submitted to Central European University - Private University

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*In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts*

# Author's declaration

I, the undersigned, **Kenichi Ebisutani**, candidate for the MA degree in Political Science declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, 31 May 2024

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Signature

# Abstract

This paper addresses a territorial dimension of the two-party system formation in Japan since the electoral reform in 1994. Drawing literature mainly from the electoral system and party nationalization, I break down electoral districts into several types to formulate particular scenarios under which Duvergerian districts are supposed to emerge. Methodologically, I utilize several linear regression models for eight lower house elections between 1996 and 2017. The finding stresses the importance of the urban/rural divide as well as the level of territorial reach of the two largest parties. Another finding implies that there are some extent of dissimilarities between national / subnational partisan affiliation, blurring a shaper bipolar competition in Japan. In sum, the research taps into the reality of relatively loose ideological distinctiveness in Japanese politics, which incentivizes politicians to engage with party-switching/defection. Opposition parties need to overcome this issue for district-level two-party systems to nationalize in Japan.

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# Introduction

Today, few deny Duverger's law, the formation of a two-party system driven by the simple plurality rule. Its bipolar tendency strongly drives parties to field candidates in more winnable districts and voters to choose among the top two candidates. Together, the district-level outcome over time will be manifested at the national level, leaving the two largest national parties.

After the historical turnover by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in 2009, Reed and Shimizu (2018) observed that Japan is halfway toward Duverger's law. Since the introduction of the single-member districts and proportional representation in 1994, observers of Japanese politics expected to see the convergence toward the two-party system. Others were more nuanced, expressing the territorially divided nature of Japan's party system. For example, Jou (2010) has expressed that "Japan has developed two party systems instead of moving toward a two-party system" (386). While the study of Duverger's law are more clearly manifested in simple plurality rules, it is essential to explore this mechanism in countries with mixed institutional settings.

In this context, this paper addresses the following questions: Under what conditions do Duvergerian districts emerge in a mixed electoral system under dominant party rule? Why despite the use of single-member districts, the Duvergerian outcomes are limited to particular territories? More broadly, will the Japanese electoral districts converge toward the two-party system nationally? In short, the findings suggest that Duvergerian districts most frequently emerge in medium-sized cities of no regionalist enclaves. Moreover, the analysis implies that districts with strong LDP support at the subnational level constrained the number of initial competitors. Together, the findings demonstrate the relatively flexible ideological/partisan lines at national/subnational levels permissive to blurring bipolar competition in Japan.

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In the following, I will first elaborate on the case and puzzle that taps into the dilemma of Duvergerian two-party districts under mixed electoral systems. Second, the paper provides a brief literature review on Duverger's law at the district and national level, proceeding to the case overview of Japn. Thirdly, based on those literature review, I formulate theoretical expectations on my outcome. The fourth section explains the methodological approach and specific data for this study. The fifth section deals with quantitative analysis mainly using linear regression and interaction with simulated data. Lastly, I will provide a qualitative view of districts that taps into the dilemma of national two-party system in Japan.

# 1. Illuminating the Puzzle: Two-party Competition under Dominant LDP Rule

To best illuminate the central puzzles for this study, few empirics proceed in the beginning. Figure 1 provides the Lower House election result (SMD districts), which took place in 2001. The electoral map describes the LDP's dominance throughout the entire territory. Its junior coalition partner Komeito was also able to secure a handful of seats from the SMD districts. Together with the PR bloc, the incumbent parties maintained 293 out of 465 seats. The largest opposition party, the Constitutional Democratic Party only managed to gain 96 seats. Together with other opposition parties, the total number of the opposition's seats resulted in 172.

The map portrays the incumbent's impressive dominance throughout Japan until we unpack the regional variation. Due to the mixed electoral system of single-member districts and PR, Japan at the

national level does not follow Duverger's law. However, when looking at particular prefectures such as Hokkaido (the northern islands prefecture, Figure 2) or Niigata (Mid-eastern prefecture, Figure 2) within SMDs, we can find the results of the two largest national parties. Although this electoral map is not a perfect representation of Duverger's law, particular regions that are evenly occupied by the two largest national parties suggest a strong bipartisan contest despite the dominant party rule.

Figure 1. Electoral Map in 2021 Japan (Based on SMDs in 2021 LH election)

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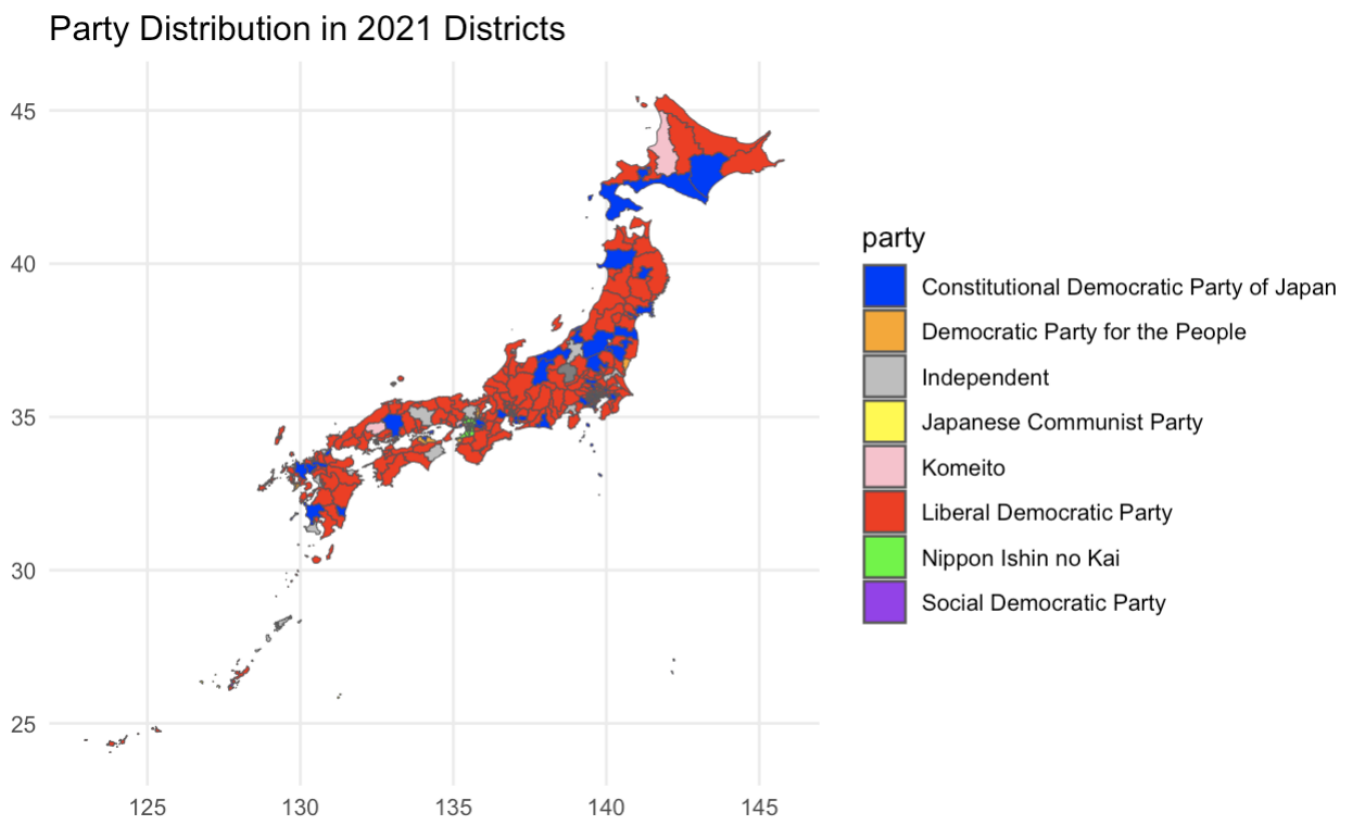
Figure 2. Electoral Map in Hokkaido and Niigata
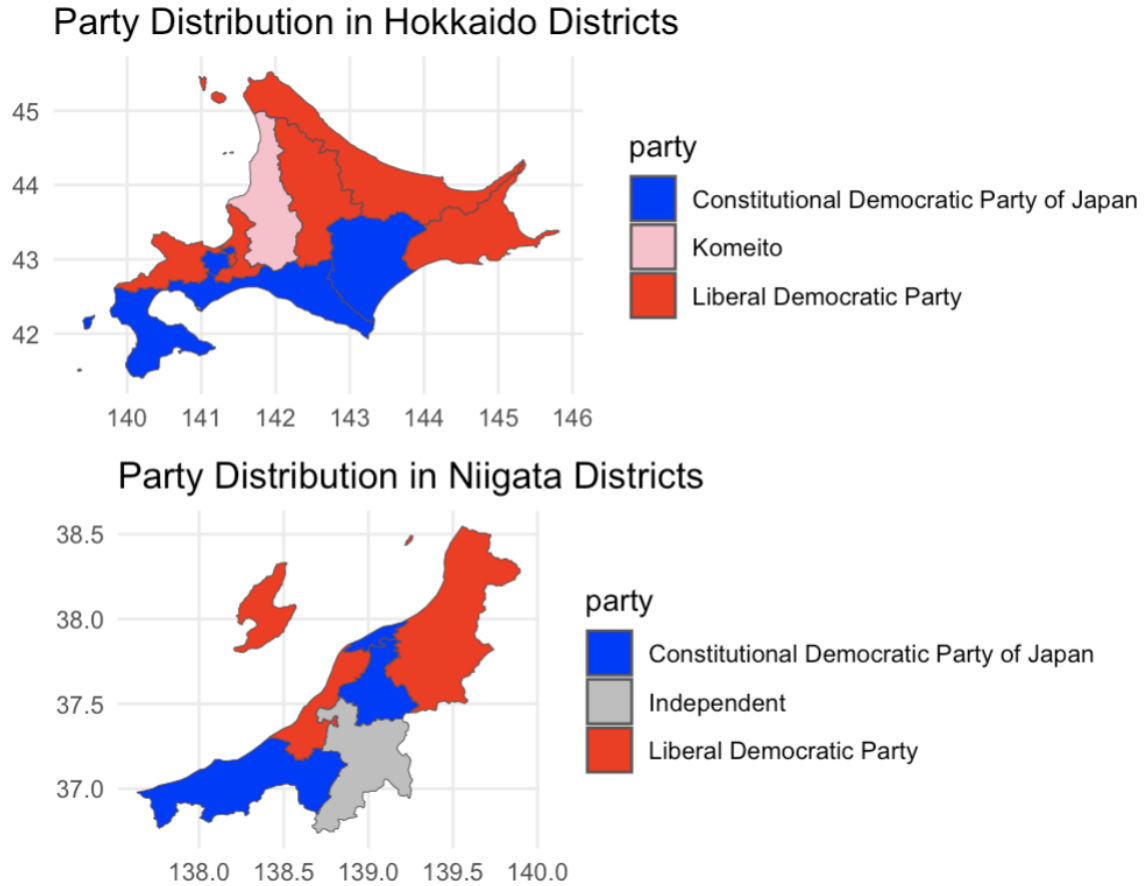


Party Distribution in Hokkaido Districts

Party Distribution in Niigata Districts

Three things make this empirics puzzling. First, the LDP is known as a party with a strong subnational base through which the local LDP members with national LDP candidates mobilize voters through party gathering (*koenkai* in Japanese) and clientelism by exchanging pork with votes. Secondly, LDP particularly enjoys its dominance in rural prefectures with the relatively malapportioned seat allocation

compared to urban areas. Niigata prefecture is not an urban prefecture but is one of the most intense battlefields between the incumbent and the opposition. Even though Hokkaido is a relatively urban prefecture, the LDP's reach is not an exception, holding more than 50 % of the LDP assembly members in many municipalities. The current Hokkaido governor, Naomichi Suzuki, is an LDP-backed politician. Taking those into account, it is puzzling to see strong bipartisan competition in a particular territory.

Besides the LDP's dominance, there are some notable exceptions where the third opposition parties lead the competition (i.e., Osaka, Okinawa). Districts in those areas tend to feature competition between regionalist parties and other national parties (mostly LDP). Although this does not contribute to the national two-party competition, those peripheral areas effectively prevent the LDP from extending its territorial reach. These empirical puzzles beg some conceptualization, which I elaborate on in the following.

## 2. Literature Review: Duverger's Law at the District and National Level

Duverger's law essentially boils down to the link between the simple majority single ballot system and the two-party system over time projecting at the national level (Duverger 1964, 217). The causal linkage is divided into two mechanisms: mechanical and psychological. The mechanical effect stipulates the advantage toward the top candidate and the disadvantage toward losers. The top candidate can gain a seat as long as he or she can secure the plurality of votes in the districts while losing candidates, even if they receive nearly the same amount of votes as the top candidates, end up with no seats. In other words, the vote-to-seat translation is overly biased toward the winner. The

psychological effect is concerned with the incentives of the voters under this zero-sum game. Voters over time learn to vote for the top two candidates to avoid wasting their votes. These psychological and mechanical effects together favor the formation of the national two-party system.

In addition to this, Duverger also hypothesized the link between proportional representation and the number of parties, arguing that PR will make a multi-party system nationally. Some scholars looked at the link between the electoral magnitudes and the fragmentation of parties by integrating majoritarian and PR components. Cox (1997) tells us that within the districts with M district magnitudes, the number of viable parties would be M + 1 at maximum. The limited number of seats available within a district encourages one additional party to compete for the seats. Therefore, the electoral system can largely predict the degree of party fragmentation.

This is inherently tied to the territorial aspects of politics. If national interests overcome territorial ones, we would see a type of election where the solid South opened its competition up for both parties in the United States. Observing the diffusion of national two parties during the 1950s in America, Schattschneider (1975) wrote that "[w]e are, for the first time in American history, within striking distance of a competitive two-party system throughout the country, and the nationalizing tendency has continued regardless of which of the parties is successful" (as cited in Caramani 2004a, 34). In this case, national interests surrounding the New Deal and the Great Depression overcame territorial issues, leading to a more homogeneous party competition for the first time in America. Likewise, Caramani's (2004) comparative historical analysis of the European countries suggests the importance of non-territorial issues (such as class issues) to overcome territorialized issues for party nationalization.

This nationalization mechanism is crucial for Duverger's district-level phenomena to extend across territories. Canadian elections demonstrate this importance where around 10 percent of voters consistently flow toward the third party nationally (Rae 1971) despite the use of the simple plurality rule. India is another case where it uses the simple majority single ballot system but fails to see the national two-party system (Riker, 1982). On the other hand, Chibber and Kollman (1998) stressed the weakly centralized authority of the national government as the main factor that led to the deviation from the national two-party system in India.

Relatedly, federalism -- the dynamics between tiers of government -- can hinder the elimination of third parties (Chibber and Murali, 2006). If regional parties have an extension at the national level, voters are expected to vote for the same regional party at both tiers consistently. However, when regional party and national parties are equally viable at the subnational level, voters fail to strategically vote for nationally viable candidates, producing three effective parties nationally.

In this way, the extent of party nationalization is a crucial factor for the district-level mechanism to extend to the national level. Also, this illustrates the fact that Duverger's law best works at the district not at the national level (Shugart 2001; Singer 2013). Therefore, once the electoral system can effectively diminish the effective number of parties to two at the district level, cross-district coordination to homogenize the district-level phenome across territory is required (Bochsler 2022; Cox 1997).

In the present study, I will explore the territorial dynamics of Duverger's law in Japan, an important yet underexplored aspects in the field of electoral studies and party system.

# 3. Overview of Japan's Case

## 3.1 Electoral Reform in Japan, Change in Behaviors

The discussion over two-party system became relevant in Japan after 1994 when the new electoral system of single-member districts and PR was introduced to the country. From the previous single non-transferable vote system (SNTV) whereby candidates competed for two to six seats within a district, the lower house seats were divided into 300 SMDs and 180 PR seats in the new system (currently 289 SMDs and 176 PR seats). PR blocs are territorially separated into 11 regions whereby the candidates are ranked at the party's discretion in advance. On election day, voters cast one ballot to choose candidates in the SMD tier and another to choose parties in the PR tier.

Observers of Japanese politics were divided on whether mixed electoral systems weaken the effects of Duvreger's law. For example, Herron and Nishikawa (2001) argued that mixed electoral systems bring contamination effects whereby SMD's disproportionality becomes relaxed due to the presence of PR blocs. Political parties are motivated to field more candidates throughout SMDs to boost their PR seats even when they cannot win in those districts. This was empirically confirmed in lower house elections in Japan and Russia.

While agreeing with its contamination effects, others argued that PR does not considerably change the functioning of SMDs. Moser and Scheiner (2004) report that both elements remain in the same expected directions, meaning that the SMD's diminishing effects stay largely unchanged. Reed and Shimizu (2018, 13337) also note that "The PR tier has, in fact, kept the communists and socialists in

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the Diet, but any party depending solely upon PR seats will have trouble getting more than five or six seats. Thus, the PR tier may weaken the effects of Duverger's Law somewhat, but not by much."

By extension, one may even claim that SMD shapes the way how parties compete in PR tiers. The dual candidacy – a strategy where parties field the same candidates in both SMD and PR tiers -- is a crucial strategy of political parties in Japan. Because the initial ranking of the PR tier is conditional on the final outcome of the ratio called *sekihairitsu*, the proportion of the SMD's vote share to its winner's vote share, dual candidates are expected to compete well in SMDs. The more closely they lose in SMDs -- the smaller the *sekihairitsu* is -- the more likely they are re-elected through the PR tier.

Shikaga (1997) argues that this dual candidacy muddles voters' perception, with regard to who are the viable candidates because defeated candidates are often revived like zombies. In voters' view, it appears that the incumbent and challenger candidates merely switch their SMD and PR seats from one election to another. Masuyama (2013) on the other hand claims that this practice helps to create national two-party systems because zombies are primarily those who compete very closely with the winner. Otsuka and Hida (2017) offer a more nuanced view, stating that this dual candidacy is neither helping nor hindering the emergence of the national party system. Instead, the authors point out that it depends on geographical locations (urban or rural) and election years (before or after the alternation).

The electoral reform surely changed the way parties compete in lower house elections in Japan. The current lower house seats are weighed more on SMDs than PR (289 SMDs and 176 PR seats); therefore, observers expected to see the SMD's bipolar effects. However, at the same time, the electoral reform invited a peculiar adaptation by the political parties (dual candidacy), arguably disrupting the psychological effect of Duverger's law.

## 3.2    LDP's Dominance, Persistent Urban-Rural Divide, Glimpse of Party Nationalization

Equally unique and puzzling feature of Japanese elections is the impressive lack of government alternation. LDP has, with only a few years of exception, kept its governing position for over 70 years since the end of the Second World War. Observers of Japanese politics attribute this phenomenon to the urban-rural divide. Scheiner (2010, 156) characterizes this divide as a parallel party system where "a one-party dominant system in rural areas and a competitive system in urban areas", resulting in the dominance of LDP. In fact, around 20 percent of the lower house seats are allocated in the countryside. LDP will mainly focus its resources on winning the remaining 30 percent in other districts to secure the majority. On the contrary, opposition parties, with no prior advantage, are from the beginning fragmented but still need to find a way to compete nationally against LDP.

This almost appears that the LDP as a dominant party is hindering the full manifestation of Duverger's law in Japan. With its founding mission to revise the national constitution, LDP embarked as a conservative, right-wing party in 1955. However, as the party realized that the majority of citizens desired peace over the constitutional revision during the 1960s, the party quickly shifted its image toward economic growth policies. During the 1960s when environmental pollution became a critical issue in the country, LDP again rebranded itself as a party responsible for environmental problems (McKean 1981). When the party was temporarily kicked out of the government due to a series of scandals in 1993, LDP did not hesitate to form a coalition with its political enemy, the Japan Socialist Party, allowing the party to quickly regain its power. Considering its impressive creativity and

adaptation skills, Reed and Shimizu (2018, 1321) wrote "We must consider the possibility that the LDP will reinvent itself yet again and find a way to bypass Duverger's Law."

One notable exception however has to be noted when Japan saw a glimpse of two-party nationalization between 2009 to 2012. Observers agree that 2009's turnover by DPJ was one of the closest times in Japanese elections that featured a national two-party system. While DPJ gained 221 SMDs by fielding its candidates across the territory, LDP was only able to receive 64 SMDs in safe constituencies. The party manifesto became a widespread keyword in the country, directing popular attention more to party policies than individual candidates.

This nationalization appeared that the two parties finally overcame the urban/rural divide. McElwain (2018, 1321) wrote, "[G]iven that the 2009 election produced the decisive ouster of the LDP, the geographical biases of the electoral system may no longer favor the LDP at all." Not only at the constituency level but there was a prospect that the two parties would reposition themselves, making a shaper bipolarity between DPJ and LDP on policy stances.

However, the optimistic views turned out to be an illusion once the DPJ government started to expose its poor leadership. The DPJ's realignment did not see success either. In the wake of DPJ's rise, the party was supposed to ideologically differentiate more from the LDP to strengthen the image of the major opposition party. However, it turned out that Yukio Hatoyama – the then DPJ party head – ideologically resembled more with the previous LDP prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi, than other DPJ members. The core DPJ leaders such as Ichiro Ozawa were disappointed at the lack of ideological coherence, consequently leaving the party with his followers (Scheiner 2016). For those reasons, the

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DPJ failed to keep its strong allies for the next election and eventually broke apart into smaller parties in 2016.

After 2009, the LDP reactivated the urban/rural divide in Japan, making it even more difficult to see the genuine two-party competition. The coalition with Komeito has been proving to be a useful tool to avoid the national two-party competition. By assisting some Komei candidates at SMDs, the LDP can receive a substantial amount of PR votes from Komei supporters. This strange couple hence is a strategic adaptation by the LDP to prolong its dominance while effectively fragmenting opposition parties.

## 3.3    Subnational Politics in Japan

The LDP's dominance is even more widespread at the subnational level as partisan competition has not developed as much as at the national level. It is only the LDP who successfully penetrates its party organization down to the municipal level. Regarding the subnational election held in 2019, the LDP captured 1158 out of 2227 seats in 41 prefectural assemblies, of which 25 prefectures are run by the LDP majority . The Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan only managed to gain 118 seats while the Democratic Party for the People was only able to gain 83 seats.

The only non-LDP executive head was elected in Osaka prefecture where its own regionalist party, the Osaka Restoration Party, succeeded in forming the majority at the prefectural assembly (51 out of 88 seats). Also, Hokkaido's gubernatorial election was the only partisan contest between candidates backed by the two largest national parties.

This lack of partisan competition and subsequent dissimilarities between national and subnational levels are primarily driven by the widespread use of independent labeling. Subnational candidates often hesitate to express their clear partisan affiliation with national parties (Hijino 2013). Hijino (2021) attributes this unique phenomena to the electoral law that allows candidates to express the gradation of partisan affiliation (from recommendation, support, and to the nomination). Even though they would affiliate more closely with a particular party after they get elected, the way they handle their partisan affiliation contributes to the lack of sharp partisan competition both at the subnational and national levels. Also, as the subnational election continues to rely on the SNTV system, candidates are more motivated to stress individuals over partisan labels to maximize their chance of winning. This asymmetric electoral system as well as unique local electoral law on partisan affiliation together are contributing to the dissimilarities between national and subnational levels.

Sometimes, national politics greatly influence the way how subnational politicians behave. For example, when the LDP was hit by a series of scandals and corruption during the 1990s, many local candidates discarded their affiliation with the LDP. In another occasion when the two largest parties reached the height of nationalization in 2009, many of them affiliated back to the LDP or DPJ.

At the same time, subnational politicians occasionally shape national party competition. With the decentralization laws enacted around the 2000s, subnational governments have gained more authority on fiscal issues[1], enabling prefectures like Osaka or Tokyo regionalists to create their own parties to control both the executive and legislative branches. Osaka Governor Toru Hashimoto (2008-2011 as a governor, 2011-2015 as a mayor) was able to achieve this by pursuing administrative deregulations.

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[1] One measure of subnational authority is called Regional Authority Index (RAI) (Hooghe et al. 2021). According to this measure, Japan scored 13 out of 30 in 2010, which is higher than the global average of 9.6 in 81 countries.

His proposal to increase the regional authority in Osaka was voted down by a very close margin; however this local issues attracted national attention. Hashimoto pursued his policies by creating his own subnational parties called Osaka Ishin no Kai, which he later extend to national party, Nippon Ishin no Kai. Now the party is the second largest opposition party but its SMD support is concentrated in Kansai regions.

As subnational politicians – after several terms at local assemblies – often attempt to stand at the national election, it is crucial to know the extent of their partisan affiliation and congruence between the two-tiers. Japan's local politics has some diverging aspects from the national level due primarily to the loose partisan affiliation (excluding Osaka). Especially, after 2009's short glimpse of party nationalization coupled with the rise of non-LDP governors, it is important to take these multi-tiered perspective into account. The next section attempts to break down my empirical puzzle to the level where we can underpin the theoretical expectations of Duvergerian districts.

## 4. Theoretical Expectations

To spell out the theoretical expectations, I will conceptually divide Japanese SMDs from 1996 to 2017 into particular groups (Figure 3). First, I divide SMDs into urban or rural districts, the sharpest political divide in Japan. Because urban districts are simultaneously the megalopolitan cities where the main national parties always field their candidates, the district competition should resemble the national one. For this reason, it is hard to expect small parties to gain the plurality of votes, hence no distinction between center and periphery. At the lowest level, the districts will be categorized into low or high dual candidacy ratios. Besides, I separately look at the degree of subnational LDP seat share to examine

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if the subnational tier accurately predicts national outcome. The dashed lines indicate that the SMDs do not have direct attributes of subnational data.

Figure 3. Classification of Japanese SMDs
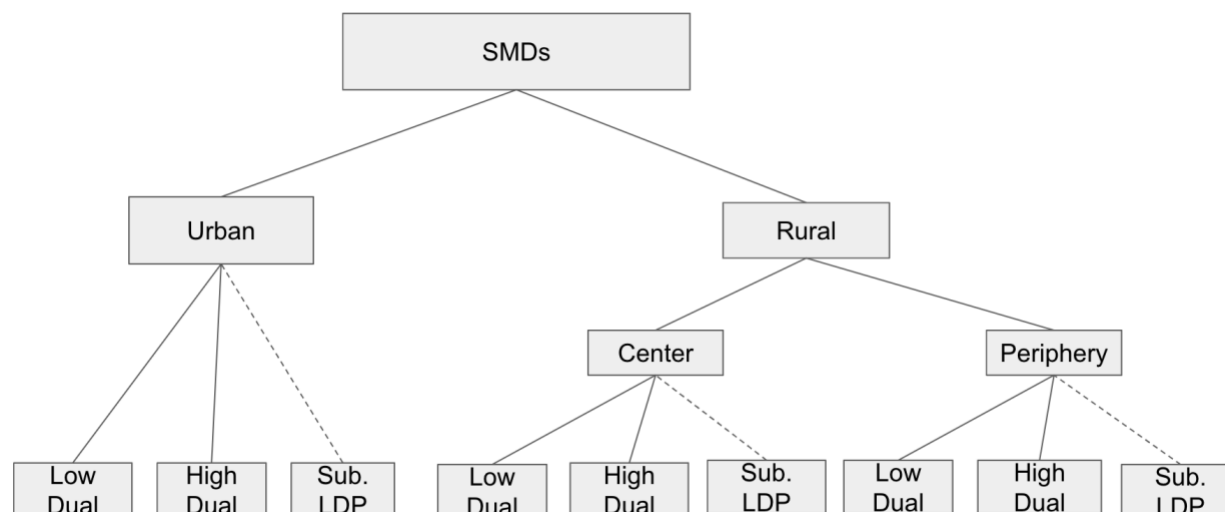


As earlier studies suggest, the practice of dual candidacy is so widespread that the majority of districts are almost always simultaneously fielded in both tiers. If however, Otsuka and Hida's (2017) conclusion is correct, high dual candidacy in urban districts should indicate a larger number of parties to compete, hence deviating from Duvergerian outcomes.

On the side of rural districts, there remains ample space to differentiate within this group. Mid-level cities are not megalopolitan cities but are still crucial places for large national parties. Therefore, centralized districts should attract the two largest national parties, leaving smaller space for minor parties. As certain extent of urbanity produces a moderate level of fragmentation, the equilibrium point of Duverger – LDP vote share and (single) opposition vote share – should reach nearly 50

percent in this group, resulting in the most likely spots for two-party systems. At this stage, dual candidacy should not change the expected outcome much.

The remaining rural districts – ones that are the least nationalized places in the country – are expected to either be the prey of LDP's dominance or regionalist parties with divided oppositions. As the literature already points out, LDP's strong geographical bias toward rural districts is undeniable. However, equally important to note is the presence of local strongholds who often stand as independents or regionalist parties. One notable example of rural/ peripheral districts would be Okinawa. The prefecture has featured several regionalized issues such as the US military base and independence movement because of the historical relationship with mainland Japan. Along with regionalist parties such as Okinawa Mass Party, nationally small progressive parties such as Japan Communist Parties and Social Democratic Party gain SMD seats in those peripheral areas over time.

Rural cities generally diminish the initial number of competitors (fragmentation of parties). Plus, those districts are often the least nationalized areas; therefore, party competition should already be predicted to a large extent.  I expect that the degree of dual candidacy will not overly change from the above expectations.

In the final category, I will see the extent to which subnational LDP seat share predicts Duvergerian districts. The districts with strong subnational LDP supporters should indicate a higher partisanship, which normally extends to the national level. This may force voters' partisan lines more sharply, hence diminishing the initial number of non-LDP competitors, making the party fragmentation somewhat closer to two.

To summarize the theoretical expectations thus far:

H. 1: Urban districts are expected to increase the fragmentation of parties more strongly than rural districts. However, a lower dual ratio should constrain this fragmentation. Therefore, urban / low dual ratio districts will moderately produce two-party competition.

H. 2: Rural districts are expected to have lower fragmentation of parties than urban districts. Central cities are nationalized districts, hence non-peripheral districts will produce two-party districts most likely.

H. 2': The remaining rural districts would be the least nationalized or highly personalized areas. The competition will feature leading competitions either by LDP or regionalist parties and divided oppositions, hence less likely to produce two-party districts.

H. 3: The subnational LDP seat share would indicate higher partisanship generally (considering the generally weak partisan competition at the subnational level); hence districts with strong subnational LDP support should sharpen bipartisan competition by diminishing the number of unviable competitors. This is expected to contribute to the two-party competition.

## 5. Data and Methodology

### 5.1 About the Dataset

To empirically test the above theoretical expectations, I will use the Constituency-Level Elections Archive (CLEA), which stores 2181 district-level election results in 183 countries. I will look at the electoral results of the Japanese General elections from 1996 (the first election after the electoral reform) to 2017 (the latest available data) and analyze the following variables.

## 5.2    Operationalization of Duvergerian Outcome

To measure the fragmentation of political parties, I will use the effective number of parties, the indicator developed by Laakso and Taagepera (1979). It calculates the relative weight of political parties (candidates) based on their vote (or seat) share. For this study, I calculate the district-level ENP vote. As no parties field two candidates from the same party in SMD districts, the ENP vote will accurately measure the district-level party fragmentation. An ENP close to two indicates a situation where votes are largely occupied by the top two parties. While ENP closer to one normally implies a dominant party system, ones that deviate further up from two normally indicate a multi-party system.

ENP can sometimes mask internal dynamics, especially when multiple candidates are closely competing with each other. For example, the following example of the two hypothetical scenarios illustrates my point (Table 1).

<div align="center">Scenario 1</div>

*Table 1*. Two Hypothetical Scenarios that Result in Nearly Identical ENPs

|  | Vote Share | ENP |
|---|---|---|
| Party A | 45% | 2.4096 |
| Party B | 45% |  |
| Party C | 10% |  |

Scenario 2

| Party | Vote Share | ENP |
|-------|-----------|-----|
| Party A | 60% | 2.4084 |
| Party B | 16% | |
| Party C | 14% | |
| Party D | 10% | |

In scenario 1, the top two parties compete evenly, occupying the majority of vote shares in a given district. The resulting ENP of 2.4 gives a somewhat closer sense of Duvergerian competition. On the other hand, scenario 2, despite its ENP of 2.4, gives us a very different pattern of competition. In this case, while party A is an obvious winner, occupying 60 percent of the votes in the district, the first and second losers (parties B and C) had a very competitive race. Even though the resulting ENP is almost identical between the two scenarios, the latter describes the dominance of party A with close competition between parties B and C. Voters were somehow unable to give up their votes for party C, which would have benefitted party B to better compete with party A. One may guess that voters were unable to distinguish who was more viable or were sincerely voting for their preferred parties, thus splitting their votes between the two. This is not an ideal phenomenon if Duverger's law always guarantees close competition between the top two parties.

This Duvergerian non-equiribrium can be essentially expressed in the parameter called sf-ratio (second to first loser ratio) where we look at the rate of vote shares between the two losers (Cox 1997). The parameter ranges from 0 to 1. While 0 means that the first loser outnumbered the second loser, leaving no margin for the latter, 1 indicates the equally competitive race between the two candidates. Under the perfect Duvergerian equilibrium, the sf-ratio should get closer to 0.

Taking those into consideration, I operationally define Duvergerian districts to be ENP between 1.9 and 2.5 AND sf-ratio smaller than 0.2. After removing PR districts, the resulting dataset stores a total of 2384 districts from eight lower house elections of which 568 were Duvergerian districts (Figure 4). The factor close race stands for the binary factor of sf-ratio smaller than 0.2. The horizontal axis defines the range of ENP. We have a small number of missing data that do not meet the sf-ratio condition as some districts simply did not have the third candidates. On the red histogram, there are a number of districts that were between 1.9 and 2.5 but were not included in the Duvergerian districts (the blue histogram) because they did not meet the condition of sf-ratio smaller than 0.2. This implies that we have a handful of districts like scenario 2 which I illustrated in Table 1.

Figure 4. Distribution of Non-Duvergerian and Duvegerian Districts from 1996 to 2017
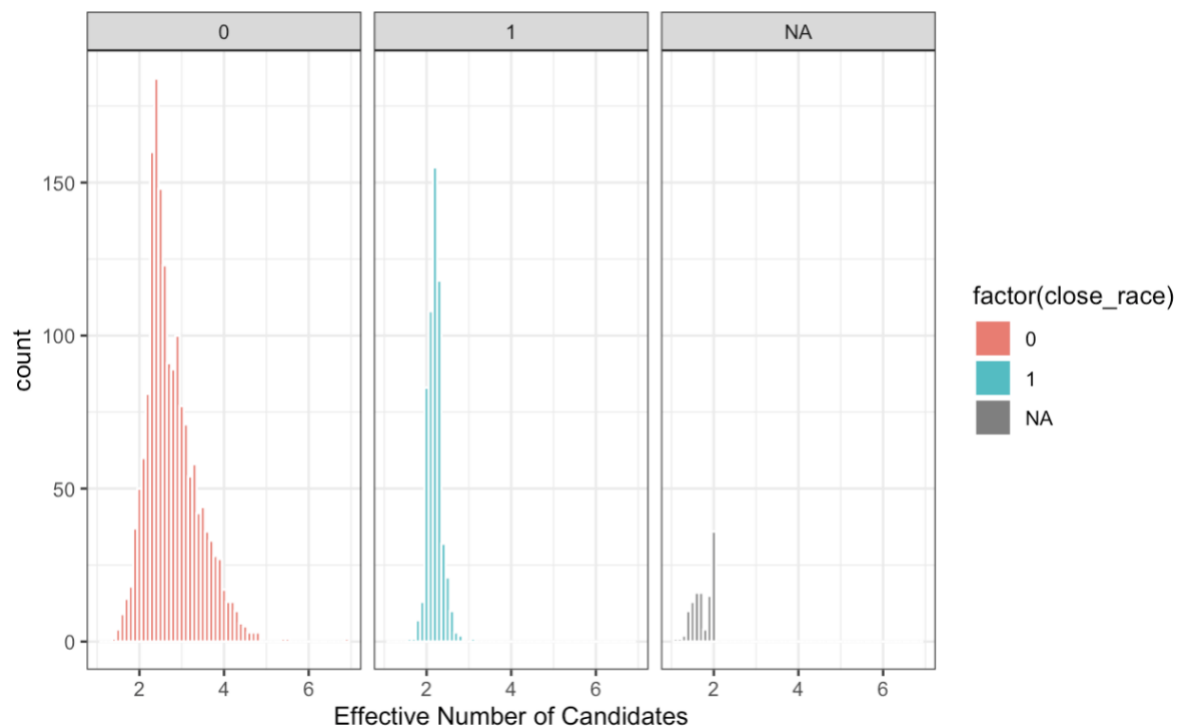


## 5.3    Sub-components of Duvergerian Districts

In the analysis stage, I will use the sub-components of Duvergerian outcomes as the link between independent and dependent variables is most clearly observed at this level. Firstly, I will utilize district-level LDP and (cumulative) opposition vote shares. It is the simplest indicator of party competition, which allows me to easily assess its linkage with urban /rural divide. Under an ideal situation where the effective number of opposition parties does not inflate to a large extent, the closer two indicators reach 50 percent, the more frequently the two-party districts should be populated.

I will also utilize the effective number of parties as another crucial indicator of a two-party system but with special attention on sf-ratio. As the above histogram of Duvergerian outcomes illustrated, I will interpret the result of quantitative analysis by considering the pitfalls of simple ENP around two. In the discussion section, I will investigate whether the analysis accurately captured true two-party system districts.

## 5.4    Independent / Control Variables

One of the main explanatory variables is the urban-rural degree. To estimate the latter, I obtain datasets compiled by Nishizawa (Nishizawa n.d.) who documented the district-level population and geographic size sensitive to the government district reforms in 2002, 2013, and 2017. The original dataset uses the population based on 2010 census data as benchmark data. The dataset stores the population and geographic size across districts each election year. After I retrieve the population density part for eight election years, I rescaled them with the logarithm. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC, 2024), densely populated districts (known as DID) have to meet the following two conditions: 1) minimal population density of 4000 people within one kilo

square meter and 2) absolute population with more than 5000 people. If those two conditions were met, I coded districts to be called urban.

The second independent variable measures the extent of party nationalization. If there are region-specific issues or strong personal ties in districts, nationally weak parties can still gain seats from those districts. Operationally speaking, I examined whether or not districts are mainly competed by two national parties in a given election year. I identified national parties as those that are popularly perceived as one of the major parties that primarily seek government[2]. From this, I subtracted it from the universe of all lower house parties, hence the remainder will be coded as peripheral. The binary variable (peripheral) was coded as one if the top two parties in a given district matched with one of the peripheral parties and zero if not.

Down at the district level, I also see the degree of dual candidacy, the extent to which the same SMD candidates simultaneously participate in PR blocs. Smith and Reed (2018) document Japanese electoral results at the constituency level from 1947 to 2014 with details on each candidate's background. I focused on elections since 1996 to see if the same SMD candidates were present in the PR tier. I retrieve the total number of dual candidacies within the same district and the total number of candidates. I manually added the data for 2017 from the website of NHK (日本放送協会 n.d.). The dual ratio is a continuous variable that divides the total dual candidacy with the number of candidates

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[2] I identified the following as national parties: Liberal Democratic Party, Constitutional Democratic Party, Japanese Communist Party, Democratic Party of Japan, New Frontier Party, New Party Sakigake, Nihon Shakai Tô", 希望 (Party of Hope)

at district level. I calibrate dual candidacy into low (below 0.41) and high (above 0.410) based on the distribution of dual candidacy in the dataset[3] for a dummy variable.

Regarding the linkage with the subnational tier, I refer to the prefectural LDP seat. Considering the widespread partisan independents at the subnational level, higher prefectural LDP should indicate voters' stronger partisanship. This should generally indicate voters' and candidates' higher awareness of party labeling. Lower LDP seat share conversely means more independent candidates who appeal more with their personal labeling than party brands.

Japanese subnational elections are normally held every four years around April (often referred to as Unified Local Election or ULE) where voters elect executive heads and / or assembly members at prefectural and municipal levels. Observers take this result as the blueprint for the next national election. Therefore, with few notable dealignment cases between national and subnational levels, it is expected to see a correlation between the two, largely predicting the electoral outcome, especially of LDP. While seat share is a continuous variable that measures the mean seat share at the prefecture level, I will also set a dummy variable to distinguish prefecture with more than 50% LDP seat shares from those that score 50%. The district within the same prefecture therefore will receive the same seat share, assuming that they are relatively homogeneous to each other.

For this data, Horiuchi (2019) documents municipal-level data of Japanese prefectural assembly elections from 1985 to 2017. As the subnational and national elections rarely take place in the same year, I matched based on the years that are closest to the proceeding national elections. For example,

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[3] The k-means clustering identifies two large cluster points in the dual candidacy rate. Taking the first cluster point (0.41) fairly divides the data into two groups that feature relatively lower and higher rate.

since there was no ULE in the same year of the 1996 lower house election, I take 1995 ULE to match the two. In the process of matching, the data for 2005 and 2012 were entirely dropped due to the absence of data.

In this study, I will look at a single control variable: incumbency, a binary variable coded as one if the winner in the previous election in SMDs wins again in the SMDs in the present election and zero if not. This data was derived also from Smith and Reed's Japanese election dataset on incumbency from 1996 to 2014. I manually retrieved the incumbency data for 2017 from the website of NHK (日本放送協会 n.d.).

## 6. Quantitative Analysis

### 6.1 Exploring the Mechanism of Duvergerian Districts

In this section, I will primarily follow the LDP and (cumulative) opposition vote shares as the indicators of two-party competition. For this, I set urban-rural cleavage at the horizontal axis and their respective vote shares in each district at the vertical axis (Figure 5). For reference, the distribution of population density for Duvergerian districts is displayed under the plot to compare the cross-points and the distribution pattern of the two-party districts. As earlier studies demonstrated, LDP's vote share gradually declines as the population density increases. At the same time, opposition parties cumulatively surpass LDP's vote share as they compete in more urban areas. From the cross-point onward, opposition parties outnumber their vote share by increasing its fragmentation. The cross-point between the LDP and opposition parties largely coincides with the most frequent spot of Duvergerian two-party districts. This implies that opposition parties managed to keep their vote shares without splitting into too many smaller parties.

Figure 5. Plotting LDP and Opposition Vote Shares on their Population Density (Urban-Rural Cleavage)
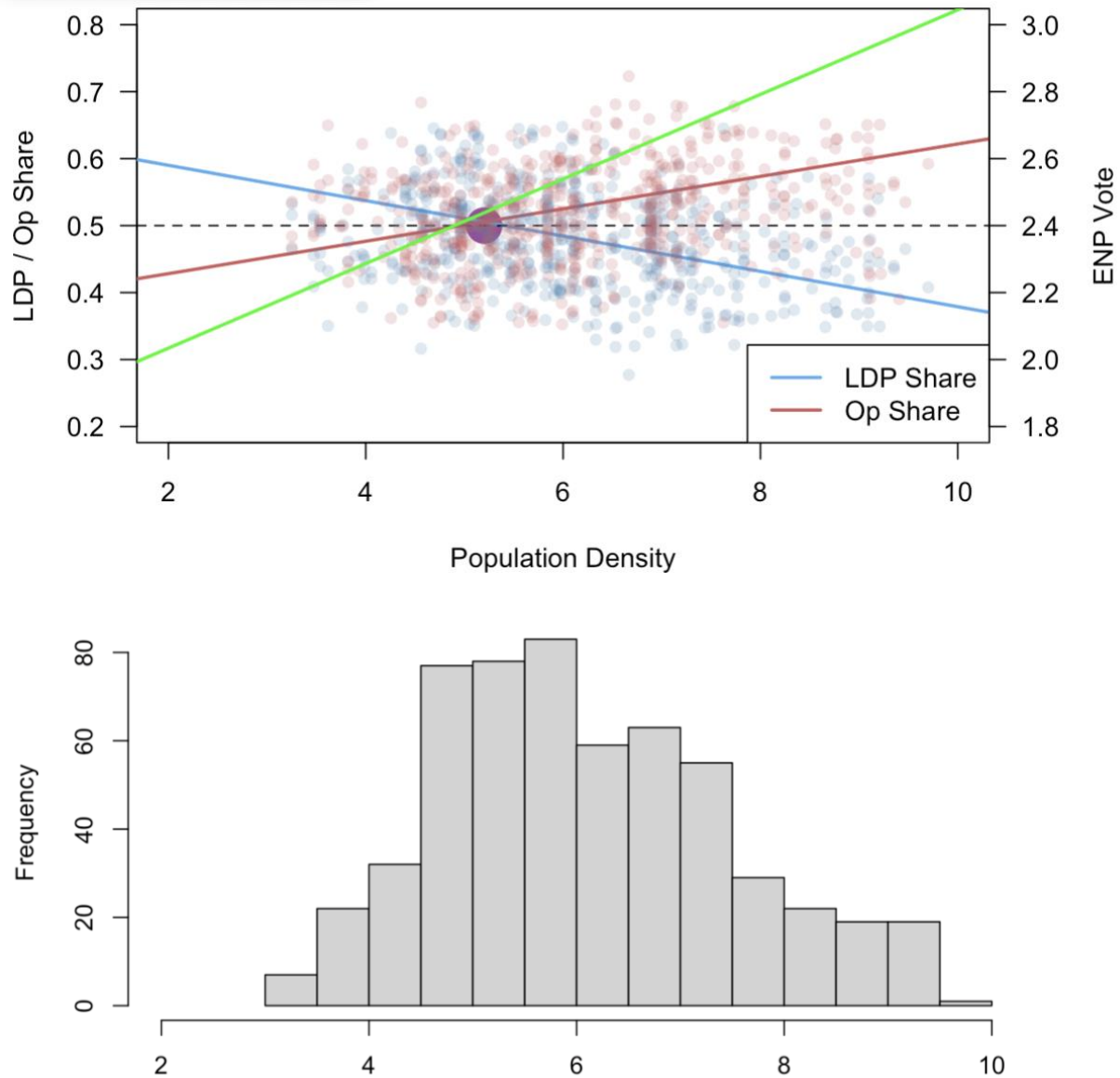
However, we have also Duvergerian districts that are not located near the cross-points, stretching toward more urban areas. When looking at variation across election years (Figure 6), it makes more sense why there are some urban two-party districts. The 2005 lower house election for example

demonstrated the LDP's unprecedented level of territorial diffusion in urban districts under Prime Minister Koizumi. Stressing the importance of administrative reform, the LDP under Koizumi was able to push the cross-point to the edge of urban areas.

Figure 6. The plotted LDP /Op Shares in Each Election Year

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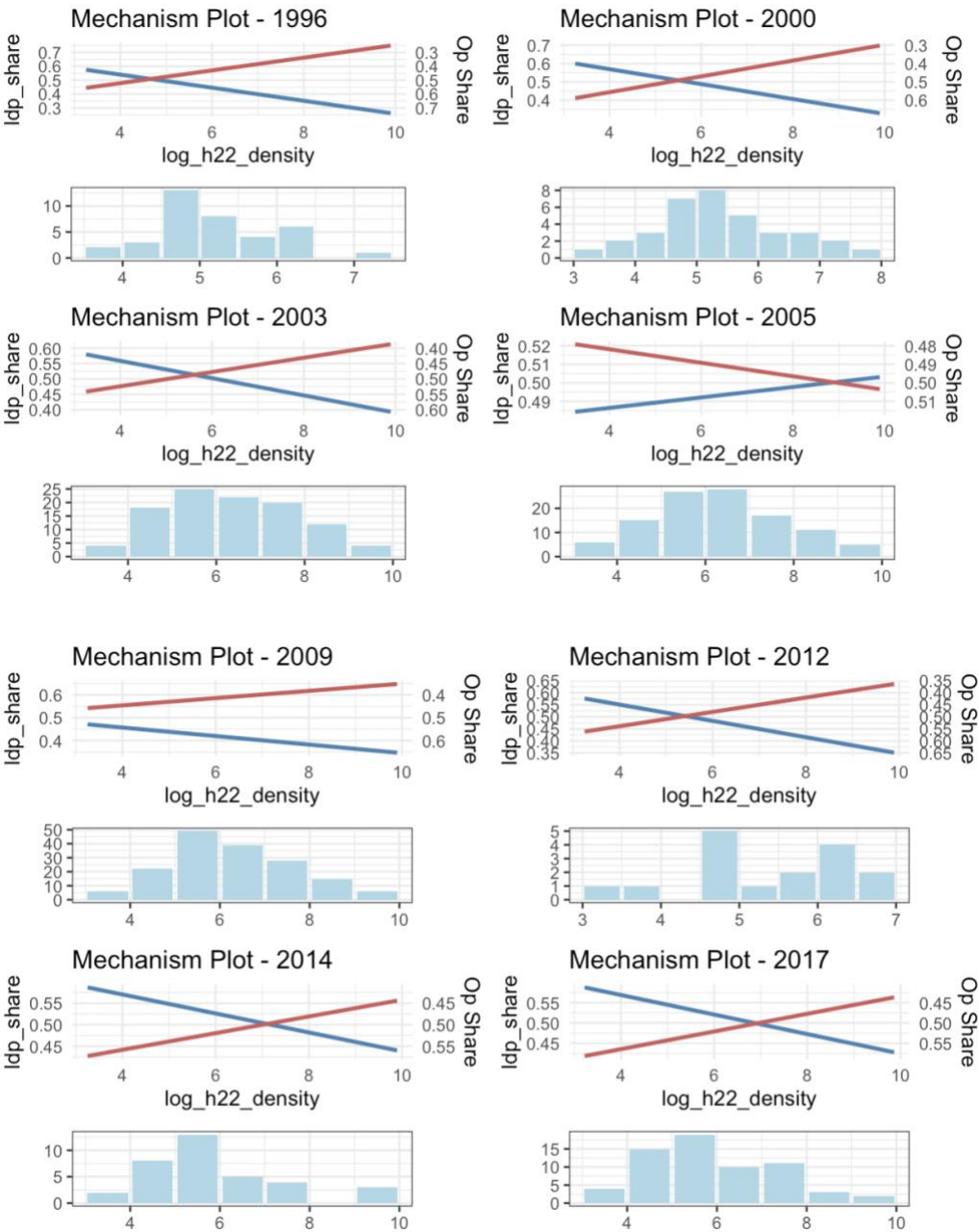
Nevertheless, the ebb and flow of cross-points are largely moving together with the center of the histogram (particularly in 1996, 2000, 2003, and 2012). Also, the opposition party share here is cumulative, not a single party. Therefore, under the multiparty system, the cross-points may not perfectly correlate with the most frequent spots of two-party districts.

Taking this cross-point as the benchmark, I will see how this original point moves under different scenarios. Figure 7 displays the shift of cross-point when we separately look at peripheral districts. The green line indicates the best fit of the effective number of parties. As we saw in the general model, the original cross-point is located at a moderately small ENP (around 2,4). In the case of peripheral districts, the cross-point moves leftward, deviating from the most frequent area of two-party districts. The new ENP also slightly goes higher, making it more difficult to see Duvergerian competition at this point.

Figure 7. The plotted LDP /Op Shares under Peripheral Districts

## The LDP and Op Share vs Pop. Density (Center vs Periphery)
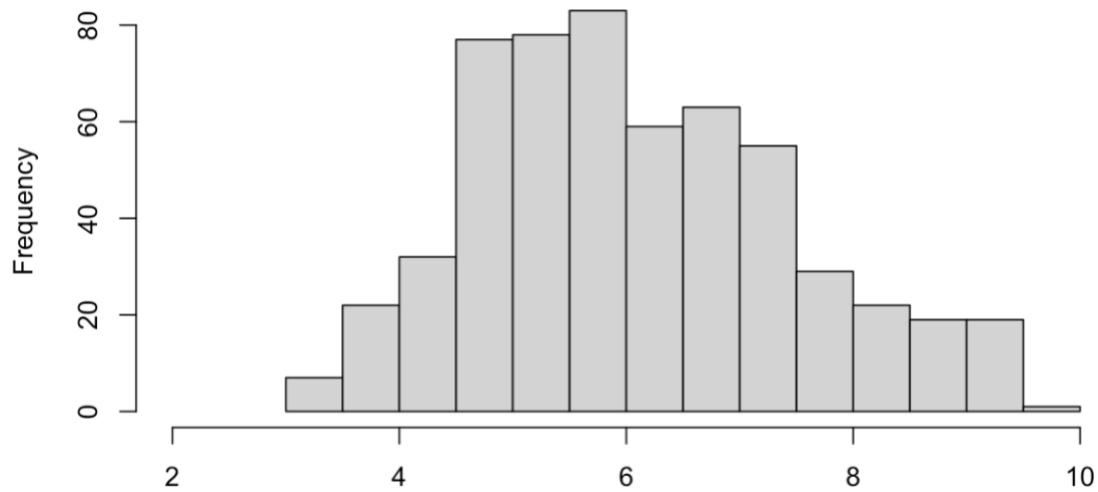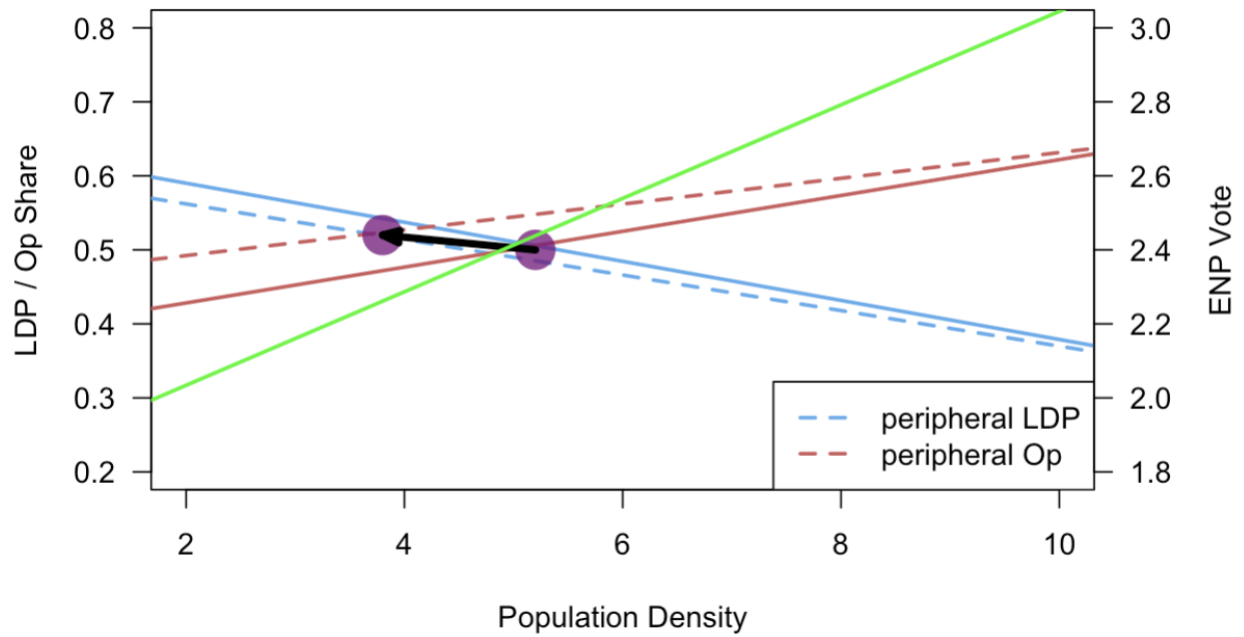
Regarding the scenario of a subnational LDP majority (Figure 8), the opposition vote share slightly decreased whereas LDP's share increased from the original lines. As a result, the $50 - 50$ points get pushed toward more urban areas. As the histogram in Figure 5 shows, there was a moderately frequent number of Duvergerian districts at a population density of around six. Considering the fact that LDP singlehandedly gains more than half of subnational seats both at prefecture and municipal levels even in urban areas, the new cross-point still does hover around moderately frequent spots of two-party districts.

Figure 8. The plotted LDP /Op Shares under Subnational LDP Majority
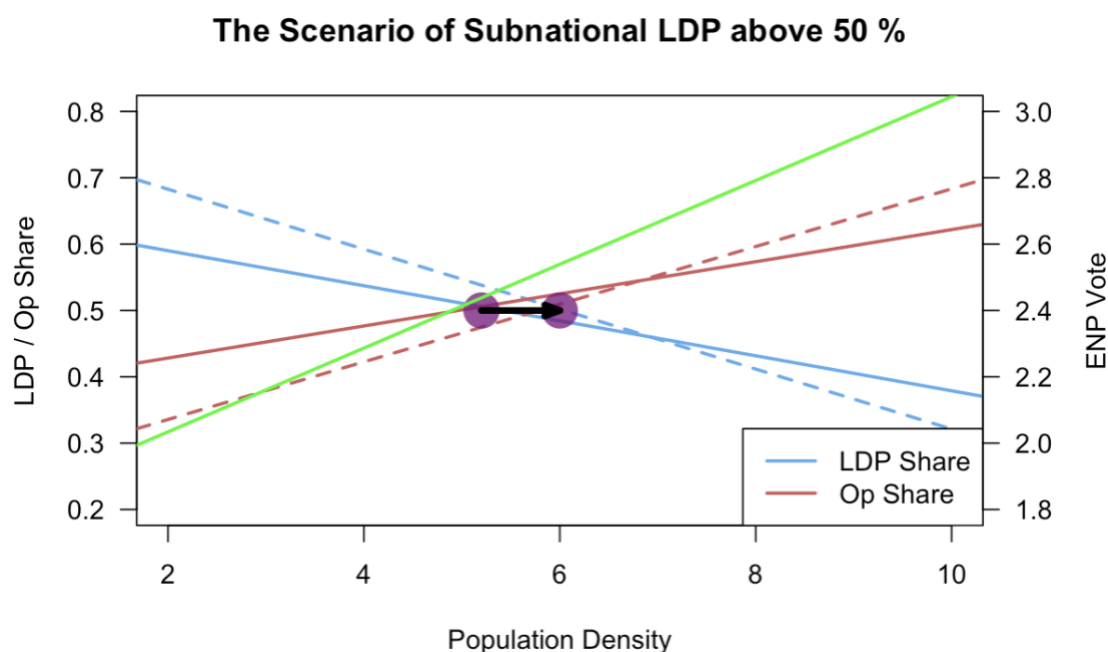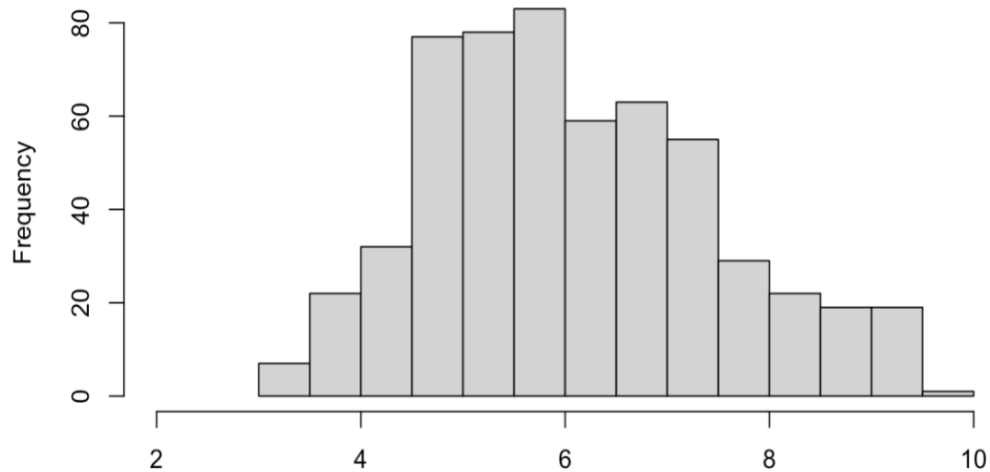
When we separately plot LDP / Op vote shares of districts with low dual ratios, the cross-point moved leftward (Figure 9). While LDP's slope remains almost unchanged, the opposition's slope goes upward, shifting the $50-50$ point toward more rural areas (population density around 4). While this implies that dual candidacy helps opposition parties more in general, the plot suggests that population density around 4 is a frequent spot of two-party districts. The average ENP slightly went up from the original point, making it more difficult to see a pure two-party competition. As far as this mechanism plot suggests, low dual candidacy is not helping to produce two-party competition much.

Figure 9. The plotted LDP /Op Shares under Low Dual Candidacy Ratio

## Scenario of Low Dual Candidacy
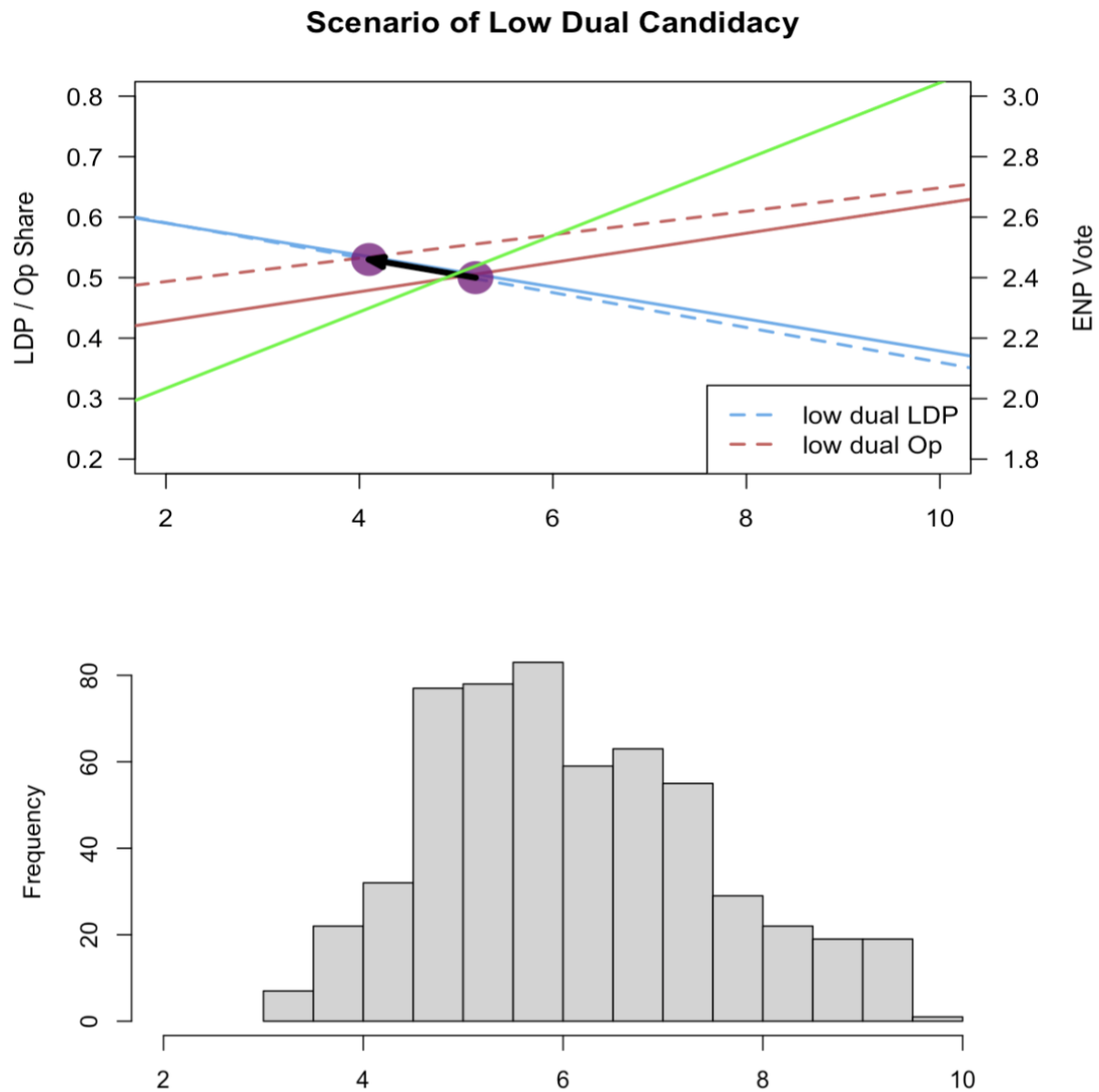
To summarize the observations thus far, the urban/rural divide (the basic model) demonstrated how this cleavage sharply divides politics in Japan. While rural districts strongly favor LDP, urban districts help opposition parties outnumber the former at the expense of the inflated ENP. The original cross-point therefore suggests the optimal point where opposition parties minimize the internal ENP while seriously challenging  LDP.

Also, the scenario that contrasted center vs peripheral districts suggested that some rural districts are controlled by local regionalists who prevent the Duvergerian two-party competition. The new cross-point deviated from the frequent area of Duvergerian districts.

At the same time, some peculiar observations stood out. In the case of dual candidacy, a high ratio turned out to be producing two-party districts more than low ratio. Although I initially expected the dual candidacy to generally weaken SMD's functioning, the empirical observation suggests the opposite. In one view, the PR tier may be reinforcing the SMD's effects as dual candidates are oftentimes very competent in SMDs.

Regarding the linkage between national and subnational levels, one level largely mirrored the other. When subnational LDP is strong, national LDP should be strong even in urban areas, pushing the cross-point rightward (population density around six). The new cross-point still coincides with a moderately frequent area of Duvergerian districts.

How accurate are those initial observations? Now that I mainly illustrated the movement of vote shares under different scenarios, the next section will formally assess its accuracy and strength.

## 6.2 Assessing the Effects of Urban-Rural Divide on ENP with Different Situations

To more precisely estimate the effects of urban/rural divides under different scenarios, I will engage with three linear regression models, which are presented in Table 2. The first model takes a dummy variable of urbanity (urban), periphery, and the interaction between the two as the main independent

variables, controlling subnational LDP seat share (subnational) and incumbency (inc). The second model takes urban, dual ratio (high /low), and the interaction between the two as the independent variables while controlling incumbency. The last model assesses urban, subnational LDP majority (dummy), and the interaction between the two as the independent variables while holding incumbency as constant.

Overall, the models stress the importance of urbanity as a crucial predictor of ENP, increasing the degree of party fragmentation by approximately 0.4. Generally, it is more difficult to see genuine two-party competitions in urban than rural areas. Control variables are also in the expected directions at significant levels. The more the LDP holds seats at the subnational level, the lower the effective number of parties would be. The total share of the LDP's vote share at the national level largely correspond to the subnational level; therefore, districts with strong LDP support do not inflate the fragmentation. The incumbency in Japanese elections often implies the LDP's advantage. Therefore, incumbent advantage seems to have a similar function to the subnational LDP. LDP's strong subnational base means that more voters have sharper partisan identity and subsequent bipartisan competition, which seems to be reflected at the national level.

Table 2. Linear Regression Model Results

| | Dependent variable: | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | ENP | | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
| Constant | 2.802*** | 2.550*** | 2.646*** |
| | (0.058) | (0.033) | (0.027) |
| urban | 0.437*** | 0.402*** | 0.372*** |
| | (0.040) | (0.065) | (0.043) |
| periphery | 0.174*** | | |
| | (0.038) | | |
| subnational | -0.538*** | | |
| | (0.102) | | |
| high_dual | | -0.039 | |
| | | (0.036) | |
| subnational_maj | | | -0.143*** |
| | | | (0.033) |
| inc | -0.198*** | -0.162*** | -0.193*** |
| | (0.030) | (0.024) | (0.030) |
| urban*periphery | -0.157** | | |
| | (0.078) | | |
| urban*high_dual | | 0.080 | |
| | | (0.072) | |
| urban*subnational_maj | | | 0.121* |
| | | | (0.073) |
| Observations | 1,576 | 2,374 | 1,576 |
| $R^2$ | 0.150 | 0.137 | 0.132 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.147 | 0.135 | 0.130 |
| Residual Std. Error | 0.570 (df = 1570) | 0.564 (df = 2369) | 0.576 (df = 1571) |
| F Statistic | 55.386*** (df = 5; 1570) | 93.667*** (df = 4; 2369) | 59.590*** (df = 4; 1571) |
| Note: | | | *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 |

Regarding the individual models, the results seem to be consistent with the analyses in the previous section. To best interpret those interactive terms, we will go through predicted ENP under the three scenarios by holding control variables at the mean.

In terms of the interaction between urbanity and periphery (Figure 10), the predicted ENP suggests that rural/center districts produce the lowest ENP (between 2.43 and 2.50), the closest of all interaction to genuine two-party districts. While the difference between rural and urban districts is visibly wide, we also see the center /peripheral divide also makes a difference.

Figure 10. Predicted ENP Vote by Center vs Periphery
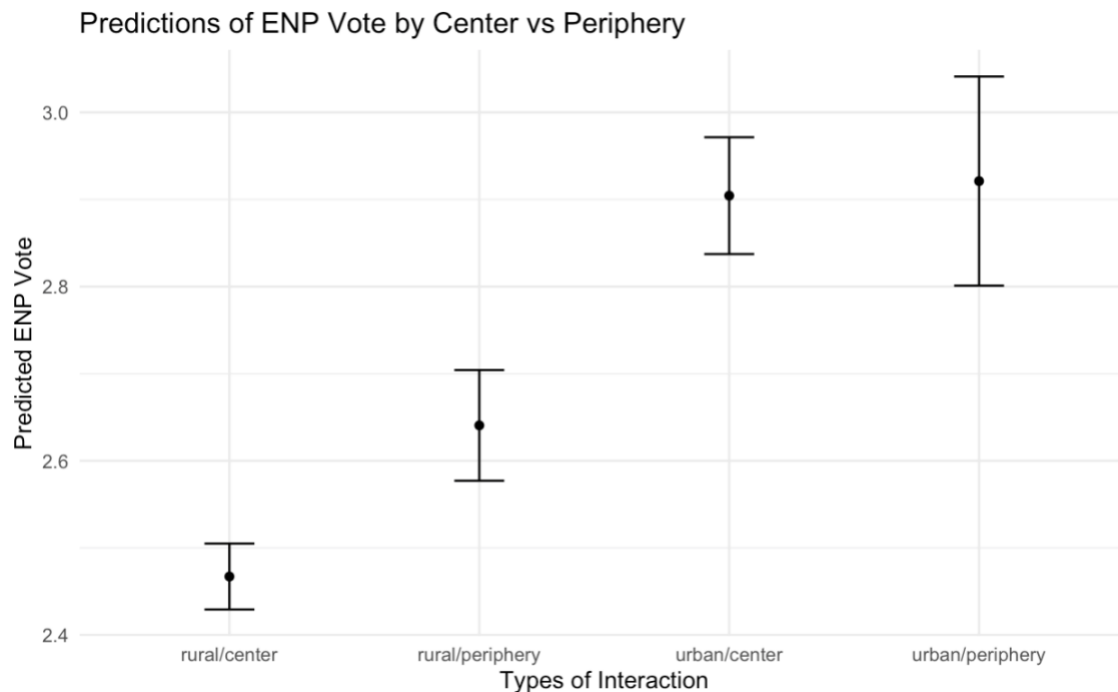


In the case of the interaction between urbanity and dual ratio (Figure 11), the regression model by itself failed to maintain the statistical significance. However, it turned out that a low dual ratio slightly increased the ENP in both rural and urban districts. This may imply that dual candidates are indeed very competent in SMDs, contributing to the close two-party race. However, the differences made by dual candidacy are not significantly large. At the pooled level cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis, therefore, the dual ratio is not a strong predictor of ENP. Urban / rural divide sufficiently differentiates the outcome.

Figure 11. Predicted ENP Vote by Low/High Dual Ratio



Predictions of ENP Vote by Low/High Dual Ratio
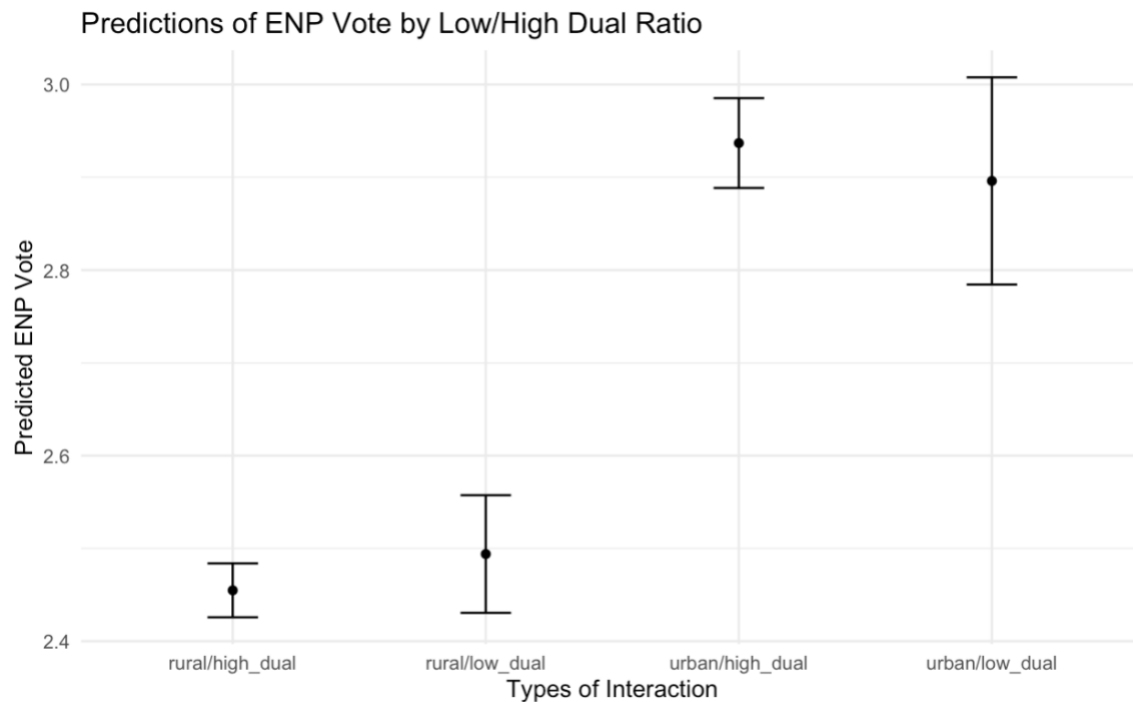
Lastly, the interaction between urbanity and the subnational LDP majority did make a somewhat larger difference between districts (Figure 12). Considering the fact that subnational level data were only available for six out of eight election years and aggregated at the prefectural level, the statistical significance of 0.1 may be interpreted in a more permissive way. Ideally, the more direct measure of the territorial vote shares such as the gubernatorial election may have produced a more accurate relationship. However, the subnational governors in Japan tend not to express their party affiliation, often standing as independents to avoid a negative reputation from the national level and maximize their vote share under the SNTV system (Hijino 2013). For this reason, it is difficult to systematically collect clear partisan governors.

Nonetheless, despite this alternative measure, the predicted ENP moderately differentiated within urban /rural districts. The most salient district type is rural/LDP majority (CI between 2.39 and 2.48). It is possible to infer that voters have a clearer partisan identity even at subnational level where it is usually a rare case. This seems to positively contribute to the bipartisan competition at national level too. From supply side perspective, small opposition parties normally do not dare to compete with LDP in districts with its strong subnational base, thus constraining the unviable oppositions.

Figure 12. Predicted ENP Vote by Subnational LDP Majority /Minority
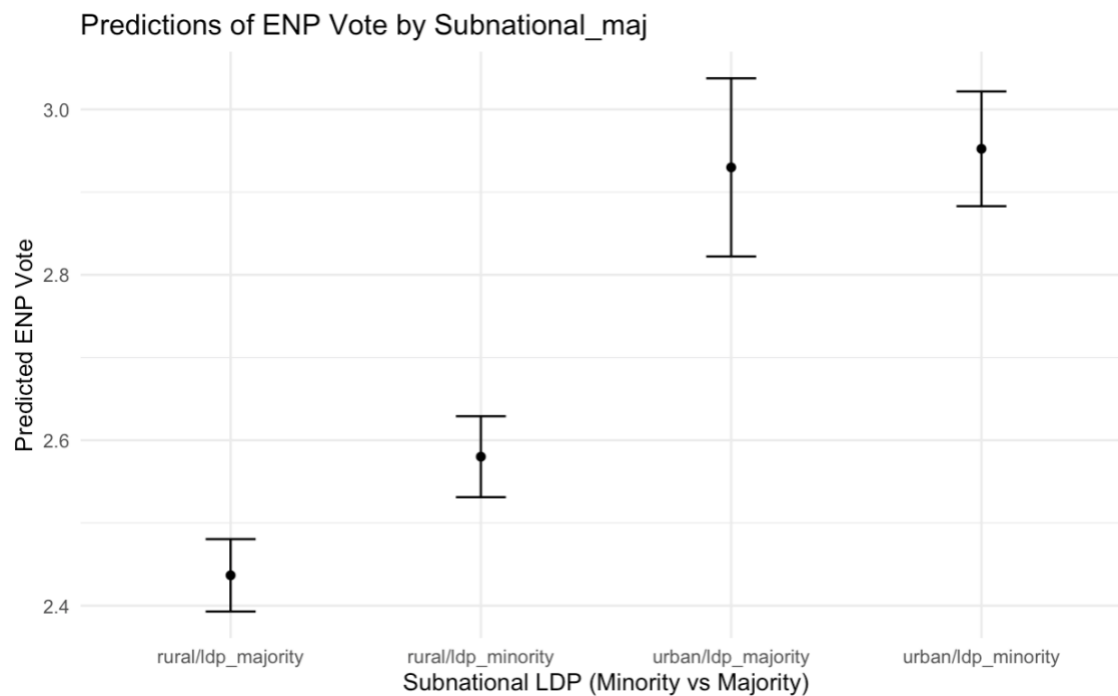


Overall, the regression analysis confirms the importance of nationalized rural districts as the most fertile ground for a genuine two-party competition. Localized rural districts and urban districts hinder this because of either many small national parties or the dominance of regionalist parties. Secondly, the result also demonstrated the subnational LDP majority as a diminishing function of ENP when combined with the urban/rural divide. This difference seems to be wider among rural than urban

districts. Thirdly, the empirical analysis left the effects of dual candidacy indeterminate. Being a low/high dual ratio did not help further differentiate the gap that the urban/rural divide has already made. This may be related to the widespread use of dual candidacy. Nowadays most parties simultaneously send the same candidates at both tiers to maximize their seats across the territory, which ends up with low discriminatory power of election outcome.

Besides dual candidacy, the regression analysis explained relatively little as to why there are still some urban two-party districts even though it generally inflates the effective number of parties. If we assume that longitudinal variation across election years contributed to this noise, it is possible to say that urban two-party districts are the byproduct of particular election years. Especially the election outcome around the 2000s was the most uncertain of all the eight election years. Excluding those outliers, we can say that empirical analysis has provided a decent level of evidence for our hypothesis.

Now that we quantitatively observed electoral districts, what do those different types of districts look like substantively? What does a peripheral district in Japan substantively mean? What are the local issues that drive voters and candidates to care for minor parties instead of larger national parties? How is it related to the subnational politics in the country in general? In the following discussion section, I will provide a more qualitative interpretation of those empirical results.

## 7. Qualitative Look at Two-Party Districts in Japan

Shifting from quantitative analysis where we primarily looked at X, this section qualitatively looks at Y, two-party districts, particularly focusing on the failure of its national projection. What still explains the formation of two-party districts in peripheral districts that nationally contribute to a multi-party system? What do those districts substantively mean? A closer investigation of those questions reveals

the unique trajectory of Japan's political parties, namely frequent party defection and switching. This implies some lingering effects of SNTV, the previous electoral system that strongly encouraged the individual over party-level competition. Because defected candidates were confident enough to leave the party and win with their reputation, the competition in peripheral areas occasionally featured close races between candidates from independents/new splinter parties and an established national party. However, exactly because they defected and joined new splinter parties, the effective number of parties inflated nationally. Also, Japanese politicians often start from the subnational level to establish their careers, where more flexible partisan affiliation is widely practiced. For those reasons, politics at subnational tiers should also not be ignored when considering the national two-party system.

To give an overview, Figure 13 presents the proportion of two-party districts over the total number of SMDs. Overall, as the quantitative part illustrated, the Duvergerian two-party districts clustered in districts with moderately dense populations but not to the extent of urban areas (higher end of rural districts). However, nearly 15 % of the entire outcomes fell into the peripheral category. What still explains a close two-party race in peripheral areas? How does it contribute to the multi-party system nationally?

Figure 13. Proportion of Duvergerian Districts in each Group

```
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │ Duvergerian Districts│
                    │       N=568          │
                    └─────────────────────┘
                   /                       \
        ┌──────────────┐            ┌──────────────┐
        │    Urban      │            │    Rural      │
        │ N=45 (7.92%)  │            │ N=521 (91.7%) │
        └──────────────┘            └──────────────┘
                                   /              \
                      ┌──────────────┐    ┌──────────────┐
                      │   Center      │    │  Periphery    │
                      │ N=438 (77.1%) │    │ N=83 (14.6%)  │
                      └──────────────┘    └──────────────┘
```
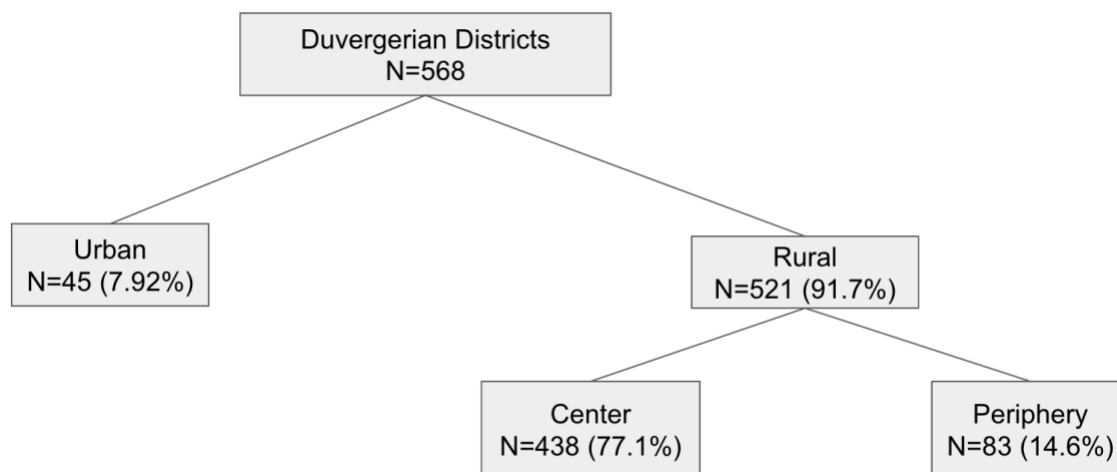
*Note.* Here I omitted the distribution for dual candidacy ratio and subnational LDP down at the bottom to primarily focus on the nationalization of two-party districts.

Answering those questions has to tap into Japan's unique political norms and customs shaped by the previous institutional settings. Institutionally, the SNTV systems and local election law allowed candidates to stress personal instead of party labels. Normatively, seniority is an important norm in Japanese politics whereby their political influence increases with the number of times they get re-elected. This applies to the hierarchical dimension; many politicians often start their political careers at the prefectural/municipal level. While seniority first encourages young politicians to rely more on particular parties to gain stability, veterans rely less on party labels to get re-elected, granting the latter freer discretion on partisan affiliation.

In relation to the old institutional legacies, today's senior politicians have gone through the SNTV system for some terms. As Japanese parties, particularly LDP is a composite of different factions, one has to rely more on intra-party factions. Provided that politicians are rational actors who try to maximize their chance of re-election, new politicians are also expected to follow this intra-party conflicts to maximize their personal interests (vote, office, policy). Based on those background, senior

politicians are expected to carry over the legacies of old institutional settings (SNTV), impacting the way how newer generations deal with partisan affiliation. Tellingly, DPJ – the largest opposition party until 2012 – was initiated by many ex-LDP opportunists. The implosion and the birth of new splinter parties from DPJ between 2012 and 2016 also suggest the still widespread practice of defection and party switching even after the 1994's electoral reform.

According to Reed and Scheiner (2003), this degree of party defection and switching varies depending on urban/rural areas in the country. When the LDP was temporarily ousted from the government in 1993, a large group of LDP members defected to create a new party (New Frontier Party). While the authors primarily stress the importance of whether defectors were reform-minded or not, they also mentioned that LDP members in rural areas who already established enough terms tended to have a higher probability of defection if their electoral security was high. On the contrary, defectors in urban areas were more conditional due to higher electoral volatility; therefore only the senior LDP members with higher electoral security defected from the party.

The proceeding study has also clarified the defection dynamics of urban/rural divide at the subnational levels (Milazzo and Scheiner 2011). This is primarily driven by the incentives of the subnational politicians whereby they often try to maximize the distributive gains from the central government. According to the study by Milazzo and Scheiner (2011), subnational defectors in 1993 turned out to be lower in urban areas where the economy was more independent from the central government. Considering those previous studies, it is not surprising that a handful of defectors cluster in rural areas, which according to my previous analysis produce nationally small parties, contributing to a multiparty system.

One exemplary case would be Ichiro Ozawa, a controversial and influential politician who conducted a number of party defections. Ozawa began his political career in Iwate (the northeastern part of Japan) as a LDP politician in the lower house. After traveling through different factions within the LDP, he decided to leave the party because of its lack of reformers. Consequently, he and his followers decided to defect from the LDP in 1993 and establish the Japan Renewal Party and later the New Frontier Party. Particularly, the latter was the merger of five small parties with diverse ideological ranges. For those reasons, commentators often criticized Ozawa as opportunistic and inconsistent reformer. As an ex-LDP politician, he pursues constitutional revision on one hand and at the same time opposes the increase in the consumption tax as a progressive.

When only considering the district-level ENP in his district, it tends to exhibit a close race between two competitors. For example, the Iwate 4 in the 2014 general election featured a competition between Ozawa (Liberal party) and two others, producing an ENP of 2.58. Ozawa finished the race as a top candidate with 47.8%. In the next election where he stood from Iwate 3, the competition became even more intense, featuring the one-on-one race between Ozawa (this time standing as Independents) and an LDP candidate, producing the ENP of 1.96. He was able to defeat the LDP candidate with 57.4% votes. In this way, even though the within-district ENP tells us of a decent level of a two-partyc ompeititon, national-level ENP turns out to inflate because he stands as his new splinter party that is small in size or independent.

Similarly, Yuichiro Tamaki from Kagawa 2 in the 2017 election featured a close competition with two other candidates (LDP and JCP, respectively), producing an ENP of 2.11. Belonging to a Party of Hope (splinter party of DPJ) at the time, he was able to get the seat with 55.5% of the vote. In the next election in 2021, this time he competed in the same district by establishing a new splinter party

called Democratic Party for the People (splinter of CDP). Because he has already established enough personal reputation, he was able to singlehandedly win over the LDP candidate with 63.5% of votes (ENP=1.86). Again, his new splinter party, DPP, is a nationally minor party, currently holding 11 lower house seats (of which 6 was SMDs). These district-level races contribute to the inflation of national ENP as the new splinter party is nationally small.

One unique case with a slightly different mechanism than the above would be Okinawa. It is different in the sense that cultural distinctiveness and identity partially drive the political competition, inflating both at the district and national level ENP.

The average ENP of all Okinawan SMD districts between 1996 and 2017 was approximately 2,71, higher than the total SMD average of 2,56. The higher sf-ratio (0.452) compared to the national average (0.3972) also suggests that voters are moderately splitting their votes between the first and the second losers.

Although the recent elections (2017 and 2021) suggest CDP's effort to align itself with the Okinawan voters, producing somewhat sharper bipolar contests in particular districts, it will not contribute to the national two-party system. This is because of the persistent local strongholds protected by the Japan Communist Party and Social Democratic Party of Japan. The issues that are dealt with during election periods are almost always driven by region-specific matters such as the US military base in the islands. When it comes to particular policy stances, LDP candidates tend to pursue the status quo – which is to maintain the relationship with the US by preserving the military base in Okinawa. On the contrary, progressive parties such as JCP openly criticize the national policies, effectively appealing to a wider range of voters. Besides JCP and SDP, independents such as Denny Tamaki – a local

celebrity who entered to politics– have successfully defeated LDP candidates. Denny stood in Okinawa 3 in the 2017 lower house election, successfully finishing as the winner with 57.9% of votes (ENP=2.01). However, once in the national Diet, his regionalist ideologies hardly matched with other national parties, occasionally matching with minor parties (e.g., Liberal Party). Nonetheless, this districts-level two-party competition ends up in inflating the effective number of parties nationally.

It is also one of the least penetrated territories by subnational LDP. The average prefectural LDP seat share over the past 20 years was 0.25 compared to the total average of 0.496. The prefectural governors have persistently been non-LDP politicians. Particularly, the former Okinawan governor Takeshi Onaga (between 2014 and 2018) was one of the exemplary figures who widely upheld the Okinawan identity as his central campaign rhetoric, which helped him to defeat the LDP-backed candidate.

In this way, a qualitative look at Japanese two-party districts revealed Japan's relatively loose partisan affiliation driven by the political norms (seniority) and institutional legacy (SNTV). Even though those "peripheral" districts feature close two-party races, defectors often stand as independents or small splinter parties, leading to an inflation of ENP at the national level. Two peaks in Figure 14 stresses my point about party defection/switching in the 1990s and early 2010s where the LDP and DPJ lost their allies respectively, producing numerous small splinter parties. From those consideration, it may be too early to assume the opposition consolidations and realistic chance of re-nationalization of the two largest parties.

Figure 14. Mean ENP (only SMDs) between 1996 and 2017

**Mean ENP Vote by Year**
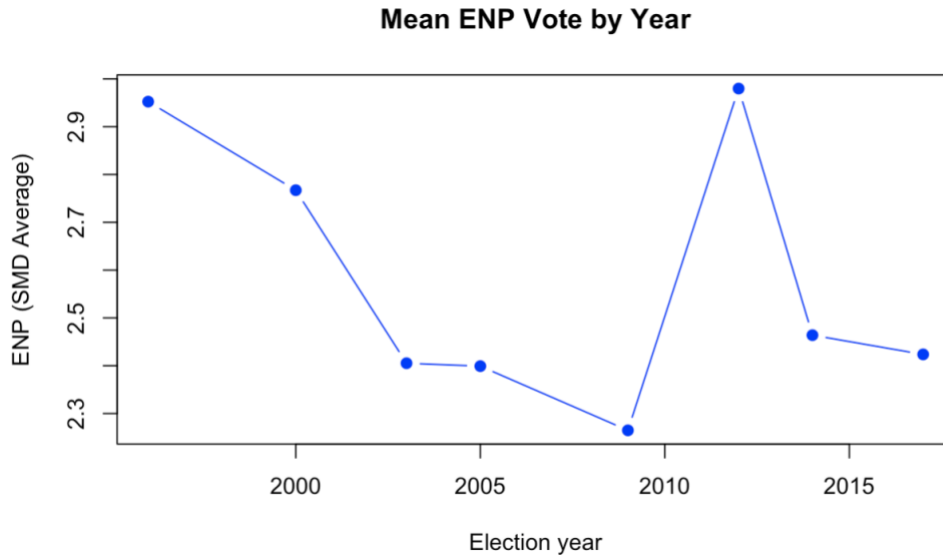


## Conclusion

This paper investigated an empirical puzzle of Duvergerian enclaves – territorially clustered two-party districts. Drawing mainly from two bodies of literature (electoral system and party nationalization), the present study analyzed 2384 SMDs in eight election years from 1996 to 2017. We divided the quantitative analysis in two steps – first with simple plots of best fits and secondly generating a predicted ENP with interactive terms. Together, the analysis suggested the importance of the urban/rural divide as a crucial predictor of party system both at district and national levels.

As earlier studies are concerned, I looked at the actor's unique adaptation between the SMD and PR (dual candidacy). Contrary to the initial expectation, the degree of dual candidacy ratio did not have an significant influence on the ENP, implying the low discriminatory power. At least the cross-sectional, longitudinal analysis thus far tells us that PR does not overly change the outcome of SMDs, from a particular point of observation (dual candidacy).

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Rather, the quantitative analysis shed more light on the interactive dynamics between rural/urban divide and peripheral/non-peripheral or subnational LDP majority/minority. The initial hypothesis of rural/peripheral districts turns out to be the most fertile ground of two-party districts. Regarding the subnational linkage, a high degree of subnational LDP seat share had a diminishing effect on ENP, implying that strong LDP supporters generally translate to higher partisan awareness of voters and politicians at the subnational level. This seems to influence the national competition, effectively constraining the initial number of unviable challengers.

Shifting from X-centered to Y-centered analysis, the last section explored the substantive meaning of Japan's "peripheral" districts and the process through which it nationally contributes to the multi-party system. A closer observation of district outcomes in this group revealed a relatively high number of defectors who later created their own splinter parties or stood as independents. Even though around 15% of the entire two-party fall into this group, the electoral outcome there only contributes to the inflation of ENP at the national level.

The future studies should tap into the lack of opposition consolidation more directly through statistical means as well as close case studies. The future reach should also take a deeper look at the subnational dimension as this study only used the LDP's prefectural seat share. Purely territorial representation of subnational politics such as governor or even upper house election could better tap into the dynamics between the two tiers.

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