

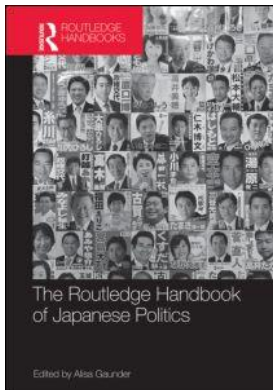
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### The Democratic Party of Japan

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# The Democratic Party of Japan

## Development, organization and programmatic profile

*Patrick Koellner*

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### Introduction

For more than five decades the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) dominated national politics in Japan. Except for a brief interlude, the LDP had been in government since 1955.<sup>1</sup> But finally, in August 2009, the LDP met the fate, which all dominant parties face eventually—they lose power. While the LDP had briefly experienced a loss of power in 1993/94, it still remained the largest party in parliament and, profiting from fissures within the then governing coalition, was soon able to assume the reins of power again. The blow which the LDP received at the hands of the voters in 2009 was, however, more devastating. In a landslide election, the LDP succumbed not only to its main challenger, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), but also lost nearly two-thirds of the seats it had held before in the Lower House. In effect, the tables got completely turned as a consequence of the 2009 election, with the DPJ becoming by far the biggest party in parliament (but choosing to govern with two small coalition partners to secure a working majority also in the Upper House).

If the LDP was always destined to lose power some day, it was hardly preordained that the DPJ would be the party to replace it. The DPJ's road to power was a winding one. The party repeatedly faced major challenges, experienced numerous internal problems and suffered electoral setbacks. Still, in the end the party prevailed. What accounts for the eventual success of the DPJ? Focusing on domestic and intra-party affairs, at least four main factors can be suggested:

- First, the party's ideological flexibility and adaptability, which in turn facilitated the absorption of diverse political groups in the course of time.
- Second, the failure of a number of other opposition parties to stick together and to develop into other genuine alternatives to the LDP.
- Third, the increasing "calcification" of the LDP itself, which by the second half of the new millennium's first decade proved unable to offer attractive visions and leadership personnel.
- Last but not least, the introduction of a mixed-member majoritarian electoral system for the Lower House of the Diet, which propelled district-level competition in the direction of two-party politics.

In this chapter we touch upon these factors in the context of an analytical survey covering the DPJ's development, organizational setup and programmatic profile.

## The “old” DPJ

The origins of the DPJ can be traced to the mid-1990s. The 1994 introduction of a mixed-member majoritarian electoral system for the Lower House, under which 300 of (then) 500 members of the Diet's first chamber would henceforth get elected in single-member districts (SMDs), put pressure on smaller parties to unite. Leaders of the Social Democrats (SDPJ, later SDP)<sup>2</sup> and the New Party Harbinger (NPH, *Shintō Sakigake*) began in late 1995 to engage in talks with a view to joining forces before the next general election, expected to take place in 1996. Within the SDPJ, in particular the right wing of the party pushed the idea of a party merger, an idea that was also supported by various unions backing the party. On the other hand, more orthodox SDPJ Diet members opposed such a move, fearing that it would (further) dilute the party's identity.<sup>3</sup>

Within the NPH, opposition to a simple party merger also existed. A number of its Diet members remained allergic to the SDPJ and thus strove either for a broader alliance of progressive forces or for an alliance with potential LDP renegades and parts of the New Frontier Party (NFP, *Shinshintō*), the biggest opposition party at the time. The prime protagonists of the latter scheme were, on the one hand, the NPH's secretary general Hatoyama Yukio, a wealthy fourth-generation Diet member—his great-grandfather Kazuo had been speaker of the (Imperial) Lower House, his grandfather Ichirō had co-founded the LDP and served from 1954 to 1956 as prime minister, his father Ichirō had been foreign minister<sup>4</sup>—and, on the other hand, Funada Hajime from the NFP, who also hailed from a well-known political dynasty. Two other prominent Diet members, popular health and welfare minister Kan Naoto from the NPH and Yukio's younger brother Kunio from the NFP, also expressed their interest in joining the new party. Still, substantial skepticism regarding the rationale and prospects of the envisaged party remained. Ex-premier Nakasone Yasuhiro likened the party-in-the-making to “soft ice filled with sweet words such as love and fraternity, which would melt as soon as the sun came out” (*Japan – Wirtschaft, Politik, Gesellschaft*, August 1996: 396).

Party-founding preparations accelerated in the summer of 1996: while Funada eventually decided to remain with the NFP, Hatoyama left the NPH and gathered like-minded Diet members around him. As for party profile, Hatoyama and his allies outlined the following somewhat lofty goals:

- a society led by citizens, not by bureaucrats;
- politics characterized by cooperation between politicians and citizens, not by collusion between politicians and bureaucrats;
- decentralization of government aimed at fostering the participation of citizens;
- the implementation of welfare reforms putting people's dignity first;
- educational reforms in tune with the demands of the twenty-first century;
- and a “foreign policy of trust” that is heard by the world (*Japan – Wirtschaft, Politik, Gesellschaft*, October 1996: 513).

Fifty-seven Diet members finally joined the new party, which was founded on 28 September 1996 under the name of “Democratic Party of Japan.” In the end, former SDPJ Diet members constituted the biggest group within the new party: 35 of them joined the DPJ—the SDPJ never recovered from this bloodletting. The NPH also lost 15 of their Diet members to the DPJ, including Hatoyama Yukio and Kan who became the party's first two co-leaders (*daihyō*,

literally “representative”). The rest of the DPJ’s Diet members hailed mainly from the small Citizen Action League (Shimin rīgu) but also included Hatoyama Kunio.<sup>5</sup> As the DPJ did not immediately receive state subsidies, the Hatoyama brothers financed from their own coffers the party’s infrastructure and the campaign activities of DPJ candidates running in the upcoming general election.<sup>6</sup> The DPJ started as the third largest party in the Diet, though trailing the LDP and the NFP by far. The DPJ retained this position after the October 1996 Lower House election, in which the party obtained exactly the same number of seats that it had held before.

Hatoyama and Kan envisaged the DPJ as citizen-oriented in terms of both policies and organization. There was however less agreement between the two co-leaders, and indeed within the party as a whole, as to whether the DPJ should vehemently oppose government policies or whether it should selectively seek cooperation in order to influence legislation. Differences also emerged with respect to how close the party should be to unions and with respect to whom it should ally in the Diet. As a matter of fact, all of these questions continued to fuel intra-party debates and remained essentially unanswered or were subject to differing answers in the years to come. Moreover, the initial dual leadership constellation proved increasingly brittle. At least this was resolved when Kan got elected sole party leader in 1997.

### The DPJ between 1998 and 2005: expansion and setbacks

The founding of the DPJ had been seen by many observers as an *ad hoc* project motivated by the need to get together a critical mass of Diet members before the next general election. Yet, despite existing internal frictions, the party stuck together until 1998, when the dissolution of the NFP provided the DPJ with the opportunity to absorb four of the resulting splinter parties. The merger of these parties into the DPJ took place on 27 April 1998. That day marked the founding of the “new DPJ”—as the party at first called itself to differentiate itself from the “old” DPJ—and serves as the starting point of official DPJ chronologies (cf. Hyde 2009: 55). Kan Naoto became the party’s first leader.

Despite being by now the biggest opposition party, the DPJ defined itself as the “third force” in Japan’s party system, alongside the LDP and the SDP. In slightly more concrete terms, the Democrats proclaimed themselves a “liberal alternative” to the established parties. Taking as a reference point the “third way” approach then propagated by leading social democratic parties in Europe (cf. Giddens 2010), the DPJ declared that it would travel the “democratic road of the middle.” In programmatic terms, the DPJ embraced a comprehensive, European-kind of understanding of liberalism, which combined a strong market orientation with a commitment to protect human and citizen rights. To this combination the party added a touch of multilateralist thinking, as reflected in the DPJ’s stance on foreign and security policy.

In the July 1998 Upper House election the DPJ was able to gain nine additional seats, while the LDP suffered a setback and remained short of a majority in the second chamber. The DPJ subsequently scored a symbolic victory, when opposition parties jointly voted for Kan as prime minister. Though the LDP used its majority in the Lower House to make Obuchi Keizō the new premier, Kan’s election in the second chamber gave further credence to the challenger status of the DPJ. In more substantial terms, the DPJ managed in the summer and fall of 1998 to use the LDP’s lack of an Upper House majority to shape legislation aimed at revitalizing Japan’s battered financial system. For the first time, the DPJ was able to put its stamp on important legislative matters and demonstrate that it could do more than just obstruct (cf. Furukawa 2002; Schoppa 2006a: 126–28). Yet, in 1999 the ruling LDP enticed two opposition parties—the New Kōmeitō and the Liberal Party (LP)—into entering a coalition, thus depriving the DPJ of its leverage and shattering the party’s dream of forming a grand opposition alliance along the lines of the Italian “olive tree” model.<sup>7</sup>

The DPJ tried hard in the following years to consolidate its position as the LDP's main challenger. The Democrats frequently matched government bills with alternative ones and undertook efforts to make its leading personnel better known to the public. In 1999 the DPJ started to put together shadow cabinets, demonstrating that it had the personnel needed to govern given the chance (*Asahi shinbun*, 8 October 1999: 2). Yet, such attempts to increase public trust were time and again torpedoed by visible discord within the DPJ regarding important issues such as constitutional revision, administrative reform, the future of the U.S.-Japan alliance, anti-terror legislation or the participation of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) in UN peace-keeping operations. Moreover, controversies continued concerning how close the party's relations with unions should be.<sup>8</sup> The DPJ leadership tried to paper over existing cleavages by:

- resorting to demands and appeals that everyone inside the DPJ could agree to—Hatoyama, for instance, pledged in 2000 to fight the “four monsters” tormenting Japan, namely growing authoritarianism and conservatism, large-scale waste of tax-payers' money, the tendency to “blindly follow” the U.S., and the decline of ethics among politicians and bureaucrats (*Japan Times*, 17 January 2000: 2);
- adopting lowest-common-denominator positions (or vague ones when no intra-party compromise could be found);
- avoiding discussions at party congresses, and;
- balancing factions in terms of proportion-based appointments to party posts.

Nevertheless, the DPJ's lack of unity was plain to see, raising questions about its ability to govern. It also did not help that the DPJ experienced in a few years time numerous changes in leadership (cf. Table 3.1) and challenges to incumbent party heads. In fall 1999, Kan, whose popularity had plummeted partly due to an extramarital affair, got replaced by Hatoyama Yukio, whose leadership abilities in turn were frequently called into question by party colleagues.

Despite its internal problems the DPJ managed to stay together. The party's Diet members seemed to understand that if they did not hang together, they were likely to hang separately. In terms of inter-party competition, the DPJ benefited between 1998 and 2001 from the far-from-stellar performance of the ruling LDP and from the inability of other opposition parties to move beyond their particular niches or, indeed, to stay together at all. The June 2000 general election, in which the DPJ increased their Lower House seats from 95 to 127, showed that the DPJ could bank on substantial urban support and was able to tap into the continuously growing group of

Table 3.1 DPJ leaders since 1996

Party leader(s)	Time in office
Hatoyama Yukio and Kan Naoto	28 September 1996–18 September 1997
Kan Naoto (“old” DPJ)	18 September 1997–27 April 1998
Kan Naoto (“new” DPJ)	27 April 1998–25 September 1999
Hatoyama Yukio	25 September 1999–10 December 2002
Kan Naoto	10 December 2002–18 May 2004
Okada Katsuya	18 May 2004–17 September 2005
Maehara Seiji	17 September 2005–7 April 2006
Ozawa Ichirō	7 April 2006–16 May 2009
Hatoyama Yukio	16 May 2009–4 June 2010
Kan Naoto	4 June 2010–

Source: Author's compilation.

non-aligned voters. The election, however, also underlined that the Democrats lacked strong roots in rural areas.

An altogether different obstacle to the DPJ's ambitions emerged in 2001, when Koizumi Junichirō became prime minister. Promising major structural reforms, Koizumi managed not only to steal the thunder from the DPJ's core political agenda but also revived the electoral fortunes of the LDP by drawing many non-aligned voters into the party's camp. On the coattails of Koizumi's popularity, in July 2001 the LDP obtained its best Upper House election result since 1992. The DPJ on the other hand stagnated. The party gained only three more seats, falling far short of its election goal of coming within striking distance of the LDP. Worryingly for the DPJ, the LDP, carried by the "Koizumi boom," recovered ground in urban bastions of the Democrats such as Tokyo and Osaka.

As Hatoyama and many of his colleagues in principle supported the structural reforms propagated by Koizumi, the Democrats had more difficulties than ever to present themselves as a genuine alternative to the LDP. Other than demanding that Japan's social safety net should be expanded in order to cushion the social repercussions of structural reforms, the Democrats provided little indication of how a DPJ government would differ from an LDP one. Still, in 2002 the DPJ agreed to closely cooperate with other parties in order to topple the LDP. In particular, close relations developed between the DPJ and Ozawa Ichirō's LP, which in 1999/2000 had been part of the governing coalition. DPJ leader Hatoyama actively pursued the integration of the two parties, hoping that an eventual merger would bring Japan closer to a two-party system.

Yet it was not Hatoyama, who saw the envisaged merger through. In December 2002 he resigned as party head, taking the responsibility for rushing negotiations with the LP without having properly consulted other DPJ top brass. The subsequent leadership contest pitted Kan Naoto against Okada Katsuya, an ex-MITI bureaucrat and a rising star within the party. Kan prevailed and eventually persuaded skeptics within the DPJ that an entry of Ozawa, who had a track record of forming and then splitting parties, and his party did make strategic sense. Kan argued that an enlarged DPJ faced better chances to compete with the LDP and that the DPJ would also benefit from Ozawa's proven campaigning know-how in rural areas (cf. Hyde 2009: 56–58).

The October 2003 entry of the LP into the DPJ made it ever more likely that party competition in the years to come would center on the LDP and the DPJ. Notably, the latter was by now no longer the center-left party it had been at the time of its original founding in 1996. As a consequence of absorbing more conservatively oriented political groupings (including the LP) and individual candidates and, on the other hand, weeding out repeatedly unsuccessful progressive candidates (cf. Miura et al. 2005), the DPJ moved straight into the ideological center of the party system.<sup>9</sup> By the early years of the twenty-first century, the DPJ had basically become a centrist, "broad-tent" party.

The November 2003 general election, following on the heels of the DPJ's merger with LP, endowed the Democrats with an additional 30 seats, bringing the party's seat total in the Lower House to 177 (compared to the LDP's 237). The DPJ not only won in 105 SMDs but also garnered for the first time more proportional representation votes than the LDP. Again, the DPJ did particularly well in urban areas. The Democrats arguably improved their standing in the eyes of voters by being the first party to adopt a full-fledged election manifesto spelling out the party's governmental aims plus relevant timelines and budgetary implications. The DPJ manifesto contained a mixture of well-known positions (breaking with centralism and bureaucracy-led politics), populist promises (toll-free expressways), and pragmatic but not necessarily popular ideas (raising the value-added tax to feed the pension system).

The DPJ also did well under its new party leader Okada—Kan had resigned over a minor scandal involving unpaid contributions to the national pension system—in the 2004 Upper

House election. The DPJ won 12 additional seats and garnered more votes than the LDP. Premier Koizumi then, however, caught the DPJ wrong-footed when he called a snap election, which he turned into a referendum on conflicting intra-LDP stances on postal privatization (and ultimately political reform in general). Koizumi's masterfully orchestrated and executed election campaign produced a landslide win for the LDP in September 2005. The DPJ lost more than 60 seats while the LDP came close to achieving a two-thirds majority in the Lower House (cf. Hyde 2009: 58–59).

### The DPJ under Ozawa (2006–09)<sup>10</sup>

The election fiasco and the following fairly brief reign of the young new party leader Maehara Seiji<sup>11</sup> increased the willingness of DPJ Diet members to put the party's fate into the hands of the experienced but controversial Ozawa (ibid.: 60–61). In the April 2006 leadership contest Ozawa easily won against Kan. Apparently, DPJ Diet members placed more faith in Ozawa to deal with the government's Lower House "supermajority." This challenge became somewhat less daunting in fall 2006 when Abe Shinzō became premier. Abe proved unable to fill the vacuum left by Koizumi's departure from the scene. His ideology-driven political priorities were not echoed by voters interested in "bread-and-butter issues." Moreover, Abe was forced onto the defensive by a string of scandals involving cabinet members and by the bungled management of a large scandal over massive losses of data on pension dues payments. In particular, the latter was adroitly used by the DPJ to pillory the LDP.

Benefiting from the government's self-made problems and from intensive campaign preparations, Ozawa mastered his first big challenge in the electoral realm, the July 2007 Upper House election.<sup>12</sup> The DPJ won 60 seats, becoming the largest party in the second chamber and relieving the government of its control there. The election showed that the DPJ could also succeed in rural districts. The pain inflicted by Koizumi's reforms on rural economies contributed to a backlash against the LDP among rural voters, especially among those engaged in farming. The DPJ, which had targeted farmers as one core voter group, profited from this backlash. Ozawa also did not shy away from populism to gain votes. In its manifesto, the DPJ pledged to guarantee all pension benefits regardless of lost pension data, a massively beefed-up child allowance, and comprehensive income support for agricultural households (cf. George Mulgan 2011).

"Divided government" after the 2007 Upper House election led to political stalemate. Overall, tactical considerations rather than a clear-cut policy agenda drove the DPJ's parliamentary behavior until the 2009 Lower House election. In contrast to the situation in 1998, the DPJ was not able after its 2007 election triumph to put its stamp on important legislative matters. The party, however, managed to effectively stall nearly every government-sponsored bill and also kept on criticizing the government on one issue after another (Maeda 2010: 10–11). Whether it was lack of patience or doubts about the reliability of his party colleagues which led DPJ leader Ozawa to tentatively agree in November 2007 with then premier Fukuda Yasuo about forming a grand coalition is unclear. In any case, other DPJ leaders, who had not been fully informed about the talks, made Ozawa turn away from the agreement.

While Ozawa's assumption of the top party post in 2006 had clearly brought new dynamism to the DPJ, the episode in fall 2007 showed that Ozawa could also easily form the Democrats' Achilles heel. Still, given his otherwise impressive track record since 2006 and his proven electioneering skills, DPJ Diet members confirmed Ozawa as party leader in September 2008. Just a few months later, however, Ozawa felt compelled to resign after having been subject to severe public criticism over a scandal involving illegal donations to his political fund management group. The subsequent leadership contest in May 2009 saw Hatoyama and Okada vying for the DPJ's

top post. While Okada enjoyed greater popular support, Hatoyama was perceived as better able to hold not only the DPJ but also a potential government coalition together (*Nihon keizai shimbun*, 17 May 2009: 2). In the end, Hatoyama, with support from Ozawa, defeated Okada.

### Governing party at last

The general election taking place some three months later confirmed what voter surveys had already indicated: a massive desire for political change (cf. Maeda 2010). The DPJ tapped into this desire by making “change of government” (*seiken kōtai*) the central slogan of its campaign. And a change of government Japanese voters got. While the strong majoritarian component of the mixed electoral system for the Lower House had enabled the LDP in 2005 to score a landslide victory, this time the DPJ profited disproportionately. Overall, the DPJ’s member strength swelled from 112 to 308. Together with its coalition partners, the SDP and the People’s New Party (*Kokuminshintō*), the DPJ came close to a two-thirds majority in the Lower House.

Arguably, the DPJ’s gaining of power was made possible by a combination of factors: First, Japan’s dominant party, the LDP, had become “calcified.” Its wearing out in terms of both substance and personnel became (again) plain to see after Koizumi had departed the scene in 2006 and was perhaps best symbolized by the fast succession of the three prime ministers following him. Second, voters had increasingly become disillusioned about Koizumi’s reforms and unnerved by the LDP’s neglect of growing social disparities in Japan. Third, the LDP’s erstwhile strong roots in rural areas—which had borne the brunt of Koizumi’s cutting down on public works projects—had weakened. And fourth, the DPJ had not only proven their standing power as the LDP’s prime challenger but had also meticulously prepared the election, *inter alia*, by carefully selecting attractive candidates in both urban and rural areas. Note that only the last-mentioned factor was of the DPJ’s own making. The 2009 general election thus confirmed the old insight that even a less-than-shining opposition can win an election if the public is sufficiently discontented with the incumbent government.

The 2009 election brought about the first electoral transition from one large party to another in the postwar era. It also led to the biggest change in the Lower House’s composition since 1947. Out of the 158 newcomers to the Diet, no less than 143 hailed from the DPJ. (Many of the Democrats’ new faces gravitated toward Ozawa whose group reportedly swelled to around 120 Diet members.) Acknowledging Ozawa’s important role in the party’s triumph, DPJ leader Hatoyama subsequently made him party secretary general. Given this powerful post, his substantial intra-party following, and his manifold connections, Ozawa was poised to remain an extremely influential figure within the DPJ and beyond.

### The organizational setup of the DPJ<sup>13</sup>

According to the DPJ’s statutes, the party’s supreme decision-making body is the party congress, which is attended by Diet members and delegates from the party’s regional associations. In reality, the annual ordinary party congresses are mostly ceremonial. Decisions taken by the party leadership are, as a rule, accepted by acclamation. It is not unusual for party congresses to last only a few hours. General meetings of the party’s Diet members, which take place a few times every year, are mainly used for briefing parliamentarians about the party’s current political agenda and tactics. Only when extraordinary leadership elections are on the agenda, do such meetings become important decision-making forums.

The day-to-day running of the DPJ is overseen by the party’s secretary general. He is also in charge of the party’s finances and coordinates candidate nominations before national elections.



When the DPJ became the governing party in 2009, the powers of the newly-appointed secretary general Ozawa Ichirō were extended beyond party matters. Among other things, he got heavily involved in determining national budget priorities. For support, Ozawa established the post of acting secretary general and installed 14 deputy secretary generals dealing with different policy areas. These deputies were to screen national and local interest groups' petitions, with Ozawa having the last word as to which petitions should be dealt with. In the context of restructuring central party organization, Ozawa also streamlined the DPJ's executive board which no longer includes an acting party head and the customary array of party vice "representatives" (cf. Kakizaki 2009). It remains to be seen whether this vast concentration of power will continue after Ozawa's term in office.

The DPJ's headquarters, which had 76 staffers in early 2009, supports the party leader and other high-ranking officials. Party staff also liaise with interest groups and run public relations. The biggest department within party headquarters used to be the policy research committee, which engaged in preparing policy proposals. To concentrate the deliberation of policy matters in the executive, the DPJ leadership decided after the 2009 election win—against some internal resistance—to abolish the committee (*Nihon keizai shinbun*, 3 October 2009: 2).

Hatoyama, Kan and others involved in the founding of the "old" DPJ, shared the vision that the party should differentiate itself from other parties by a network-type of organization bringing together citizen groups, social movements, and local politicians (Igarashi 1996: 104–6; Kan and Hatoyama 1997: 131–35). The Democrats never quite managed to fulfill this vision. While many local politicians joined the party's ranks, cooperation with citizen groups, let alone social movements, remained confined to a number of local and regional elections and to successful mobilization efforts of individual Diet members. Overall, the party struggled in its efforts to develop deep roots. Certainly at the beginning of the twenty-first century the DPJ could not rely on a tightly-knit network of party branches. Aware of their problems, the DPJ invested more in local-level organization after the 2003 general election and also tried to recruit "next-generation leaders" to invigorate its women and youth activities.

The results of these efforts have been mixed at best. By 2008, there were around 550 DPJ branches countrywide. Yet, the DPJ is still dependent to a substantial degree on the organizational prowess of its Diet members and candidates. A number of these have set up (or brought into the party existing) personal support organizations (*kōenkai*)<sup>14</sup> or continue to rely on organizational support from unions at various levels. While the official number of DPJ members rose to 270,000 in mid-2008, this figure includes "supporters" (*shijisha*) who pay a reduced fee, enabling them to vote in regular leadership contests.<sup>15</sup> Core DPJ membership remained fairly flat between 2004 and 2008, ranging from 30,000 to 40,000 (*Daily Yomiuri Online*, 4 January 2009).

### *Factionalism DPJ style*

Most but not all DPJ Diet members belong to one or more intra-party groups. For the greater part, these groups have only been loosely coupled. Two factions,<sup>16</sup> however, the *Yūai kurabu* ("fraternity club") centering around former Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) Diet members and the *Shinseikyoku kondankai* ("new government discussion circle") centering around former Social Democrats, were fairly institutionalized at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Koellner 2004). While the *Yūai kurabu* inherited from the DSP close relations with private-sector unions, the *Shinseikyoku kondankai* maintained close relations with public-sector unions. These links explain some of the interests of the two factions, e.g. the focus of the *Yūai kurabu* on energy policy (relevant for unions in the electricity-generating and the electronics sector) and on environmental policy (relevant for unions in the automotive sector).

As the number of former Socialists and Democratic Socialists among DPJ Diet members dwindled over time, so did the importance of these two factions. On the other hand, party newcomers—including Ozawa himself—set up their own intra-party groups, further increasing the patchwork character of the DPJ. Also, aspiring DPJ Diet members such as Maehara and Noda Yoshihiko used factional support to shore up their standing within the party (cf. Hyde 2009: 62–69). Tellingly, factional activities have tended to become more virulent before leadership contests. While dual membership makes counting faction members difficult, Table 3.2 provides an idea of the DPJ’s factional landscape as of fall 2009.

DPJ factions have been used as mutual-aid organizations, especially for less experienced Diet members, and as venues for exchanging information. Moreover, faction membership can convey the feeling of belonging to a group of like-minded politicians. DPJ factions can also serve to articulate views and positions in areas of central interest to individual factions. Different views on constitutional revision and Japan’s military profile, for example, frequently pitted the former Socialists against other factions during the party’s early years. Inter-factional conflict also occurred over economic policy, extending voting rights to foreign residents, the legalization of the Japanese national flag and anthem, or the protection of civil rights. By resorting to vaguely worded official statements, party leaders have tried to gloss over diverging intra-party standpoints. In consequence, the DPJ’s policy-oriented profile has often lacked in clarity.

Given the existence of substantial internal conflicts, what has kept the DPJ together? From the beginning of the party until more recently, DPJ leaders helped to integrate the various factions by means of “balancing” the distribution of posts. For example, the numerous but mostly ceremonial posts of party vice chairs went to senior members of the different parties involved in forming and enlarging the DPJ. Individual party leaders also took care to allocate the more important posts of secretary general, chairs of the committees on policy research, Diet affairs and electoral strategy, and of the Upper House caucus to different groups.

Of arguably even greater importance for keeping the party together have been the centripetal forces of the mixed-member majoritarian electoral system (MMS). In contrast to the previously used single nontransferable voting system (SNTV), under MMS candidates of the same party do not compete against each other in local Lower House districts. Thus, only when the LDP had no incumbent or candidate in a given district, did a window of opportunity emerge for potential DPJ renegades. The institutional logic of MMS explains why discontented conservative DPJ Diet members shied away from turning their back on the party. Moreover, under MMS incumbents and candidates in SMDs vastly increase their electoral chances if they belong to a large party. This helps to explain why during the DPJ’s time in opposition no splits of whole factions from the party and ensuing establishments of new parties occurred.

Table 3.2 DPJ factions (as of September 2009)

Ozawa group (Isshinkai)	around 120 members
Hatoyama group	around 45 members
Kan group	around 40 members
Maehara group (Ryōunkai)	around 35 members
Noda group (Kaseikai)	around 30 members
Ex-DSP group (Yūai kurabu)	around 30 members
Ex-SDPJ group (Shinseikyoku kondankai)	around 25 members

Source: *Nihon keizai shinbun*, 5 September 2009: 4.

## The DPJ's political menu: core notions and changes over time

Another feature of the DPJ making hanging together easier has been the party's programmatic flexibility and adaptability. Under the label of "liberalism," the DPJ initially pursued a comprehensive political agenda, including both market and decentralization-oriented reform initiatives and a strong commitment to protecting and enhancing citizen and human rights. The basic idea underlying this agenda was to give greater prominence to market mechanisms, lower levels of government and self-organizing citizens. The core elements of the DPJ's political agenda were supplemented with more "social-democratic" ideas on how to expand the existing social security system, with environment-related demands and, last but not least, with a multilateral and even "globalist" orientation with respect to foreign and security affairs (cf. Koellner 2011).

The DPJ's "market-friendly" core economic agenda of deregulation, attracting more foreign investment, eliminating "wasteful" public-works spending and curtailing the discretionary power of Japan's national bureaucracy went hand in glove with the party's call for major decentralization. From early on, the DPJ espoused the "subsidiarity" principle, arguing that decisions should not necessarily be taken at the central government level but at whatever level of government (or societal self-organization) was appropriate. Leading Democrats have always believed in a close link between the empowerment of regions and the empowerment of ordinary citizens.<sup>17</sup>

To the dismay of the DPJ, decentralization, deregulation and cutting back on public work projects were put on the official government agenda in 2001, when Koizumi became premier. To some degree, the DPJ was still able to differentiate itself from the LDP by emphasizing the need for expanding the social safety net, protecting human and citizen rights and by clamoring for a less U.S. focused foreign and security policy (cf. Miura *et al.* 2005; Uekami 2010). At least from the perspective of the DPJ, there is no contradiction between continuing close security relations with the U.S. and, on the other hand, according due weight to the United Nations and its operations. While the DPJ officially renounces the right to engage in collective self-defense (cf. DPJ 1998), this remains in fact a controversial issue and has been subject over time to different interpretations by individual DPJ leaders. Overall, as Boyd and Samuels (2008: 45) note, security policy preferences are fairly broadly distributed among Democratic Diet members.<sup>18</sup>

Survey data indicate that the DPJ does not embrace the kind of nationalistic attitudes that can be found in some pockets of the LDP. For example, the "dominant view" within the DPJ holds that Japan was the aggressor in the Pacific War. A majority of the DPJ Lower House members surveyed in 2005 argued that Japan's actions in that war were "mistaken." The same survey also indicated widespread opposition among DPJ Diet members against prime ministerial visits to the Yasukuni shrine (which honors Japan's war dead) and more support for the establishment of a national secular war memorial than in the LDP (*ibid.*: 44).

When Ozawa became DPJ leader in 2006, the party's political menu underwent some changes. In the face of increasing "reform fatigue" in Japan, propelled in part by rising concern about growing social disparities, Ozawa began to favor more distributive approaches to government spending. Sensing a change in popular attitudes, he effectively shifted from his earlier focus on small government to a defense of the status quo. Under Ozawa, the DPJ as a whole moved away from some of the neo-liberal ideas, which the party had at first propagated, and increasingly positioned itself as the champion of the losers of market opening and deregulation.

The DPJ manifesto for the 2009 general election took up some well-known party themes such as decentralization and breaking with bureaucracy-led government. On top, it included generous policy pledges aimed a different groups of voters such as families (raising monthly child allowances, providing lump-sum childbirth benefits, waiving senior high school fees), pensioners (solving existing pension-record problems, improving medical and long-term care),

farmers (providing household-based income support), and drivers (abolishing or reducing the tax on gasoline, eliminating highway tolls) (DPJ 2009; George Mulgan 2011; Uekami 2010). To finance all this, the DPJ proposed to eliminate wasteful public spending and to use “hidden reserves” buried in special accounts.

## Conclusion

The DPJ’s victory in 2009 endowed the party not only with the opportunity—and indeed challenge—to make good on its campaign promises<sup>19</sup> but more generally to reshape the political arena in Japan in light of its programmatic ideas. If the DPJ’s road to power had been a winding one, the challenges of governing are no less daunting. In view of two small coalition partners bent on putting their stamp on only a few but fairly contentious policy issues, new political funding scandals embroiling yet again Ozawa but also Hatoyama himself, mounting questions about the leadership abilities of the premier, and strained relations with the U.S., the DPJ-led government experienced a shaky starting phase.

Yet, the DPJ’s performance as governing party can only be truly evaluated after the fact. While the vagaries of the Lower House’s current electoral system, in combination with the increasing fickleness of voters, make it unlikely that the DPJ will ever become as dominant as the LDP once was, the Democrats can still hope to make their dent on Japanese politics. Certainly, the party’s plans for reshaping the executive-legislative nexus in Japan along the lines of the (idealized) Westminster model, and for transforming the hitherto existing politicians-bureaucrats symbiosis into a genuine principal-agent relationship are rather ambitious (cf. George Mulgan 2011; Iio 2010). But then perhaps only big ambitions have the potential to make a lasting difference.

## Notes

- 1 For explanations of the long rule of the LDP see Reed (2011), Koellner (2006).
- 2 The Japan Socialist Party (JSP) changed its name in English to the Social Democratic Party of Japan (SDPJ) in 1991. In 1996, the former JSP became the Social Democratic Party (Shakai Minshutō) and changed its English abbreviation to the SDP (Social Democratic Party) dropping “of Japan.”
- 3 In 1994, the SDPJ entered a coalition government with the LDP and the New Party Harbinger. As a price for the coalition, the SDPJ had to ditch many of its high-profile opposition demands, including an abrogation of the U.S.-Japan alliance treaty and the scrapping of Japan’s Self-Defense Forces (cf. Hyde 2009: 75–97). In consequence, the party lost much of its core identity and entered a spiral of decline, which reduced it to a minor political actor by the beginning of the twenty-first century.
- 4 For portraits of the Hatoyama political dynasty see Itoh (2003), Tawara (1997: ch. 1).
- 5 Admittance to the new party took place on an individual basis (cf. Hyde 2009: 50–54).
- 6 Reportedly, the Hatoyama brothers loaned around 1.5 billion yen (US\$16.5 million) to the DPJ (*Nikkei Weekly*, “New Government Special,” 21 September 2009: 1).
- 7 “Olive tree” (L’Ulivo) was a term used from 1995 to 2007 to describe several successive coalitions of center-left Italian political parties.
- 8 On DPJ-unions relations see Hyde (2009: ch. 4).
- 9 Based on ideological self-assessment surveys, Kabashima and Steel (2006: 14) show that the average DPJ Lower House member moved between 1998 and 2005 from slightly left of center into the center itself. In other words, a small but noticeable conservative shift took place among DPJ Lower House members in this period.
- 10 This section draws on Koellner (2011).
- 11 Maehara resigned in March 2006, taking responsibility for a scandal involving false allegations by a junior DPJ Diet member against a senior LDP politician.
- 12 Among other things, Ozawa carefully selected promising candidates in rural districts. For a discussion of Ozawa’s successful “ground-warfare strategy” and Abe’s failed “air-warfare strategy” in the run-up to the election see Itō (2006).

- 13 This section draws on Koellner (2011).
- 14 Notably, a number of DPJ Diet members “inherited” local political bastions and *kōenkai* from their fathers and other close relatives. While their share has more recently declined, “hereditary politicians” still accounted for 10.4 percent of the DPJ’s victorious candidates in 2009 (Nikkei.com, 13 August 2009).
- 15 In 2009 the annual supporter fee amounted to 2,000 yen (US\$ 22), compared to 6,000 yen for regular party membership ([www.dpj.or.jp/sub\\_link/volunteer/index.html](http://www.dpj.or.jp/sub_link/volunteer/index.html), accessed 23 September 2009).
- 16 “Intra-party groupings” and “factions” are used synonymously here. The latter term does not imply a high organizational degree of such groups as some conceptualizations do.
- 17 For a discussion of the DPJ’s early neo-liberal policy agenda see Schoppa (2006a).
- 18 For a recent discussion of the DPJ’s security policy profile see Easley *et al.* (2010).
- 19 As of spring 2010, the DPJ had only been able to deliver in some respects. Income compensation for farming households and monthly child allowances had been brought on the way and senior high school fees had been abolished. Budget constraints, however, prevented the DPJ-led government from abolishing the tax on gasoline and highways tolls were only eliminated in case of some select pilot projects.