*Agenda Power in the Japanese House of Representatives**

by

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I. Introduction

In this paper we provide evidence from Japan that bears on a general theory of agenda power in legislatures. By agenda power we mean the power to determine (a) which bills are considered in the plenary session of the legislature, and (b) restrictions on debate and amendment for these bills, when they are considered. While a substantial amount of work has focused on the second category of agenda power, including studies of special rules in the U.S. House (e.g., Sinclair forthcoming), closure in the U.K. House of Commons (e.g., Cox 1987; Dion 1997), and the guillotine in the French National Assembly (e.g., Huber 1996), there is very little on the first and arguably more fundamental sort of agenda power. This agenda power—the power to decide which bills will actually be considered on the floor of the legislature—is our focus here, and henceforth when we refer to 'agenda power' we shall mean this narrower conception.

In most parliamentary systems, most observers take for granted that the government "controls the agenda." That it generally does so—indeed, that it monopolizes the agenda—is argued explicitly by Döring (1995). Yet, there are exceptions to the government's agenda power even in parliamentary systems. In Denmark in the 1970s, for example, the government clearly lost control of the agenda on social issues, retaining control only over foreign and budgetary issues (Damgaard and Svenson 1989).

Here, we are particularly interested in factors that might *limit* the government's agenda power. Two institutional features of legislatures that can potentially lessen the ability of a government to get its way are bicameralism (Tsebelis and Money 1997) and a strong committee system (Strom 1990). An upper house can hinder the government's ability to push through its legislative programme if, for example, (1) it lacks a majority in the upper house or its majority is small; and (2) the upper house can block or delay legislation. A strong committee system can block

or slow a government's legislative progress if, for example, the opposition chairs some of these committees and chairs have significant agenda powers.[1]

Japan has both an upper house which has sometimes been under opposition control and a committee system in which the opposition sometimes secures chairs. We ask whether these features have allowed the opposition systematically to affect the government's agenda. We look in particular at two questions: (1) How large is the government's agenda (i.e., how many bills does it seek to push through to enactment), as a function of opposition institutional power (control of upper house and lower house committee chairs)? (2) How controversial is the government's agenda—i.e., how many bills do opposition parties oppose—again as a function of opposition institutional power?

Our results, based on analyses of the period 1977-96, show that the controversialness of the government's agenda in Japan declines when the opposition controls more lower-house committee chairs. Controversialness also declines—substantially—when the opposition holds a majority in the upper house. However, the size of the government's agenda, at least by our crude measure, is unaffected by changes in these two institutional features.

Our results provide the first systematic evidence that lower-house chairs *do* affect policy outcomes in Japan. They also demonstrate that even Japan's relatively weak upper house is still powerful enough to extract significant concessions from the government. More broadly, our work

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[1]. In the U.S., the committee system is often viewed as an autonomous brake on the majority party's ability to legislate, even though there are no opposition chairs. On how committees operate in America see, for example, Cater 1964; Polsby, Gallaher and Rundquist 1969; Dodd and Oppenheimer 1977; Shepsle 1978; Shepsle and Weingast 1987; Weingast and Marshall 1988.

is among the first to measure systematically the extent to which government agenda-setting is constrained by the opposition's institutional "veto" powers (cf. Tsebelis 1995).

II. The Model

To understand how the committee system and bicameralism may affect the government's ability to set the agenda, we make use of the spatial theory of voting as applied to committees.[2] The main actors in our model are the political parties and factions.[3] The political parties and factions play a game, in which the sequence of events is as follows: first, the parties and factions in government decide which bills will be submitted to committee; second, the parties and factions represented on the committee vote on whether to report the bill to the floor (we call this an *agenda-setting vote*); third, votes are held in the plenary session on each bill put on the floor agenda. Three assumptions are key in deriving our results:

> (A1) **The government has a monopoly on agenda-setting**. In other words, the parties and factions in government form an "agenda cartel:" They agree to decide the agenda in advance among themselves, by some procedure they have agreed upon, then vote as a bloc in support of that agenda in committee. We assume that cheating on this agreement—failing to support the introduction of a bill chosen by the agreed-upon procedure—results in

[2] Our model is developed elsewhere (Cox and McCubbins forthcoming) and thus we review only its key features and relevant results here. For earlier antecedents of this model, cf. Downs 1957, Black 1958, Kramer 1977. For the direct antecedent of our model, see Shepsle 1979.

[3]. If a party is without factions, the party itself is taken as a unitary actor. Otherwise, the component factions are taken as the unitary actors. In principle, the model can accommodate the case where a party with 50 members has 50 factions, each consisting of one person.

the fall of the government.[4] We also assume that each pivotal member of the government has a veto on the placement of bills on the agenda.

(A2) **The parties and factions in government have complete information about all parties' and factions' preferences**.

(A3) **Parties and factions value bills only as instruments to change policy outcomes, not as instruments to publicize their policy positions with the electorate**. This assumption rules out a government introducing a hopeless bill for purposes of highlighting its differences with the opposition. It may well be that governments in some countries do use bill introductions to stake out their ideological positions. But at least in Japan we assume that such a practice is of negligible frequency. Thus, the government introduces a bill only if it thinks it can thereby change policy for the better.

The importance of our model is that from the assumptions given above, one can derive several conclusions about the nature of bills put on the floor agenda. The first and most fundamental result is simply that the government never gets rolled. The general definition of a roll, applicable to a wide range of legislatures, is as follows: a party or coalition is rolled on an agenda-setting vote if a majority of the individual members of the party or coalition *unsuccessfully* oppose

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[4]. This assumption can be read as saying that there is an equilibrium in which the factions and parties in government play a "grim trigger" strategy against defections from the equilibrium path of play, with that path stipulating that the government agents decide the agenda among themselves and then support it in the House. Obviously, one could generate such an equilibrium in a repeated-game set-up; we do not here stipulate a particular model, simply requiring that the equilibrium have the characteristics stipulated.

the placement of a bill on the floor agenda. In the case of parliamentary systems with majority governments (including Japan), the general expectation is that the government will present a united front on all important votes, and thus win (since it holds a majority of seats). A roll in a parliamentary system thus can occur only if this general tendency of parliamentary governments to present united fronts breaks down. Our first assumption, A1, simply asserts that in the special case of agenda-setting votes the government's united front does not break down. Thus, our first result:

Proposition 1: The government is never rolled on agenda-setting votes.

This prediction is not particularly daring when there is a majority government in a parliamentary system. But it is more informative and controversial in other cases, such as a minority parliamentary government or for congressional majorities in a presidential system (on the latter, cf. Cox and McCubbins forthcoming).

Our next two predictions concern the frequency with which opposition parties and factions are rolled. There are two main ways in which an opposition party may avoid being rolled.

First, the party may happen to agree with the government—that is, to prefer the government's new bills to the status quo policies the government seeks to displace. In this case, it does not get rolled.[5] Thus, one predictor of an opposition party's roll rate is simply its ideological distance from the government (see appendix for a more formal statement of this proposition):

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[5]. Note that a party that cares only about final policy outcomes will vote against placing a bill b on the agenda if it prefers the status quo, if it is pivotal. If the party is not pivotal, we assume that it votes sincerely.

Proposition 2a: The further an opposition party is ideologically from the government, the more often it will be rolled.

Here, we assume that the Japanese parties can be arrayed along a single left-right continuum. In other words, the Japanese policy space is essentially unidimensional, in the sense that parties' voting patterns can be predicted well with a single scaling dimension. Given this additional simplifying assumption, a special case of opposition parties "agreeing" with governments arises when the government is not ideologically connected.[6] The LDP-JSP-Harbinger government was, for example, not connected. Two parties, Renewal and the NFP, were more conservative than the JSP, less conservative than the LDP, yet not in government. We shall call such parties *interior* opposition parties, because they lie within the range of ideological positions represented in the government. If assumption (A1) holds—in particular, pivotal members of the government can veto bills—and the policy space is dominated by a single dimension of conflict, then we should find that interior opposition parties are rarely rolled. To see why, consider the LDP-JSP-Harbinger government again. Only bills that *both* the LDP *and* the JSP find acceptable will be put on the agenda. Spatially, this means that only status quo points to the left of the JSP or to the right of the LDP will be the subject of bills. The point is, that the interior opposition parties should find all these bills acceptable, too.

A second way in which an opposition party may avoid being rolled is by exercising institutional veto or delay powers with which it is endowed. We speak here of powers above and beyond the opposition's raw voting strength on the floor, as this can by definition be overcome by a

[6] By "ideologically connected," we mean spatially adjacent on one dimension without any parties inbetween.

united majority government. The threat of delay or outright veto of government proposals should induce the government either to abandon the bills that are distasteful to the opposition or to amend them so as to make them acceptable to the opposition. The first strategy leads to a smaller agenda, the second to a less contentious agenda (where an agenda is defined as less contentious when it produces fewer opposition party rolls). Hence:

> **Proposition 2b**: When the opposition has greater institutional veto or delay powers, either the size of the government agenda, or its contentiousness, or both should decline.

III. The Legislative Process in Japan

A. Introduction of Bills

The Japanese Diet is composed of two houses—the House of Representatives and the House of Councillors (hereafter the lower house and the upper house, respectively). Ordinary Diet members are entitled to propose bills to the house to which they belong, if they are supported by a sufficient number of their colleagues (at least twenty members in the lower house and at least ten members in the upper house). In the case of a bill affecting the budget, the member must secure the support of fifty or more members of the lower house and twenty or more members of the upper house.

Some Diet members holding official positions may introduce bills without securing evidence of support. First, Diet committee chairmen can submit bills concerning matters under the jurisdiction of their committees. Second, the prime minister can submit bills on behalf of the cabinet.

B. Deliberation of Bills

When a bill is presented to the Diet, the presiding officer of the house concerned refers it to the committee under whose jurisdiction it falls. There is no evidence in the literature that referrals are strategic, as they sometimes are in the U.S.

The first committee action taken on the bill is to hear its purpose explained (either by the Diet member who introduced the bill or by the relevant cabinet minister). The committee then holds hearings and deliberates on the measure. At the conclusion of deliberation, committee members representing each parliamentary party may express their views on the bill. Following this, the committee votes on the bill. If the bill passes, the chairman submits a report on the deliberation and result to the presiding officer of the house concerned. The bill is then put on the order of the day of a plenary sitting.

In the plenary session, the committee chairman first presents the committee report. Questions regarding the bill may then be asked, and debate follows. With the close of the debate, the house votes on the bill.[7]

There are some ways to arrange for a bill to bypass formal committee deliberation. One method is to apply in writing to the presiding officer of the house concerned requesting that committee deliberation be dispensed with. The house presiding officer then places the application on the order of the day for a decision by the house. A second way to bypass committee deliberation arises when a committee takes no action on a bill. In such a case, the house may demand an "interim report" on the bill. This interim report procedure provides each house with a way to salvage a bill being shelved in committee. Once an interim report is requested on a bill, the house

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[7]. Although bills usually undergo committee examination first, some important bills are referred to a committee after the house hears the reason for its introduction.

may limit the period of committee examination or require the bill to be debated at a plenary session. In practice, there have been only three cases in the lower house (a dozen in the upper house) where an interim report was actually requested.[8]

C. Enactment of Bills

A bill passed by one house must be considered by the other house. A bill becomes law after passage by both houses (in the same form) but this is not the only route to enactment. If the two houses disagree on a bill, each house may call for the convening of a conference committee of both houses to work out a compromise bill, which shall then be presented to both houses for approval.[9]

The Constitution recognizes the precedence of the lower house by stating that a bill passed by the lower house but acted on differently by the upper house becomes law if the lower house

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[8]. A third method is that, by precedent in the lower house (and rule in the upper house), committee-sponsored bills are placed on the calendar without being again referred to committee. The committee is assumed to have thoroughly deliberated on any bill they allow the chair to report. Committee-sponsored bills are almost always submitted with the unanimous support of the committee.

[9] A conference committee of both houses is composed of 20 members, each house electing half of them. In practice, the presiding officer of each house designates conferees in proportion to the number of members belonging to the parties that supported the bill adopted in each house. When the lower house requests a conference committee by invoking the Constitution, Article 59.4, upper house conferees are designated according to party strength in the upper house. In a conference committee, there must be a majority of two-thirds of the members present for the matter to be approved.

passes its own version a second time by a majority of two-thirds or more.[10] If the lower house acts differently on an upper house bill, the upper house may request a conference committee although the lower house may reject the request.

With regard to the budget, the decision of the lower house becomes the decision of the Diet if the upper house differs from the lower house in its final action and a conference committee can reach no agreement. The lower house decision on the budget also prevails if the upper house fails to take final action within 30 days of receiving the budget passed by the lower house. The procedural provisions concerning the budget apply to Diet approval of treaties, and the only difference is that the cabinet may submit treaty bills first to the upper house and the thirty days provision does not apply to such treaty bills.

D. Opposition Institutional Power

Although the Diet occupies a central place in the Constitution, most observers have concluded that the Diet merely "rubber stamps" the bills proposed by the ministries (Johnson 1982; Pempel 1974; Baerwald 1974). Mochizuki (1982) challenged this conventional view, arguing that the constitutional position of the Diet necessitates interparty accommodation and makes the legislative process more "viscous" than it appears. The institutional attributes that Mochizuki emphasizes are (1) the limited length of Diet sessions, (2) the unanimity norm on procedural matters, (3) the committee system, and (4) bicameralism. From his perspective, these features all directly or indirectly relate to time and constrain the governing majority's ability to make law (p. 48).

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[10]. If the upper house fails to take final action within 60 days of receipt of a lower house bill, the lower house can construe this as a rejection of the bill (Constitution, Article 59.4), and then seek to pass it by two-thirds.

However, Ramseyer and Rosenbluth (1993, p. 30) questioned the effectiveness of the first two of these institutional devices. First, they noted that legislation, not the Constitution, governs the length of Diet sessions. Thus, were the opposition's dilatory tactics particularly troublesome, they could be outlawed. Second, they argued that the unanimity norm is frequently violated. The majority maneuvers around the opposition's objections without making substantial concessions.[11]

In the rest of this section, we consider the importance of the last two of Mochizuki's institutional features—the committee system and bicameralism. We ask in particular whether securing agenda power at these legislative stages systematically affects the content of legislation that the government pursues.

E. Committee Chairmanships

Every Diet member serves on at least one standing committee.[12] Currently, there are 20 standing committees in the lower house (17 in the upper house). Appointments to each committee are allocated to parliamentary parties in proportion to their numerical strength in the house, and the house presiding officer nominates them on the recommendation of the parties. Each house

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[11] With regard to procedural matters, the presiding officer of each house may make a decision if the opinion of the House Management Committee is not unanimous. Although there is a written rule under the prewar Imperial system that dictates the decision of Deliberative Council be unanimous, it is no more than informal tradition in the postwar Diet for a committee chairman and directors to seek a unanimous decision on procedural matters (Oyama, 1997, p. 45).

[12] Presiding officers, cabinet ministers, and vice ministers may resign the membership of standing committees assigned to them, and the membership in question may be assumed by another member of the parliamentary party to which the resigning member belongs.

ostensibly nominates the chairmen of the standing committees, but in practice the presiding officer of each house is entrusted to nominate chairmen on the recommendation of the governing majority.

The committee chairman, as the presiding officer at meetings, arranges the proceedings of the committee, maintains order, and represents the committee. Among other matters, the chairman decides the dates for the committee meetings; precipitates a committee decision by initiating a vote; decides the issue in case of a tie vote; and may restrict the time for questions and debate upon consultation with the committee. A committee may choose several directors from among its members, typically from both government and opposition, and in practice the chairman decides procedural matters in consultation with the directors.

Some scholars, such as Mochizuki (1982), believe that there is a strong norm of unanimity within committees, that gives the opposition substantial power to delay. In particular, it is thought that the committee directors operate by consensus, with the government reluctant to override this norm. As far as the rules are concerned, there is no written rule that states that committee directors can veto consideration of a bill or that the committee chair and directors must agree on procedural matters. Indeed, one rule specifically states that a committee chair has the right to decide. So the opposition's power of delay will presumably be proportional to the fuss it threatens to kick up on the floor or in the streets; and such threats will be credible only for certain bills.

If a committee does bottle up a bill, the governing majority has two procedural options to take if it wishes. One is to have the majority move in the house for an interim report and require the bill to be considered at a plenary session. As noted, this option has been selected only three times in the postwar era in the lower house.

A second option is to have the majority move in the committee for the immediate termination of deliberation and a vote—what Krauss (p. 249) calls a "snap vote". In practice, when

the majority wants to force a snap vote, a majority committee member requests to speak and is recognized by the chair; the recognized member moves to terminate deliberation; and then the chair initiates a vote. If an opposition member chairs the committee, he can hinder and delay the majority's snap vote: by not scheduling a meeting for the committee; or by recognizing opposition members before the majority members, who then make other motions that must be dispensed with. Thus, when an opposition member chairs a committee, snap votes may be more difficult to arrange (and the whole legislative process in committee may be generally more "viscous").

The importance of committee agenda power is highlighted by the cases of "divided" committees. The December 1976 lower house election gave the LDP only 260 out of 511 seats even after 11 independents joined the party. After all Diet members were assigned to standing committees, the LDP had to face a difficult choice on these committees with an even-number of members: either take the committee chairmanship and lose the voting majority, or forsake the chairmanship and maintain a voting majority. This is due to the practice that the committee chairman does not vote except to break a tie. Take a committee of 30 members, for example. If only 15 members are allocated to the governing majority, then taking the chairmanship would allow the opposition to hold a voting majority of 15-14.

In fact the LDP took the committee chairmanships rather than retaining its voting majorities. Why? If it chose to retain a voting majority, it would have handed the chairmanship's power of delay to the opposition. If it chose to retain the chairmanship, it no longer had a majority on the committee. However, even if a bill is voted down in committee, the chairman can make a report on the course of the committee deliberation and submit it to the presiding officer of the

house concerned. Since the committee's decision does not bind a plenary meeting, the majority in the house then reverses the decision and wins passage for the bill.[13]

The narrative description of the chair's powers and of the LDP's choice when forced to choose between the chairmanship and a voting majority makes it plausible that committee chairs can delay the government's bills significantly. In principle, the government can resort to the interim report procedure to extract bills from a recalcitrant committee but such an action may have legislative costs (the opposition can increase the number of "cow walks" in the plenary session, for example) and public relations costs (if the action can be depicted as dictatorial). Thus, whether committee chairs really can delay bills significantly and hence block the government's bill or at least extract concessions from the government is an empirical question. In what follows, we provide what we believe is the first systematic statistical evidence bearing on this question.

F. Bicameralism

After its disappointing performance in the July 1989 election, the LDP lost its majority in the upper house. Consequently, the LDP alone could not insure that a bill would win Diet passage. In this "divided" Diet, the LDP had to bargain with one or more opposition parties to maintain a voting majority in the upper house. This remained the case until the LDP eventually went out of power in 1993.

Did the opposition's control of the upper house, which should have increased its power of delay, even of veto, substantially, have the expected impact on the government's agenda? Control of the upper house will be the second form of opposition institutional power that we shall consider

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[13]. A case in point is the lower house Local Administration Committee in the late 1970's. The opposition majority committee voted down two local administration tax bills that were approved by the LDP's slim majority at the subsequent plenary session.

(along with chairing lower house committees) in testing the prediction that such power makes the government's agenda less contentious, smaller, or both (Proposition 2b).

IV. Data

In the Diet there is no formal record with respect to how each member voted on a bill. However, we can infer which party voted for or against a bill by the view each expressed on the bill during debate prior to voting. In this fashion, we analyze lower house committee votes on government bills for the 80th through 139th Diet sessions (1977-1996).[14] Thus, we deal only with how often the party is rolled in committee. Nevertheless, the results basically apply to the final passage votes on the lower house floor since parties seldom vote differently from how they vote in committee. For the period we cover, there are 2,335 government bills.[15] Of those, a lower house committee took a vote on 1,863 bills.[16] Of the bills on which a vote was taken in a lower house committee, 96.5 percent became law. In this study, we look only at the bills referred to standing committees, which constitute 92% of all bills. (Our results differ little if the special committee bills are included.)

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[14] The party voting records are compiled by the House of Representatives Standing Committee Research Bureau and published in its annual report *Chosa [Research]* beginning with the 80th session and lately in *Shuugiin no Ugoki [A Trend in the House of Representatives]*. Since the member bills that go through the committee stage are usually the ones proposed by a committee chairman with the unanimous support of the committee members, we focus on government bills.

[15] 360 bills failed to pass during a session and were carried over to the following session.

[16] 22 bills appear twice since they were voted on but failed to pass during their first session, and were voted on for a second time in the following session.

V. Results: Government Roll Rates

Roll rates by government status for major parties are displayed in Table 1.[17] Two things are evident. First, when in government, parties are virtually never rolled. This was expected, given our assumption that the government controls the agenda and each (pivotal) party in government has a veto over the placement of bills on the floor agenda. Second, when in opposition, parties are rolled more often, with the roll rates ranging from a low of 1.48 % (for the NFP) to 46.55 % (for the JCP).

To put the Japanese figures in perspective, we also provide roll rates by party and government status for two other cases, one another parliamentary system with a dominant party (Sweden, Table 2), one a presidential system (the U.S., Table 3).[18] As can be seen, Proposition 1 holds not just in Japan, but also in Sweden and the US: majority coalitions controlling legislatures are virtually never rolled on agenda-setting votes.

Opposition parties, by contrast, are rolled at varying rates. On the low end of the spectrum, the NFP, Renewal and the LDP in Japan were all rolled less than 10% of the time. On the high end of the spectrum, the JCP in Japan, the nonsocialist parties in Sweden, and the U.S. parties were all

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[17]. One party that we do not put in the table is the NLC. Its roll rate was reduced from 9.3% to zero when it joined the LDP in government (at which point, while maintaining a separate electoral existence, it formed a single unitary parliamentary group with the LDP).

[18]. The definition of a roll in all three systems is the same. A party is rolled when a majority of its voting members oppose a bill's placement on the floor agenda, but lose. However, it should be kept in mind that in Japan and Sweden the parties vote as blocs, while in the U.S. they do not. See also the notes to Table 3.

rolled on more than a third of the bills reported from committee in their respective legislatures. In the next section, we take a closer look at what causes variations in opposition parties' roll rates.

VI. Results: Opposition Roll Rates

We now turn to our results concerning the frequency with which opposition parties are rolled on committee agenda-setting votes. The unit of analysis is an opposition party's statement or vote regarding a particular government bill. The dependent variable is whether the opposition party votes against the bill in committee, and hence is rolled (all bills were reported, so all parties voting negatively were rolled). We consider three different periods, each corresponding to a different government: 1977-93 (LDP governments), 1993-94 (all parties but the JCP and LDP in government), and 1995-96 (LDP-JSP-Harbinger coalition government).

In order to test Proposition 2a, we include dummy variables for each of the opposition parties except a chosen "reference" party. For the first period, the reference party is the DSP. The traditional ordering of the Japanese parties on the left-right spectrum during this period is as follows: JCP, JSP, CGP, SDL, DSP, NLC, and LDP. Thus, other things equal, we expect that the JCP's roll rate will be the highest among the opposition parties, followed in order by the JSP, CGP, SDL, DSP and NLC. As we use the DSP as the excluded or reference party, our expectation is that the coefficients for the NLC dummy will be negative (it is ideologically closer to the LDP than the DSP and so should be rolled less often), while the coefficients for the other parties' dummies will be positive. Moreover, we expect the coefficient on the JCP dummy to be the largest positive, followed in order by the JSP, CGP and SDL. Our procedures in the other two periods are similar and explained below.

In order to test Proposition 2b, we include two further dummy variables. The first, *Divided*, equals one when the government does not control the House of Councillors. This variable is

included only for the first period, as it does not vary in the last two. The second variable, *Opposition_Chair*, equals one when the bill under consideration was referred to a committee chaired by an opposition party member. Our expectation is that the coefficient on *Divided* will be negative, as will be the coefficient on *Opposition_Chair*.

A. Period 1: 1977-93 (LDP governments)

During the first period, there were 6,391 observations of an opposition party voting on a government bill. For only 6,183 of these cases, however, could we clearly identify whether the bill was referred to a committee chaired by an opposition party member (the unclear cases all involve transitions in the chairmanship from an opposition party to the LDP or vice versa). Thus, the total number of usable observations is 6,183.

The results of our logit analysis for the first period are presented in Table 4. As can be seen, the party dummy variables behave as we expected. Controlling for divided government and whether the bill was referred to an opposition-chaired committee in the lower house, the JCP is the most likely to be rolled, followed by the JSP, CGP, SDL, DSP and NLC. This accords with the conventional ordering of the parties from furthest from the LDP to closest to the LDP, and hence supports Proposition 2a.[19]

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[19]. An alternative approach to testing Proposition 2a is to use expert opinions on the ideological locations of the Japanese parties on a ten-point left-right scale. We prefer the ordinal approach reported above, as it makes fewer assumptions, but we also ran analyses using scale variables drawn from Laver and Hunt (1992) and Kato and Laver (1998). The results (not reported) also provide strong support for the notion that ideological distance from the government increases an opposition party's roll rate.

Turning now to Proposition 2b, both of our "veto power" hypotheses are also born out. The probability that any opposition party is rolled is lower when the LDP does not control the upper house; it is also lower if the bill in question is referred to an opposition-chaired committee in the lower house. We elaborate on these findings in the next subsection.

The impact of opposition control of the upper house. The coefficients on the relevant variables in Table 4 suggest that the upper house effect was about 60% larger than the committee effect. This, however, greatly understates the value to the opposition of controlling the upper house, relative to controlling a lower house committee, and we wish here to explain why.

Control of the upper house depressed the probability of being rolled on every bill in the session. In contrast, control of a lower house committee affected only the bills referred to that particular committee. Thus, control of the upper house not only had a somewhat greater impact on each bill affected, it also affected a much larger number of bills. Thus, the value of controlling the upper house, measured in the expected reduction in the opposition's roll rate, was considerably greater than the value of controlling a single lower house committee.

We can calibrate the two effects as follows. Consider the probability that the JSP is rolled on a bill that is referred to an LDP-chaired committee in a year in which the LDP controls the upper house. Our results in Table 4 imply that this probability is .28. Now consider a bill that is referred to an opposition-chaired committee; the probability that the JSP is rolled on such a bill is .16. In other words, chairing the committee has reduced the probability of a roll by .12. Finally, consider a case in which the bill goes to an LDP-chaired committee but the opposition controls the upper house. Now the JSP's probability of being rolled is reduced by .17, to .11. Thus, on a per-bill basis, the value of controlling the upper house is only about 44% greater, in terms of reducing the probability of a roll.

Now consider that the proportion of bills referred the average opposition-held committee during the LDP's reign was only .04. Thus, in a session in which 100 government bills are processed, control of the upper house reduces the expected number of JSP rolls by 100×.17 = 17. In contrast, control of one lower house committee reduces the expected number of JSP rolls by 100×.12×.04 = .48. In terms of the total rather than per-bill reduction in rolls, then, control of the upper house is about 35 times more valuable than chairing a single lower house committee.[20]

The power of the upper house appears significant from another perspective as well. The estimated reduction in the JSP's roll rate just noted—17%—is almost as large as the party's average roll rate of 23% (Table 1). Even the institutionally weak Japanese House of Councillors appears to be able, when under opposition control, to extract substantial concessions from the government.

The impact of opposition control of lower-house committee chairs. Now let us consider at greater length whether our evidence really suggests that lower-house committee chairs matter. There are two possible mechanisms that might make bills referred to opposition-chaired committees less likely to produce opposition rolls. First, it may be that the government chooses to send its more controversial bills to committees that its members chair. Presumably, it also decides which committees to allow the opposition to chair in light of the bills that it wishes to introduce in each jurisdiction. The combination of these decisions by the government—which chairs to let the opposition have, which bills to send where—may lead to fewer rolls in opposition-chaired committees without any overt action on the part of the opposition chairs. Note, however, that there

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[20]. One might ask whether chairmanships matter any longer when the upper house is held by the opposition. The answer is that they do continue to matter. Control of the upper house is not so powerful a card that the opposition needs no others.

would be no reason for the government to worry about how it allocated members to chairs and bills to committees if chairs had no power of delay. Thus, the second reason that opposition-chaired committees produce fewer bills that roll the opposition may be that such bills are delayed, more or less effectively, by the opposition chair concerned.[21] The price the chair asks for accelerating the process is making the bill more acceptable to the opposition, which lessens the chance that it will produce an opposition roll. We do not know which of these two mechanisms is dominant but our data suggest that some combination of them is producing the statistical patterns we have uncovered.

One might ask why the government does not simply change the rules by which the House of Representatives operates—by, for example, increasing the number of members on each committee, so that it can take both the majority and the chair on all committees. At this point, we can only observe that (a) the estimated price the government pays per committee it allows the opposition to chair is only 0.5 fewer opposition rolls per 100 bills; and (b) changing the rules to allow the government to take all the chairs would be sure to spark opposition protests and charges of authoritarianism. Possibly, the costs to the LDP of allowing the opposition a few chairs never exceeded the costs of altering the rules.

B. Period 2: 1993-94 (the broad coalition government)

During the second period, there were 156 observations, all usable for our analysis. Our coding of the independent variables proceeded as follows.

First, there were only two opposition parties, the JCP and the LDP, and we use the former as the reference party. Our belief is that the LDP was ideologically closer to the coalition government than was the JCP, so we expect the LDP dummy variable to have a negative coefficient

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[21]. Masuyama (2000) shows that bills referred to opposition-controlled committees do take longer to become laws.

(reflecting a lower probability of being rolled). Second, as control of the upper house did not change during this period, we exclude the variable *Divided* from the analysis. Finally, as only the LDP secured chairs of lower house committees during this period, and its interests are opposed to those of the JCP, we expect the referral of a bill to an opposition-chaired committee to lower the LDP's roll rate more than the JCP's.

The results of our analysis are presented in Table 5. We note two results. First, the LDP's roll rate is lower than the JCP's, as would be expected by its closer ideological proximity to the government. Second, opposition roll rates were lower still on bills referred to opposition-chaired committees. If one looks at the roll rates of the JCP and LDP separately, one finds that the LDP was never rolled on a bill referred to a committee that it chaired (remember, all the opposition chairs were from the LDP), while the JCP's roll rate was moderately depressed as well.

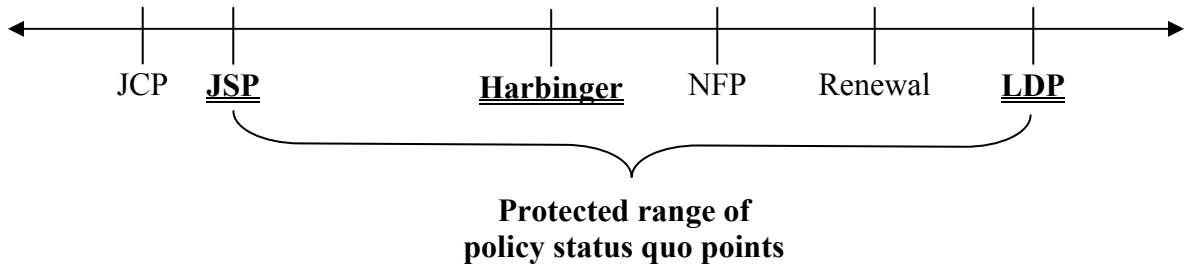
C. Period 3: 1995-96 (LDP-JSP-Harbinger coalition government)

During the third period, there were 414 observations, all of which were usable in our analysis. We coded the independent variables as follows. First, there were three opposition parties—the JCP, Renewal and the NFP—and we use Renewal as the reference party. The theoretically distinctive feature of this government is that it is not ideologically connected. As illustrated in Figure 1, both Renewal and the NFP were closer to the LDP than was the JSP. Thus, we expect Renewal and NFP to have relatively low roll rates (they do; see Table 1) and not to differ much in their probability of being rolled—i.e., the coefficient on NFP should be insignificant. In contrast, the coefficient on the JCP dummy should be positive and significant. Second, as control of the upper house did not change during this period, we exclude the variable *Divided* from the analysis. Finally, our expectations regarding the effect of a bill being referred to an opposition-chaired committee are different in this period, due to the non-connected nature of the government.

Government proposals were drafted so as to be acceptable to all parties in government, including the JSP. Thus, policy status quo points in the range indicated in Figure 1 will be changed as changes to such status quo points would be rejected by one or the other coalition partner. Because their ideal points lie within this protected range, Renewal and the NFP have been protected from government proposals that pulled policy too far right (or left) for their liking. There is thus little reason to expect that it would matter whether a bill was referred to an opposition-chaired committee or not, unless the committee was chaired by a Communist (but none were).

Our results are presented in Table 6. We stress two points. First, as expected, the "interior" opposition parties' probabilities of being rolled do not differ; only the JCP stands out with a larger roll probability and it is clearly the ideologically most distant from the government.[22] Second, as expected, the referral of a bill to an opposition-chaired committee no longer matters because (a) the government is not ideologically connected and (b) the opposition chairs are all from "interior" opposition parties.

Figure 1



Note: Government parties are underlined.

[22]. There is of course another reason to expect Renewal and the NFP to differ little in their roll rates: Renewal was one of the main components that merged to form the NFP. So, not too much should be made of the first finding. More telling is how low both Renewal's and NFP's roll rates were.

VII. Results: The Size of the Government's Agenda

Proposition 2b predicts that the government's agenda will become either less contentious or smaller or both when the opposition's power to delay is enhanced. In the last section, we considered the contentiousness of the government's agenda—measured by the frequency with which opposition parties voted against it—and found support for Proposition 2b. In this section, we report on the size of the government's agenda, measured simply by the number of bills it seeks to enact.

The report can be brief. Controlling for the length of the session, we find no significant relationship between the size of the government agenda and either the percent of bills referred to opposition-chaired committees or whether the opposition controls the upper house. This is possibly due to the crude measure of "size," or perhaps the government in Japan navigates around opposition hurdles by bargaining rather than by abandoning bills.

VIII. Conclusion

In this paper we have examined the structure of agenda power in the Japanese Diet. Japan is typical of parliamentary systems in the developed world in that the government seems clearly in charge of the parliamentary agenda. Here, we have looked at several aspects of the government's control.

First, we looked to see if there were ever bills forced onto the plenary agenda against the government's wishes, finding that there were not. Weak minority governments in Europe in some sessions lose control of portions of the legislative agenda (cf. Damgaard and Svenson 1989) but in

Japan during the period 1977-96 examined here, the government's ability to keep issues off the agenda held firm.

Second, we looked at how often bills were forced onto the plenary agenda against the wishes of opposition parties. It is one thing if the government is never rolled but neither is the opposition. This would suggest a consensual system in which the government has not much more policy influence than the opposition. It is quite another if the government's bills are regularly opposed by the opposition. This suggests a system in which the government not only differs from the opposition but has the institutional power and political will to proceed without accommodating the opposition's complaints.

We found that opposition roll rates in Japan were lower than in Sweden and the U.S. for the non-socialist parties. Among the socialist parties, however, the Japanese roll rates are comparable to those elsewhere. The JSP—the main opposition party during the LDP's long reign—was rolled on about 23% of all government bills, comparable to the SDP in Sweden. The JCP was rolled more often than any other party in the analysis, except for the U.S. Democrats in the 104th congress.[23]

Third, we investigated the determinants of the opposition parties' roll rates, using a simple spatial model based on the work of Shepsle (1979) and Cox and McCubbins forthcoming. Our main findings were two: Opposition parties that are ideologically more distant from the government are rolled more often; and all opposition parties are rolled less often when the opposition has a better institutional position, in the form either of lower house committee chairmanships or of control of the upper house.

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[23]. It is certain, however, that the Democrats' roll rate would be less than the JCP's were all reported bills included in the U.S. analysis. See the notes to Table 3.

Our findings on the determinants of opposition roll rates suggest that both Japan's bicameral structure and its committee structure are consequential elements in the opposition's ability to slow down government bills enough to extract concessions. In the Japanese literature, this corroborates part of Mochizuki's (1982) argument. In the broader comparative literature there are, as far as we know, no comparable studies of how opposition roll rates vary with opposition institutional power. Mughan and Patterson (1999, pp. 334-35) note the paucity of studies (outside the U.S. case) assessing the legislative impact of upper houses and the literature is even sparser when it comes to legislative committees. Nonetheless, the work of Tsebelis and Money (1997) on bicameralism and of Strom (1990) on committees suggests, and we believe, that much the same structure of government agenda power exists in other systems as we have uncovered in Japan. Perhaps once enough comparable studies are completed, it will be possible to calibrate the influence of upper houses and committees by systematic cross-national comparison.

Appendix

In this appendix we illustrate Proposition 2a by presenting a special case. Our general assumption is that the factions and parties in government agree to a simple game to implement their agenda cartel. That is, they agree on a list of coalitions within the government that will count as decisive on agenda matters. If any of the listed coalitions demand the placement of a bill on the agenda, then the government as a whole is committed to supporting it.

Now consider a five-group government, consisting of g_1, g_2, g_3, g_4 and g_5, in which the only decisive coalition is $\{g_1,g_2,g_3,g_4,g_5\}$. In this case, a natural definition of an opposition group's distance from the government is the distance between the group's ideal point and the "government interval," defined as the smallest interval including all of the government groups' ideal points. Thus, when an opposition group lies *outside* the government interval, its distance from the government is the distance between the group's ideal point and the nearest government group's ideal point. When an opposition party lies *inside* the government interval, we take its distance from the government to be zero.

Figure A1 illustrates Proposition 2a for two opposition groups both of which are outside the government interval. It shows the five government groups on the right and two opposition groups on the left. Every bill the government puts on the agenda will deal with a status quo point that lies outside the interval $[g_1,g_5]$. Any status quo inside this interval is protected, since not all government groups can agree on a direction of change. Now consider any status quo point q to the left of g_1. Suppose that the government bill proposes changing q to g_3, the government median. Group o_j will oppose the government's proposal to change q if and only if $q > 2o_j-g_3$. This is because the point $2o_j-g_3$ is just as far to o_j's left as g_3 is to o_j's right. Any status quo to the left of

$2o_j$-g_3 will thus be worse, in o_j's view, than is g_3. (See Cox and McCubbins forthcoming if further details are required.)

Thus, group o_1 will oppose everything that o_2 opposes, but there are some things (fairly far left) that o_1 opposes but that o_2 will support. Thus, the more extreme group, o_1, will have the higher roll rate.

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Table 1: Roll rates on agenda-setting votes in Japan by party and government status, 1977-1996

A. Traditional parties

Government Status	LDP	DSP	CGP	JSP	JCP
In government	.12	.00	.00	.00	--
	(1634)	(78)	(78)	(285)	(0)
In opposition	3.85	11.50	13.89	23.06	46.55
	(78)	(1418)	(1418)	(1427)	(1712)

B. New parties

Government Status	REN	NFP
In government	.00	--
	(78)	(0)
In opposition	7.69	1.48
	(13)	(203)

Note: Cell entries give roll rates (and total number of votes) on government bills voted on in standing committees.

Table 2: Roll rates on agenda-setting votes in Sweden by party and government status, 1972-90

Government Status	SDP	Liberals	Center	Conservatives
In government	2.4	4.7	3.6	4.1
(majority or strong minority)	(1538)	(666)	(666)	(666)
In government (weak minority)	--	19.0	20.4	--
	(0)	(426)	(793)	(0)
In opposition	28.7	43.8	37.3	39.7
	(1459)	(1538)	(1905)	(2331)

Source: Authors' compilation from Sjölin 1993, especially Table 4.1. The bills tabulated are government bills. Majority governments are those that control a majority of seats in the Riksdag, minority governments those that do not. Strong majority governments are those whose candidate for prime minister is supported by at least half of the total members in the Riksdag; weak minority

governments are the rest. By this definition, the only two weak minority governments were the Liberal government (1978-79) and the Liberal/Center government (1981-82).

Table 3: Roll rates on agenda-setting votes in the United States by party and majority status in the 94th and 104th congresses

Majority Status	Democrats	Republicans
In majority	2.7 (112)	0.0 (64)
In minority	65.6 (64)	33.9 (112)

Note: The Democrats were in the majority in the 94th congress and in the minority in the 104th. The analysis here looks only at bills for which there was a recorded vote in committee on final passage (i.e., on the decision to report the bill to the House). In the U.S. case, only a small fraction of all bills reported by committee are subject to a final passage vote and these tend to be the more contentious ones. In the other cases (Japan and Sweden), all bills are subject to a recorded vote; this difference should be kept in mind when interpreting the data. In particular, assuming that bills not voted on in the U.S. would be passed without either party being rolled, the roll rates based on all bills reported would be considerably lower.

Table 4: Probability that an opposition party is rolled on a government bill, 1977-93 (LDP governments)

Independent Variables	Coefficient	Standard error	Sig. at 5% One-tailed
NLC	-0.4408	0.1815	*
SDL	0.0162	0.2301	
CGP	0.2170	0.1150	*
JSP	0.8491	0.1064	*
JCP	2.0378	0.1016	*
Divided	-1.1668	0.0928	*
Opposition_Chair	-0.7123	0.2109	*
Constant	-1.7878	0.0851	*
N	6183		
Pseudo R2	0.1349		

Note: The dependent variable is 1 if a party voted against a bill referred to a lower house standing committee, 0 if the party did not. As all bills voted on in committee were in fact reported to the floor, the dependent variable can also be thought of as equalling 1 when the party is rolled.

Table 5: Probability that an opposition party is rolled on a government bill, 1993-94 (The Broad Coalition Government)

Model 1

Independent Variables	Coefficient	Standard error	Sig. at 5% One-tailed
LDP	-2.7491	0.6387	*
Opposition_Chair	-1.0611	0.5585	*
Constant	-0.2608	0.2667	
N	156		
Pseudo R2	0.2148		

Note: The dependent variable is 1 if a party voted against a bill referred to a lower house standing committee, 0 if the party did not.

Table 6: Probability that an opposition party is rolled on a government bill, 1994-96 (LDP-JSP-Harbinger Coalition Government)

Independent Variables	Coefficient	Standard error	Sig. at 5% One-tailed
NFP	-1.6653	1.1926	
JCP	2.0262	1.0508	*
Opposition_Chair	0.0677	0.3525	
Constant	-2.5009	1.0443	*
N	414		
Pseudo R2	0.2477		

Note: The dependent variable is 1 if a party voted against a bill referred to a lower house standing committee, 0 if the party did not.