



## When do you follow the (national) leader? Party switching by subnational legislators in Japan

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### ABSTRACT

In 1993, after 38 years of single-party control, more than 20% of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) House of Representatives members left the party to form new alternatives and create an anti-LDP coalition government. However, despite substantial popular support, the new parties attracted few subnational politicians. The effect of this lack of subnational party switching was substantial since the relatively small pool of subnational defectors meant that the new parties had difficulty forming the strong subnational bases of support that would help them to compete with the LDP in the future. In this paper, we consider why so few subnational politicians were willing to switch to these new party alternatives. Using case studies and conditional logit analysis of party affiliation pattern among prefectural assembly members in Japan, we find that party switching was most common among subnational politicians who had powerful patrons who had also left the LDP and had maintained especially good access to central government largesse. We also find that subnational politicians from urban areas, which depend less upon central government pork, were considerably less likely to switch parties, than their rural counterparts.

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### 1. Introduction

In 2009, Japan's Democratic Party crushed the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in the summer House of Representatives (HR) election. It was the first time since the LDP's birth in 1955 that a single opponent outpolled the longtime ruling party in a House of Representatives (the lower house of the parliament or Diet) race. However, this was not the first time the LDP had lost an HR election. Fifteen years earlier, it also appeared that the LDP had finally lost its stranglehold on the government: In 1993, after 38 years of single-party control, there was a split in the LDP, and over the following year more than 20% of its HR members left the party to form new parties or become independents. After new elections were held on July 18, 1993, the new parties

joined with the bulk of the traditional opposition to form a coalition government excluding the LDP. However, despite substantial popular support, the new parties had great difficulty developing grassroots. Even though large numbers of national level politicians were willing to leave the long-time ruling party, only about 7% of politicians did so at the *subnational* level. As a result, the new parties were never able to develop the local roots necessary to promote party organization and strong candidates for national office. After their initial success in 1993–1994, the new parties and their successors had difficulty mounting a strong challenge in the House of Representatives, and the LDP regained control of the HR in 1994, holding power until 2009.

If more than one-fifth of LDP politicians left the ruling party at the national level, why were so few willing to do so at the subnational level? This question is important for understanding the new opposition's inability to seriously challenge the unpopular LDP at the national level for fifteen years. Given local politicians' role in Japan as vote

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mobilizers, campaigners, and even candidates in national elections, the unwillingness of most subnational LDP politicians to switch to Japan's new parties undoubtedly hurt the new opposition's efforts to develop and maintain a sustained national challenge to the LDP for many years (see, e.g., Scheiner, 2006). Indeed, parties in other countries, such as the Liberal Democrats in the U.K. (see, e.g., McAllister et al., 2002; Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005) and new right parties in Europe (see, e.g., Art, 2007) have been able to use success in local elections and control over local governments to demonstrate an ability to provide constituency service, and, in turn, prosper at the national level more than they might have without local electoral success.

In Japan, the lack of subnational party switching relates to subnational politicians' efforts to access central governmental resources. Japanese politics – particularly at the subnational level – has long deemphasized “issue” politics and instead has tended to be driven by pork-barrel. The principal job of most mainstream subnational legislators has been to provide goods and services to their constituents. At the same time, Japanese subnational governments have had little control over their own spending and, therefore, needed substantial assistance from the central government. For this reason, recent work (Desposato and Scheiner, 2008; Scheiner, 2005, 2006) argues that in order to gain resources from the center, subnational politicians sought to develop close ties to national politicians who work with the national government on their behalf. According to this logic, to maintain these close ties mainstream Japanese subnational politicians have had a strong incentive to affiliate with the party of a national patron who acts as their point of access to the central government. Given that the LDP was the party in power, this gave subnational politicians a strong incentive to join the LDP. And when the LDP split in 1993–1994, subnational politicians had an incentive to follow their patron, their access point to the central government. That is, if their patron joined a new party, subnational politicians had an incentive to join that party as well; and if the patron did not switch, the subnational politicians had little incentive to switch. In short, new parties were limited in that they were likely only attracting subnational politicians in areas where there were national politicians who had left the LDP.

We take the analysis a step further and argue that in fact things were even more grim for the new opposition in that they were really only likely to attract a narrow subset of subnational politicians from areas where national politicians left the LDP. The above analysis presumes that all subnational politicians ought to have followed their national leader. But, if maintaining access to resources was the driving force behind these national–subnational politician ties, there ought to have been systematic variation in subnational politicians' willingness to follow their leader. First, subnational politicians ought to have been much more likely to follow a national politician to a new party when that politician had particularly good access to central governmental largesse; less powerful national politicians ought to have been less likely to be able to draw subnational politicians to new parties with them. Second, where politicians relied less upon central government resources, as well as relied less upon pork as a political tool in general,

subnational politicians ought to have been much less likely to have developed close ties to national leaders. These subnational politicians, therefore, ought to have been less likely to follow any national leader out of the LDP.

We investigate the variation in subnational politicians' willingness to follow their national leader out of the LDP to new parties in Japan over 1993–1994, and our results are consistent with the above logic. Subnational politicians in Japan were more likely to follow national politicians with significant political seniority and positions of power – especially in posts that control access to pork – out of the LDP and into new parties. Moreover, subnational politicians from urban areas – which are both less focused on pork in general and less dependent upon central government funding – were highly *unlikely* to follow a national politician away from the LDP. Together, these findings offer strong evidence that subnational politicians' party affiliation in Japan was driven heavily by a need to access government resources, thus providing greater insight into the slow start Japan's new parties had in attempting to attract subnational support to help them challenge the LDP.

## 2. The literature on party switching: summary and areas for additional work

In most political systems, elected representatives do not switch parties; once they join a party, they never leave it. Maintaining the status quo is beneficial for democratic stability, but it impairs scholars' ability to understand politicians' reasons for joining parties. It is only through variation in partisan affiliation that we can understand why politicians choose the parties they do. For this reason, it is useful to study examples of legislator party switching. Although party switching is relatively rare, a growing body of research studies this phenomenon in a variety of contexts, including (but not limited to) Brazil (Desposato, 2006), Ecuador (Mejia-Acosta, 1999), Italy (Heller and Mershon, 2005, 2008), Japan (Cox and Rosenbluth, 1995; Kato, 1998; Reed and Scheiner, 2003), Mexico (Barrow, 2007), the former Soviet bloc (Benoit and Hayden, 2004; Shabad and Slomczynski, 2004; Thames, 2007; Mershon and Shvetsova, 2008; Slomczynski et al., 2008), Turkey (Turan, 1985), the United States (Nokken and Poole, 2004), and the European Parliament (McElroy, 2003).

Although this literature is diverse, it generally builds upon two foundational assumptions. First, politicians are ambitious (Schlesinger, 1966); they are concerned with bettering their political standing. Second, politicians choose the party that maximizes their likelihood of reelection (Aldrich, 1995; Aldrich and Bianco, 1992). Taken together, these assumptions suggest that legislators are concerned with bettering their political standing and choose parties that maximize their ability to do so.<sup>1</sup> Party switching is one of the tools available to them to accomplish this goal (Turan, 1985; Aldrich and Bianco, 1992; Agh, 1999; Desposato, 2006; Laver and Benoit, 2003; McElroy, 2003). According to Heller and Mershon (2005) a legislator will be more likely to switch

<sup>1</sup> Politicians may also choose *not* to affiliate with a party if it increases their chances of electoral success (Bolloyer and Weeks, 2009).

if “she sees opportunities better to reach her aims in a new party” (538). Thus, many have argued that party switching should be particularly prevalent when ambition is unconstrained (e.g., Turan, 1985; Mejia-Acosta, 1999).

Furthermore, certain national level factors may influence politicians’ incentives to switch parties. Scholars often point to the role played by a country’s electoral rules in shaping politicians’ incentives to switch (Cox and Rosenbluth, 1995; Mejia-Acosta, 1999; Desposato, 2006). For example, the open list proportional representation system in Brazil encourages a relatively high level of intraparty competition, giving politicians strong incentives to focus on their local constituencies (Ames, 1995; Samuels, 1999). Politicians have an incentive to switch parties if their relationship with their party impedes their ability to cater to the wishes of their constituents (Desposato, 2006). Similarly, the electoral system may also provide politicians with incentives to affiliate with no party. Irish politicians often find a lack of party affiliation to be a politically viable strategy because it allows them the flexibility to tailor their campaign to suit their constituency, without being bound by the restrictions of a party program (Bolleyer and Weeks, 2009).

National level factors can also affect the incentives for politicians to switch parties by reducing the costs of defection. Politicians who abandon their party may be deemed less reliable by voters and may lose valuable positions that come from their tenure within a given party (Shabad and Slomczynski, 2004; Desposato, 2006). Thus, there is a potentially significant cost associated with the decision to switch. However, a relatively weak party system at the national level can help to lower the costs of party switching by weakening the ties between voters, politicians, and political parties (Mejia-Acosta, 1999). In their study of Poland and the Czech Republic, Shabad and Slomczynski (2004) find that party switching was more common in the elections immediately following the transition to democracy when the connection between voters and parties was particularly weak.

In addition to national level factors, there is also evidence that certain individual level factors are associated with party switching. In keeping with the ambition model, legislators switch parties when another party offers them a better chance at reelection or to achieve their goals. For example, Reed and Scheiner (2003) show that support for reform was an important predictor of legislators’ decisions to abandon the LDP in Japan. For many Japanese politicians, creating new parties offered a better opportunity to achieve the policy goal of reform. Furthermore, there are certain individual-level features that affect the costs of switching. Legislators who are associated with ambiguous programmatic positions or ideology are generally more likely to switch parties (Heller and Mershon, 2005). Finally, the fate of a politician with strong local ties or previous political experience at the local level is less dependent on the success of his or her national party (Tavits, 2009), and thus, such a politician may be more likely to abandon his or her party if the need arises.

In summary, the literature on party switching offers useful insight into the circumstances that may encourage (or hinder) a politician’s ability and/or willingness to switch parties. Factors at both the national and individual level can help shape the incentives politicians have to abandon their

current party or select a new one. Oftentimes, the predictors of party switching vary from country to country. However, the general assumption of the party switching literature is that legislators choose parties that maximize opportunities (minus the transaction cost associated the switching), whether they be electoral, political, ideological, or distributive (Desposato, 2006: 77) and the literature offers a number of clever tests of the individual level incentives that drive politicians’ willingness to switch parties.

### 2.1. *Linking party-switching to a desire for resources*

In general, this literature has given short-shift to the distributive dimension, but recent work by Desposato and Scheiner (2008) pays it greater attention: that is, in many countries, the link between voters and politicians is dominated by patronage, rather than policy. In these cases, politics is founded on the delivery of pork, and the central task of politicians is delivering governmental resources to their constituents. Where party switching is an option in these pork-oriented systems, politicians ought to be especially likely to switch parties when it helps them acquire access to such resources.

In highly pork-oriented systems, the location of resource control plays an important part in shaping party affiliation and yet, the location is not the same in all polities. In some countries, such as Brazil, resources are highly decentralized, with both the central and state governments controlling government pork-barrel funding. Not surprising, legislators in Brazil switch parties in order to match their own party affiliation with both that of the national president and their own state’s governor (Desposato, 2006; Desposato and Scheiner, 2008).

In other countries, resource control is more centralized, and when combined with a heavy focus on pork in the system, we expect a clear pattern to emerge in party switching. Evidence from studies of pork-centric systems such as Italy (Hine, 1993), Mexico (Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2003), and Japan (Curtis, 1971; Scheiner, 2005, 2006), where the central government has maintained great control over state resources, suggests that even subnational politicians and/or voters in such systems tend to favor affiliation with the party (or parties) that dominates the national government because it offers them better access to central funding from the national government. Such a pattern extends beyond simply party affiliation to party switching. That is, based on the above logic, in centralized systems that place great emphasis on pork, we should expect politicians to switch parties if it helps provide them with access to national level resources. And, indeed, Desposato and Scheiner (2008) find that in the centralized Japanese case in 1993–1994, subnational politicians were more likely to switch parties when their national patron did so.

However, this analysis overlooks likely variation in subnational politicians’ willingness to follow a national leader out of one party and into another, even in highly centralized, pork-centric political systems. That is, Desposato and Scheiner appear to assume that in centralized (and pork-focused) cases all subnational politicians ought to follow the lead of national politicians in their districts. This assumption misses the fact that subnational politicians

may not take cues from national politicians who are less capable of accessing much needed resources and/or when accessing these resources is less important.

In other words, there are two factors that are likely to shape a subnational politicians' likelihood of following a national leader. First, to what extent is the national leader perceived as capable of influencing access to state resources? The level of power and political influence held by different national politicians varies, and subnational politicians ought to recognize which national politicians are more powerful and more capable of accessing state resources. Subnational politicians ought to be more likely to switch parties with a national patron who can better provide them access to resources.

Second, to what extent is it important that the subnational politician even has access to central government resources? In Desposato and Scheiner's (2008) analysis, the apparent assumption is that all areas of a centralized, pork-focused system equally desire access to central governmental pork. But, in reality, even in pork-centric systems, not all regions of the country value pork equally. And, even in centralized systems, not all regions of the country are equally dependent upon the center. Where central governmental resource funding is less valued, subnational politicians ought to be less likely to look to the center for pork-related resources. Since the presumed relationship between subnational and national politicians in centralized/pork-focused systems is founded on subnational politicians' desire to access central governmental pork, presumably ties between national and local politicians will be weaker in areas that need these resources less. Therefore, in areas that place less emphasis on pork and/or do not rely as heavily upon the central government for funding, party switching by national politicians ought to be less likely to lead to similar switching by subnational politicians.

### 3. The Japanese context

Japan is a useful context in which to examine this idea. Japanese politics is heavily pork-oriented and the central government has the greater control over state resources (Desposato and Scheiner, 2008; Scheiner, 2005, 2006). As is commonly argued, the overwhelming emphasis in Japanese politics is on resource delivery, especially among mainstream politicians. Fukui and Fukai (1996) write, "Japanese voters are mobilized at election time mainly by the lure of pork barrel, only marginally by policy issues, and even less by ideals and visions" (268–269). Thus, in addition to "personal" factors, such as personal connections, warmth, and loyalty, many voters affiliate with particular candidates because of the candidates' capacity to deliver material benefits.

Japan's governmental resources are also highly centralized. Local governmental projects make up a large percentage of all government spending, but local governments raise little of their own revenue. Most of the difference must be made up by the central government (Akizuki, 1995). Not only is the regulation of local taxes heavily restricted by the national government, but the uses of grants and loans from the national government are constrained to specific purposes (Reed, 1986: 27–29). Moreover, subsidies from the central government are typically distributed at the

central government's discretion to cover projects beyond those that are "need-based" (Ishihara, 1986; Yonehara, 1986). This provides a mechanism for the central government to push its own priorities at the subnational level.

As a result, politicians in Japan make a great effort to demonstrate that they have sufficient clout in the central government to get funding for their district (Curtis, 1992), and there is a widely held belief that regions electing politicians affiliated with the national ruling party are more likely to receive funding from the central government (Fukui and Fukai, 1996). In this way, the distribution of government resources is an effective way of demobilizing political opposition. Indeed, leaders of the LDP very publicly suggest that victories by non-LDP candidates will lead to a curtailment of local funds (Scheiner, 2003). Regardless of whether these threats are carried out, anecdotes of the LDP's withholding funds appear to encourage the belief that links to the LDP-led central government are critical for funding.

However, the link between subnational and national politicians is not merely based on shared partisanship – they also create a personal bond, based on mutual political advantage. Subnational politicians in Japan are linked to national LDP politicians by *keiretsu*, or patron–client relationships (Inoue, 1992). A *keiretsu* is beneficial for a national politician because subnational politicians use their connections at the local level to get their constituents to vote for the *keiretsu* leader in the national election (Fukui and Fukai, 1996). For the subnational politician, a *keiretsu* provides a link or "pipeline" to the national government, allowing them to bring pork to their constituency. This enhances their reputation, and therefore, their chances of reelection.

Consequently, many local politicians became part of national members' *keiretsu* in order to gain access to national pork. Traditionally, members of the opposition parties in Japan did not have *keiretsu* because *keiretsu* tended to be tied to the pork center of Japan: the LDP-controlled central government. As a result, the *keiretsu* system biased the political system in favor of the LDP; even when parties other than the LDP increased their strength at the national level, there was little incentive for local candidates to join them. Thus, this system played a large role in ensuring that the LDP dominated subnational politics to an even greater degree than it achieved at the national level (Scheiner, 2005, 2006).

The above describes the context faced by subnational politicians when the LDP split at the national level in 1993. The LDP's split was, in large measure, a result of factional politics and a desire for electoral reform, two issues that did not affect subnational LDP politicians, and so were unlikely to affect subnational politicians' decision to stay in the party or not. With the national-level defections from the party, the LDP was now out of power in the HR, but subnational politicians' primary access to central governmental pork was through their national patron. For subnational legislators whose patron stayed in the LDP, incentives to stay in the party of the individual who provided them access to the organs of the central government and bureaucracy remained strong. In contrast, as Desposato and Scheiner argue, subnational politicians in the *keiretsu* of LDP defectors had an incentive to join their patron's new party. It was a time of great uncertainty in Japan, as it was totally unclear

how long the new coalition government would be able to maintain power. Nevertheless, even if subnational politicians were skeptical of the non-LDP government's ability to stay in power, it was in their interest to consider shifting with their *keiretsu* leader. To not do so, would potentially undermine their main tie to the central government.

### 3.1. Variation in subnational politicians' party switching: hypotheses

In short, all else being equal, in districts where a national politician left the LDP to join one of the new alternatives, subnational politicians also had a strong incentive to leave the party so as to maintain their access to central governmental resources. However, we argue that the incentives were not the same for all subnational politicians whose national leader switched parties.

First, where national level defectors from the LDP had less power, subnational politicians ought to have had less incentive to follow them out of the party. One of the most important measures of power in Japanese politics is seniority. The greatest power within Japanese politics typically goes to those politicians who have served the most terms. Senior politicians usually receive the choice party and governmental assignments, and therefore, have more interactions with the powerful Japanese bureaucracy. Such politicians can, in turn, expect to have greater access to and exert greater influence on those who make policy and resource-distribution decisions. We should note, however, that it is possible that links to senior politicians may be based less on their power and more on other important features of their longtime in office. That is, by definition senior politicians will have had more time to develop organizations – and *keiretsu* – to support them.

But, there are also more specific indications of power and influence among Japanese national politicians. In particular, membership, and especially leadership positions in important government, legislative, and party posts indicate the power of politicians. Moreover, the type of posts a politician is assigned can be especially important in shaping the area of influence held by that politician. Some politicians are noted for holding influence in the area of pork or distributive politics by holding positions in ministries or committees on construction, transportation, agriculture, local affairs, post office and telecommunications. Others meanwhile hold positions of influence in “high policy” through their positions in the Finance, Foreign Affairs, Legal Affairs, Defense, Cabinet, Tax, and Basic Policy ministries and committees (Pekkanen et al., 2006).

In a time of uncertainty, such as 1993–1994 in Japan, staying close to a powerful patron was, in many ways, the best insurance policy. Put differently, those subnational politicians with more powerful patrons who had left the LDP had the greatest incentive to switch parties. We expect that subnational politicians valued their relationship with their national patron particularly highly if the patron was fairly senior (either because of influence at the national level or because of close ties developed over time) and/or a member or leader of a high-policy post (because of the patron's general influence at the national level) and especially if they were a member or leader of a distributive post (because of the

patron's national influence in the area of pork distribution). As a result, when such national politicians – especially those in pork posts – left the LDP, we expect that the subnational politicians tied to them were particularly likely to follow.

Second, in parts of Japan where access to central governmental pork was less important, subnational politicians ought to have been less likely to follow a national leader to a new party. That is, although on the whole Japanese politics is centralized and pork-focused, not everyone depends in the same ways on central government pork. To begin with, many politicians, voters and parties (especially in the opposition) place emphasis on broad issue-based politics. Moreover, urban areas rely far less on the central government's largesse than rural areas. There are two principal reasons for this. First, pork in general appears to play a larger part in rural politics. Rural areas tend to have less-well-developed infrastructures, making development projects a constant in the countryside. In addition, Japanese rural industry tends to be less internationally competitive, making regular government support necessary in order to help maintain and support many businesses and residents. Second, as a result of their greater wealth, urban areas are able to fund more of their own local governments' projects and therefore rely much less on the central government for their funding.<sup>2</sup> In other words, Japanese urban areas appear less pork-focused and dependent upon central government funding. As a result, subnational politicians in more urban areas may feel less need to develop close relationships with national politicians in the central government. Therefore, we expect that when compared to subnational politicians from rural areas subnational, urban politicians will be less likely to follow a national leader out of the LDP to a new party.

We should note that it is not wholly clear what subnational politicians would be likely to do when they are in the district of a national LDP politician who left the party to become an independent. On one hand, the subnational politician might follow the national leader out of personal loyalty. Or, subnational politicians might follow their (now independent) national leader if they believe that the national politician would be able to use the independent status to hedge his bets and join any government – thus, maintaining access to distributive goods. On the other hand, in many cases having a national leader become independent might simply prevent the national politician from being an important part of the government. In turn, this would limit the national leaders' access to and influence over the distribution of pork.

We investigate the above hypotheses in several ways. We begin with prefecture-level analysis, examining the extent to which prefectures that had HR members leave the LDP also saw subnational politicians join the new party of the national level defector. Second, we delve more deeply into subnational behavior by examining a single prefecture, Nagano, where subnational party switching took a particularly unusual form. Finally, we move to the individual level and conduct a large-*n* statistical analysis that allows us to highlight systematic variation in the factors associated with subnational politicians following their national leaders.

<sup>2</sup> For more detail on the differences between urban and rural Japanese politics, see Scheiner (2006).

#### 4. Analysis

At the start of 1993, there were 267 LDP legislators in Japan's national House of Representatives. Over 1993–1994, 38 (14.2%) members of this group joined the new party *Shinsei*, 10 (3.8%) joined the new party *Sakigake*, and 22 (8.2%) became independents. Strikingly, far fewer defected at the subnational level. The prefecture is Japan's largest administrative subunit. Japan contains 47 prefectures, each with its own directly elected legislature and governor. In 1993, at the prefectural assembly level, there were 1605 LDP legislators.<sup>3</sup> Of them, only 78 (4.9%) joined *Shinsei*, 9 (0.6%) joined *Sakigake*, and 25 (1.6%) became independents.<sup>4</sup>

##### 4.1. Prefecture-level analysis: patterns and exceptions

Consistent with Desposato and Scheiner (2008) and Scheiner (2005, 2006), at the most basic level we expect that party switching among prefectural assembly members in Japan was driven by patron–client ties. Anecdotally, there is significant support for this idea. In interviews, four 1993–1994 Diet-level defectors from the LDP— Shigeru Ishiba (Tottori prefecture), Michihiko Kano (Yamagata), Hiroshi Kumagai (Shizuoka), and Kozo Watanabe (Fukushima)<sup>5</sup>—each explained that all the members of their *keiretsu* left the LDP with them and that in their respective prefectures the only prefectural assembly members to defect from the LDP were those in the *keiretsu* of a Diet member who left the LDP as well.<sup>6</sup> And, information provided by local reporters in Aomori, Shizuoka, and Mie indicates clearly that in all three prefectures the only prefectural assembly members from the LDP to join *Shinsei* were in *keiretsu* of Diet-level LDP defectors and the only prefectural assembly members of defectors' *keiretsu* who did not join *Shinsei* were two in Aomori, who, while nominally still part of defector Masami Tanabu's

*keiretsu*, had for years been moving significantly closer to a different LDP Diet member, Tadamori Ôshima, who did not leave the ruling party.<sup>7</sup>

Patron–client ties in Japan tend to be founded on shared geography; national politicians tend to represent the same areas as their subnational clients. Given this, if subnational politicians base their party affiliation choices on the party that their national patron chooses, we should see subnational politicians switching parties only in areas where national politicians did so as well.

Indeed, we can see this pattern in Table 1. As the upper left-hand portion of the table shows, there was a very high correlation between defection from the LDP to *Shinsei* at the national and subnational levels. Out of 47 total prefectures in Japan, 28 had HR members who split from the LDP by 1994 to join *Shinsei*. In 20 out of those 28 prefectures, prefectural assembly members also left the LDP to join *Shinsei* (Yes-Diet-Defection/Yes-Prefectural Assembly Defection, or YD/YP). In addition, in only three of the 19 prefectures where no national Diet members left the LDP to join *Shinsei* did any assembly members defect (No-Diet-Defection/Yes-Prefectural Assembly Defection, or ND/YP). There was little switching to *Sakigake*, but the pattern is in many ways similar (see the upper-middle portion of Table 1). Subnational politicians *only* switched to *Sakigake* in (two) prefectures in which national politicians did so as well. There was no prefectural assembly member switching to the party in the 39 prefectures where no HR members joined the party.

In contrast, there was a far weaker relationship between national and subnational politicians when it came to leaving the LDP to become independents. In eight prefectures where LDP HR members left the party to become independents, subnational politicians did so as well. However, in the eight other prefectures that LDP HR members became independents, no subnational politician followed. Even more striking is the fact that in seven prefectures, prefectural LDP members became independents even though no LDP HR member did so. This is consistent with our earlier discussion that suggested that subnational politicians might have less incentive to switch to independent status since it may not help them in a quest to gain resources from the central government.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The quantitative analysis here draws from the data set on LDP prefectural assembly incumbents used by Desposato and Scheiner (2008) and available at <http://swd.ucsd.edu/data.html> (see their acknowledgements and p. 516, fn. 10 for details of the data set). We supplement Desposato and Scheiner's data set with information from the "J-LOD" (Japan Legislative Organization Data) data set utilized in Pekkanen et al. (2006). We focus on the 1993–1994 period because that is the only period with all the relevant information in the data set and because it was overwhelmingly the most significant period of party switching. To be sure, national LDP politicians occasionally had conservative independent prefectural assembly members in their *keiretsu*. However, the Desposato and Scheiner's data set on party switching does not include information on such politicians and, based on our conversations with Japanese politicians and journalists, we have good reason to believe that there were very few independent prefectural assembly members in the *keiretsu* of LDP House of Representatives members prior to 1993–1994.

<sup>4</sup> There were also three additional LDP members of prefectural assemblies who left the party to join the Japan New Party. Because they made up such a tiny group, we do not include them in the analysis here, but their inclusion leads to no change in the results of models focused on the other three switching options.

<sup>5</sup> Interviews with these four politicians were conducted, respectively, July 23, May 21, May 27, and May 21, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Toshio Terayama, a Democratic Party member of the Tokyo assembly, noted that the defection from the LDP in that assembly tended to follow *keiretsu* lines (Interview, May 27, 1999), but, as we show later, on average *keiretsu* were much likely in urban areas and prefectural assembly members, therefore, were less likely to switch parties with a national defector from the LDP.

<sup>7</sup> Written correspondence with prefectural political reporters in Aomori (May 5 and 14, 1999), Shizuoka (May 12 and 19, 1999), and Mie (June 4, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, in roughly half (seven) of the 15 prefectures in which an LDP prefectural assembly member became an independent, there was no national politician who had also done so. Out of 25 LDP prefectural assembly members who became independents, only four (although seven if we include Tottori prefecture's Shigeru Ishiba whom we discussed in the Appendix) shared a district with an LDP national politician who became an independent. Moreover, there is little correlation between the presence of senior or non-urban politicians and switching to independent status at the prefectural assembly level. It appears that prefectural assembly members were more likely to become independents when in prefectures of national LDP politicians who held leadership positions in pork posts and who became independents (see Table 1), but this aggregate prefecture-level data is misleading: At the individual level, out of 25 prefectural assembly members who left the LDP to become independents, only one actually shared a district with a pork-post-holding national LDP member who became an independent.

#### 4.1.1. Variation in prefectural patterns of following the national leader

Clearly, the correlation between joining *Shinsei* and *Sakigake* at the national and the prefectural levels is not perfect, but the exceptions are useful for what they can tell us about the reasons for defection. Many of the exceptions are idiosyncratic cases and we discuss a number of these in greater detail in the *Appendix*. For example, out of the three cases of prefectural assembly member switching that occurred without national-level defection (ND/YP), two were clearly more about individual behind-the-scenes squabbling than party realignment, and in the third prefectural assembly members actually did take their cue from a national leader. Similar sorts of exceptions exist in some of the YD/NP cases (i.e., where an HR member went to *Shinsei*, but no prefectural assembly members did). For example, in one case (Tottori prefecture) an HR switcher merely asked his supporters to leave the LDP and saw no need for them to join *Shinsei* with him.

However, the idiosyncratic cases are the exception, rather than the norm – most cases within the YD/NP type fit into our hypotheses about the how subnational politicians were less likely to follow a national leader when that leader was less powerful and/or had less access to pork and when they were from a district that simply did not rely as much on central resources. As *Table 1* indicates, in 11 out of the 17 prefectures in which a *senior* (more than three terms in the HR) LDP member switched to *Shinsei*, a prefectural assembly member did as well. The six in which prefectural assembly members did not switch to *Shinsei* with the HR politician were Okayama, Saga, Oita, Osaka, Hyogo, and Hiroshima. We discuss the exceptions of Okayama and Saga in the *Appendix*. Meanwhile, members of prefectural-level *keiretsu* attached to national-level defectors from urban, but not overwhelmingly metropolitan districts in Oita, Hyogo, and Hiroshima decided not to join *Shinsei* out of concern that such a move would hinder their ability to get funding for their districts from the national government.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> This information is based on correspondence and interviews with local political leaders and media from these prefectures, May–August, 1999. Why might prefectural assembly members be skeptical of defecting to *Shinsei* if it was in the national government in 1993–1994? Most likely, the answer has to do with politicians' perceptions of the staying power of the non-LDP government. Defection at the national level allowed *Shinsei* to gain a foothold in the government, but the non-LDP government's tenure was quite short. Only nine months elapsed between the time that the anti-LDP government was formed and the time it lost its Diet majority. When combined with insecurity about the stability of the new party system, and local skepticism about the new party's staying power in government, the brevity of *Shinsei*'s time in government may have led many local politicians to conclude that *Shinsei* was not a reliable long-term link to central governmental resources. Interviews conducted over May–August 1999 with Diet members from three different parties (the DPJ, *Kōmei*, and the LDP), with the DPJ prefectural organization in Hyogo (June 24, 1999), and correspondence over the same period with prefectural reporters in Hiroshima and Saga confirmed the uneasiness held by a number of subnational politicians with regard to the stability of the party system and the anti-LDP government. Moreover, unlike the national House of Representatives, prefectural assembly elections are on a fixed schedule, occurring ever four years. Most assembly members did not face reelection until 1995, allowing skeptical subnational politicians time to wait and see how the new parties fared at the national level before making a decision to switch.

In addition, very high levels of urban-ness also worked against the development of close ties between national and subnational politicians at times. That is, we hypothesized that highly urban areas both focus less on pork as a political tool and generally require less support from the central government. As a result, metropolitan subnational politicians have less incentive to become part of a tight *keiretsu* relationship with a national politician. Indeed, LDP politicians' staff members and political reporters confirm that *keiretsu* developed less often and with far less strength in very urban areas. In three of the YD/NP prefectures – Osaka, Hyogo, and Hiroshima – there were HR defectors from very metropolitan districts who simply had no established *keiretsu* who could have followed them.<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly, *Table 1* shows that out of 14 prefectures where an urban national politician switched from the LDP to *Shinsei*, 11 also saw a prefectural assembly member switch to *Shinsei* – but this figure is somewhat misleading.<sup>11</sup> Not surprisingly, the three exceptions here are again Osaka, Hyogo and Hiroshima. Nevertheless, in general we had expected less following of national leaders in urban areas, and it turns out the most of the urban YD/YP cases are a result of a very small number of prefectural assembly members switching. Out of 224 urban LDP prefectural assembly members who had in their district an LDP HR member who joined *Shinsei*, only 21 (9%) left the LDP to join the new party as well. In contrast, out of 301 LDP non-urban prefectural assembly members who had in their district an LDP HR member who joined *Shinsei*, 45 (15%) followed the national leader, with the difference between the two types of districts statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Prefectural assembly members appeared to take an especially strong cue from the posts held by the national politicians from their districts. As the third *Shinsei* grouping in *Table 1* indicates, there were 11 prefectures where an HR LDP member who had held a leadership position in a pork/distributive politics post left the party to join *Shinsei*.<sup>12</sup> Prefectural assembly members left the LDP and joined *Shinsei* in 10 out of these 11 prefectures. The one exception to the pattern here was Hyogo, which, as we discussed earlier, had two reasons consistent with our hypotheses for having no prefectural assembly switchers to *Shinsei*.

*Table 1* also indicates that *Sakigake* fits the general pattern as well, albeit with a much smaller number of switchers. Prefectural assembly members switched to

<sup>10</sup> Written correspondence with secretary of an LDP Diet member from Osaka (May 27, 1999) and telephone interview with a Hiroshima prefectural political reporter (August 1999). In addition, in a survey one of the authors conducted with national LDP legislators, Diet members from urban areas were much more likely than rural politicians to claim that they had no *keiretsu*.

<sup>11</sup> To measure urban-ness, we utilize the commonly used DID (Densely Inhabited Districts) index. The measure runs continuously from close to 0 to 1, with more densely inhabited districts (higher scores) indicating greater urban-ness. For the sake of dichotomizing the measure, we term all districts that score 0.8 or higher as urban and those with lower scores as not urban.

<sup>12</sup> Leadership positions are: vice-minister or minister in a cabinet post, director or chair in a legislative committee, and vice-chair, chair, or acting chair/director in an LDP Policy Affairs Research Council (PARC) post.

**Table 1**

In how many prefectures was there party switching from the LDP in the national House of Representatives (HR) and prefectural assembly?

		To <i>Shinsei</i>		To <i>Sakigake</i>		To Independent	
Prefectural Assembly Member Defection?	Was there a national switcher?	Yes (YD)	No (ND)	Yes (YD)	No (ND)	Yes (YD)	No (ND)
	Yes (YP)	20	3	2	0	8	7
	No (NP)	8	16	6	39	8	24
	Was there a national switcher who was senior (more than 3 terms in HR)?	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
	Yes (YP)	11	12	0	2	4	11
	No (NP)	6	18	2	43	5	27
	Was there a national switcher who held a pork leadership post?	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
	Yes (YP)	10	13	0	2	4	11
	No (NP)	1	23	2	43	1	31
	Was there a national switcher who was from an urban district (DID $\geq 0.8$ )?	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
	Yes (YP)	11	12	0	2	4	11
	No (NP)	3	21	5	40	3	29

YD – Yes Diet switcher, ND – No Diet switcher, YP – Yes Prefectural assembly switcher, NP – No Prefectural assembly switcher, DID – Densely Inhabited Districts (measure of population density/urbanization).

Notes: Compiled from information in *Yomiuri Shinbun* (various years), interviews and correspondence with local political reporters and national level Diet members, and the J-LOD data set.

*Sakigake* only in prefectures where HR LDP members had also switched. But, only ten HR LDP members had joined *Sakigake* in the first place, making it unlikely that there would be many prefectural assembly members who would join the new party. In fact, prefectural assembly switching occurred in only two prefectures, Kumamoto and Shiga. Kumamoto was the home of Hiroyuki Sonoda, a Diet member who left the LDP to become Secretary-General of *Sakigake*. He was followed by two prefectural assembly members (although one did not share a district with him). *Sakigake's* president was Masayoshi Takemura, former governor and one of the most powerful politicians in Shiga. All seven prefectural assembly members who switched to *Sakigake* in Shiga shared a district with Takemura. However, not one of the LDP members of the House of Representatives who switched to *Sakigake* had served more than two terms in office, making it less likely that there would be close ties between these national switchers and prefectural assembly members. Moreover, *Sakigake* openly focused on reforming the Japanese system, and therefore, was less focused (especially compared to members of *Shinsei*) on procuring distributive goods. As a result, there was simply little reason to expect many prefectural assembly members to follow national leaders into *Sakigake*.

In short, our story here is similar to the one told by Desposato and Scheiner – efforts to maintain access to central state resources drove subnational politicians' party affiliation. Yet, all members of the ruling party were not the same. Some were more powerful than others and those who were especially powerful were more attractive to subnational politicians who relied upon central government goods.

#### 4.2. Case study – Nagano prefecture

There is also important variation in the amount of switching that occurred in each prefecture. In particular, four prefectures – Aomori, Iwate, Nagano, and Shizuoka – had a large number (9, 14, 12 and 10, respectively) of prefectural

assembly members leave the LDP to join *Shinsei*. It is striking that in each of these prefectures, the major political figure at the national level was a leading LDP HR member who not only joined *Shinsei*, but was a leading member of the new party.<sup>13</sup> And, with the exception of one prefectural assembly switcher in both Iwate and Shizuoka, every single *Shinsei* switcher in those four prefectures shared a district with an LDP HR member who left to join the new party. In Aomori, Iwate, and Shizuoka, the general pattern was that prefectural assembly members simply followed their national leaders. However, the pattern in Nagano prefecture was somewhat different, but in a way that reinforces our point about the importance of subnational legislators cultivating and maintaining ties to especially important national level figures from their prefecture.

In Nagano, at the time of the LDP's national level split in 1993, three LDP members of the HR left the party to form *Shinsei*. A fourth defected later. Prefectural assembly members responded later in the year: on December 1, 1993, after a vote approved by all 39 members of the LDP prefectural assembly group, the group abandoned the LDP title and renamed itself *Jiyū Kenseikai*.

In late April of 1994, the leading politician in Nagano, Tsutomu Hata, became Japan's prime minister at the head of a minority government that excluded the LDP. As a result, it became uncomfortable for those closely affiliated with Hata and other *Shinsei* members to remain in a parliamentary group with those affiliated with the LDP. Eight *Jiyū Kenseikai* members defected from the group to form the *Shinsei* affiliate *Shin Kenseikai*. In May, a group dissatisfied with the administration of the *Jiyū Kenseikai* formed its own parliamentary group entitled *KenMin Club*. Later that year, the 4 veteran members of *KenMin Club* joined with the

<sup>13</sup> Three of the Diet members were in fact probably the three leading members of the new party: Ichiro Ozawa in Iwate, Tsutomu Hata in Nagano, and Hiroshi Kumagai in Shizuoka.

existing *Shin Kenseikai* members to make the latter group 12-strong.

Up to this point, prefectural assembly events in Nagano had occurred in a manner similar to those in other prefectures where Diet members had split from the LDP. However, in late June 1994, the Hata government fell and was replaced by a new government led by the LDP. After the prefectural assembly elections in April of 1995, *Jiyū Kenseikai* and *Shin Kenseikai* dissolved their respective parliamentary groups and inaugurated one giant new one, named *Shinseikai*. Thus, neither the LDP, nor any of the new parties existed as a party or parliamentary group in the Nagano prefectural assembly.<sup>14</sup> While many of these assembly members received LDP nominations and endorsements, for years afterward – even after other national politicians had returned to the LDP – most did not acknowledge any sort of relationship with the LDP in their campaign activities and posters, especially in Hata's bastion in the east (*Asahi Shinbun*, March 19, 1999).

A number of features of Hata's power may have led to this behavior in Nagano. Hata's reach may have been so great in Nagano that he had ties to subnational politicians throughout the prefecture. His long history of relationships with the bureaucracy and important politicians at the national level may have driven Nagano prefectural assembly members to fear offending him, even if he was not in the government. Or, it may have been that assembly members feared that should Hata ever rejoin the government – through any political party – his power would be so great that punishment for turning their back on him would be severe. Whatever the reason, it is clear that Hata's powerful presence played a major part in leading the subnational politicians in Nagano to avoid more serious party affiliation for a number of years.

#### 4.3. Individual level quantitative analysis

We also examine the dynamics across Japan more systematically. If party switching among prefectural assembly members in Japan was a result of a desire to maintain access to central governmental resources, we ought to see systematic differences in the contexts faced by switchers and non-switchers. When particularly powerful – especially in the arena of distributive politics – members of the LDP switched parties in 1993–1994, their prefectural assembly clients ought to have switched to the same party. Moreover, subnational politicians ought to have been less likely to follow the lead of a national leader in parts of the country where access to central governmental pork was less important – i.e., in urban areas.

Following Desposato and Scheiner, we draw on a data set of all 1605 LDP prefectural assembly members from 1993–1994 and examine their choice to remain in the LDP or switch to one of the new parties (or become independent). The decision to switch parties is based on factors related to both the individual characteristics of the legislators and features of the parties they considered joining,

making the conditional logit model a particularly appropriate form of analysis.<sup>15</sup> The unit of analysis is the individual prefectural assembly member and we seek to explain the party each LDP prefectural assembly member chose to affiliate with after party switching (away from the LDP) occurred at the national level.

As we discuss above, patron–client relationships between national and subnational politicians in Japan tend to be founded on shared geography. *Keiretsu* are most likely to form between national and subnational politicians who represent the same geographic area. Our data set indicates, for each prefectural assembly politician (or, more accurately, for the politician's district), (1) whether there was in the same geographic area a national LDP politician who had left the LDP, (2) if so, to what party that national politician switched, (3) how many terms that national politician had served in the national House of Representatives, (4) whether that national politician had in the most recent year held a leadership position in a pork and/or high policy post,<sup>16</sup> and (5) the level of urban-ness of that national politician's electoral district. Following Desposato and Scheiner, we use this shared geography between national and subnational politicians as a proxy measure of a *keiretsu* relationship. Desposato and Scheiner find that when national LDP politicians left the party to join another (or become independents), their prefectural assembly clients were likely to switch to the same new party.

We therefore include in our analysis the variable *National Leader's 1994 Party*, which indicates the party affiliation – once all of the 1993–1994 party switching had occurred – of HR legislators within the prefectural assembly member's district.<sup>17</sup> We expect a positive coefficient on the variable: prefectural assembly members ought to affiliate with their patron's party. When there is no switching by national politicians in the district, prefectural assembly members ought to stay in the LDP; when a national politician moves to a new alternative, the prefectural assembly member ought to follow. That is, prefectural assembly members ought to switch parties with their patron in order to try to maintain their access point to central government resources.

However, as we highlight throughout this paper, not all patrons are able to offer the same opportunities to their clients. It is unlikely that prefectural assembly members would join the new parties simply because they believed that doing so, by itself, would give them access to resources. Rather, we expect that prefectural assembly

<sup>15</sup> For details of the conditional logit model, see Desposato (2006), Desposato and Scheiner (2008), Long (1997), and McFadden (1973).

<sup>16</sup> We were unable to get complete post information for two national defectors from the LDP, leading to missing data and 14 prefectural assembly members getting dropped from the analysis. We re-ran the models while adding for each of these two national candidates each possible combination of values for these variables. Even doing so, the results do not change markedly from those reported in Table 2.

<sup>17</sup> If there was in the district an HR politician who left the LDP, National Leader's 1994 Party indicates the new party of the politician. Otherwise, the variable indicates that the politician stayed in the LDP. This is the same as Desposato and Scheiner's "Pipeline Switch" variable. For additional details on how to code variables in this manner for conditional logit analysis, we recommend looking over Desposato and Scheiner (2008: 513–515).

<sup>14</sup> This information is based on written correspondence with political reporters from Nagano, various issues of the *Shinano Mainichi Shinbun*, and *Yomiuri Shinbun* (various years).

members switched parties in order to have the best chance of gaining access to central resources. If so, they were most likely to switch parties when they were the clients of *powerful* national politicians who left the LDP.

A number of different factors can indicate power among national politicians. As we noted earlier, power in Japanese politics tends to be associated with seniority and politicians who have served more terms tend to exert greater political influence and are seen to have greater access to political and bureaucratic decision-makers.<sup>18</sup> However, other attributes of national politicians might be at least as important. Most notably, politicians might be members of or hold leadership positions in important government, legislative, and/or party posts – especially in the areas of distributive policy and “high policy.”

Based on these expectations, we develop three hypotheses: First, prefectural assembly members will switch to the new party of their patron when the patron is a *senior* politician who left the LDP. For most prefectural assembly members, *Senior Politician* is coded 0. However, for all LDP prefectural assembly members with an HR LDP politician in their district who had served more than three terms and who had left the LDP, *Senior Politician* indicates the new party the patron moved to.<sup>19</sup> We expect a positive coefficient on this variable: if prefectural assembly members were most concerned with maintaining access to central resources through an HR politician, they were more likely to follow that politician to a new party when he held substantial seniority.

We also offer a more direct measure of influence over pork barrel. If maintaining access to central governmental pork truly is important, prefectural assembly members will follow national politicians to new parties when the national politician is influential in the area of distributive politics. We introduce the variable *Pork Leadership Post*, which is coded 1 for the new party of any national LDP defector who held in the previous year a leadership position in a construction, transportation, agriculture, local affairs, post office or telecommunications ministry, legislative committee, or LDP PARC committee (and 0 otherwise).<sup>20</sup> If a desire to access pork drove prefectural assembly members' ties to national

leaders and, thus, their decision to stay or leave the LDP, *Pork Leadership Post* will have a positive coefficient.

We also include one other measure of power – whether the legislator held a position of influence on “high policy” posts. We introduce “*High-Policy*” *Leadership Post*, which is coded 1 for the new party of all national party switchers who held leadership positions on the Finance, Foreign Affairs, Legal Affairs, Defense, Cabinet, Tax, and Basic Policy ministries and committees (and 0 otherwise). We expect “*High-Policy*” *Leadership Post* to have a positive coefficient, indicating that prefectural assembly members were more likely to join the new party of their national patron when that national leader was a powerful legislator at the national level.

At least as important as the power of the national leader is the type of district being represented. As we discussed, we expect urban prefectural politicians to have less need to access distributive resources from the central government. We therefore expect weaker ties between national and subnational politicians in urban districts, whereby prefectural assembly members would be less likely to follow a national politician out of the LDP to a new party. To test this hypothesis, we include *Urban-ness of Defector's District*, which measures the population density (running from close to 0 for very rural districts to 1 for metropolitan districts) of each HR party switcher's district. The more urban the district, the less it relies on pork resources from the central government. As a result, its prefectural assembly members should have been less likely to follow national leaders to new parties, so we expect a negative coefficient on this variable.

Our remaining variables are the controls that Desposato and Scheiner used: *Governor's Party* indicates the party (or parties) associated with the governor of the prefectural assembly member's prefecture. The variable is non-significant in Desposato and Scheiner's model, and, given the importance of *central* resources in Japan, we do not expect governors to have a great impact here. We include a variable that we call *No Switch*. Conditional logit models are designed to measure the impact of characteristics of the choice set – in this case, the choice of parties – so in order to bring in characteristics of the individuals themselves, it is necessary to interact them with a dummy variable like *No Switch*.<sup>21</sup> The coefficient on *No Switch* captures a baseline intercept-like propensity to stay in one's current party, and interactions with *No Switch* show how legislators' individual characteristics affect their decisions to switch parties.

This becomes important as we control for candidates' electoral security. During the period we examine, Japanese HR and prefectural assembly elections utilized the SNTV/MMD system. Under SNTV/MMD, voters cast ballots directly for candidates, and election is based entirely on the number of votes each candidate wins. To measure prefectural assembly members' level of electoral strength, we use

<sup>18</sup> Seniority might also simply mean that the national politician had more time to develop *keiretsu*.

<sup>19</sup> In the data set, there are nearly 1400 LDP prefectural assembly members who did not have in their districts a national legislator who had left the LDP. For these prefectural assembly members, there was typically more than one LDP national politician sharing the district. Given the sheer number of these cases, as well as the uncertainty over who precisely was the patron for each, we do not code for the characteristics of any of the national LDP politicians who did not leave the LDP. However, we do not believe that this harms our analysis: given that prefectural assembly members in such districts had no national patron who had switched parties, they had little incentive to switch parties as well, irrespective of the level of seniority of those who provided them with access to resources. Also, ultimately, the purpose of these national defector characteristics variables is not to predict the likelihood of a prefectural assembly politician switching parties in general. It is to help predict when they will or will not follow a national leader out of the LDP to a new party.

<sup>20</sup> For both the pork and high-policy variables, we tried a different coding in which all members – irrespective of leadership role – of the posts were coded as 1. The coefficients on these modified versions of the variables were non-significant.

<sup>21</sup> Our *No Switch* variable is the same as Desposato and Scheiner's “Home” variable. It identifies legislators' initial party – it is coded 1 for the legislator's party at the beginning of the period (i.e., the LDP) and 0 for all other parties. For additional details on this variable and the interaction with Electoral Strength, see Desposato and Scheiner (2008: 513–517).

Desposato and Scheiner's measure, which defines *Electoral Strength* as the candidate's vote total from the previous election minus the droop quota in the district in that election (all divided by 100,000).<sup>22</sup> The variable shows how close the candidate came to losing the previous election, with higher numbers indicating wide margins of victory. However, again, because the variable indicates an individual characteristic of the candidate, it is necessary to interact it with No Switch. The coefficient on this Electoral Strength variable therefore indicates the impact of a candidate's degree of electoral security (as measured by his margin of victory in the previous election) on staying in the LDP. We expect a positive coefficient – those who are the most electorally secure will be less likely to switch parties.

The results of the conditional logit model, presented in Table 2, offer strong evidence for our arguments about the factors shaping subnational politicians' propensity to follow a national leader. Let us look first at Model 1 (all LDP members). The results for the control variables are nearly identical to those found by Desposato and Scheiner. All else being equal, prefectural assembly members were generally unlikely to switch parties (positive and significant coefficient on No Switch); were more likely to stay in the LDP when they were electorally secure (positive and significant coefficient on Electoral Strength); and they tended to remain – whether staying in the LDP or joining a new party – a member of the party of their patron (positive and significant coefficient on National Leader's 1994 Party).

Most important for our purposes, the results clearly indicate when prefectural assembly members will be most likely to follow their national leader and, overall, provide strong support for our claim that subnational politicians' efforts to access central government pork drove the relationship between these politicians and national leaders. First, prefectural politicians were likely to follow powerful HR politicians, especially those who helped provide access to pork. The coefficient on Senior Politician is positive and significant, indicating that prefectural assembly members were more likely to follow senior – rather than junior – national politicians out of the LDP. We also find more direct evidence of the importance of pork access in driving subnational politician party affiliation: the positive and significant coefficient on Pork Leadership Post indicates that prefectural assembly members were more likely to join the new party of an HR LDP defector from their district when that national politician held a leadership position on a distributive politics post.

The results also suggest that the relative importance of pork to subnational politicians from different areas affected their likelihood of following a national politician: the negative coefficient on Urban-ness of Defector's District indicates that subnational politicians from urban areas were much less likely to follow a national leader from their district. Indeed, the fact that the negative coefficient on this variable is nearly identical in magnitude to the positive coefficient on National Leader's 1994 Party indicates that,

**Table 2**

Conditional logit model of party affiliation and switching among LDP prefectural assembly members (1993–1994).

	(1) All LDP members	(2) Not including independents
National Leader's 1994 Party	3.518** (0.436)	4.356** (0.515)
<i>Characteristics of HR Party Switcher</i>		
Senior Politician	0.582** (0.263)	0.486* (0.271)
Pork Leadership Post	0.636* (0.290)	0.528* (0.307)
"High-policy" Post	0.575* (0.305)	0.456 (0.314)
Urban-ness of District	-3.702** (0.871)	-3.473** (0.926)
Governor's Party	0.427** (0.178)	0.188 (0.204)
No Switch	4.315** (0.215)	4.924** (0.306)
Elect. strength *No Switch	7.951** (2.612)	9.243** (3.142)
Log-likelihood	-425.0	-282.8
N	1591	1566

One-tailed tests, \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Entries are conditional logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

all else being equal, the presence of a junior defector from the LDP in a metropolitan district (DID equal to 1) has no effect on the likelihood of any prefectural assembly member switching parties. We interpret this to mean that the political-economic context in urban areas gave prefectural assembly members less incentive to create close ties to national politicians.

Our data set includes all prefectural assembly LDP members, but it might make sense to drop from the analysis politicians who chose to become independents, rather than staying in the LDP or joining a new party. As we saw in our prefecture-level analysis, there appears to be no relationship between national and subnational politicians when it comes to switching away from all parties (i.e. becoming an independent). Indeed, we run a logit model (with variables corresponding to those in our conditional logit models) to predict when prefectural assembly members would leave the LDP to become independent and find no evidence that subnational politicians follow a national leader (results not shown). The decision to become independent rather than stay in the LDP or join a new party appears to be based on less systematic forces.

Therefore, we introduce Model 2, which is identical to Model 1, but drops independents from the analysis. Our most important findings do not change, but there are a few noteworthy differences. First, in Model 1 there was a surprising result in that Governor's Party had a significant and positive coefficient, suggesting that prefectural assembly members also based their party affiliation on the party of their prefectural governor. However, once we drop independents from the analysis, as we do in Model 2, the coefficient on Governor's Party is no longer significant. Second, there is now weaker evidence that having a patron who holds a high-policy post matters for subnational politicians' party choices. In Model 1, "High-Policy" Leadership Post had a positive and significant coefficient, but in Model 2, it is no longer significant. Third, the impact of having a national patron appears greater, as indicated by the larger coefficient on National Leader's 1994 Party in

<sup>22</sup> For candidates who ran unopposed in their districts, the Electoral Strength score is equal to that of the candidate with the highest score in the prefecture.

Model 2. But, overall, the major findings remain: subnational politicians from areas that rely less upon the central government for pork were less likely to switch parties with a national leader (negative and significant sign on Urbanness of Defector's District); and subnational politicians were more likely to join the party of a national patron when that patron had held office for more than three terms and/or held a leadership position on a distributive post.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

In 1993, there was widespread optimism that, after 38 years, there would finally be an end to LDP dominance in Japan. Party switching by national politicians away from the LDP had made it possible for new parties to enter the government. However, the new parties and their successors – made up of defectors from the LDP – quickly found it difficult to build on their early successes. In many ways, their greatest difficulty was developing grassroots support and a group of subnational politicians on whom they could build. Work on the Liberal Democrats in the U.K. (e.g., McAllister et al., 2002; Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005) and new right parties in Europe (e.g., Art, 2007) indicate how important control over local government can be in helping small and new parties develop and grow at the national level.

Indeed, in Japan developing a base of subnational politicians provides huge advantages for a party. As Park points out, in Japan “[s]ecuring the cooperation of local politicians is critical to the success of the electoral campaign” (1998: 76). Japanese subnational politicians are knowledgeable campaigners who can mobilize their own supporters for national politicians and can campaign full-time. In addition, subnational politicians often make the most successful candidates in races for national level office (Scheiner, 2006). Lacking many such politicians undoubtedly slowed the development of Japan's new opposition in the years following 1993–1994.

Our analysis in this paper demonstrates just why the new parties had difficulties developing such a base. For the most part, the only subnational politicians who were willing to leave the LDP to join these new parties were those who had patrons who had also switched. Moreover, the most likely subnational politicians to switch to the new parties were (a) from rural districts and (b) had powerful patrons, particularly in the realm of distributive politics. But, out of 70 switchers away from the LDP in the national House of Representatives, well over half were from urban districts, less than half had served more than three terms and only around one-quarter held leadership positions in pork posts. Moreover, of the new parties that emerged from the 1993–1994 split, the only one that remained reliably opposed to the LDP was *Shinsei*, a party with roughly half of its national defectors from rural districts and less than 50% who had held more than three terms or led a pork post. In short, no matter how popular the new parties became, they were dependent upon a small number of already existing patron–client networks to build up their strength.

For the purposes of building new parties, patron–client networks founded on powerful former LDP members were likely to be the most effective, but these networks tended to

be the scarce among the defectors. Moreover, there was a bit of sad irony in this story for the opposition. Because urban subnational politicians relied relatively little on central governmental pork, they were much less likely to develop the close ties to national leaders that would be necessary for them to follow a national politician leaving the LDP. In this way, even though the new opposition was at its most popular in urban areas, it was harder to attract urban subnational politicians to leave the LDP and help build more substantial local level challenges to the LDP in the cities. As a result, the new parties faced additional difficulties developing a solid base over the short-to-medium term. To be sure, the Democratic Party of Japan, a new party growing out of the 1990s movements, was finally able to topple the LDP. But it only did so by riding a national wave of displeasure with the LDP a full fifteen years after the 1993–1994 splits.

Our work here contributes to scholarship on Japanese and comparative party politics in specific ways. Work by Scheiner (2005, 2006) suggests that the opposition in Japan had difficulty building a strong base in subnational level politics, but his arguments are based primarily on aggregate-level seat data from the pre-1993 period. In contrast, in this paper we focus specifically on the 1993–1994 period in which non-LDP parties had their greatest opportunity to overtake the LDP. During this period, legislators were willing to leave the LDP at the national level, making it possible to see what the effects of shifts at the national level would be on shifts at the subnational level. Moreover, we offer an *individual-level analysis* of prefectural assembly members, allowing us to avoid many of the ecological inference problems inherent in approaches that utilize aggregate-level data. Perhaps most important – from the perspective of understanding Japanese politics – the analysis here suggests even more strongly the extremely difficult situation faced by the new parties in Japan that sought to supplant the LDP in the 1990s.

Our analysis is similar in many respects to that of Desposato and Scheiner (2008), but extends their work in important ways. Unlike Desposato and Scheiner, we introduce a *direct* measure of national politicians' influence over pork – our Pork Leadership Post variable – and show more definitively that subnational politicians, in fact, followed national leaders who held such influence. In addition, we argue and demonstrate that there was substantial variation in subnational politicians' party switching patterns depending on the amount of influence held by their national patron and their relative need for central government pork. Desposato and Scheiner argue that the location of resource control is important in shaping party affiliation and party switching by legislators. Analysts might be inclined to take the implications of that analysis too far, suggesting that legislators will simply seek to join the parties of those who control resources. However, we argue here that different legislators – even within the same political system – have different options available to them to facilitate access to state resources. In Japan, subnational legislators needed to work through their national patrons, but not all patrons held the same degree of power, thereby leading to variation in their influence over their subnational clients. Moreover, politicians from more urban

districts either did not need to use pork as a political tool or did not need to rely upon the central government to provide it to them, and therefore, did not create the same close ties to national patrons that would make following the leader likely.

Our analysis of the variation in party switching patterns has implications for understanding party switching in other pork-dominated countries as well. Given Desposato and Scheiner's work, Brazil is the most obvious comparative case here. Desposato (2006) and Desposato and Scheiner's analyses focus on Brazilian politicians switching to *parties* that compose the government coalition supporting the executive. But within these coalitions, different parties undoubtedly maintain different levels of influence – in large part because of their size in the legislature – and presumably would, therefore, vary in their level of attractiveness as a landing spot for ambitious politicians looking to access pork through a new party. Moreover, not all state governments in Brazil are equally wealthy and able to fund pork projects. One could thus imagine ambitious Brazilian politicians taking stronger or weaker party affiliation cues from state governments depending on their relative funding power. Analysis of this sort also makes great sense in studying party affiliation patterns in Mexico, where variation in the relative spending power of different subnational governments and the recent decentralization of government power allows studies to examine variation in the location and extent of spending influence and their impact on party affiliation (see, e.g., Diaz-Cayeros, 2003) and, even to some extent, party switching (Barrow, 2007). Moreover, Brazil's and Mexico's focus on allying with specific *parties* is an interesting contrast to Japan, where links to individual *politicians* appear to matter a great deal as well. Future work would do well to consider more systematically when ties to individual politicians may compete with (or even trump) ties to particular parties.

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### Appendix. Idiosyncratic exceptions to the prefecture-level patterns

Most prefectures saw a situation where either an HR member and a prefectural assembly member leave the LDP to join *Shinsei* or one where no LDP member at any level

switched to the new party, but the exceptions are useful for what they can tell us about the reasons for defection. First, the three cases of prefectural assembly members switching to *Shinsei* without a national patron also doing so (ND/YP) are actually exceptions that prove our rule. In one prefecture, Aichi, one longtime LDP Diet member retired from the Diet before the 1993 election and his son ran in his stead. Thus, technically the sitting incumbent did not defect, though his anointed replacement ran under the *Shinsei* banner and, accordingly, the members of his father's *keiretsu* joined *Shinsei* with him. In another prefecture, Miyazaki, two LDP prefectural assembly members had a dispute with the LDP leadership over whom to support in the Miyazaki City mayoral election. They split from the party in anger, joining *Shinsei* without following any national-level *keiretsu* leader.<sup>23</sup> In the third ND/YP prefecture, Ehime, a seven-term prefectural assembly member was on the verge of being kicked out of the party for violating party rules when he switched to *Shinsei*.<sup>24</sup>

Also, idiosyncratic cases exist where Diet members joined *Shinsei*, but prefectural assembly members did not. Recall that in 8 of the 28 prefectures where LDP Diet members joined *Shinsei*, there were no LDP prefectural assembly members who followed their lead and switched to the new party (YD/NP). In Tottori, a YD/NP prefecture, HR member Shigeru Ishiba split from the LDP and eventually joined *Shinsei*. However, Ishiba's underlying reason for leaving the LDP was his displeasure with the LDP's military policy. Upon leaving the LDP, he became an independent, was unconcerned with creating a new, stronger party, and merely asked his supporters to leave the LDP, not join *Shinsei*. Therefore, Ishiba's *keiretsu* members became independents, rather than staying in the LDP or becoming *Shinsei* members.<sup>25</sup> In heavily conservative Okayama prefecture, LDP assembly members affiliated with LDP-to-*Shinsei* defector Mutsuki Katô worried about their electoral chances if they were not members of the LDP and expressed concern about their ability to be involved in the prefectural legislative process if they were no longer LDP members.<sup>26</sup> In only one prefecture, Saga, were there substantive policy reasons for prefectural assembly members affiliated with the LDP choosing not to switch to *Shinsei*. Saga assembly members were nervous about the potential electoral costs of losing the LDP label. In addition, as politicians in an area that is highly dependent economically on agriculture, they appeared to have particularly strong misgivings with *Shinsei* because of the agricultural liberalization being pushed by the Diet coalition government of which *Shinsei* was a major part.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Written correspondence with Miyazaki prefectural political reporter, May 8, 1999.

<sup>24</sup> Written correspondence with Ehime prefectural political reporter, May 15, 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Ishiba, July 23, 1999.

<sup>26</sup> Telephone interview with Okayama prefectural political reporter, August 10, 1999. Two of Katô's twelve *keiretsu* members did leave the LDP (Fukui and Fukai, 1996), but neither joined *Shinsei*.

<sup>27</sup> Written correspondence with Saga prefecture political reporter, August 12, 1999.

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