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Taro Tsuda

Abstract

The dominant political party in Italy for most of the postwar period, the Christian Democratic Party (*Democrazia Cristiana*, or DC) defined Italian government from the end of World War II until the early 1990s. In this paper, I examine the sources and nature of DC's political hegemony from a comparative perspective, drawing upon insights from another case of single-party dominance, the Liberal Democratic Party in postwar Japan. I will contend that clientelism has been particularly significant as a distinctive feature of DC and of Italian politics in general. Furthermore, I investigate how patronage and one-party dominance were interrelated and mutually-reinforcing. In short, I will aim to study DC dominance in Italy through the conceptual framework of clientelism in order to better understand Italy's political development from the second half of the 20th century.

Keywords: postwar Italy, Christian Democratic Party, dominance, clientelism, Japan

Italy is a land of paradoxes. Celebrated for its culture, climate, and cuisine, it is one of the top tourist destinations in the world. Yet in the media it is often portrayed as a political and fiscal basket case—the country of revolving-door governments, ballooning public debt, pervasive corruption, and the scandal-ridden Silvio Berlusconi. One scholar colorfully described Italy as “a sunny, picturesque Mediterranean landscape whose inhabitants are in chronic disarray.”¹⁾

To understand Italy's idiosyncratic brand of politics, it is necessary to examine the Christian Democratic Party (*Democrazia Cristiana*, or DC). While this political party disappeared from Italy's political scene in 1994, it governed the nation from the end of World War II until the early 1990s. It was the dominant political party in Italian politics for most of the postwar period. Studying DC and its experience in power may shed light on the political sensibilities of the Italian people since the mid-20th century.

The purpose of this paper is to explore DC's role in Italian politics and its track record

of political dominance. I will contend that clientelism has been particularly significant as a distinctive feature of DC and of Italian politics in general. Furthermore, I investigate how patronage and one-party dominance were interrelated and mutually-reinforcing. In short, I aim to study DC dominance in Italy through the conceptual framework of clientelism. First, I examine the concept of one-party dominance, its applicability to postwar Italy, and discuss some key attributes of DC's influence. Second, I consider how clientelism has been relevant to modern Italy even before the rise of DC. Third, I will turn my attention to the ways in which clientelism contributed to DC dominance by helping the party cultivate a broad social base, manage its internal organizational politics, and interact with other major parties in the Italy's postwar democracy. Fourth, I will explore how clientelism contributed to DC's downfall.

A distinctive aspect of this paper is that I write as a specialist of Japanese politics and history. This vantage point allows me to appreciate the Italian case from a comparative perspective. I am interested in DC and Italian politics precisely because of parallels with postwar Japan under the Liberal Democratic Party. Therefore, I will often refer to the Japanese case to shed further light on the topic. In this approach I draw inspiration from comparative work such as Richard Samuels' innovative study of political leaders in modern Japan and Italy.²⁾

One-Party Dominance and Italy's Christian Democrats

One often thinks of two general types of party systems. One is a highly-competitive system with frequent change in party government, characteristic of most democracies. The other is an authoritarian "party-state," where free competition among political parties is not allowed. However, there is another, third type of situation that is more complex, less common, and less often acknowledged than the other two. This is the scenario where a genuinely competitive and pluralistic multiparty framework exists yet actual change in party government is infrequent. In such a "dominant party system," all parties are subject to the same rules, but one party consistently enjoys greater electoral success than its rivals and it serves at the pinnacle of government continuously for extended periods of time.³⁾

Political scientist T. J. Pempel offers a four-part formulation of single-party dominance. First, a dominant party is the top vote-getter in any given electoral contest, winning at least a plurality of contested seats. Second, in the formation of governments, the party has a "dominant bargaining position" vis-à-vis other parties that guarantees that it consistently

serves in the administration either alone or as part of a coalition. Third, the party is the major presence in the government for a considerable duration, not intermittently for a few years at a time. Fourth, the party becomes a long-term agenda-setter, that is, it comes to significantly shape the structure and nature of the political system and public policy of the country it governs for a long time to come.⁴⁾

Italy's DC clearly fulfills these criteria. From 1946 to 1992, the party won at least a plurality in every national parliamentary election and participated in every cabinet, sometimes alone and sometimes in coalition with other parties. Of the twenty men who served as Italy's prime minister between 1946 and 1994, sixteen were Christian Democrats. Five of these leaders held the office five or more times.⁵⁾ Although the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and Italian Socialist Party (PSI) proved to be formidable adversaries, DC played a preeminent role in shaping Italian politics and defining this period as a whole. The party's fall from primacy in the early 1990s transformed the political landscape and marked the end of a real era in postwar Italian history, an era often known as Italy's "First Republic."

Among the relatively rare examples of single-party dominance around the world, the Liberal Democratic Party's preeminent position in postwar Japan offers a particularly uncanny comparison. Also a center-right party, the LDP's first, unbroken stint in power spanned from 1955 to 1993, a time frame that roughly overlaps with that of DC. During this time, the LDP consistently won national elections and led the national government. Like Italy's First Republic, Japan's multiparty system with the LDP as the incumbent party and its Socialist and Communist rivals on the left as the perennial opposition yielded a distinct political and economic order that has come to be known as "the 1955 system."⁶⁾

Key Attributes of DC Dominance in Postwar Italy

A brief overview of the elements of DC dominance is in order. First of all, DC's identity is defined by "Christian democracy," which is basically a form of political Catholicism. Averse to the secular, nationalist tendencies of the modern Italian state, the Roman Catholic Church originally discouraged Catholics from participating in political life, but pressures for the Church to serve as a bulwark against disorder and radicalism led it to reverse the ban in 1919. That same year, a Sicilian priest established the Italian People's Party (PPI), a Catholicism-inspired but officially non-confessional party which would be the predecessor to DC. PPI positioned itself as a moderate, socially-conscious alternative

to Italy's socialist and liberal parties and soon gained traction. Though Benito Mussolini's Fascist movement illegalized PPI and party politics, in 1943, PPI resistance leader Alcide de Gasperi reconstituted the party as DC.⁷⁾

Due to these origins, DC defined itself as a party that both (1) championed traditional Catholic values and (2) occupied the broad, moderate political center, rejecting both leftwing and rightwing radicalism.⁸⁾ While many scholars have emphasized DC's backing from the Catholic Church, it is important to recognize that Italy's nearly-universally Catholic population exhibits a variety of attitudes and numbers of devout practitioners have been continuously declining. DC's source of strength was less because it was Catholic but more importantly because it sought to be a transcendent "catch-all party."⁹⁾

DC's inclusive, big-tent approach took several forms. The party cultivated ties with powerful Catholic trade unions, thereby depriving the Left of a united labor constituency that ordinarily one would expect to fall in its camp.¹⁰⁾ By implementing a thoroughgoing program of land reform (much like the one executed by Japanese conservatives under the American Occupation), DC elevated the position of poor tenant farmers and agricultural laborers and thus gained a loyal base in Italy's rural South, which had vacillated between neo-fascism and communism.¹¹⁾ This was especially important as Italy's sector of primary industries remained large through much of the Cold War. While drawing on Catholic ecumenicalism to promote social welfare, the party also appealed to public and private corporations through pro-growth policies, thereby appealing to large and small-scale capitalists.¹²⁾

DC thereby managed to address the interests of a large segment of the Italian populace, with the notable exception of left-affiliated unions and the intelligentsia.¹³⁾ How did DC appeal to so many constituencies simultaneously? It did so by being a large and heterogeneous organization. In 1961 its membership was characterized as being about 50 percent left-leaning, 25 percent centrist, and 25 percent right-leaning, with each of these wings representing a different part of the electorate.¹⁴⁾ This meant DC was highly factionalized not only by ideology but also based on the personalities of various bosses who led the individual cliques within it.¹⁵⁾ Factionalism compromised DC's unity and efficiency, but it allowed it to be an inclusive, flexible enterprise that was in touch with a variety of interests and associations. Factions also provided useful channels to other parties both on the right and the left, fostering interparty cooperation in coalition-building and policy formation.

Indeed, a number of scholars have identified flexible political bargaining and horse-trading as defining aspects of Italy's First Republic.¹⁶⁾ Known as *trasformismo*, this political

dealmaking meant “the distinction between majorities and minorities in the legislature will not be clear-cut; government coalitions will be loose, viscous, and shifting; and electoral outcomes will be, at best, only vaguely related to the formation of governments or the enactment of public policies.”¹⁷⁾ Such compromise politics reflected the First Republic’s institutional features, including its bicameralism, proportional representation electoral rules, and relatively weak head of government. However, *trasformismo* made Italy above all a system of “party rule” (*partitocrazia*) in which parties rather than formal state institutions were the relevant political agents.¹⁸⁾ DC’s skill at the game allowed it to remain in the center of multiparty government for forty-eight years even at times its margins over its rivals were very thin. While such power-sharing might suggest that DC dominance was shaky in comparison to dominant parties like Japan’s LDP, some contend that it merely represented a different but equally effective “soft hegemony.”¹⁹⁾

Addressing the broader public, DC could also marshal several ideas to unite its large and unwieldy social base. First, despite the diversity of outlooks among Catholics and a declining number of pious ones, Catholic principles continued to resonate with many Italian voters, especially women and senior citizens in rural areas.²⁰⁾ Second, DC touted an impressive track record of national economic development whose benefits transcended particular socioeconomic or geographical lines.²¹⁾ Third, DC could emphasize opposition to communism and radicalism as another ideological position its supporters held in common. Since the Italian Communist Party (PCI) was DC’s main adversary and one of the few parties that did not join any of the DC coalition governments, a vote for DC was a vote against PCI and its communist agenda, which was also associated with the Cold War threat.²²⁾

DC’s pro-growth doctrine and anticommunism ensured the support of the United States. Washington regarded DC as a reliable Cold War partner and actively worked to ensure that it would remain at the helm of a strong, capitalist Italian state. The party’s close ties to the Vatican and embrace of European integration were major assets in the perspective of the Americans. So as the main incumbent party in a valued member-state of NATO and Europe, DC gained much prestige, legitimacy, and political advantage over its rivals from its good relations with rich and powerful Western allies. At times it even received some concrete material benefits, such as covert funding from the CIA.²³⁾

Here it makes sense to compare DC’s origins and social foundations to that of the LDP in postwar Japan. The Italian party’s roots in Catholic morality and Catholic-affiliated civil society suggests a clear difference with its Japanese counterpart. As its founding

documents indicate, the LDP had no particular religious institutions or philosophies behind its establishment. It was created in November 1955 by the merger of two large, heterogeneous center-right parties, the Liberal Party and the Democratic Party, which themselves traced their ancestry to prewar conservative parties that had been dissolved during the Asia-Pacific War.²⁴⁾ None of these antecedents had a distinct denominational character akin to DC's Catholicism. To be sure, many LDP members have subsequently chosen to affiliate with religious organizations (like the Shintō Seiji Renmei, founded in 1969), but these associations are neither required nor were they involved in the party's origins.²⁵⁾ Indeed, the only party in Japan with a confessional background comparable to DC's is Kōmeitō, which was originally the political arm of the religious organization Sōka Gakkai.²⁶⁾

Apart from the question of religious roots, there are many parallels between the early organization of the LDP and DC. The LDP was also conceived as a catch-all party and a counter to radicalism—namely that of a resurgent Japan Socialist Party (JSP), whose more moderate and far-left wings united in October 1955. Its consolidation was deeply informed by the Cold War, and it built broad coalitions among many similar constituencies as DC: farmers and rural voters newly elevated by postwar land reforms, small-scale and large-scale business owners, and the many in the growing white-collar labor force (though it incorporated fewer unionized workers). Like DC, the LDP's appeals to these core groups relied on its touting economic growth and anti-communism. For these same ideological reasons, it was the party advocating close ties with the United States. On the opposite side of the political spectrum, the Japanese Socialist and Communist Parties captured a narrower base comprised of students, educators, and industrial workers concentrated in the urban areas. Only as Japan rapidly industrialized in the 1960s and new political parties emerged were these political battlelines blurred.

Clientelism and Italy's Political Development

Japan's and Italy's experiences with one-party dominance reflected some important historical parallels. Both were set in countries in which the hardship of authoritarianism and war was followed by democratic revolutions set off by the defeat of wartime Axis regimes. These transformations spawned both left and right parties, but conservatives made the first electoral gains and the onset of the Cold War impelled a powerful US ally to firmly side with them. Thus, the incumbent conservative parties in both Japan and Italy were entrusted by their domestic publics and by their American protectors to oversee postwar

economic development and the fulfillment of a democratic experiment. As their years in office accumulated, they became identified with these projects in a way their opponents could not emulate.²⁷⁾ Furthermore, DC and the LDP proved more successful than their rivals in ideological positioning, speaking to a broad constituency, and navigating the institutional rules they themselves had shaped.

One might expect that a similar situation would arise after 1945 in newly-liberated West Germany, given some background conditions it shared with the other two countries. One highly plausible reason it did not is because the German Left as progressive party movement was historically older, more politically-experienced, and more mainstream than its counterparts in Italy and Japan.²⁸⁾ Another possible explanation might relate to a phenomenon that is relatively characteristic of both Japan and Italy but less so for Germany: clientelism. This practice was pervasive in Italian politics during DC's rule and in Japanese politics under the LDP, which suggests it had implications for one-party dominance in these contexts. However, it was an important aspect of political life in both countries even earlier.

The terms "clientelism" or "patronage" refer to the politics that arises from a reciprocal relationship between political actors. Clientelism has three constitutive elements. First, it involves "direct contingent exchange," in which political actors ("patrons") solicit political support from a specific group of constituents ("clients") in exchange for providing tangible private goods that only this group can enjoy. Second, patronage aims at predictability in the relations between patrons and clients: patrons provide a flow of rewards and clients provide consistent political support. Third, to ensure predictability, patrons may use monitoring or enforcement mechanisms that make sure that clients follow through in providing political support and to punish them if they do not. These points suggest that patronage is typically not a one-time deal but a sustained relationship of repeated exchanges. They also imply that clientelism entails an asymmetry of power and resources, with patrons in a dominant position and clients in a dependent state.²⁹⁾

What circumstances foster this type of politics? The early academic literature on patron-client relations in sociology and anthropology suggested that political clientelism is an outgrowth of deeply-embedded patterns of hierarchical, paternalistic interpersonal relations in small-scale preindustrial communities. Thus, patronage has been perceived as most pervasive in less-developed countries where most politics remain local and the norms and practices of rural life still hold considerable sway. Another important condition of clientelism is an unequal distribution of resources in which political elites control a number of important

goods. This is because if ordinary people have plenty of good opportunities to get what they need in the free market, they have a lower incentive to be respond to the political solicitations of patronage politics. Political elites must also have the means to monitor and enforce the clientelistic contract. One common enforcement mechanism in emerging democracies is the compensated service of intermediaries like local ruffians or organized crime elements.³⁰⁾

As a founding member of the Group of Seven (G7) in 1975, Italy can hardly be described as economically backward. However, the wealth the country had amassed by the late 20th century was largely the result of remarkably rapid economic growth in preceding decades. When party politics first emerged there in the beginning of the century, Italy was a developing, heavily agrarian economy. The conditions were ripe for clientelistic politics. Italy's initial steps toward democracy occurred when governing factions sought to expand their power by creating grassroots bases of support. Especially because of weak constitutional checks and balances, these elites had extensive state resources at their disposal, including a high number of civil service jobs. The slow expansion of suffrage meant that Italy's early electorate was predominantly composed of rural property-owning men, and thus party linkages to the clientelism-prone countryside proved especially important.³¹⁾ In southern Italy, a poor, rural region with underdeveloped horizontal civic ties and institutions, there already existed a centuries-old tradition of patronage where quasi-illegal groups such as the Mafia of Sicily played a pivotal role providing resources to communities and mediating between them and an authoritarian state.³²⁾

To highlight the significance of Italy's late industrialization and incremental expansion of the franchise to its endemic clientelism, it is worthwhile to point out strikingly similar patterns in Japan in the same period. There too, the first political parties emerged as vehicles for the ambitions of ruling oligarchs, who sought to create a social base among propertied rural voters by dispensing large amounts of state resources in various forms. Largely based on such a strategy, two large center-right parties, predecessors to the LDP, alternated power in early 20th-century Japan. Thus, one might argue that a conservative duopoly existed in Japan long before the beginning of the LDP's one-party dominance in 1955.³³⁾ Like their Italian counterparts, these early Japanese parties also capitalized on ties to rural civil society to mediate exchanges and monitor voting. For example, they collaborated with local ruffians who were the forerunners of right-wing associations and criminal syndicates that would become influential political fixers in Japan over the course of the 20th century.³⁴⁾

DC Dominance and Clientelism

Like one-party dominance, clientelism in Italy and Japan attracts attention because it is often regarded as a form of politics unbecoming an advanced industrial country. Yet DC and the LDP came to power at a time when both Japan and Italy had existed as modern nation-states for less than a century. Emerging from the tumult of authoritarianism and war, the two countries were still highly agrarian and their limited prior experiences with democracy involved heavy doses of patronage. The vigor of clientelism in modern Italy and Japan was associated with the late industrialization of these two nations, and it is not surprising that both DC and LDP drew heavily from these legacies. The distinctive pairing of one-party dominance and clientelism in two developed countries with similar modernization histories suggests that the two conditions were closely interrelated.

The logic behind the positive correlation between clientelism and one-party dominance is straightforward. Patronage is premised upon the state's control over important resources which allows elites to make enticing material offers to constituents. Political dominance entails a considerable incumbency advantage, including the ruling party's ability to access and use state resources for its electoral ends. Thus, one-party dominance would seem to encourage clientelistic tendencies. In turn, clientelism appears to cement one-party dominance as it is one way in which an incumbent party can leverage its structural advantages to perpetuate its rule. According to an influential study, "[u]nder conditions of high development...clientelism can hold on as long as hegemonic parties or party alliances ...remain more or less unchallenged and control a political economy penetrated by partisan politics."³⁵⁾ To be sure, competitive party politics in prewar Italy and Japan demonstrate that one-party dominance is hardly a necessary condition for clientelism. Furthermore, not all dominant parties rely heavily on clientelism—Sweden's long-ruling Social Democratic Party, for example, was not clientelistic.³⁶⁾ Yet the strong correlation between one-party dominance and clientelism is undeniable.

Clientelism was manifested in DC rule in multiple ways. First, it was crucial to DC's conquest of the southern Italian countryside. Despite the strength of the Italian Socialists in urban industrial areas, DC was originally centered in Italy's North, where there existed a dense solidaristic network of Catholic institutions and organizations.³⁷⁾ The much poorer South was originally foreign territory for DC. As Robert Putnam has demonstrated, this region has a very different political culture than that of Northern Italy—less broadly civic,

more narrowly particularistic, and tending towards clientelism that operates outside the formal institutions of the state.³⁸⁾ To gain sway over the southern countryside, DC tapped into the existing patronage networks by penetrating layers of local authority and creating working relationships with provincial elites and associations who could deliver votes in exchange for public works, benefits to small and medium businesses, local government jobs, and direct handouts such as pensions.³⁹⁾

The villages of the Southern countryside or tight-knit Catholic communities in the North were not the only places where DC benefited from widespread clientelism. The practice was also prevalent among national-level political elites in Rome. As previously discussed, DC was highly factionalized as a party organization. As years of DC government passed, the ruling party's factions became institutionalized to the point that they behaved like "semi-sovereign" mini-parties.⁴⁰⁾ While also defined by ideology, socioeconomic profile, and policy interests, each intraparty faction was in many ways a patronage machine for dispensing public wealth. Within this hierarchical structure, rank-and-file politicians gave their political loyalty to DC faction heads in exchange for campaign support and resources. Thus, the factions created "patron-client chains" that linked Italy's political center and peripheries, extending from voters and minor politicians in the provinces to national representatives and leading statesmen in Rome.⁴¹⁾

Because factions in the national legislature were unequal in power and resources, clientelism shaped not only their internal dynamics, but also the relations between them. Patronage was at the very heart of *trasformismo*, the characteristically Italian tradition of political horse-trading and backroom dealmaking that DC refined to an artform, especially under the influence of party leader Amintore Fanfani.⁴²⁾ A large proportion of public sector jobs in the central ministries and state enterprises were filled by political appointment, and these became the currency of a spoils system within the national government known as *lottizzazione*. In this game, state posts were divided among political players according their electoral clout. In the 1950s, when DC governed alone or lead a centrist coalition, the main participants in *lottizzazione* were the dominant party's factions.⁴³⁾ Thus, clientelistic connections between factions held together an ideologically diffuse party that otherwise might have eventually fragmented due to centrifugal tendencies. Factions, according to one scholar, were the "prime political brokers through which individuals, organizations, patrons, and clients operate. They keep the system running. Without them, it would probably fall apart."⁴⁴⁾

Facing a decline in the DC vote in the late 1950s, party leaders like Fanfani increasingly

entertained the idea of including the Socialists (PSI) in the governing coalition. This ultimately occurred in 1963, beginning the so-called “opening to the left,” in which DC-PSI collaboration became a fact of Italian political life. PSI thus became a real stakeholder in national governance and *lottizzazione* became a truly interparty exercise. With access to some of the advantages of incumbency, PSI’s own factions became increasingly institutionalized, materialistic, and intertwined with DC counterparts and Italy’s political machinery.⁴⁵⁾

In the Japanese context, clientelism similarly played a large role in maintaining the LDP’s social base especially in rural, agrarian areas. On the national level, patronage defined the relations both within each LDP faction and between factions.⁴⁶⁾ However, the Japanese national bureaucracy has been far more independent and professionalized than its Italian counterpart so civil service posts have not served as commodities in clientelistic bargaining.⁴⁷⁾ Furthermore, Japan lacked a tradition of multiparty consociationalism comparable to Italy’s. While proportional representation and DC’s relatively thin margins over its competitors led to the formation of coalition governments, Japan’s electoral system and the LDP’s strong majorities meant that the LDP typically governed alone or with a junior coalition partner.⁴⁸⁾ The main opposition Japan Socialist Party was far more marginalized than Italy’s PSI. Furthermore, LDP factions cooperated with interlocutors in other parties to a far lesser extent than did DC factions, which sometimes even forged bipartisan alliances that defied the rest of their party.⁴⁹⁾

Clientelism and the Fall of DC

The demise of DC and the First Republic in the early 1990s has often been attributed to the end of the Cold War. Yet one need not conclude that this was the entire story. Many scholars have observed a consistent decline in DC electoral fortunes from the late 1970s. There were several possible structural reasons for this. One was the waning influence of Catholicism, a trend caused partially by generational change in the electorate.⁵⁰⁾ The 1973 Oil Shock set off a deep recession and marked the end of the country’s period of rapid economic growth. Italy also weathered labor agitation, New Left movements, and violent radical groups.⁵¹⁾ The first postwar administration led by a Socialist prime minister in 1981 also arguably weakened the inevitability of DC rule.

However, the most important cause of DC’s ultimate downfall was its increasing involvement in money politics. The First Republic’s rampant patronage system has been characterized as “structural corruption.” Though they may be difficult to distinguish in

practice, “corruption” and “clientelism” are distinct terms. Clientelism is when a political actor provides constituents with benefits in exchange for political support, whereas corruption signifies an unambiguously criminal practice in which those in positions of power offer favors to select individuals or organizations in exchange for direct compensation that clearly violates established rules. Ultimately the two practices are closely correlated.⁵²⁾

Clientelism in Italy’s First Republic ultimately created a hopelessly corrupt system. Patronage politics required a growing amount of material resources, and from the early 1970s diminished economic growth and decreasing support from foreign allies meant increasing financial pressures on politicians of all parties. They increasingly resorted to illicit deal-making and fundraising. Italy’s governing parties used their economic influence to extract electoral funds, soliciting bribes from corporations in exchange for securing them favorable public works contracts. Politicians also relied heavily on the compensated help of the resourceful and well-connected Mafia. As players increasingly involved in the horse-trading, the Socialists also became tainted by money politics.⁵³⁾ As one scholar notes, “[t]he fundamental problem was that in a multiparty system based on proportional representation, a generally benign and even functional spoils system generates into corruption.”⁵⁴⁾

DC suffered the most from these controversies but managed to stay in the governing coalition. However, this all ended in 1992, when the arrest of a PSI politician on corruption charges triggered a spiral of confessions and accusations and a far-reaching judicial probe. This investigation, which came to be known as *Mani Pulite* (“Clean Hands”), implicated numerous politicians from Italy’s major political parties, including five former prime ministers, exposing a pervasive and institutionalized web of corruption.

Mani Pulite transformed Italian politics. With scores of their members and even leaders indicted or under investigation, governing parties such as DC and PSI completely lost public confidence and suffered devastating electoral losses. Their brands incorrigibly tarnished, they dissolved in 1994, their former members joining a range of new parties.⁵⁵⁾ Thus, corruption stemming from clientelistic politics ultimately proved to be DC’s downfall. Soft hegemony tied the dominant party to its rivals, so that when it finally fell, it took the others down with it.⁵⁶⁾

Once again, comparison with the Japanese case is informative. The LDP’s clientelism also encouraged corruption. The most famous example is the career of Tanaka Kakuei, Japan’s king of money politics, who was indicted in 1976 for taking bribes from Lockheed Aircraft Corporation. Interestingly, Lockheed had engaged in similar deals with other pro-American governments, including Italy’s, making the “Lockheed Scandal” an international

affair rather than a purely Japanese issue.⁵⁷⁾ Tanaka's ethical woes seriously eroded the LDP's public support in the 1970s. Furthermore, corruption scandals in the late 1980s and early 1990s, such as the Recruit Scandal and Sagawa Kyūbin Scandal, deepened the Japanese public's disenchantment with politics, and this mood that contributed to the end of unbroken LDP rule in 1993.⁵⁸⁾

Here too there are also significant differences. Since Japan's other parties were much more marginalized than Italy's, corruption was mostly confined to the LDP and was thus less likely to threaten the entire Japanese party system. Moreover, Japan's judiciary has been less insulated from electoral politics than that of Italy, making Japanese prosecutors more reticent to pursue corruption.⁵⁹⁾ Japan never experienced a systemic shock of *Mani Pulite's* level. Although the LDP lost power in 1993, within a few years it reentered the government as part of a coalition and soon regained a preeminent position. Japan's postwar party system was never decisively overthrown as it was in Italy.

Conclusion

DC's half-century as the main force in Italian politics is a remarkable feat. The party succeeded because it tapped into widely-shared tendencies in postwar Italian society: Catholic values, anticommunism, capitalism, moderate social justice, rural traditionalism, and alignment with Western Europe and the United States. It occupied the broad political center, forcing its adversaries into more marginal positions. DC also appealed to its large political base through its heterogeneous, decentralized organization and with clientelistic practices, which proved especially important in Italy's less-developed rural areas. Thus, DC was a big-tent party similar to Japan's LDP. The strength of large, clientelistic, and conservative-leaning parties in both countries has much to do with the two countries' relatively late industrialization.

Italy's and Japan's one-party dominance had important differences. While DC was rooted in a distinctly Catholic worldview, the LDP as an organization was not founded upon any particular religious creed. DC was a party that embraced the idea of European integration, while the LDP lacked any regionalist aspirations (for no regional project comparable to that in Europe existed in Cold War East Asia). The LDP tended to marginalize industrial labor, whereas DC incorporated a substantial trade unionist element.⁶⁰⁾ While the LDP often governed alone or with a single junior partner, DC's coalition-building reduced polarization and encouraged compromise and consensus. Yet this power-sharing also fueled systemic

corruption brought down Italy's postwar party system in the early 1990s. By contrast, the LDP has managed to marginalize its rivals and continues to thrive as Japan's dominant party despite two brief periods in the opposition. One might say that conservative one-party dominance has been even more pronounced in Japan than in Italy.⁶¹⁾

Since 1994, Italy has not seen any party that even approaches the broad, unifying capabilities of DC. Indeed, the messiness of recent Italian politics often makes the First Republic seem orderly and efficient in comparison. Yet DC's legacy of providing stability and prosperity lives on. In an era of change and uncertainty, Italy remains an important member of NATO, the European Union, as well as the G7. These achievements may all be attributed to Italy's now-extinct dominant party. They support Daniel Ziblatt's notion that center-right parties have often defended Europe from extreme change.⁶²⁾

Notes

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- 5) LaPalombara, "Partitocrazia," 104.
- 6) On the 1955 system, see Junnosuke Masumi, *Gendai seiji: 1955-nen igo* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1985); Kataoka Tetsuya, ed., *Creating Single-party Democracy: Japan's Postwar Political System* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1992).
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 - 13) Joseph LaPalombara, *Democracy, Italian Style* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 68-71.
 - 14) Cappadocia, 394.
 - 15) To be sure, other Italian parties, especially PSI, also contained factions, but to a lesser degree than DC. Zuckerman; Sartori, 88-91.
 - 16) LaPalombara, *Democracy*; Giuseppe Di Palma, “Establishing Party Dominance: It Ain’t Easy,” in Pempel, *Uncommon Democracies*, 162-88; Tarrow.
 - 17) LaPalombara, *Democracy*, 12.
 - 18) *Ibid.*, 215-18; Di Palma.
 - 19) Sidney Tarrow, “Maintaining Hegemony in Italy: ‘The softer they rise, the slower they fall!’,” in Pempel, *Uncommon Democracies*, 306-32.
 - 20) Leonardi and Wertman, 164-78.
 - 21) Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 210-253.
 - 22) Leonardi and Wertman, 178-81, 246.
 - 23) Samuels, 179-224; Patrick McCarthy, *The Crisis of the Italian State: from the Origins of the Cold War to the Fall of Berlusconi* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 41-60.
 - 24) For more on the LDP’s origins and early organization, see Masumi; Kōno Yasuko, *Sengo to kōdo seichō no shūen* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2002), 7-163; Komiya Hitoshi, *Jiyū Minshutō no tanjō: sōsai kōsen to soshiki seitōron* (Tokyo: Bokutakusha, 2010).
 - 25) For discussions on religious affiliations of LDP politicians, see Tsukada Hotaka, *Shūkyō to seiji no tentetsuten: hoshu gōdō to seikyō itchi no shūkyō shakaigaku* (Tokyo: Kadensha, 2015); Shimazono Susumu, *Sengo Nihon to kokka Shintō: tennō sūkei o meguru shūkyō to seiji* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2021)
 - 26) George Ehrhardt, Axel Klein, Levi McLaughlin, and Steven R. Reed, eds., *Kōmeitō: Politics and Religion in Japan* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 2014); Yakushiji Katsuyuki, *Kōmeitō: Sōka Gakkai to 50-nen no kiseki* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2016).
 - 27) Tarrow, 330-32.
 - 28) Pempel, “Introduction,” 24-28.
 - 29) Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson, “Citizen-Politician Linkages: an Introduction,” in Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson, eds., *Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1-23.

- 30) Kitschelt and Wilkinson, *Patrons*, especially 2-4.
- 31) Carlo Rossetti, "Constitutionalism and Clientelism in Italy," in Luis Roniger and Ayşe Güneş-Ayata, eds., *Democracy, Clientelism, and Civil Society* (Boulder: L. Rienner Publishers, 1994), 87-104.
- 32) James Walston, *The Mafia and Clientelism: Roads to Rome in Post-war Calabria* (London: Routledge, 1988), 46-49; for a discussion of regional differences in civil society and its significance for political development see Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).
- 33) Suetake Yoshiya, "Senzenki no senkyo to chiiki shakai: kindai nihon no mitsu no hadō" *Nihon seiji* 544 (September 1993): 3-21.
- 34) Eiko Maruko Siniawer, *Ruffians, Yakuza, Nationalists: the Violent Politics of Modern Japan, 1860-1960* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).
- 35) Kitschelt and Wilkinson, "Citizen-politician," 35.
- 36) Wolfgang C. Müller, "Political Institutions and Linkage Strategies," in Kitschelt and Wilkinson, *Patrons*, 259.
- 37) Ginsborg, *History*, 168-73, 176-77 ; LaPalombara, *Democracy*, 60-62.
- 38) Putnam.
- 39) Ginsborg, *History*, 177- 81; 286-90.
- 40) Sartori, 88; Leonardi and Wertman, 17-18, 90-124.
- 41) Zuckerman, 121-36.
- 42) Samuels, 253-58.
- 43) LaPalombara, *Democracy*, 77; Walston, 57-58, 64-68.
- 44) LaPalombara, *Democracy*, 124.
- 45) *Ibid.*, 78-79; Walston, 68-70.
- 46) Ethan Scheiner, *Democracy without Competition in Japan: Opposition Failure in a One-party Dominant State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Zuckerman, 183-206.
- 47) Zuckerman, 195-96.
- 48) During the 1955-1993 period, the LDP governed alone except for a brief interval in the 1980s when it shared power with a small offshoot party. Since the 1990s, the party has formed a coalition with the junior partner Kōmeitō.
- 49) Sartori, 91-92. See also Kim Eric Bettcher, "Factions of Interest in Japan and Italy: The Organizational and Motivational Dimensions of Factionalism," *Party Politics* 11.3 (2005): 339-58.
- 50) Zuckerman, 164-70; LaPalombara, *Democracy*, 142-43.
- 51) Ginsborg, *History*, 348-405.
- 52) Herbert Kitschelt, "The Demise of Clientelism in Affluent Capitalist Democracies," in Kitschelt and Wilkinson, *Patrons*, 304-05.

- 53) McCarthy; Newell, 160-62 ; Stefano Guzzini, "The 'Long Night of the First Republic': Years of Clientelistic Implosion in Italy," *Review of International Political Economy* 2.1 (Winter 1995), 27-61; Samuels, 225-59.
- 54) Samuels, 257.
- 55) Mark Gilbert, *The Italian Revolution: the End of Politics, Italian Style?* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 126-81.
- 56) Koff and Koff, 175-76 ; Douglas Wertman, "The Last Year of the Christian Democratic Party," in Carol Mershon and Gianfranco Pasquino, eds., *Italian Politics: Ending the First Republic* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 135-50.
- 57) Tachibana Takashi, *Tanaka Kakuei kenkyū: Zenkiroku* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1982-1983); Jacob M. Schlesinger, *Shadow Shoguns: the Rise and Fall of Japan's Postwar Political Machine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).
- 58) For comprehensive accounts of political corruption in contemporary Japan, see Murobushi Tetsurō, *Nihon oshoku zenshi: mireniamu kōzō oshoku 130-nenshi* (Tokyo: Sekai Shoin, 2000); and Matthew M. Carlson and Steven R. Reed, *Political Corruption and Scandals in Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018).
- 59) David Johnson, "A Tale of Two Systems: Prosecuting Corruption in Japan and Italy," in Frank J. Schwartz and Susan J. Pharr, eds., *The State of Civil Society in Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 257-77.
- 60) T. J. Pempel and Keiichi Tsunekawa, "Corporatism Without Labor? The Japanese Anomaly," in *Trends toward Corporatist Intermediation*, eds. Philippe C. Schmitter and Gerhard Lehmbruch (London: Sage Publications, 1979), 231-70.
- 61) Pempel, "Introduction," 24-29.
- 62) Daniel Ziblatt, *Conservative Parties and the Birth of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

(つだ・たろう 外国語学部助教)