

# 1

---

## *The Japanese Prime Minister: Reactive Leadership*

**T**he role and influence of the top political leader have always been important concerns in political science, from Plato's *Republic*, to the *Federalist*, to studies of the modern U.S. presidency: "The need to give direction to government is universal and persisting. Every country, from the Egypt of the Pharaohs to contemporary democracies and dictatorships, faces the challenge of organizing political institutions so that leaders can make authoritative decisions about collective problems of society."<sup>1</sup> This seems even more true today than ever before, as many countries address again the problems of governability.

From the United States to the major European countries of Great Britain, Germany, and France, to other countries around the world, the focus of the political system has increasingly been on the top political leader—the president, the prime minister, or the chancellor. In the United States, the story of the twentieth century is the rise of presidential government in meeting new demands for waging hot and cold war, creating welfare programs, managing economic recovery and growth, and protecting civil rights. Margaret Thatcher, during her eleven years as prime minister, had a profound impact on British politics and public policy, with her aggressive style in pushing market capitalism as the solution for her country's economic ills. In Germany, Helmut Kohl, as chancellor, led the way in forcefully promoting the reunification of East and West Germany. For the French, the problems of the Fourth Republic

seemed to prove the need for a strong leader. With Charles de Gaulle providing the impetus, the succeeding Fifth Republic was founded in 1958 on a strong presidency.

Even in Asia, where the cultural heritage emphasizes the collectivity over the individual, the politics of many countries have been dominated by strong and often charismatic leaders: Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping in China, Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan, Lee Kwan Yew in Singapore, Sukarno and Suharto in Indonesia, and Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi in India.<sup>2</sup> The conventional wisdom, around the world seemingly, is that strong leadership is critical to national success. And a change of leadership in any of these countries, East or West, generally brings about major political changes.

It is surprising, then, how little attention is paid to the head of Japan's government, the prime minister, especially given the growing interest in the country's economic success and increasing impact on international affairs. The prime minister, particularly his role and influence in the policy process, is almost completely ignored in writings about policy making. Part of the reason for this is that Japanese prime ministers, with the recent exception of Nakasone Yasuhiro, are almost always seen as uncharismatic, colorless figures. Edwin Reischauer noted, "There is a strong prejudice against the sort of charismatic leadership commonly sought in a president of the United States."<sup>3</sup> The typical Japanese prime minister appears to be a remarkably weak and passive figure. He is the one who tends to be lost or forgotten when the pictures are taken at the annual summit conferences of the advanced industrialized democracies. As one reporter commented, "when photographed together, the other leaders might be paired up, apparently sharing some private joke, while successive Japanese Prime Ministers typically stood apart, scrutinizing the nearby foliage."<sup>4</sup>

Japan is, unlike most other countries, "a nation without a pantheon of political heroes."<sup>5</sup> It has no equivalent of such leaders as Franklin Roosevelt, Charles de Gaulle, or Mao Zedong. Changes at the top seem more to confirm Japan's political stability than to signify any major political changes. Even though the conservatives have ruled for almost the entire post-1945 period, it is surprising to find that Japan has had more instability at the top than virtually any other country.<sup>6</sup> Under the postwar constitution, promulgated in 1947, there have been nineteen

prime ministers—if one counts Yoshida Shigeru twice, since he held the office on two separate occasions (see table 1.1). By comparison, during the same period, Australia, Canada, and Sweden have each had nine; Great Britain, eleven; and New Zealand, which has had an unusually rapid turnover during the last few years, twelve. The United States has had ten presidents. West Germany, since 1949, has had only six chancellors. France has had only four presidents since 1958, when the Fifth Republic was founded. Only Italy and Switzerland have a higher turnover rate than Japan's. Italy, with its unstable cabinets, has had twenty-nine prime ministers, while the chairmanship of Switzerland's national executive, the Federal Council, rotates annually among its seven members.

Moreover, the few activist exceptions seem to prove the rule of weak and passive Japanese prime ministers. Postwar, Yoshida Shigeru certainly had the most impact. He was by no means simply a tool of the Americans, but the source of his strong rule was the absolute authority of

**TABLE 1.1**  
**Postwar Prime Ministers: Terms of Office**

Higashikuni Naruhiko	8/17/45–10/9/45
Shidehara Kijurō	10/9/45–5/22/46
Yoshida Shigeru	5/22/46–5/24/47
Katayama Tetsu	5/24/47–3/10/48
Ashida Hitoshi	3/10/48–10/19/48
Yoshida Shigeru	10/19/48–12/10/54
Hatoyama Ichirō	12/10/54–12/23/56
Ishibashi Tanzan	12/23/56–2/25/57
Kishi Nobusuke	2/25/57–7/19/60
Ikeda Hayato	7/19/60–11/9/64
Satō Eisaku	11/9/64–7/7/72
Tanaka Kakuei	7/7/72–12/9/74
Miki Takeo	12/9/74–12/24/76
Fukuda Takeo	12/24/76–12/7/78
Ōhira Masayoshi	12/7/78–6/12/80 <sup>a</sup>
Suzuki Zenkō	7/17/80 <sup>a</sup> –11/27/82
Nakasone Yasuhiro	11/27/82–11/6/87
Takeshita Noboru	11/6/87–6/2/89
Uno Sōsuke	6/2/89–8/8/89
Kaifu Toshiki	8/8/89–11/5/91
Miyazawa Kiichi	11/5/91–

a. Following Ohira's death and until Suzuki's appointment, Itō Masayoshi served as acting prime minister.

the U.S. occupation.<sup>7</sup> More recently, Nakasone raised many expectations with his attempts to “presidentialize” the prime ministership so that the incumbent would become more activist and influential. Clearly, his style was different: he was active in a more public way than other recent prime ministers. Yet he, too, was heavily constrained in many areas, such as defense, education, and trade frictions with the United States.

The leadership of the Japanese premiership, then, seems quite different from what is considered typical of the top leadership in the United States and the West, or even in the rest of Asia. The purpose of this chapter is to determine what sort of leader the prime minister is. It first reviews the literature on the Japanese policy process and how it relates to the prime minister. It then looks at the different possible ways the prime minister can affect the policy process, and, in particular, it outlines three potential types of leadership in that arena. And finally, on the basis of an analysis of prime ministerial issues such as Miki Takeo (since 1974), the chapter concludes that the Japanese prime minister’s leadership can best be described as reactive.

### Literature on Policy Making in Japan

The conventional wisdom—to the extent there is one, given the state of the literature—is that the Japanese prime minister is exceptionally weak and passive compared to other heads of government. Japanese prime ministers are regularly lambasted in foreign countries and at economic summits for their inability to ease trade frictions. Prime Minister Kaifu Toshiki was heavily criticized both in Japan and abroad for his government’s weak response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Frequent changes in prime ministers, as was mentioned above, seem more to confirm Japan’s political stability than to signify any major political changes. This view is further reinforced if one looks at the way people view decision-making and policy processes in Japan.

The Japanese, as is well known, value consensus and harmony. Decision makers within their group or organization try to avoid conflict if possible.<sup>8</sup> Rather than forceful, top-down leadership, which tends to be viewed as illegitimate, Japanese tend to favor bottom-up styles of decision making.<sup>9</sup> Chie Nakane, in her classic analysis of Japanese society, writes, “Superiors do not force their ideas on juniors; instead,

juniors spontaneously lay their opinions before their superiors and have them adopted.”<sup>10</sup> Rather than the strong and independent leaders who are favored in the West, the Japanese have traditionally favored articulators of consensus. Nakane argues that “the leader is expected to be thoroughly involved in the group, to the point where he has almost no personal identity.”<sup>11</sup> Leadership, therefore, tends from the outside to be “invisible”:

The effective actor in Japanese society is the selfless arbitrator between conflicting interests and opinions, the messenger and negotiator who, in a flurry of activity, smooths away all disputes, differences, and injured feelings, all the while maintaining a pure detachment and neutrality. . . . His role is not to find new solutions, but to seek accommodation among old ones, and this privately, behind the scenes so that the dispute can be contained as much as possible. Hence the leader in Japan remains invisible.<sup>12</sup>

The view of Takeshita Noboru, a former prime minister, is typical: “It is the role of the leader today not to pull people along, it is to get the consensus of the people.”<sup>13</sup>

This view of weak and passive prime ministers is further reflected in the two quite different models of the Japanese policy process that dominate the literature, one of which sees power as highly centralized in the hands of a coherent elite, and the other of which sees it as highly fragmented with no central power capable of making decisions. Both models reflect important aspects of Japanese politics, but they leave little room for the prime minister to play an autonomous role.<sup>14</sup>

### *Japan, Inc.*

The prevailing view of Japanese politics, at least until quite recently, has been that power is centralized in the hands of “Japan, Inc.”—a ruling triad made up of leaders of the bureaucracy; the ruling conservative party, the LDP; and big business (commonly referred to in Japan as the *zaikai*, literally the “financial world”). In this view, the ruling triad is united in promoting high economic growth above all else while at the same time subordinating Japan’s defense and foreign policy more generally to that of the United States. Indeed, probably more than most of the industrialized democracies, Japan has had, and to a large extent still has, an unusually cohesive and stable political elite.

This centralization of power is attributed to two broad factors. First, Japan has, as will be shown in detail in the next chapter, the major ingredients of a majoritarian government: a unitary government and a parliamentary system with a disciplined, long-term ruling party. Second, in comparison to other countries, Japanese society, and particularly the ruling elite, is very homogeneous. The cohesion is fostered by school ties, particularly Tokyo University and to a lesser extent Kyoto University, that form a pervasive "old boy" network throughout society. Graduates of these two schools dominate the bureaucratic and big business elite and form a substantial part of LDP leadership. An overwhelming majority of the elite bureaucrats, especially in the more important ministries such as the Finance Ministry, continue to be graduates of one of the two schools.<sup>15</sup> Of the postwar presidents of Keidanren (the Federation of Economic Organizations, widely considered to be the leading big business group), a majority have also been Tokyo University graduates.<sup>16</sup> Of the nineteen postwar prime ministers, ten were graduates of these schools (nine from Tokyo University), serving thirty-three of the forty-six postwar years.

The cohesiveness of the elite is further strengthened, it is argued, because each element of the triad is dependent on the other two groups. The LDP depends on the bureaucracy for policy expertise, while the bureaucracy relies on the party to pass its proposals in the National Assembly. The LDP counts on big business for electoral funds; in return, big business depends on the LDP for support of capitalism, a favorable business climate, and political stability. Finally, the bureaucracy relies on business for jobs after retirement (a practice the Japanese refer to as *amakudari*, literally "descending from heaven"), while business depends on the bureaucracy for favors in the drawing up and implementation of legislation.<sup>17</sup>

For most of those who favor this view of Japanese politics, the bureaucracy is the key actor, particularly in the policy process. The basis for this argument is as follows: First, the bureaucracy has had a long tradition of rule in Japan. It was set up in the mid-1800s well before the National Assembly was established in 1890, and it continued to have the upper hand through the rest of the prewar period. Many argue that the civil service, particularly the economic ministries, maintained and even strengthened its near monopoly on policy expertise even after the war. As

Chalmers Johnson points out, the economic ministries survived the U.S. occupation nearly intact, while most of the other prewar elites, particularly the military and the *zaibatsu* (the prewar big business conglomerates), were eliminated.<sup>18</sup> The politicians are dependent on the bureaucracy because they—and the prime minister, as will be shown in chapter 8—have little support staff of their own to draw up policy proposals and thus are forced to rely on bureaucrats for most of their information and expertise. Under one of the early postwar governments, the cabinet ministers were reportedly “so lacking in expertise and so unfamiliar with legislation that everyone had his vice-minister sitting next to him in the cabinet room in order to advise him on what to do.”<sup>19</sup>

Second, the power of the civil service is supposedly reinforced by the practice of high-ranking bureaucrats moving into politics or business after retirement. This provides another link between a ministry and its main clients and “contributes to a common orientation” between government and business.<sup>20</sup> The fact that most of the prime ministers from Yoshida through Satō Eisaku, Fukuda Takeo, and Ōhira Masayoshi were former elite career bureaucrats is often given as further evidence of the dominance of government officials over the system. Indeed, from 1955, when the LDP was formed, to 1980, former elite bureaucrats dominated the prime ministership, serving a total of nineteen out of the twenty-five years.

“Japan, Inc.” models generally view politicians not as leading the government but as merely the tools of the bureaucrats. The politicians’ primary role is to serve as “supreme ratifiers” of the bureaucracy’s policies. Beyond this, their role is to insulate the bureaucracy from pressure by political and interest groups so that it can autonomously implement policies fostering high economic growth.<sup>21</sup> This generally meant acting as safety valves by satisfying the main group of voters supporting the LDP, farmers and other rural constituents, with agricultural supports and public works projects.<sup>22</sup>

The prime minister, in this model of Japanese decision making, is not an important autonomous actor. He is either irrelevant because he is part of the consensus or powerless to make an impact in changing the consensus: the constraints of the bureaucracy, the LDP, and big business, according to Taketsugu Tsurutani, reduce prime ministers “to near impotence” in influence.<sup>23</sup> For example, Donald Hellmann argues that

Nakasone's attempt to fashion a more assertive role for Japan in international politics failed because elite consensus on national policy inhibits change.<sup>24</sup>

### *Fragmentation in Policy Making*

The "Japan, Inc." model of decision making continues to be the predominant view in most popular accounts, and it still is important in much of the scholarship on Japanese politics. However, scholars increasingly question whether this model continues to describe politics accurately. They have come to see the current process as much more pluralist than was previously believed. Research using case studies across a number of policy areas indicates that more social interests than just big business, farmers, and other conservative groups have access to and influence in the system.<sup>25</sup> In particular, there is a growing consensus that the process is more fragmented or sectionalized than it is cohesive or unified.

Most of those who see the current system as fragmented believe that, though the cohesive, united view may have been accurate in the 1960s, "Japan, Inc." since then has become "unbundled."<sup>26</sup> In particular, the overwhelming consensus of the early 1960s on promoting economic growth began to unravel by the late 1960s. Economic successes led to a "new middle mass," which stressed issues related to the quality of life. Pollution became a major political issue in the late 1960s and early 1970s, to be followed by demands for expanded welfare programs in the early to mid-1970s. In addition, the international environment favoring high-growth policies also changed. The United States began to apply more pressure in matters of trade and defense. Richard Nixon pushed Japan to limit exports of textiles to the United States, abruptly abandoned the postwar Bretton Woods system, which supported a yen-dollar exchange rate that greatly undervalued the yen, and urged Japan to beef up its military forces.<sup>27</sup> Then in 1974 came the first of the two major oil shocks, which brought an end to the high-growth era in Japan.

As a result of the changes in the domestic and international environments the dominance and cohesiveness of the conservative camp in Japan began to come apart. First, the opposition parties gained in influence. During the mid-1970s, the LDP's majority in both houses of the



National Assembly dropped to razor-thin margins. After the 1976 election, for instance, it maintained its majority only after a number of conservative independents joined the party. The LDP was forced to make more concessions to the opposition parties in order to pass important pieces of legislation.

Second, the conservative camp lost much of its coherence. As T. J. Pempel notes, "there are important divisions among powerful conservatives within Japan over almost all elements of foreign, economic, and defense policy."<sup>28</sup> A major reason for this is that the LDP, in order to stay in power, broadened its electoral base beyond just farmers and industrialists. Over the years, it became a catchall party, expanding its base of support to include virtually all parts of society.<sup>29</sup> According to Gerald Curtis, by the 1980s the LDP had become so dependent on the support of a diverse coalition of social interests that the need to avoid alienating any significant element itself acts as a powerful check on the party's policies.<sup>30</sup> These interests are mostly represented in the party's Policy Affairs Research Council (PARC) by groups of LDP legislators generally known as *zoku* ("policy tribes"), who specialize and have particular influence in specific areas of policy, such as taxes, education, construction, and agriculture.<sup>31</sup> Many now see these politicians as rivaling and often exceeding the influence of bureaucrats.

While the research shows that more social interests are being represented in the system, it also suggests that government institutions have structured the access of social interests in a way that limits the extent of pluralism, especially because the cleavages caused by the bureaucracy's long-recognized sectionalism are being reinforced by the development of LDP *zoku*. According to this model of Japanese politics, policy making is dominated by subgovernments. Decision making is sectionalized into separated arenas each of which involves a ministry or a bureau, its related policy group or *zoku* in the LDP (which is somewhat akin to a congressional committee in the United States), and interest groups. Although strong subgovernments and subgovernmental conflict are hardly unique to Japan, they do seem to be particularly prominent.<sup>32</sup> Satō Seizaburō and Matsuzaki Tetsuhisa argue that subgovernments are even stronger in Japan than in the United States.<sup>33</sup> Instead of seeing Japanese decision making as highly centralized and unified, then, the tendency now is to emphasize the system's fragmentation. Michio Mura-

matsu and Ellis Krauss call it "patterned pluralism": "Policymaking conflict under patterned pluralism are *pluralist* in that many diverse actors whose alliances may shift participate, but *patterned* in that the shifting coalitions occur within the framework of one-party dominance and of a bureaucracy that procedurally structures the types of possible alliances and policymaking patterns."<sup>34</sup>

The effect of this fragmentation is that Japan has a strong bias toward maintaining the status quo. The main role of the *zoku* politicians is to act as brokers between bureaucrats and interest groups. But the energy of these politicians is usually concentrated less on initiating change in policy than on preventing their clientele from being hurt. At best, the prime minister is seen as a mediator of last resort. In Murakawa Ichirō's description of the policy process, the prime minister, as LDP president, becomes involved only when lower bodies are deadlocked and cannot make a decision.<sup>35</sup> At worst, the premier is hardly able to do even that. Karel van Wolferen, in his controversial article "The Japan Problem," goes so far as to argue that the Japanese prime minister has less influence than the head of government of any Western country.<sup>36</sup> He asserts that the Japanese political system is so fragmented that it is incapable of making decisions in its best interest; it is, he says, a "government without a top."<sup>37</sup>

### *The Prime Minister and Models of Japanese Policy Process*

As we have seen, neither of the two paradigms has much to say about the prime minister's role and influence. Both models virtually ignore the premier as an influential autonomous political actor. In "Japan, Inc." models, the prime minister is reduced to "near impotence" by the ruling triad made up of the party, the bureaucracy, and big business. In models of fragmentation, particularly as envisioned by van Wolferen, the prime minister lacks the influence to counter the centrifugal forces of the fragmented system. Van Wolferen argues that change in Japan's trade practices will occur only when the United States and other countries apply intense pressure for change.<sup>38</sup> But both models, by concentrating on the constraints, overlook the cases in which the prime minister has been important, often critical, in bringing about policy change.

Even during the 1960s, when the "Japan, Inc." model applied best, politicians played more important roles than simply being ratifiers and safety valves. They often dominated important areas of policy other than those directly related to economic growth. In fact, much evidence supports the view that bureaucratic dominance of industrial policy was an exception rather than the norm. Kent Calder's study of various areas of policy through the postwar period shows that, long before the 1970s, entrepreneurial conservative politicians played far more activist roles in many areas, including agricultural, regional, and public works policy, than they are given credit for.<sup>39</sup> In foreign policy, prime ministers in the postwar period have often established and then accomplished major personal goals during their tenure: Hatoyama Ichirō reestablished diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union; Kishi Nobusuke renegotiated the United States–Japan Security Treaty; and Satō reestablished relations with South Korea and negotiated the return of Okinawa to Japanese sovereignty.<sup>40</sup> Haruhiro Fukui concludes in his study of the reestablishment of relations with China in 1972 that the "central role of the prime minister was abundantly clear."<sup>41</sup>

Even in economic policy, politicians were not simply the tools of bureaucrats in pursuing economic growth. Michio Muramatsu and Ellis Krauss emphasize that political leadership was critical in establishing and institutionalizing the conservative line emphasizing high economic growth.<sup>42</sup> As they point out, the conservatives were not unified on the conservative line; many wanted to push policies favoring traditional values and military power.<sup>43</sup> Although the conservative line was initiated by Yoshida while he was prime minister during the late 1940s and early 1950s, the conflict between the two conservative camps was not resolved until Ikeda Hayato became prime minister in 1960. He consolidated the conservative policy line with his "low-posture" politics, thus reducing the confrontation between the conservative and progressive camps.

Politicians were crucial in overriding the caution of what is regarded to be Japan's most powerful ministry, the Finance Ministry, in developing budgetary policies critical to the country's expansionist economic policies. In the beginning, it took an activist prime minister to persuade Finance Ministry officials to support the highly expansionist economic policies.<sup>44</sup> John Campbell's study of the budgetary process reveals that in formulating subsequent budgets the LDP leadership often overrode

objections from the Finance Ministry. For instance, the ministry worked hard—and failed—to control increases in the 1968 budget because it could not resist the pressure from the LDP.<sup>45</sup> Thus it is clear that politicians, particularly prime ministers, were much more than simply safety valves for the bureaucracy even in economic policy during the 1960s, when “Japan, Inc.” was supposedly at its peak.

Models emphasizing Japan’s fragmentation also are flawed. In particular, they tend to exaggerate the deadlock of the system. A number of important changes in policy occurred without significant subgovernmental conflict, such as the new and expanded welfare programs under Tanaka. These models also neglect a number of cases in which conflict between subgovernments has been resolved or at least contained. Administrative and fiscal reforms of the 1980s brought down a huge chronic government deficit that was, in the late 1970s, even larger in terms of gross national product than that of the United States. Takeshita played an important part in opening two important agricultural markets, those in oranges and beef. As will be shown in chapter 4, both Nakasone and Takeshita played leading roles in reforming the tax system despite intense public opposition. As Daniel Okimoto argues, despite the fragmented nature of the system, “the state still seems capable of rising above petty politics to take action in the public’s and nation’s best interests.”<sup>46</sup>

Japanese prime ministers, then, have figured prominently in a number of cases of policy change. By virtually ignoring this prominence, both models underestimate the possibility of policy change and the role that the prime minister can potentially play in bringing it about.

### Leadership and the Policy Process

We are presented with a puzzle: the Japanese prime minister is certainly not a strong and assertive leader; nevertheless, there is much evidence to suggest that he can and often does play an important role in policy change. The solution to the puzzle lies in widening our view of the role of leadership in the policy process. The process leading to policy change, after all, can be long and complicated; most major legislation is the result of years of effort. A leader’s role and influence in the process,

therefore, can also be quite complex. The question, then, is, Where and how in this process are prime ministers most likely to be involved?

The usual approach is to "measure" influence in terms of "power," that is, whether a person gets his or her way. This is particularly true in much of the literature on the U.S. presidency; for example, much of the discussion on presidential power focuses on "boxscores" that tally the president's wins and losses vis-à-vis Congress. The president either wins or loses the battles.<sup>47</sup> But this approach is too narrow a framework to analyze the many possible ways in which the head of government can affect the policy process.

To understand an actor's role and influence, we need a broader framework than is generally used. The policy process includes at least the following three parts: agenda setting, determining the content of change, and the enactment of change.<sup>48</sup> In addition, change can follow different types of process, which may be divided into three major categories: rational, political, and garbage can models.<sup>49</sup> Building on these approaches, one can postulate that leadership can be categorized into three major types: technocratic, political, and reactive.

### *Technocratic Leadership*

Technocratic leadership involves problem solving. The leader's task is to search for solutions that best solve the problems at hand, monitoring the environment, and, when a problem arises, searching for alternative solutions, systematically comparing them, their costs and benefits, and choosing the best. The classic model of rational choice requires perfect information about all the alternatives and the ability to calculate the consequences of each. But, as many have noted, this is impossible because of the substantial time and resources needed to acquire information.<sup>50</sup> Decision makers are at best "boundedly" rational; they inevitably must cut the costs of following a rational process and settle for the first satisfactory alternative that comes along. For the purposes here, leadership is technocratic as long as it approximates a unitary actor being able to make a decision based on well-defined goals.

What this model implies is that, first, the leaders have the power to make the decisions without interference from other actors and, second,

goals are clear and unified. Technocrats, Joel Aberbach, Robert Putnam, and Bert Rockman have noted in their study of bureaucrats and politicians in Western democracies, tend to emphasize continuity, stability, and predictability.<sup>51</sup> Leaders in this case are not involved in setting the agenda—the goals are assumed. Rather, the leader's main role is to find the appropriate solutions to the problem at hand to bring conditions back to some sort of equilibrium. A relatively pure example of technocratic leadership is the role of the chairman of the Federal Reserve, who monitors the economy and adjusts interest rates depending on changing economic conditions.

But Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman found that the emphasis on technical problem solving is more representative of bureaucrats than of politicians.<sup>52</sup> Bureaucrats, particularly in nonpoliticized issues, often have a great deal of autonomy to pursue specific goals. Thus one would expect to see technocratic leadership in highly centralized, bureaucratically dominated societies with a strong consensus on goals. One major example of this was Meiji Japan, where the leaders had the power and the desire to advance policies to modernize and industrialize the country in an attempt to catch up to the Western powers.<sup>53</sup> A more recent case of technocratic leadership is France in the late 1970s, when Raymond Barre, prime minister under the presidency of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, implemented policies to restrain government deficits.<sup>54</sup>

For most top political leaders, however, so pure a technocratic role is unusual. In most cases, even if they have strong coherent goals, they must compete with other significant actors in the process. Leadership in this case would be political.

### *Political Leadership*

In political models choice is a result of individuals and groups with different interests, perceptions, and resources. That is, goals within camps are unified, and change is the result of conflict among the participants who have a stake in the outcome. The leader plays a forceful part in pushing for change; he has clear goals and pursues those goals using the resources at his disposal to overcome opposition. Political leadership, in other words, is top-down leadership. Enactment may be an important part in political leadership; ultimate success is determined by

whether the leader is able to have policies adopted. But the emphasis is on initiating policy change, that is, agenda setting. The assumption is that the leader has a program of change to carry out. Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman conclude in their study of bureaucrats and politicians that politicians contribute "direction, energy, and a modicum of idealism" to the policy-making process; their role is to "articulate society's dreams."<sup>55</sup>

As is suggested above, this type of leadership is the one that is emphasized in the United States, particularly in studies of the presidency. David McKay, for example, argues that modern presidents have exercised a high degree of control over the initial design of domestic programs.<sup>56</sup> Presidents can pursue their own preferences, formulate coherent policies, and seize opportunities for innovation not available to other institutions in a fragmented political order. A number of other studies of policy making seem to confirm that the president's primary role is the initiation of policy rather than the determination of the content or even the enactment of change.<sup>57</sup>

It is also the type of leadership ascribed to party governments in Europe. Richard Rose argues that, in Great Britain, taking initiatives is "often the most important thing a party does to influence government policy."<sup>58</sup> European parties are "likely to have a long-term commitment to a statement of principles, the support of a relatively stable group of voters, and a manifesto of pledges for action by government."<sup>59</sup> Party leaders push these policy platforms to win elections, so that on entering office, the prime minister has a strong commitment to the programs outlined in the party manifesto. Rose's study of British parties found that the great majority of the nearly one-hundred pledges made at each election were put into effect by the winning party.<sup>60</sup>

### *Reactive Leadership*

One of the main assumptions of the political model is that the behavior of actors is the result of their pursuit of well-defined goals. But these assumptions do not hold in many situations.<sup>61</sup> Not only are preferences often unclear, but they are "discovered through action as much as being the basis of action."<sup>62</sup> Members of an organization may have only a fragmentary and rudimentary understanding of why they are doing what they are doing, and with what effect. For many reasons

participants vary in the amount of time and energy they put into the process. Michael Cohen, James March, and Johan Olsen refer to these situations as "organized anarchies," which result in a "garbage can" style of organizational choice.<sup>63</sup>

Choice in an organized anarchy depends on more than just the political power of the actors. It is highly contextual, depending substantially on the pattern of flows in four streams that run through organizations: problems, solutions, participants, and possible choices. Each of the streams is largely independent of the others. Participants may generate solutions because they want to expand the activities of their jobs or that of the unit, rather than as responses to problems. They drift in and out of decision making; their attention to an issue is not necessarily fixed, because other demands upon them may impinge on their time. Choice, therefore, is viewed as a somewhat fortuitous confluence of the streams.

In this sort of situation, the leader has relatively little influence. His role "is a bit like the driver of a skidding automobile. The marginal judgments he makes, his skill, and his luck may possibly make some difference to the survival prospects for his riders. As a result, his responsibilities are heavy. But whether he is convicted of manslaughter or receives a medal for heroism is largely outside his control."<sup>64</sup> When a leader has no clear policy goals and thus no agenda to advocate, he will instead apply his energy to issues that happen to be salient at the moment. He does not take the initiative for change. Neither is he involved directly in the content of change. When he takes up issues that are at hand and applies his energy to them, his role is simply to try to resolve them in some way. This leadership can be described as reactive. Although without a say in determining which issues are attended to or the content of proposed changes, the leader can be important in deciding whether any choice occurs, and therefore which issues are resolved.

Although this is not the typical view of leadership in the West, it is not by any means unknown. In Germany, Renate Mayntz comments: "While there are variations in the internal balance in the executive, the dominant pattern is one of checks and countervailing powers. The need for consensus building and conflict resolution is correspondingly high. . . . The pattern of executive leadership in the Federal Republic of Germany seems . . . to make more for a stable than for a very powerful



government.”<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, in Italy, Sabino Cassese claims: “The leadership exercised is more the result of mediation among factions, pressure groups, and parties, than the result of elaboration, promotion, and planning by responsible and expert ministry officials. . . . The Italian system is more suited to reaching agreement about problems as they gradually emerge than to ensuring positive guidance and direction.”<sup>66</sup>

Indeed, scholars increasingly describe American presidential leadership in similar ways. Because of changes in the American political system in the last twenty years, leadership has become more difficult and complex, which makes it much harder to predict “what the consequences of one’s actions will be.”<sup>67</sup> As Hedrick Smith writes in the *The Power Game*, we tend to see the president as John Wayne, but in reality we have a fluid system of power in which power floats to and then away from the president.<sup>68</sup> Presidential government, Hugh Heclø argues, is an illusion. “Far from being in charge or running the government, the president must struggle even to comprehend what is going on.”<sup>69</sup> This perception is even stronger under the presidency of George Bush with his “just-in-time” foreign policy: he is often accused of reacting to events rather than trying to take advantage of opportunities in order to shape them.<sup>70</sup>

### Prime Ministerial Issues

What sort of leader, then, is the Japanese prime minister? As a first step, a logical approach is to look at the proposals in which recent incumbents have been most involved. By developing lists of these, one can discover a number of things about the prime minister’s role in the policy process. The number of issues on a list gives an idea of the breadth of his involvement—whether he participates in many or relatively few. The list also provides an indication of whether his involvement is in important issues or in minor ones. And finally, it offers some idea of the way he participates in the process—whether he helps put these proposals on the agenda or becomes involved after they are there. The lists were developed on the basis of analysis of headlines in the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* (Japan’s equivalent of the *Wall Street Journal*, usually referred to as *Nikkei*), and a content analysis of two other major newspapers: *Asahi*

*Shimbun* and *Yomiuri Shimbun* (see appendix A for details of the methodology). Major issues are indicated by an x.

Miki Takeo	Fukuda Takeo
x Lockheed scandal	x Economy
x Clean politics	x China peace treaty
x Economy	x Trade frictions
x Antimonopoly bill	ASEAN/Fukuda Doctrine
x China peace treaty	Energy
Right to strike	Administrative reform
Revenue bills	USSR fishing treaty
Welfare/life cycle	Party reform
	Education
Ōhira Masayoshi	Suzuki Zenkō
x Fiscal reform	x Fiscal reform
x Energy	x Administrative reform
x U.S. relations: [Trade, defense, Iran, Afghanistan]	x Defense expenses
Economy	x Trade frictions
Political ethics	Foreign aid
	Economy
	Ethics/party reform
	Textbooks
Nakasone Yasuhiro	Takeshita Noboru
x Trade frictions	x Tax reform
x Defense	x Recruit/political reform
x Tax reform	x Trade frictions
x Economy	x Land reform
x Administrative reform	Foreign aid
x Education reform	Hometown revival
x Fiscal reform	
x Kokkai representation	
Yasukuni Shrine	

### *Analyzing the Lists*

What do these lists suggest about the prime minister's role in the policy process? One is that he is not particularly activist: he is involved in relatively few issues. The premiers surveyed generally concerned themselves with three to four primary issues during a two-year term. Nakasone, generally considered to be the most activist of recent prime

ministers, participated in more, but he also served five years—more than double the time of any of the others.

The lists also suggest that the prime minister is involved in major issues, the ones that dominated the political agenda: foreign crises such as trade frictions with the United States, political scandals such as Lockheed and Recruit, and major domestic issues such as administrative and fiscal reform. These all showed up on the front pages of the newspapers. In this sense, the prime minister is involved in important issues. The major omission is industrial policy, which is widely regarded as an important area of public policy; however, the prime ministers surveyed were not particularly involved, although some did concern themselves with it as part of their involvement in economic issues (e.g., Fukuda).

Finally, the lists provide some idea of the prime minister's degree of involvement. The issues divide into three categories.<sup>71</sup> First are those that the prime minister cannot ignore. Second are those that were already major political questions when he became involved. These are issues that the prime minister would have a hard time turning away from. Third are those over which he has discretion: in other words, he chooses to participate. This analysis gives some insight into the prime minister's role in policy, in particular the extent to which he has discretion over matters of policy in which he is involved.

*Obligatory Issues* The prime minister must often deal with policy crises that entail systemwide conflicts within the political system. As head of government and party president, he is the only person who can coordinate broad policy programs and resolve major conflicts. Thus he must deal with any large-scale flare-ups that occur during his term. There are three main types of obligatory issue that make it to the prime minister's agenda: political scandals, international crises, and economic problems. (Note that brackets indicate secondary issues.)

Miki Takeo	Clean politics, economy, Lockheed, [right to strike]
Fukuda Takeo	Economy, trade frictions
Ōhira Masayoshi	Energy crisis, U.S. relations, [political ethics]
Suzuki Zenkō	Defense, trade frictions, [textbooks]
Nakasone Yasuhiro	Trade frictions, defense, economy
Takeshita Noboru	Recruit scandal/political reform, trade frictions

Some of the biggest issues that prime ministers have had to deal with were scandals. Miki Takeo not only had to attend to the Lockheed scandal, which dominated his second year in office, but he also pursued his goal of clean politics as the result of the public's furor over Tanaka's "money power politics." Takeshita had to cope with the Recruit scandal, which dominated the latter part of his tenure.<sup>72</sup>

International crises, in particular those involving Japan's relations with the United States, also pushed themselves onto the prime ministers' agendas. Almost all have had to deal with some sort of crisis in that area. Only Miki seems to have been largely exempt. In particular, the trade friction between the two countries was one of the top items for every prime minister from Fukuda to Takeshita. In addition, Ōhira and Suzuki Zenkō have had to face demands for more defense spending. Almost all of Ōhira's agenda was taken up by problems in the Japanese U.S. relationship: there were not only the usual trade frictions and defense demands, but also the U.S. push for sanctions on Iran for taking U.S. hostages and on the Soviet Union for invading Afghanistan.

The U.S. relationship is quite special for the prime minister: his speeches in the National Assembly inevitably include a section reaffirming that the United States is the cornerstone of Japan's diplomacy. He meets the U.S. president about twice a year, once alone in Washington (or occasionally in Tokyo) and once at the summit of industrialized democracies. Arranging a trip to the United States is nearly the first task for a new prime minister.

These meetings often provide the stimulus for the prime minister to deal with the problems of relations with the United States. So that the meeting will go as smoothly and harmoniously as possible, he does his best to ease any frictions that may exist at the time. This is reflected in the Nikkei index, which shows that prime ministerial involvement in trade or defense issues increases sharply with the approach of a planned trip to the United States or the economic summit and decreases sharply afterward. Nakasone, for example, had scheduled a meeting with President Reagan in 1987 as a farewell visit to help cap his final year in office, but trade frictions increased as the date approached. (Congress often uses the prime minister's visit to press for Japanese trade concessions.) Nakasone needed to show the president and Congress that Japan was taking concrete action to ease the trade imbalance. The number of Nikkei

headlines mentioning Nakasone in conjunction with trade issues went from zero in January 1987 to a peak of nineteen in May, when he made his visit. It then dropped to four in June.<sup>73</sup>

Such situations arise not only with the United States. Suzuki became involved in a problem because of a planned trip to China. In the summer of 1982 proposed revisions of Japanese high school history textbooks exploded into a major diplomatic issue as much of East and Southeast Asia, particularly China and South Korea, made clear its opposition to them. Suzuki had scheduled a trip to China that fall, and he worked to have the Education and Foreign ministries settle matters before he left for his visit.<sup>74</sup>

The third type of obligatory issue is economic. The prime minister must deal with economic matters both because they are important and because they usually go beyond the jurisdiction of any one ministry or agency. Economic questions, although not always obligatory, were on the agenda for almost every prime minister in the period surveyed. Tanaka Kakuei had to cope with the economic crisis brought on by high inflation following the oil shock. Economic problems continued from the middle to the late 1970s, as the economy suffered from stagflation, and were major issues for Miki, Fukuda, and Ōhira.<sup>75</sup> Ōhira also faced the inflation caused by the second oil shock. In addition, Nakasone had to deal with the economic slowdown to the dramatic rise in the yen's value against the dollar in 1986–87.

Incidentally, in two cases the prime minister passed on the responsibility to someone else, in both instances Fukuda Takeo. In 1973, Tanaka brought in Fukuda to take over the Finance Ministry to tackle inflation; and in 1974, Miki appointed him deputy prime minister and director of the Economic Planning Agency, as well as head of a cabinet council in charge of economic problems. Despite his giving Fukuda much of the responsibility for developing and coordinating economic measures, the economy still ranked as one of the top issues for Miki himself.

Overall, obligatory issues tend to take up a large portion of the prime minister's agenda. Three of the top five issues for Miki can be considered obligatory, and the proportion for other prime ministers is similar. For Fukuda, the proportion is two out of three; for Ōhira, two out of three; for Suzuki, two out of four; for Nakasone, two (or three, if defense is included) out of eight; and for Takeshita, two out of four. In addition,

there were a number of shorter-term problems beyond their control that demanded their attention, such as the textbook controversy under Suzuki, and various scandals and other political controversies that virtually all prime ministers have had to deal with at some point during their tenure.

*Continuing Issues* Prime ministers also concern themselves with major continuing political questions, that is, issues over which prime ministers have some discretion—they could decide not to get involved—but it would be difficult for them to ignore. In effect, they would have to make an effort to stay out of them. Issues that are already on the national agenda generally take up one or two places on the prime minister's personal agenda.

Miki Takeo	—
Fukuda Takeo	China peace treaty, [party reform]
Ōhira Masayoshi	—
Suzuki Zenkō	Fiscal reform
Nakasone Yasuhiro	Administrative reform, fiscal reform
Takeshita Noboru	Tax reform, land reform

Many of these are tasks left unfinished by the previous administration. Fukuda took over a number of problems from Miki, including negotiating a peace treaty with China, revising the antimonopoly law, and reforming the party. Suzuki continued Ōhira's efforts at fiscal and administrative reform, which then became Nakasone's centerpiece issue of administrative reform. Takeshita's efforts at tax reform were a continuation of those of Nakasone. Another example, outside the period under scrutiny, is Uno Sōsuke's promise in 1989 to double Japan's foreign aid; this was a continuation of Takeshita's Global Contributions plan.

Much of this continuity can be explained by two factors: succeeding prime ministers were from the same party, and to some extent the party's priorities are also the prime minister's; and new prime ministers often were important figures in the administrations of their immediate predecessors, even in promoting these particular issues. Fukuda was deputy prime minister in the Miki cabinet and head of the cabinet council dealing with economic issues. He had also helped Miki push for party reform at the end of Tanaka's tenure as prime minister. Ōhira's concern for

the national deficit was in part due to his having been finance minister under Miki and secretary general under Fukuda.<sup>76</sup> Nakasone was the director general of the Administrative Management Agency in Suzuki's cabinet and was central in starting the Second Ad Hoc Council on Administrative Reform (Rinchō), as well as supporting Suzuki on fiscal reform. Takeshita served as finance minister and secretary general in Nakasone's administration and played a strong supporting role in advocating tax reform. And Uno, as foreign minister under Takeshita, helped in Takeshita's Global Contributions plan to increase Japan's foreign aid.

*Discretionary Issues* If one assumes that in most of the items in the first two categories, prime ministers had relatively little discretion, then the remaining issues on the lists can be considered discretionary—ones in which they chose to become involved.

Miki Takeo	China peace treaty, Antimonopoly, [welfare/life cycle]
Fukuda Takeo	[ASEAN/Fukuda Doctrine], [administrative reform], [education]
Ōhira Masayoshi	Fiscal reform
Suzuki Zenkō	Administrative reform, [foreign aid]
Nakasone Yasuhiro	Tax reform, education reform, [Yasukuni Shrine]
Takeshita Noboru	[Foreign aid], [hometown revival]

Often the prime minister has had a long-standing interest in these, frequently since well before becoming head of government. Miki, who pushed for the signing of a peace treaty with China, was one of the main supporters of Tanaka's recognition of China in 1972. Ōhira's efforts at fiscal reform, as I mentioned above, was in large part the result of his concern for the increasing budget deficits incurred while he was finance minister under Miki and secretary general of the party under Fukuda. And Nakasone's attempt to reform the education system was something he had called for well before becoming prime minister.

These issues, however, are a relatively small portion of the primary agenda of prime ministers and range from zero to two issues per incumbent. Miki and Nakasone each had two; and Ōhira and Suzuki each had one. Fukuda and Takeshita had none, although all had one or more

issues of lesser priority that can be considered discretionary (the issues in brackets). In addition, for the most part, the prime ministers did not get very far with these problems. Miki failed to accomplish either of his two initiatives while in office (although both were accomplished under Fukuda); Ōhira was forced to back down on fiscal reform; and Nakasone accomplished little with education reform and managed to pass only a relatively minor part of his tax reform plan (although most of the remaining plan was passed under Takeshita).

On the basis of the analysis of the lists, one can make three conclusions about the prime minister's participation in the policy process. First, given that the number of primary issues on the lists is small, he is not particularly activist. Second, with the possible exception of industrial policy, he is involved in the questions that dominate the political agenda. And third, the lists suggest that the prime minister's agenda is dominated by issues over which he has little discretion. Almost inevitably, at least two of the top problems are ones he is forced to deal with, and there is usually one more that he would have difficulty ignoring because it already is of major political importance. Moreover, these two types of issue tend to be at the very top of his agenda. Only a few arrived there by his choice.

### Conclusion

The typical Japanese prime minister is, by the standards of most other countries, a remarkably weak and passive figure. Prime ministers have come and gone with more rapidity than in virtually any other country, and they are almost completely ignored in writings about the policy process in Japan. Neither of the two major models of this process that dominate the literature—one of which sees power as highly centralized and the other of which sees it as highly fragmented—view the premier as an influential autonomous political actor in the process. Indeed, Japan has had few examples of strong, assertive leadership. Yet, despite this, prime ministers have often played a central part in bringing about change in policy. The leadership of the Japanese prime ministership, then, seems quite different from what is considered typical in the West or in the rest of Asia.

What sort of leader, then, is the Japanese prime minister? There are



three possible types: technocratic, political, and reactive. Japan is often thought of as a technocratic state because of its strong bureaucracy. Many ascribed this sort of leadership to the former bureaucrats who entered politics, in particular, Ikeda and Satō. Technocratic leadership may be strong at the lower levels, particularly in policy areas in which the bureaucracy is the leading actor, such as the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) in industrial policy. But, at least since Miki, prime ministers have generally not been involved in issues that one would generally associate with technocratic leadership. Most of the problems they were forced to deal with, for instance, were political scandals and international crises, rather than technical matters.

Prime ministers sometimes provide political leadership. In the past a number of prime ministers have taken initiatives. During the 1950s, Hatoyama and Kishi pushed ideological issues, such as rolling back some of the more liberal Occupation reforms. In the early 1960s, Ikeda pressed for economic growth as a priority. Heads of government have also been central in foreign policy, for example, Hatoyama's initiative to reestablish diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union, Kishi's renegotiation of the United States–Japan Security Treaty, and Tanaka's recognition of China. But, at least since Miki, these sorts of initiative have been relatively few. Japanese prime ministers have not been important agenda setters; their leadership in this sense has not been particularly political.

Prime ministers, therefore, have not tended to be either technocratic or political leaders. Most of the issues they deal with are those that are already on the agenda. They have tended to become involved in them as the result of outside factors, such as foreign pressure on trade and security policies, domestic and international economic problems, diplomatic crises, and political scandals. The prime minister, then, has tended to be reactive.