

Karol Żakowski

University of Lodz

Political Leadership vs. Prime Ministerial Leadership: Evolution of the Priorities in Decision-Making Reform in Japan

Abstract

The slogans of “political leadership” (seiji shudō) and “prime ministerial leadership” (Kantei shudō) have been commonly used to describe the institutional reforms in Japan in the last three decades. The former term referred to the supremacy of the politicians over the bureaucrats, and the latter to the strengthening of the powers of the head of government. The aim of this chapter is to clarify differences and similarities between the two concepts, as well as to compare their applicability to decision-making patterns under subsequent governments. It is argued that different prime ministers put emphasis on either the former or the latter concept.

Keywords: *Japan, political system, political leadership, prime ministerial leadership*

1. Introduction

The disfunctionalities of the decision-making process in Japan drew attention from the public at the beginning of the 1990s. They consisted both in corruption-like connections between the politicians and big businesses, and excessive reliance on bureaucratic guidance. As a remedy,

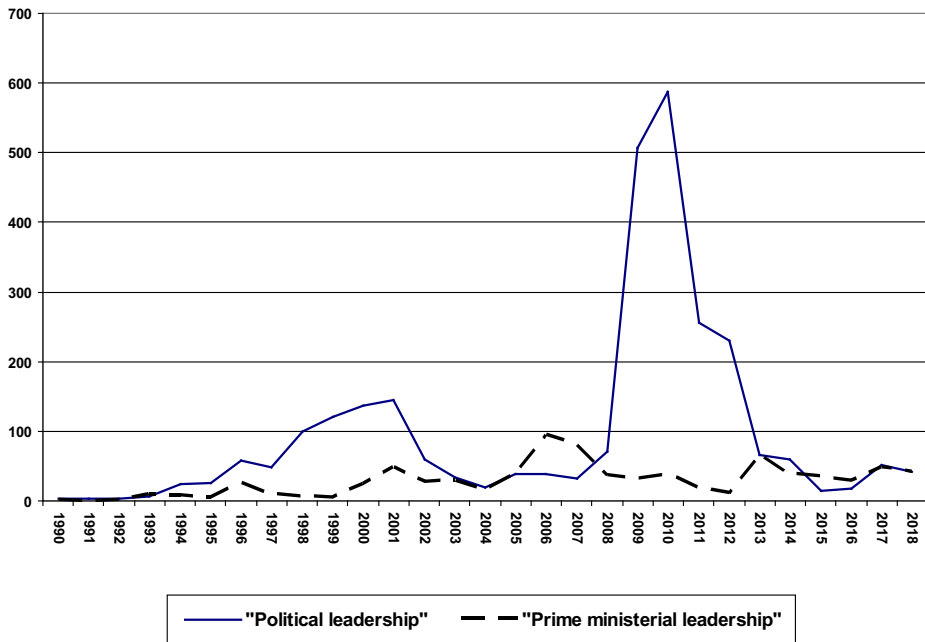
political reforms were proposed based on the concepts of “political leadership” and “prime ministerial leadership.” While the former term became popular in the 1990s, it ceded ground to “prime ministerial leadership” under the Koizumi (2001–2006) and especially first Abe (2006–2007) administrations. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) government (2009–2012), in turn, over-focused on promoting “political leadership,” which contributed to its ultimate failure in reforming decision-making patterns. After Abe Shinzō regained power in December 2012, “prime ministerial leadership” once more gained in prominence. The chapter examines these developments.

The concepts of “political leadership” and “prime ministerial leadership” were conceived as a response to decision making practices established during the long Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) rule.¹ Because LDP parliamentarians had been focused on maintaining clientelistic ties with their electorate, they entrusted most every-day matters to the bureaucrats. From the 1970s, the power of civil servants was further strengthened by their connections with the so-called “parliamentary tribes” – informal groups of LDP politicians specializing in separate legislative fields and representing respective interest groups. This “iron triangle” – a nexus between the world of politics, bureaucracy and big business – constituted a serious constraint on the prime minister’s leadership and impeded conducting any far-reaching economic reforms.

The basic principles of political leadership were formulated in the 1990s. They were based on the ideas formulated by Hōsei University Professor Matsushita Keiichi, who criticized the “bureaucratic cabinet system” (*kanryō naikakusei*) and advised strengthening the role played by the Diet and by parliamentarians. To create a genuine parliamentary cabinet system, Matsushita proposed abolishing the administrative vice-ministers’ council (*jimujikantō kaigi*) together with the post of administrative vice-minister. The administrative vice-ministers’ meeting was one of the symbols of the power of the bureaucrats. It convened before each cabinet meeting and virtually no decision could be submitted for government approval without its prior authorization. Matsushita (1998, pp. 31–110) claimed that thanks to an increase in the number of political appointees in the government, the politicians should learn how to conduct inter-ministerial policy coordination by themselves instead of the bureaucrats.

1 In 1955–2009, the LDP remained the largest party in the House of Representatives and lost power only for 10 months in 1993–1994.

Figure 10.1. Number of References to the Terms “Political Leadership” (*Seiji Shudō*) and “Prime Ministerial Leadership” (*Kantei Shudō*) in *Asahi Shinbun*



Source: Compiled by the author, based on *Asahi Shinbun*.

The concept of “prime ministerial leadership,” in turn, gained in prominence at the beginning of the 21st century. Its Japanese version (*Kantei shudō*) refers to the Kantei, the prime minister’s official residence which is used as a metonym for the head of the government and his/her direct entourage. It includes the chief cabinet secretary, three deputy chief cabinet secretaries, three assistant chief cabinet secretaries, prime minister’s special advisers and executive secretaries, as well as special advisers to the cabinet (Mulgan, 2018, p. 2). It is probable that the popularity of this term was influenced not only by the top-down leadership style of Prime Minister Koizumi, who assumed office in 2001, but also by the construction of the new Kantei building, which was completed in 2002.

Figure 10.1 illustrates the number of references to the terms “political leadership” and “prime ministerial leadership” in one of the major Japanese newspapers, *Asahi Shinbun*, since 1990. While both concepts were almost unknown at the beginning of the 1990s, they started

appearing in the newspaper following the historic alternation of power in 1993. At that time, an eight-party coalition ousted the LDP from government after 38 years of unceasing reign of this dominant party. It was mainly “political leadership” that attracted interest from the public, and this tendency was even increased during the process of drafting administrative reforms at the end of the 1990s. Nevertheless, the graph shows that after Prime Minister Koizumi came to power in 2001, also the concept of “prime ministerial leadership” started gaining in prominence. The term *Kantei shudō* was most popular under the first Abe administration in 2006–2007. Constant reference by the DPJ to the need for establishing a politician-led government, in turn, contributed to an abrupt increase in the number of references to *seiji shudō* in 2009. Under the second Abe administration since 2012, both terms became equally popular.

It is argued that different prime ministers treated various aspects of political reform as priorities, which resulted in the diversity of their approach to the concepts of political and prime ministerial leaderships.

2. Discourse on Political Leadership in the 1990s

One of the main initiators of the discourse on political leadership was Ozawa Ichirō, a prominent politician who, in 1993, defected from the LDP together with a group of his followers, thus contributing to an historical loss of power by the dominant party. It was Ozawa who became a “shadow shogun” behind Prime Ministers Hosokawa Morihiro (1993–1994) and Hata Tsutomu (1994). In 1993, Ozawa published a bestseller *Blueprint for a New Japan*, in which he criticized the lack of leadership by Japanese politicians. According to him, the policies instituted by statespersons in Japan were passive and short-term oriented, which resulted in the common perception of the country as a “dinosaur with a small brain.” Ozawa deplored the fact that despite broad competences, Japanese prime ministers were, in fact, weak leaders. He saw the cause of this situation in the long reign of the LDP and inter-factional frictions in the dominant party. Ozawa criticized the excessive sectionalism of separate ministries that cared only for their own interests. He claimed that the central government should start functioning as a real brain for the overgrown body of state administration. In order to reinvigorate policy debate and enable the alternation of power, he proposed the introduction of single-seat con-

stituencies. At the same time, Ozawa stressed the necessity to provide the prime minister with a better administrative backing by increasing the number of the Prime Minister's Office staff and assistants to the head of government. His main aim was to strengthen the coordination capabilities of the Kantei and turn the ministers into real decision-makers, not mere representatives of the interests of their bureaucratic subordinates. In Ozawa's vision, politicians should take responsibility for their decisions, while using bureaucrats' experience to realize the governmental agenda (Ozawa, 2006, pp. 16–96).

The appeal for political leadership in *Blueprint for a New Japan* found fertile ground in post-Cold War Japan. In 1994, the Hosokawa cabinet introduced a new electoral system, to a large extent based on the single-seat constituencies promoted by Ozawa. Nevertheless, the task of implementing central government reforms was undertaken by the LDP, which in 1994 returned to power thanks to a coalition with the Japan Socialist Party. As the connections between LDP politicians and civil servants had been weakened during the Hosokawa and Hata administrations, the politicians of the ruling party became more willing to show the administrative staff who was the boss. Moreover, the good image of civil servants among the general public was destroyed by numerous corruption scandals which involved bureaucrats in the mid-1990s. As LDP's main competitor in the 1996 parliamentary election, the New Frontier Party, planned to reduce the number of ministries, the LDP answered with an even more ambitious pledge to conduct a large-scale administrative reform (Iio, 2008a, pp. 163–172).

In particular, Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryūtarō (1996–1998) was eager to introduce political leadership over the bureaucrats. At the same time, he admitted that the real problem lay not in the bureaucrats, but rather in the politicians who were unable to properly use their administrative staff. Hashimoto (1994, pp. 187–194) found it natural that civil servants were characterized by sectionalism, as they could not exceed the competences of their home ministries. It was the task of statespersons to establish a general policy direction for the bureaucrats and find creative ways for its implementation. As such, Hashimoto perceived the greatest problem in politicians who blindly followed the policy proposals of their administrative staff. While Hashimoto initiated the central government reform, its details were decided by his successor Obuchi Keizō. Ozawa Ichirō, who, as the leader of the Liberal Party, formed a ruling

coalition with the LDP in 1999, also influenced the direction of institutional changes.

The central government reform entered into effect in 2001. It reduced the number of ministries and agencies from 22 to 12 and considerably strengthened the prime minister's institutional backing. The Prime Minister's Office absorbed several agencies and was turned into the Cabinet Office (Naikakufu), staffed by a larger number of bureaucrats. Most importantly, the new organ gained a status superior to all the ministries and was accorded the power to order them to provide the head of government with information (Neary, 2002, p. 127; Woodall, 2014, p. 176). In addition, Article 4 of the revised Cabinet Law clarified that the head of government had the right to propose new policies during cabinet meetings, while Article 12 enabled the Cabinet Secretariat to take the lead in preparing and coordinating "important policies" (*jūyō seisaku*). As a result, the rule of "dispersed management" (*buntan kanri gensoku*), which had prohibited the head of government from initiating policies falling within the competences of one of the ministers, was considerably weakened.

The prime minister gained new officials in his/her closest entourage. He/she was allowed to appoint more than five secretaries and to establish *ad hoc* offices in charge of specific policy areas (Shinoda, 2007, pp. 70–76). The maximum number of prime minister's special advisers was raised from three to five (Eda & Ryūzaki, 2002, pp. 103–106). In addition, new posts of ministers of state for special missions, whose role was to deal with distinct problems specified by each head of government as requiring inter-ministerial coordination, were established in the Cabinet Office. Functioning outside of rigid ministerial divisions, these ministers were less prone to pressure from bureaucrats or interest groups, and thus, potentially, more loyal to the prime minister. Moreover, thanks to new advisory councils operating under his/her jurisdiction, such as the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy (Keizai Zaisei Shimon Kaigi), the head of government became able to circumvent bureaucratic procedures in a top-down manner.

The political leadership promoted in the 1990s put emphasis both on empowering the politicians against the bureaucrats and on strengthening the prime minister's position in the government. Just like Ozawa, Hashimoto stressed the need for enhancing the Kantei's power, and saw the biggest challenge in creating a system that would enable the emergence of strong political leaders.

3. Prime Ministerial Leadership under the Koizumi and Abe Governments

The first beneficiary of the Hashimoto reforms turned out to be Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō, who assumed office in 2001. Koizumi's leadership style differed greatly from the style of his predecessors. Thanks to his charisma and skilful media policy, Koizumi maintained high popularity throughout his whole term in office, which enabled him to quell voices of discontent in the ruling party. Interestingly, Koizumi did not waver from announcing he would reform the LDP even if he had to destroy it, which drew to him many unaffiliated voters (Iijima, 2006, p. 8). Structural reforms instituted by him were oriented against bureaucratic veto players. In his book entitled *Discourse on the Demolition of the Bureaucratic Kingdom*, Koizumi (1996, pp. 3–92) criticized the excessive influence of civil servants on the decision-making process and declared his intention to take everything that could be done by the private sector out of the direct control of the bureaucrats. As a remedy to the illnesses of Japanese politics, he proposed the introduction of general election of the head of government. Thanks to a stable position during the full term in office, the prime minister could thus focus on realization of a long-term policy agenda. Koizumi's main goal was to privatize Japan Post, which turned out to be a difficult task as many LDP politicians received electoral support from postal employees in exchange for protecting their interests.

Koizumi was unable to revise the Constitution so as to enable general election of the prime minister, but he took advantage of the empowered Kantei to promote prime ministerial leadership. He used the Cabinet Secretariat to transmit his orders in a top-down manner to the bureaucrats. Chief Cabinet Secretary Fukuda Yasuo instructed his administrative deputy Furukawa Teijirō to inform all the ministries about the prime minister's intentions through the administrative vice-ministers' council. As a result, this organ, which used to be perceived as a symbol of bureaucratic power, turned out to be a useful tool in imposing the head of government's will on administrative staff (Shinoda, 2007, pp. 68–78). At the same time, Koizumi strengthened control over cabinet members by giving them letters with detailed policy instructions. The prime minister ignored factional recommendations when nominating ministers, and took into account the skills of candidates instead. Moreover, to strengthen the position of the ministers against the bureaucrats, he often reappointed politicians to

crucial offices during cabinet reshuffles (Iio, 2008b, p. 196). What is important, Koizumi made full use of advisory bodies created by the administrative reform, especially of the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy, supervised by Minister of State for Economic and Fiscal Policy Takenaka Heizō. By issuing basic policies (*honebuto no hōshin*) on a yearly basis, the Council heavily influenced the budget compilation process.

Eventually, Koizumi managed to impose the privatization of Japan Post on the bureaucrats and LDP backbenchers. After making minor concessions to the postal parliamentary tribe, the privatization was acknowledged by the LDP General Council at the end of June 2005 (Takenaka, 2006, pp. 204–226). Against the tradition of unanimity, the decision was made by a majority vote. While the House of Representatives authorized the privatization, the House of Councilors rejected the bill in August 2005. Surprisingly, Koizumi dissolved the lower house. As the head of government cannot dissolve the upper house, the only choice was to gain two-thirds of the seats in the House of Representatives to overrule the upper house's veto. The prime minister's position had been strengthened to the point that he expelled from the party all the politicians who opposed the bill and endorsed competing candidates in their constituencies. As a result, the LDP won as many as 296 out of 480 seats in the House of Representatives, which together with the votes of its coalition partner Kōmeitō was sufficient to pass the privatization bill (Uchiyama, 2007, pp. 94–102).

Koizumi's successor, Abe Shinzō, not only tried to continue the top-down leadership style, but also put greater emphasis on strengthening the Kantei. In his bestseller, *Towards a Beautiful Country*, he characterized himself as a "struggling politician" (*tatakau seijika*) who was not afraid to fight for his ideals despite harsh criticism (Abe, 2006, p. 4). Ignoring factional recommendations, Abe nominated his closest associates as ministers. He appointed the maximum allowed number of five prime minister's special advisers, mostly lawmakers, which indicated his intention to ensure political leadership. To keep bureaucrats in check, the Abe cabinet prepared anti-*amakudari* legislation, which was passed through the Diet in June 2007. The bill prohibited the practice of arranging employment for retired civil servants in public institutions or private companies (so-called *amakudari* – "descent from heaven"), which met with displeasure from the bureaucrats. What is important, the bill project was rejected by the administrative vice-ministers' council, but Abe arbitrarily ordered it to

be submitted for the cabinet's approval, thus ignoring the unwritten rule of bureaucratic guidance (Kakizaki & Hisae, 2007, pp. 74–111).

Despite his ambitious plans, Abe was less skilful than his predecessor in imposing his will on veto players. First of all, the political appointees in the government lacked a spirit of teamwork. Due to over-saturation of the Kantei with high-profile politicians who did not necessarily like each other, the prime minister was forced to micromanage various matters (Hayashi & Tsumura, 2011, pp. 134–135). Moreover, Abe did not attach as big importance to advisory councils, in particular the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy, as Koizumi had (Shinoda, 2013, pp. 110–111). Instead, the prime minister started withdrawing from neoliberal economic policy, which undermined his credibility in the eyes of unaffiliated voters. Eventually, numerous scandals with ministers contributed to LDP's defeat in the House of Councilors election in July 2007, forcing Abe to resign two months later. His successors, Fukuda Yasuo (2007–2008) and Asō Tarō (2008–2009), preferred to return to traditional decision-making patterns.

Both Koizumi and Abe had the ambition to exceed the framework of political leadership and strengthen the Kantei's control over both bureaucrats and LDP backbenchers. While Koizumi displayed an effective top-down leadership, his successor's attempt at going one step further ended in failure. It turned out that while the electoral and administrative reforms of the 1990s provided the heads of government with new instruments of power, their use depended on the prime ministers' personal skills.

4. Politician-Led Government under the DPJ Administration

The DPJ achieved a landslide victory in the House of Representatives election in August 2009, and its leader Hatoyama Yukio formed an anti-LDP government the following month. The DPJ had called for the overthrow of “bureaucracy-led protectionism” since its establishment in 1998 (Democratic Party of Japan, 1998). In the 2003 electoral manifesto, DPJ politicians had stated that they wanted to establish “an administration under which the bureaucrats are shown who is boss” (Democratic Party of Japan, 2003, p. 6). Over the years, the slogans of political leadership became a desperately needed common denominator for the parliamentarians from both the left and the right wing of the Japanese political scene, who formed the biggest opposition party (Yamaguchi, 2012, pp. 58–69).

Before the electoral victory in 2009, the DPJ defined a politician-led government more precisely. In its electoral manifesto it announced the so-called “five principles,” the first three of which were directly related to political leadership:

“Principle 1: From government delegated to the bureaucracy, to politician-led government in which the ruling party holds full responsibility;

Principle 2: From a two-track system in which policy-making proceeds in parallel in government and in the ruling party, to a unitary system of Cabinet-centred policy-making;

Principle 3: From the ministries’ pursuit of their own compartmentalised interests to the pursuit of the national interest led by the Prime Minister’s Office” (Democratic Party of Japan, 2009, p. 4).

While the third principle suggested implementation of prime ministerial leadership, in fact, the DPJ focused on empowering all politicians in the government rather than the Kantei alone. The Hatoyama government planned to abolish the administrative vice-ministers’ council and instead increase the number of politicians in governmental posts to about one hundred. The “three political officials” (*seimu san’yaku*) – minister (*daijin*), senior vice-minister (*fukudaijin*), and parliamentary vice-minister (*daijin seimukan*) – were to take the lead in drafting, coordinating, and deciding policies in each ministry. Difficult issues involving several legislative fields were to be discussed by the related ministers during the cabinet committee meetings. The DPJ also planned to strengthen the power of the prime minister by establishing two new bodies: the National Strategy Bureau (*Kokka Senryaku Kyoku*) and the Administrative Reform Council (*Gyōsei Sasshin Kaigi*). The former’s mission was “to shape a national vision for the new era, and formulate the budget framework with politicians taking the lead,” and the latter’s to “scrutinise all budgets and programs and eliminate waste and abuses” (Democratic Party of Japan, 2009, p. 5).

In September 2009, Hatoyama abolished the administrative vice-ministers’ council and prohibited civil servants from holding press conferences or contacting with the representatives of other ministries without the consent of their political superiors. Instead, the “three political officials” took charge of policy coordination in separate ministries, while the issues exceeding competences of one legislative field were entrusted to cabinet committees. This reform created an impression of politicians taking the lead of policymaking, but in reality many coordination problems appeared both at the level of separate ministries and the government as a whole. Many of the

“three political officials” erroneously interpreted the “politician-led government” as a complete exclusion of the bureaucrats from the decision-making process. Instead of making general decisions and entrusting their execution to the administrative staff, DPJ lawmakers tried to assume all of the bureaucratic duties, which was futile (Koga, 2011a, p. 95). As a result, ministers, vice-ministers, and parliamentary vice-ministers were overwhelmed with work and lacked time to conduct inter-ministerial coordination.

The overworking of the “three political officials” was also caused by the fact that the Bill Establishing Political Leadership was not passed through the Diet before the DPJ lost its majority in the upper house in July 2010. Implementation of the bill would have not only increased the number of political appointees in the Diet, but also given sufficient legal basis for the activity of the National Strategy Bureau and the Administrative Reform Council. The relations between the cabinet and the ruling party were far from the ideals of the politician-led government, either. To unify the decision making under the government, Hatoyama abolished the DPJ Policy Research Committee and completely isolated ruling party backbenchers from the decision-making process. The only exception was DPJ Secretary-General Ozawa Ichirō’s influence on government policy from behind the scenes (Shimizu, 2011, pp. 63–103).

Both the abolition of the Policy Research Committee and Ozawa’s role as “shadow shogun” met with protests from DPJ backbenchers. While the “three political officials” actively participated in policymaking, the parliamentarians who did not receive governmental posts felt they were turned into mere “voting machines.” The intra-party voices of criticism increased when the government support rate dropped sharply at the beginning of 2010. Without inter-ministerial coordination conducted by the bureaucrats, the cabinet often lacked policy coherence, which increased the impression that the DPJ did not have enough experience to efficiently administer the country.² Eventually, Prime Minister Hatoyama resigned at the beginning of June 2010, after only eight months in office.³

2 One of the best examples was the problem of relocation of the American military base, Futenma. During the electoral campaign in 2009, Hatoyama Yukio promised to move it outside the Okinawa prefecture, but he had to give up these ambitious plans due to American pressure. The inconsistency of declarations by various DPJ ministers on the possible relocation sites severely damaged Japan’s negotiating position.

3 Besides the failure in renegotiating the Futenma relocation agreement, Hatoyama resigned because of illegal donation scandals which involved himself and Secretary-General Ozawa Ichirō.

Hatoyama was replaced with Prime Minister Kan Naoto. As emphasized by Kan (1998, p. i), who had been one of the co-founders of the DPJ, Matsushita's vision of abolishing the "bureaucratic cabinet system" had constituted an inspiration for his political activity since the 1970s. Learning from the failure of his predecessor, the new head of government felt a need for a major modification of the concept of politician-led government. While in the past Kan had been known for his quarrels with bureaucrats, at a press conference in June 2010, he stated that it was absolutely out of the question to completely exclude the civil servants from decision making (Nakano, 2010, p. 8). In December 2010, Chief Cabinet Secretary Sengoku Yoshito explicitly asked all administrative vice-ministers to participate in the meetings of the "three political officials." As he emphasized: "The politician-led government does not mean an atrophy of administrative staff or delegation of all the decision making to the politicians. It means that the three political officials and the bureaucrats properly divide their roles, and work together for the people, while closely sharing information and communicating mutually" (Koga, 2011b, pp. 164–165). Another turning point occurred after the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011. To facilitate general coordination of disaster relief activities, Kan established the inter-ministerial liaison council (*ka-kufushō renraku kaigi*) composed of administrative vice-ministers (Kidera, 2012, p. 209). It resembled the administrative vice-ministers' council, but Chief Cabinet Secretary Edano Yukio stressed that its role was to follow the instructions given by the politicians, not to set an agenda for cabinet meetings (Shimizu, 2011, p. 12). In addition, Kan restored the DPJ Policy Research Committee. To ensure unification of decision making under the government, he nominated its Chairperson, Genba Kōichirō, as minister of state for national policy. Genba was supposed to conduct policy coordination between the government and the ruling party (Kuboniwa, 2012, pp. 133–134). Kan hoped that the Policy Research Committee would become a "frustration-venting" forum for the backbenchers.

Despite his efforts, Prime Minister Kan failed to establish an efficient top-down decision-making system. Eventually, frustrated with many communication problems and erroneous advice received from the bureaucrats during the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant crisis, he returned to belligerent anti-bureaucratic rhetoric at the end of his premiership.⁴

4 On March 11, 2011, the Great East Japan Earthquake caused a radioactive leakage at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant.

As pointed out by Machidori (2012, p. 119), in comparison with the Hatoyama administration, the ratio of Kan's appointments with the administrative staff of various ministries increased only slightly from 8% to 11%, and the percentage of meetings with the bureaucrats from Cabinet Office even dropped from 4% to 3%. Eventually, heavily criticized by intra-party opposition led by Hatoyama and Ozawa, Kan resigned in August 2011.

Noda Yoshihiko, who became prime minister at the beginning of September 2011, explicitly announced another major overhaul of decision-making mechanisms. He emphasized that the competition for leadership between the politicians and the bureaucrats was unproductive. Noda stressed that: "without making full use of the bureaucratic organization, which constitutes a group of experts, it is impossible to effectively administer the country" (Noda, 2011, pp. 102–103). In September 2011, Chief Cabinet Secretary Fujimura Osamu announced that the meetings of the inter-ministerial liaison council, founded in March 2011, would be convened regularly once a week. The council was formally turned into a permanent platform for discussion on all issues exceeding the competences of one legislative field (Minami, 2011, p. 4). In addition, Noda introduced a system of advance screening of all bills by the ruling party and promised he would not make any decision without explicit authorization by the DPJ Policy Research Committee. The DPJ backbenchers thus gained the possibility to block government policies. Answering to the concerns over the danger of the formation of parliamentary tribes, Policy Research Committee Chairperson Maehara Seiji emphasized that the right of advance approval was given exclusively to him, and that he did not intend to bend to the pressure from industrial circles (Maehara, 2011). Nevertheless, in many ministries the influence of interest groups grew tremendously. At the same time, internal frictions in the DPJ increased, especially after the decision on a consumption tax hike, which contributed to this party's crashing defeat in the parliamentary election in December 2012 (Zakowski, 2015, pp. 175–185).

The popularity of the slogans of political leadership culminated under the DPJ administration. Nevertheless, the over-ambitious plans of decision-making reforms ended in a disastrous failure, which translated into disappointment with the idea of politician-led government.

5. Return to Kantei Leadership under the Second Abe Administration

Opposite to the DPJ government that tried to empower all politicians in the government, the Abe cabinet, that was formed after LDP's return to power in December 2012, clearly promoted Kantei leadership, even at the expense of the political influence of individual ministers. To ensure better communication in the Kantei, Abe started holding daily meetings with key members of his staff: Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide, his three deputies, and the prime minister's executive secretary. Although such get-togethers usually lasted only 10 or 15 minutes, they became instrumental in avoiding any misunderstandings that had been one of the factors that caused the failure of the first Abe administration (Tazaki, 2014, pp. 26–33). As pointed out by George Mulgan (2018, pp. 87–95), the Abe Kantei acted as a collective rather than as a representation of the will of the prime minister alone.

Kantei leadership was symbolized by institutional changes in the Cabinet Secretariat. Numerous new offices and secretariats were temporarily established in this organ to deal with various policy initiatives. At the same time, the number of bureaucrats in the Cabinet Secretariat increased from approximately 800 persons in 2012, to more than 1000 in 2015. The new staff were dispatched in particular to the National Security Secretariat and the Cabinet Bureau of Personnel Affairs (Makihara, 2016, p. 81). The former organ strengthened the prime minister's control over foreign and security policy making, while the latter changed nomination patterns for high-ranking bureaucratic posts. The Cabinet Bureau of Personnel Affairs was established in May 2014 and enabled the strategic promotion of all executive officials of the rank of section heads (*buchō*) and above (Mori, 2019, pp. 190–193). As a result, more and more bureaucrats started acting as loyal executioners of the will of the prime minister rather than representatives of their home ministries.

What additionally kept bureaucrats in check was the fact that Abe did not reestablish the administrative vice-ministers' meetings in their pre-DPJ form. The organ, renamed the administrative vice-ministers' liaison council (*jikan renraku kaigi*), gathered once a week on Fridays – after, instead of prior to, cabinet meetings. As a result, its role was modified from advance authorization of policies, to discussion on the ways of implementing cabinet decisions (Asakura, 2016, p. 226). While subduing the bureau-

crats, Abe also controlled politicians in the government. He increased the number of ministers of state for special missions (maximum number of ministers was raised to 19) and charged them with the numerous policies of his ambitious policy agenda (Shindō, 2019, pp. 170–171). Furthermore, the prime minister entrusted supplementary responsibilities to almost all the cabinet members, which symbolized that they were expected to act as Abe's aides rather than as representatives of their ministries. According to Makihara (2016, p. 79), Abe controlled the “three political officials” in separate ministries indirectly – through bureaucrats who now remained loyal to the head of government.

Under his second administration, Abe finally managed to achieve the goals he had formulated in 2006. The powerful Kantei, backed by the coordination skills of Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide, became a centripetal force for the whole government.

6. Conclusion

While the terms “political leadership” and “prime ministerial leadership” are similar, they put emphasis on different aspects of decision-making reforms. The former concept became popular in the 1990s as a slogan for weakening bureaucrats' excessive political influence. What is characteristic, it was conceived by the eight-party coalition that ousted the LDP from power in 1993, and was revived by the DPJ government in 2009. As such, “political leadership” was treated as a remedy for the collusion between the dominant party and civil servants. Interpreted radically by the Hatoyama cabinet, it led to institutional disorder, which prompted Prime Ministers Kan Naoto and Noda Yoshihiko to gradually return to the traditional decision-making patterns even before the regaining of power by the LDP in 2012.

The concept of “prime ministerial leadership,” in turn, was more frequently promoted by LDP politicians. Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō took full advantage of the institutional tools provided by the Hashimoto administrative reforms to impose top-down leadership both on the bureaucrats and LDP backbenchers. Instead of all politicians, it was the Kantei that became the exclusive centre of power. Prime Minister Abe tried to continue Koizumi's efforts in 2006, but he failed due to excessive hastiness in imposing reforms on veto players. After returning to power in 2012, he managed to empower the Cabinet Secretariat against

civil servants thanks to such newly established organs as the Cabinet Bureau of Personnel Affairs. At the same time, Abe kept his ministers in check through bureaucratic guidance and the strategic nomination of cabinet members. As such, instead of isolating civil servants from the decision-making process, “prime ministerial leadership” turned them into loyal subordinates of the head of government.

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