

Democracy Without Competition: Opposition Failure in One-Party Dominant Japan

Ethan Scheiner
Stanford University

Party Competition Failure: Challenges to Democracy

- Problem of one party dominance
 - “Uncommon Democracies”
- If the party is popular → not a problem
- If the party is unpopular → failure of democracy

Ruling Party Unpopularity: Failure of Democracy, the Japanese Case

Japan

- Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Rules
- Economic Collapse
- Political Corruption
- Voter anger
 - 55% of public: no party affiliation
 - Only 20-30% support for ruling LDP
 - Typically low cabinet approval
 - 44% dislike LDP

➤ *But no successful challenger to LDP*

The Puzzle: Party Competition Failure in Japan

What can explain opposition party failure in a democratic system where the ruling party is very unpopular?

Outline

- I. Introduction – Party Competition Failure: Challenges to Democracy
- II. Framework
- III. Background on Japan
- IV. Candidate Experience as Key to Party Success
- V. Analysis of Local Opposition Failure
 - A. Japan
 - B. Comparative Typology
- VI. Implications for New Democracies

Part II –Framework

The Impact of Candidacies: Explaining Party Competition Failure in Japan

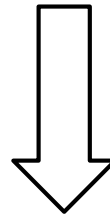
- Key to party success: strong candidates
 - Japan: Weak opposition candidates
- Underlying problem: opposition weakness at subnational level
- But, WHY subnational opposition failure?

Central Argument

Clientelism

+

Financially Centralized Government Structure



Failure in Subnational Office Elections by Parties
not in the National Government

Part III – Background on Japan and Existing Explanations for Opposition Failure

A History of LDP Dominance

1955-1990

- LDP: majority of the seats in every House of Representatives (HR) election
- But slow decline in LDP support

1990-1995

- Growing Anti-LDP sentiment
- LDP split and temporary loss of power (8/93-6/94)

1996-Present

- Anger toward LDP remains
 - Birth of centrist Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ)
- BUT LDP dominance continues

Past Failure to Explain LDP Dominance/Opposition Failure

I. Party Popularity

- Miracle Economy
- Japanese Culture
- LDP Policies

Problem:

- LDP is not popular. It has not won majority of the vote since 1963.

II. Electoral Institutions

- Opposition coordination problems

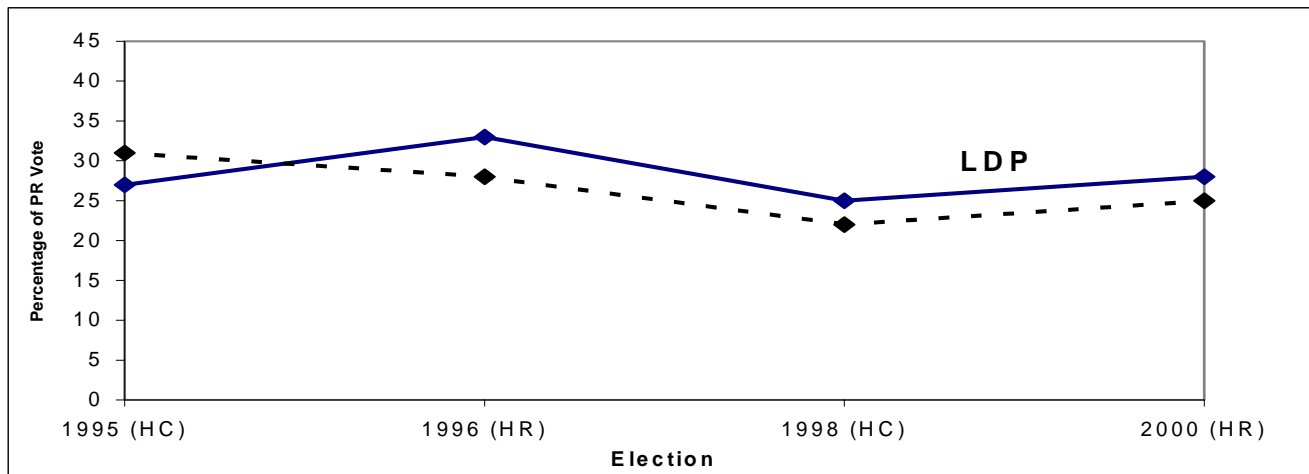
Problems:

- Electoral system affected opposition and LDP.
- Opposition failure continues under new electoral system.

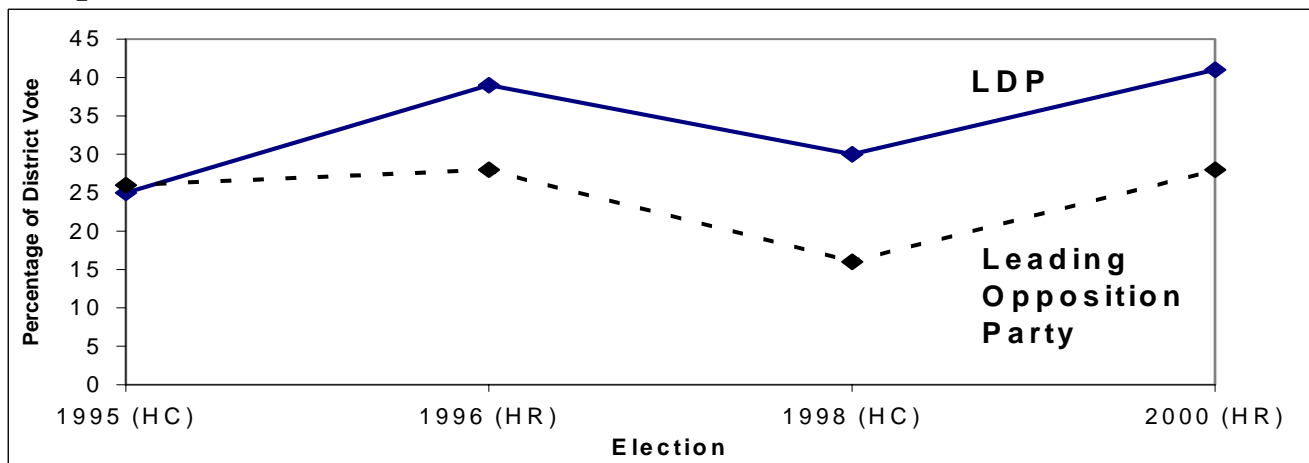
Part IV – Candidate “Quality” or Experience is Key to Party Success

Chart 1: LDP Success: It’s the Candidates, not the Party

Proportion of **Party** Votes Won



Proportion of **Candidate** Votes Won



Implication: The Importance of Candidates

LDP Has Candidate Advantage

- Confirmed by opposition
- LDP has more incumbents

The Importance of “Quality” New Candidates

- Jacobson (1990): “Quality”/experienced U.S. Congressional candidates more likely to win
- Best source of “quality”: subnational level office
- LDP advantage in “quality” of new candidates too?

What is a “Quality” Candidate?

- Former local office holders
- Other: Former member of Upper House of parliament, former bureaucrat, former television newscasters, those who “inherited” seat from family member

Chart 2: All “Quality” Candidates Do Well, But LDP Has Higher Proportion of Quality Candidates

	LDP	DPJ
Total Candidates	280	242
New Candidates	56	139
% of New Candidates Who Were “Quality”	59%	18%
% of “Non-Quality” New Candidates Who Won	22%	12%
% of “Quality” New Candidates Who Won	42%	48%

“Quality” LDP and DPJ Candidates in 2000
(300 total single member districts)

Chart 3: LDP As A Party Is Not More Popular

LDP Success Is Due To Its Candidate Advantage

Former Local Office Holders More Likely To Win
(Predicted Probabilities of Victory)

	Non-Quality	Former Local Office Holder
Runs against DPJ or LDP Incumbent	5.8%	19.2%
No Incumbent Opponent	31.1%	58.2%

- **LDP advantage is in its higher proportion of quality candidates and former local office holders.**

Part V – The Underpinnings of the Recruitment Problems of Japan’s Opposition

Q: Why doesn’t the opposition run more candidates with local office experience?

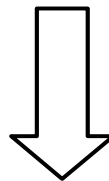
A: Few office holders belong to opposition parties at the subnational level.

The Reason

Clientelism

+

Financially Centralized Government Structure



Failure in Subnational Office Elections by
Parties not in the National Government

Definitions

Clientelism

- Contrasts with “issue-based” politics
- Patronage and pork barrel

Financially Centralized Systems

- Subnational reliance on central government financing
- Transfers to localities: politicized

Clientelism + Fiscal Centralization Encourages Local Pols To Affiliate With Nat'l Ruling Party

Clientelist Systems

- Mainstream local politicians must show they can bring in patronage

Financially Centralized Systems

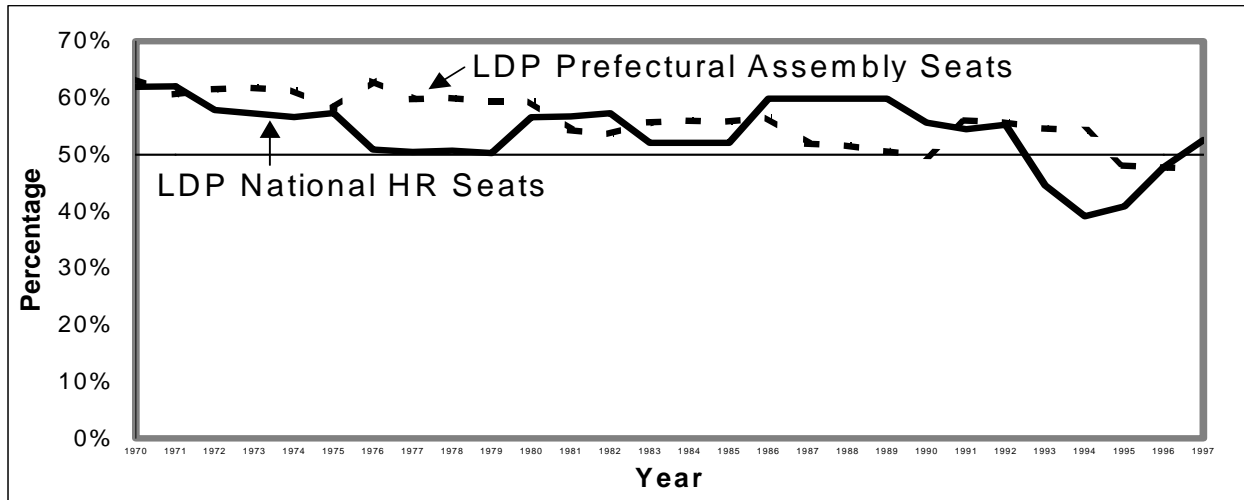
- Local level politicians' primary function: help deliver benefits from center

Clientelist + Financially Centralized Systems

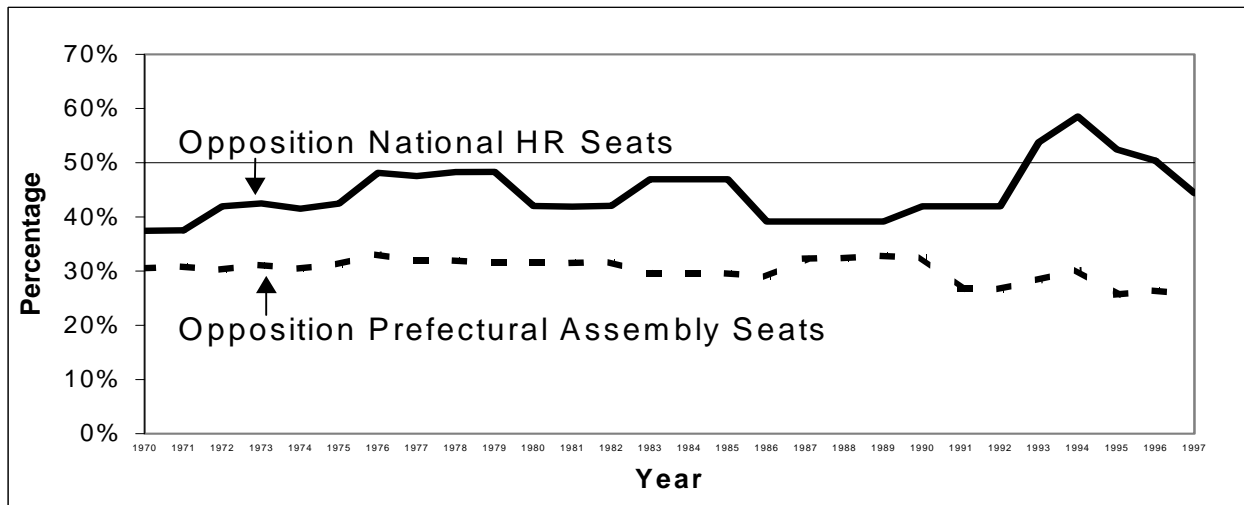
- To gain central funding, local politicians have incentive to ally with national ruling parties

Chart 4: Local LDP Hegemony, Utter Opposition Failure at Local Level

Proportion of Legislative Seats Held by the LDP (1970-1997)



Proportion of Seats Held by Non-LDP Parties (1970-1997)



National-Local Pipelines of Pork: The Reason for Local Opposition Failure

- LDP local hegemony due to efforts to maintain “pipeline” between center and localities
- LDP patron-client relationships at core of pipelines
- Pipelines
 - Discourage local party defection from LDP
 - Encourage local party defection to the LDP

If Pipelines Are Important, What Should We See?

- If fiscal dependence is important to local elections
 - Opposition most successful where the pipeline is less important

The opposition's greatest success should occur in the most autonomous prefectures.

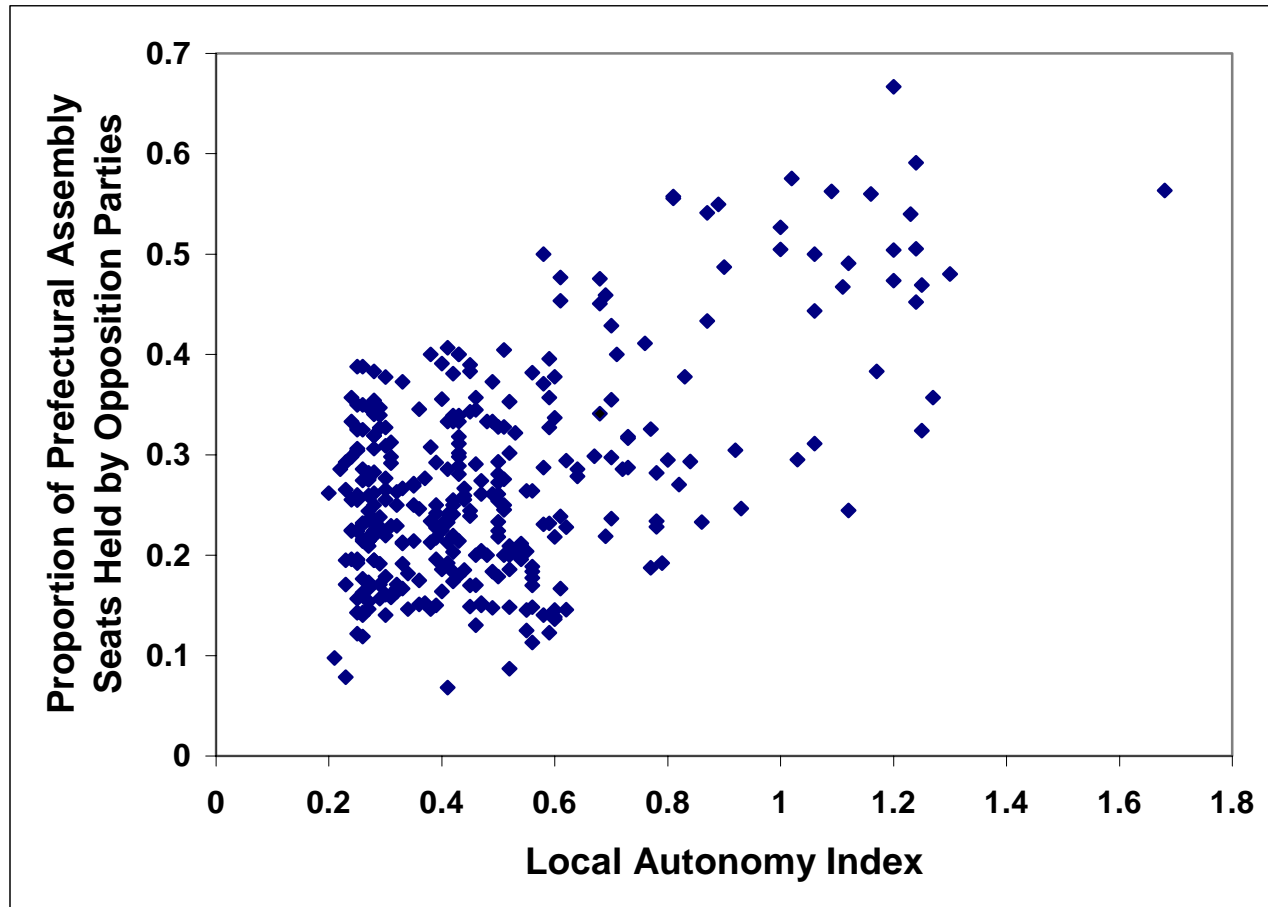
Definition of “Autonomy” Local Fiscal Capability Index

$$\text{Autonomy Index} = \frac{\textit{Locality's Revenues (i.e., Local Taxes)}}{\textit{Locality's Spending "Needs"}}$$

Note: Central government caps local tax rates across country

Opposition Wins More Assembly Seats In Autonomous Prefectures

Chart 5: Opposition Prefectural Assembly Success by Level of Autonomy (1967-1991)



R=.57

Greater Opposition Local Success in Autonomous Prefectures: Review of Statistical Results

Prefectural Assemblies

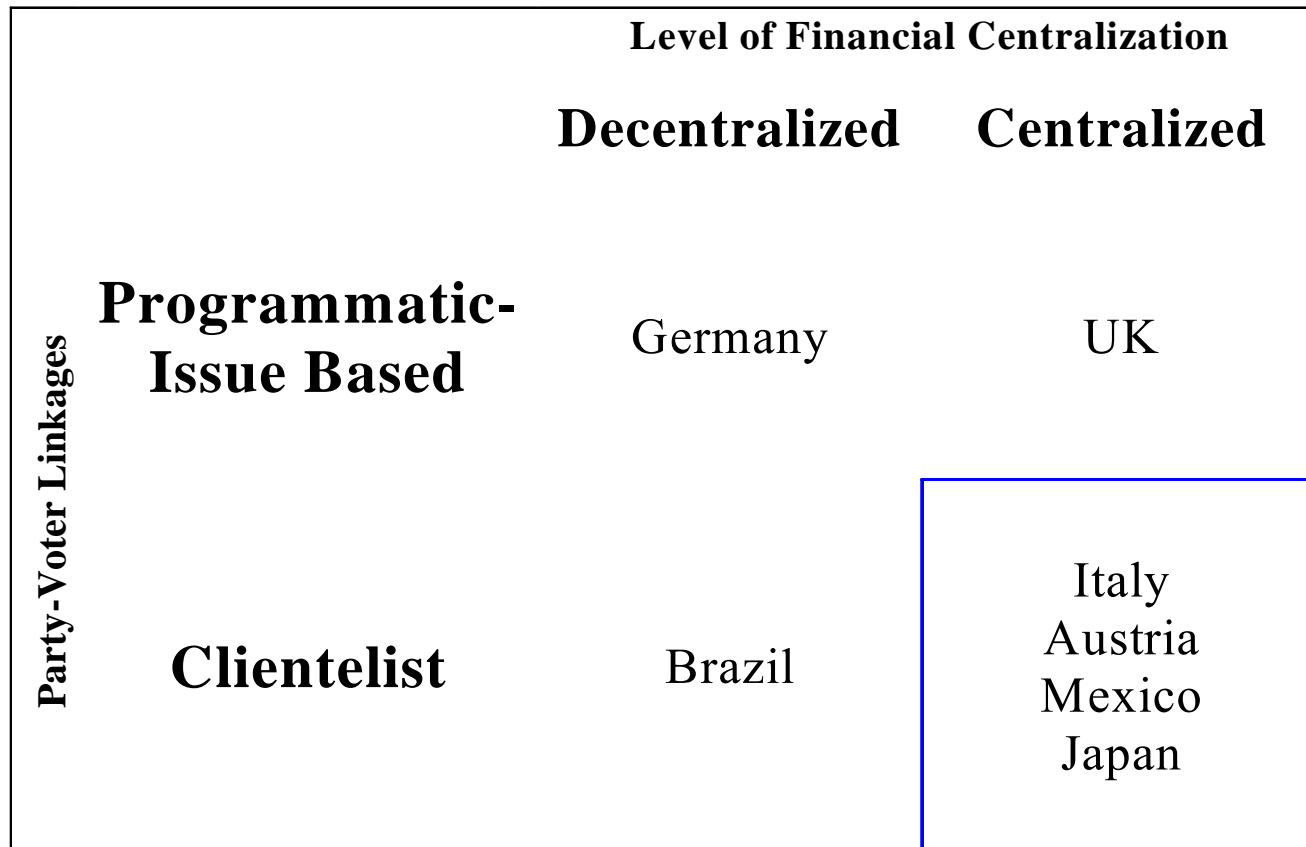
- Even controlling for other variables,
 - More opposition assembly members in places and times of greater autonomy

Mayors

- During periods of greater autonomy:
 - More opposition mayors
- During periods of lesser autonomy:
 - Fewer opposition mayors
 - Rise in number of opposition mayors who also sought LDP endorsement

Comparative Perspective: Japan Is The Rule, Not The Exception

Chart 6: Comparative Typology



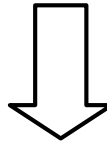
- Local one-party dominance common in Clientelist/Financially Centralized cases.
 - Exceptions similar to Japan's

Part VI: Conclusion

Summary of Key Points

- (1) Importance of “quality” candidates
- (2) Major Contribution:

Clientelism
+
Fiscal Centralization



Local Opposition Failure

- (3) Explanation for opposition failure in Japan at the national level: A combination of (1) and (2).

Final Thoughts

- **A Vicious Circle in Japan**
 - Parties cannot gain strength at national level without gaining at local.
 - Cannot gain strength at local level without holding power at national.
- **Hope for Japan's Opposition?**
 - National party developments (new LDP defection?)
 - Decentralization movement
 - Growing anti-clientelist sentiments
- **Implications for New Democracies**
 - New democracies likely to be clientelistic
 - Important to create institutions that decentralize fiscal power
 - Decentralization can raise the quality of democracy

LDP As A Party Is Not More Popular

LDP Success Is Due To Its Candidate Advantage

Chart 3: Probit Model of New Candidate Success in 2000 (LDP and DPJ)

Variables	Aggregated Model		Disaggregated Model	
	Coef.	(SE)	Coef.	(SE)
Quality	1.077	(0.282)***		
Former Local Politician			0.702	(0.333)**
HC			1.506	(0.708)**
Bureaucrat			1.549	(0.468)***
TV			1.729	(0.860)**
Inherit			a	
LDP	-0.457	(0.297)	-0.476	(0.313)
Campaign Expenditures	0.851	(0.851)	0.405	(1.187)
Opponent Inherits	b		b	
Weak Inherit	1.023	(0.822)	1.109	(0.824)
Ran in 96	0.525	(0.288)*	0.527	(0.295)*
Urban	0.293	(0.155)*	0.338	(0.162)**
Incumbent Opponent	-0.441	(0.360)	-0.294	(0.442)
Major Incumbent Opponent	-0.839	(0.296)**	-0.784	(0.301)**
Constant	-1.189	(0.582)**	-1.294	(0.667)*
N	191		184	
Percent Correctly Predicted	79.0		88.2	
Goodman-Kruskal λ (PRE)	.244		.244	
Chi-sq	55.52		42.77	
Prob>chi-sq	0.0000		0.0000	
Pseudo R-sq	.2662		.2282	
Log Likelihood	-76.520		-72.329	

*p<.05 (one-tail), **p<.05 (two-tail), ***p<.01 (two-tail)

- **“LDP”**: negative and non-significant
- **“Quality” & “Former Local Politician”**: positive and significant
- **Former Local Pols**: 15-30 percentage points more likely to win than non-quality candd

Opposition Wins More Assembly Seats In Autonomous Prefectures: Statistical Evidence

Opposition Party Success in Prefectural Assembly Elections (1971-1991): Panel Data Estimation

Dependent Variable=Proportion of Seats Won by Opposition in Prefecture i in Election t (with logit transformation)

Variables	Coef.	(Std. Error)
Constant	-0.543	(0.129)***
Autonomy	0.182	(0.055)***
GDP Growth	-0.033	(0.008)***
Lag of Dependent Variable (Pref. i , Election $t-1$)	0.718	(0.051)***
1971 (dummy variable)	0.254	(0.055)***
Proportion of Seats Won by Opposition at HR Level in Prefecture i in last HR election before t	0.588	(0.187)***
N	280	
F (5, 46)	463.95	
Prob > F	0.0000	
R-Sq	0.755	

Number of clusters (prefectures): 47

*p<.05 (one-tail), **p<.05 (two-tail), ***p<.01 (two-tail)

- Autonomy is statistically significant and positive

Greater Autonomy Leads to a Larger Proportion of Local Executives Who Are Progressive

Chart A: Mean Levels of Autonomy and Proportion of Local Executives Who Are Opposition

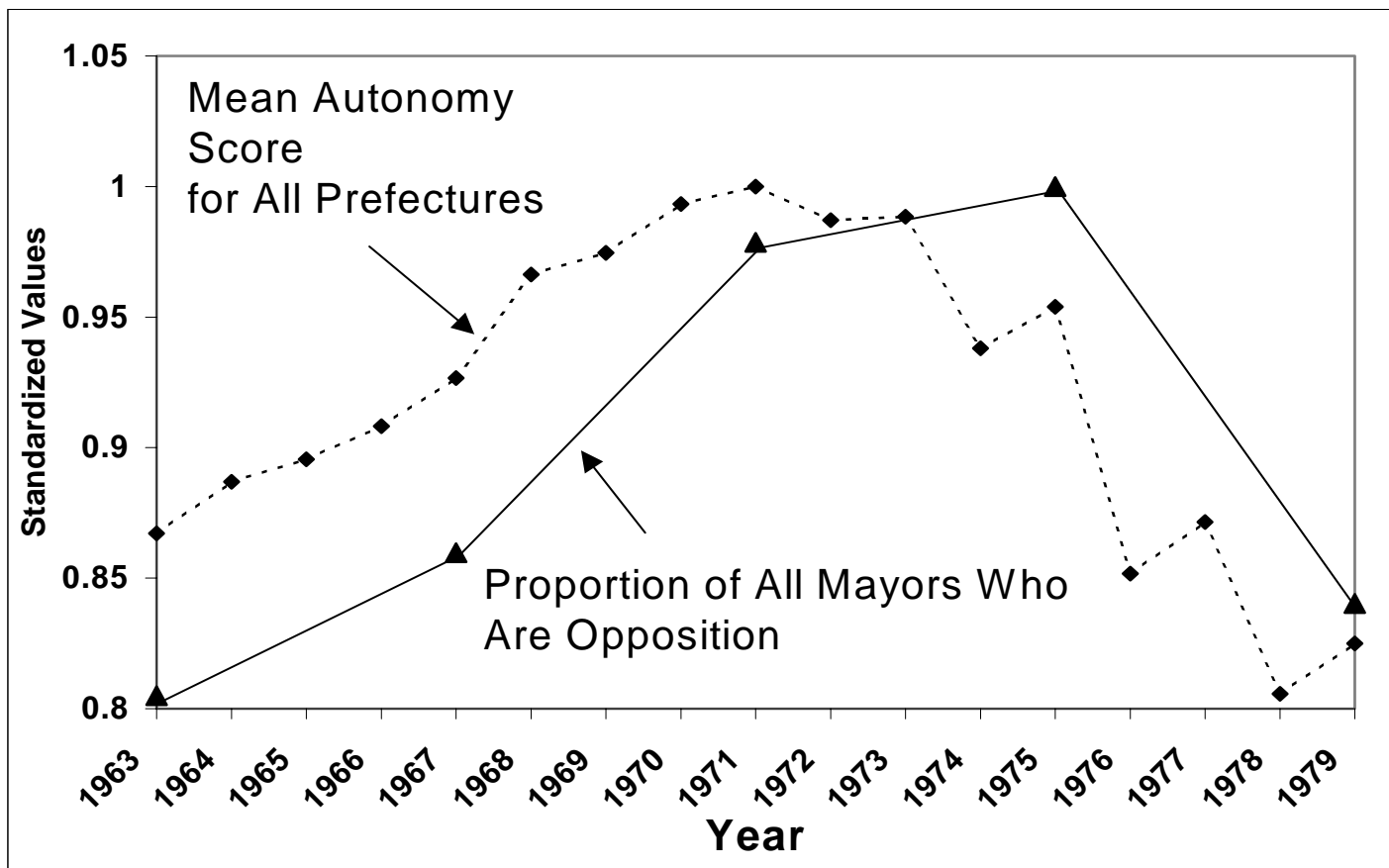


Chart B: Rise in Proportion of LDP-Affiliated Mayors, While Decline in Opposition-only Mayors Once Greater Dependence on Central Government

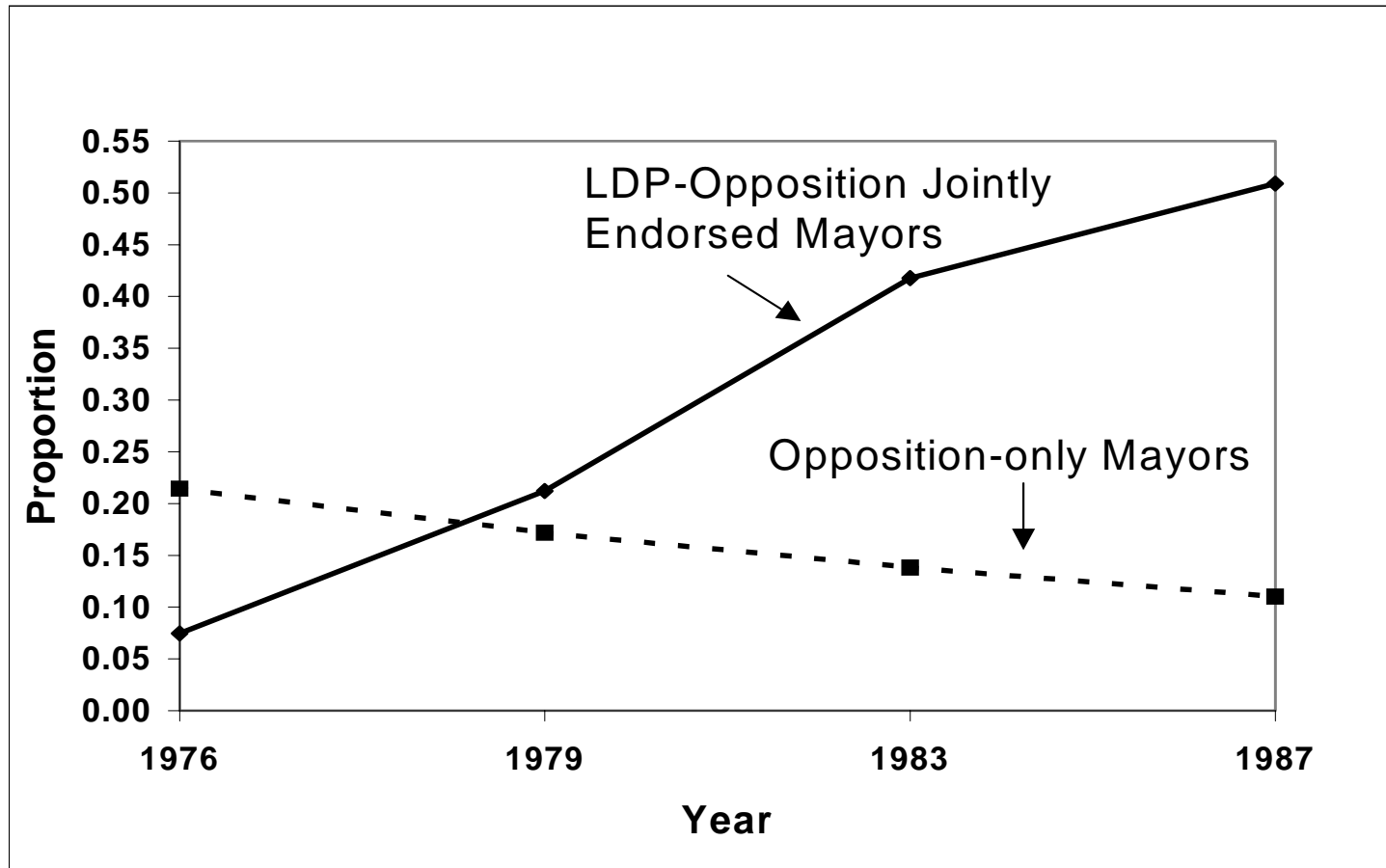


Chart C: Fewer Progressive Mayors When Fewer Cities Operate at a Deficit

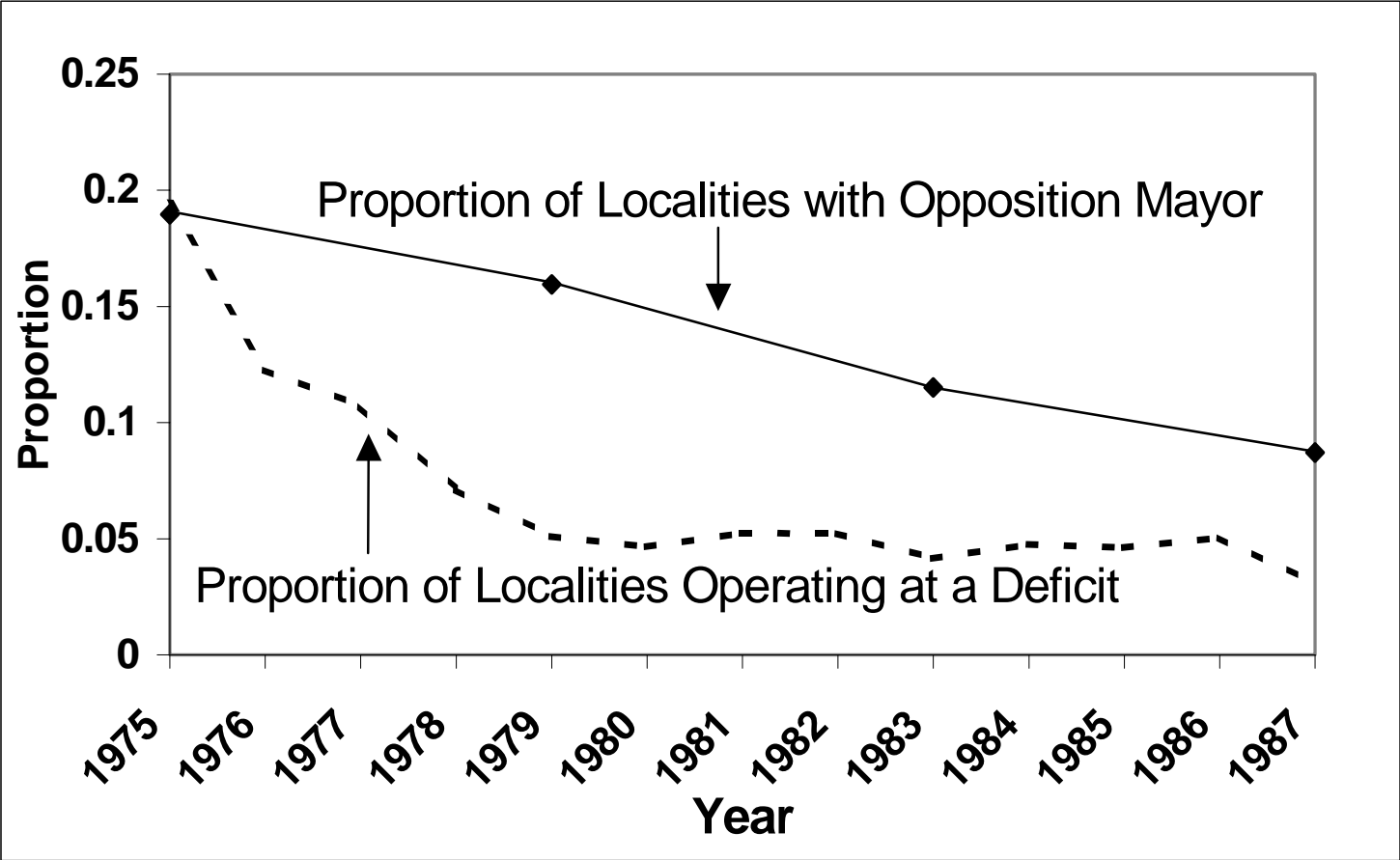


Chart D: Correlates of Opposition Party Success or Failure

