Preface

This book, like many others in politics, grew out of a mixture of intellectual trends and contemporary events. Although every effort has been made to create a truly comparative study, the project began with Japan, and concerns about events in that country and explanations for them led to examination of other one-party dominant states. Within the community of Japan specialists, many prevailing notions about the country were being reassessed during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Some scholars challenged the expectations and consequences of Japan's high economic growth policies. Some expressed concern that the power of the national bureaucracy had perhaps grown so great as to pose a threat to the links between elections, parties, and popular sovereignty. For others, growing evidence suggested that the links between the Liberal Democratic party (LDP), certain interest groups, and the national bureaucracy had become so institutionalized as a consequence of the long-term rule by the LDP as to be a parallel threat. Others considered the likelihood that the ever-dwindling electoral support for the LDP might lead to a coalition government or to rule by the opposition parties.

Most important by far was an increased awareness that dealing with such questions about Japan would best be done in comparative terms. Despite the frequent assumptions about Japanese uniqueness, many political scientists began to recognize that questions being asked about Japan were similar to those being asked by comparativists in many other industrialized countries—questions about party-bureaucratic and/or state-society relations; about the possibly diminishing relevance of elections and parties for understanding the key decisions being forced on industrialized democracies in the late 1970s and early 1980s; about the integration of some or all social

interests into governing coalitions; about the creation of regimes and ideological biases; and a host of others.

But with what nations should Japan be compared? The standard reference point for many studies had been the United States, the country of origin of most Western scholars of Japan. Yet the two countries share so little in political history, political structures, and political philosophy that most such comparisons concluded by simply reinforcing preexisting notions about Japanese uniqueness. Only as Japan specialists became more familiar with European politics did it become clear that more often than not it was the United States, not Japan, that was unique among industrialized democracies. In this broader universe, what emerged as particularly striking to many of us was the unusually long period of conservative rule in Japan. For an understanding of the causes and consequences of this long-term rule, the experiences of Sweden, Israel, and Italy became particularly compelling.

Just as Japan in the late 1970s had faced a possible loss of dominance, so these other three nations experienced similar threats to long-term rule. The Social Democrats in Sweden had just been replaced by a bourgeois coalition after forty-four years of uninterrupted rule; the Labor party in Israel had been defeated in 1977 after being in control since the formation of its predecessor, Mapai, in 1930; and in Italy, the Christian Democratic party, in many ways remarkably similar in its history and support base to the LDP, appeared to be in similar electoral trouble.

The logical academic response—a conference to bring together scholars whose primary work had been on one or more of these countries—was facilitated by the collaborative efforts of the Committee on Japanese Studies and the Committee on Western Europe of the Social Science Research Council. Various members of the group met in New York City; Ithaca, New York; Kona, Hawaii; and Oxford, England, over a period of several years to refine their specific topics and the group's overall agenda.

Scholars who had become convinced that they understood the general preconditions for, or consequences of, long-term rule because of their experience with the country they studied were suddenly confronted by evidence from other countries in which presumed causes and consequences were different. As the search for general principles proceeded, moreover, it was clear that not all of the countries under study behaved similarly at all times. The question arose as to why these four one-party dominant regimes succeeded and regimes that seemed at one point in history to have had similar potential for long-term dominance ultimately gave way to coalition government or opposition-party rule—countries such as Norway, Denmark, Britain, West Germany, Australia, New Zealand, and France.

At least two competing and complementary agendas emerged: how to identify the most appropriate comparisons both inside and outside the universe of one-party dominant regimes; and, within the comparative framework, how to find patterns while remaining true to the specific cases we

knew best. This volume is the result. We hope that we have shed light both on the specific countries we have studied and on general problems in comparative politics.

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