

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION IN JAPAN IN 2014

Rudolf KUCHARČÍK¹ – Miroslav ŘÁDEK^{2*}

¹Rudolf Kucharčík, Department of Political Science, Alexander Dubček University of Trenčín, Študentská 2, 911 50, Trenčín

²Miroslav Řádek, Department of Political Science, Alexander Dubček University of Trenčín, Študentská 2, 911 50, Trenčín

*Corresponding author E-mail address: rudolf.kucharcik@tuni.sk

Abstract

Snap election in Japan took place on December 14, 2014 after Prime Minister Shinzo Abe decided to dissolve lower house of the parliament (Diet) – House of Representatives. The topics were clear – economy, recession, middle class position, nuclear power, relations to geographically close countries – including China and South Korea and relations to the United States. Debate about the modification of current constitutions also began. Shinzo Abe's party – Liberal Democratic Party was favourite of election and confirmed its position with huge victory. Main opposition party – Democratic Party was not able to propose alternative attractive for majority of voters of the country.

Keywords: Japan, election, 2014, Shinzo Abe

1 Introduction

The snap parliamentary election¹ in Japan was hold on December 14, 2014 (the fourth elections to the House of Representatives in 10 years – the previous were in 2005, 2009 and 2012). Those were the 47th elections to the House of Representatives in the country. The voters could chose their candidates in single member districts (295 members of the House of Representatives) and also in multi-members districts (180 of them). The electoral system of the country is the mixture of proportional and majority (simple majority) model. It means that every voter casts two ballots – one for a candidate in his constituency and one for a political party (there are 11 electoral districts in Japan for proportional votes). In the past there were 300 single members' districts in Japan. Candidates could compete in both lists.

2 Topics

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called (for some observers surprisingly) early election (it is the power of the Prime Minister in Japan to do so) in Japan on November 18, 2014. As it was written above, the election was hold in about four weeks later – on December 14 that year. Shinzo Abe dissolved the lower house of the parliament (Diet) – House of Representatives in next few days – on November 21, 2014 and unprepared opposition had to answer and to mobilize really quickly.

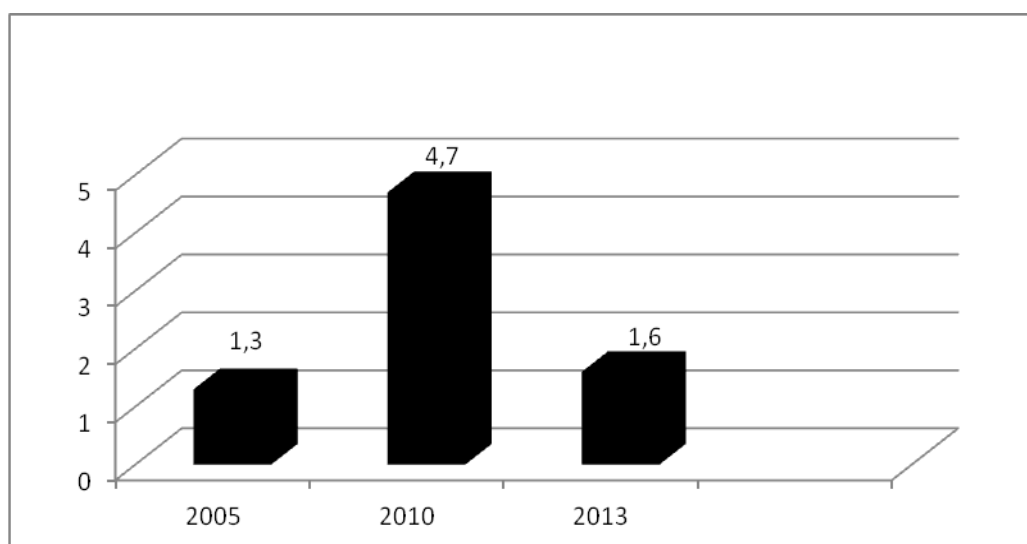


Fig. 1 GDP Growth (Annual %) in Japan.

Source: The World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/>

¹ Japanese parliament consists of two chambers – House of Representatives (475 members to serve 4 years) and House of Councilors (96 members to serve 6 years).

According to Japan Business Press “Prime Minister Abe called the election to seek a fresh mandate for his economic policies, including the postponement of the unpopular consumption tax rise“(Miyake, 2014). So it is obvious that before taking other unpopular measures, he decided to confirm his and his party position in the country.

The main topic of the election was clear – restarting economy of the country in recession as the key figures are not too good – comparing it to the main geopolitical rivals of Japan (Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3).

Some observers saw the election as a referendum on so called Abenomic. Prime Minister advocated his decision for the postponement of a scheduled consumption tax hike (Schoff, 2014).

Except for the economy the issue of the election campaign was also the expanding of country’s military capabilities or involvement of the country in Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement (Schoff, 2014.)

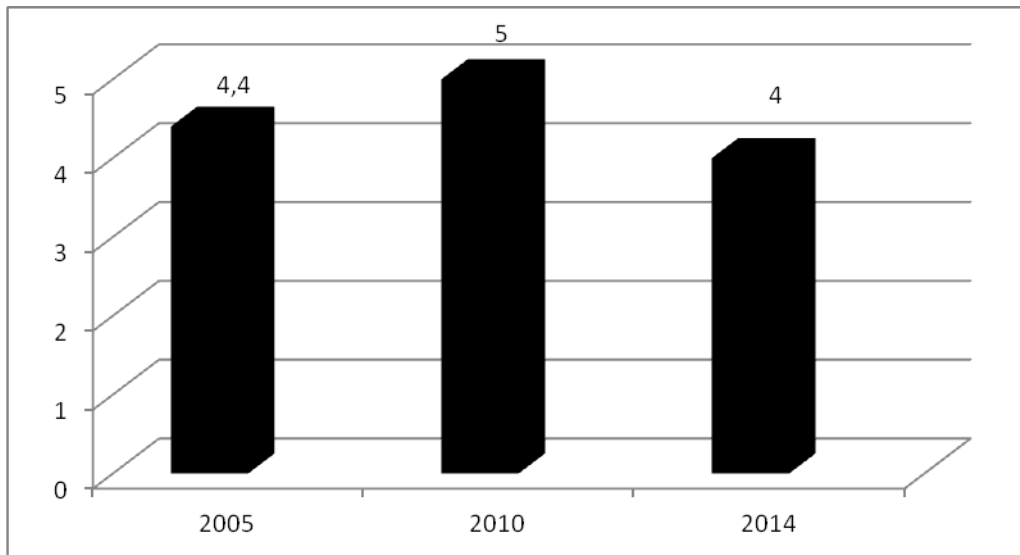


Fig. 2 Unemployment Rate in Japan.

Source: The World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/>

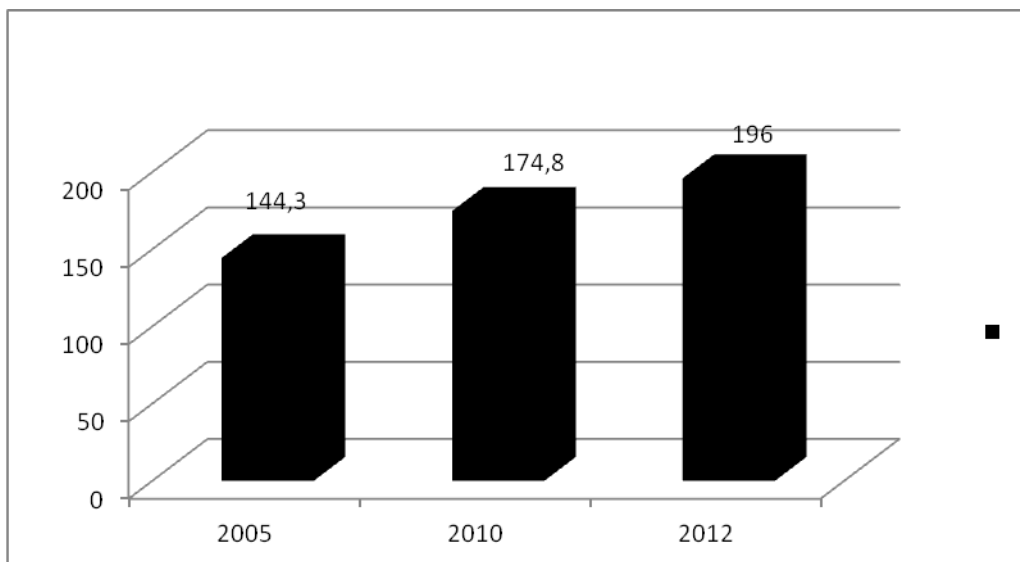


Fig. 3 Public debt (%) in Japan.

Source: The World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/>

3 Results

The results of election were marked by very poor turnout of voters, as only about 52 % of them decided to come to polls (Electionresources, 2015), but Prime Minister Shinzo Abe confirmed his position as a leader of the country and his party clearly won (his Liberal Democratic Party and his coalition partner – party Komeito obtained 326 seats; it also means 2/3 majority necessary for important economic reforms that country needs). Shinzo Abe won the election with the slogan “There is no other way to economy recovery than Abenomics” (The

Abe Habit, 2014). Shinzo Abe consolidated his position and there is almost no chance for the opposition for early elections in next four years.

The apathy about politics in Japanese society also favoured governmental parties (one of the reasons of Abe's success was also divided opposition in the country). According to Yakushiji Katsuyuki "this apathy was expected to translate into low voter turnout, which will favour the LDP and the Komeito, so Abe could not have planned it better" (Katsuyuki, 2014). Some critics said Abe won only because he is "the least bad option" (Ryall, 2014).

The complete results of the election are as follows (compare Figure 4): Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) – 291 mandates, conservative Komeito (NK) 35 mandates, main opposition party – Democratic Party (DPJ) 73 mandates, centrists from Japan Innovation Party (JIP) 41 mandates, Japan communists (JCP) 21 mandates (JCP is oldest and still active party in Japan – founded in 1922).

There are not remarkable changes comparing the 2014 results with the results from 2012 (Figure 4).

Liberal Democratic Party is still dominant political platform in the country (during almost last all 20 years – Figure 5) and main opposition party Democratic Party of Japan (Figure 6) is still too weak to govern (DPJ tries to profile itself as centrist party for middle class) – or to govern as main force of the alternative coalition. The party is still unpopular after its governmental results from 2009 to 2012 (and its absolute electoral defeat in 2012 – losing more than 250 mandates). DPJ is now looking for real charismatic local and national leaders. And more – it is not able to perform real alternative to Abe's Abenomics model (Katsuyuki, 2014). Despite that, the party was in election campaign very critical to Abenomics and pointed out worse living conditions than in the past. It tried to be in the position of the advocate of "ordinary citizens". It also called other opposition parties to cooperate (DPJ election platform, 2014).

Current support for Japan communists is also interesting for political scientist– in 2012 they had 8 and now even 21 mandates in parliament. According to LDP member and former defence minister Yuriko Koike is JCP "the only opposition party that made significant gains in the recent vote was Japanese Communist Party, which nearly tripled its seat total, from eight to 21. The JCP has recently sought to position itself as a "reliable opposition" to the LDP – though it has never proved particularly "reliable," at least not in promoting realistic policies". (Koike, 2014).

Political newcomer is Japanese Innovation Party. The bases of the party are former members of Japan Restoration Party (JRP) and Unity Party.

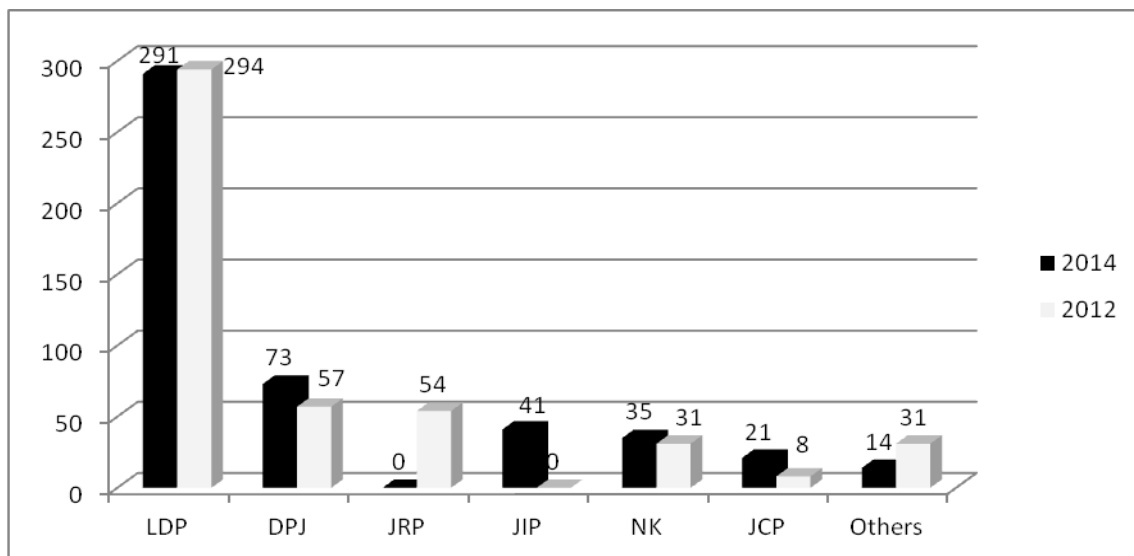


Fig. 4 Results of elections in 2014 and 2012 in Japan.

Source: Election Guide, <http://www.electionguide.org/>; Electionresources, <http://www.electionresources.org/>

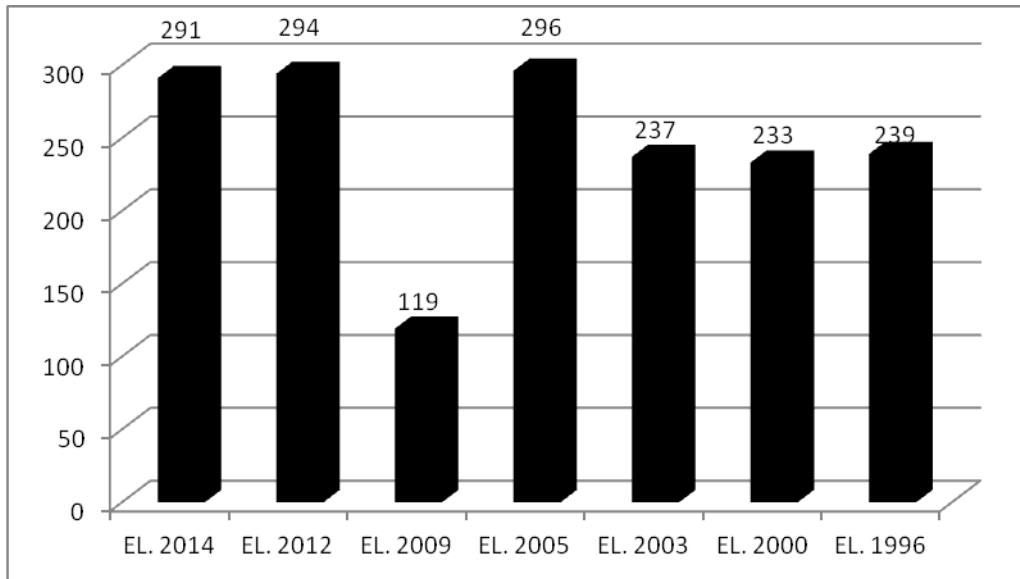


Fig. 5 LDP results in last 20 years.

Source: Election Guide, <http://www.electionguide.org/>; Election Resources, <http://www.electionresources.org/>

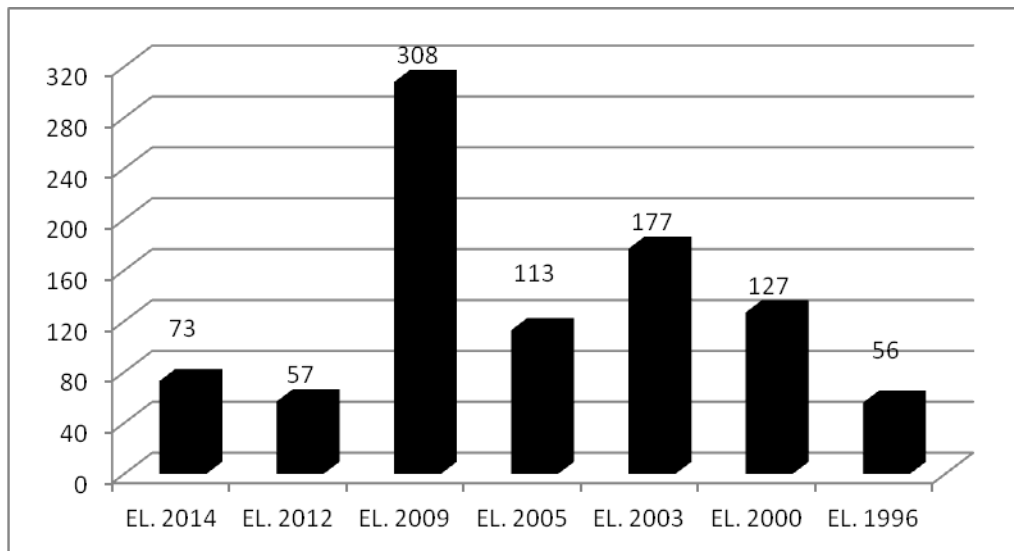


Fig. 6 DPJ results in last 20 years.

Source: Election Guide, <http://www.electionguide.org/>; Election Resources, <http://www.electionresources.org/>

4 Conclusion

Japanese voters gave mandate to prime minister Shinzo Abe to continue in his “Abenomics” economic model (Sieg, Kajimoto, 2014). He also promised to implement his Three Arrows policy (fiscal stimuli, monetary and structural reforms of the country) –to stimulate Japanese economy (Yoshino, Hesary, 2014). According to Koichi Hamada: as “Abe’s government has a renewed mandate from Japanese voters, it must deliver on its promises – and that means decisive and comprehensive implementation of structural reforms. Of course, this will require some sacrifices. Indeed, households have already endured some hardship, brought about by the consumption-tax hike“(Hamada, 2014). Shinzo Abe in that context wrote: „we now have a mandate to launch what has become known around the world as the “third arrow” of so-called Abenomics: structural reform. And it is structural reform that will unleash the competitiveness, and long-pent-up dynamism, of Japan’s firms and people.... We now have the Japanese public’s support to make all of these changes happen. That support is based on explicit statements of the government’s intentions....for or me and my government, the main task ahead – working even harder to restore Japan’s economy – is inseparable from safeguarding our country’s position in the global vanguard of peace, progress, and prosperity (Abe, 2015).

Some critics reject that view and according to them Abenomics does not work. Makoto Watanabe is saying: "These reforms have done nothing to assist the ordinary people; all they have done is benefitted large companies and people who were already wealthy...since Abe came to power, the gap between the rich and poor in Japanese

society has grown wider, while only two percent of Japan's big businesses take in about half of the total profits." (Ryall, 2014)

The other issues necessary to solve in current Japan are global military reach of the country and the restart of nuclear reactors in the country (McCurry, 2014) and restoration of national pride (The Abe Habit, 2014).

Debate about the changes in pacific Japanese constitution is also possible (The Abe Habit, 2014; Katsuyuki, 2014).

Shinzo Abe's task should be also improving poor and complicated (historically) relations with two close (geographically) countries – China and South Korea as tensions are more visible in East Asia during last few years – although Shinzo Abe called for a tough stance on territorial claim with China in the past.

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