

Change and Continuity in the 2009 Japanese General Election

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Change and Continuity in the 2009 Japanese General Election

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Abstract

The 2009 Japanese general election was a landslide victory for the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) and an overwhelming defeat for the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). As a result, the DPJ came to power for the first time since it was established in 1996. In contrast, the LDP had retained power for 38 years. In the 1993 general election, the LDP lost its majority in the lower house and thus lost administrative power for the first time. Even while the LDP was out of power, it maintained its status as the top party. The LDP returned to power because of a split among the coalition parties in 1994. After that, the LDP remained in power for fifteen years. On the other hand, the DPJ was established in 1996, and gradually expanded its support among Japanese voters. At last, the DPJ came to power in 2009.

In order to understand the 2009 election, we need to understand the trends of Japanese voters using electoral statistics and survey data. The findings from these data were as follows. (1) A sudden change in SMDs occurred in urban areas. (2) In 2005 and 2009, the second parties were obviously disadvantaged because of the SMD system. (3) Evolving two-party system, voter's interest in the general election tended to increase in the recent elections. (4) Middle aged and elderly voters were alienated from the LDP in the 2009 election, as were conservative voters. (5) The effect of occupational differences on vote choice was almost diminished in the two most recent elections. (6) The percentage of "party voters" who attached greater importance to a party rather than to a candidate in the SMD vote increased largely to 61.2% in the 2009 election.

Keywords: Election, Voting behavior, Public opinion, Japanese politics, Japanese general election

Introduction

The 45th Japanese General Election was held on August 30, 2009. The result was a historical one because the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) suffered an unprecedented overwhelming defeat and the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) came to power for the first time since its establishment in 1996. In contrast, the LDP had retained power for 38 years after its formation in 1955. In the 1993 general election, the LDP lost its majority in the lower house. This first-time loss of administrative power was due to the splitting of the party.

Even while the LDP was out of power, it maintained its status as the top party. The second most powerful party at that time was the Japan Socialist Party (JSP), but it held only about one-third of the seats that the LDP held. At the end of June 1994, the LDP returned to power because of a split among the coalition parties. At that time, the LDP formed a coalition government with the JSP and the Sakigake Party, which was formed by splitting from the LDP in 1993. Since then, the LDP remained power. In contrast, the DPJ was established relatively recently in 1996, and gradually expanded its support among Japanese voters. At last, the DPJ came to power in 2009¹.

In order to understand the 2009 election, we need to understand the trends of Japanese voters using electoral statistics and survey data. This paper mainly focuses on the vote cast for the two major parties.

1. Transition of public opinion

The Taro Aso administration began at the end of September 2008, immediately after the “Lehman Shock.” Aso was elected as president of the LDP after former Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda’s resignation. The main reason for his resignation was that his administration had lost public support, so if he were to dissolve the lower house, the LDP would have little possibility of winning the next general election and staying

in power. The main reason for Aso's victory was his relatively high popularity with Japanese voters as compared to other candidates for the LDP presidential election of 2008. Many LDP Diet members expected him to dissolve the lower house immediately after his inauguration and execute a general election, given the high approval rating for the cabinet, but Prime Minister Aso decided not to do so. Based on an analysis of public opinion polls, it is apparent that the main reason for Aso's decision not to dissolve the lower house was a low public approval rating.

I now will examine the transition of public opinion during the Aso administration. Figures 1 and 2 present the results of Fuji Television Network's "Shin-Hodo 2001" weekly poll, which was conducted among metropolitan area voters in the Kanto region. Figure 1 presents the approval and disapproval rating for the Aso cabinet, and Figure 2 shows the percentage of voting intension for the top two parties. The results for the approval and disapproval ratings of the cabinet obtained by Fuji Television Network were similar to those of many national polls executed by other mass media.

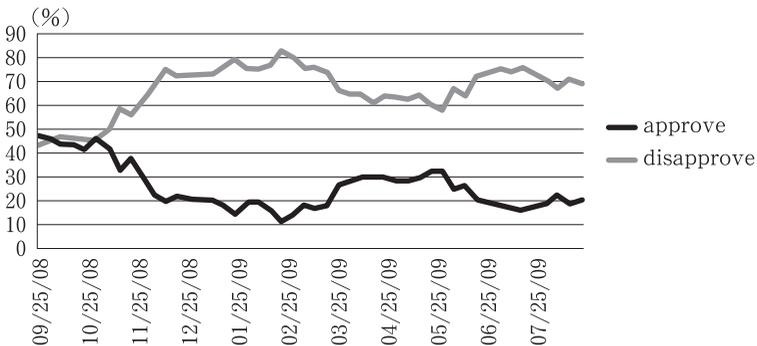
Immediately after the inauguration of the Aso administration, the approval rating of his cabinet was 47.2%. That percentage level was lower than that expected by many LDP members in the Diet. Other polls indicated a similar level of approval. For instance, as the first approval rating for the Aso cabinet, the percentage in the Asahi Shimbun national poll was 48% and that of Yomiuri Shimbun national poll was 49.5%. According to the results of Fuji Television Network's "Shin-Hodo 2001" weekly poll, the first approval rating for the Abe cabinet was 67.0% (September 2006) and that for the Fukuda cabinet was 55.6% (September 2007). Therefore, the first approval rating for the Aso cabinet was lower than that of the preceding two administrations.

The approval rating of 40% continued only for one month and then declined thereafter. The approval rating for the Aso cabinet sharply decreased in November and December 2008, mainly because of the

policy of flat-sum cash benefits pulled from the state coffers. The main purpose of this policy was to engender for an economic recovery after the Lehman Shock, but many voters considered this as a “claptrap” policy and doubted its effectiveness. In the Asahi Shimbun national poll, only 26% of respondents thought it was a necessary policy with 63% of them thinking it was unnecessary (Asahi Shimbun, November 11 2008). In addition, many indices of the country’s economic condition were getting worse at that time. The approval rating was under 20% from the middle of January to the middle of March. In this tough situation for the Aso cabinet and the LDP, Prime Minister Aso was more and more hesitant to dissolve the lower house.

Figure 2 illustrates the transition of voting intension for the LDP and the DPJ during Aso’s administration. At the beginning of a new administration, the LDP support rating has usually been much higher than that of the DPJ, but there was little difference between the LDP and the DPJ support rating immediately after the inauguration of the Aso administration. From the end of October to December 2008, the percentage of DPJ support tended to increase and that of the LDP tended to decrease along with the decreasing trend in the approval rating for the Aso cabinet.

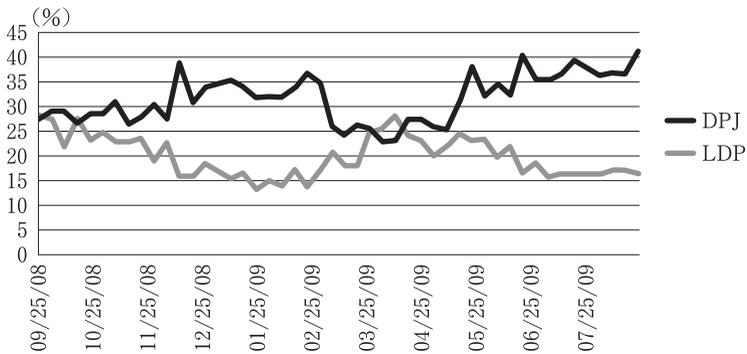
The LDP reversed its disapproval trend temporarily in April 2009,



Source: Fuji Television weekly poll.

Figure 1 Approval rate for Aso cabinet

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Source: Fuji Television weekly poll.

Figure 2 Vote intention for the DPJ and the LDP

due to the Ichiro Ozawa financial scandal. Ozawa was the leader of the DPJ at that time. After he resigned, Yukio Hatoyama was chosen as party leader of the DPJ in the middle of May, and the percentage of DPJ support quickly recovered with the percentage of LDP support decreasing to less than 20% again. In the last survey before the election, the percentage of voters who intended to vote for the LDP was 16.3%, and the percentage of the voters who intended to vote for the DPJ was 41.2%, so the landslide victory of the DPJ was forecast.

Of course, the correlation between the cabinet approval rating and the percentage of the vote intention for the LDP was strong at 0.819. Following a regression analysis, it became apparent that the LDP support rating had increased 3.5 points when the cabinet approval rating increased ten points. In contrast, the correlation coefficient between the cabinet approval rating and the percentage of the vote intention for the DPJ was -0.467 , and therefore the DPJ support rating tended to rise along with the decline in the cabinet's approval rating. In the end, Prime Minister Aso was not able to find an appropriate time to dissolve the lower house to benefit the LDP. He finally dissolved the lower house September 21, 2009.

After a party realignment in the 1990s, the life of the cabinet was shorter than it was under the 1955 system where the LDP was dominant.

However, we recognize that prime ministers had become careful about dissolution since a Mixed System was introduced in 1994. I think that the Single-Member District System is one factor that made Prime Minister Aso carefully consider the dissolution.

The possibility that the administration could be changed by a general election was extremely low under the old electoral system (multi-member district system, MMD). Under the 1955 system, except for the 1958 election, only the LDP could run candidates in numbers constituting a majority of total members. Therefore, it was clear that opposition parties were not able to acquire administrative power. For the opposition parties, it was necessary to form a coalition with other opposition parties in order to acquire administrative power. In practice, an effective coalition was not able to be formed by the opposition parties.

Ironically, there is now a danger of losing office when a contrary wind blows against the party in power because the new SMD system brought the possibility of a sudden change. As a result, the prime minister has tended to be more careful about dissolving the lower house. The dissolution of 2009 was a typical case of that tendency.

2. Results and analysis

2-1 Turnout and voter's interest

Turnout

First of all, I will examine the trend of turnout in Japanese general elections. Table 1 presents the turnout of the general elections since 1947. The 1947 election was the 23th general election, and it was also the first election under the new constitution. From 1947 to 2009, the 23 general elections were held. The highest turnout rate was 76.99 percent in the 1958 election that was the first election after the 1955 system was established. The turnout rate was around 70 percent from 1960 to 1993 elections. In 1994, Japanese electoral system for the lower house election was replaced the Multi-Member District system with the Mixed Member Majority system². It decreased to around 60% after the new

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Table 1 Turnout in Japanese general elections, 1947–2009

year	total	men (a)	women (b)	difference(a) – (b)
1947	67.95	74.87	61.60	13.27
1949	74.04	80.74	67.95	12.79
1952	76.43	80.46	72.76	7.70
1953	74.22	78.35	70.44	7.91
1955	75.84	79.95	72.06	7.89
1958	76.99	79.79	74.42	5.37
1960	73.51	76.00	71.23	4.77
1963	71.14	72.36	70.02	2.34
1967	73.99	74.75	73.28	1.47
1969	68.51	67.85	69.12	–1.27
1972	71.76	71.01	72.46	–1.45
1976	73.45	72.81	74.05	–1.24
1979	68.01	67.42	68.56	–1.14
1980	74.57	73.72	75.36	–1.64
1983	67.94	67.56	68.30	–0.74
1986	71.40	70.21	72.52	–2.31
1990	73.31	71.93	74.61	–2.68
1993	67.26	66.39	68.09	–1.70
1996	59.65	59.03	60.23	–1.20
2000	62.49	62.02	62.94	–0.92
2003	59.86	59.68	60.03	–0.35
2005	67.51	66.80	68.18	–1.38
2009	69.28	69.46	69.12	0.34

Source: Shugiin Jimukyoku (2009)

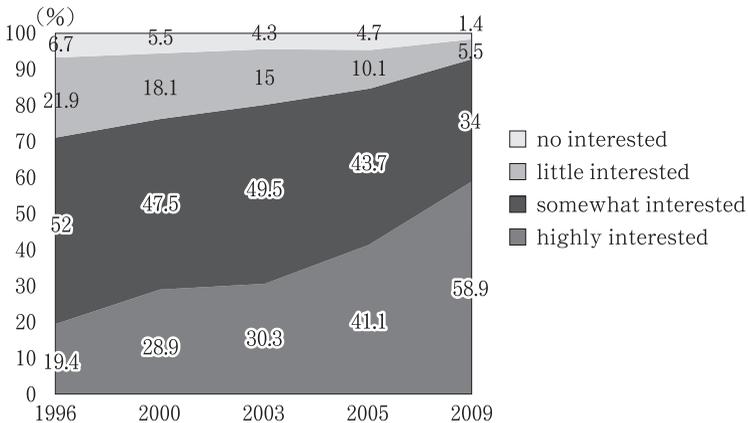
electoral system was introduced in 1994, however, the turnout rate tended to increase in recent general elections. In the 2005 general election, the turnout rate rose by about eight points over the previous general election. In the 2009 general election, the turnout rate rose to nearly 70% (69.51%).

In the 2009 election, male turnout exceeded that of women for the first time since 1969. In Japan, women’s suffrage was introduced in 1945 under the US occupation. The first several elections after it was introduced, female turnout was considerably lower than men. As Martin Harrop and William L. Miller pointed out, “As is normal among newly-

enfranchised groups, turn-out was low” (Harrop and Miller 1987, 207), therefore the low turnout of women in the first stage was the usual fact. From the 1950’s to 1960’s, the difference of turnout between men and women had reduced gradually. In the 1969 election, female turnout exceeded the male for the first time. Since then, women’s turnout always slightly exceeded the men in general elections, however, in the 2009 election, men’s turnout increased by 2.66 points compared with the previous election. On the other hand, the increase rate of women remained 0.94 points.

Increasing voter’s interest in general election

In voter’s attitudinal level, the degree of voter’s interest in general election tended to increase recently. Figure 3 presents the result of the public opinion polls executed by The Association for Promoting Fair Elections (*Akarui Senkyo Suishin Kyokai* in Japanese). The proportion of “highly interested” voters tended to increase since the 1996 election. The proportion was about 20% in 1996, about 30% in 2000 and 2003, about 40% in 2005, and about 60% in 2009. According to these polls, voter’s interest for the general election had tended to increase greatly.



Source: Akarui Senkyo Suishin Kyokai Post Election Poll.

Figure 3 Voter’s interest in the general election, 1996–2009

Table 2 shows the percentage of “highly interested” voters by social force. The rightmost column shows regression coefficient (B). The proportion of “highly interested” voters of men was always higher than that of women, but the regression coefficient of men was similar to that of women. Hence, the degree of increasing trend of men was similar to that of women. The older voters were always more interested than the younger voter.

The proportion of the highly interested voters was always highest in the residents of metropolitan areas, and the degree of increasing trend was relatively high among urban voters (the residents of metropolitan and larger city). By educational level, the proportion of the highly interested voters was always highest in the college graduate, and the degree of increasing trend was relatively high among the educated voters.

Table 2 Percentage of “highly interested” voter by gender, age, region, and educational level, 1996–2009

	1996	2000	2003	2005	2009	B
men	25.4	37.7	37.3	49.1	65.4	9.1
women	14.3	21.8	24.3	34.2	53.1	9.0
20–29 years old	8.3	13.1	14.2	21.9	30.5	5.3
30–39 years old	12.9	17.4	16.6	33.8	55.0	10.1
40–49 years old	17.4	25.4	21.5	39.1	64.2	10.7
50–59 years old	22.1	34.1	34.8	41.7	61.8	8.7
60 and older	25.5	36.7	39.2	48.5	56.6	7.4
metropolitan	21.1	32.4	36.0	49.5	60.8	9.7
larger city	18.7	28.9	27.5	40.6	60.4	9.5
smaller city	20.4	27.0	27.9	39.9	54.3	8.1
rural	18.3	27.3	31.0	34.7	59.5	9.0
junior high school	17.3	23.4	26.1	31.3	43.8	6.1
high school	18.1	27.4	28.5	36.8	57.9	8.9
junior college	16.1	26.6	30.7	43.4	58.5	10.2
college	32.7	41.0	39.4	61.2	71.2	9.7

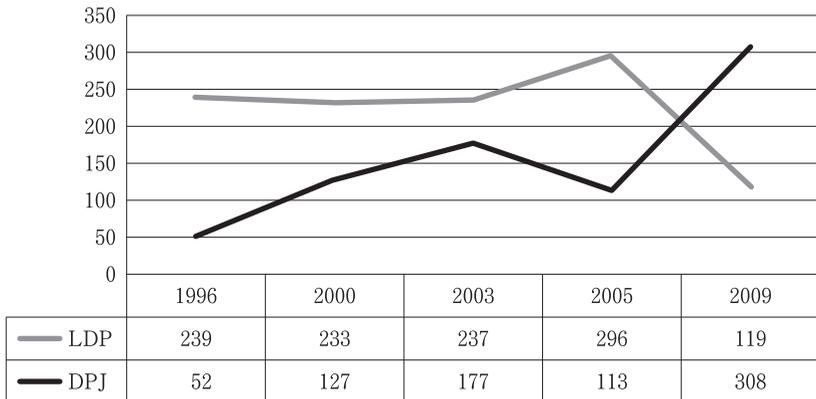
Source: Akarui Senkyo Suishin Kyokai Post Election Poll.

2-2 Seat and vote share

Landslide victory of the DPJ

Figure 4 shows the results of the LDP and the DPJ in the recent five general elections. In the 1996 election that was the first election under the new electoral system, the LDP acquired 239 seats of the total 500 seats. The seat share was 47.8%, so the LDP could not acquire the majority of total seats. In the election, the second party was New Frontier Party (NFP) that was founded in 1994. NFP aimed the top party, but it could not attain. On the other hand, the DPJ was the status of a third party in that election. But in December 1997, the second party NFP dissolved by the party leader Ichiro Ozawa. As a result, the party realignment was occurred and the number of DPJ seats increased in 1998.

In the 2000 election, the LDP acquired 233 seats of the total 480 seats. The seat share was 48.5%, so the LDP could not acquire the majority of total seats again. In 1999, however, the LDP formed the coalition government with the Clean Government Party (CGP). The CGP gained



Source: Shugiin Jimukyoku (2009).

Figure 4 Number of acquired seats of the LDP and the DPJ, 1996–2009

31 seats in the 2000 election, so the sum of the in-parties attained majority in the lower house. On the other hand, the DPJ acquired 127 seats in the election.

Before the 2003 election, the Liberal Party merged into the DPJ. As a result, the number of seats of the DPJ somewhat increased before the election. The DPJ acquired 177 seats of the total 480 seats in the 2003 general election that the number was highest of the second parties in the post war Japan. On the other hand, the LDP acquired 237 seats in the election. The seat share of the top two parties was 86.25%. So, we can say a two-party system was established in 2003.

The result of the 2005 election was a landslide victory for the LDP. The LDP acquired 296 seats of the total 480 seats. The seat share was 61.7%, so the LDP could acquired the majority of total seats after a long time. On the other hand, the DPJ suffered overwhelmingly defeat, as a result, Katsuya Okada decided to resign the president of the DPJ.

In contrast, the 2009 election was a landslide victory for the DPJ. The DPJ acquired 308 of the total 480 seats and increased its number of seats in 2005 by 195. The number of the DPJ acquired seats in 2009 election was the highest in the Japanese general elections since the World War II. On the other hand, the LDP acquired 119 seats, which was a 177-seats decrease from the 2005 election. The 2009 election was the worst performance for the party since it was formed in 1955. Before the 2009 election, the worst performance of the LDP was 223 seats in the 1993 election.

There was a great change in the number of seats of the two major parties because of the effect of the sudden change of the SMD system. DPJ seats in the SMD tier increased suddenly from 52 seats in the 2005 election to 221 seats in 2009. In contrast, LDP seats in SMD's decreased sharply from 219 seats in 2005 to 60 seats in 2009. The LDP's coalition partner, the CGP acquired 21 seats, which was a 10 seat decrease from the 2005. In the 2009 election, the CGP ran 8 candidates in the SMD tier, but all candidates could not win.

SMD tier

The 300 seats of total 480 seats had been elected in the SMD (Single Member District) tier since the 2000 general election. So, 62.5% of total seats were elected in the SMD tier. Table 3 shows the pattern of the winner in the recent three elections. About one third of the districts, the LDP won in 2003 and 2005 and the DPJ won in 2009. The number of districts that the seat transfer from the LDP to the DPJ in 2009 was 158, over half of the total number of districts.

The number of districts of the LDP won in the every three elections is only 47, and the number of districts that the DPJ won in the three elections is 44. The sum of these districts is 91, so the fixed district is

Table 3 Pattern of winners in the SMD tier, 2003-2009

2003	2005	2009	N	%
L	L	D	97	32.3
D	L	D	57	19.0
L	L	L	47	15.7
D	D	D	44	14.7
O	O	D	8	2.7
L	L	O	6	2.0
L	O	L	5	1.7
L	O	D	5	1.7
O	L	L	5	1.7
L	D	L	4	1.3
O	L	D	4	1.3
O	O	L	4	1.3
L	O	O	3	1.0
O	O	O	3	1.0
O	D	D	2	0.7
L	D	D	1	0.3
D	L	L	1	0.3
D	L	O	1	0.3
D	D	L	1	0.3
D	O	O	1	0.3
O	L	O	1	0.3
			300	100.0

* L=LPD, D=DPJ, O=other parties.

about one third. Over two thirds of the districts resulted in a seat transfer between parties in recent three elections. The districts that experienced a seat change between the LDP and the DPJ can be called “swing districts”. So, the proportion of the swing districts is near two third. This fact implies that there are many swing voters in Japan. The result of the SMD tier in the 2009 election was clearly “landslide.” The two major parties have few districts to which they can surely win at the status quo.

Figure 5 presents the transition of votes-seats ratio in the SMD tier in the five recent elections. In theory, the top party takes advantage of SMD. This is a case of Japan. The votes-seats ratio for the top parties had always been above one. Except for the 2003 election, the degree of the ratio was over 1.4 times. In the UK, that has adopted SMD system for a long time, there were eighteen general elections after the World War II. Of these eighteen elections, only four elections were the votes-seats ratio for the top parties was over 1.4 time. The ratios were in the range from 1.07 to 1.57 and the mean was 1.27 (see Figure 6).

In the first three elections, the votes-seats ratio of the second parties were around one, so the second party was neither at an advantage nor

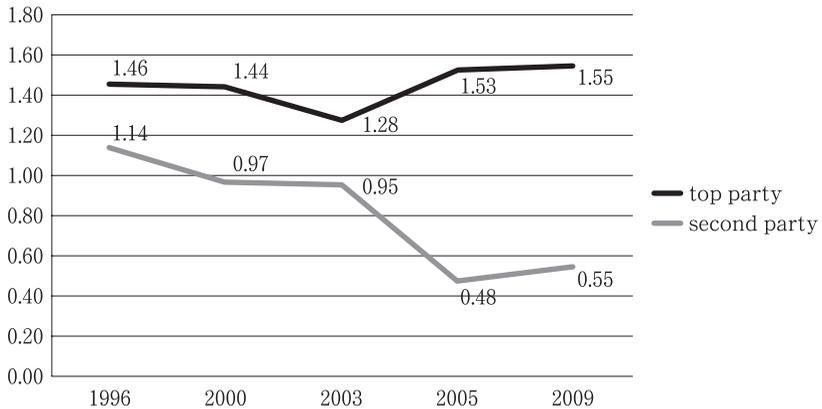


Figure 5 Votes-seats ratio for the top and the second party in the SMD tier, Japan, 1996-2009

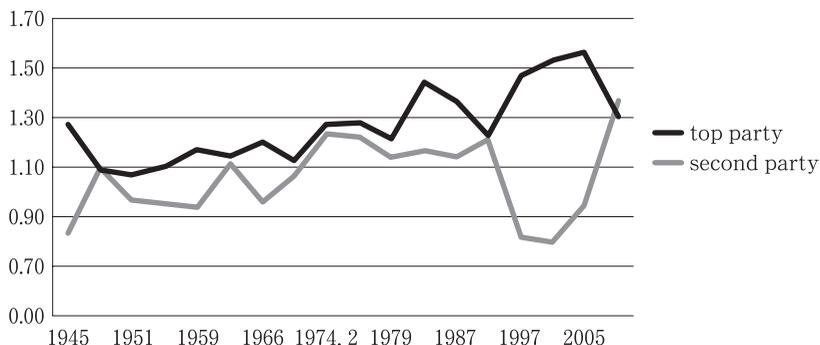


Figure 6 Votes-seats ratio for the top and the second party, UK, 1945-2010

at a disadvantage because of the SMD system. But in 2005 and 2009, the second parties were obviously disadvantaged because of the SMD system. The seat share of the second party was about half of the vote share of them. These facts had not been seen in the UK. The mean of that in the postwar UK was 1.05 and the lowest ratio was 0.79 in 2001. The seat share of the second party in the 2005 and 2009 Japanese elections were abnormally low when compared with that of the UK.

These facts mean that the percentage of swing districts in Japan were higher than that in the UK. In other words, the percentage of fixed districts of Japan was fewer than that of the UK, so there were many criticisms against SMD system in Japan.

Table 4 shows the number of acquired seats for the LDP and the DPJ by district type in 2003, 2005, and 2009. A Japanese political scientist Taku Sugawara calculated the Densely Inhabitant District (DID) population ratio of 300 electoral districts from the 2000 census data and divided urban, intermediate, and rural type districts into 100 electoral districts each³. In 2003, the LDP was the rural type party and the DPJ was the urban type party. In the 2005 election, however, that pattern collapsed. The LDP acquired over 70% of seats among every district type, but this was an exceptional case.

In the 2009 election, the DPJ gained almost all of the urban and

Table 4 Result by district type, 2003–2009

	2003	2005	2009	2005–2003	2009–2005
LDP					
urban type (100)	31	74	10	+43	–64
intermediate type (100)	58	71	12	+13	–59
rural type (100)	79	74	42	–5	–32
DPJ					
urban type (100)	60	16	86	–44	+70
intermediate type (100)	35	25	86	–10	+61
rural type (100)	10	11	49	+1	+38

intermediate type districts, and the DPJ had a slight gain over the LDP in the rural type elections. In 2005, the seat change was especially large in the urban type districts. In contrast, the winning party of the rural type district was almost constant, so, Koizumi's whirlwind blew only in urban areas. In the 2009 election, the number of acquired seats of the DPJ was more than that of the LDP in every district type. In the urban type districts, the DPJ gained 70% in 2009.

The sudden change in SMDs tended to occur in urban areas, because in urban areas, there are many floating voters. For instance, in Tokyo, the capital prefecture, the LDP won 23 of the 25 districts in 2005, but it won only two districts in the 2009 election. In contrast, the DPJ won only one district in 2005, but it won 23 districts in 2009.

The candidates of the DPJ tended to be younger than those of the LDP. The average age of the DPJ candidates in SMD's was 48.2 and that of the LDP candidates was 55.4. There were 263 districts in which both major parties ran a candidate. In 176 districts of the total 263 districts, the DPJ candidate was younger than the LDP candidate. On the other hand, there were 84 districts that the LDP candidate was younger than the DPJ candidate.

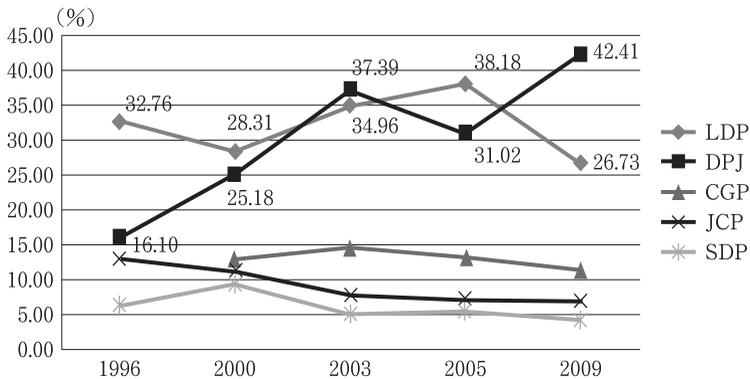
PR tier

Since the 2000 general election, the 180 seats of total 480 seats in the

Japanese lower house was elected by a Proportional Representation System (PR). Figure 7 illustrates the transition of vote share in the PR tier from 1996 to 2009. In the three out of five elections, the LDP gained the top share, however, it gained the smallest share of votes in these five general elections in 2009. The LDP vote share decreased in 2009 by 11.45 points compared with that of the previous election.

On the other hand, the DPJ gained the top share in 2003 and 2009. In 2009, the vote share of DPJ was over 40 percent, and that level had been never reached by the LDP in these five elections. The vote share of minor parties such as the CGP (Clean Government Party, in Japanese, New Komeito), JCP (Japan's Communist Party), and the SDP (Social Democratic Party of Japan) had tended to decrease.

Table 5 shows the correlation coefficient between party vote share



Source: Shugiin Jimukyoku (2009)

Figure 7 Vote share in the PR, 1996-2009

Table 5 Correlation coefficient between vote share and DID population ratio by prefecture (PR).

	LDP	DPJ	CGP	JCP	SDP
2003	-.597	.386	.134	.418	-.140
2005	-.026	-.162	.034	.388	-.031
2009	-.534	.074	.129	.525	-.096

in PR and the percent of DID by prefectures. The higher a positive correlation, the more the urban type vote structure is shown, the higher a negative correlation, the more the rural type vote structure is shown. In 2003, the LDP was obviously the rural type party and the DPJ had the urban type structure as well as JCP, however, in the 2005 election, located “postal election” by Prime Minister Koizumi, the vote structure was changed fundamentally. There was no correlation between the party vote share and the percent of DID. Thus, the Koizumi whirlwind blew only urban area. In 2005, there was almost no correlation for the DPJ. In the 2009 election, the correlation coefficient of the LDP returned to almost the same level as in 2003. That is, the LDP became a rural type party again. On the other hand, no correlation continued for the DPJ.

3. Trends in voting behavior

3-1 Criterion of voting in the SMD

Since the 1996 election, Japanese voters casted two votes in the general election because of introducing the mixed electoral system. So, one is in the SMD tier, the other was in the PR tier. Figure 8 presents the transition of the criterion of voting behavior in the SMD tier in the last five general elections. In the 1996 election, the first election under the new electoral system, the percentage of “party voters” who attached greater importance to a party rather than to a candidate was 43.4 percent of the respondents. The ratio was somewhat increased in the 2005 election. In the 2005 election, half of the voters were party voters. In the 2009 election, the proportion of party voters increased largely to 61.2%.

In contrast, the percentage of “candidate voters” who attached greater importance to candidate than to party had gradually decreased after the new electoral system was introduced. That was over 43.8 percent in the 1996 election, but it was under 30 percent in the 2009 election. The percentage of party voters was almost equal to that of candidate voters in the 1996 election. On the other hand, the percentage of party voters was about twice of that of candidate voter in the 2009

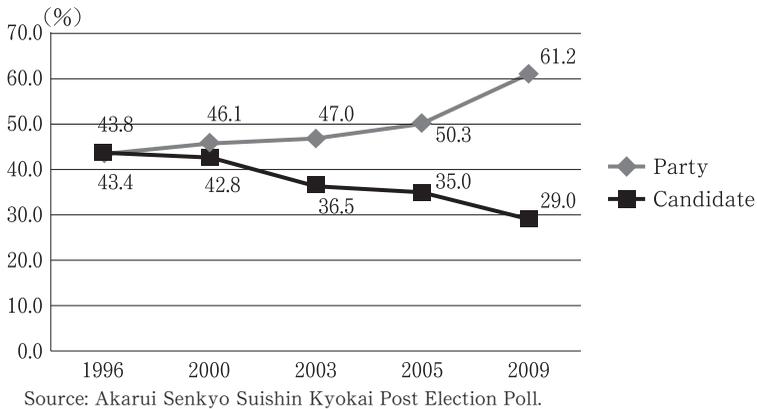


Figure 8 Criterion of vote choice in the SMD tier, 1996-2009

election. One of the aims of electoral reform executed in 1994 was to encourage the transition from candidate vote to party votes. Because candidate centered campaign and candidate votes caused to expensive electoral campaigns, and political corruption. According to the result of the polls, the aim of electoral reform was being accomplished in the 2009 election.

Table 6 shows the percentage of party voter by social background from 1996 to 2009. With regard to gender, the percentage of men was always higher than that of women. On average, the percentage of men was higher by 6.9 points than that of women. In addition, the regression coefficient of men is higher than women. A consistent difference among age categories is not recognized. The trend toward party voting was relatively high in the twenties. In terms of region, the percentage of urban voters was higher than that of rural voter. On the average, the percentage of party voters in metropolitan area was higher by 13.0 points than that of voters in towns and villages, however, the degree of the trend of rural voters was somewhat higher than that of the urban voter. From the viewpoint of education, Based on the results of the five surveys, the percentage of party voters were relatively high in the voter who experienced higher education.

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Table 6 Proportion of “party voter” by gender, age, region and educational level, 1996–2009

	1996	2000	2003	2005	2009	mean	B
men	46.9	49.5	49.9	54.1	65.8	53.2	4.2
women	40.0	43.2	44.5	46.9	57.0	46.3	3.8
20–29 years old	40.6	44.9	40.2	57.1	65.2	49.6	6.1
30–39 years old	46.6	44.8	51.3	46.4	65.0	50.8	3.8
40–49 years old	42.7	45.1	47.5	51.3	57.6	48.8	3.6
50–59 years old	39.7	46.3	43.4	49.7	62.0	48.2	4.8
60 and older	45.0	47.0	48.4	50.5	60.6	50.3	3.5
metropolitan	50.4	55.0	51.9	61.4	64.3	56.6	3.4
larger city	46.1	46.6	48.8	49.2	62.8	50.7	3.6
smaller city	41.5	41.1	42.6	48.3	58.7	46.4	4.2
rural	35.6	41.7	42.9	43.3	54.7	43.6	4.0
junior high school	39.0	35.4	44.1	46.5	51.2	43.2	3.6
high school	42.3	45.4	43.6	47.1	61.0	47.9	3.9
junior college	45.9	52.5	50.4	51.4	60.4	52.1	2.8
college	54.1	54.4	55.0	60.3	68.6	58.5	3.5

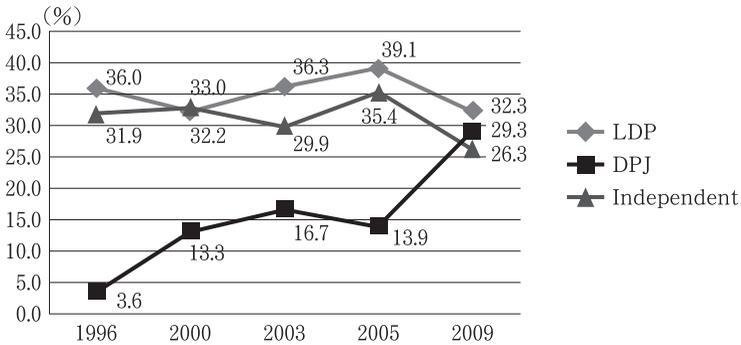
Source: Akarui Senkyo Suishin Kyokai Post Election Poll.

3-2 Political attitude and vote choice

Party Identification

In classical findings of voting behavior, the Michigan group asserted the importance of Party Identification on American voting behavior (Campbell et al 1960). Since then, others have recognized the importance of Party Identification in many countries. Japan was not an exception. For instance, Ichiro Miyake, a Japanese political scientist, argued the importance of Party Identification (Party Support) on the Japanese voting behavior (Miyake 1985). The concept of Party Support is not entirely equal to the concept of Party Identification advocated by the Michigan Group, however, the concept of party support was similar to that of Party Identification.

Figure 9 presents the percentage of the LDP and the DPJ supporter,



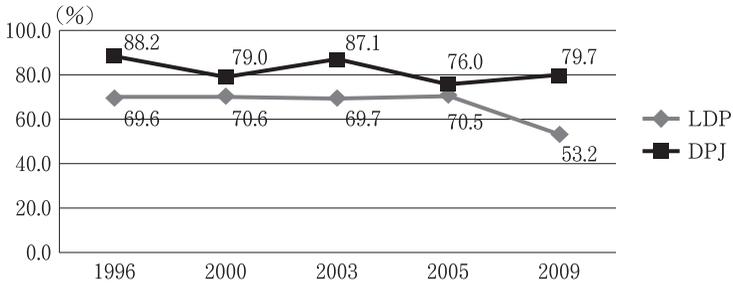
Source: Akarui Senkyo Suishin Kyokai Post Election Poll.

Figure 9 Party Identification, 1996-2009

and the Independent voter. In this survey, the wording of the question wording on Party Identification is “do you usually support any party?” In 1996, the first election for the DPJ, the percentage of the DPJ identifier was only 3.6%. In the end of 1997, the second party at that time, the New Frontier Party (NFP), dissolved. The DPJ expanded in 1998, adding a part of the former NFP members of Diet to their own party. The percentage of Democratic Party supporters increased the next two election surveys and was over fifteen percent in 2003. But it decreased to 13.9% in 2005. The percentage rose significantly to 29.3% in 2009. On the other hand, the percentage of the LDP identifier was relatively stable. In 2005, it rose to 39.1%, and it was 32.3% in 2009, about 7 points down from previous election. In 2009, the level of the percentage of DPJ identifier was similar to that of the LDP. The percentage of Independent voters was about one third of respondents from 1996 to 2005. That decreased to one fourth in 2009. These results implied that a part of the Independent electorate in 2005 shifted to support the DPJ in 2009.

Figure 10 shows the transition of the proportion of the loyal voter in the PR vote who support the LDP or DPJ in the recent five general elections. The meaning of loyal voter is a voter who voted for the party in which the voter identified in attitudinal level. The percentage of the LDP loyal voters is fewer than that of the DPJ in all five surveys. In

Change and Continuity in the 2009 Japanese General Election



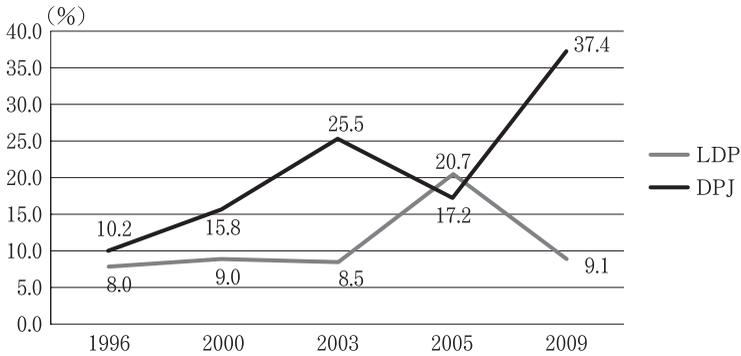
Source: Akarui Senkyo Suishin Kyokai Post Election Poll.

Figure 10 Loyal voter among the LDP and the DPJ supporters in the PR tier, 1996–2009

other words, the LDP supporter defected more easily than the DPJ supporters. The percentage of loyal voters among the LDP supporters was about 70% from 1996 to 2005 in the general elections, but in 2009, that decreased to about 50%. In 2009, 25% of the LDP supporters voted for the DPJ in the PR tier, so the percentage of deviate voters among LDP supporters increased in 2009. This fact implies that the party loyalty among the LDP identifiers is weaker than that of the DPJ identifiers. The percentage of loyal voter in PR was highest within the CGP identifiers in 2009. The proportion of loyal voters among the CGP identifier was 81% in that election. The high loyalty of the CGP identifier had been repeatedly recognized.

Independent voters

In recent elections, the voting behavior of Independent voters had great influence on election results. Many Japanese voters were disillusioned and frustrated with politics since the collapse of the Hosokawa coalition in 1994, gave up all party affiliations and became Independent (Ida 2002). Needless to say, Independent voters used to be more volatile than partisan, so they are sensitive to any given political situation. Figure 11 shows the behavior of Independent voters in the PR tier from 2000 to 2009 (including nonvoters). In three out of four elections, the percentage of the DPJ voter exceeded that of the LDP voter. In general,



Source: Akarui Senkyo Suishin Kyokai Post Election Poll.

Figure 11 Vote for the LDP and the DPJ among Independent in the PR tier, 1996–2009

Independent voters tended to vote for the DPJ more than the LDP. An exceptional case was the 2005 election in that the DPJ experienced an overwhelmingly defeat. In that election, the landslide victory of the LDP was partly attributed to the choice of Independent voters. In 2009, the percentage of the DPJ voter was over four times that of the LDP, so the DPJ gained much more than the LDP.

Ideology

The words frequently used to describe the ideological axis in Japan have been “Conservative (in Japanese, *Hoshu*) and Progressive (in Japanese, *Kakushin*).” The distribution on the ideological self-image of respondents was almost unchanging in the results of the polls for last twenty years. Even in 2009, when the shift of power occurred, the distribution on the ideological self-image was similar to that in 2005, so the power alternation from the LDP to the DPJ in 2009 was not accompanied with ideological change of voters. The meaning of “progressive” is somewhat similar to that of “liberal” in the USA and to “left” in Europe, so the progressive voter had tended to vote for left-wing parties such as the JSP under the 55 system. Needless to say, the LDP has been generally recognized as a conservative party in Japan. Therefore, con-

servative voters tend to vote for the LDP, and the progressive voters tend not to vote for it.

Table 7 shows the voting behavior by conservative-progressive self-image since the 1996 general election. In the 2005 election, the percentage of the LDP voters increased among voters who were identified progressive, and that did not increased among the conservative voter. Former Prime Minister Koizumi’s structural reform and the privatization of postal service gained a portion of progressive voters in the 2005 election. This fact implied that a portion of progressive voters are oriented towards a small government, not toward a big government. However, this change was an exception.

In addition, the LDP lost its traditional supporter largely in the 2009 election. In previous elections, the percentage of the LDP voter among the “conservative” voters was always over 60%, but it decreased to 40.4% in the 2009 election. The percentage of the LDP voter among the “fairly conservative” group was about 50% in the 2005 election, but it was only one fourth in the 2009 election.

On the other hand, the DPJ extraordinarily gained the support of conservative voters in the 2009 election. In 2005, only one twentieth of

Table 7 Conservative-Progressive self-image and vote in the PR tier, 1996–2009

	Conservative	Fairly Conservative	Middle	Fairly Progressive	Progressive	B
vote for LDP						
1996	70.0	49.6	25.3	9.7	7.6	−16.47
2000	74.8	45.0	22.2	8.7	6.1	−17.37
2003	64.2	38.5	19.9	7.0	9.2	−14.15
2005	66.4	49.0	30.1	20.3	22.0	−11.75
2009	40.4	25.5	16.0	5.8	6.2	− 8.81
vote for DPJ						
1996	2.7	12.1	13.2	16.9	10.6	2.06
2000	7.8	22.3	23.2	33.4	20.4	3.63
2003	9.7	25.7	29.8	51.3	40.2	8.66
2005	5.1	18.7	23.9	37.2	30.0	6.83
2009	27.4	42.6	47.4	56.3	49.2	5.73

Source : Akarui Senkyo Suishin Kyokai Post Election Poll.

“conservative” voters voted for the DPJ, but in 2009, one fourth voted for the DPJ. The percentage of the DPJ voters among “fairly conservative” group was under 20% in the 2005 election, however, that was over 40% in the 2009 election, and close to the level of the LDP voters in 2009. One of the major characteristic of the 2009 election was “the alienation of conservative voter from the LDP”. This fact implies the diminish of the former ideological axis for Japanese politics.

3-3 Social group and vote choice

Gender

Table 8 shows the voting behavior from the viewpoint of gender. The survey has showed a gender gap in voting behavior. For the LDP vote, the percentage of men exceeded that of women in 1996 and 2000, but the gender gap for the LDP vote has almost disappeared since 2003.

For the DPJ vote, the ratio among men has always exceeded the women. The difference by gender was slight in 1996 and 2000, but it has expanded after the amalgamation of the Democratic and the Liberal party in 2003. The regression coefficient (B) shows that men have a higher tendency for party vote. That is, for a decreasing tendency of the LDP vote and an increasing tendency of the DPJ vote, men has stronger tendency than women.

Table 8 Vote choice by gender in the PR tier, 1996–2009

	1996	2000	2003	2005	2009	B	mean
LDP							
men (a)	37.8	37.5	34.9	43.8	23.5	-2.2	35.5
women (b)	34.5	30.9	35.3	44.4	23.5	-0.9	33.7
difference (a) - (b)	3.3	6.6	- 0.4	- 0.6	0.0	-1.4	1.8
DPJ							
men (a)	11.7	26.2	36.6	28.6	52.7	8.4	31.2
women (b)	10.1	25.2	30.0	20.1	45.8	6.6	26.2
difference (a) - (b)	1.6	1.0	6.6	8.5	6.9	1.8	4.9

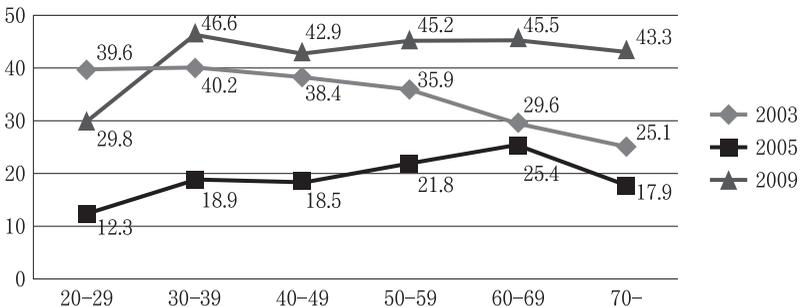
Source: Akarui Senkyo Suishin Kyokai Post Election Poll.

Age

Among many sociological factors, it has been recognized broadly that age is a very important determinant factor on Japanese voting behavior. The percentage of the LDP voter had been higher than that of younger voters for a long time (Ida 2009a). In Japan, ageing tends to be accompanied with conservatism in terms of political and social attitudes⁴.

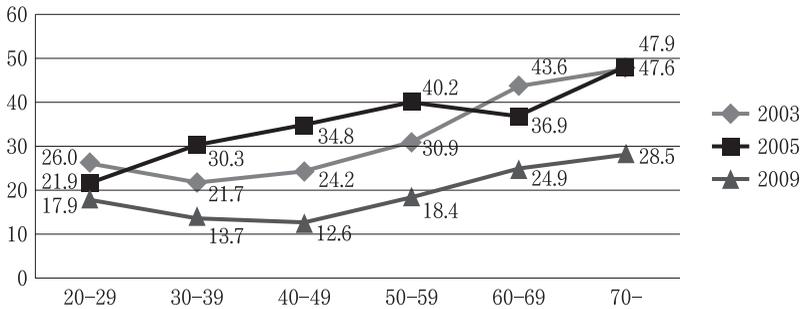
Figure 12 presents the percentage of DPJ voter by age category. In 2003, the percentage of the DPJ voter was relatively high among younger voters and it was relatively low among the older voters; however, that voting pattern collapsed in the 2005 general election. In 2005, the DPJ lost votes especially among younger voters. The highest percentage of DPJ voters were voters aged 60–69 in 2005. In 2009, the DPJ gained votes among over 30 voters. Except for voters in their 20's, the DPJ gained over 40% of voters according to the poll.

Figure 13 presents the percentage of the LDP voter by age category. The percentage of the LDP voter increased in the middle age category in the 2005 election when compared to 2003. This fact implied that structural reform to smaller government advocated by Junichiro Koizumi was supported especially by middle age voters, however, in 2009, the percentage of the LDP voter decreased largely among middle age voters. In 2009, voters in their 40's represented only one third of



Source: Akarui Senkyo Suishin Kyokai Post Election Poll.

Figure 12 Percentage of the DPJ voter by age in the PR tier, 2003–2009



Source: Akarui Senkyo Suishin Kyokai Post Election Poll.

Figure 13 Percentage of the LDP voter by age in the PR tier, 2003-2009

Table 9 Vote choice by age in the PR tier, 1996-2009

Age Category	1996	2000	2003	2005	2009
Vote for LDP					
20-39 (a)	21.8	21.5	23.1	39.5	20.5
40- (b)	39.6	37.1	37.4	45.2	24.2
difference (a) - (b)	-17.8	-15.6	-14.3	- 5.7	- 3.7
Vote for DPJ					
20-39 (a)	13.3	29.2	40.0	23.8	54.0
40- (b)	10.3	24.8	31.7	24.1	47.9
difference (a) - (b)	3.0	4.4	8.3	- 0.3	6.1

Source: Akarui Senkyo Suishin Kyokai Post Election Poll, re-calculated by the author.

that of 2005. The LDP voting pattern by age in 2009 is similar to that of 2003, but in 2009, the percentage of the LDP voter decreased among all age categories in comparison to the 2003 election.

Occupation

In addition to age, occupation had been also a important social factor on Japanese voting behavior. For a long time, the social base of the LDP was farmers, and managerial occupation. Table 10 shows vote choice in PR by occupation. In the 2003 election, about half of self-employed people voted for the LDP and about a quarter of employee voted for it.

Table 10 Voting behavior by occupation in the PR tier, 2003–2009

	2003	2005	2009	2005–2003	2009–2005
Vote for the LDP					
self-employed (a)	48.3	51.9	29.5	+ 3.6	– 22.4
employee (b)	26.9	43.2	20.4	+ 16.3	– 22.8
difference (a) – (b)	21.4	8.7	9.1		
Vote for the DPJ					
self-employed (a)	28.0	23.1	45.1	– 4.9	+ 22.0
employee (b)	41.5	24.8	51.7	– 16.7	+ 26.9
difference (a) – (b)	– 13.5	– 1.7	– 6.6		

Source: Akarui Senkyo Suishin Kyokai Post Election Poll, re-calculated by the author.

In the 2005 election, the proportion of the LDP voter was almost invariable in the self-employed person. In contrast, the percentage was greatly increased among the employee. As a result, the difference between the two occupation categories was reduced. In the recent two elections, the occupational difference was small. In the 2009 election, the voting percentage for the DPJ was much higher than that for the LDP in both categories, so as a determinant of voting behavior, the importance of occupation was declined.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, we examined about the 2009 Japanese general election and the trends of Japanese voter. Finally, we will summarize as follow.

- ① A sudden change in the SMD tier occurred in urban areas. As a result, the election was a landslide victory for the DPJ and an overwhelming defeat for the LDP.
- ② In 2005 and 2009, the second parties were obviously disadvantaged because of the SMD system. The seat share of the second party in the recent two elections were abnormally low when compared with that of the UK.

- ③ Evolving two-party system, voter's interest in general elections tended to increase in recent elections.
- ④ For a long time, the LDP had gained votes from middle aged and elderly voters. But these groups were alienated from the LDP.
- ⑤ Occupation had been recognized as an important sociological factor on the Japanese voting behavior for a long time. But, the effect of occupational differences on vote choice was diminished in the two most recent elections.
- ⑥ Conservative voters alienated from the LDP in the 2009 election. This fact implies the diminishment of the former ideological axis ("Conservative" — "Progressive").
- ⑦ In addition, the percentage of "Party Voters" who attached greater importance to a party rather than to a candidate in the SMD increased largely to 61.2% in the 2009 election. One of the aims of electoral reform executed in 1994 was to encourage the transition from candidate vote to party votes. Because candidate centered campaign and candidate votes caused expensive electoral campaigns, and political corruption. According to the result of the polls, the aim of electoral reform was being accomplished in the 2009 election.

Notes

- 1 In 2005, Steven R. Reed expressed, "Personally, my bet on a continued evolution toward a two-party system and an alternation in power within three elections" (Reed 2005, 292). This forecast was supported by the results of the 2009 election.
- 2 The introduction of mixed system in Japan was the one that it consequentially got on the fashion of the world. As Federico Ferrara, Erik S. Herron, and Misa Nishikawa wrote, "Mixed electoral systems were regularly classified as anomalies until 1990s." But, according to their count, "40 states used these rules at the national level during the period 1990-2004. This figure constitutes slightly more than 20 percent of the countries of the world" (Ferrara, Herron, and Nishikawa 2005, 24-25).

- 3 Taku Sugawara HP, *Nihonseiji Sho Bunseki (An Analysis of Japanese Politics)* http://page.freett.com/sugawara_taku/data/2003did.html.
- 4 In the past, Barrie Stacey referred on ageing and conservatism. He wrote as follow. "It is part of conventional political wisdom that people become typically conservative as they grow older. In this context the word "conservative" has several meanings: cautious, unwilling to take risk, opposed to hasty changes or innovations, strongly supportive of the existing system of law and order, convinced of the value of authority and obedience; resistance or active opposition to influences for general change in society or many specific kinds of change, or change which is viewed as a threat to the existing social order, disposed to maintain existing institutions and traditions; belief that human nature inevitably leads to inequality, conflict, aggression, and suffering; anti-egalitarian and resistance to change which would benefit disadvantaged segment of the population." (Stacey 1978, 138).

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