



International Snapshot: Japan Parliamentary Elections, September 2005

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Published September 2005

The results of Japan's September 2005 parliamentary elections have been held up by the Japanese media as demonstrating a stunning mandate for Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, leader of the nation's Liberal Democratic Party. FairVote's analysis of the election results, however, indicates that this mandate was far from clear, with Koizumi's party in fact winning just 38% of the popular vote. As our International Spotlight research series demonstrates, time and again, a nation's choice of electoral system often has just as much impact on the election results, as candidate or party popularity and other factors.

Election System Basics

Japanese parliamentary elections employ both a winner-take-all aspect and proportional voting aspect to fill the combined 480 seats. 300 of the seats are elected from single-member districts by a simple plurality (i.e. winner-take-all), as in the United States. An additional 180 seats are elected using a party list proportional voting system where seats are allocated to parties based roughly on their percentage of the national popular vote. The proportional seats are not used to correct any distortions in proportionality that might take place in the district seat totals, and parties place candidates on the ballot under a "closed list" where voters can not determine the order in which the party's proportional seats are filled.

Under Japan's system, voters select their single district representative, but their vote also counts toward the nationwide total of that candidate's political party. According to the results, 67,811,069 people out of a population of 127,333,002 (roughly 50%) turned out to vote in these 2005 "Mixed Member" Parliamentary elections. This hybrid system allows for a comparison of how single-member districts skew representation when compared to proportional voting systems. Below, we have analyzed the results of the election by calculating how skewed each party's representation is in the single member seats and the proportionally allocated seats when compared to its share of the national

popular vote.

Over-Representation of the Liberal Democratic Party

Prime Minister Koizumi's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) members captured a combined 38.18% of the nationwide vote. This translated into the LDP winning an astounding 219 out of the 300 single member district seats. This means that, under the single member district system, the LDP was able to capture 73% of the single member election seats available despite having only won roughly 38% of the popular vote. In contrast, the LDP was awarded a more balanced number of 77 of the 180 proportionally allocated seats representing roughly 42% of the total proportional voting seats.

Hence, it becomes clear that the single member system, when compared to a proportional allocation system, has the potential to skew election outcomes away from fair results. In fact, the over-representation of the LDP through the single member district seats was so severe that even with the inclusion of the proportional seats, the LDP still holds 61% of the total parliamentary seats – almost 23% more seats than their share of the vote would warrant. It is through the winner-take-all single member system that Japan now has a governing political party in solid power with the support of less than half of voters.

Record Number of Women Elected

One bright spot in the election results is that women were elected in record numbers this year, owing mainly to Prime Minister Koizumi's initiative to shake up party insiders and freshen up the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) image by boosting women's representation. Under the plan, dubbed the "female ninja" strategy, Koizumi made women's representation a priority by recruiting female candidates and placing them high up on the LDP's proportional voting party list. This meant that when the LDP was allocated its proportional voting seats, the women on the LDP list were likely to receive seats before their male counterparts lower on the list. It is through this method that the LDP tripled the number of women in its caucus from nine to twenty-six. Of the 83 freshman lawmakers elected this cycle, roughly a third were women.

Other nations ensure fair women's representation by mandating that political parties make a certain proportion of their party list women, for example, every third candidate. Though the overall number of women in the Japanese parliament still stands at a paltry 43 out of 480 seats, representing only 9% of the seats, even this modest gain would not have been possible in the winner-take-all, single member district parliamentary seats. Women running for office in the single member districts would most likely have to go head-to-head against a male candidate instead of being part of a cooperative slate of candidates, as with the proportional voting seats. This first step towards greater representation of women in parliament provides hope for future gains in Japan.

Under-Representation of the Other Parties

This problem of skewed representation in the single member district seats was witnessed over and over for Japan's other political parties. The Democratic Party of Japan won 52 single member seats, representing roughly 17% of the available single member seats, despite winning 31% of the nationwide popular vote - just 7% less than the Liberal Democrats. Under the proportional voting system they won 61 seats, giving them a more accurate 33% of the proportional voting seats. Overall, the Democratic Party of Japan holds 23.5% of the seats.

Although the New Komeito Party, a coalition partner of the Liberal Democrats, won 13% of the overall popular vote, they only won 8 seats in the single member elections. This equals only 2.6% of the single member seats. However, under proportional voting they saw a fairer result, winning 23 seats, or 12.7% of the proportional seats. Overall, they hold 6% of the overall number of seats.

The Japanese Communist Party (JCP) did not win any single member election seats. In spite of this they won 7% of the popular vote, giving them 9 proportional voting seats, or 5% of the proportional seats available. The JCP won 2% of the overall seats.

Meanwhile, similar under-representation occurred for the Social Democratic Party, which received only 5% of the popular vote, less than the Japanese Communist Party. They were able to win one single member election, or 0.3% of the single member elected seats. Because of this they were also awarded 6 proportional voting seats, equal to 3% of the available proportionally allocated seats. They hold 1.4% of the overall seats.

There were several other groups that were not on the ballot in every prefecture and each group won less than 4% of the overall vote. Of these groups, the People's National Party won 2 single election seats and 2 PR seats for a total of 4 seats. The New Party of Japan and the Shinto Daichi each won one seat through proportional voting.

Table 1. Proportionality Analysis

Party	% Popular Vote	% SMD* Seats Received	SMD* Skew	% PR** Seats Received	PR** Skew	% Total Seats Received	Total Skew
Liberal Democratic Party	38.18%	73.00%	34.82%	42.78%	4.60%	61.67%	23.49%
Democratic Party of Japan	31.02%	17.33%	-13.69%	33.89%	2.87%	23.54%	-7.48%
New Clean Government Party	13.25%	2.67%	-10.58%	12.78%	-0.47%	6.46%	-6.79%
Japan Communist Party	7.25%	0.00%	-7.25%	5.00%	-2.25%	1.88%	-5.37%
Social Democratic Party	5.49%	0.33%	-5.16%	3.33%	-2.16%	1.46%	-4.03%
New Party Japan	1.74%	0.67%	-1.07%	1.11%	-0.63%	0.83%	-0.91%
People's New Party	2.42%	0.00%	-2.42%	0.56%	-1.86%	0.21%	-2.21%
Shinto Daichi	0.64%	0.00%	-0.64%	0.56%	-0.08%	0.21%	-0.43%
Other (combined)		6.00%	---	0.00%	---	3.75%	---

* Single Member District

** Proportional Representation



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