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Make Japan Great Again – Japan's Democratic Backsliding

Master Thesis

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TO MY FATHER AND MOTHER

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ABSTRACT

Democratic backsliding as a phenomenon, has recently been raised as a new challenge for the political world. Because of this, this thesis aims to shine light on the extent of democratic backsliding in Japan and the factors that enable it. This is done through a Mixed Methods research design, consisting of a description of changes in testing the case study three main strands of potential explanations for backsliding. A key finding is that that of the five tested hypotheses three have been confirmed and one has been partially confirmed, through this we see a negative development during the past 20 years in Japan. Furthermore, it is found that weak check and balances, a disproportional electoral system and mainstream parties' adopting populist policies decreases their commitment to democracy, appear to be factors enabling backsliding in Japan.

Keywords: *Democratic Backsliding, Democracy, Democratic Consolidation, Japan, LDP*

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1.INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades, there has been an ongoing discussion regarding the status of democracy in the world. The optimism after the “third wave of democratization” has now changed to pessimism concerning the future of democracies, and there is talk of a worldwide democratic recession, even more worryingly is the process in many democratic countries as they begin to show authoritarian symptoms. These once consolidated democracies are now experiencing dramatic domestic changes. The political discourse is becoming increasingly more polarised. Checks and balances are being weakened, and the executive powers are strengthened to allow the government to advance their policies unhindered. There are also electoral “irregularities” that simultaneously harm the prospects of election for the opposition, while favouring the incumbent’s political parties. In 1989, Francis Fukuyama famously predicted the end of history and the victory of the western liberal democratic ideology. While he got many things wrong, he correctly predicted the spread of one component of the western liberal democratic system: that of competitive elections.

By 2020 we still have not seen a genuine democratic nationstate that does not hold at least minimally competitive elections. To put it differently, competitive elections seem to be a necessary condition for democracy. However, minimally competitive elections are by no means sufficient for democracy.

After democratization and transitology had dominated in the 1990s and early 2000s, the focus of research became more pluralistic. A research agenda on comparative authoritarianism, hybrid regimes and the function of institutions in non-democratic setting quickly emerged. The consensus coming out of these debates suggests that institutions in general and elections in particular can be drivers in both processes of democratization and autocratization.

This thesis aims to contribute to debates about the role of institutions in general and elections in particular by focusing on the causes and consequences of an issue that is fundamental for understanding when elections contribute to democracy or not: electoral fairness. However, this increased emphasis on democracy has more recently been accompanied by rampant illiberalism and a sharp rise in cases of democratic backsliding in new democracies whose transitions to democracy were heavily influenced and supported by the international community. Overall, the number of cases of backsliding has risen over time. This is even the case in Europe and the Americas, which are historically the two most densely democratic regions in the world.

When it comes to democratic backsliding, there is little coherent knowledge. Because of this, there is no consensus on what democratic backsliding means or what the main explanations of it are. Existing explanations are diverse with the main strands much reflecting those of democratization research. Democratic backsliding occurs when elected officials weaken or erode democratic institutions and results in an illiberal or diminished form of democracy, rather than autocracy. As such, democratic backsliding is a process unique to democracies, or, states that meet the minimal procedural requirements to be considered democratic: relatively free and fair elections coupled with mass participation. This thesis interprets the main themes in backsliding literature to be institutional, political and economic.

Institutional explanations focus much on electoral systems, democratic checks and balances and the meaning of democratic institutions.

Political explanation mainly focus on populist parties, parties' adoption of populist rhetoric as a political strategy and their consequent lack of democratic commitment.

The economic explanations are concerned with per capita income, development and the impact of economic crisis.

None of these explanations seem to dominate the others in the existing literature. This thesis will through the research design explained later, be able to advance research on which explanatory factors are found in Japan while testing direct causality. As noted above, the case of Japan has been chosen. This case is chosen due to Japan's consolidated liberal democracy, and subsequent reversion from it. Before discussing the process of democratic backsliding in this case, the status as a liberal democracy must be established. For democratic backsliding to occur, the case must have at one point been considered liberal democracy.

The purpose for doing this study is twofold. Firstly, democratic backsliding in Japan is one of the greater challenges today in the political landscape. Thus, a need for a holistic grip on the phenomenon in Japan is needed to find out how bad things have gotten and what has caused it. This in turn can help us better understand how democracy can be protected in Japan and in the world after all. Secondly, research on democratic backsliding is young and shows a great deal of divisiveness. By testing the most prominent strands of explanations, this thesis contributes by bringing clarity to this divided and burgeoning research field.

The approach to answer all the research questions is to conduct a single case study, which will enable a comparison of the different factors that theoretically contribute to democratic backsliding, and later compare such factors with the mechanisms that are constructed to overcome their contribution.

Thus, the approach that will be used in this thesis is threefold.

First, it will identify when in time democratic backsliding can be registered.

Second, it will identify the factors that are contributing to democratic backsliding.

Third, based on the answers from it will compare the mechanisms with the factors that are contributing to democratic backsliding.

Indicators will be applied to identify when in time democratic backsliding can be registered, and the factors contributing to it. Moreover, the timeframe that is set for the indicators will start in 2000 and include as updated data as possible until 2019, since that timeframe will be long enough to show exact data. Additionally, the indicators will be selected on basis of democratic backsliding theories. As no grand theory of democratic backsliding has been made, it is necessary to apply several theories.

This thesis's structure is that first there will be a methodological framework explaining the concept of democratic backsliding, and provide a minimal theoretical logic for the selection of the indicators that will identify when in time democratic backsliding occurs, and which factors that are contributing to it. In addition, six hypotheses will be constructed to test later, whether the theoretical factors are contributing to democratic backsliding in the selected country.

Secondly, there will be a theoretical framework explaining democracy as a key concept, democratic backsliding as the sub – component of democracy the main factor that will be explained and Japan will be detailed described from the history of democratic governance, the constitution, the political system, electoral system and unique Japanese features of the political system.

Thirdly, there will be an analysis that will determine when in time democratic backsliding can be observed, the results of the empirical study and the factors contributing to it.

Fourthly, a conclusion will sum up the findings from the analysis and analytical discussion of the results will be presented.

2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 SELECTION AND DEFINITION OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

2.1.1 Subject of Research

During the last two decades, there has been an ongoing discussion regarding the status of democracy in the world. The optimism after the “third wave of democratization” has now changed to pessimism concerning the future of democracies, and there is talk of a worldwide democratic recession, even more worryingly is the process in many democratic countries as they begin to show authoritarian symptoms.

These once consolidated democracies are now experiencing dramatic domestic changes. The political discourse is becoming increasingly more polarised. Checks and balances are being weakened, and the executive powers are strengthened to allow the government to advance their policies unhindered.

There are also electoral “irregularities” that simultaneously harm the prospects of election for the opposition, while favouring the incumbent’s political parties (Diamond et al, 2016).

Regardless of whether there is a global stagnation or a recession of democracies, the fact remains that several consolidated democracies have experienced democratic backsliding. The subject of this study is to study the process of democratic backsliding in the case of Japan. This thesis tests a model of democratic backsliding, attempting to determine factors if there is democratic backsliding in Japan. By studying this case, it is expected that a better understanding of democratic backsliding will be gained. The study will be guided by the literature, in particular Levitsky and Ziblatt book *How Democracies Die* and other articles referring to Democratic Backsliding. If there is democratic backsliding in Japan it will be one of the greater challenges in the World today, with the potential to slideback Japan opens probably a way for the strengthening of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes across Eastern Asia and open a way for other countries in Asia to democratic backslide. This in turn can help us better understand how democracy can be protected in Asia. This important development is an aspect of democracy requiring further research, and as of yet it remains relatively unresearched. There remain many unknowns on the process of democratic backsliding. This is the starting point of this thesis, as it attempts to shed light on the process of democratic backsliding by analysing Japan.

2.1.2 Research Problem

The developments of democratic backsliding are relatively recent, with the form most common today only beginning roughly two decades ago with the election of Chávez in Venezuela in 1999. Democratic Backsliding has since then occurred in several countries across the globe. It is debated if these developments of democratic backsliding have a common pattern, similar to those found in the democratization process. Indeed, there is literature describing a pattern of democratic backsliding. The literature provides with a model of democratic backsliding, claiming that there is a common process of democratic backsliding.

The process includes three steps, beginning with:

(1) the government taking control of the judiciary and law institutions,

(2) using these institutions to target opposition.

Finally, the government (3) change the laws and constitution to the benefit of the incumbent, allowing them to retain their power.

This interprets the main themes in backsliding literature to be institutional, political and economic and other themes.

Institutional explanations focus much on electoral systems (Batory 2016, Reynolds 2011), democratic checks and balances (Diamond 2015, Kapstein & Converse 2008), and the meaning of democratic institutions (Ágh 2016).

Political explanation mainly focus on populist parties (Palonen 2009), mainstream parties' adoption of populist rhetoric as a political strategy (Pappas 2013), and their consequent lack of democratic commitment (Herman 2016).

The economic explanations are concerned with per capita income, development (Przeworski 2005, Przeworski et.al. 1996), and the impact of economic crisis (Krastev 2016).

As noted above, the case of Japan has been chosen. This case is chosen due to Japan's consolidated liberal democracy, and subsequent reversion from it. Before discussing the process of democratic backsliding in this case, the status as a liberal democracy must be established.

For democratic backsliding to occur, the case must have at one point been considered liberal democracy. To determine the status of liberal democracy in this case, the indexes of V-Dem will be used. V-Dem is widely accepted as a measurement of democracy and freedom, and their definitions of democracy is consistent with the definition used in this thesis.

2.1.3 Previous Research

Research in democratic backsliding is still developing. However, literature on the subject is emerging. Levitsky and Ziblatt's *How Democracies Die* is an example on how the world has reacted to the democratic backsliding. What few studies of democratic backsliding specifically that do exist tend to focus predominantly on domestic-level causes of this regime outcome. Highlighting the central role that executives play in triggering backsliding, certain scholars find that power-seeking presidents are better able to initiate backsliding in cases where their power is unconstrained by institutional safeguards or oppositional political forces (Fish, 2001; Van De Walle, 2003). The phenomenon of democratic backsliding is difficult to conceptualize as there is a limited understanding of what democratic backsliding is (Lust & Waldner 2015). Lust & Waldner (2015) argues that the phenomenon can occur in both authoritarian and democratic regimes, and that it entails a deterioration of qualities, either democratic qualities of governance in authoritarian regimes, or quality of democracy in democratic regimes. In addition, then Lust & Waldner (2015) conceptualize democratic backsliding as the following: “...*backsliding is best conceived as a change in a combination of competitive electoral procedures, civil and political liberties, and accountability, and that backsliding occurs through a series of discrete changes in the rules and informal procedures that shape those elections, rights, and accountability.*” (Lust & Waldner 2015, p.2).

In particular, actors' normative preferences about democracy and dictatorship, their modernization or radicalization policy preferences, and international political influences, both direct and indirect, exercised through external actors, all influence regime outcomes. In addition to explanations based on political actors and institutions, others have attributed backsliding to structural and cultural factors at the domestic level.

2.1.4 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study concerns the two essential concepts of Democracy and Democratic Backsliding, as well as the theoretical model for democratic backsliding developed by Levitsky and Ziblatt. Following the definition of liberal democracy, democratic backsliding will be defined. Discussing democratic backsliding, the form of democracy concerned is most often the liberal democratic version. The backsliding can commonly be found in the areas of liberal institutions, such as the judiciary and the media. These institutions are often being sidelined or taken control over by the government. In essence, democratic backsliding can only occur in liberal democracies and it must be assured that the case of Japan is considered a liberal democracy.

2.1.5 Research question

In developing good research questions, King et al. (1994, p. 15) suggest two main criteria: „They recommend that research should pose questions that are important in the real world and should make a specific contribution by increasing our ability to create explanations of some aspect of the world.“ The issues arising from the proposed phenomenon of democratic backsliding in Japan and based on these recommendations, this thesis seeks to answer one primary question and four secondary questions designed to elaborate on different aspects of the primary question.

The primary question is:

To what extent has there been democratic backsliding in Japan and what seems to be the factors enabling democratic backsliding in Japan ?

The secondary questions are:

Which factors have contributed to democratic backsliding in Japan ?

How has the LDP contributed to Japan's democratic backsliding ?

How did the LDP and other political parties in Japan attempted to undermine democracy and entrench its political role following the last 7 election cycles ?

How did the Government of Shinzo Abe used populism during their period of rule from 2006 till 2007 and from 2012 till today ?

2.2 SELECTION OF THE FIELD OF SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS

Starting from the current state of research on democratic backsliding, this phenomenon is a fairly new. The main problem is where to place and from what aspects to observe and research this phenomenon and whether it would have quality research results. Some scientists believe that this problem is mostly interdisciplinary because it can be viewed from different aspects of science. From the current state of the academic literature, it is poorly describing it. As it stands, divisions in the recognition of the problem has academic interest, such that we know little about what is happening and how to alleviate it. Opinions and speculations are numerous, both from scholars and the public, but rigorous empirical evidence is rare. We paint broad strokes by reviewing what we know about democracy, what we still don't know, and where we should look for answers. This thesis holds the normative assumption that democratic backsliding is happening and that it warrants a response.

We proceed by :

- (1) summarizing the historical and political development of democracy research,*
- (2) reviewing the theoretical and empirical findings of the extant literature,*
- (3) identifying plausible predictors for democratic backsliding from said literature,*
- (4) testing these predictors.*

The design of the thesis is premised on recent reviews of the growing literature on election in non-democracies and articles that just focus on democratic backsliding. The research is going to be conducted and explored through a disciplinary research.

2.3 DEFINITION OF TERMS AND CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Through the thesis, there are different terms and concepts for the thesis, some of these terms are going to be defined in this phase, others will be defined through the thesis in different chapters because of the coherence of the thesis. These concepts and terms are used for the variables and are frequently in the research and should be understood as defined below:

Democratic Backsliding

This thesis uses a definition of backsliding by Lust and Waldner (2015 p.5). Democratic backsliding is; “*changes that negatively affect competitive elections, liberties, and accountability*”. This definition is narrower than some others but allows for a return to what could be seen as the core of democracy.

The broader definition: “*...backsliding is best conceived as a change in a combination of competitive electoral procedures, civil and political liberties, and accountability, and that backsliding occurs through a series of discrete changes in the rules and informal procedures that shape those elections, rights, and accountability. (Lust & Waldner 2015)*

There is no consensus on a definition of democratic backsliding (Lust & Waldner 2015 p.2), but when democracy itself is an essentially contested concept, it follows that democratic backsliding also is contested.

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP, Jiyūminshutō, Jimintō)

Is a conservative Japanese political party and largest political party in Japan, which has held power almost continuously since its formation in 1955. The party has generally worked closely with business interests and followed a pro-U.S. foreign policy.

Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ, Japanese Nihon Minshutō)

Is a centrist Japanese political party that was founded in 1996 to challenge the long-dominant Liberal-Democratic Party (LDP). The DPJ made strong electoral showings from its earliest days, and within little more than a year of its establishment it became the country's largest opposition party. It subsequently ruled Japan for more than three years (2009–12) before being replaced by the LDP.

Illiberal democracy

Also one term that is hard to define for this thesis is Illiberal democracy. Illiberal democracy is composed of policies that extend an electoral advantage for governing parties with the aim to remain in power indefinitely. This includes perpetuating advantageous socio-economic structures and governing practices, as well as specific and targeted restrictive actions against political opponents and independent institutions. Therefore the definition is as follows:

„Democratically elected regimes often re-elected or reinforced by referendums that ignore the constitutional limits of their power and deprive their citizens of basic rights and liberties” (Zakaria, 1997)

To avoid confusion Illiberal Democracy is not Illiberal politics. By illiberal politics, we understand policies that are enacted (or proposed) by political parties in government with the aim to remain in power indefinitely while maintaining competitive elections. The resulting regimes maintain competitive multiparty elections but are neither democratic nor fully authoritarian.

Populism

Are any of various, often antiestablishment or anti-intellectual political movements or philosophies that offer unorthodox solutions or policies and appeal to the common person rather than according with traditional party or partisan ideologies. From this concept we define populism as follows: Political ideas and activities that are intended to get the support of ordinary people by giving them what they want.

Institutional checks and balances

Checks and balances are various procedures set in place to reduce mistakes, prevent improper behavior, or decrease the risk of centralization of power. Checks and balances usually ensure that no one person or department has absolute control over decisions, clearly define the assigned duties, and force cooperation in completing tasks. The term is most commonly used in the context of government. Principle of government under which separate branches are empowered to prevent actions by other branches and are induced to share power. Checks and balances are applied primarily in constitutional governments. They are of fundamental importance in tripartite governments, which separate powers among legislative, executive, and judicial branches.

Political instability

Political instability can be defined in at least three ways. A first approach is to define it as the propensity for regime or government change. A second is to focus on the incidence of political upheaval or violence in a society, such as assassinations, demonstrations, and so forth. A third approach focuses on instability in policies rather than instability in regimes (i.e., the degree to which fundamental policies of, for instance, property rights are subject to frequent changes).

For this definition of the term we use the first approach.

Political competition

Political competition is competition for political power. It is competition for the ability to shape and control the content and direction of public policy and rivalry for the capacity to influence or determine official governmental decisionmaking and action on questions of public policy.

2.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The problem: *To what extent has there been democratic backsliding in Japan and what seems to be the factors enabling democratic backsliding in Japan ?*

General goal: Is to investigate the main factors and actors responsible for the occurrence of democratic backsliding in Japan.

Guided by this research problem, we determine the most important users, benefits and the way of using the research results.

The most important users of this research result can be various academic institutions, social science journal's and the population that is interested in democratic backsliding in general. The benefits of this research may be based on the results of the research, and it will be possible to determine factors for democratic backsliding, we will be able to notice in a timely manner what factors and indicators are emerging when democratic backsliding is happening.

The way in which the data will be used will depend on the obtained research results. If it is found that there is a lack of information, work will be done on improving the information system and similiar.

Other objectives also include to :

Examine the connection between democracy and democratic backsliding.

To examine the connection if there was a democratic backsliding and in which sphere it happened.

Examine if the Government attempted to exert pressure and in what way, to independent institutions in Japan, that could lead to democratic backsliding.

Also, this thesis will contribute and deepen the expertise of democratic backsliding in Japan. The findings and conclusions can create a starting point for more comprehensive analyzes of past, current and future actions of democratic backsliding. This thesis will try to answer the research problem by the following scientific objective, where we will determine the level of knowledge we need to achieve in order to solve the problem.

Of the four stated findings of the scientific objectives, we can immediately throw out a scientific prediction because it will be unnecessary in this research. We will describe the remaining three scientific goals.

2.4.1 Scientific Description

This method will involve the following steps:

1. *The systematic observation and detailed description of democratic backsliding in Japan in a manner that could be replicated*
2. *Based on the literature this phenomenon is going to be used to develop a hypothesis or multiple working hypotheses to explain the phenomenon.*
3. *Additional observations or other types of research will be conducted to test the hypothesis or to determine the likelihood of the competing hypotheses.*
4. *Eventually, an explanatory theory that fits the observations and evidence will be developed.*

Though it can stand alone as a research method systematic description is often a component of other types of scientific research.

2.4.2 Scientific Explanation

To explain the phenomenon of democratic backsliding this research is going to discover the causes of its occurrence, change and disappearance.

However, we have two types of explanatory goals:

- 1) *discovery of connectivity*
- 2) *discovery of cause-and-effect dependence.*

The explanatory goals of the research are going to answer the question of how and why is democratic backsliding happening. Also, the research will try to answer the connectivity between democratic backsliding and its factors that enable democratic backsliding. Coming to the causal mechanism what is the cause of democratic backsliding and the effect of democratic backsliding in Japan. This Causal mechanism will be conducted under controlled conditions.

Also the scientific explanation will expand knowledge about the phenomenon because of several reasons:

- 1. Better introduction and explanation of democratic backsliding*
- 2. Checking the correctness of the initial research orientation*
- 3. Checking the suitability of selected research methods and techniques*
- 4. A warning of the difficulties we may encounter in research.*

2.4.3 Scientific Classification

Through classification goals we will strive to gain a closer understanding of the phenomena and processes behind democratic backsliding.

Therefore, two types of scientific classifications are possible:

- 1) classification with respect to the dependent variable,*
- 2) classification with respect to independent variables.*

2.5 SYSTEM OF HYPOTHESES & VARIABLES

The incoherence in the literature on main explanations of backsliding makes it feasible to include prominent themes of institutional and political strands in the theoretical framework. The empirical results can consequently give more weight to one or a combination of explanations. The framework aims to explain democratic backsliding and its causes in Japan.

From the institutional strand of the literature a *disproportional electoral system* and the ability of the incumbent party to *override democratic checks and balances* on the executive power, can negatively affect accountability and political liberties.

From the political strand of the backsliding literature, the first important factor is the *strength of populist parties*, which can negatively affect competitive elections, accountability and commitment to democracy. Populist parties contribute to political polarization, diminish deliberative politics, and limit popular control of political content (Palonen, 2009). Because of party polarization, populists often take measures to protect and concentrate executive power.

Therefore, deriving from the problem question, we set a general hypothesis:

General hypothesis:

Dominant – Party Systems with strong leaders makes a democracy more vulnerable to democratic backsliding.

Next, I introduce the 5 working hypotheses to measure democratic backsliding, in order to understand whether or not the variables are significant across a constant measure of democracy.

Working hypotheses:

- ***A disproportional electoral system is more vulnerable to democratic backsliding.***
- ***The weaker the institutional checks and balances, the more vulnerable a democracy is to democratic backsliding.***
- ***The stronger presence populist parties have in the legislative assembly the more vulnerable a democracy is to democratic backsliding.***
- ***Populist leaders in government, particularly when exercising government leadership, exert a negative effect on democratic quality, that leads to democratic backsliding.***

- A deep economic crisis increases the likelihood of democratic backsliding.

As these hypotheses elucidate, the following analysis examines these trends in Japan's political system, in order to understand whether the hypotheses are consistent in Japan, or if the data behaves differently.

2.5.1 Variables

Should we expect these patterns to remain significant in Japan's context, or do these patterns behave differently in Japan? Nevertheless, before answering this question the details of variables and operationalization must be carefully analyzed.

General hypothesis:

Dominant – Party Systems with strong leaders makes a democracy more vulnerable to democratic backsliding.

Dependent Variable: Democratic Backsliding

Independent Variable: Dominant – Party Systems

2.6 OPERATIONALIZATION & INDICATORS

The operational measures used in the second part of the empirical study are presented below along the hypotheses they will test.

Disproportionality of the electoral system: The first hypothesis will investigate the proportionality of those electoral systems, by applying the Gallagher Index as an indicator to assess the disproportionality of an electoral system.

Indicators: Characteristics of the electoral system and the Gallagher Index.

Checks and balances: The second hypothesis will test the strength of checks and balances, and three indicators from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) database have been selected to assess the checks and balances (Varieties of Democracy 2018). The first indicator will indicate the strength of the legislature to check on the executive, which is considered a cornerstone in a democratic system (Lijphart 2012), by applying the indicator of “HOG (Head of Government) Removal by Legislature”. The second indicator indicate the independence of the High Court, which is determined to be independent when it can enforce the laws without interference from either the executive or legislature actors (La Porta et al. 2004), by applying the “High Court Independence”. And the third indicator the Government's censorship of Media.

Indicators: Varieties of Democracy data on legislature’s ability to remove the head of government, High Court Independence and Government censorship of Media.

Strength of populist parties in the legislative assembly: To measure the electoral strength of populist parties and whether they have gained political influence, official election results are used. Vote shares of populist parties are assessed at the national level. Election data is gathered from the ParlGov database. It will be the last seven national elections for the House of Representatives that will be used to check the performance of the populist parties, since it will then be consistent with the national elections that used in Hypothesis 1.

Indicators: Performance of populist parties in national elections for the House of Representatives, data will be used from the ParlGov Database.

Populist leaders in Government: Control discussed within the “electoral regime” (vertical accountability) as well as within the “horizontal accountability regime” means control of the government by the people or by institutions. However, control also means control exerted by the government over policies. To function properly, a democratic government must obtain a certain autonomy to govern in an accountable and responsive way.

Indicators: Populism literature is combined with the Party Project Manifesto database.

Economic Crisis: It will test whether there is an economic crisis, as these factors will indicate the impact of an economic crisis and as much data that is available in the set timeframe from 2000 to 2019 will be presented. Data will be used from the World Bank database.

Indicators: Growth rate of GDP, GDP Per Capita, Unemployment

2.6.1 Validity and reliability

Many of the concepts central to the explanations of backsliding can be seen to be disputed. For example, populism and the severity of crisis are not easily or straight forwardly measured. The disagreements surrounding some concepts makes the choices of materials in this thesis important to ensure validity. The measurements have been chosen to be as closely related to the concept they measure as possible. Since this is the criterion for validity (Powner 2015 p.168), the material should ensure that nothing else than the intended indicator is measured. However, this can never be perfect, and ideal materials might not exist. Any validity issues thereby stem from a discrepancy between indicator and measurement, mostly caused by disagreements on the underlying concept or a lack of exact materials. One can also never exclude subjective interpretations, and the reader should therefore be aware of judgments made by the author. The sources chosen are selected because they are widely used and regarded as reliable. Information from these materials should therefore be the same, should this study be replicated. The materials are therefore reliable.

2.7 RESEARCH DESIGN

The design allows the thesis to answer two characteristically different questions and study both the dependent variable of democratic backsliding, and its key explanations, the potential causes of backsliding. The case study methodology was used to examine the presence of democratic backsliding, and a qualitative approach was taken.

2.7.1 Method

In this research thesis the aim is to study democratic backsliding in the case of Japan, with the purpose of attempting to find if there is a common path of democratic backsliding and what are its causes. As a descriptive and causal explanation study, the ambitions of this study are to accurately describe the process of democratic backsliding. In this method part I will discuss the selection of the case. The case of Japan was chosen because it's a relevant case when discussing democratic backsliding, due to Japan's consolidated liberal democracy before the democratic backsliding if it is happening has begun. If democratic backsliding occurred with the same temporal sequencing in these case with widely different characteristics, it would be beneficial for the study of democratic backsliding. The method used in this thesis will also be discussed in the following pages.

2.7.2 Mixed-Methods Approach

The research question is two-fold, inquiring into both the conditions and the mechanisms of democratic backsliding. To answer these two subquestions, this dissertation employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative component tests the conditions of democratic backsliding, whereas the qualitative component studies the mechanisms. I adopt a sequential design in that theories are proposed based on the results of the quantitative analysis, and then tested and further developed in the qualitative analysis. This quantitative-to-qualitative design is useful to propose internally consistent theories and enables a meaningful integration of the two components through the development of “*the qualitative data collection protocols based on results from the quantitative statistical analyses*” (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009: 30) so that the qualitative component can provide further explanation for the findings (Ibid. 142, 153).

Also, Process tracing is the method chosen, and it will ensure that a detailed description of the process of democratic backsliding in this case. Levitsky and Ziblatt's model of democratic backsliding will guide the process tracing, as it will be utilized as a reference point to which processes to include in the research (George, Bennett 2005: 210).

The case will then be compared with the model in a structured and focused comparison. The structured and focused comparison will guide the research. This is accomplished by standardizing the process tracing of each case, as well as keeping the process tracing focused on relevant aspects (Ibid, 67).

2.7.3 Process tracing

Process tracing will be performed on the case, which will give a detailed description of the sequence of events in each case. Process tracing is a method commonly used to find causal mechanisms, as the method delivers detailed descriptions of the sequence of events enabling causal mechanisms to be found. Instead, in this study process tracing will be used to gain a complete understanding and description of the sequence of events in this case. This form of process tracing is known as detailed narrative, and it aims at chronicling an event or process. The process is presented in a linear way, describing the sequences of the process in a way to enhance the understanding of the chain of events (Van Evera 1997, 64). The result is a descriptive and extensive narrative that describes the sequence of events in the process that lead to the event occurring. The aim of a detailed narrative, is to provide this description of the process to further the understanding (George, Bennett 2005, 210).

2.7.4 Material and Dana

In this study a selection secondary sources will be used. V-Dem will be used extensively, to provide a clear picture for the case regarding the development in regard to democratic backsliding. V-Dem provides basic descriptions of the events. Democracy indexes can be tricky to handle since a numerical scale of democracy values does not guarantee that each value lies at the same distance from each other.

2.7.5 Study's Scope, Limitations, and Instrumentation

This research will explore the extent of the rejection of weak commitment to democratic rules, challenges to the legitimacy of political opponents and institutions, toleration of violence, and the willingness to reduce or eliminate civil liberties of opponents as well as their connection to the aforementioned tipping points. As the dependent variable (backsliding) is a dichotomous variable, meaning a state is either a democracy or an autocracy, a logistic regression is the most appropriate measure to analyze the variables. The sample examined will exclude autocratic reversion, as the study aims to measure democratic backsliding in Japan. The study measures whether or not Japans democracy reverts to authoritarianism in the subsequent year starting from the 2000's.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 DEMOCRACY

To define and measure backsliding, it is important to establish a common basis for what democracy entails.

Democracy essentially refers to a form of government with the power ultimately in the hands of the people. In his classic work, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, Schumpeter illustrates the differences between “the classic theory of democracy” and “another theory of democracy.” Therefore, he presents an alternative definition which conceptualizes democracy as a method to realize the people’s will: “*an institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote*” (Schumpeter 1976, 250-83).

Following the Schumpeterian tradition, modern political theorists characterize representative democracy, as opposed to direct democracy, based on two dimensions, political contestation and participation (Dahl, 1971). From this perspective, democracy is a political system in which “*its most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote*” (Huntington 1993, 7).

Defining democracy as a host of institutional arrangements of “government for and by the people” (Lijphart, 1999), political theorists not only provide the criteria that differentiate a democratic system from a non-democratic one, but also imply how importantly institutional arrangements are associated with the substance of political systems.

These values are mainly reflected in democratic elections. Democratic institutions that promote fair representation, promote equal opportunities for competing candidates in democratic elections, and advocate political participation are therefore seen as good designs of democracy. However, democracy is about elections, but not just about elections. From a more simplified perspective, however, three groups of democracy theories can be identified:

the minimalist

middle-ground

and maximizing theories.

The Minimalist Model

Minimalists like the influential economist and democracy theorist Joseph A. Schumpeter assume that free, equitable and secret elections are not only the core of democracy, but also democracy itself. According to Schumpeter's market-like democracy model, political entrepreneurs and parties can make their own offer of programmatic goods that are sought, inspected, selected, or rejected by voters.

Minimalists, who like to see themselves as realists, thus deliberately reduce the essence of democracy to “vertical accountability” between the ruled and the rulers (Przeworski 2007, 475). Minimalist concepts are unsuitable for analyzing crises in mature democracies. The selection of the government alone in the competition does not show, or only very late, whether a democracy is in crisis, unless the election analysis takes into account the organization and vitality of the parties and examines whether the parties represent the interests of the voters in parliament and in the Government essentially represent what citizens' trust in the core institutions of democracy, such as the rule of law, protects civil and political rights.

The Midrange Model

To the uncontested core of democracy, namely, free, general, equal, and fair elections, they add the rule of law and horizontal checks and balances (O'Donnell 1998). Only free elections embedded in guaranteed human, fundamental, and civil rights, the democratically legitimated genesis of norms binding on the whole of society, and the interlocking of and mutual constraints on the executive, legislature, and judiciary make formally democratic elections also effectively democratic (Beetham 1994, 30). Proponents of a democratic model based on the rule of law that focuses on procedures postulate the intrinsic “equiprimordiality” of civil protection rights and political participation rights. For them, the rule of law is not a boundary condition of democracy, but one of its key elements. What the minimalist and middle concepts of democracy have in common is the restriction to norms, principles and procedures on which the democratic decision-making process is based.

The Maximalist Model

When defining democracy, maximalists therefore include the output dimension as a systemic achievement. This heading includes collective goods such as internal and external security, economic well-being, welfare state guarantees and fairness, which are, however, defined in the distribution of basic goods, income, social security and life opportunities.

Nonetheless, the socio-economic performance in a democracy determines its susceptibility to crisis and its quality. If it is unable to solve key problems and if it does not deliver what citizens expect, its production legitimacy will decline and the stability of the system will be at risk. And even if one prefers not to include socio-economic inequality issues in the definition of democracy, the actual development of democracies, their stability and quality cannot be understood without this important limiting condition

Growing socio-economic inequality can be seen as an early warning sign of an impending crisis in democracy, as it threatens key principles of democracy such as equal opportunities for participation and representation and threatens to undermine citizens' trust in the legitimacy of democracy. The answer to the question of whether democracy is in crisis therefore depends heavily on the chosen concept of democracy.

There are basically two components of a democracy: the institutional component and the citizen component. This work not only focuses solely on the extent to which citizens participate in free and fair elections, but also takes into account the strength of representative institutions such as political parties, lawmakers, institutions that uphold civil liberties and the rule of law, including independent judicial authorities, media freedom and Constitution.

Since the result of relapse is an illiberal or diminished form of democracy, not autocracy, working on the quality and gradation of democracy instead of distinguishing between democracies and autocracies based on minimalist procedural definitions of democracy is a relevant starting point for conception to slide back .

Defined as such, the appropriate level of relapse that I propose will involve the erosion or dismantling of a number of (liberal) democratic institutions, but not the complete dismantling of those characteristics that distinguish democracies from autocracies: mass participation in free and fair elections.

Minimum conditions of democracy:

(1) **Multi-party competition in decision-making and regular elections** - is now seen as the most important element of democracy. Under a democratic regime, multi-party competition should be well institutionalized so that all people, not just ordinary citizens but also rulers and elites in the country, expect decision-making and elections to be based on multi-party competition. This condition is the first minimum requirement for a democracy.

(2) **Fair competition (and rule of law)** - This condition requires the rule of law so that arbitrary decisions by those in authority are subject to institutional restrictions. If the dominant groups can place visible and / or obvious restrictions on competitors, the competition cannot be considered fair. Fair competition is another minimum requirement for democracy. However, it requires careful attention to the required level of fairness, as many authoritarian governments have indeed institutionalized multi-party competition in decision-making and regular elections. The first condition for minimal fairness is that opposition parties must really be opposition parties and be able to oppose the ruling party. The second condition for minimal fairness is that all parties must obey the rules and laws.

(3) **Representing people** - Political parties and political elites must represent their people. This is an important requirement for a decent democracy. Fair and frequent elections cannot guarantee that these elected officials will be representative for two main reasons. First, many elected politicians work for their wealthy sponsors rather than the general public. Second, citizens often fail to find a favorite candidate in elections and therefore choose a candidate they least like. This is particularly the case when multi-party competition is associated with regionalism.

(4) **Citizens' Participation in Politics** - By political participation, I mean much more than just the right to vote, because so many authoritarian electoral regimes have institutionalized universal suffrage for minors only. Citizens have the right to participate in politics if the regime guarantees their access to information, freedom of thought and speech, freedom of association and many other channels through which they can participate in politics. However, these are not fully realized even in the most developed democracies.

3.1.1 Two Strands of Democracy:

Electoral Democracy

Schumpeter argues that “the role of the people is to produce a government”. Thus, democracy for Schumpeter is how the political leaders of a state are elected in competitive elections by the electorate (Schumpeter 1997, 269). Fairness and freedom of elections are considered by him and are important but not essential. However, choices range between "idealistic" and authoritarian, and to be considered democratic they have to be in the "idealistic" range. Similarly, he notes that there is an obvious link between democracy and freedoms, in order to have truly free and fair elections, certain individual freedoms of expression and choice are required.

The electoral law contains all the important provisions that regulate the electoral process. All of these issues are of course fundamental to regulating the democratic process of an election. Each electoral system is the product of various circumstances: the country's political history, the will / ability of the dominant elite to change the rules for their own benefit. Strictly speaking, the electoral system can be defined as the set of laws which regulate the transformation of preferences into votes and of the votes into seats (Rae, 1971; Blais, 1988). The law of electoral democracy encompasses the law and institutions governing representative elections (at whatever level), political parties, political finance and referendums.

If democracy is defined as regular, free and fair elections, the rhetorical success of this statement is supported by some relatively mundane facts: In many countries the parties have been the main actors in choosing the rules that make up electoral democracy. There is thus a symbiotic relationship between the rules of the campaign and the players in this competition, each of which affects the survival of the other. The work of Boix (1999) and especially Colomer (2004) on the electoral arena suggests that the process of parties preserving or altering rules and rules favoring or harming parties can settle into either of two equilibria:

- (1) two large parties competing under highly disproportional rules or
- (2) many smaller parties competing under highly proportional rules.

Liberal Democracy

The "liberal" component in liberal democracy is derived from liberalism, a pre-democratic political ideology that claims that there should be as much individual freedom in any society as is compatible with the freedom of others. More formally, liberal democracy is a system of representative government with majority rule in which some individual rights are nonetheless protected from state interference and cannot even be restricted by an electoral majority. Larry Diamond developed a ten-point criterion for defining democracies. The definition of diamonds is similar to Dahl's in that it aims to define liberal democracy as opposed to Schumpeter's minimalist and electoral definition.

Individual freedom of belief, opinion, discussion, speech, publication, broadcast, assembly, demonstration, petition, and internet 2. *Freedom of ethnic, religious, racial, and other minority groups (and excluded majority groups) to practice their religion and culture and to participate equally in political and social life* 3. *The right of all adult citizens to vote and to run for office* 4. *Genuine openness and competition in the electoral arena, enabling any group that adheres to constitutional principles to form a party and contest for office* 5. *Legal equality of all citizens under a rule of law, in which the laws are clear, publicly known, universal, stable and non-retroactive.* 6. *An independent judiciary to neutrally and consistently apply the law and protect individual and group rights* 7. *Thus, due process of law and freedom of individuals from torture, terror, and unjustified detention, exile or interference in their personal lives by the state or nonstate actors.* 8. *Institutional checks on the power of elected officials, by an independent legislature, court system and other autonomous agencies* 9. *Real pluralism in sources of information and forms of organization independent of the state, and thus a vibrant civil society* 10. *Control over the military and state security apparatus by civilians who are ultimately accountable to the people through elections* (Diamond 2008, 22). He also includes criteria of the judiciary and makes it more explicit in how the democratic state is governed, with independent judiciaries and check and balances (Diamond 2008, 22). The benefits of Diamond's definition, compared to Schumpeter's is its concreteness. Diamond's criteria are extensive, covering the many different aspects of liberal democracy.

Democratic backsliding is mostly about reversing the liberal aspects of democracy and not necessarily about choice. If a definition of electoral democracy is used, it is of little use in measuring relapse from liberal democracy. A concept of measuring liberal democracies needs to be used to measure democratic relapse.

Schedler presents the different notions of democracy in an article in the Journal of Democracy under five different headings:

Preventing democratic breakdown,

preventing democratic erosion,

completing democracy,

deepening democracy

and organizing democracy (Schedler; 1998).

Wolfgang Merkel (Merkel; 1996, 1999) has developed an encompassing concept of consolidation which is based on the concept of Stepan and Linz and does not include only three but four different dimensions or levels of analysis, one macro-level, two intermediate levels and one micro-level.

1. Institutional Consolidation: Unlike Linz and Stepan Merkel uses this term for the central constitutional and political institutions like the head of state, parliament, government, judiciary and electoral system. With their norms and guidelines these institutions influence the next levels.

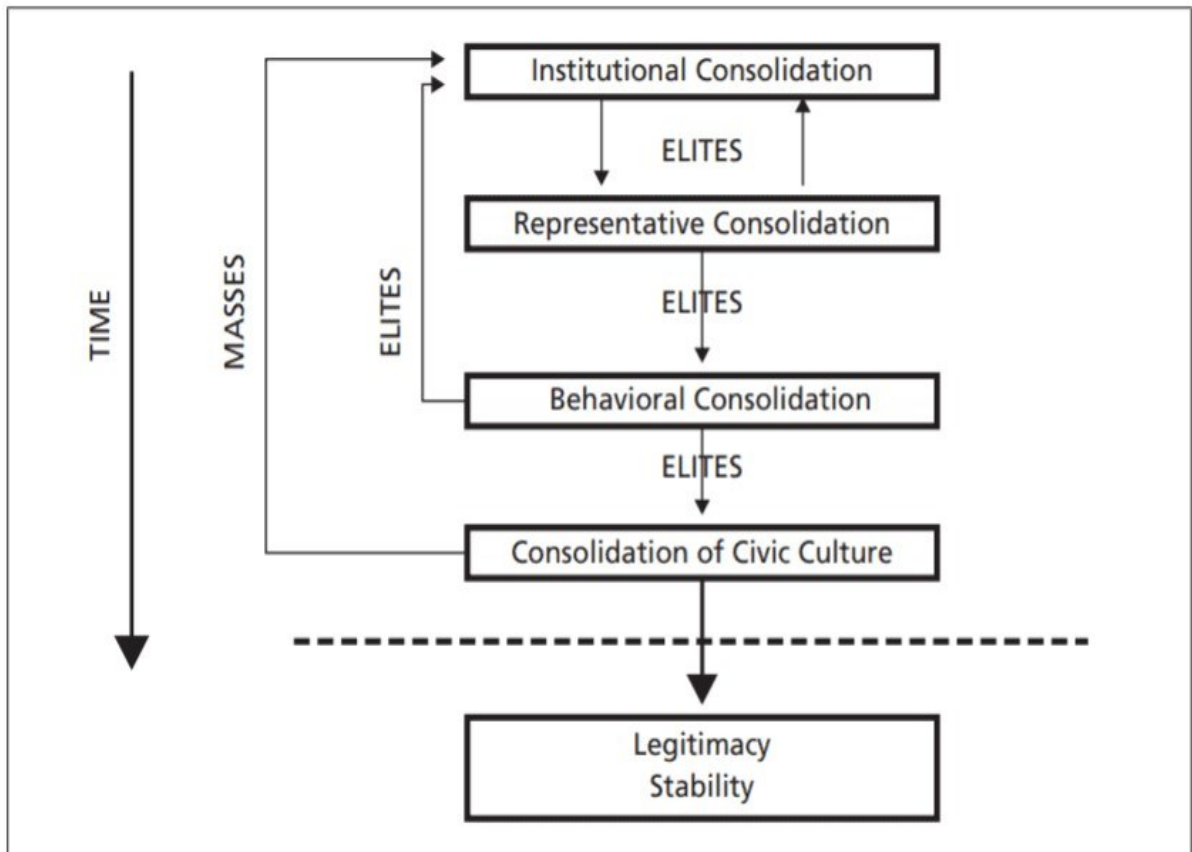
2. Representative Consolidation: This intermediate level refers to the parties and interest organizations. This level and the first level are decisive for the third level.

3. Behavioral Consolidation: powerful actors like the military, enterpriser, radical movements try not to get through their interests outside or against the democratically legitimized institutions and actors.

4. Civic Culture or Political Culture, which is the basis of democracy. The consolidation of this level can take generations. Only if the four levels are consolidated, one can speak of a consolidated democracy which is resistant to crises (Merkel; 1996: 38-39; 1999: 145).

Figure 3 : Multilevel Model of Democratic Consolidation

Figure 1:
Multilevel Model of Democratic Consolidation



Source: Merkel, Wolfgang (1999)

3.1.3 Defective Democracies

Types of Defective Democracy

We distinguish between four types of defective democracies:

exclusive democracy,

domain democracy,

illiberal democracy,

and delegative democracy

The only focus of this theoretical framework will be on illiberal democracy.

In intact democracies, legitimate representatives are bound by constitutional principles. In an illiberal democracy with its incomplete and damaged constitutional state, the executive and legislative control of the state is limited by the judiciary. In addition, constitutional norms have little binding effect on government action and individual civil rights are either partially suspended or not yet established. In illiberal democracies, the rule of law is damaged, which affects the very core of the liberal self-image. To the equal freedom of all individuals. This is the most common type of “defective democracy” and it is common around the world.

The more “informal” authoritarian heritage (e.g. clientelism, patrimonialism, corruption) influences the interaction patterns between elites and the population as a whole, the more difficult it is to validate and standardize the new “formal” institutions. Informal institutions threaten to crack the functional code of formal, democratically legitimized institutions, to deform them and to displace them

A democracy but is more authoritarian due to its “systematic destruction of checks and balances in the government.” (Agh, 2016).

Democracy is based on a set of rules that opposition parties and other actors join. Compliance with these accepted rules requires compromise and collaboration. However, when the parties cannot do this, polarization manifests and creates distrust. Erosion is therefore based on the inability of executives to agree to and obey accepted rules, which may lead them to take action that deviates from the convention.

Democracies collapse either rapidly typically as a result of a coup or more slowly as a result of internal breakdown and the decay of constitutional safeguards that had ensured mechanisms of accountability (Erdmann and Kneuer,). The process that leads to democratic collapse is known as democratic erosion, and there are two modal paths to erosion, reversion (authoritarianism) or retrogression (constitutional decay). Linz and Stepan identify legitimacy, efficacy, and effectiveness as critical elements of democracy; when members of a democracy weaken these elements, democratic erosion begins. Linz and Stepan's study confirms the importance of checks and balances and accountability within the governance structure, which strengthen legitimacy, and notes that when leaders take actions to erode these elements of democracy, retrogression is underway. Leaders have taken actions such as rejecting or weakening the commitment to democratic rules, challenging the legitimacy of political opponents and institutions, tolerating violence, and showing a willingness to reduce or eliminate opponents' civil liberties.

3.1.4 Problems of Democracy

In 1975 a nongovernmental, international think tank, 'The Trilateral Commission,' published a report called *The Crisis of Democracy* in which it claimed that democracy in North America, Japan, and Western Europe had lost the ability to pursue common goals due to several 'dysfunctions' caused by democracy itself (Crozier et al. 1975).

This problem has its source, in democracy: „*democratic egalitarianism has delegitimized authority, most prominently in such institutions as 'the family, the church, the school, and the army. Presumably, institutionalized liberalism and comprehensive constitutional checks maintain the democratic equilibrium and protect against endogenous threats, while a robust civil society reinforces itself'*“ (Przeworski, 2006). Second, if democracies were at risk, the threat is believed to be an exogenous shock that can turn the liberal regime on its head. These assumptions prescribe the institutionalization of the liberal “trinity” - free elections, constitutional controls and an independent judiciary - and trust that these benchmarks, if properly institutionalized, can adequately protect democracy without further intervention.

Authoritarians have a better understanding of how to navigate electoral politics to advance their personal goals and pursuit of power. We may also witness a self-fulfilling prophecy in which the results of the newest democracies undermine liberal institutions. While this does not specifically apply to democratic relapse, Rodrik links globalization and related populism with authoritarianism. Even if democratic relapse is rooted in disorganized feelings, if those feelings persist, ideology manifests itself. We are concerned with the "democratic backsliding", which we define as the corrosion and nuanced weakening of the various "building blocks" of democracy, as opposed to a complete and unambiguous regression of the regime from democracy to authoritarianism - a process that is described as "democratic" it referred to regression ", "democratic deconsolidation" and "democratic collapse".

Although less obvious, we believe that democratic relapse poses a greater threat to consolidated democracies, where authoritarian forces have to subtly grapple with a pre-existing democratic tradition. The aim is to identify some threats and proponents of consolidated democracy by examining the institutional and political institutions that are subject to democratic relapse and countries that are showing resilience. Hopefully these findings will help future researchers develop a broader theory of democratic relapse, particularly in advanced consolidated democracies.

These theories usually focus on the factors that contribute to either democratic consolidation or autocratic reversal, or a complete reversal from democracy to autocracy. The democratic relapse between states is not taken into account.

Domestic political institutional variables are theorized to influence regime outcomes in democracies. These domestic political institutions include the rule of law (Bugaric, 2015), an independent judiciary (Issacharoff, 2015; Gibler and Randazzo, 2011), state capacity (Fortin, 2012), civil society (Blokker, 2013; Putnam, 1993), characteristics of the previous regime, and founding elections (Morlino, 2011).

In addition, parliamentary political systems are found to lead to more stable forms of democracy when compared to presidential systems (Linz, 1990; Stepan and Skach, 1993).

In addition, institutions that effectively limit the power of the executive have been identified as particularly important for determining democratic success. Political parties are an important source of control over executive power. These less developed party systems are characterized by electoral volatility, high levels of personalism, and parties that are both less rooted in society and less legitimized.

Unconsolidated party systems are argued to harm both the quality of democracy and also the prospects for democratic consolidation (Mainwaring, 1998), thereby making democratic backsliding a more likely outcome (Svolik, 2008).

Another, primarily domestic, proposed cause of weakly institutionalized party systems is the presence of parties that lack strong organizations. Tavits argues; „*parties that invest in strong party organizations which entails cultivating large memberships, developing extensive networks at the local level are more likely to survive elections and behave cohesively in parliament*“ (Tavits, 2013). However, these theories focus primarily on explaining democratic collapse or the complete reversal of autocracy, but say less about the causes of more subtle erosions of democracy such as regression.

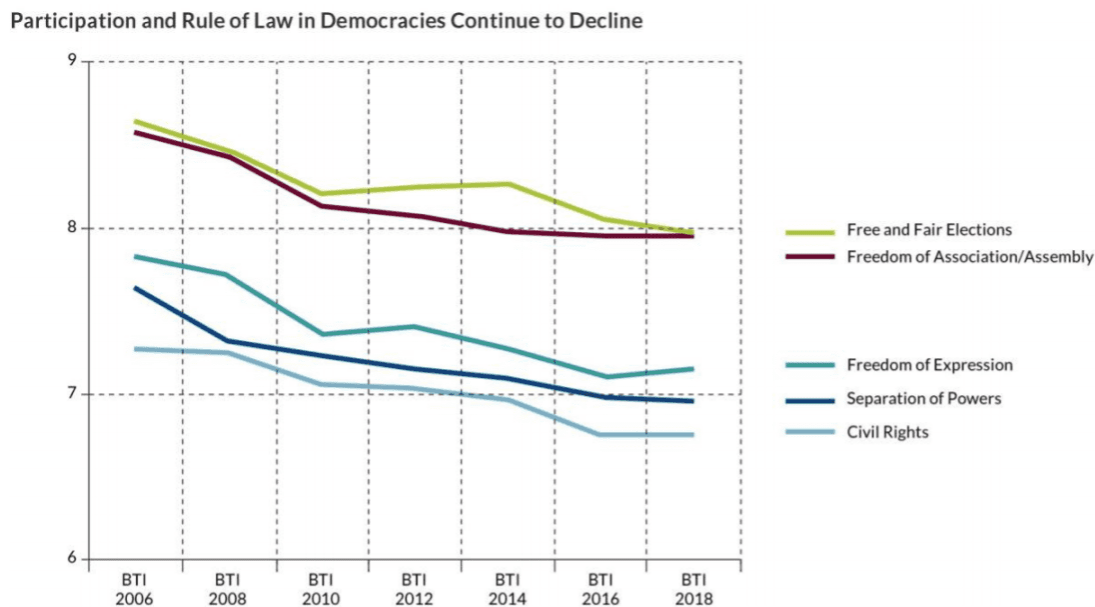
In view of the increasing polarization of societies and the lower level of commitment to democratic norms and processes, there is, in addition to the institutional aspect, a discursive dimension that weighs on the “withdrawal of democracy”. However, anti-democratic positions prove to be most effective when they focus on perceived or actual deficits in the functionality or performance of liberal democracies.

All currents of populism are characterized by the demand for more equal opportunities and the mantra “society before individuals”. By conception of the population as homogeneous, populism is necessarily anti-pluralistic and therefore, as the political scientist Jan-Werner Müller emphasizes, also anti-democratic.

„*This is because in democracies, the will of the people is not discernable a priori, but is instead the product of pluralist decision-making processes*“ (Muller, 2016). As numerous BTI country reports show, the anti-democratic, illiberal character of populists becomes clear when they gain political power. They see their election victory not only as a change of government, but also as a regime change as a revolution at the ballot box. They therefore interpret their electoral mandate as a mandatory mandate to thoroughly dismantle the political system that is supposedly still controlled by the old political elites. Although the individual steps can vary in order and intensity, there is a typical chronology in which populist democratic institutions dismantle. That chronology generally begins with the weakening of the regulators who should hold the government accountable. Since the populist executive is in most cases supported by a clear parliamentary majority and therefore remains relatively uncontrolled by the legislature, the judiciary is generally the first target. The second step is usually an attack on media freedom. With the aim of dominating the discourse and minimizing criticism, a restrictive media law is

passed and closed or bought up by government-related entrepreneurs. Social media channels and online platforms are exposed to cyber attacks or simply banned and critical journalists are threatened. The third step is to try to influence civil society by using massive threats that limit foreign assistance or by targeting organizations close to the government. The fourth step is manipulating the voting system. A number of approaches are used strategically to secure the electoral victory of the ruling party and significantly reduce the power of the opposition. These include reshaping constituency boundaries, changing electoral laws in relation to the distribution of seats or election funding, restructuring the electoral authorities, weakening the capabilities of the opposition by restricting media access, and passing anti-terrorism laws. Finally, the fifth step is to prevent the likely strengthening of the opposition by amending the constitution. Populist governments often try to enshrine the “will of the people” in the constitution. This strategy of concentrating and securing power is generally communicated openly and justified in a normative manner. By weakening or eliminating all regulatory agencies, this approach also makes it more difficult to prosecute abuse of authority and to achieve transparency and accountability.

Figure 4: Pattern of Democratic Decline



Source: Author's Calculations

Crises related to the legitimacy and performance of liberal democracies play into the hands of populists and autocrats around the world. The quality of democracy is being undermined around the world, particularly in terms of political participation and the rule of law.

Commitment to democratic institutions and support for democracy are some of the consolidation indicators that have deteriorated the most in recent years. The deficits in the functionality and performance of democracies are one reason for this development. Another reason is the influence of anti-democratic critics of populist and authoritarian origins. Populists in power are trying to crucially undermine the regulators that limit their power. They first weaken the rule of law and then move on to the participatory elements. However, their successes in government do not compare well with their anti-elitist promises. Many populist leaders are increasingly dedicated to maintaining power and developing new clientelist structures, as they had previously promised to abolish.

Nominally democratic institutions such as parties, lawmakers, the judiciary and elections in non-democratic environments must be analyzed from the point of view that they can possibly act democratically and that it is more the authoritarian measures and methods that are used that prevent them from fulfilling their potential. Other authors have pointed out that while regimes with nominally democratic institutions such as competitive elections are more likely to face protests and break down; they are not necessarily more likely to democratize (Knutsen and Nygård 2015).

If elections are understood as a framework for examining the competition between incumbent and opposition, then freedom and fairness of elections become essential. This could be because the fairness of the elections is a little more ambiguous and difficult to define than freedom. According to most classic procedural definitions, elections are not competitive unless they provide citizens and candidates relatively equal opportunities to contest for votes through fair competition (Skaaning and Møller 2013: 32–33).

Stating that an election must be “competitive” or “free and fair” does not really answer the question of how electoral competition becomes competitive or free and fair and why it is so. Morgenbesser (2014: 33) argues that *„the presence of a sufficiently fair electoral system allows for free and fair elections, and that this in turn is what separates a democratic from a non-democratic contest.“* While it is not entirely clear why the electoral system is key to electoral justice, it does show the importance of separating cause and outcome when it comes to electoral justice. In other words, for democracy to exist, elections must at least be challengeable and preferably competitive.

Even with the adoption of democratic elections, in short, *„Asian political systems are not adopting the rest of the liberal-democratic baggage shaped and justified by the value and vote*

buying and intimidation seem to have increased in the latest local elections“ (Bellows, 1994: 120) and it goes without saying that most Asians do not feel a burning need to free individuals.

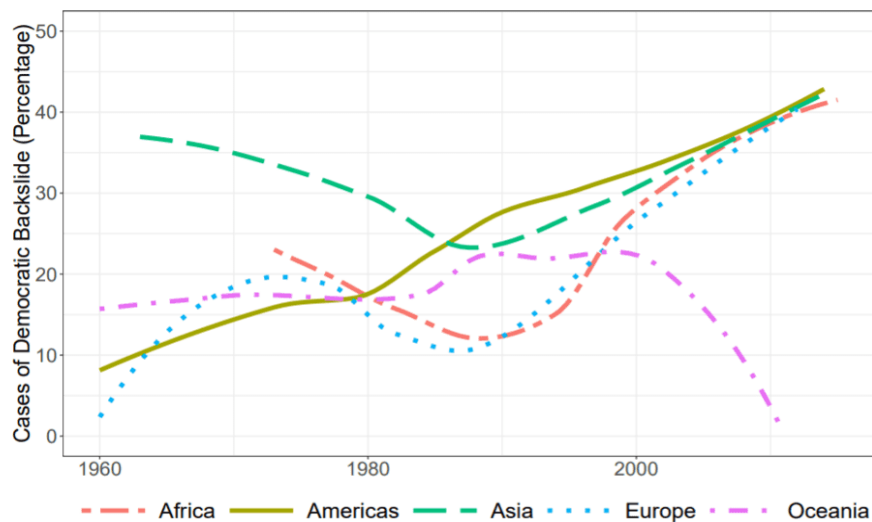
"Western" political practices such as competitive elections can be selectively adopted without the full range of liberal democratic practices and institutions and, if adopted, can be used for a number of unique illiberal purposes.

3.2 DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING

3.2.1 Introduction

„The history of modern democracy appears to consist of episodes in which democratic transitions cluster together, followed by clusters of democratic breakdowns. Academic priorities follow these trends, and thus we can identify literatures on democratic transitions, democratic breakdowns, democratic consolidation, and authoritarian resilience. Academic interest in incremental forms of backsliding, however, is quite new, and no crystallized, coherent literature evaluates rival hypotheses about a relatively fixed set of cases. Despite becoming an increasingly common phenomenon over time, studies of democratic backsliding, and particularly of its causes, remain inchoate” (Waldner and Lust, 2018). The few studies of democratic backsliding that exist specifically tend to focus primarily on the causes of this regime outcome at the national level. Although individual actors, institutional and structural domestic factors are undoubtedly important causes of setbacks.

Figure 5: Cases of Democratic Backslides in Time



Source: Author

Too often, competitive elections are undermined, citizens lose their right to mobilize or voice their demands, and governments become less accountable. Changes are being made to formal political institutions and informal political practices that significantly reduce citizens' ability to make enforceable claims against government. While these changes do not lead to the breakdown of democratic regimes, setbacks can occur in both democratic and authoritarian regimes, but they undermine citizens' rights and commitment to the state.

Only a democratic breakdown illuminates the processes of democratic relapse and only deals with cases where relapse has resulted in a switch from democracy to autocracy.

In short, we know very little about democratic relapse. In this thesis, the current state of knowledge on political change is assessed using a "theory of change" lens, with particular attention being paid to the processes of democratic relapse. The theory of change can best be understood as “describing the logical causal links between multiple conditions or intermediate outcomes that are necessary to achieve a long-term goal.

3.2.2 Theories of Democratic Backsliding

In the first part we will examine and discuss the distinction between structural theories and agent-based theories, supply-side and demand-side, institutional and systemic causes. In the second part of the theories of democratic relapse, we will take a closer look at the six families of theories.

1. Structural vs. agent theories - A structural factor can affect an outcome in two ways. First, it can limit or make some decisions impossible and therefore make some results highly unlikely. Second, it can motivate and make some decisions, and therefore some outcomes, more likely. Agent theories burden possible decisions that are made by political actors under relatively unrestricted conditions, explanatory. In these reports, the relevant actors could just as easily have made very different decisions with major consequences for democratic transitions. Understanding the distinction between structural and agent causal factors is important in properly designing causal interventions. Generally, acting factors are short-term while structural factors are long-term, but this is not always the case.

2. Supply-side and demand-side causes - The supply side refers to causes that act directly on the political leadership that “delivers” political reforms, while the demand side refers to causes that lead citizens to demand political reforms.

3. Institutional versus systemic causes - Institutional interventions directly shape political institutions, while systemic interventions take place via “background factors” such as the economy or the cultural system. These three distinctions do not exhaust the way we can describe causal interventions, but they are most useful in summarizing the lessons of social science theories.

THE CURRENT SIX THEORY FAMILIES:

(1) political leaders,

(2) political culture,

(3) political institutions,

(4) political economy,

(5) social structure and political coalitions,

and (6) international factors.

Political leaders

Theories of political leadership exemplify agent theories. To explain the political results, these theories rely on an aspect of political leadership that is not itself dependent on other causes. In other words, the actions of political leaders are relatively devoid of anything other than the strategies and behavior of other political leaders. We could ascribe an unlimited choice to one of the agent's enduring personal attribute: her temperament, her intellect, or some other personal disposition. We can ascribe unlimited choices to certain strategic or tactical decisions. Or we attribute the unrestricted choice to interactions between two or more agents. By emphasizing freedom of choice, leadership theories imply short-term causal interventions that target the supply side.

Political institutions

We can imagine democratic political institutions with three broad modes of action.

First, different democratic institutions can affect the level of vertical accountability and representativity so that governments are more responsive to citizens and citizens see their government as a legitimate source of authority, reducing the incentive to support anti-democratic movements.

Second, various democratic institutions can affect the level of horizontal accountability and prevent members of government from becoming increasingly autocratic and undermining democracy from within.

Third, various democratic institutions can influence the level of government effectiveness and performance, avoiding political stalemates and crises that can be the excuse or the cause of anti-democratic action.

We can, therefore, hypothesize that even if we recognize that citizens and government agencies may share the executive branch's preference for less democratic accountability, we can hypothesize that initial institutional configurations that undermine these three characteristics of accountability and effectiveness are more likely to be democratic relapse. Institutions are not simply exogenous instruments that put pressure on political actors. They are also objects of manipulation by strategic actors precisely because they could make favorable outcomes more likely. Faced with this concern about endogenous institutions, we are initially skeptical of the validity of two types of institutional arguments: those that attribute democratic stability to electoral institutions and those that attribute them to parliamentary systems of executive-legislative relations. Reynolds (2011) contends that *„relative to majoritarian political institutions, power-sharing systems based on proportional representation create incentives to accommodate others and thus deter democratic breakdown.“* Personal connections to powerful actors are more important than impersonal rules, which in principle apply to everyone equally. Institutional interventions are usually short-term and supply-side oriented. These interventions change the range of incentives and constraints available to political leaders, and therefore their effects should be almost immediate, direct through citizen action, and by definition institutional. Finally, we can gain insights from studies that combine political stability with features of the party system. The existing literature offers four points.

First, *„party-system fractionalization, especially in interaction with presidential systems, undermines democratic stability“* (Mainwaring 1999, Powell 1982).

Second, *„dominant-party systems may be especially prone to noncompetitiveness that facilitates executive degradation of democracy“* (LeBas 2011, Riedl 2014).

Third, *„democratic stability may be threatened by unbalanced party systems in which one party has much greater capacity to mobilize electors than its rival has; especially when parties are divided along ideological grounds, the subsequent threat of hegemony may lead actors to undermine democracy“* (Lust & Waldner 2016).

Finally, *„the short-term collapse of the electoral viability of the traditional party system may be particularly conducive to the subversion of democracy by executive fiat“* (Seawright 2012).

We cannot yet say whether dysfunctional properties of party systems are causes of backsliding or symptoms of the vulnerability to backsliding. However, party-system characteristics are probably less vulnerable to the influence of strategic actors.

Political Economy

Political economy is the study of the mutual relationship between the organization and exercise of power on the one hand and the production and exchange of consumer goods and services on the other. Government structures and activities can influence economic structure and activities in a variety of ways, from setting up courts to allow private property and enforceable contracts to setting tax rates that affect savings and spending rates. By and large, we can think of these economic factors in three ways that affect the structure of government. First, we can think of governments as “revenue maximizers” who shape government structures and policies to gain access to higher tax revenues. Second, we can consider how changes in income levels, in the short or long term, affect citizens' preferences towards different types of governance and their ability to act collectively for their preferences. Third, we can consider how economic factors create divisions and conflicts between different groups of citizens. The effects of an intervention on a politico-economic factor can have a direct impact on the political leadership (supply side) or be mediated by the citizens (demand side). All politico-economic interventions are systemic by definition. A recent study of new democracies finds that high rates of growth are associated with lower risks of authoritarian reversion, while high rates of inflation substantially increase the risks of democratic breakdown (Kapstein & Converse 2008).

3.2.3 Conceptualizing Democratic Backsliding

Backsliding leads to a deterioration in the qualities associated with democratic governance within a regime. It is a decline in the quality of democracy when it occurs within democratic regimes, or in the democratic quality of governance in autocracies. An analysis of the changes in the quality of democracy therefore not only requires the use of finely tuned "measures" or instruments, but also primarily requires a refined conceptualization of democracy. "Scientists agree that democracy is a multidimensional concept, although they differ in how they operationalize it. Minimalists focus solely on elections, while those who take a maximalist view require highly informed citizens to think about it almost constantly in order to develop policies that maximize social, economic and cultural equality. We argue that regression can best be understood as changing a combination of competitive electoral processes, civil and political freedoms, and accountability.

Democratic procedures should embody three core principles:

- 1) Uncertainty, such that office holders and the outcomes they pursue cannot be known for certain ex ante;*
- 2) Impermanence, such that governments have a limited duration; and*
- 3) Constraint, such that constitutional limits are imposed on the obligations and sanctions a government can impose on citizens.*

In order to make these principles operationally manifest, legislative and executive offices must be staffed through free and fair elections, in which multiple parties compete with established corporations and use the power of the state to deter contradictions. The procedural element requires not only that we investigate the conduct of elections, but also that we form a broader network to assess the existence of independent electoral bodies overseeing the enforcement of electoral laws in order to maintain electoral integrity. Participation must go hand in hand with competition: the widespread right to vote and run for office is a special feature of democracy. Civil and political freedoms thus form the second part of the conceptualization. Concerns about civil and political freedoms lead us to review laws regulating civil society associations, the media, freedom of assembly and affiliated venues. It also requires evaluating the implementation of such laws, including the ability of the judiciary, legislature and others to protect these rights.

Accountability forms the third part of our conceptual triad. While most scholars of democratic relapse emphasize campaigning and freedoms, they point to stolen elections, restrictions on political parties, associations, and language.

Indeed, Tilly (2003, p38) highlights accountability in his discussion of “de-democratization,” which he defines as the reversal of a population’s “binding, protected, relatively equal claims on a government’s agents, activities, and resources.” For him, backsliding occurs when political participation is narrowed, equal access is withdrawn, collective control over the government’s resources and activities is reduced, and its arbitrary power increases”. Similarly, Kapstein and Converse (2008, pp57-58) note that “*One of the first things that would-be authoritarian leaders try to do is roll back existing constitutional constraints,*” thereby limiting accountability.

Accountability has two parts: "accountability" and "punishment".

Accountability refers to the duty of officials to provide information about their activities and to justify them; Offer facts and explanations. Punishment refers to the ability to impose negative sanctions on public officials who violate certain rules of conduct.

In addition, there are two basic types of accountability.

Horizontal accountability is the classic concept of checks and balances, in which independent government agencies hold each other accountable.

Vertical accountability, on the other hand, is exercised by non-state actors (citizens, civil associations, media) to state actors.

Backsliding should be understood as a change that negatively impacts competitive choices, freedoms and accountability. There are theoretical reasons to believe that the three areas are closely related, and it is difficult to imagine significant changes in one area that do not result in changes in the other. For example, undermining democratic elections removes a basis of vertical accountability and is also likely to be associated with limited rights. It is also difficult to see how competitive elections and the transparency necessary for effective surveillance and thus accountability are maintained in the face of limited civil and political rights.

Democratic relapse can be understood as a change that affects several dimensions of democratic quality: election campaigning, freedoms and accountability. Therefore, in order to determine whether a country is relapsing, we need to examine changes in institutions and

procedures in a number of sectors. The procedural dimension of democracy requires that we pay special attention to campaigning (e.g. the laws governing the ability of parties to organize and participate in elections, the existence of independent electoral bodies). Concerns about horizontal and vertical accountability urge us to take into account the strength and independence of the judiciary and legislature, as well as the civilian constraints of the armed forces. A careful definition of relapse will help avoid over-involvement in cases of political change and crises that do not significantly affect the democratic properties of regimes.

There are a variety of policies and political outcomes that might have anti-democratic overtones, but which should not be viewed as a democratic relapse. Dramatic political crises are also alarming and may even require international intervention, but they are not necessarily a democratic relapse.

Focusing on the interrelated changes in elections, freedoms and accountability not only helps us avoid false positives, but also enables us to spot similar processes despite very different conditions. Indeed, understanding democratic relapse as a decrease in competitive elections, freedoms and accountability also helps us to avoid inappropriately confining relapse to cases where there is only democratic breakdown or which conflicts with regime change.

Although some scholars (Kapstein & Converse 2008) use the term “democratic backsliding” almost exclusively as a synonym for reversion to authoritarianism, we agree with Aleman & Yang’s (2011) criticisms of transition-based categorizations that do not allow for incremental regime changes.

As Amel Ahmed (2014, p2) has noted, the concept of backsliding, as it is conventionally used, implies a “theoretical move back on an imagined linear trajectory”; that is, it suggests that a backsliding episode makes it harder for a country that backslides at present to attain democracy in the next period.

First, both autocratic and democratic regimes have inclusive and exclusive policies that vary over time. That is, all regimes are inclusive to some extent, granting at least some civil and political freedoms to at least some populations, and they are all exclusive to some extent, which limits those freedoms. Second, seemingly exclusive measures can further advance democratization and enable the stability of the regime needed for further strengthening or, at other times, the provision of priorities or "mobilization of narratives" around which political forces will gather and upon urge more democratic action.

Ahmed's claims are important because they help meet our expectations. We must be open to the possibility that obvious setbacks in democratic practices and institutions can ultimately provide context or catalysts for further democratization. Slippage can also vary in length, with some occurring from rapid and decisive changes and others from more gradual creep.

Setbacks occur through a series of discreet changes in rules and informal procedures that affect elections, rights and accountability. These take place over time, separated by months or even years. It can be difficult to determine where the relapse started. Indeed, citizens and observers often debate whether a country is falling behind. Ultimately, there is much work to be done to develop a full understanding of relapse and the conditions that encourage it. Scientists and practitioners must be able to define and identify regression independently of the regime change. And they need to consider how the nature of the relapse (e.g. different underlying coalitions, sequences of changes) will affect the results. These are first steps in developing a better understanding of the forces that drive relapse and the possible mechanisms by which it can be frustrated. Ultimately, this can help improve the lives of citizens regardless of the relationship between relapse and regime change.

Since the outcome of backsliding is *„an illiberal or diminished form of democracy, not autocracy, work on the quality and gradations of democracy, rather than the distinction between democracies and autocracies, is a relevant starting point for conceptualizing and measuring democratic backsliding.“* (Geissel et al., 2016).

In this thesis, democratic backsliding *“denotes the state-led debilitation or elimination of any of the political institutions that sustain an existing democracy. Since the political institutions that sustain democracy are myriad . . . the term embraces multiple processes”* (Bermeo, 2016, 5).

This general definition highlights several important components of democratic backsliding

First, democratic backsliding is *„a state- and often executive-led process, not a mass-based one, whereby elected leaders make legal institutional changes that weaken checks on their power while simultaneously eroding the strength of the opposition“* (Bermeo, 2016). These same elites have similarly been unwilling to pass reforms to limit their power or strengthen institutional checks.

The ability of leaders to make these changes is enhanced in scenarios where opposition parties, lawmakers, or civil society do not have the strength, organizational capacity, and societal roots

necessary to oppose the executive branch. The result is a state with a powerful and often unchecked executive. Second, a democratic backsliding involves attacks by these elected officials on democratic-related political institutions. „*Institutions that are targeted include the constitution, the rule of law, civil and minority rights, the independence of the judiciary and the media, and the separation of power within government*“ (Maeda, 2010; Bermeo, 2016). Many of these institutions can be categorized as components of constitutional liberalism (Zakaria, 1997), or what is often identified as the liberal aspect of western liberal democracy. The total dismantling of institutions that are minimally necessary for a state to be considered a democracy in particular, open, free, and fair elections (Schumpeter, 1950). Thus, the outcome of democratic backsliding is an illiberal or diminished form of democracy, not autocracy.

As suggested by the range of institutions that can be targeted by elected officials, the outcomes of democratic backsliding can look different from one case to the next. One term that is often closely linked to discussions of democratic backsliding is illiberal democracy, „*which is effectively a state that maintains minimal democratic characteristics, yet aspects of constitutional liberalism are limited or eroded*“ (Zakaria, 1997).

Hybrid regimes could in fact be another descriptor for states that have relapsed, provided the procedural minimalist aspects of democracy are preserved. Competitive authoritarianism is a kind of hybrid regime that would fall under this general categorization.

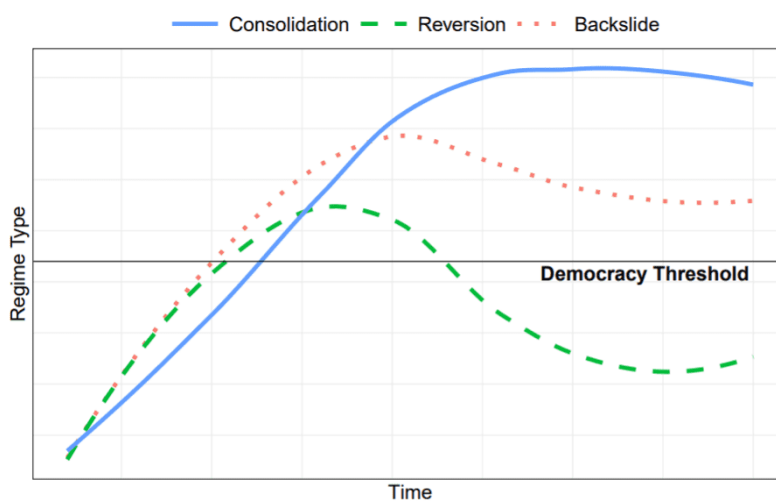
Competitive authoritarian regimes are those in which multi-party elections are relatively or at least procedurally free and fair, but the election conditions are shifted in favor of the ruling party or the incumbent. From the viewpoint, „*elections themselves in competitive authoritarian regimes are more or less democratic, free, and fair*“ (Levitsky and Way, 2010).

In summary, democratic backsliding occurs when elected officials weaken or undermine institutional controls over executive power, opposition strength and other, often liberal, aspects of democracy, such as institutions that guarantee civil liberties and minority rights. The minimal aspects of democracy-free and fair elections and mass participation in politics remain, however. Hence, the result of a democratic relapse is an illiberal or diminished form of democracy, but not an autocracy.

3.2.4 Explaining Democratic Backsliding

What causes backsliding is the great debate within the field, where there is no consensus on a main explanation. Many studies use quantitative methods or single case studies to study the phenomenon (Kapstein & Converse 2008, Fish 2001, Ágh 2016). While results diverge greatly on what the main explanations of backsliding are, these can be found to generally follow certain themes. Institutional, political and economic explanations are interlinked and dominating in the existing literature. Other explanations like, religion (Fish & Wittenberg 2009), economic inequality (Przeworski et.al 1996), ethnic fragmentation (Fish & Wittenberg 2009), and an active civil society (Greskovits 2016) are also visible in the literature and have been considered for this thesis. Since the thesis aims at describing the process of democratic backsliding in the case of Japan it is important to define the process. Democratic backsliding is the erosion of the democratic criteria discussed above, and on the most basic level it concerns the erosion of democracy within a state. Democratic backsliding can range in meaning from the complete breakdown of democracy and the establishment of an authoritarian regime, to the slow weakening of democratic institutions over decades. Bermeo identifies six major forms of democratic backsliding, with different endpoints and speeds, ranging from the swift coups d'état and turn to complete authoritarian regime, to contemporary backslidings legitimized through the democratic institutions and occurring subtly and slowly (Bermeo 2016, 5 - 6).

Figure 6: Pattern of Democratic Backsliding



Source: Author

Bermeo also identifies election day fraud as another form of democratic backsliding. Election day fraud is the manipulation of votes, fraudulent counting, ballot stuffing etc. on the election day. This has also declined after the end of the cold war, and is not common today (Bermeo 2016, 7 - 8). According to Bermeo, the forms of democratic backsliding that are occurring today are subtler, and not as swift as the previous forms. In addition, they are often claimed to be legitimate as they are argued to be the will of the people. Bermeo recognises election manipulation as one form of democratic backsliding being widespread today.

Electoral manipulation is different from election fraud in that it does not directly alter the election results. Instead it is aimed at influencing voters, and tilt the playing field in favour of the incumbent. This can take many shapes, and includes; *restricting media access for opposition, using government funds for incumbent campaign, hindering voter registration, harassing opponents, and changing electoral rules to favour the incumbent.*

Executive aggrandizement is the most common form of democratic backsliding today. Executive aggrandizement occurs subtly, and incrementally. The same political party or even the same leader remains in power for an extended period of time, slowly accumulating more power and removing control over the powers of the executive branch. These exams are not removed at the same time, but rather targeted individually. The democratic relapse begins slowly and so subtly that many citizens fail to realize that it is happening.

Elections are still held regularly, opposition politicians stay in parliament, independent media check and criticize the government, albeit often with consequences for their actions. In many ways it still feels like a democracy. Every step is barely noticeable and does not seem to threaten democracy.

The institutional changes brought about by executive aggrandizement also weaken the opposition and the ability of the opposition to challenge executive power (Bermeo 2016, 10 - 11). Bermeo defines the democratic veil as the defining feature of executive aggrandizement. These processes are done through legal channels and institutions. It is not uncommon that the political party, or executive aiming at performing these reforms have popular support, both within the broader population and in parliament. Courts, parliaments or referenda are used to give legitimacy to the changes. Thus, the reforms are often executed in these institutions, and can be framed as being democratic to both domestic and international actors.

This thesis uses a definition of backsliding by Lust and Waldner (2015 p.5). Democratic backsliding is; *“changes that negatively affect competitive elections, liberties, and*

accountability". This definition is narrower than some others but allows for a return to what could be seen as the core of democracy. While much has been written on democratization, democratic backsliding is causally different (Dresden & Howard 2016 p.1123). Democratic backsliding is simply not reversed democratization, since factors contributing to democratization do not have to, in their absence, cause democratic backsliding.

Democratization focuses on the process towards democracy, and backsliding on the process away from democracy. Another problem with conceptualizing democratic backsliding is its possible extensiveness, as pointed out by Bermeo (2016). However, many can agree that democratic backsliding is a gradual process (Bermeo 2016 p.6, Lust & Waldner 2015 p.6). The question of how this should be measured is an important aspect of studying democracy- and the answer depends on how the author defines backsliding, and what aspects of democracy the author hopes to capture.

3.2.5 Causes of Democratic Backsliding

The main causes of democratic backsliding are:

On the demand side (i.e., on the citizen side): People are influenced by economic populism. Scientists believe that economic populism leads to a democratic relapse.

People are influenced by dependent media - the rise of the propaganda media and the (financial and political) dependence of mainstream media are seen as a central issue;

People are disappointed and not interested in politics - widespread disappointment in politics leads to less civic engagement. While protests have been viewed as a "civil awakening" in recent years, these movements are still struggling to exert influence.

On the supply side (i.e. on the politicians side):

Lack of punishment / corrupt legal system - there is a very strong consensus among experts on this. The lack of punishment is the most important factor for corrupt politicians to play a central role in the country's democratic process.

Crony capitalism / link between politicians and big business / oligarchy - political power is intertwined with economic power, and this intersection shapes the political process in the country.

Leaders Undermine Democratic Values - The focus here is not only on anti-democratic political rhetoric, but also on the lack of political support for much-needed judicial reform. This is also in line with the general perception of an increasing centralization of power and corruption.

There are three main challenges to democracy in Japan that are clearly visible in the polls and focus groups.

While defining the challenges, we can group the problems in the judicial system and corruption under the heading of "State Detention". "State imprisonment" means a kind of systematic political corruption that covers a wide range of state institutions, including not only those of the legislative and executive branches, but especially the judiciary. Based on all of this, we can outline the main challenges for democracy in Japan:

State detention - almost all experts agree that democracy in Japan fails when it comes to an effective separation of powers and the rule of law. There are at least two sub-challenges closely related to the general challenge of state imprisonment:

Justice - the basis of this challenge is the overwhelming dissatisfaction with the lack of punishment in the country.

Corruption - The issue of corruption in Japan is closely related to the more general idea of crony capitalism. This trend, outlined by some of the roundtable participants, is "the centralization of corruption"; H. A stronger political influence on certain economic sectors, exercised only by a small group of influencers.

Dependent media - 2/3 of the experts believe there is a serious problem with media freedom in Japan.

3.2.6 Factors Contributing to Democratic Backsliding:

Lust & Waldner (2015a) have identified six families of theories which each explains the factors that could contribute to the occurrence of democratic backsliding. However, due to the scope of the thesis and the availability of data, then only three of those six theories have been selected, and they are:

- (1) Institutional,
- (2) Leadership
- (3) Economical.

Within each theory there are several factors that are contributing to democratic backsliding. Again, due to the scope of the thesis, then only two factors from each theory has been chosen.

Institutional: Within the institutional approach the factors of the “electoral system” and the “checks and balances” (Lust & Waldner 2015a) has been chosen.

Institutional explanations

Institutional explanations are widespread in research on democratic backsliding, but also in research on democratization. These statements are structural in that they argue that the structure within which politics is contained is causing a democratic relapse. The institutional explanations focus mainly on electoral systems, controls and balances of executive power and the strength of the institutions. There is little agreement as to which of these aspects are the main causes of relapse, although they are linked. Electoral systems form a backbone of democracy and have therefore become an important factor in institutional explanations of backsliding.

Palonen (2009), points out *„the disproportional elements in the electoral system, giving advantages to large parties and coalitions, thus enabling landslide victories“*. Reynolds (2011 p.74-85) maintains that *„electoral system design is crucial for democratic stability because it determines the level of inclusion of parties and marginalized groups. He finds two overall negative electoral system designs for democratic stability. The first is the First Past the Post (FPTP) system, were the candidate with the most votes wins the whole constituency, not*

necessarily needing a majority to do so. The second design is block voting, a super majoritarian system that works like a FPTP system but for multiple seats in a single district“ (Reynolds 2011 p.74-85).

Therefore, the design of the electoral system is of importance for democratic backsliding. In such political system, Diamond (2015 p.107) argues that it becomes easier for democratically elected politicians to violate institutions and abuse their authority. Therefore, *„solid institutional checks and balances, like constitutional constraints and other branches of government’s ability to control the executive“*, are found by Kapstein and Converse (2008) to be vital for democracies since it prohibits abuse of power. As a result, checks and balances that prohibit rogue action are critical to keeping democratic processes going. In such a system there is a lack of effective checks and balances to prevent an actor from gaining too much power. Weak checks and balances indicate weak institutions. *„Weak institutions can generally not produce redistribution and other tasks expected by citizens“* (Fukuyama 2015 p.14p). When weak institutions cause people to lose faith in democracy, it is an opportunity for illiberal actors to gain ground. The importance of effective and trustworthy democratic institutions therefore becomes paramount to backsliding.

Electoral System:

„The design of an electoral system is essential for the democratic stability, since it is the “playing field” where the inclusion of marginalized communities and political parties is either defeated or secured“(Reynolds 2011). In addition, a study conducted by Reynolds (2011) found that the more proportional an electoral system is; the more political competition and stability is improved.

Checks and Balances:

Kapstein & Converse argue that *„the trajectory of a country can be influenced by the distribution of power between the legislative, judicial and executive, which is the system of checks and balances. Since the system will prevent the elected officials from abusing their power, since other branches of the government are functioning as watchdogs, and thus, each branch in a government will function as a watchdog to one-another“* (Kapstein & Converse 2008a: 2008b). In addition, Diamond (2015) argues that *„when it is possible to override checks and balances, then political leaders are enabled to accumulate wealth and power for their*

clients, parties and cronies, which in the end will lead to further violation of the democratic procedures“. Based on the theoretical understandings it can be argued that a disproportional electoral system and weak checks and balances can contribute to the process of democratic backsliding.

Political explanations

Political explanations of democratic backsliding focus on the actors in politics. They motivate democratic change with political strategies and commitments. The connection between populism and democratic relapse is explored. There is little agreement as to which aspects are the main contributors to democratic relapse, although they are interlinked. The phenomenon of populism is currently a hot topic where research has grown rapidly trying to explain its progression. Even if research has struggled to define it, a common definition is presented by Mudde (2004 p.543) that populism is *“an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people”*. Populism does not have to be either left or right-wing. Populists will do anything to stay in power *“in the name of the people”* and democratic foundational laws and institutions are an obstacle to that.

Populism and democracy are therefore not compatible and strong populist parties could become a threat to democracy. Palonen (2009) finds that *„populist parties contribute to political polarization and diminish deliberative politics since they create a new consensus on what the political dividing line is, eliminating any discussion questioning the political poles or debating policy“*. Enyedi (2016) also points out that *„the populist threat to democracy involves a lack of courtesy and collegiality among politicians, creating a winner-takes-all mentality. Because of the contagion factor, political elites’ commitment to liberal democracy can be crucial in hindering democratic backsliding. If democratic commitments are taken lightly, politicians are more likely to consider successful populist rhetoric.“* Herman (2016) finds that mainstream political parties’ commitment to democracy indicate that democratic norms are deeply integrated in society and democracy is therefore less likely to be abandoned as a political idea.

Antidemocratic positions

„Democracy needs the mainstream parties, or the elite’s loyalty, to commit to the democratic rules in order to survive, otherwise will these actors seize any opportunity to gain more power, and thus undermine democracy for their own personal gain“ (Herman 2016).

Presence of Populism in the Legislative Assembly:

There is not a universal definition of the term “populism”, since there is still no consensus about what the term should define (Reinemann et al. 2017). Still, populism can be considered as illiberal, as it oppose open political discourse and intermediaries; its representatives favor the pure rule of majority, and support the idea of a homogenous society. Building on this, then Norris (2017) argues that *„authoritarian populism is one of the most serious threats to Western democracies“*. Hence, populism challenges liberal democracies by weakening the legitimacy of mutual scrutiny to establish a strong leader who advocates authoritarian values. Summing up the arguments of these two proposals, it can ultimately be argued that the strength of the populist presence in the legislative assembly shows how challenged liberal democracy is. It can be argued that democratic regressions are more likely when the dominant political parties hold anti-democratic positions and that there is a strong populist presence in the legislative assembly.

Economic explanations

The economic explanations are, like the institutional, a main strand of the democratization literature, translating into democratic backsliding. These explanations are structural since *„the economy is beyond the control of individual actors. They focus mainly on per capita income, development and economic crisis, and there is little agreement on what matters the most“*. Przeworski (2005) is a main proponent of the economic explanation for democratization and has, among others, found that the probability of a democracy surviving increases with per capita income and the standard of living. The economic explanations thus diverge somewhat on what economic developments matter for democratic backsliding and what the implications of them can be. In addition, Fish (2001) argues that *„economic reform is linked to democratization, since a rapid liberalization of the economy can transform it into becoming more pluralized, and thus establish non-state economic organizations that can check up on the growth of the executive absolutism“*. As such it can be established that macroeconomic performance and the distribution of income do contribute to the process of democratic backsliding.

4. POLITICAL LANDSCAPE OF JAPAN

4.1 POLITICS AND THE POLITICAL SYSTEM BEFORE 1945

What happened in 1868 is known as Meiji ishin in Japanese, which is usually translated as "Meiji Restoration," although "Meiji Renewal" would be more accurate. The emperor (Tennō) was relocated from seclusion and powerlessness in Kyoto to Edo (renamed Tokyo or "Eastern Capital") and became the source of legitimation for the new Meiji regime. The Japanese heads of state and government have copied the British parliamentary system, French local government, the Prussian (German) civil service, the American monetary system, the Belgian banking system, and the Prussian and French military. They also systematically examined European constitutions before drafting and enacting the Meiji constitution of 1889, which was mainly based on the Prussian model.

Although Japan had based its new political system on the parliamentary model, it practiced only a limited form of democracy: competing political parties emerged, but the emperor still ruled with divine rights and appointed the prime minister and cabinet. The politics of the first decade after the constitution of 1889 were particularly important. Only one of the two houses of parliament, the House of Representatives, was elected. In the 1890s, there was a highly restrictive ownership qualification for voting, so the house essentially represented rural landlords and wealthy urban businessmen. For one, the unelected and conservative House of Peers had the same rights as the House of Representatives and could override its initiatives. The government tried various strategies, including election rigging, to get out of the traffic jam. Political parties also emerged, and in the 1920s there was at least a switch between two parties. This was the time of the so-called "Taishō democracy" (after the name of the Emperor Taishō, 1912-26). In 1940, all existing political parties were merged into a single party known as the Imperial Rule Assistance Association (Taisei yokusankai). After the defeat of Japan in World War II and the beginning of the occupation, Japan was under Allied control. The occupation lasted from 1945 to 1952. In the earlier phases (until 1948/19) radical reform programs were initiated, based on a determination to change the ideology and practice of Japanese politics and government for all time.

What emerged from the occupation was a political system that was in some ways different from what was planned. We come to a particular problem with the Japanese political system, namely how to deal with rising voter expectations. Instead of the mainstream (shuryūha) competing

with the anti-mainstream (*hanshuryūha*), almost everyone is brought into a cooperative general mainstream (*sōshuryūha*). This phenomenon has been graphically observed in local executive elections from the early 1980s onwards, as it proved more beneficial to belong to a general mainstream and have access to the resources that are consequently available than to remain a lone opposition voice from outside. Corporate Japan (the *Zaikai*) not only played a vital role in promoting the conservative system of 1955, but also mobilized the business community. This consolidation and rationalization of the relationship between the *Zaikai* and the conservative politicians formed two legs of the vaunted "tripod" on which conservative power rested in the decades that followed. The third leg was the bureaucracy, which drafted most of the laws introduced in the state parliament and also enabled a steady exodus of influential former officials into the LDP.

4.2 CONSTITUTION

The constitution, also known as the "**Postwar Constitution**" (戦後憲法 *Sengo-Kenpō*) or the "**Peace Constitution**" (平和憲法 *Heiwa-Kenpō*), is most characteristic and famous for the renunciation of the right to wage war contained in .

The final form of government of Japan will be determined by the freely expressed will of the Japanese people, according to the Potsdam Declaration. "Several sections of the December 1945" Potsdam Declaration "have been interpreted as" instructions "to replace Japan's" Meiji Constitution "with a democratic constitution, thereby ending the country's militaristic and imperialist tendencies and policies for good. Japan was ruled without a written constitution for most of its history, relying instead on custom and tradition. The Meiji Constitution was authoritarian and was based on the idea that the government was all powerful and benevolent and gave rights and freedoms as gifts to citizens. It hasn't even been changed since its adoption, mainly because changes are so difficult to achieve: they need a two-thirds majority in both houses of the legislature and then have to go through a national referendum. Japan had both a democratic and an authoritarian constitutional legacy at the end of World War II, although it had dominated for a generation.

Seperation of powers

The constitution of Japan, which came into force in 1947, is based on the principles of popular sovereignty, respect for basic human rights, and the advocacy of peace. Japan's political system is one of constitutional democracy. In accordance with the principle of "separation of powers", the activities of the national government are formally divided into legislative, judicial and executive bodies.

The constitution of Japan proclaims a system of representative democracy in which the state parliament is "the highest organ of state power". It is formally stipulated that the state parliament, as the core of the Japanese system of government, takes precedence over the executive branch of the government. The appointment of the Prime Minister, who heads the executive branch, is made by resolution of the state parliament. Japan practices a parliamentary cabinet system whereby the prime minister appoints the majority of cabinet members from among the members of the state assembly. The cabinet thus works in solidarity with the state parliament and is responsible to it.

The emperor

Japan is a constitutional monarchy, which means that its government is led by hereditary leaders who have almost no real political power, whose job it is to act as the country's symbolic leader. According to the constitution, the Japanese emperor is only the "symbol of the state". The distinction is reminiscent of the modern role of the emperor, who was a more important element in the political system. With the advice and approval of the Cabinet, the Emperor carries out the following acts in state affairs, such as the promulgation of amendments to the Constitution, the laws, the Cabinet ordinances and treaties, the convocation of the Landtag and the dissolution of the House of Representatives, the proclamation of the general election of members of the state parliament, the certificate of the appointment and dismissal of state ministers and other officials in accordance with the statutory provisions as well as the unrestricted powers and powers of ambassadors and ministers, the award of honors, the certification of ratification documents and other diplomatic documents, as provided by law, accepting foreign ambassadors and ministers and performing ceremonial functions while he has no governmental powers. He also appoints the Prime Minister and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court as determined by the State Parliament and the Cabinet, respectively.

4.3 POLITICAL SYSTEM OF JAPAN

4.3.1 Executive Branch

Executive power rests with the cabinet, which consists of the prime minister and no more than 17 ministers of state (including ministers without portfolio and the chief cabinet secretary) and is jointly responsible to the state parliament. The cabinet must resign if the office of Prime Minister becomes vacant or if the first session of the state assembly is called after a general election of the members of the House of Representatives. If the House of Representatives passes a vote of no confidence or rejects a vote of confidence, the cabinet resigns en masse, unless the House of Representatives is dissolved within ten days. The Japanese prime ministers have few opportunities to show or exercise much leadership and are among the weakest leaders in a liberal democracy. The prime minister's power is limited by the bureaucracy, factions within political parties, party leaders, and the consensus style of Japanese politics. However, this does not mean that they are completely powerless: they hire and fire members of the cabinet and all other high-ranking members of the government and their party, appoint the chairmen of the main government councils and appoint the chief judge of the Supreme Court and they do not preside the same tests and considerations. The Prime Minister, who is named among the members of the Landtag by a resolution of the Landtag and appointed by the Emperor, must be a civilian. The Prime Minister, who represents the Cabinet, submits bills to the Landtag, reports to the Landtag on general national affairs and external relations, and exercises control and supervision over various branches of administration.

The cabinet has 11 ministries established by the respective establishment laws and listed in the law of the National Government Organization, as well as the Cabinet Secretariat, the Cabinet Legislative Bureau, the National Personnel Agency, the Security Council of Japan and other cabinet organs. The Cabinet Office was created through the restructuring in 2001 to strengthen the Cabinet functions and the Prime Minister's general ability to lead. Under the leadership of the Prime Minister, the Cabinet Office drafts plans and provides extensive coordination at a level one step above other government departments and agencies. Japanese ministers protect their departmental interests first, and government interests second. Ministers are usually given their posts as political favors and cabinet sales are usually high. Even important bills such as the annual household bill are usually stamped by the cabinet and the state parliament.

4.3.2 Legislature

The Japanese legislature is called Kokkai.

The Japanese parliament consists of the upper house (Shugiin) and the lower house (Sangiin). The politically decisive instrument is the House of Commons, which currently consists of 465 members, 289 of whom are elected from the single-seat constituencies and 176 from the proportional representation system, where the nation is divided into 11 electoral blocs that return between 6 depending on their size and 30 members.

The legislative period of the lower house runs theoretically four years, however in the Japanese post-war history the legislative period was mostly ended prematurely. The reason for this is that *„the ruling prime ministers have always made use of the right to dissolve parliament prematurely in order to get new elections“*. (Pohl, 1998)

The dissolution of parliament often represented the last attempt to rescue a failed head of government, who fled to his constituents by means of new elections.

The total membership of the House of Councilors is 245, of whom 121 are elected by the proportional representation system from a single nationwide electoral district and 73 from 124 are elected from 47 prefectural constituencies, each returning 2 to 8 members. Their term of office is 6 years, and a half of the members being elected every 3 years.

The House of Councilors has more of an advisory role. Resolutions passed in the House of Representatives can only be delayed by a contradicting resolution in the House of Councilors to such an extent that the decision has to be confirmed by a renewed persistent resolution (2/3 majority) in the House of Representatives. The bicameral system is intended to ensure that political decisions are weighed more precisely. In the following, *„the two chambers are of interest to the party system in so far as different electoral systems lead to different compositions, which illustrate the influence of the electoral system on the party system or the political system“*. (Kevenhorster, 1969)

The main tasks of the state parliament include the appointment of the Japanese Prime Minister, the approval of the state budget and the ratification of international treaties. The political parties, to which almost all members of the state parliament belong, are the basic units of political activity. Three categories of diet sessions are held: ordinary, extraordinary and special.

For example, if a bill is passed by the House of Representatives but the Council does otherwise (rejecting the bill or insisting on amendments), the bill will still become law if it is re-submitted to the House of Representatives and approved by two-thirds of the House members present. The state parliament's weakness vis-à-vis the bureaucracy is symbolized by the fact that the state parliament only meets for five months per year, of which two months are normally tied to the annual budget debate. Other weaknesses are the large number of political parties represented in the House of Representatives (usually six to eight in recent years), the divisions created by political groups within the major parties, and the tradition of consensus politics, which has led most members to not with the Party agree executive branch.

4.3.3 Judicial Branch

In Japan, the independent standing of the judicial branch of government is protected, and the constitution stipulates that “no disciplinary action against judges shall be administered by any executive organ or agency“. Established by the constitution, the Supreme Court is Japan’s highest judicial organ. There are four types of lower courts, whose numbers and English designations (as of December 2012) are as follows: 8 high courts, 50 district courts, 50 family courts, and 438 summary courts. According to article 6 of the constitution, “the Emperor shall appoint the Chief Judge of the Supreme Court, as designated by the Cabinet,” while the cabinet directly appoints the other 14 Supreme Court judges (Ramseyer and Nakazato, 1999: 17). All judges of the Supreme Court must be reviewed by the people in the first general election following appointments, and every 10 years thereafter.

In addition to being the sole court of last resort, the Supreme Court has the power to establish rules of litigation and other specific rights of the administration of justice, including appointing a list of individuals for whom the Cabinet judges appoint the lower courts. Japan's judicial system is basically a three-process system, in which, after a trial and decision, parties to a dispute have the right to make two additional trials and decisions, as in the appeal process (koso) and ultimately the final appeal (jokoku) is set). The judiciary often makes decisions in favor of government positions, and the Supreme Court is more conservative than lower-level courts. The problem is not that conservative politicians (like the long-ruling LDP) intervene

directly in the judicial process, but that senior judges usually share the LDP's political positions. „Judges who join left-wing legal organizations or pass verdicts against the government are far less likely to be promoted than more conservative judges“ (Ramseyer and Nakazato, 1999: 18–20).

4.3.4 State/provincial Government

The 1947 Japanese Constitution confirmed the “principle of local autonomy” (Article 92), and the Local Autonomy Act of 1947 defined a two-tiered structure of prefectures and municipalities, separating local from national administration. The act also established the competencies and provided for the election of assemblies and chief executives (governors and mayors). The local governments in Japan are divided into various levels, such as prefectures, sub-prefectures and municipal levels. Japan is divided into 47 administrative divisions. Each of the 47 local jurisdictions has a governor and a unicameral assembly, both elected every four years. Cities are self governing units administered independently of the larger jurisdiction within which they are located.

Detailed policy and budget programs drawn up by local governments must be approved by Tokyo. Indeed, ministers have the power to remove elected governors and mayors who do not obey their orders. The title of the Local Autonomy Act draws attention to a key problem in Japanese politics: the extent to which one can speak of real local autonomy in local government. The local administration is largely dominated by the central Japanese state. Government relationships are critical to understanding the difficulties local governments face, particularly in times of crisis. The elected governors are the chief executives of the prefectures and have a wide range of powers. You direct a significant number of public programs, particularly public law and order (including local courts and police), health and welfare (including hospitals, social services and environmental protection), infrastructure (including roads, transport, land development, utilities and parks), and education and culture (including schools, libraries and art galleries).

4.3.5 Media

In Japanese „*daiyon no kenryoku*“, or “fourth authority” (Feldman 2002; Hoshi and Osaka 2006; Pharr and Krauss 1996). Most scholars considered the importance of the mass media in Japanese politics to be negligible. But as the mass media changed and politicians changed the ways they responded to the media many researchers now argue that the media have influenced the style and content of politics.

Krauss argues that the „*media’s criticism of the state helped maintain LDP dominance: criticism ensured that the LDP responded to changing public opinion, as expressed through the media, even if the response was sometimes belated.*“

A study in Japan reported an astonishing and much-cited finding: when a wide range of actors in political bureaucrats, party officials, business elites, trade union leaders, media elites, leaders of feminist and other social movements, etc. were asked to rank each other according to power and others Influence, all actors except the media themselves, ranked the media first. In support of this view, they cite the restrictions on the use of media by candidates set out in the electoral law, which drastically limit the effects of the media on, for example, campaign style. The press base in Japan's metropolitan areas and its strong links to a left-wing intellectual tradition are believed to contribute to a "predominant left-wing bias" in the newspapers. That is how widespread is the role of the media as a powerful, independent critical force in Japanese politics. Several authors have argued that in the long era of one-party dominance, the surveillance role of the Japanese media was practically a functional equivalent to the role of opposition parties in industrial democracies with stronger political opposition. Nathaniel Thayer has emphasized the crucial role of the media in controlling the quality and quantity of information flowing from bureaucracy to the public; in his view, adroit Japanese bureaucrats shape the content of news through their use of briefings and their personal relationships with reporters in Japan’s remarkable reporters’ (kisha) clubs. According to Dutch journalist Karel van Wolferen, the Japanese press today is among the “servants of the system,” frequently engaging in self-censorship and “never really ‘taking on’ ” the powers that be (Van Wolferen, 1989). At least in the Japanese case, the media appear to have played a positive transforming role in improving the quality of mass political participation over the postwar period. The media have made the electorate more aware of and interested in national politics and issues. Although

strict laws on media use in elections have deterred the rise of negative campaign advertisements in Japan.

While the types of media influences examined here can be viewed as largely negative in the West, in the Japanese case paradoxically they have played three positive roles in changing the context of political competition. First, the media helped calm the highly controversial positional policy of the 1950s and 1960s, when the electorate was trapped in polarized camps, by underestimating divisive ideological issues. Second, by contributing to the shift from positional to valence issues, the media has increased the volatility of the elections. Hence, the media's role in reducing ideological divisions and fixing voters' attention to the issues of political corruption and reform has contributed to this great political transformation. A third positive role for the media is to draw attention to the candidates' images. Why was the media important in Japan?

First, because the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) ruled for nearly four decades, Japan's opposition parties have had less leverage over the control of government power than opposition parties elsewhere that have the prospect of "eliminating the rascals". It has been left to the press to be the primary institution capable of limiting the power of the elite through the exposure and reaction of public opinion. Second, the particularly close relationship of Japanese business and other key stakeholders with the LDP and an electoral system that requires staggering amounts of money to keep the representatives in power have led to frequent scandals and allegations of corruption involving politicians, particularly those of the LDP were . Finally, Japan's media organizations have some unique characteristics. The press formally commits itself to norms of independence, impartiality and truthfulness and even "to ensure the democratization of Japan". If there is no confrontation between the three great powers, it falls to the fourth estate to oppose the government. "

4.4 ELECTORAL AND PARTY SYSTEM

4.4.1 Electoral System

When political scientists agree on anything, voting rules affect party systems, so changes to those rules should lead to changes in the party system. The rules by which democracies select political leaders are some of the most important details of politics. The 57 years of virtually unbroken rule of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the party's dramatic loss in the 2009 elections, and its landslide victory and return to power in 2012 are partly explained by Japanese electoral rules.

The electoral system that Japan used until 1993 has been credited (or made a mistake) for having created a long list of political attributes, including: one-party LDP rule; strong candidates and weak political parties; Factional divisions within the parties; a fragmented opposition; Monetary policy and endemic scandals; and the over-representation of rural interests in Japanese politics. Japanese voters were told that the new electoral system would cure almost all of the political ills affecting Japan. Corruption would decrease; The parties would be strengthened and two major parties would participate in the elections in Japan. Even so, since 1994 elections seem to have focused more on issues and the images of political parties, and particularly of party leaders. The new electoral rules introduced in 1994 contributed to the LDP's landslide victories in 2005 and 2012 and its first loss in an election in the House of Commons. In fact, almost everything that is interesting about Japanese politics has at some point been explained by looking at the Japanese electoral system. After all, factional splits within the LDP and the fragmentation of the opposition are the two political manifestations most affected by the new electoral system. To understand Japanese politics and politics, one must know the nature of the ruling and opposition parties and their leaders. More specifically, the quality of the Japanese government over the past decade has been closely tied to the strengths and weaknesses of the Japanese prime ministers and the dominant party in the system. Many scholars have suggested that electoral systems with mixed members could offer the best of both worlds, both "majoritarianism and proportional representation" and "personalized geographic and party representation".

First party system

This voting system, known as "Single Non Transferable Vote" (SNTV), produced some of the most interesting aspects of the Japanese political system. In particular, the electoral rules created incentives that influenced the shape of Japanese politics in the following ways: Many argue that the pork barrel policy, combined with several other features of the Japanese electoral system, gave the LDP an inherent advantage in the Japanese elections. During the first party system, party politics evolved from a two-party system in 1955 to a fragmented system with six parties at the national level. This situation was called the Tatoka era (proliferation in smaller parties) by the Japanese. It was a party system that had frozen a permanent ruling party and opposition

The second party system

Japan's state parliament passed its own change to the electoral system, replacing a single non-transferable vote (SNTV) with a direct majority system of mixed members (MMM). The basic idea behind such systems is simple. Some legislators are elected in single-member districts (SMDs) according to the pluralism rule, while others in multiple-member districts are elected according to a version of proportional representation (PR). According to the new system, 300 seats were elected by the Single-Member-Plurality (SMP) and 200 seats by the PR from closed party lists in eleven districts without any compensation being made between the two parties. The electoral system literature suggests that switching from SNTV to MMM in Japan should have reduced the number of political parties. The MMM systems in Japan therefore put heavy pressure on small parties and create incentives for a switch to a two-party system. A legislator-centric view suggests that electoral reform should also have affected the internal factions of major parties in Japan. The first characteristic caused by multi-member districts is greater proportionality. Smaller parties can more easily win a share of legislative seats that is comparable or proportional to the share of the vote they have won. The most important change in the party system is therefore the emergence of a viable alternative to the LDP. The Japanese party system is based on personalistic and clientelistic competition.

Even the new, mixed-member electoral system, which includes a PR component, offers significant incentives for personalistic and clientelistic behavior (McKean and Scheiner 2000).

What used to be a system with a dominant majority party and a rather stagnant group of hopeless opposition parties has been transformed into a system with two large parties competing against each other in each individual district (SMD). Perhaps the most obvious

contrast between pre-reform Japanese politics and post-reform diversity has been its turn to coalition government. It is no accident that Germany's mixed electoral system is very similar to the new Japanese system (and has been the inspiration for many), and in both cases the small centrist party only survives because of the PR tier and never deserves which SMD sits on its own Position. The 2009 and 2012 elections suggest that it may have evolved into a true two-party system with several smaller parties and acquired a new feature for Japanese post-war politics, a pattern of power transfers between the two major parties. To establish such a two-party system would have required some degree of success for the DPJ governments (there was none) and for the LDP to recover from their terrible defeat in 2009 and learn how to be a responsible party becomes the opposition (didn't). No significant internal changes were made with the LDP victory in 2012, and with the DPJ's defeat that year, we are not sure whether the pattern of change of power is an integral part of the system. In short, Japanese politics are not significantly affected by the change in the electoral system. There are still vestiges of individual politics, as evidenced by the interaction between the district system with a member and the proportional representation system. By creating a larger seat swing, a majority system makes it easier for voters to hold the ruling party accountable. The power of the small parties in Japan is strengthened by bicameralism in two ways. First, it is easier for a small party to win a seat in the HC elections because the electoral system mixes 48 national PR seats with 73 SNTV seats. Second, Japan's bicameral system is nearly symmetrical as the HC can veto most of the prime minister's proposed bills, which in turn puts the prime minister's leadership at risk. Small parties can thus exchange their legislative veto right for political resources. Elections are largely determined by the personality of the party leader. Turnout remains low as the “pending vote” moves back and forth between the LDP and the DPJ.

The “pending vote” has switched from the LDP to the DPJ to the LDP in the three HR elections since 2005. The old right-left axis from the 1945–1993 era has disappeared and has been replaced by a right-right or right-hand axis. The right / middle axis and Japanese politics will never be the same again. Ellis Krauss argues that the electoral reforms that took place at the beginning of the Second System had a profound impact. In this case, the party system would continue to be fragmented with unclear political positions and “crony capitalism” would continue. The instability of the current Japanese party system is reflected in this uncertainty in the nation's ruling party. As a result, Japanese party politics are again shifting from an era of relative stability to an era of increasing political chaos and unstable government

Factional divisions within parties (Habatsu)

„Personal loyalty to a political mentor has always been a feature of Japanese politics, but factions flourished under Japan’s SNTV electoral system creating strong organizations and explicit rules to govern the relationships between the faction leader and faction members“ (Thayer 1969, pp. 15–57). Factions flourished because the electoral system increased the incentives for politicians to do one another favors based on personal loyalties rather than differences in ideology or politics. The party competition to be expected in any democratic system has increasingly shifted to the parties themselves. The result is that all major parties are made up of factions, each of which is an influential sub-group with a high level of organization. The aim of the parliamentary groups is to occupy a key position in the party apparatus in order to fill as many political offices as possible. All parliamentary groups are headed by a "parliamentary group boss" who, through good contacts with business and industry, secures the group's donation income, as such donations are essential for the parties due to the lack of a party financing law. Within the party, care must be taken to ensure that each parliamentary group is given important party posts according to its position of power. Fractionation therefore creates a high turnover. However, this does not immediately lead to instability, as the power system within the LDP, which is the only major interested party in this context, is balanced and has worked well in this form for decades.

Kōenkai

A prominent feature in Japanese electoral and party politics are the kōenkai. They play a number of roles. *„Kōenkai transmit local demands to party politicians. Membership in the kōenkai socializes political society, familiarizing citizens with the political process and establishing a mode of political interaction. Kōenkai also provide the opportunity for constituency service“* (Abe, Shindō, and Kawato 1994, 177). However, their key function from the candidate's point of view is to mobilize votes. Kōenkai are permanent organizations with formal membership or overlapping groups or networks of organizations. In the electoral statement, kōenkai are seen as a means of coordinating the distribution of votes and are therefore a logical solution to the problems of the electoral system. In the words of Mark Ramseyer and Frances Rosenbluth: “Building personal loyalty is key to the LDP's electoral strategy.

Violations of the electoral law

The basic conclusions are perfectly clear: if a state wants to reduce the number of violations of the electoral law, it should adopt a party-centered electoral system instead of a candidate-centered electoral system. Of course, the government must impose and enforce significant penalties for violating electoral laws, and various other factors also affect the number of electoral systems, but the electoral system is the most powerful influence. Electoral laws in Japan are complex and strict, and it is said that almost all successful candidates must break them in order to be elected. Winning elections, breaking electoral laws, and arresting some activists after each election was seen as little more than a necessary cost to politics.

„Election law violations were common partly because Japanese election campaigns are among the most strictly regulated in the world and partly because intraparty competition is linked to higher levels of corruption“ (Nyblade and Reed 2008; Carlson and Reed 2013).

There are two basic types of campaigns and Japanese law outlaws the most effective ways of conducting either. The most effective means of conducting a campaign of persuasion is through the mass media, but Japanese election law severely restricts the use of television advertising. *„The only liberalization of these rules came in 2013 when the ban on Internet campaigning and the use of social media was lifted“ (Tkach-Kawasaki 2011; Wilson 2011).* Election campaigns are necessary for the proper functioning of democracy. Anything that makes campaigning less effective depresses turnout, reduces the information available to voters, protects incumbents from challengers, and promotes single-party dominance by hindering alternation in power. Japanese regulations make it difficult to conduct an effective campaign and should therefore be considered a form of systemic corruption. Restrictive campaign regulations also hurt challengers and help incumbents.

Conservative Voters

As Y. Kuroda has noted, for many Japanese, “voting is not so much a political activity as it is a part of general social behavior” (Kuroda 1974). Citizens are encouraged to vote as part of the proper role in Japanese society. In general, most Japanese seem to have relatively little/interest in Japanese parties or politics. About half of the electorate have some level of identity with any one of Japan’s major or minor political parties; but half have no such identity. This latter half is often called Japan’s “floating vote” (Stockwin 2008; Hayes 2009). This is because it has a tendency to switch from one party to another, especially in the last decade. The four most recent national elections can illustrate the lack of loyalty to the pending vote. The fact that the

Japanese refused to change ruling parties in free and fair elections for 55 years is an indication of how conservative Japanese voters are. Not that conservative in the ideological sense, but really conservative in its resistance to change and a desire to stick with the candidates and parties it knows.

Japanese-style democracy: a dominant party system

Maurice Duverger defined such a party as follows: „*A party becomes a dominant party when it represents a whole epoch, when its ideas, its methods, its whole style are identical with those of an epoch. A ruling party is one that is believed to be one. Even the enemies of a dominant party, even citizens who do not vote for it, acknowledge its superior status and influence; they deplore it, but admit it*“ (Duverger 1959: 317). O’Leary (1994: 4) postulates that a dominant party in democratic systems has to exhibit the following characteristics: *First, it must be dominant in number, it must regularly win more seats in parliamentary or congressional elections than its opponents. Secondly, this party must enjoy a dominant bargaining position. It must be able to stay in government on a regular basis. If it must share power with smaller parties it is nevertheless the key agent in the political system, with privileged access to the key executive and legislative posts. Thirdly, a dominant party must be chronologically pre-eminent. It must govern continuously for a long time, regardless of whether three or four general election victories [or one decade or more in power] are the crucial benchmarks of dominance. Finally a dominant party must be ideologically dominant: it must be capable of using government to shape public policy so that the nature of the state and the society over which it presides is fundamentally changed.*

Françoise Boucek (1998) distinguishes three distinct dimensions or, from the viewpoint of the parties in question, challenges. Such challenges exist for many parties, but dominant parties have to master them over an extended period to stay in power.

First, there is the dimension of electoral dominance, which refers to the aspect of vote acquisition. Boucek (1998: 105) notes that „*dominant parties achieve electoral dominance by maximizing their electoral support. They aggregate broad segments of the electorate through successful collective appeals (via issues and policies) and preference-accommodating strategies*“. The second dimension focuses on parliamentary dominance. Of interest is here how votes won in parliamentary elections are translated into seats. This is for one a question of the mechanical aspects of electoral systems (i.e. the concrete modes of transforming votes into seats) and the instrumental aspects of electoral systems (including the design and redesign

of electoral systems with the aim of ensuring as many seats as possible for the largest party). Thirdly, there is the dimension of executive dominance. For dominant parties without a parliamentary majority of their own, the question of entering and maintaining coalitions is vital in this regard. In most general terms, the positioning of a party in or near the centre of the relevant ideological spectrum makes entering coalitions easier. For dominant parties with a majority of their own, internal coordination can become a vital question. The continuation of one-party dominance in Japan went against a worldwide trend. At the same time that former communist and authoritarian regimes were overcoming their nondemocratic legacies, one-party dominant regimes in long-time democracies were undergoing major changes, as their leading parties lost the grip on power they had held for decades. The Japanese system raises critically important questions about representative democracy. In times of citizen anger, voters in a democratic society are supposed to be able to remove the object of their displeasure.

4.4.2 Political Parties

The attempt to assign European attributes or divisions to Japanese parties is difficult, since the function, origin and structure of the parties correspond to European models on the surface, but on closer inspection they are very different. This means that personalization has a higher priority than programmatic content, both internally and externally.

The common conviction as a coherent element in European parties is replaced by a specific person. It is therefore also possible to make a slight difference in content between individual parties and to change parties frequently without meeting the voters' displeasure. Party competition forces political elites and voters alike to consider changes to the existing political agenda. examine alternative ideological, cultural or political ideas; and reassess which social groups should be represented by the government and how. Clientelism is not enough to lead to a failure of party competition. However, if a system is based on the exchange of client lists, opposition parties usually have difficulties because they do not have access to government services.

4.4.2.1 Liberal Democratic Party (Jiyuu Minshu To) – THE DOMINANT PARTY

To study Japanese politics, one must study the politics of a leading party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The LDP has the character of a people's party, which is also reflected in the voters, who go through all professional groups and age groups. Most of the LDP strongholds, however, are located in rural areas, while the opposition has its electorate in the population of the big cities. The LDP is a classic example of Japanese consensus politics. It's a mainstream party for business, but it's less of a party than a coalition of factions. Hence the general opinion that the LDP is neither liberal nor democratic nor a party. The three dimensions of LDP dominance are: electoral, parliamentary and executive dominance. The client list policy explains a lot about the LDP's past success.

The historic success of the Liberal Democratic Party depended less on its general mass attractiveness than on the so-called Sanban (three "prohibitions"): Jiban (a strong, well-organized constituency), Kaban (a briefcase full of money) and Kanban (prestigious appointment, particularly at the cabinet level). As Giuseppe Di Palma (1990) notes, it is not easy to establish one-party dominance in democratic systems. With regard to both the electoral and the parliamentary dominance of the Japanese Liberal Democrats, the importance of the electoral framework in Japan has repeatedly been emphasized. A well-functioning *koenkai* was seen as a precondition for obtaining the necessary number of votes under SNTV. While effective voter mobilization via pork barrelling and personalized support organizations can be pointed out as the main local mechanisms for maintaining the LDP's electoral dominance, we also need to look at the central level of politics. Here, additional sources of both the LDP's electoral and the parliamentary dominance can be found. First, the party's success in linking up with numerous interest groups has to be mentioned. Tanaka can be 'credited' for perfecting 'machine style' relations between the LDP and interest groups at both the national and the local levels (Johnson, 1995). Being in possession of parliamentary majorities most of the time, the main challenge the LDP faced in the executive dimension did not concern coordination processes in the cabinet or the Diet, but rather intra-party management. The factional system inside the LDP was guided by a set of informal norms that determined in particular how cabinet and party posts would be distributed according to criteria of proportionality and seniority (Sato and Matsuzaki 1986: 66–73; Curtis 1988: 80–116; Kohno 1992). The institutionalized factional system also served as a sort of a 'checks-and-balances mechanism' vis-à-vis the power of the

president and the executive of the LDP. The LDP used clientelistic distributive politics to maintain electoral support (Hirose, 1981). The LDP was particularly strong in rural areas, and conducted large-scale redistribution of wealth from urban areas to rural areas in the form of government subsidies and grants to local governments and industries, public works projects, and subsidies to farmers. Furthermore, the LDP was adept at incorporating new policy positions and even the opposition parties' policy agendas to broaden its electoral bases and maintain its electoral strength (Calder, 1988). Japanese politics under the LDP's one-party dominance was characterized by the following features : a policy making process dominated by the alliance of the LDP, bureaucracy, and the LDP's client industries and sectors, which existed in each policy area; a bureaucracy that was stronger and exerted more policy influence than its counterparts in other Western democracies; the diffusion of policy making power among multiple veto players and the resulting difficulty of policy innovations; and relatedly, the weaker policy-making power of the prime minister due to the multiplicity of veto players.

Like most other Japanese parties, the LDP is based upon a factional structure. In most general terms, it can be argued that factions in political parties perform one or more of the following functions: the distribution of posts and spoils, the articulation of specific ideologies and issueoriented interests, and finally the representation of certain socio-political and sectoral interest groups (Beller and Belloni 1978). The institutionalised faction system within the LDP served as an effective functional equivalent for formalised procedures and norms of party management. Just like formal procedures and norms in other parties, the institutionalised factional system guided and stabilised the behaviour and expectations of LDP parliamentarians. Baerwald expresses personal support for the continuation of the faction system as a source of pluralism. A problem with Baerwald's argument is that pressure to reform the faction system has always come from inside Japan: both the media and the *zaikai* (business groups which fund the LDP) have long expressed disgust at the workings of party factions (Masumi, 1995: 211–18). In addition to the faction system, some LDP Diet members are also members of *zoku*, or 'policy tribes'. *Zoku giin* have policy "expertise," but the policy decisions that concern them tend to focus on such matters as the allocation of construction projects to companies, thereby undermining bureaucratic dominance. The institutionalised factional system within the LDP led to a decentralisation and fragmentation of power inside Japan's dominant party. This, in turn, led to the fact that the Japanese prime minister acted even during the long solo-reign period of the LDP more as the leader of a coalition than of a single-party government (Reed 1991: 82). As Duverger noted many years ago, every dominant party carries within itself the

seeds of its own destruction. Long-term rule can lead to a party's loss of vitality. To the same degree that dominance stabilises political life, it also makes it tensionless. Two further challenges put the electoral dominance of the LDP at risk. First, support groups at the national level were no longer able to mobilize the number of votes they were able to muster in the past. A third challenge to LDP electoral dominance was potentially even more problematic than the declining effectiveness of the 'organised vote'. The problem was Japan's stagnant economy. The future of the LDP depends on how it will continue to tackle the challenges in all three dimensions of dominance. Another issue that impacts the LDP is the ubiquity of *seishugiin* ("hereditary parliamentarians"), where politicians "inherit" the *jiban* (constituency base), as well as the *koenkai* (personal support group), from their fathers, grandfathers. The number of these hereditary parliamentarians has increased in recent years. The hereditary parliamentarians make up a significant portion of the Diet and especially the LDP diet members. These hereditary politicians could be said to have an easy route to the top of Japanese politics because they do not need to cultivate their own election machine.

4.4.2.2 The Democratic party of Japan - DPJ (Minshu To)

The concept of opposition should be viewed differently in the Japanese context than in the European one. While Western party systems with the opposition and the ruling majority pursue "the majority principle combined with guarantees for the minority", such a compromise position is not possible in Japanese society. The pronounced need for harmony in Japanese society is important for the opposition, in which public conflicts are to be avoided. For the political opposition as a minority, this means that either there is no opposition at all or there is no opposition. There is therefore an ambivalence between confrontation and cooperation with the majority (Hartmann, 1992). In 1998 the "New" Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) was formed as a "liberal alternative" to the long-time ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The founding members consisted in particular of SDP members who feared the decline of their own party, and of young former LDP who had switched from the LDP to newly founded parties in the early 1990s. Yukio Hatoyama and the former popular health minister Naoto Kan were the driving forces behind the young party, which is located in the center and thus to the left of the LDP. Despite a vague program, the DPJ was able to establish itself as the strongest opposition party. Japan's Democrats embraced a comprehensive, traditional European-kind of

understanding of liberalism, which combined a strong market orientation with a commitment to protect and enhance human and citizen rights. The basic philosophy of the DPJ centers on the aim of “building a free and secure society”. The empowerment of regions, or so the DPJ argues, is closely linked to the empowerment of ordinary citizens. Especially during the first few years of the DPJ’s existence, party leaders helped to integrate the various factions by means of “balancing” the distribution of party posts. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) does have some factions, or groups as they are more commonly called, but the party is not as factionalised as the LDP which has traditionally placed high priority on intra-party factional alignment. At first glance, the internal organization of the DPJ looks fairly well structured, functionally differentiated and hierarchically ordered. According to the party statutes, the supreme decision making body of the DPJ is the party congress (totaikai), which is attended by the Diet members and delegates from the regional associations of the party. So called “floating voters” constitute about half of the Japanese electorate. They can and do shift back and forth among the various parties and contribute to the instability of the party system. This is one of the DPJ’s major weakness it is a party without a common core of ideology or policy preferences. Also the party’s poor leadership, lack of experience in administration and policy making of many of its Diet members, its internal instability, its failure to effectively deal with the political, security and disaster challenges and its inability to devise an effective strategy to survive politically when the Japanese electorate is so loosely attached to it. Since the LDP had a 50-year “partnership” with Japan’s national bureaucracy, the DPJ decided to take a position of hostility toward the national bureaucracy and demanded that future policy be determined by the elected political Diet members and not the unelected bureaucrats (Tatsumi 2013).

4.5 BUREAUCRACY

In this context, there are two issues that are particularly important for reform in Japan. One is the relationship between the ruling party and the government. The other is the relationship between the parties and the bureaucracy. When the government puts legislation before parliament, party members vote in favor. In Japan the situation is not quite the same. There is strict party discipline when voting in the state parliament and it rarely happens that a party member violates the party.

The government is not required by law, but by habit to obtain the approval of the Executive Council of the LDP before submitting laws to the state parliament. Apparently, this convention was originally introduced to increase the party's power over the bureaucracy. The second important area of reform concerns relations between political parties and the bureaucracy. This is far too complex a subject to be discussed in detail here. The basic points are these. In the past, the bureaucracy served as the think tank of the ruling party. For various reasons, trust in the bureaucracy has decreased and the coordination mechanism that smoothed relations between the LDP and the bureaucracy has largely collapsed. If political corruption can be defined as distortion of the course of the democratic process, bureaucratic corruption can be defined as distortion of the course of the administrative process. The LDP government implemented administrative reforms that would later affect the power of the Japanese prime minister and the balance of power between the executive, ruling party, and bureaucracy. In short, the administrative reform provided an institutional setting in which the Prime Minister could take strong political initiative and leadership over other actors such as the ruling party and the bureaucracy. As a result, the Prime Minister can now take strong political initiatives when he is ready and has a clear mandate from the people.

Politicians involved in a scandal have to face re-election and therefore must be in public before, during and after the scandal. However, bureaucrats embroiled in a scandal seldom appeared in the news before the scandal and disappear into anonymity soon after.

5. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

5.1 Measurement of Dependent & Independent Variables & Robustness Checks

Five indices had been chosen to measure the independent variables which will try to explain the degree of democratic backsliding and the phenomenon of democratic backsliding in Japan. The objective of these indices is to clarify the moment in time that the backsliding occurred, and how the overall perception of democracy is. The indices that have been chosen are:

Disproportionality of the electoral system - The Gallagher Index is selected as the indicator to assess the disproportionality of an electoral system. Since it investigates both over and under-representation of political parties in elections. The index score runs from 0 to 100 (Gallagher 1991), where 0 means no disproportionality and 100 means full disproportionality.

Checks and balances - Varieties of democracy Index by the Kellogg Institute has been chosen, which offers different aspects of indicators to measure the quality of democracy (McMahon & Dowd 2014). V-Dem draws on theoretical and methodological expertise to produce data in the most objective and reliable way possible. Approximately half of the indicators in the V-Dem dataset are based on factual information obtainable from official documents such as constitutions and government records. The other half consists of more subjective assessments on topics like political practices and compliance with de jure rules.

Strength of populist parties in the legislative assembly - The Parliament and Government Composition Database (ParlGov) has been chosen. The ParlGov, aims to provide an infrastructure that systematically combines information on party positions, election results and government composition. ParlGov offers: a database and data tables for the empirical study of parties, elections and governments. The database combines approximately 1400 parties, 640 elections with 5500 election results and 2100 governing parties in 890 cabinets. This information is linked to various external data sources.

Populist leaders in government – To measure populist leaders in government and their position towards democracy, the populism literature is combined with the Party Project Manifesto. Because populism is inherently hard to measure (Herman 2016 p.271), and therefore any exact data is not available, therefore we will try to explain this variable through a qualitative and quantitative approach.

Using existing research can help find qualitative answers to this variable through work exclusively focused on populism and populist agendas. If populist leaders are found to have adopted more populist views or appeals, that would indicate a backsliding in democracy. This is since populism holds the view that democratic institutions, checks, balances, and civil rights hinders true rule of the people (Batory 2016 p.284). Research covering the extent and spread of populism in Japan should therefore be a good indicator of how populist leaders used populism. When research is lacking, reliable news articles are used to decipher towards populists politics in government. The Party Project Manifesto, will provide quantitative data, since it measures party positions in election campaigns and when the parties are in Government Position.

Economic crisis – Data from the World Bank will be used. It will test whether there is an economic crisis, by checking the indicator of growth rate of GDP. Additionally, the impact of an economic crisis will be tested by analyzing the level of GDP Per Capita, together with the level of unemployment, as these factors will indicate the impact of an economic crisis and as much data that is available in the set timeframe from 2000 to 2019 will be presented.

Selecting a democracy index is that it can assess the state of democracy in a country (McMahon & Dowd 2014), and assess whether any changes had occurred, which potentially could be linked to the phenomenon of democratic backsliding. Since freedom is linked to democracy in that way democracy might promote freedom, and thus the argument of democracy enhancing freedom can be made. Therefore, the more freedom there is, the more democratic the regime is (McMahon & Dowd 2014). The logic for selecting these indices is that the combination of these indices allows to check for the quality of democracy, freedom and the rule of law, which are all essential factors in assessing the occurrence of democratic backsliding and the perception of democracy in Japan.

Robustness Checks

Since the time over which backsliding occurs can vary from one moment to the next, I estimate models that consider the 1 year changes the last 20 years in the state of Japan and their level of democracy. The impact of Democratic Backsliding on the state of Japan is hard to measure because of the time span of the last 19 years starting from the 2000's and finishing in 2019. This explanation or assumption is made on a theoretical basis as explained by Nancy Bermeo that democratic backsliding does not happen at once but is a gradual process, and so this may mean that democratic backsliding has not happened at all in the previous 19 years.

In this thesis and empirical analysis we are trying to find out whether democratic backsliding has started and not whether it is happening or has happened, because democratic backsliding is a phenomenon that has a lot of variations, this means that at one moment it could have happened, and at another moment democracy is already returning to its original state. Democratic trajectories are relatively small in the short term (at the 1-year mark) but increases over time. My theory is unsurprisingly a largely post-Cold War phenomenon so there would be no logical connection to look for democratic backsliding, which may have happened before 2000. I re-estimate the models using the Liberal Democracy index from the Varieties of Democracy dataset as an alternative measure of democratic backsliding. This variable captures the extent to which a country constitutionally protects individual and minority rights, exhibits strong rule of law, has an independent judiciary, maintains institutional checks on executive power, and upholds free and fair elections (Coppedge et al., 2018); in other words, it picks up on many, though not all, of the characteristics in my definition of democratic backsliding.

5.2 Factors contributing to democratic backsliding

The above notable themes in the theoretical framework, gives reason to believe that institutional, political, and economic factors could be the main explanations of democratic backsliding in Japan. They thereby lay ground for the hypotheses tested for the research question; The empirical results can consequently give more weight to one or a combination of explanations. The framework aims to explain democratic backsliding in Japan from the 2000's.

From the institutional strand of the literature a disproportional electoral system and the ability of the incumbent party to override democratic checks and balances on the executive power, can negatively affect accountability and political liberties. The former can also come to cause the latter. Disproportional elements of electoral systems, in Japan for example, give advantage to large parties and coalitions, and weaken opposition and auditing institutions (Reynolds 2011, Batory 2016). The conditions the electoral systems set for political parties is a determinant of who wins power and how much power winning entails. Electoral features, like that causing the two thirds-majority in Japan, can allow the executive power to override democratic checks and

balances. Therefore, a lack of checks and balances are also indicators of factors that may contribute to democratic backsliding.

From the political strand of the backsliding literature, the first important factor is the strength of populist parties, which can negatively affect competitive elections and accountability. Populist parties contribute to political polarization, diminish deliberative politics, and limit popular control of political content (Palonen 2009). Because of party polarization, populists often take measures to protect and concentrate executive power. Populism therefore poses several threats to democracy which is why its strength is important to consider on the national and regional level. The second political factor to consider is populist leaders in government and their populist policies that they pursue while they are in power. These populist leaders in government pose a serious threat on actors and institutions aiming to protect democracy.

From the economic strand of literature, the most relevant contributor to democratic backsliding is economic crisis (Fish 2001, Przeworski et.al 1996), which can negatively affect belief in democracy and the nature of competitive elections. It is therefore important to look at the economic crisis to assess the depth of the crisis and the effects on ordinary people. An economic crisis that hits hard enough to negatively affect the people and discredit an incumbent democratic government, can create social dissatisfaction which becomes a breeding ground for illiberal actors' support.

The empirical study follows a research design with the first step aiming to find the extent of democratic backsliding in Japan, and the second to find possible explanations for it. The design allows the thesis to answer the research question and study both the dependent variable of democratic backsliding, and its key explanations and the potential causes of backsliding. Through this a wider picture of democratic backsliding in Japan can be captured. The set timeframe starts in 2000 and include as updated accounts as possible until 2019. This is an appropriate starting point since most of the political turmoil in Japan happened from the 2000's with unpredicted electoral losses and wins, and probably the most difficult period for Japan, due to the economic crisis of 2008, the earthquake in 2011, the Fukushima nuclear incident and the corona virus pandemic.

5.2.1 Identifying backsliders and determining severity of backsliding

The first step of the empirical study aims to answer the first part of the research question; To what extent has there been democratic backsliding in Japan? The answer to both aspects are found by looking at changes in Varieties of Democracy index. The Varieties of Democracy index can point out which countries have experienced a decline in democracy and to what degree through different indicators. Democracy indexes can be tricky to handle since a numerical scale of democracy values does not guarantee that each value lies at the same distance from each other. In other words, the scales should be seen more as ranking scales, ordinal scales, that tells us if there is more or less democracy in a country, but not how much more or less (Teorell & Svensson 2007 p.110). Explanatory factors of backsliding cannot also be a part of what they are trying to explain. However, considering that this thesis uses a simpler definition of democratic backsliding, it is better to use a narrow index that focuses on a few core processes of democracy rather than a wide. The chosen definition of backsliding focuses on competitive elections, liberties, and accountability. These core aspects of democracy are well-covered by all these indices. The Varieties of Democracy index focuses on political rights-measures on competitive elections and accountability, while the civil rights-measure focus on liberties. V-Dem is therefore valid and compatible with the view taken on democratic backsliding in this thesis.

If Japan is showing any negative developments during the set timeframe it will be considered as democratic backsliders. This means that if Japan fluctuates between negative and positive developments in scoring, it can be considered as backsliding. This is reasonable since all negative developments indicate a significant change in the country, which is still of interest to understand why such negative developments take place. Fluctuating scores indicate instability and instability could indicate signs of backsliding. The degree of backsliding is determined the following way: One downturn that has later improved is considered mild. One downturn that has not improved is considered moderate. More than one downturn without improvement is considered substantial.

5.3 Overview of factors contributing to democratic backsliding:

Table 1: Overview of the Empirical Analysis

	Hypotheses	Question	Operational Measurements
Institutional Factors	A disproportional electoral system is more vulnerable to democratic backsliding.	Is the electoral system disproportional?	Characteristics of the electoral system and the Gallagher Index.
	The weaker the institutional checks and balances, the more vulnerable a democracy is to democratic backsliding.	Is the executive power effectively controlled?	Varieties of Democracy database: (1) HOG Removal by legislature. (2) High Court Independence. (3) government censorship of the media
Political Factors	The stronger presence populist parties have in the legislative assembly the more vulnerable a democracy is to democratic backsliding	Are populist parties strong at the national level and in the diet ?	Vote share of populist parties in national elections. ParlGov database
	Populist leaders in government, particularly when exercising government leadership, exert a negative effect on democratic quality, that leads to democratic backsliding	Do political leaders in government use populist rhetoric and policies ?	Academic and news assessment of radical policies of the leaders in power with the combination of the party project manifesto database
Economic Factors	A deep economic crisis increases the likelihood of democratic backsliding.	Was there a full-fledged economic crisis in the last 20 years	World Bank's Data Bank: Data for GDP per capita, growth rate of GDP per capita and unemployment.

5.4 3 step model of democratic backsliding

The model assumes that the goal of the dominant political party is to consolidate their power. The model has three steps, each with a distinct goal.

Table 2: Overview of 3 Stepm model for Democratic Backsliding

STEP	GOAL
1. Target the „referees,,	Gain control of law enforcement institutions
2. Target opponents of the government	Scare away opponents from the political arena or from criticising the government
3. Change the “rules of the game”	Ensure the continued political dominance of the governmental party

In each step of the model different aspects and institutions of the democratic state are targeted. The aim is to entrench the power of the government and political party in charge. In the first step of the model, the autocrat targets and attempts to control the judiciary, law enforcements and regulation institutions with the explicit goal of controlling these institutions (Levitsky, Ziblatt 2018: 78). In the second phase the focus is changed to political opponents and critics. Attempts are made to discourage them from opposing the government, using the institutions whose loyalty was ensured in the previous step (Levitsky, Ziblatt 2018: 81). The final step is to changes the laws of the state to allow the incumbent to continue its dominance in politics (Levitsky, Ziblatt 2018: 88).

5.4.1 1 step – capturing institution

In the first step of democratic backsliding, law and law enforcement agencies are the targets of the government. This category includes courts, police, tax institutions, and regulatory agencies.

These institutions and agencies are referred to as the “referees” of the state, because their purpose is to monitor and investigate both private citizens and public officials to uncover if the law is being upheld. In a liberal democracy, the “referees” are of course designed to be independent of the government, and act as neutral actors who monitor all equally. Independent institutions, especially the judiciary, should act as a check and balance to the executive and legislative powers. Their goal is to uncover and hinder illegal and abusive actions taken by the legislative and/or executive powers. In other words, they shall ensure that all actors act according to the laws and constitution of the state. Failing that, they are to punish and aim to revert these actions. There are several tactics for how a government can gain control over an institution, and the same tactics can be used across the institutions. There are the direct methods of blackmailing or bribing public servants to be loyal to the government, rather than the institution or state. Additionally, new employees will be hired based on their loyalty to the government (Levitsky, Ziblatt 2018: 79). Similar tactics can be used on judiciary. However, the highest court is usually designed to be independent and different methods might be required. If possible, the courts can be purged of critical voices, similar to other institutions. Judges can be impeached, and be replaced by judges more sympathetic to the government. Court packing is what expanding the court is called. If a court is critical of the government, it can be decided to increase the size of the court. If the government can also control the nomination to the court, it can be ensured that the newly appointed judges will be loyal to the government. As part of court packing, loyalists will outnumber independent judges. The court can thereafter support the government by majority decision. Barring these options, the institution can be removed, and a new institution can be created.

Table 3 : Step 1

Step 1	Goal	Methods
<p>Target “referees” of the state.</p> <p>The judiciary, law enforcement, tax and regulation agencies etc.</p>	<p>Ensure the loyalty of the institutions, so they can protect the government and attack opponents.</p>	<p>Blackmail or bribery</p> <p>Replace civil servants with loyalists</p> <p>Impeach Judges</p> <p>Court Packing</p> <p>Create new institutions</p>

5.4.2 2 step – targeting opponents

Once the “referees” are under governmental control, the targets shift to the opponents of the government. These opponents can include opposition politicians, critical media, business, or cultural and religious figures. All of these actors can in some ways influence the opposition of the government. Opposition politicians can fight them in elections and in parliaments, critical media can change opinions and investigate the government, business leaders can finance opposition media or politicians, and cultural and religious leaders can influence opinion (Levitsky, Ziblatt 2018: 81). There are many benefits for a government to control these institutions and agencies. If the executive threatens civil rights, violate laws or the constitution, the government would not have to worry about checks or criticism from the “referees”. They would not criticize the actions, which further would add a “layer of legitimacy” to the government as their actions are approved by the “referees”. However, the main goal in assuring the loyalty of these institutions is to use them as a weapon against the government's opponents. With the loyalty of the judicial and law enforcement institutions, the government can target political opponents unhindered. Intelligence agencies can target political opponents, making them susceptible for blackmailing (Levitsky, Ziblatt 2018: 78 - 79). Opponents are usually not wiped out completely, but rather targeted strategically. Instead of targeting the opposition as a whole, key figures with prominent roles are targeted. Similarly, media and businesses can receive government contracts or subsidiaries in exchange for less critical behaviour. The threat of losing these benefits can also be used by the government. Opponents that cannot be bought are instead targeted in other ways. As with democratic backsliding in general, the opponents are targeted by actions that have a pretense of legitimacy. Opponents can now be incarcerated for disrespecting or criticising the government, for invented crimes by the loyal police and courts, or for “inciting violence” at rallies or protests. Finally, businessmen are also targeted by the government, due to their capability to finance opposition politicians and media. By supporting opposition, businessmen can be targeted with fraud cases, tax evasion and embezzlement. As “kinder” punishment, businessmen may lose government contracts and subsidiaries if they do not comply (Levitsky, Ziblatt 2018: 83 - 86). This is the goal of the government, not necessarily to crush the opposition completely, but to weaken the opposition enough that they are not a threat anymore (Levitsky, Ziblatt 2018: 87).

Table 4: Step 2

Step 2	Goal	Methods
<p>Targets opponents of the government.</p> <p>Political opponents, critical media, business leaders etc</p>	<p>To demoralize and weaken the opposition, and to dissuade criticism of the government</p>	<p>Bribery/blackmail</p> <p>Charge opponents with invented or exaggerated criminal activity</p>

5.4.3 3 step – Establishing political dominance

The final and third step is to further consolidate the power of the government. This can be accomplished by altering the laws and constitution of the state, or by introducing new legislature with the specific goal of strengthening the government and weakening any opposition. Laws exist and are followed, but they are being tilted to favour the government. Election fraud is not a practice generally utilized. With the case of elections, there is no need to alter the results post-election. Instead, the electoral system is altered to favour the government. The electoral system can be altered to favour larger parties, which is often disadvantageous to a disunited opposition. Gerrymandering can also be used by the government to create districts the government are more likely to win in (Levitsky, Ziblatt 2018: 88).

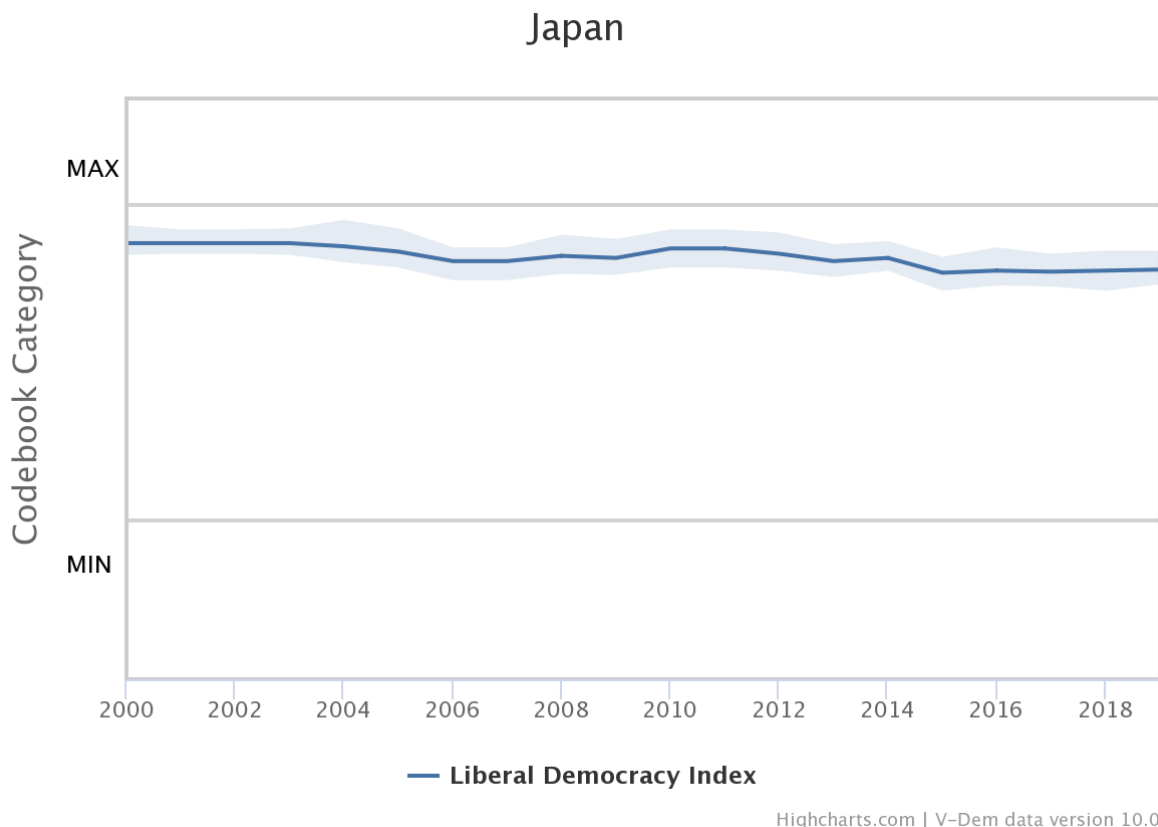
Table 5: Step 3

Step 3	Goal	Methods
<p>Change the rules of governing.</p> <p>Legislation, constitution, and electoral system</p>	<p>Ensure the continued political dominance of the governmental political party</p>	<p>Gerrymandering</p> <p>Alter the electoral rules</p> <p>Introduce legislature to favour the ruling party</p>

5.5 Explanation of democratic backsliding in Japan

The results below provide an answer to the research question; to what extent has there been democratic backsliding in Japan? Based on the V- Dem ratings for the Liberal Democracy Index, we tried to find data for the extent of Democratic Backsliding in Japan. The liberal principle of democracy emphasizes the importance of protecting individual and minority rights against the tyranny of the state and the tyranny of the majority. The liberal model takes a negative view of political power insofar as it judges the quality of democracy by the limits placed on government. This is achieved by constitutionally protected civil liberties, strong rule of law, an independent judiciary, and effective checks and balances that, together, limit the exercise of executive power. To make this a measure of liberal democracy, the index also takes the level of electoral democracy into account.

Figure 7: Japan's Liberal Democracy Index



Japan saw a downturn from 2000 which only makes it a mild backslider because it did not fall by at least one degree. Since this data is not enough to show the full scale of democratic backsliding we proceed with the testing of the other five hypotheses in the next section

5.5.1 Institutional:

5.5.1.1 Electoral System:

Table 6 : Gallagher index Japan

Years	Gallagher Index Single member districts	Gallagher Index Proportional lists	Overall Gallagher index score 0-100
2000	15.57	2.49	11.49
2003	10.64	4.01	8.52
2005	23.00	4.65	15.63
2009	22.47	5.85	15.11
2012	28.55	3.89	19.96
2014	22.81	4.41	16.32
2017	22.78	3.67	16.28

Average Score of the last 7 elections is : 14,75

Japan has a mixed member majoritarian or (MMM) electoral system. In the House of Representatives (*Shugin*), 289 members are elected by plurality vote in single-member constituencies to serve 4-year terms and 176 members are elected through a closed-list proportional representation system to serve 4-year terms. Parties surpassing 5% of the votes are represented in the parliament. The electoral system was changed in 1994 with the passing of a new electoral law. This change was implemented to form a stable two party system but it is seen to benefit the incumbent party in power the LDP. The higher the score the more disproportionality. The Japanese electoral system has thus become increasingly disproportional and seen changes to its electoral system during the time studied, greatly surpassing the average for the population. The electoral system must therefore be seen as disproportional

The Gallagher Index reveals also that elections in Japan do not have an excellent score below 5 % as the average score of the last seven elections is 14,75

5.5.1.2 Checks and Balances:

Three indicators are selected

HOG removal by legislator in practice

Figure 8: HOG removal by legislature in practice

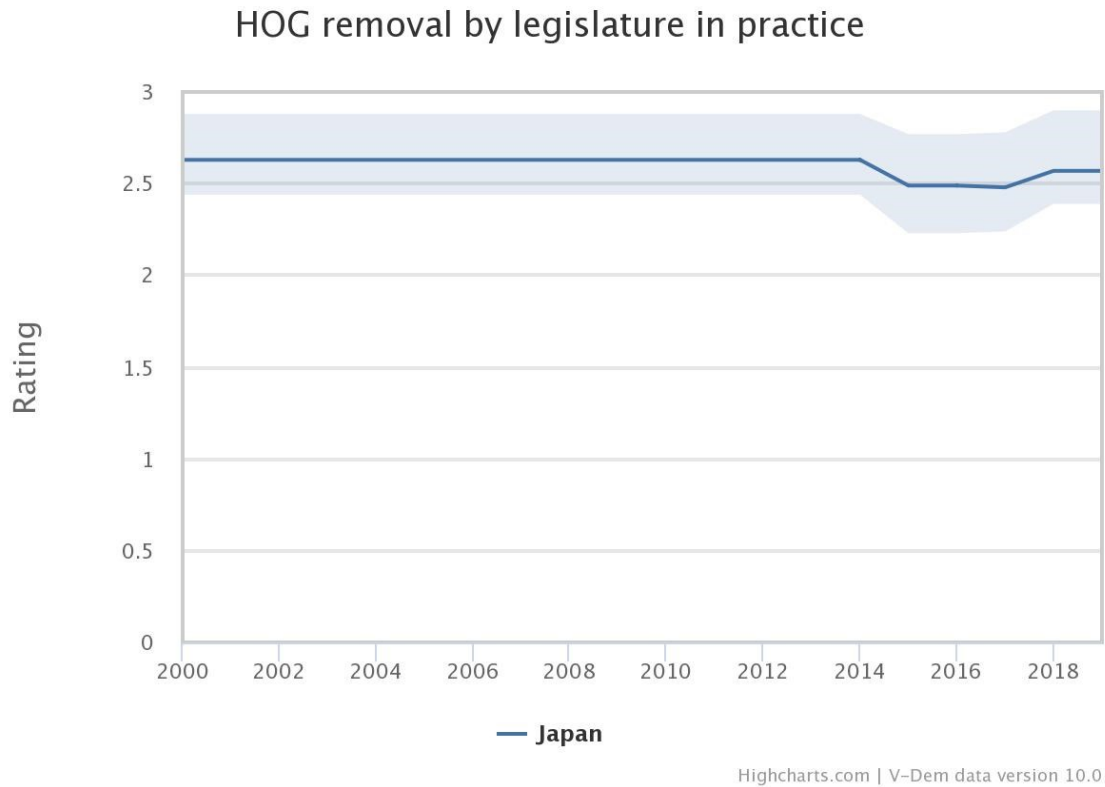


Table 7: HOG removal by legislature in practice

Years	HOG Removal by Legislature (Score 0-3)
2000 - 2014	2,63
2015 - 2017	2,49
2017 - 2018	2,48
2018 - 2019	2,57

Overall score for HOG Removal by Legislature in the last 19 years : 2,54

Varieties of Democracy’s variable “HOG removal by legislator in practice”, shows the parliaments actual likelihood to succeed in removing the head of government from office if

attempted (Lindberg et.al 2017 p.171). If the legislature, or either chamber of the legislature, took actions to remove the head of government from office, would it be likely to succeed even without having to level accusations of unlawful activity without the involvement of any other agency?

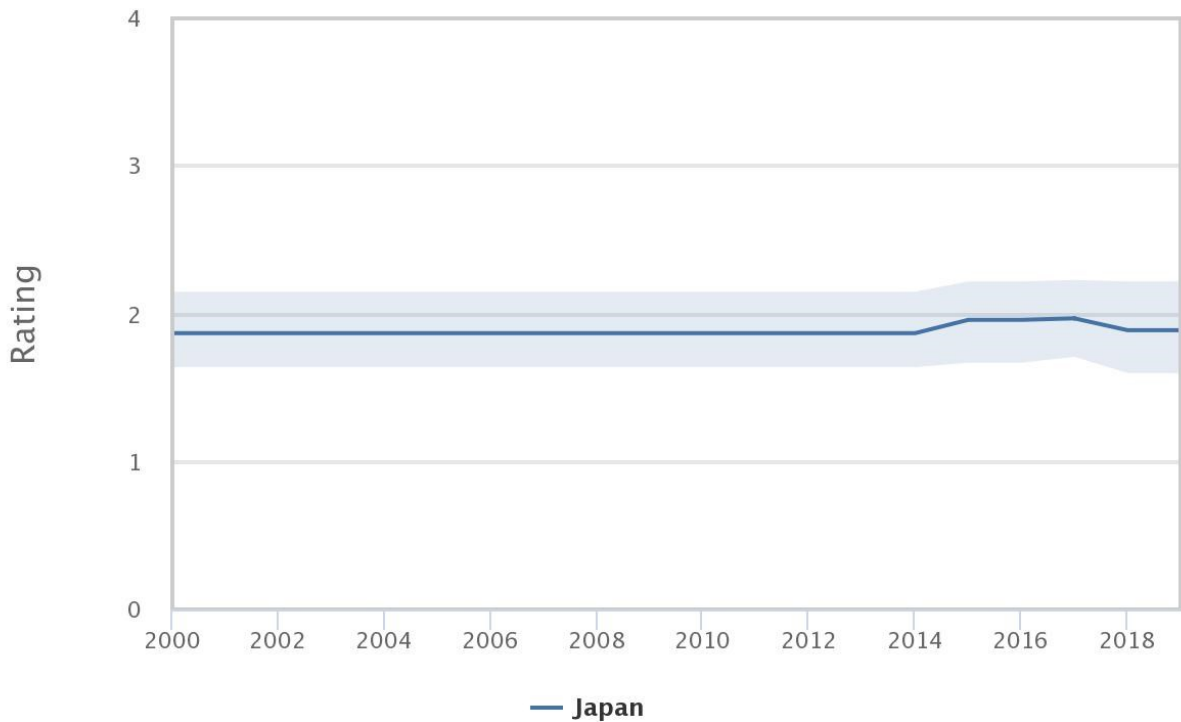
Japan remains on a score between 2,5 and 3. A score of 1 means that the legislature is not likely to succeed in removing the head of government but there is a chance. A score of 2 means that it is likely to succeed but there is a chance it will fail (Lindberg et.al. 2017 p.171) and a score of 3 means that the legislature is likely to succeed.. This means that the Japanese Diet balances on a fine line on whether their potential attempts at ousting the head of government would succeed. The power of the legislature's check on the government depends on if the government holds a majority in the parliament. The governing party LDP, has since 2000 (only a period from 2009 – 2012 where they were the opposition) held a so-called supermajority in the Japanese parliament. Because of the electoral system, they have held more than two thirds of the seats despite only winning 32,58 % of votes in the last 6 election cycles when they were the ruling party in government. Thus, the parliamentary democratic checks have been weak and possible to override

The likelihood of the legislature to remove the HOG has not changed much over the years, since the likelihood is still categorized as “Yes, probably, but there is a chance it would fail” (Coppedge et al. 2017 p. 169)

High Court Indipendence

Figure 9 : High Court Indipendence

High court independence



Highcharts.com | V-Dem data version 10.0

Table 8: High Court Independence

Years	High Court Independence (Score 0-4)
2000 - 2014	1,87
2015 - 2016	1,96
2017 - 2018	1,97
2018 - 2019	1,89

Overall score for High Court Independence: 1,92

When the high court in the judicial system is ruling in cases that are salient to the government, how often would they make decisions that merely reflect government wishes regardless of its sincere view of the legal record? We are seeking to identify autonomous judicial decision-making and its absence. Decisions certainly can reflect government wishes without those wishes, i.e. a court can be autonomous when its decisions support the government's position. This is because a court can be fairly persuaded that the government's position is meritorious.

By this indicator we mean that the court's own view of the record, its sincere evaluation of the record, is irrelevant to the outcome. The court simply adopts the government's position regardless of its sincere view of the record.

How much the rulings of the High Court is reflecting the wishes of the government is still categorized as “About half of the time” (Coppedge et al. 2017 p. 212). However, in 2018 – 2019 there was a 0.09% change. Since, the rulings can almost be categorized as “About half of the time” (Coppedge et al. 2017 p. 212) they are reflecting the government’s wishes.

Government Censorship effort on Media

Figure 10: Government Censorship effort of Media

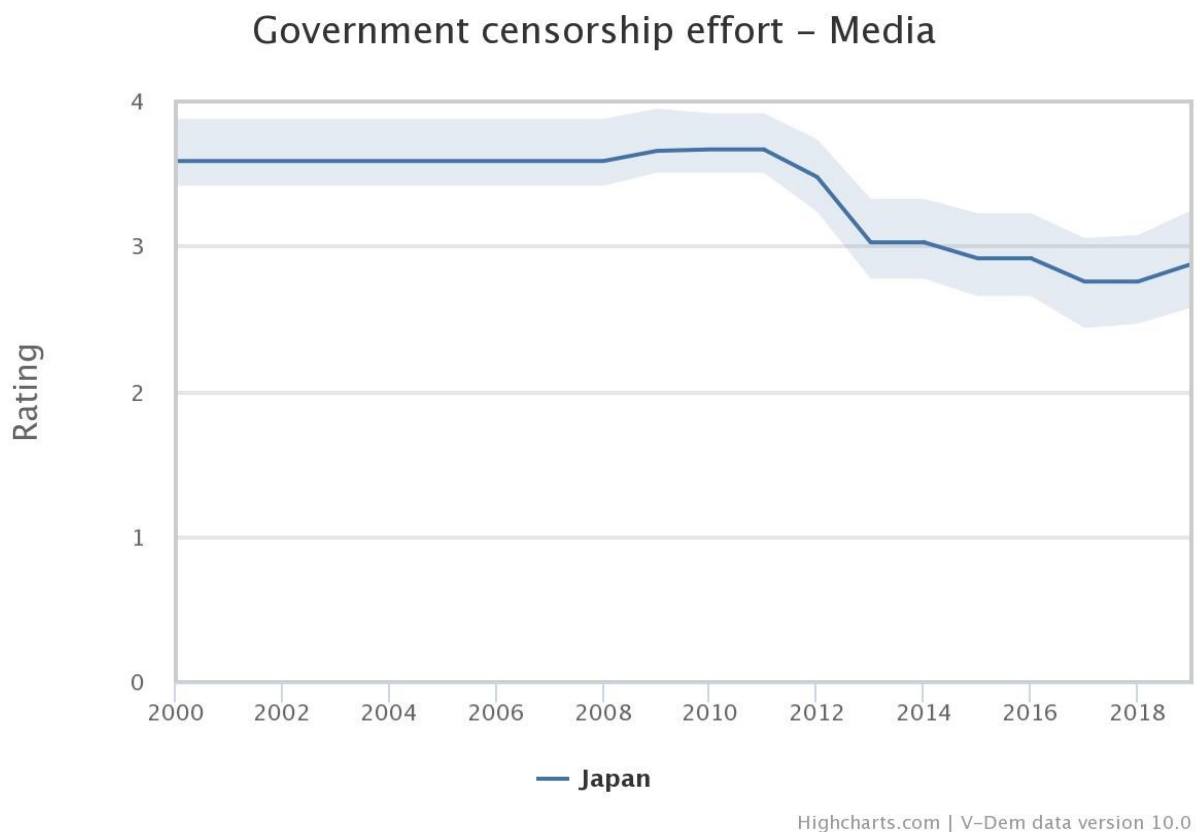


Table 9: Government Censorship of Media

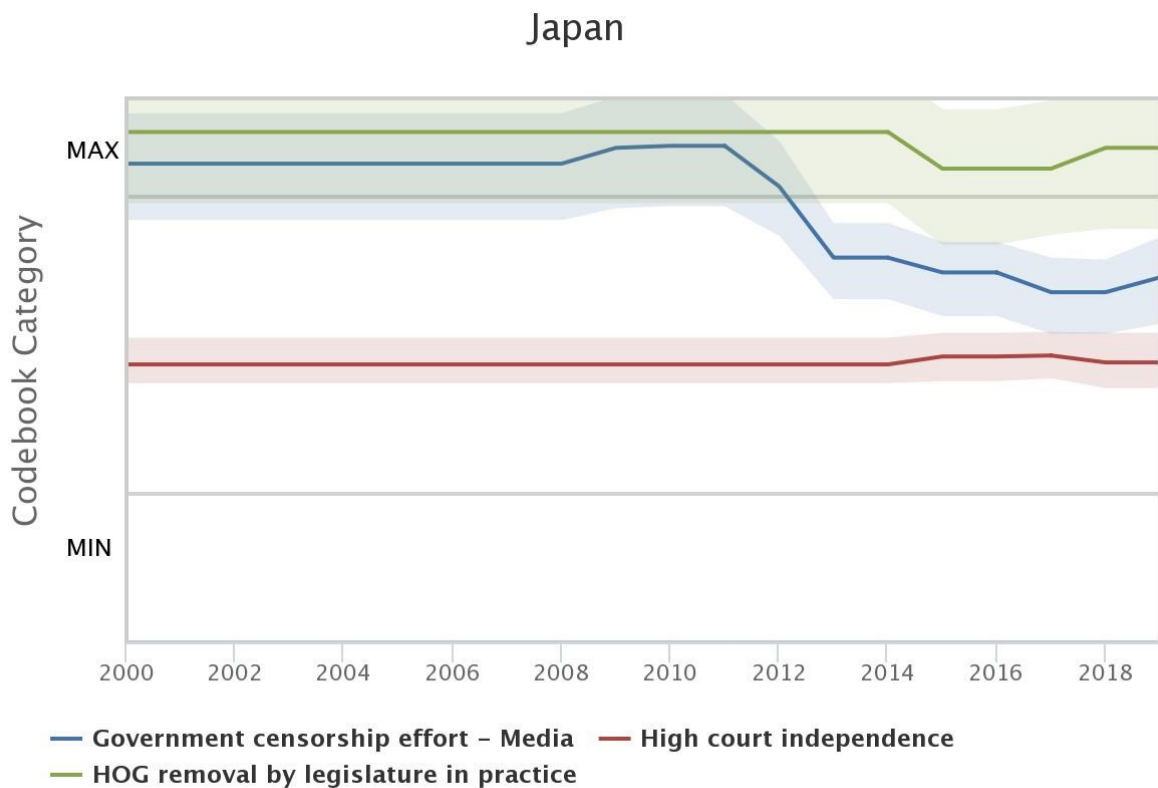
Years	Government censorship effort – Media (Score 0 – 4)
2000 - 2008	3,59
2008 - 2009	3,66
2009 - 2011	3,67
2011 - 2012	3,48
2012 - 2014	3,03
2014 - 2016	2,92
2016 - 2018	2,76
2018 - 2019	2,88

Overall score for Government censorship effort – Media : 3,24

Indirect forms of censorship might include politically motivated awarding of broadcast frequencies, withdrawal of financial support, influence over printing facilities and distribution networks, selected distribution of advertising, onerous registration requirements, prohibitive tariffs, and bribery. The data shows that the Government censorship is mostly in Attempts to censor indirect and limited information, especially sensitive issues. From 2012 – 2018 we see a steady backtracking in the Government to censor free and independent media, therefore we can point out that at this time span of 6 years there were Attempts to censor direct but limited especially sensitive issues. After all the average score in the last 20 years shows a stable relationship between the government and the media by an average score of 3,24 %

Summary:

Figure 11: Overview of Institutional Explanations



Highcharts.com | V-Dem data version 10.0

The checks and balances in Japan have most of the time maintained their same categorization since 2000, and are considered to be robust. Still, a change has occurred in the last 7 years with the rule of the LDP and Shinzo Abe as Prime Minister. The data indicates a decline in the independence of the High Court and the Government Censorship of the Media thus this indicates a weakening of the checks and balances. The finding indicates, according to Hypotheses 2 , that the Japanese democracy is vulnerable to an extent to democratic backsliding, since the factor of weak checks and balances is present in Japan.

5.5.2 Political

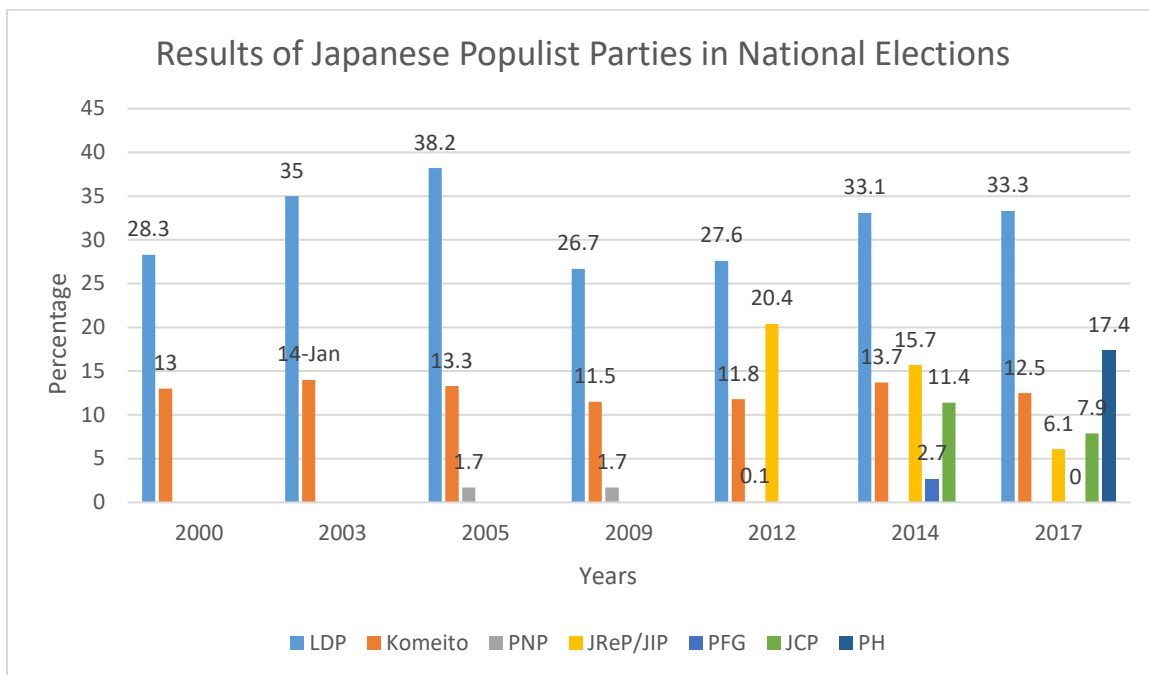
5.5.2.1 *Strength of populist parties in legislative Assembly*

Analytically populism in Japan must be understood as a political strategy employed by politicians. By examining cases of populist Japanese politicians, we observe that populist politics are fueled in the Diet. Therefore we use a qualitative approach with a quantitative dataset. Every politician that had populist or semi-populist tendencies will be viewed as a populist, so if the party to which it belongs by ideology and principle is not populist, the party is made up of members that produce populist policies and shapes its policy into the parliamentary procedure. Although the Japanese parties are quite factionalized. So, if only one factionalization has populist tendencies it will be viewed as populist.

National Election results for populist parties in Japan

Seven political parties can be labelled as populist: LDP - Liberal Democratic Party (自由民主党), KOMIITO – (Shin Kōmeitō) (公明党), PNP - People's New Party (Kokumin Shinto) (国民新党), JreP/JIP - Japan Restoration Party/Japan Innovation Party (Nippon Ishin no Kai) (日本維新の会), PFG - Party for Future Generations (Jisedai No Tou) (次世代の党), JCP - Japan Communist Party (Nihon Kyōsan-tō) (日本共産党), PH - Party of Hope (Kibō no Tō) (希望の党)

Figure 12: Results of Japanese Populist Parties in National Elections



Japan has seen a lack of populist parties until recently. Before the economic crisis in 2008 there was a political crisis caused by decreasing popular trust in politicians and political institutions like there always was, much due to continuous corruption scandals. When winning a significant part of the electorate in one election, we see most of the political parties to disappear in the next like the PNP or PFG. Also what is seen from the election cycles is that most of the parties have a tendency to lose votes in the next election like the JreP/JIP party. Where in 2012 the vote share was 20,4% and in the last elections for the House of Representatives the party had only 6,1 % of the vote share. These political parties that have been labelled as populist parties during the time under study, have significant vote share. Additionally, in each election a populist party has achieved representation, especially in the last 2 election cycles, particularly 2014 and 2017 we see a growing phenomenon of populist parties in Japan. In conclusion, the factor of presence of populist parties is solidly present in Japan, which according to Hypotheses 3, makes Japan vulnerable to democratic backsliding.

5.5.2.2 Populist leaders in government

All results represent a combination of the previous hypothesis where the parties were characterized as populist, and with a combination of qualitative research and quantitative raising of data with the Party Project Manifesto Database, we make a complete complementary base for political factors, through the Party Project Manifesto and observing the agendas of populist parties and populist ideas we come to data that will be able to characterize and give answers to the third hypothesis and answers to hypothesis 4.

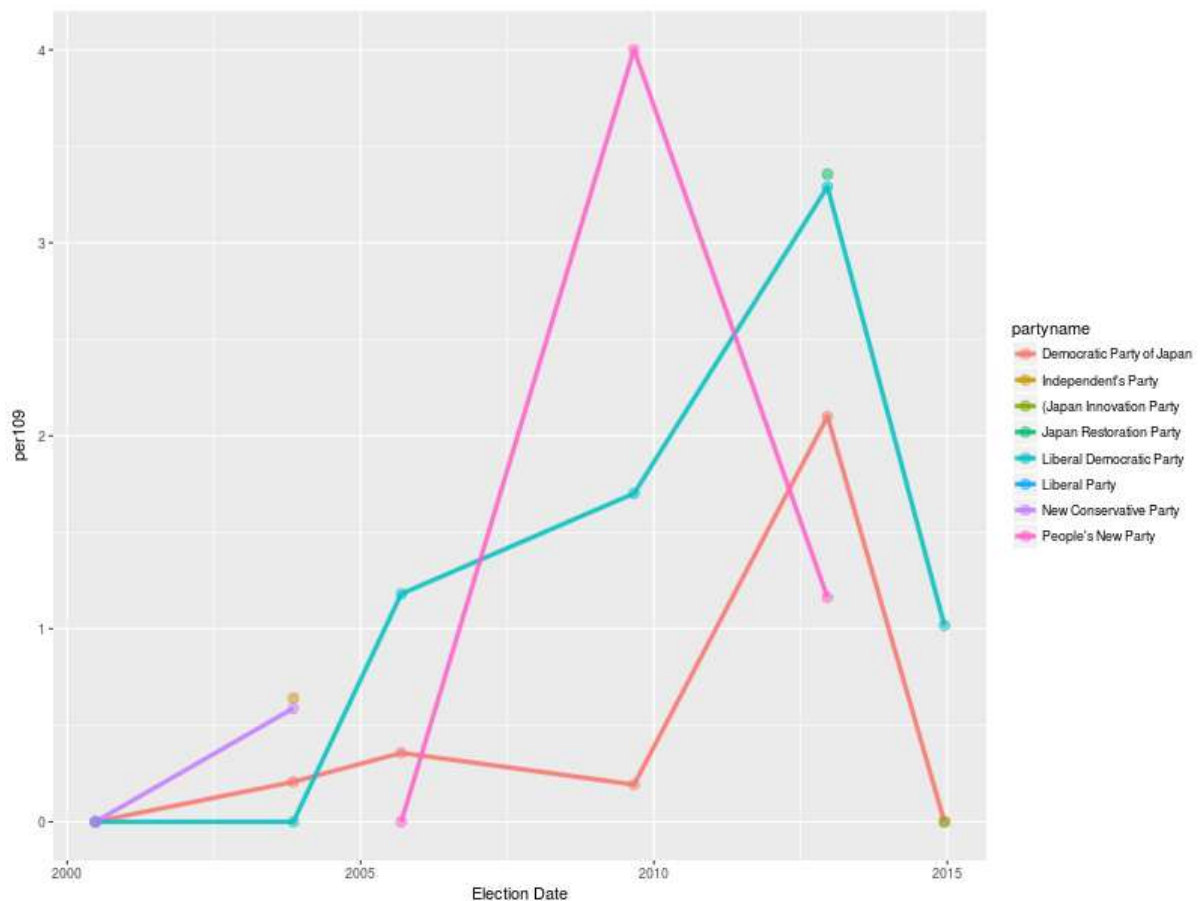
Populist leaders tend to adopt populist appeals. There is scarce of information to be gathered on the Japanese mainstream parties' that were in government. In the last 20 year's this were the LDP & DPJ. Since the DPJ, was not characterised as a populist party and searching through their agenda to find any information about populist policies, the conclusion is that the DPJ who was in power from 2009 – 2012 will not be researched. The only focus will be on the LDP party of Japan, since they are in power the last 17 years.

The limits of 'Abenomics' - the economic reforms led by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe - have become more apparent. Despite a budget stimulus plan, monetary easing and structural reform, growth remained weak and public debt continued to remain very high (237.7% of Japan's GDP in 2019); a trend that IMF estimates to continue in 2020 and 2021 (237.6% of Japan's GDP in 2020, 238.4% of Japan's GDP in 2021). From this qualitative approach we can see that the LDP used populist policies in they campaigns and that the results of the reform are missing. Therefore, we can mark this reform as populist.

In addition, the Government deficit remained high, with rising social expenditure. Japan's budget deficit was -2.9% in 2019, but it is expected to decrease in 2020 and 2021, to -2.1% and -1.9% respectively. This does not appear to be a realistic goal, as health care spending due to the ageing population has increased. An increase in VAT (from 8% to 10%) was implemented in October 2019 there was an increase in household spending ahead of the sales tax hike, followed by a contraction after its implementation. An ageing society causes a big challenge for the country, as the government's expected spending on pensions and health care is set to keep on rising. Notwithstanding the negative economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the unemployment trend should remain stable in the upcoming years, 3% in 2020 and 2.3% in 2021.

Following all of this, in the Party Project Manifesto three indicators have been selected, based on populist policies and populist ideology: A negative view towards Internationalism, Political Authority over other political parties, and Protectionism of the economy.

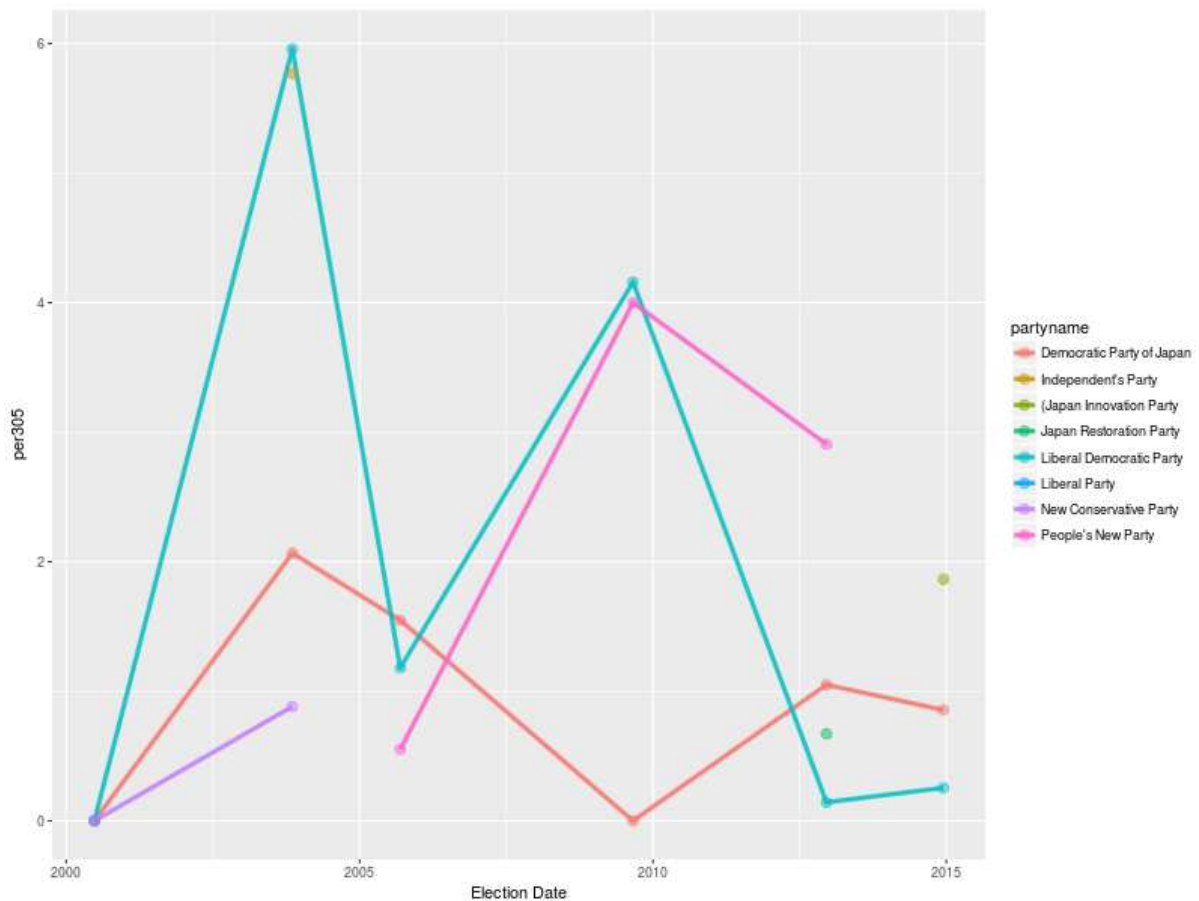
Figure 13: Overview of the position of the LDP towards internationalism



Since the Manifesto Project Database, can not throw out different political parties from their graph, we have used the conservative parafarm for political parties selection where we have all the marked conservative/nationalist political parties in Japan. Therefore, we can see in the first paragraph that the LDP had a constant growth of a negative view towards Internationalism from 2004 to 2006. When the LDP lost the „General Elections in 2009 to the DPJ“, the LDP's position towards internationalism was negative, the graph grew constantly to the moment when the LDP regained power after the „General Elections in 2012“. After that moment the graph has a harsh falldown towards a positive view of internationalism.

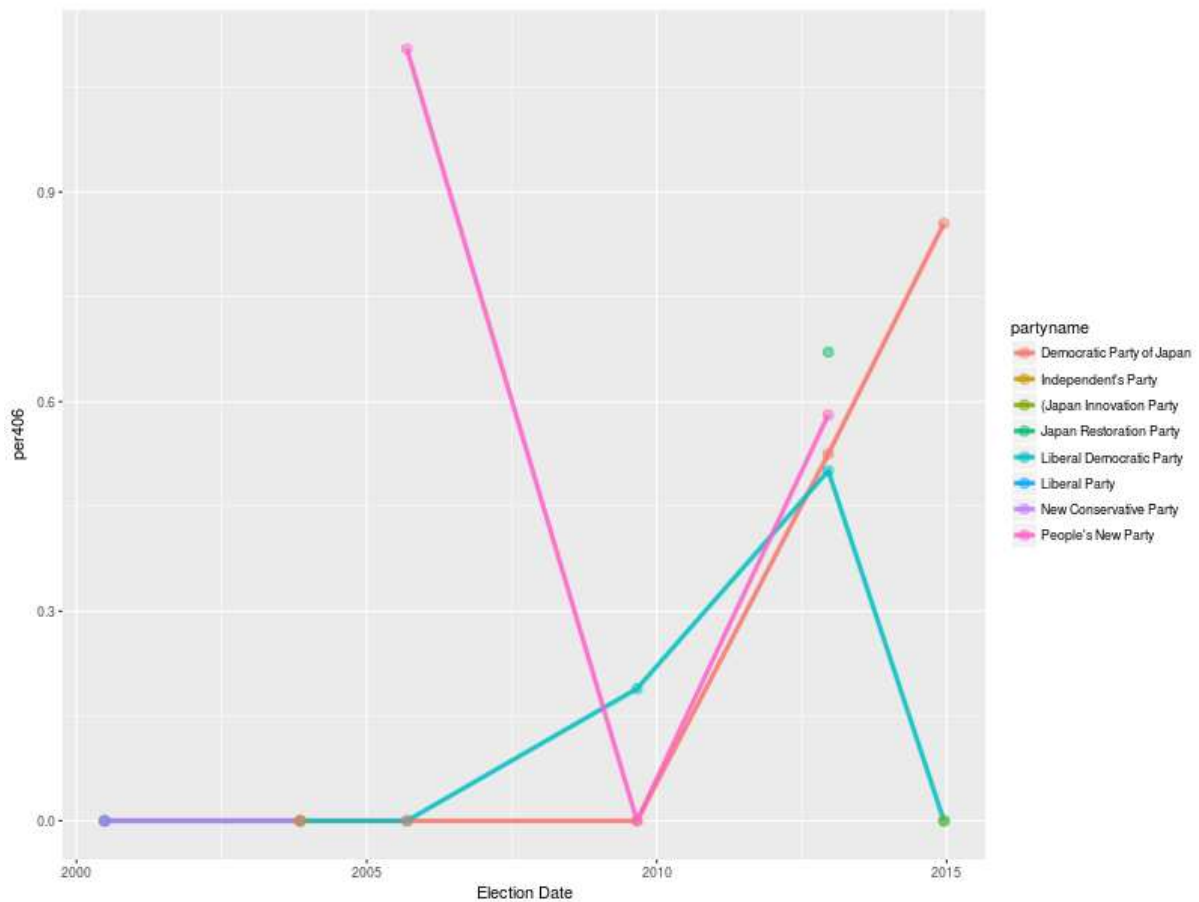
Due to the relevance of the data, it was only possible to measure the data until 2015 before the last election cycle in 2017. From the data shown it is clear that the LDP adopted „Populistic Policies“ and used populist rhetoric

Figure 14: Overview of the position of the LDP towards Political Authority



In the second paragraph, the Political authority over other political parties was measured. The data shows that the LDP during their time in government had policies to restrict other political parties. One thing to note here is that the maximum peak was under Koizumi's Cabinet. Since Koizumi was the leader of the LDP in this period and was a skilled politician, this graph could give us more information about the LDP's landslide victory in the „ General Election in 2005“. After the elections in 2005, after the election, immediately a year later we see a huge drop on the chart again, and is gaining momentum again towards the elections in 2009. Again we see, an exponential drop after the 2009 elections for the House of Representatives. In the last 10 years we see a steady fallback from political authority, with a little swing and growth after Shinzo Abe became Prime Minister.

Figure 15: Overview of the position of the LDP towards Economic Protectionism



The last paragraph is referred to protectionism of the Economy. The LDP, is mostly known for their free market economy position and their connection with businesses. After the 2008 economic crisis we see a growth towards economic protectionism, particularly we can see this as a populist outrage towards the DPJ who was in ruling power at that time. This explanation is due to the intense influence of factions in the LDP who had a more protective position towards the economy of Japan. After Shinzo Abe became Prime Minister in 2012 we see a sharp decline towards protectionism.

Summary:

There is little evidence that Japanese Leaders who have adopted populist appeals and consequently used them in government. One thing is also clear, that is that the LDP did at certain times have populist intentions and policies which is well seen in the charts. The problem is how relevant these data are to measuring populism in government.

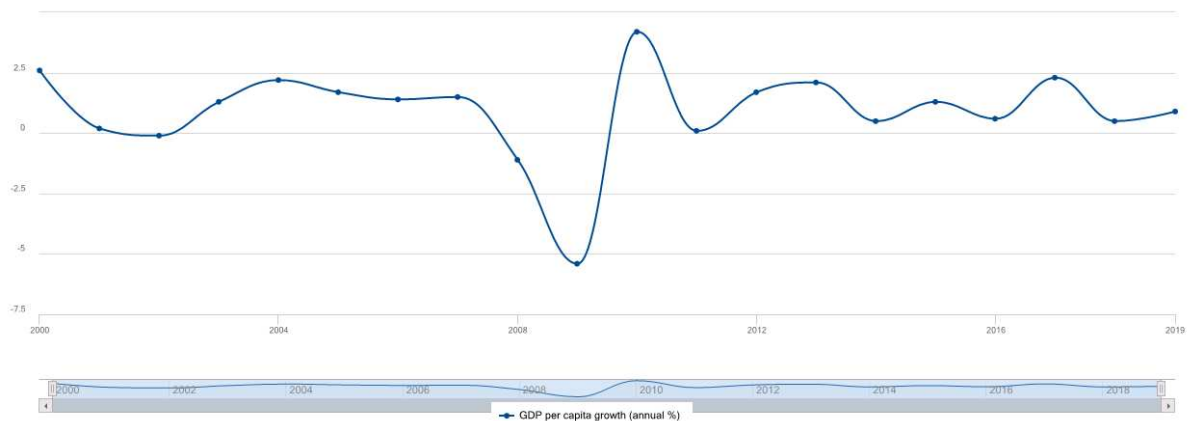
Therefore, we can say that populist leaders push towards democratic backsliding, but partially. From this point of views we can say that this thesis is partially confirmed.

5.5.3 Economic

5.5.3.1 Economic crisis

GDP per capita growth (annual):

Figure 16: GDP per capita growth in Japan



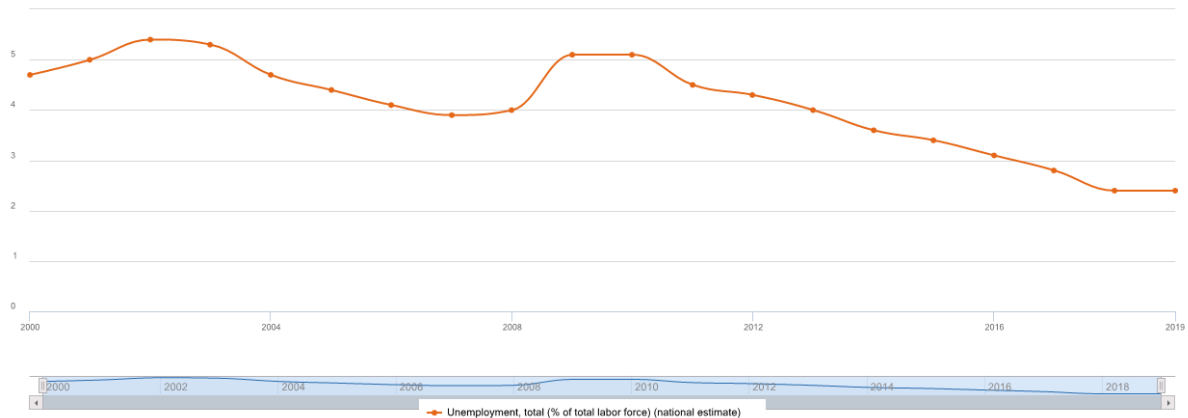
Country : Japan
Source: World Development Indicators
Created on: 09/06/2020

GDP per capita growth is an important indicator of economic performance and a useful unit to make cross-country comparisons of average living standards and economic wellbeing. However, GDP per capita is not a measure of personal income and using it for cross-country comparisons also has some known weaknesses.

The graph illustrates the development of the GDP per capita growth in Japan in the last 20 years, and it shows that at one point in the last twenty years was the annual growth rate less than -5% , this was due to the „Economic Crisis“ in 2008. Most of the time there are no major deviations in the paragraph, except for the aforementioned 2008 crisis. This indicates that Japan was in a economic crisis, but it' is not currently finding themselves in an economic crisis. It is certainly clear that Japan will find themselves in a Economic Crisis in 2020 due to the Coronavirus pandemic, but the data for that is not currently available. According to Acemoglu & Robinson's (2006) definition of an economic crisis and the trace it leaves to democracy it is certainly clear that Japan has a rough time ahead. Since the data is gathered from 2000 – 2019 we can say that Japan is not currently in an unstable economic position.

Unemployment rate

Figure 17: Unemployment rate in Japan



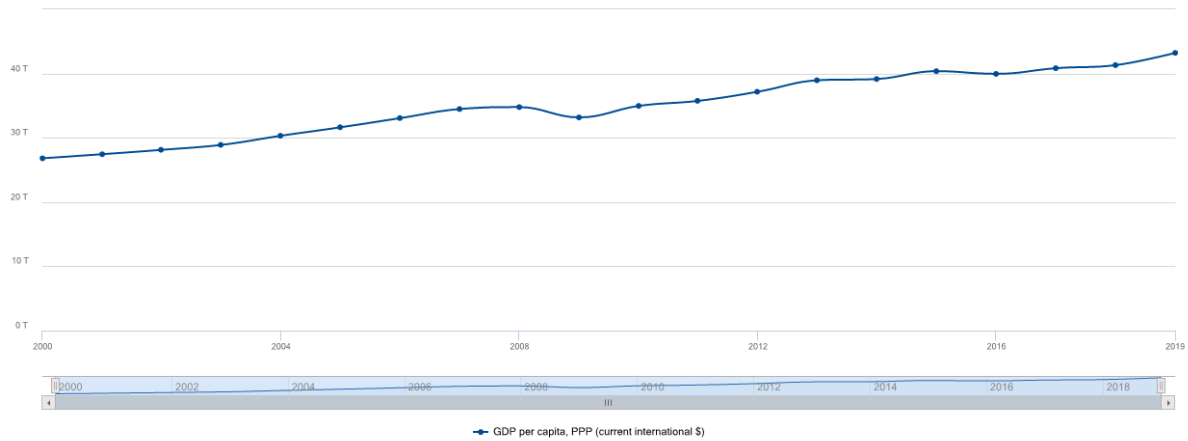
Country : Japan
Source: World Development Indicators
Created on: 09/06/2020

The unemployment rate is the percent of the labor force that is jobless. It is a lagging indicator, meaning that it generally rises or falls in the wake of changing economic conditions, rather than anticipating them. The unemployment rate is an important indicator it uses to determine the health of the economy when setting monetary policy. Investors also use current unemployment statistics to look at which sectors are losing jobs faster. They can then determine which sector-specific mutual funds to sell. The graph illustrates the unemployment rate in Japan in the last 19 years. The graph shows that since 2012 unemployment is constantly falling.

Since all the unemployment rates increase from 2008 due to the economic crisis we can say that Japan couldn't have managed it any better to bring down their unemployment rate, so that in 2016 it was lower than the pre-crisis level in 2008. Therefore, the conclusion is that Japan has a healthy economy and is working towards an unemployment rate under 2%.

GDP Per Capita:

Figure 18: GDP Per Capita in Japan

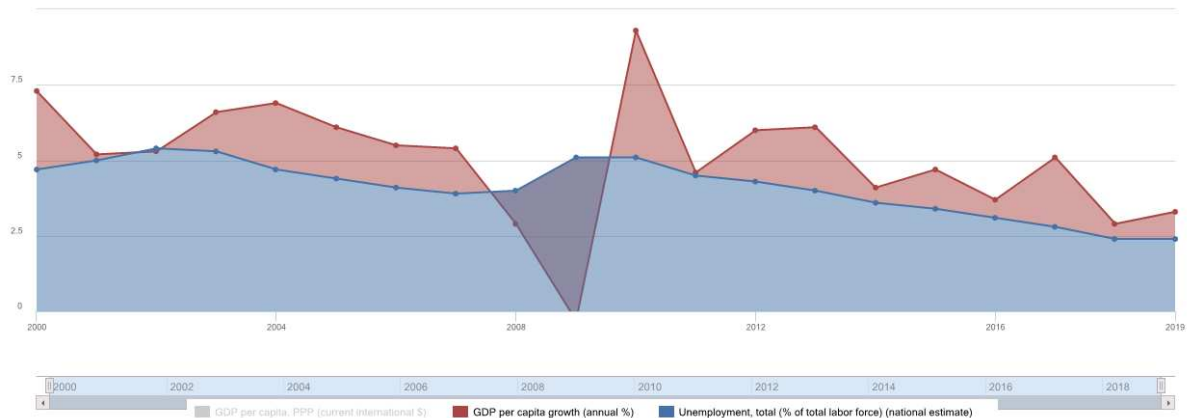


Country : Japan
Source: World Development Indicators
Created on: 09/07/2020

The per capita GDP shows how much economic production value can be attributed to each individual citizen. Alternatively, this translates to a measure of national wealth since GDP market value per person also readily serves as a prosperity measure. GDP itself is the primary measure of a country's economic productivity. The graph illustrates the GDP Per Capita rate in Japan, the last 19 years and it shows that it was steadily growing to the moment of the 2008 economic crisis, after the economic crisis it is steadily growing again. A high GDP per capita indicates a high standard of living, a low one indicates that a country is struggling to supply its inhabitants with everything they need. Therefore the conclusion is that also this indicator, show that the Japanese economy is stable and has no drastic downturns.

Summary:

Figure 19: Overview of Economic Explanations



Country : Japan
Source: World Development Indicators
Created on: 09/07/2020

This graph illustrates the overlapping between 2 indicators of GDP per capita growth (annual %) and Unemployment, total (% of the total labor force). Since this two indicators are a component of GDP per capita, PPP, we summarize that Japan has a well functioning economic, and there are no detections of economic crisis.

The GDP per growth has been only once less than -5% in any of the proceeding twenty years as such Japan could be considered to have been in a state of an economic crisis in 2008. Therefore, as Japan is not finding themselves in an economic crisis in the last 20 years then it will make sense to see the only influence from the former economic crisis in 2008. The data indicates that the economic crisis in 2008 did influence the level of GDP per capita growth and unemployment rate. When it comes to the unemployment rate, then table clearly illustrates that Japan was affected by the 2008 economic crisis. Japan has managed to bring their rate of unemployment below their own national 2008 pre-crisis level which indicates that Japan was no longer affected by the 2008 economic crisis. In conclusion, Japan is not in a state of an economic crisis, and the indicators shows that to. Therefore, the factor of economic crisis is not present in Japan, and it cannot be deemed present in Japan. From this summary we conclude that the economic crisis has no effect on democratic backsliding in Japan.

5.6. Summary of findings

The table summarizes the results of the case study. It shows which explanatory factors have been found in which cases. The answer to the second research question; What seems to be the factors enabling democratic backsliding Japan?

Table 10: Summary of Findings

Factors	Hypotheses	Found in Japan
Institutional Factors	A disproportional electoral system is more vulnerable to democratic backsliding.	Confirmed
	The weaker the institutional checks and balances, the more vulnerable a democracy is to democratic backsliding.	Confirmed
Political Factors	The stronger presence populist parties have in the legislative assembly the more vulnerable a democracy is to democratic backsliding.	Confirmed
	Populist leaders in government, particularly when exercising government leadership, exert a negative effect on democratic quality, that leads to democratic backsliding	Partially Confirmed
Economic Factors	A deep economic crisis increases the likelihood of democratic backsliding	Not Confirmed

It is that a disproportional electoral system, weak institutional checks and balances, and the presence of populist parties in the legislative assembly, and partially populist leaders in government are factors seemingly facilitating democratic backsliding in the studied country.

This would confirm hypotheses 1,2,3 and partially 4 since they can be found present in Japan. A further discussion of how these findings can be interpreted is found in the conclusion.

6.CONCLUSION:

The study of backsliding is an important new research frontier. The increased incidence of democratic backsliding has been met with a similar increase in scholarly interest, but much is to be done to develop a coherent theoretical understanding of this phenomenon. As we look at the emerging literature on backsliding, much of which describes particular pathways of backsliding, we see a great deal of theoretical modesty, it became clear that while the literature is extensive it lacks consistency and uniformity. Each paper, article examines democratic backsliding through a different lens, each with different parameters for what the phenomenon entails. There is no readily available set of theories that we can uncontroversially adopt, adapt, and apply to the problem of backsliding.

The causes of vulnerability to backsliding may be distinct from the proximate causes of particular instantiations of backsliding. A political actor in a polity that is vulnerable to backsliding may initiate a low-level assault on democratic accountability in response to a particular global event that does not trigger backsliding in other, less vulnerable democracies.

As with every thesis, paper, essay, science article, there are shortcomings that potentially impacted the results, validity and replication of this study. As a student with moderate expertise on the subject of democratic backsliding, I am limited in my ability to completely and wholly grasp every aspect of what democratic backsliding entails. Additionally, the study relied on data and findings from other authors, and therefore the definitions and parameters were limited to the expanse of such studies.

Japan is facing a set of serious democratic challenges in a turbulent political environment. Political instability has dominated the scene since the 1980's, and has shaped the democratic debate in the country ever since. The leading challenge to democracy in Japan identified in this thesis, appears to be state capture. The latter brings together the problems in the judicial system and the widespread political corruption in the country. These processes are accompanied by a worsening of the media environment. An additional factor for these negative tendencies is the rise of nationalist/populist parties and widespread economic populism in the last years. These two are working together, as the main players. Their rise in popularity has drawn some of the mainstream parties to the same battleground of populism.

This thesis has aimed to answer the following question; To what extent has there been democratic backsliding in Japan and what seems to be the factors enabling democratic backsliding in Japan?

One of the key findings of this thesis is that out of the five hypothesized explanations for backsliding, three seem to enable backsliding in the Japan. It cannot be assessed here if all the found factors are required to appear together for backsliding to occur. This thesis has made three main contributions. Theoretically, it has developed an analytical framework based on the still quite underdeveloped research field on democratic backsliding particularly in a case study. Methodologically it has applied a method not previously prominent in backsliding research which made it possible to seek explanatory factors in depth. Empirically, this thesis has, based in existing data, identified democratic backsliders in the Japan.

The institutional strand is a prominent one in the backsliding and democratization literature but institutional factors lack importance in the results. Institutional features usually do not vary over a short time period like the one studied here. It is hard to claim that a constant institutional feature would cause a change in democracy. The institutional hypotheses stated that a disproportional electoral system weakens oppositions and auditing institutions, and the ability to override democratic checks and balances limits control on the executive power. One reason for this could be the possible time order of when different factors are “activated”. It is possible that institutional changes weakening democracy take place after economic crisis and spread of populism.

Populism seems to matter for democratic backsliding since if mainstream parties adopts populist appeals, they abandon a commitment to democracy. The theoretically proposed causal mechanism is primarily that mainstream parties find that instead of constraining populists, a populist rhetoric can be strategically and electorally advantageous (Pappas 2013). While this can be closely connected to the electoral success of populist parties, it is the mainstream parties’ abandonment of democratic principles that poses the greatest threat to democracy.

A suggested causal mechanism for the economic explanations is that people lose belief in the democratic system if it cannot deliver prosperity (Ágh 2013, Krastev 2016). Consecutive crises can open the field to other type of political actors when the people became disappointed and lost belief in democracy’s ability to care for them (Ágh 2013). When people lose hope in mainstream politics ability to improve lives through a democratic political system, alternative

political agendas, often populist, may be more appealing. In this way, the economic explanations are also interlinked with the political explanations.

What can be said is that in countries where mainstream parties show a weak commitment to democracy, there is a greater risk of backsliding in the future, especially if this factor is combined with an economic crisis that in turn negatively affected ordinary people.

However, economic crisis and populism are themselves enough to cause backsliding.

There is no denying that democratic backsliding within Japan can come to be the greatest challenge the country has faced so far.

Future research should delve deeper into the connection between the three explanations found here. The next step is to fully understand the causal links between economy and populism, and the importance of belief in democracy. A study including more cases, further examining the explanations found here, is relevant for future research.

Additionally, the data that has been available to test the identified factors has been limited, which consequently do not provide the full understanding of the identified factors. Yet, the approach is a humble attempt to map out the factors of democratic backsliding, and investigate whether mechanisms that is designed to overcome democratic backsliding exists. The accuracy of the theoretical model could also be tested in another comparative study.

As already mentioned in the course of this work, Japanese society is shaped by values and morals that cannot be compared with European models. When evaluating the party system, these boundary conditions should not be completely disregarded. In the Japanese context in particular, commitment and loyalty to people and groups are of particular interest. This has the effect that the competence of the candidate who is elected often takes a back seat to his family background. In this way, political dynasties arose in Japan in which mandates were repeatedly "inherited". Japan may be a liberal democracy, but the changes it has seen in the last century have come so rapidly that many traditional aspects of Japanese political culture remain intact, or at least play an important residual role in understanding Japanese political culture. The emphasis placed on group orientation, hierarchy, mutual obligation, and consensus has come under increasing criticism for acting as a brake on Japan's political modernization. Political power is based on a web of patron-client relationships: social and financial ties that bind a small political elite and promote nepotism and factionalism.

Also, possible explanations of this findings are rooted according to Clark D. Neher concept, that Japan is a traditional „Asian Style Democracy“ with western liberal elements of democracy and authoritarian traits. These elements of western liberal democracies are the following: general, free and fair elections for the election of political leaders, privacy of the citizens without state interference, free access to the media and freedom of the press, the possibility of citizens to form interest groups. This is comparable to semidemocracies or semiauthoritarianisms described in Western concepts.

Neher describes the Asian form of democracy on the basis of five characteristics: patron - client - relationships, the strong personalization of the political process, a high level of respect for authority and hierarchy based on religious tradition, the dominance of individual parties and the presence of a strong state of intervention. As long as political leaders maintain peace and harmony, their authority remains. The strong personalization the most important organizational unit for policy making. Confucianism encourages the emergence of authoritarian structures. Also, there is usually no alternating change of government. The reason for this is the factionalisation of political parties. Informal factions determine the internal organizational form of Asian parties. Differences about directional decisions are not settled between different parties but between the different factions of a party. While writing this thesis, some expected as well as unexpected situations occurred. One of the possible explanations to set in democratic backsliding in Japan is the coronavirus pandemic, which will leave long-lasting consequences on the Japanese economy that can already be noticed. Perhaps the most important information is that Shinzo Abe, after 8 years in power, decided to resign as prime minister due to health reasons. Interestingly, Abe was the longest-serving prime minister in Japan after World War II, it can be noticed that Shinzo Abe during his 8 years was a leader who did not take Japan in the direction he had planned. It is fascinating that he endured 8 years in power at all, given the Japanese political system and frequent changes of prime ministers, one of the possible explanations for why he stayed so long is perhaps the democratic backsliding that he produced and used for his own purposes to stabilize his position as prime minister. We do not know what will happen in the near future, it is assumed that Taro Aso the current Finance and Deputy Prime Minister from the LDP will inherit the position of Prime Minister. The world currently needs a strong democratic Japan with democratic values, democratic backsliding will be more and more, especially in Asia. Therefore, Make Japan Great Again.

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