

Japan: The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) scored a landslide victory in the House of Councillors election

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LDP scores huge win, ending divided Diet

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) scored a landslide victory in the House of Councillors election on July 21, enabling the party to control both houses of the Diet with its coalition partner New Komeito and to proceed with the “Abenomics” economic policy mix.

After the convincing victory, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, also LDP president, is likely to ponder implementing his pet project to revise the postwar Constitution.

With half of the 242 upper house seats up for grabs, the LDP won a record 65 seats, eclipsing the previous record of 64 in the 2001 upper house election, under the current electoral system. The New Komeito party garnered 11 seats, giving the ruling coalition a combined total of 135 seats in the chamber to secure a stable majority in the 242-member assembly.

In contrast, the largest opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) suffered a crushing defeat, winning only 17 of the contested seats, down from 44 before the election. The Japanese Communist Party (JCP) performed well, winning seats in prefectural constituencies for the first time in 12 years on its way to more than doubling its three contested seats to eight. The Japan Restoration Party and Your Party also captured eight seats each, while the Social Democratic Party (SDP) secured one seat. The People’s Life Party and Green Wind party failed to win any seats.

Mainichi Shimbun, July 22, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130722p2a00m0na010000c.html>

Nearly quarter of unaffiliated voters cast ballots for LDP

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Nearly a quarter of swing voters cast ballots in Sunday's House of Councillors election for the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, which is projected to secure a comfortable majority in the chamber with its coalition partner, according to Kyodo News exit polls.

Among voters interviewed at polling stations, 20.3 percent said they did not support a specific political party. Of them, 23.0 percent said they had voted for the LDP in the proportional representation block or for LDP candidates in prefectural districts, up from 16.7 percent in the last upper house election in 2010.

Meanwhile, 15.5 percent of the voters who did not support a particular party said they cast ballots for Your Party, down from 22.8 percent in the 2010 election but surpassing 14.4 percent for the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan, which was in power for around three years until last December.

The proportion of unaffiliated voters who cast ballots for the DPJ fell far short of the 28.8 percent recorded in the 2010 election in which the party suffered a major setback, with many swing voters who previously supported the party shifting to other parties such as the Japan Restoration Party and the Japanese Communist Party.

The JCP secured the support of 13.5 percent of the swing voters, compared to 7.1 percent in 2010.

Around 13.3 percent backed the Restoration Party led by Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto and former Tokyo Gov. Shintaro Ishihara. The New Komeito party, the LDP's coalition partner, secured support from 8.9 percent, compared with 7.5 percent in the last contest.

The Social Democratic Party was supported by 3.2 percent of the swing voters, compared with 5.0 percent in 2010.

Kyodo news, July 21, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130721p2g00m0dm026000c.html>

Voter turnout slips to 52.6 percent for upper house election

Only 52.61 percent of eligible voters cast ballots in July 21's House of Councillors election, according to data collected by the Mainichi Shimbun, marking one of the lowest turnouts in postwar upper house election history.

The voter turnout rate dropped more than five points from the 57.92 percent of the electorate who cast ballots in the 2010 upper house poll, and ranks as the third worst turnout after the 50.72 percent who came out in 1992, and the 44.52 percent of 1995.

It appears likely that voter interest in the election remained cool due to the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's perceived dominance of Japan's political landscape.

According to Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications statistics, however, this upper house

election saw the most early ballots cast since the advance voting system was established, going from just over 12.08 million in 2010 to nearly 12.95 million this year — a 7.15 percent increase.

Mainichi Shimbun, July 22, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130722p2a00m0na012000c.html>

Actor Yamamoto, ex-wrestler Inoki assured of election victory

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Taro Yamamoto, an actor known for his antinuclear activities, and former Japanese wrestling star Antonio Inoki were assured of victory in Sunday's House of Councillors election, Kyodo News projections and early returns showed.

Yamamoto, 38, who ran as an independent in the Tokyo constituency, is set to enter the upper chamber after failing to win a seat in the House of Representatives election last December.

He became known for his antinuclear activities following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear crisis. He has also campaigned against Japan's participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade negotiations, while calling for improved social security.

Inoki, 70, ran in the upper house's proportional representation block for the Japan Restoration Party, co-headed by former Tokyo Gov. Shintaro Ishihara and Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto.

The wrestling legend became an upper house lawmaker in 1989 when he ran as a member of the now-defunct Sports Peace Party. He lost his seat in 1995.

Kyodo news, July 21, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130721p2g00m0dm030000c.html>

Before elections

LDP's lead growing ahead of Upper House election: survey

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party is building its lead in the opinion polls ahead of the Upper House election, the latest survey shows.

A nationwide telephone survey conducted by Kyodo News over the weekend found that 31.1 percent of respondents intend to vote for the LDP in the proportional representation section of the House of Councilors election, up from 28.8 percent last week.

The election will be held on July 21 and campaigning is expected to kick off on Thursday.

In second place is the Democratic Party of Japan, the largest opposition force, with 7.5 percent, down from 8.2 percent last week.

In the meantime, 5.9 percent of the respondents said they intend to vote for the LDP's coalition partner, Buddhist-backed New Komeito, little changed from 6.0 percent in the previous poll.

About 3.3 percent said they will vote for Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Restoration Party), co-led by former Tokyo Gov. Shintaro Ishihara and Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto, down from 4.8 percent.

The survey covered 1,218 eligible voters, of whom 35.5 percent said they had not decided who to vote for, down from 37.7 percent last week.

The support rate for Abe's Cabinet meanwhile stood at 66.8 percent, up slightly from 65.6 percent in the previous survey, while its disapproval rate declined to about 22.1 percent, compared with 23.6 percent last week.

Kyodo News, July 1, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/07/01/national/ldps-lead-growing-ahead-of-upper-house-election-survey/#.UdtMSaxjbRY>

45% will vote for LDP in upper house's proportional segment: Mainichi poll

Forty-five percent of respondents to an opinion poll by the Mainichi Shimbun say they will vote for the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in the proportional representation section of the House of Councillors election on July 21.

The Mainichi poll, taken June 29 and 30, shows that only 8 percent would vote for the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), 7 percent for Your Party and 5 percent for the Japan Restoration Party (JRP), reflecting the LDP's continued popularity as in the case of the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly election on June 23.

According to the poll, 6 percent would vote for the New Komeito party, the LDP's junior coalition partner, bringing the coalition's combined popularity to 51 percent. The Japanese Communist Party (JCP), which made big gains in the Tokyo assembly election, will pick up 4 percent, unchanged from the previous survey in May. The LDP was the most popular choice among all age groups and over 60 percent of those in their 20s say they would vote for the LDP.

The latest Mainichi poll also shows that the LDP's approval rating came to 40 percent, up 2 percentage points from the last survey, while the DPJ was backed by 6 percent and the JRP by 3 percent, down 1 point, and on par with the JCP.

The once-ruling DPJ has remained stagnant since a huge setback in the House of Representatives election last year. The JRP has failed to recover from the ill effects of JRP co-leader and Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto's remarks about comfort women.

The *Mainichi* poll shows that 5 percent back Your Party and 4 percent support the New Komeito.

Voter turnout stood at 57.92 percent (constituencies) in the previous upper house election in 2010. If the previous pre-election poll is any guide, voter turnout this time would be about the same or may be a little lower.

The *Mainichi* carried out the telephone survey on 1,541 households with eligible voters and received

valid responses from 946 eligible voters.

Mainichi Shimbun, July 1, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130701p2a00m0na016000c.html>

Maximum vote-value disparity is 1 to 4.77 in upper house election

The maximum disparity in vote value will reach a ratio of 1 to 4.77 in the upcoming House of Councillors election, the Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry said July 4, as it released statistics on the number of eligible voters across Japan.

According to the ministry, eligible voters in Hokkaido, where two of four seats are up for grabs this time, numbered 1,153,852 and those in Tottori Prefecture, where one of two seats is at stake, totaled 241,867, resulting in a disparity ratio between the two constituencies of 1 to 4.77. The maximum vote-value disparity improved slightly from five times in the previous upper house election in 2010.

The number of eligible voters at home and abroad came to 104,780,660 (50,645,976 men and 54,134,684 women) on July 3, a day before the start of official campaigning for the July 21 upper house election. The total represented an increase of 266,557 from 2010, reversing declines from 2007 to 2010 for the first time since the end of World War II.

In 2010, the disparity resulted in votes in Tottori Prefecture carrying five times more weight than those in Kanagawa Prefecture. The Supreme Court ruled in October last year that the big gap represented “a state of unconstitutionality.”

In response, the Diet passed a measure to boost the number of seats from six to eight each in the Kanagawa and Osaka constituencies and reduced the number from four to two in the Fukushima and Gifu constituencies.

The change narrowed the vote-value disparity between the Kanagawa and Tottori constituencies to a ratio of 1 to 3.83 but the disparity between Hokkaido and Tottori widened to 1 to 4.77.

The new law barely helped to keep the so-called constitutionality line to a maximum five times (three times in the case of the House of Representatives election). The nation’s top court said in a ruling that a 1 to 4.86 disparity in vote value in the 2007 upper house election should be rectified at an early date.

The Supreme Court in its October ruling last year pointed out that the central government should revise the current system to determine the number of seats by prefectures. The law to add four new seats and cut four others is a stopgap measure and there is a strong possibility that the government will be required to implement drastic reforms after the July 21 upper house poll.

Mainichi Shimbun, July 5, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130705p2a00m0na008000c.html>

LDP leads pack with 28% support rate ahead of Upper House poll

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party on Sunday had the highest support rating going into next month's Upper House election, leaving the opposition Democratic Party of Japan far behind, the latest survey says.

The nationwide telephone survey, conducted Saturday and Sunday by Kyodo News, found that 28.8 percent of the respondents intend to vote for the LDP in the proportional representation section of the House of Councilors election and that 8.2 percent plan to vote for the DPJ.

Among the other parties, New Komeito, the LDP's junior coalition partner, drew 6.0 percent support, followed by 4.8 percent for the Japan Restoration Party, 3.9 percent for Your Party, 3.2 percent for the Japanese Communist Party, 0.6 percent for the Social Democratic Party, 0.2 percent for Kokumin no Seikatsu ga Daiichi (People's Life Party), and 0.1 percent apiece for New Party Daichi and Green Wind.

The outcome is far from uncertain, however, because 37.7 percent of the respondents said they still haven't decided who to vote for.

The support rate for the Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has meanwhile declined to 65.6 percent from the 68.0 percent logged from June 1 to 2, while its disapproval rate has jumped to 23.6 percent from 16.3 percent.

The latest survey drew responses from 1,224 eligible voters, with 56.4 percent saying they want the LDP-New Komeito ruling coalition to gain a majority in the Upper House poll, and 27.9 percent saying they do not.

The survey also found that 35.4 percent of the public will scrutinize the politicians' economic proposals, especially on jobs, for clues on how to vote.

Another 28.3 percent will examine social security-related policies, such as pension and health care measures.

As for other issues of interest, 8.9 percent mentioned the consumption tax hike and 7.7 percent brought up plans to amend the Constitution.

On revising the Constitution, 50.4 percent expressed support and 33.5 percent expressed opposition.

Kyodo News, June 24, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/06/24/national/ldp-leads-pack-with-28-support-rate-ahead-of-upper-house-poll/#.UdCwIthjbRY>

LDP's lead widens as support expands ahead of election: Kyodo poll

TOKYO (Kyodo) — The ruling Liberal Democratic Party lead in the polls ahead of the looming upper house election has widened over the past week, the results of the latest Kyodo News survey show.

A nationwide telephone survey conducted on Saturday and Sunday found that 31.1 percent of respondents said they intend to vote for the LDP in the proportional representation section of the

House of Councillors election, up from 28.8 percent in the previous survey a week earlier.

The support rate for Abe's Cabinet stood at 66.8 percent, up slightly from 65.6 percent in the previous survey.

Kyodo Press, June 30, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130630p2g00m0dm067000c.html>

Support for Cabinet tumbles below 60% — Second month of losses laid to doubts about 'Abenomics'

Public support for the Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe sagged 2.8 points in June to 57.4 percent – the first time it has dipped below 60 percent since January, just after he took office, a survey says.

The Cabinet's polling numbers have now dropped for two consecutive months, the Jiji Press survey said.

Its disapproval rate meanwhile shot up 2.4 points from May to 20.0 percent, it said.

The poll was conducted from June 7 to 10 via nationwide interviews with 2,000 adults and drew valid responses from 65.2 percent of them.

The decline in support appears to reflect concern about the flaws of "Abenomics," a slick-sounding recipe for economic recovery that some experts have dubbed "Asset Bubble Economics."

Last week's dive in the benchmark Nikkei stock average marked the reversal of a surge ignited by Abe's Bank of Japan chief in April, when he began helping the revisionist leader stoke inflation and jawbone the stock market.

Among those backing the Cabinet, the largest chunk, 17.9 percent, credited Abe's leadership for their backing. Another 17.3 percent said there was nobody else suitable to be a Cabinet leader.

Those who said they trust Abe came to 16.0 percent and 15.0 percent praised his policies.

Among those who disapprove of the Cabinet, 9.6 percent said they had no expectations of it, 6.9 percent said they oppose Abe's policies, and 6.7 percent said they not trust him.

Support for Abe's ruling Liberal Democratic Party sank 1.8 points to 27.7 percent, falling for the second consecutive month.

The Democratic Party of Japan, the biggest opposition force, saw its support drop 0.4 point to 3.5 percent, its lowest since being booted from power in the general election in December.

Support for LDP ally New Komeito stood at 2.5 percent.

Jiji Press, June 17, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/06/17/national/support-for-cabinet-tumbles-below-60/#.UcEDpDphjBRY>

DPJ to play up dark side of “Abenomics” in Upper House poll

The Democratic Party of Japan has unveiled a final draft of its campaign platform for July’s House of Councilors election, criticizing Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s economic policies.

The platform of the DPJ, which lost power in the Dec. 16 general election, also attacks Abe and his Liberal Democratic Party for rushing to revise the pacifist Constitution, the draft showed Monday.

Currently the largest opposition party, the DPJ will stress the “strong side effects” on the economy from “Abenomics,” aimed at beating chronic deflation with large budgetary spending, bolder monetary easing and other stimulus, and will warn of “various concerns, such as excessive weakening of the yen and vicious inflation.”

“Abenomics is turning into something that could devastate people’s lives,” DPJ leader Banri Kaieda told a news conference. He pledged that his party will protect people’s livelihoods “while upgrading pension systems and medical services through comprehensive social security reforms.”

The DPJ plans to argue there is a need to improve public finances by revising government spending, promise fiscal discipline legislation to halve the country’s primary budget deficit by March 2016 and vow to achieve a surplus five years later.

The party will also vow to boost the economy with a growth strategy focusing on promoting energy-efficient technologies, increasing exports of agricultural and fishery products, and assisting small and midsize firms.

On the Constitution, it will stipulate its opposition to any move by Abe to amend Article 96 to ease the rules for initiating constitutional reform. “We oppose relaxing conditions for revision without discussing what is to be revised” first, the draft platform says. It is believed Abe is angling to ultimately amend the war-renouncing Article 9.

Among other pledges, the DPJ will promise Japan’s exit from the Trans-Pacific Partnership free-trade negotiations unless the nation’s interests can be protected, and to end operations at all nuclear power plants by the 2030s.

The party is scheduled to finalize its campaign platform later this month. Voting in the Upper House election will likely take place July 21.

Kyodo News, June 12, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/06/12/national/dpj-to-play-up-dark-side-of-abenomics-in-upper-house-poll/#.UbrB6NjuLRY>

LDP, New Komeito at odds over constitutional amendments ahead of poll

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its coalition partner New Komeito are at odds over whether to revise the country’s pacifist Constitution while New Komeito shares some policy agenda

with the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), according to a recent survey conducted by the Mainichi Shimbun.

The Mainichi conducted the survey of 10 political parties on key policy issues ahead of the upcoming House of Councillors election expected to be held on July 21. The official campaigning for the national contest is likely to kick off on July 4. Evaluations of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's economic policy mix, dubbed "Abenomics," and constitutional amendments are expected to be hotly debated during the upper house election, among other issues.

To the question of whether the Constitution should be revised, five political parties — the LDP, the Japan Restoration Party (JRP), Your Party, the People's Life Party (PLP) and the New Renaissance Party (NRP) — said in their separate responses that the supreme law should be amended. The DPJ said that it would propose, if necessary, to add to the Constitution what is deemed missing or revise what needs to be changed. New Komeito showed a positive stance toward revising the Constitution only in the context of adding new clauses such as one on "environmental rights." The DPJ and New Komeito both replied that they could not clearly say whether the Constitution should be amended.

The LDP, the JRP and the NRP shared the view that the requirement for initiating constitutional changes stipulated in Article 96 of the Constitution should be eased from a two-thirds vote of all members in both houses of the Diet to a simple majority. The DPJ and New Komeito, on the other hand, stood against revising Article 96. The two parties also stood against revising the Constitution to upgrade the country's Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to the "National Defense Forces (Kokubogun)" and reviewing the government's constitutional interpretation which forbids Japan from exercising the right to collective self-defense.

To the question of whether they believe "Abenomics" will lead to an increase in jobs and wages, five political parties — the DPJ, the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), the PLP, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and Green Wind — replied negatively. The JRP said it could not clearly say Abenomics would lead to more work, while insisting on the need to improve productivity and ensure mobility of labor. In many cases, the JRP was also in favor of policies pursued by the Abe administration to take part in the U.S.-led Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade negotiations and reactivate nuclear reactors that meet new regulatory standards, among other policy steps.

In the questionnaire survey conducted by the Mainichi, the 10 political parties picked their choices from among prepared answers to 25 questions. Officials in charge of policy issues at political parties replied in writing to the survey.

Mainichi Shimbun, June 04, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130604p2a00m0na014000c.html>

Support for Abe Cabinet edges down to 68.0%: Kyodo poll

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Support for the Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has edged down to 68.0 percent in the latest poll from 70.9 percent last month, a Kyodo News survey showed Sunday.

It is the first time since January that the Cabinet approval rating has fallen below 70 percent. Analysts say recent stock market turbulence is believed to have weighed on the support rate but high expectations for Abe's economic policies is expected to support the Abe administration ahead of

the upcoming upper house election.

The disapproval rating stood at 16.3 percent, up a tad from 16.2 percent in the previous survey.

In a telephone survey conducted on Saturday and Sunday, 65.0 percent of respondents said they expect positive effects from “Abenomics,” or the economic policies pursued by Abe, to turn around Japan’s deflation-battered economy, against 29 percent who replied they are not expecting much.

The latest nationwide survey covered 1,440 eligible voters, of whom 1,010 responded.

On Abe’s controversial proposal to revise Article 96 of the Constitution to make constitutional amendments easier, 51.6 percent opposed the proposal, topping 50 percent for the first time since March when the question was added. Some 37.2 percent expressed support.

The survey also found 49.8 percent supported Japan’s export of nuclear power technology as promoted by Abe, while 43 percent were against it.

As for Japan’s current monetary easing policy, 25.6 percent said it should be maintained and 20.2 percent called for a review, while 50.3 percent said they had no opinion on the matter.

Asked which party they will vote for in the proportional representation section of the House of Councillors’ election this summer, 44.6 percent of respondents supported the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, up 0.2 point, followed by 7.9 percent who will vote for the opposition Democratic Party of Japan, up 1.1 point.

The New Komeito party came third at 6.4 percent, up 2.0 point, while the Japan Restoration Party fell to fourth at 4.5 percent, down 1.2 point, following party co-leader Toru Hashimoto’s controversial remarks about wartime sex slavery, which drew harsh criticism at home and abroad.

Also 65.6 percent said they do not have expectations for the Japan Restoration Party in the upcoming election, while 27.3 percent voiced expectations for the party.

As for party support ratings, the LDP was preferred by 48.1 percent, down 0.4 point. The DPJ followed at 7.0 percent, up 1.1 point, while the New Komeito party, the LDP’s ruling coalition partner, secured 5.2 percent support, up 2.0 points.

Support for the Japan Restoration Party stood at 4.2 percent, down 0.6 point, while the Your Party secured 3.6 percent and the Japanese Communist Party 2.0 percent.

Kyodo News, June 3, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130603p2g00m0dm040000c.html>

Support for Abe Cabinet edges down to 70.9%: Kyodo poll

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Support for the Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has edged down but remains high at 70.9 percent, compared with 72.1 percent in the previous poll last month, a Kyodo News survey showed Sunday.

It was the fourth time that the Cabinet approval rating has topped 70 percent in the monthly surveys

since Abe's Liberal Democratic Party came to power in December.

The disapproval rating, meanwhile, stood at 16.2 percent, up 0.2 percentage point from the previous survey conducted on April 20 and 21.

The latest nationwide telephone survey, conducted on Saturday and Sunday, received responses from 1,022 eligible voters.

Asked which party they will vote for in the proportional representation section of the upper house election this summer, 5.7 percent of the respondents said they would support the Japan Restoration Party, down 2.8 points, compared with 6.8 percent who will vote for the opposition Democratic Party of Japan, up 1.0 point.

Abe's Liberal Democratic Party secured the highest support rating at 44.4 percent, up 1.9 points, according to the survey.

The Japan Restoration Party's drop to third place came after Toru Hashimoto, the party's co-leader and Osaka mayor, was harshly attacked at home and abroad over his controversial remarks about wartime sex slavery.

The survey also showed 54.3 percent oppose restarting idled nuclear reactors even after the government confirms their safety, against 37.2 percent who expressed support.

On nuclear power plant exports by Japan, 46.2 percent were opposed, compared with 41.0 percent who expressed support.

Asked about Abe's handling of the economy, 67.6 percent of the respondents said it was going smoothly, far exceeding the 26.9 percent who expressed negative views.

On the controversial proposal to revise Article 96 of the Constitution to ease the criteria for constitutional amendments, 48.6 percent opposed the proposal while 41.5 percent expressed support.

In the survey, 43.7 percent said they would refer to information on the Internet once the ban on online election campaigning is lifted for the upcoming House of Councillors election, against 53.6 percent who said they would not.

As for party approval ratings, the LDP secured 48.5 percent support, up 4.4 points and the highest level since the party marked 49.2 percent support in September 2006, immediately after the launch of Abe's first Cabinet.

The DPJ followed at 5.9 percent, up 0.1 point, while the Japan Restoration Party secured 4.8 percent support, down 0.7 point.

Support for the New Komeito party, the LDP's ruling coalition partner, stood at 3.2 percent, while the opposition Your Party secured 4.4 percent and the Japanese Communist Party 2.8 percent.

Kyodo News, May 19, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130519p2g00m0dm062000c.html>

