

# Japan's upper house election system

Tuesday 23 July 2013, by [Kyodo News](#) (Date first published: 21 July 2013).

TOKYO (Kyodo) — The following is an explanation of how members of the House of Councillors are elected.

Lawmakers of Japan's House of Councillors, or the upper house, are elected every three years, with half the 242 seats up for grabs alternately, and those elected serve a six-year term.

Unlike the House of Representatives, or the lower house, which is more powerful than the upper chamber in Japan's bicameral legislature, the upper house is never dissolved for an election and its members serve out their terms.

Under the Constitution, the lower house is granted more power and its decision takes precedence over that made by the upper house, as it reflects the will of the people more directly with its members serving for a shorter period than upper house members.

Lower house members often do not serve out their four-year term due to dissolution of the chamber.

Of the 121 seats to be contested in the July 21, 2013 election, 73 will be filled by the winners from 47 prefectural electoral districts and the remaining 48 by those chosen under the nationwide party-list proportional representation system, with voters casting two ballots on election day.

Of the 47 electoral districts, 31 are assigned one seat each to be up for grabs, two seats are allocated to 10 prefectures, three seats to Saitama, Chiba and Aichi prefectures, four seats to Kanagawa and Osaka prefectures and the largest number of five seats to the country's capital Tokyo.

The number of seats for electoral districts has been adjusted to narrow disparity in the weight of votes among constituencies.

Under the proportional representation system, voters can either vote for a political party or a candidate of their choice from contenders registered by parties under an open-list system.

Seats will be allocated to the parties in line with the total ballots they receive in terms of their names or the candidates on their lists.

Candidates will then be ranked within each party according to the number of ballots received under their names. The one with the largest number of votes will be given top priority in the allocation of seats for the party.

Under such a system, parties often field candidates known to the public, such as celebrities, scholars or athletes, to draw a large number of votes.

Candidates cannot run in both the electoral district and under the proportional representation system at the same time, while those running for seats in the lower house are allowed to do so.

**Kyodo News**, July 21, 2013

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\* <http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130721p2g00m0fp002000c.html>