

Hashimoto's Japan Restoration Party suffers severe blow in Sakai mayoral election

Sunday 13 October 2013, by [ABE Ryosuke](#), [KUMAGAI Go](#), [Mainichi Shimbun](#), [NOGUCHI Takenori](#), [SUZUKI Miho](#), [YOSHIDA Reiji](#) (Date first published: 30 September 2013).

Contents

- [JRP candidate's loss in \(...\)](#)
- [JRP candidate's defeat in \(...\)](#)
- [Hashimoto's prefectural \(...\)](#)

JRP candidate's loss in Sakai mayoral election deals blow to Hashimoto

OSAKA — Incumbent Sakai Mayor Osami Takeyama beat Katsutoshi Nishibayashi, an opponent backed by Japan Restoration Party (JRP), in the mayoral election on Sept. 29, dealing a heavy blow to the JRP and its co-leader Toru Hashimoto, mayor of Osaka.

Takeyama, 63, who was backed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the largest opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), won re-election with a large majority over Nishibayashi, 43.

Nishibayashi's defeat casts a dark shadow over the JRP's blueprint for an Osaka metropolis that would involve consolidating the cities of Osaka and Sakai. The electoral result is likely to reduce the centripetal force of Hashimoto, who floated the idea of creating a metropolis in 2010, while he was Osaka governor, and is certain to adversely affect his party's standing in national politics.

"Non-affiliated voters now support Abe. The JRP has not grown into a political party accommodating these voters, so we are looking to step up our efforts in preparation for the next opportunity," Hashimoto said at a news conference in Sakai on the night of Sept. 29.

However, some JRP members have expressed concerns about Hashimoto's ability to unite his party. A senior LDP lawmaker, meanwhile, commented, "The JRP's raison d'être has been denied. The JRP is finished."

In the run-up to the House of Councillors election in July, Hashimoto caused a stir with his remarks on the so-called "comfort women" of World War II. After the July 21 election, he hinted during a meeting of JRP executives on July 27 that he might step down as JRP co-leader, indicating that he wanted to focus his energy on Osaka's reform. The JRP's other co-leader is former Tokyo Gov. Shintaro Ishihara.

Hashimoto needed a victory in the Sakai mayoral election to help realize the goal of reorganizing Osaka into a metropolis, and to improve his standing within the party. The electoral setback was tantamount to a rejection of the goal, the starting point from which he launched the Osaka Restoration Association, which is now under the wing of the JRP.

Hashimoto's dwindling clout within the JRP is expected to affect Prime Minister Abe's political strategy. Abe and Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga have attempted to develop a channel of communication with Hashimoto with an eye to amending the postwar Constitution. Because the LDP and the JRP are in sync with each other over constitutional revision, the LDP may be able to keep its coalition partner New Komeito, which is cautious about revising the pacifist Constitution, in check.

In the Sakai mayoral race, the LDP supported Takeyama but stopped short of recommending him, as the rival DPJ did, reflecting the wishes of Abe and his advisers at the prime minister's office. The LDP and the JRP also share a similar view on reforming the Diet. Suga said at a news conference on Sept. 27 that the Abe government would naturally cooperate with other parties that understand its policies.

The two parties are expected to maintain relations regardless of the Sakai election's outcome. JRP Secretary-General and Osaka Gov. Ichiro Matsui said Sept. 29 that the JRP wants to implement reform of government structures in cooperation with the Abe government.

The Sakai electoral loss, however, will force Hashimoto to further retreat from national politics to some extent. He may have to change his tactics to emphasize his ties with Abe and Suga, and the level of mutual dependence between the Abe administration and the JRP under Hashimoto may diminish.

A high-ranking government official said that the JRP first of all should analyze the outcome of the Sakai election. But an LDP source said some LDP lawmakers wonder if the JRP is worth enlisting as a potential partner in light of its sharp decline in popularity. LDP Secretary General Shigeru Ishiba said, "We would never imagine tying up with the JRP through disbandment of the LDP-New Komeito coalition."

Hashimoto's unifying force mainly concerns his strength as leader at polling stations. The Sakai setback has led some young JRP members to voice fears of being defeated as JRP candidates, and to consider leaving the party ahead of unified local elections in 2015.

With the disappointing results in both the upper house election in July and the Sakai mayoral election under the party stewardship of Hashimoto and Matsui, the powers of acting party leader Takeo Hiranuma and other lawmakers of the defunct Sunrise Party of Japan are likely to rise. A source close to Hiranuma said there is no choice but to give him reign over the party.

The possible realignment of opposition parties in preparation for the next House of Representatives election is murkier than ever before. After the upper house election in July, Hashimoto has advocated the creation of a new political party with some members of the DPJ and Your Party, but his leadership may lose steam.

Miho Suzuki and Ryosuke Abe, Tokyo Political News Department, and **Takenori Noguchi and Go Kumagai**, Osaka City News Department, *Mainichi Shimbun*, September 30, 2013

* <http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130930p2a00m0na013000c.html>

JRP candidate's defeat in Sakai poll threatens Osaka metropolis scheme

OSAKA — The defeat of a Japan Restoration Party (JRP) candidate at the hands of incumbent Sakai Mayor Osami Takeyama in the Sakai mayoral election on Sept. 29 is casting a dark shadow not only over Sakai's proposed inclusion in an Osaka metropolis scheme but also over reorganization of Osaka Prefecture and its capital city.

"The election this time is not just a Sakai mayoral election. It's a test of the metropolis project," JRP deputy chief Yutaka Imai, a member of the Osaka Prefectural Assembly, told a group of about 50 fellow prefectural assembly members belonging to the JRP on Sept. 18 as he urged them to round up support. "If we lose, the New Komeito party will turn its back on us in voting ahead of a referendum (scheduled for fall next year)," he said.

Since February this year, the Osaka prefectural and city governments have negotiated a zoning of special districts and fiscal adjustments, and discussed how clerical work for such districts and the prefecture as a whole would be divided up after the formation of a metropolitan government. The two bodies need to draw up a blueprint of a proposed structure for the prefectural and city assemblies to vote on next summer. The plan has to be approved by a majority in an Osaka City plebiscite.

JRP co-leader and Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto had said prior to the Sakai mayoral election that a setback for JRP candidate Katsutoshi Nishibayashi would not affect the metropolis scheme, but would have a bearing on a referendum on the issue and on negotiations with the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

Residents of the city of Osaka harbor mixed emotions toward the metropolitan government scheme. A public opinion poll by the Mainichi Shimbun and Mainichi Broadcasting System (MBS) in June last year showed that only 29 percent supported dismantling their city to make way for an Osaka metropolis. The re-election of Sakai Mayor Osami Takeyama, an opponent of the Osaka metropolitan government scheme, may work against the scheme.

Decisions by the Osaka prefectural and city assemblies on the scheme are not foregone conclusions. Hashimoto's JRP enjoys a majority in the prefectural assembly but the JRP needs the support of New Komeito, the No. 2 force in the city assembly, to secure a majority in the city assembly.

In the House of Representatives election in 2012, the JRP refrained from fielding candidates in six single-seat constituencies in the Kansai region out of consideration of its ties with New Komeito, which fielded candidates in those electoral districts. The JRP's strength was seen at polling stations.

But on Sept. 26, New Komeito sided with the LDP and the DPJ in passing a non-confidence motion against Teruo Minobe, speaker of the Osaka City Assembly and a member of the JRP, over the performances of city-run high school brass bands at his three fundraising parties last year. New Komeito is cautiously approaching the metropolitan government scheme but may distance itself from the JRP from now on.

* *Mainichi Shimbun*, September 30, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130930p2a00m0na012000c.html>

Hashimoto's prefectural power play threatened by decisive election loss in Sakai

Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Restoration Party) co-leader and Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto was facing a critical battle. And he lost.

On Sunday, a candidate fielded by Nippon Ishin lost a local government election for the first time in Osaka Prefecture, the power base for both Hashimoto and his party.

According to the Sakai election board, the 63-year-old Osami Takeyama received 198,431 votes in his re-election bid, while former municipal assembly member Katsutoshi Nishibayashi, 43, got 140,569. Turnout was 50.69 percent, up 6.76 points from the last mayoral race four years ago.

An analysis of media exit polls clearly illustrates that Hashimoto's appeal to swing voters has diminished. The surveys show that a majority of unaffiliated voters – the key element in many elections across the country – no longer support Nippon Ishin, even in Osaka Prefecture.

"Many people say unaffiliated voters have deserted (Nippon Ishin). It's true that now we have already become an 'old existing party,'" Hashimoto told a news conference in Osaka on Sunday. "To be honest, I would say unaffiliated voters now support (Prime Minister Shinzo) Abe. It's clear to everyone he has momentum."

Hashimoto, a former lawyer and popular TV commentator, emerged as a rising political star by attracting swing voters frustrated with the old major parties.

But according to an exit poll by the Asahi Shimbun, 69 percent of swing voters in Sakai voted for Takeyama even though he was supported by major parties including the LDP and Democratic Party of Japan.

Hashimoto's meteoric rise in politics owed much to the debating skills and colorful rhetoric he uses during TV appearances and election campaigns. He has long stressed that his party's main support base should be formed by frustrated swing voters and not by a rigid campaign machine like the major parties.

Swing voters have apparently turned on Nippon Ishin as it has grown more radical in its nationalistic leanings and as Hashimoto's fresh public image as an administrative reformist loses its luster.

According to monthly national polls by NHK, Nippon Ishin's support rate plummeted from 6.5 percent in January to only 2.2 percent in September.

Reiji Yoshida, *Japan Times* Staff Writer, September 30, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/09/30/national/hashimotos-osaka-merger-dream-in-jeopardy/#.UINegFNjbRY>
