

More on Japan Upper House Election

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LDP nets quarter of unaffiliated proportional ballots

About a quarter of voters who support no particular political party cast their ballots for the ruling Liberal Democratic Party in the proportional representation part of Sunday's Upper House election, according to a Jiji Press exit poll.

With 25.8 percent, the LDP garnered the largest share of unaffiliated votes in the poll, which the ruling bloc won in a landslide, the survey showed.

The LDP figure was up 5.1 percentage points from December's Lower House election.

It was the first time in the past decade that the LDP has captured the largest share of unaffiliated votes in a national election.

In the nationwide proportional representation section of the Upper House poll, voters were asked to choose either a political party or a candidate listed under the system. In addition, each voter cast a ballot for a candidate in a prefectural constituency.

The LDP was followed by Your Party, with 15.4 percent, up 2.6 points from the Lower House election. Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Restoration Party), which took the top share of unaffiliated votes in the Lower House poll, came third, with 15.3 percent, down 8.8 points.

The share for the Democratic Party of Japan fell 3.3 points to 13 percent.

Combined, the three opposition parties accounted for 43.7 percent of the unaffiliated vote – a figure much higher than the LDP number – suggesting that a realignment of opposition parties could create a competitive alternative to the LDP-led ruling coalition.

The Japanese Communist Party held a share of 11.2 percent, up 5.7 points, for fifth place, up from seventh. It was followed by New Komeito, the LDP coalition partner, with 7.5 percent, up 1.2 points.

A total of 34,011 voters responded to the exit poll. Of the total, unaffiliated voters accounted for 34.5 percent, up 1.6 points.

Separately Monday, the Foreign Ministry said the number of Japanese living abroad who cast ballots in Sunday's election totaled 25,922 for proportional representation voting and 25,454 for

prefectural constituencies.

Voting for the Upper House election took place at 215 Japanese embassies and consulates abroad as well as by mail.

Turnout among Japanese living abroad came to 22.97 percent for the proportional representation section and 22.56 percent for prefectural constituencies.

Japan introduced the expatriate voting system ahead of the 2000 Lower House election.

Jiji Press, July 23, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/07/23/national/ldp-nets-quarter-of-unaffiliated-proportional-balls/#.UfTtDqxGTFw>

Only 15% of election winners support need for nuclear plants: *Mainichi* survey

Only 15 percent of winners of the July 21 House of Councillors election said Japan needs nuclear power stations, according to a Mainichi Shimbun survey.

Nearly half, 46 percent, said nuclear plants should be eliminated in the future although they need to be retained for now.

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is the only political party that has stopped short of clearly calling for the future elimination of nuclear plants, but only 25 percent of individual LDP winners said Japan needs nuclear plants. Forty percent said nuclear plants should be done away with in the long run although Japan needs to rely on them for the time being.

Only 7 percent of the winners on the ticket of the largest opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) said nuclear power stations are necessary for Japan, while 67 percent said such power stations should be abolished in the future. Twenty percent said nuclear plants are unnecessary.

All the successful candidates fielded by New Komeito, the LDP's coalition partner, and 75 of those on the ticket of the Japan Restoration Party (JRP) said nuclear plants should be retained for now but abolished in the long run.

All the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) and Social Democratic Party (SDP) winners as well as 88 percent of those on the ticket of Your Party responded that Japan does not need nuclear power plants.

The government intends to review the basic plan on energy, which outlines the nation's energy policy, possibly by the end of this year. The "Japan Revitalization Strategy — Japan is Back," which the Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe approved in June, calls for active use of nuclear reactors whose safety has been confirmed.

Four utilities have applied with the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) for safety inspections on 12 reactors at their six nuclear plants in preparation to restart them. The NRA has already begun inspection procedures.

The government is required to determine how it will characterize nuclear power as its future energy strategy will be called into question.

In the meantime, successful candidates in the upper house election are split over whether Japan should promote the export of nuclear reactors — with 32 percent calling for the promotion of sales of nuclear reactors overseas and 37 percent opposing the idea.

By party affiliation, 48 percent of LDP winners called for the promotion of nuclear plant exports, well above the 11 percent who were opposed. Similarly, just half of the JRP winners called for the promotion of nuclear reactor exports, while 25 percent were opposed. Nearly half, or 47 percent of the DPJ successful candidates and 73 percent of New Komeito winners as well all the JCP and SDP winners were opposed to exporting nuclear reactors.

New Komeito leader Natsuo Yamaguchi has suggested the party will approve the export of nuclear reactors with some conditions attached while many of its legislators are wary of such a move. Since Prime Minister Abe is actively promoting the sale of nuclear reactors overseas, New Komeito is expected to support the move to prevent a split within the coalition government.

The survey has also hinted that the upper house is gradually leaning toward considering the possession of nuclear weapons.

Over half, or 64 percent of the overall winners, said Japan should not consider possessing nuclear arms both now and in the future, down 13 points in a survey on winners of the 2010 upper house poll. Nearly one in three successful candidates — 28 percent — said Japan should consider arming itself with nuclear weapons depending on the international situation, an increase of 10 points from 2010.

Of successful candidates in the LDP that scored a landslide victory in the election, 46 percent said Japan should consider possessing nuclear arms depending on the international situation, slightly above the 43 percent who were opposed to the idea. Of the 2010 LDP winners, 34 percent are supportive of the idea. The increase apparently reflects the increasingly severe security environment surrounding Japan as a result of the progress in North Korea's nuclear weapons development.

All New Komeito winners said Japan should not consider possessing nuclear arms, highlighting a wide gap in nuclear policy within the ruling coalition.

Among opposition parties, an overwhelming majority, or 93 percent of successful candidates fielded by the DPJ, as well as all Your Party, JCP and SDP winners said Japan should not consider possessing nuclear bombs.

In contrast, over 60 percent of JRP candidates who won the July 21 poll called for considering whether Japan should possess nuclear arms.

Mainichi Shimbun, July 23, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130723p2a00m0na015000c.html>

Opposition disparate; foe common — DPJ, Your Party, Ishin no Kai ranks mull new party

Major opposition groups have been rocked by intensifying internal strife since the Upper House

election, and with the secretaries-general of the Democratic Party of Japan, Your Party and Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Restoration Party) launching a nonpartisan policy study group next week, speculation is flying they might try to form a new party.

However, policy stances of the three key lawmakers – Goshi Hosono of the DPJ, Your Party's Kenji Eda and Yoriyoshi Matsuno of Nippon Ishin – still differ markedly, and whether they can gather a substantial number of lawmakers behind them is unclear.

Hosono is regarded as a center-left liberal, whereas Nippon Ishin's members have advocated right-leaning, significantly more nationalistic policies.

Each of the three parties is riven by infighting, and many of their members are exploring ways to form a new political force able to survive in a Diet completely controlled by the Liberal Democratic Party-New Komeito ruling bloc following its landslide victory in Sunday's House of Councilors poll.

On Friday, Hosono quit as secretary general of the DPJ, the largest opposition party. DPJ President Banri Kaieda had earlier turned down Hosono's offer to resign to take responsibility for the party's shattering election loss.

Hosono had initially planned to resign at the end of August, but he moved up the schedule after DPJ members started arguing he should be punished for meeting Sunday – on the day of the election – with Eda and Matsuno, the DPJ's campaign foes.

As for Eda, his personal relations with Your Party chief Yoshimi Watanabe have become heavily strained amid a leadership struggle and the two have barely communicated recently.

The chasm within the minor opposition group seemed to reach a critical point Thursday, when both Eda and Watanabe held separate news conferences and publicly assailed each other.

Watanabe ripped into Eda for holding meetings with Hosono and Matsuno at the same time he was refusing to report to his party leader.

"It's too early to rush for a realignment of political forces," Watanabe said. "I have asked Eda to report (to me what's going on), but he hasn't responded yet. If he is (promoting political realignment) as an individual, he should do that after quitting (his secretary-general post)."

Eda told reporters : "Nothing has been decided, so I don't need to report anything (to Watanabe). I don't understand what "too early" means."

Nippon Ishin, meanwhile, has long been divided between followers of its two co-leaders, Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto and former Tokyo Gov. Shintaro Ishihara.

On July 18, Hashimoto made a stir by saying in an election campaign speech that "some part the DPJ, some part of Your Party and some part of Nippon Ishin will become a certain (political) force for sure" to push for administrative reforms. The remark has been widely interpreted to indicate that Hashimoto prefers splitting the party and forming a new group with certain members of Nippon Ishin, the DPJ and Your Party.

"Opposition parties should combine forces to become one. Otherwise, it won't be good for the country," Hashimoto told a news conference Sunday. "It's the duty of their members to create an alternative opposition party that can realize a change of administration".

Reiji Yoshida, *Japan Times* Staff Writer, July 26, 2013

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>

Support for Abe's Cabinet climbs to 57.7% in latest poll

The public approval rating for the Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has climbed to 57.7 percent, up slightly from 56.2 percent in July, a survey said Sunday.

The Cabinet's disapproval rating meanwhile fell to 25.6 percent, down from 31.7 percent the previous month, it said.

In a nationwide telephone survey conducted Saturday and Sunday by Kyodo News, 29.1 percent of the respondents said the consumption tax rate should remain at 5 percent, rather than being raised to 8 percent next April as scheduled.

Meanwhile, 22.7 percent said the tax hike should be delayed, 22.5 percent said it should be raised as scheduled, and 22.0 percent said the margin of the increase should be narrowed, suggesting the public is divided on the issue.

Abe is expected to make a final decision on whether to let the tax rate rise in April as planned before the Diet convenes for an extraordinary session in mid-October.

On the controversial issue of whether to allow Japan to exercise the right of collective self-defense, 47.4 percent were opposed.

Abe is eager to lift the nation's self-imposed ban on collective self-defense by changing the government's interpretation of the Constitution.

Successive governments have maintained that Japan cannot exercise the right because Article 9 of the Constitution limits the use of force to the minimum necessary to defend the country and bans the use of force to settle international disputes.

Of the respondents, 24.1 percent said exercising the right should be enabled by revising the Constitution, while 20.0 percent said it should be enabled by changing the government's interpretation of the supreme code.

On Abe's decision not to visit war-linked Yasukuni Shrine on the Aug. 15 anniversary of Japan's surrender in World War II and to send a ritual offering instead as leader of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, 62.2 percent said it was appropriate and 26.0 percent said it was not.

The prime minister avoided visiting the Shinto facility, which honors Class-A war criminals along with the nation's war dead, to avoid worsening severely strained ties with China and South Korea.

In the survey, 45.5 percent said the prime minister should decide whether to visit Yasukuni regardless of the state of Japan's ties with China and South Korea, while 28.0 percent said restraint was the best option to avoid harming diplomatic ties.

A total of 19.8 percent said that prime ministers ought to visit Yasukuni no matter what.

On the economy, 17.9 percent said they believe Japan has been recovering under Abe's unorthodox strategy, while 77.9 percent said they do not believe so.

As for the outlook for Japan's economy, 30.7 percent said they expect conditions to improve and 58.9 percent said they do not.

Asked about Tokyo's bid to host the 2020 Summer Olympics, 78.0 percent expressed support while

19.1 percent were opposed.

Kyodo News, August 25, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/08/25/national/support-for-abes-cabinet-climbs-to-57-7-in-latest-poll/#.UhsqbH9jbRY>

Abe Cabinet approval rate drops to 56%

The approval rate for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Cabinet has fallen to 56.2 percent from 68.0 percent in June, according to a Kyodo News poll, suggesting low expectations for the administration's economic policies.

It is the first time since Abe took office in December that the support rate has fallen below 60 percent. The survey, conducted Monday and Tuesday after Abe's Liberal Democratic Party won the Upper House election on Sunday, found that 31.7 percent of the respondents disapproved of the Cabinet, almost doubling the 16.3 percent in June.

Among those expressing disapproval, 29.6 percent – up from 20.6 percent – said the prime minister's economic policies dubbed "Abenomics" do not offer much hope. This apparently reflects concerns about the slow increase in wages despite rising prices due to the weakening yen, Kyodo said.

The telephone poll of about 1,000 voters nationwide found 39.8 percent welcomed the LDP's sweeping victory in the Upper House election, compared with 17.8 percent against it and 42.0 percent with either mixed, ambivalent or no opinion.

Given the poor showing by opposition parties, 68.8 percent of the survey respondents cited a need for realignment among opposition parties, against 22.7 percent who disagreed.

Because the LDP and opposition parties that support revising the pacifist Constitution fell short of building a two-thirds majority in the chamber, one of the conditions for initiating the revision process, 30.6 percent said the outcome was good, 16.1 percent said it was not good and 51.7 percent had no opinion.

Regarding the LDP's desire to restart idled nuclear reactors once they are confirmed safe, 32.5 percent were in favor and 58.3 percent were against.

On the government's plan to raise the consumption tax in April, 22.6 percent back it, 35.0 percent said the increase should be delayed and 40.5 percent favor the rate staying unchanged at 5 percent.

Kyodo News, July 23, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/07/23/national/abe-cabinet-approval-rate-drops-to-56/#.UfTvAaxGTFw>

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>
