

July 2022

# country report

Country Programme Japan



## Upper House Election 2022

### Results and Implications

By Naoki TAKIGUCHI

#### Introduction

The Upper House<sup>a</sup> election, held July 10, ended in a landslide victory for the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The election took place in a sombre mood of national mourning following the tragic death of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, shot while campaigning just two days before polling.

This paper describes the implications of this election for the major political parties.

#### I. Election Results

The results are shown in the table below. There were no major divergences from the results of pre-election polls, thus no big surprises ensued. The main takeaways can be summarised as: (1) landslide victory for the LDP; (2) successful performance by the Japan Innovation Party (JIP); (3) poor performance by the Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP), the largest opposition party; (4) retention of two-thirds of seats by the ruling coalition<sup>b</sup>, the JIP, and the Democratic Party for the People (DPFP), which is necessary for proposal of constitutional amendments<sup>1</sup>; and (5) an increase in the number of female Upper House members.

The LDP won 28 of the 32 single-seat electoral districts, which gives the results a decisive flavour. They had their first victory in Iwate in 30 years. Iwate has long

<sup>a</sup> The House of Councillors

<sup>b</sup> LDP and Komeito

been the stronghold of Ichiro Ozawa, a CDP Lower House<sup>c</sup> member. In the 2016 and 2019 Upper House elections, the opposition parties unified their candidates in all 32 single-seat constituencies, but this did not happen this time round, leaving several opposition candidates standing in many constituencies.

Election Results					
Political Parties	Seats Held (Before election)	Constituency	Proportional Representation	Uncontested Seats	New Strength
LDP	63 (+8)	45	18	56	119
Komeito	13 (-1)	7	6	14	27
CDP	17 (-6)	10	7	22	39
JIP	12 (+6)	4	8	9	21
DPFP	5 (-2)	2	3	5	10
JCP	4 (-2)	1	3	7	11
Reiwa	3 (+3)	1	2	2	5
SDP	1 (±0)	0	1	0	1
Anti-NHK	1 (+1)	0	1	1	2
Sanseito	1 (+1)	0	1	0	1
Independent	5 (-3)	5	-	7	12
Total	125	75	50	123	248
Vacancy in Kanagawa added to the 124 contested seats					

(Source : Liberal Democratic Party. Translated by the writer)

In the French National Assembly election last month, the ruling bloc lost a large number of seats due to rising inflation. However, that was not the case for Japan. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications consumer price index (CPI) for Japan was 2.5%<sup>2</sup>, which is relatively low compared to other countries. According to a Kyodo News opinion poll conducted after the election (July 11, 12), 42.6% of respondents gave top priority to measures to counter the cost of living crisis and economic measures when deciding whom to vote for.

## II. Implications

The landslide victory should give the LDP major impetus and a three-year period of stability to focus on its policies (the so-called "three golden years") before the next Upper House election, provided that the Lower House is not dissolved for a snap election prior to that. However, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told NHK late on election night that he did not share this view. The government must tackle the many challenges it faces, including the Ukraine crisis, soaring energy prices, the weaker yen, response to the seventh wave of Covid-19, revision of three security-related documents at the end of the year, and the path to fiscal

<sup>c</sup> The House of Representatives

consolidation, as well as policies to achieve PM Kishida's key policy theme, a "new form of capitalism". Meanwhile, the assassination of former PM Abe, leader of the LDP's conservative forces, as well as of the party's largest faction (the Abe faction or the Seiwa Policy Study Group), is a serious blow. Although PM Kishida and former PM Abe did not necessarily agree on every aspect of policy, PM Kishida took note of former PM Abe's intent. One example was when PM Kishida clarified a fundamental reinforcement of defense capabilities over five years in the government's Basic Policy on Economic and Fiscal Management and Reform 2022 (経済財政運営と改革の基本方針 2022<sup>3</sup>), citing the commitment of NATO members to aim to devote at least 2% of GDP to defense spending, a policy measure strongly supported by former PM Abe. In addition, not only did former PM Abe lead discussions on certain topics himself; he was also a balancer who used his authority to keep order in the party. The Abe faction had sought to shift to a collective leadership system, but will maintain the current leadership for the time being. The flip side of this is that there is no one who can immediately take over the reins of the faction. The management of the party, intra-party dynamics, and the power balance between the government and the party may change.

As for the opposition parties, since last year's general election, the leading opposition party, the CDP, and the second-largest opposition party, the JIP, have switched places in the polls or remained neck and neck. In the national proportional representation (seats up for grabs this time), the JIP outnumbered the CDP by approx. 1.07 million votes. Thus, a change in the main opposition party occurred in terms of proportional representation votes. It can be said that the JIP, which originally described itself as a third political pole, has strengthened its foothold towards becoming the largest opposition party. While the CDP has support from organised groups such as labour unions, like the national federation representing various public sector unions, the JIP does not have such a large support group, but it still gained a certain level of support from the electorate.

**【JIP and CDP: Changes in the number of proportional representation votes in the Upper House】**

Year	JIP	CDP
2016	5,153,584	-
2019	4,907,844	7,917,720
2022	7,845,995	6,769,860

(Source: NHK)

On the other hand, the JIP's results were not so remarkable in constituencies other than its original base of the Osaka-Kansai region. Professor Izuru Makihara of the University of Tokyo expressed the same view<sup>4</sup>. The party failed to win seats in large cities like Tokyo and Aichi. However, in several constituencies, the JIP was able to come quite close to the lower-ranked winning candidates.

This puts a lot of pressure on other parties. Even in two-seat constituencies like Ibaraki, where the LDP and the JTUC-Rengo<sup>d</sup>-backed opposition parties have won consistently, the JIP candidate has posed a threat to the lower-ranking winner. However, given the lack of a solid support organisation nationwide for the JIP, whether this trend will continue nationwide will largely depend on the party's own performance. The key to JIP's future success is whether it can manage to achieve the same increase in the number of local assembly members as it did in the Osaka in other areas around the nation. It should also be noted that another key issue is whether the successor to Matsui Ichiro (Osaka mayor) as party president will be able to organise the party successfully.

Meanwhile, the CDP lost seats following last year's general election. After that, its direction and position towards this Upper House election (organising electoral cooperation with other opposition parties including the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) was not clear, and it faced difficulties in this regard. There may be calls within the party for it to join forces with the DPFP, but on July 11 DPFP president Yuichiro Tamaki expressed his opposition to this, saying, "[a merger with the CDP] could be perceived by voters as collusion if we cannot agree on fundamental policies", highlighting the CDP's zero-nuclear policy in particular.

As for the DPFP, it took its own position, endorsing policies, such as approving government-sponsored budgets, which opposition parties usually do not approve. Other opposition parties regard the DPFP as close to a ruling party. Party leader Tamaki told NHK late on election night that the party will continue its policy of cooperation across the ruling and opposition parties. There had been speculation prior to the election that the DPFP was trying to become a member of the ruling coalition, but party leader Tamaki denied this view at his press conference, saying "[the party] has to work hard to realise policies for the people"<sup>5</sup>.

Komeito and the JCP, both parties with organised support bases, lost seats. For Komeito, the number of votes gained is in itself a direct reflection of its degree of influence over the LDP within the coalition government. The JCP has just marked its 100th anniversary, but pundits have pointed out that the party's support base is ageing.

### III. Conclusion

The LDP won a landslide victory, but the absence of a strong opposition party is also a factor in its success. Although the JIP has increased its strength, it will take considerable time for it to reach the level of the LDP. Professor Yosuke Sunahara of Kobe University says that the position of the JIP depends on the behaviour of the LDP, and that if the LDP proceeds with reforms this could eventually cost the

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<sup>d</sup> Japan Trade Union Confederation has traditionally supported the Democratic Party of Japan and their succeeding parties of CDP and DPFP.

JIP its place in national politics<sup>6</sup>. In other words, the LDP's position itself has a major impact on the status of the opposition.

The opposition parties may not be able to act together in various fields in the near future. There are policy differences between the CDP and DPFP, and now that the JIP has boosted its power to attract votes, it will need a huge incentive to respond to calls from other parties to coordinate its candidates with them in future elections. In other words, there would need to be both a worthwhile cause and particular political circumstances to realise this.

A strong opposition is essential for a sound democracy. The Upper House election has shown that Japan still needs quite some time before this can be achieved.

This article reflects the sole opinion of the author and does not present the official standpoint of KAS.

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<sup>1</sup> See the writer's arguments this February on constitutional amendments, Discussions on Constitutional Amendments: Momentum and Issues (February 3, 2022) <https://kas-japan.or.jp/en/pub/discussions-on-constitutional-amendments-momentum-and-issues/>

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, The consumer price index for Japan in May 2022 (June 24, 2022) <https://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/cpi/1581-z.html>

<sup>3</sup> Cabinet Office (June 7, 2022) Basic Policy on Economic and Fiscal Management and Reform 2022

<sup>4</sup> Yomiuri Newspaper (July 12, 2022) Interview

<sup>5</sup> Democratic Party for the People (July 19, 2022) President Tamaki's press conference <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Y8wr9QplZo>

<sup>6</sup> Asahi Newspaper (July 12, 2022) Interview

(All the links last accessed July 20, 2022)

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