

Japanese government facing losses in upper house election

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Japan will hold an election next Sunday for half of the 248 seats in the upper house of the Diet, or parliament. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)-led coalition is currently projected to lose its majority, which could dramatically alter Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba's right-wing government.

The LDP currently holds 113 seats in the upper house alongside the 27 held by its junior partner Komeito. The opposition bloc led by the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP) holds 91 seats. Nine seats are considered unaffiliated and the remaining seats are vacant. Representatives in the upper house, or House of Councillors, serve six-year terms with half of the seats up for election every three years.

While the upper house does not select the prime minister, a bad election result will increase pressure on Ishiba's government. It could potentially lead to a shake-up in the coalition in order to pass legislation or even Ishiba's resignation. The LDP ruling coalition lost its majority in the lower house for only the third time since World War II following the general election in October 2024.

Hanging over the election is the growing danger of a war with China instigated by US imperialism. Last weekend, the *Financial Times* reported that Washington has been demanding allies Japan and Australia to make clear that they would join the US in war against China over Taiwan.

These plans, which Tokyo backs, are far advanced as indicated in the Defense Ministry's annual white paper released on Tuesday. The report branded China "an unprecedented and the greatest strategic challenge," adding that the world is entering a "new era of crisis," the biggest "since the end of World War II."

The Trump administration has demanded Japan, along with allies like South Korea, to raise military

spending to 5 percent of GDP. The Japanese government is currently in the process of doubling military spending to 2 percent by 2027.

Ishiba has responded by striking a nationalist tone towards Washington. He told a campaign rally on July 9, "This is a battle for national interests. We will not be disrespected." He added, "We must say what we need to say, fairly and squarely, even to our ally."

If the prime minister has balked at Washington's demands, it is not because he opposes the US war drive against China. Rather, he is aware of the widespread anti-war sentiment and that the massive increase in military spending will mean new burdens on the working class, already hit by a rising cost of living, and will be met with resistance.

The economic and social crisis in Japan is being compounded by Trump's tariffs, including the 25 percent auto tariff and the threatened 25 percent "reciprocal" tariff on Japanese exports, slated to go into effect on August 1. Despite multiple negotiations and trips to Washington by Japanese officials, no agreement has been reached on the latter. The Trump administration is insisting that Japan open up to US rice imports—a measure that would impact on the LDP's social base in rural areas.

Ishiba and his government are already highly unpopular, as are the other establishment parties. The LDP currently has a 24 percent support rating, according to a recent NHK poll. It has gone from one scandal to the next, including a fundraising scandal that erupted in November 2023 that led to the resignation of Fumio Kishida as prime minister last year.

The poll also showed CDP with only 7.8 percent. The Democratic Party for the People (DPP), which split from the Democrats and could potentially join the LDP-led coalition after the election, has an even lower rating

at 4.9 percent. LDP ally Komeito is backed by only 3.5 percent. One-third of respondents in the poll supported no party.

The far-right is attempting to exploit this widespread disillusionment, in particular Sanseito, which was founded in 2020. In fact, the political establishment and media have allowed the party to set the tone for the current election, cultivating a more openly fascistic formation.

Sanseito mixes Trump-style “Japanese First” policies with attacks on foreigners, blaming them for growing crime rates and the rising cost of living. Party leader Sohei Kamiya has expressed support for Trump’s Republican Party and European fascist parties including Alternative für Deutschland in Germany and National Rally in France.

Sanseito lacks broad support, polling only 5.9 percent in the recent NHK poll. The establishment press, however, has given it widespread coverage while giving credence to its xenophobic pronouncements, with articles linking social problems and “crimes” to foreigners who account for just 3 percent of the population.

Ishiba has also given credence to Sanseito’s unsubstantiated allegations by announcing on Tuesday that his government would launch a “control tower” body to address supposed “foreign crime.”

The so-called progressive CDP offers no alternative to Ishiba and the LDP. While it accepts Japan’s remilitarization, it quibbles over parliamentary procedure to give the appearance that it represents an anti-war faction. On the economy and social crisis, the CDP offers little more than limited promises that it has no intention or ability of keeping.

The Democrats came to power for the first and only time in 2009 with a large majority in the lower house. They quickly reneged on their election pledges, earning widespread scorn, which enabled the LDP to sweep back into power in 2012. The Democrats have never recovered from the debacle.

The CDP and its allies including the Stalinist Japanese Communist Party (JCP) meekly call for a “multicultural” society. However, they have done nothing to oppose the growth of xenophobia in Japanese politics as they are mired in nationalism themselves.

As for the JCP, it is completely integrated into the

political establishment. Any socialistic phrase-mongering is limited to advocating minor social reforms under capitalism through parliament. Its overriding purpose in running for office is to shore up support for the Democrats.



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