

MNI POLITICAL RISK ANALYSIS – LDP Likely To Hold On In Japanese Election

by Tom Lake

Japan's voters head to the polls on 31 October to elect the 465 members of the lower chamber of the National Diet, the House of Representatives. The legislative election comes a month after Prime Minister Fumio Kishida took over as head of the governing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) from previous office holder Yoshihide Suga. This is the first House of Representatives election since 2009 where Shinzo Abe has not been the prime ministerial candidate for the LDP, with the former PM casting a long shadow over the subsequent Suga and Kishida administrations.

Scenario Analysis

- **LDP Wins Overall Majority but Lose Seats from Current Level – 50%:** The loss of seats from the 2017 election is broadly expected by opinion polls, meaning that the blow to Kishida's premiership of this result would be somewhat softened. Nevertheless, Kishida's position would be in the balance, especially given that his challenger for the LDP presidency in September, Taro Kono, was shown by opinion polls to be the more popular candidate among voters. If Kishida holds on some of his more controversial policies, such as the resumption of Japan's nuclear power stations, could be jettisoned.
- **LDP Short of Overall Majority, Need Komeito Support – 20%:** Should the LDP emerge short of a majority it is unlikely to result in a change of overall government, with its coalition partner Komeito likely to provide enough seats to retain control of the chamber. It would likely see Kishida forced to step down as party head, resulting in Japan's third prime minister in just over a month. Would result in a continuation of political instability with unclear policy implications. A stronger role for Komeito, the LDP's coalition partner, could see the LDP's more hawkish right-wing lose its sway over foreign policy, with a more dovish stance on China, Korea, and the Japanese armed forces emanating from government.
- **LDP Wins Overall Majority with Same or More Seats Than Current Level: 20%:** In this scenario Kishida holds onto the reins of government and would be well positioned to seek to implement his manifesto pledges, focusing on the resumption of nuclear power, the doubling of defence spending, and policies aimed at reducing wealth inequalities in Japan.
- **LDP Wins Two-Thirds Supermajority – 10%:** Kishida ensured a relatively long tenure as prime minister, would be well placed to take momentum into the 2022 House of Councillors election. Winning a supermajority in the upper house as well could smooth the path towards an amendment to Article 7 of the constitution to allow for a Japanese standing army for the first time since the end of WWII.

Electoral System – Of the 465 members of the House of Representatives, 289 represent single-member constituencies and are elected via a first-past-the-post method. The remaining 176 members are elected via proportional representation as part of 11 constituencies based on different regions. Seats in these blocks are distributed to party lists based on their share of the vote in that regional constituency.

Main Political Parties:

- **Liberal Democratic Party** – LDP – Leader: Fumio Kishida – Founded: 1955 – 276 Seats – Conservative, Japanese nationalist
- **Constitutional Democratic Party** – CDP – Leader: Yukio Edano – Founded: 2020 – 113 Seats – Centre-left, social liberal, progressive
- **Komeito** – Leader: Natsuo Yamaguchi – Founded: 1964 – Seats: 29 – Centre-right, Buddhist interest, social conservative
- **Japanese Communist Party** – JCP – Leader: Kazuo Shii – Founded: 1922 – Seats: 12 – Far-left, communism, pacifism
- **Japan Innovation Party** – Ishin – Leader: Ichiro Matsui/Toranosuke Katayama – Founded: 2015 – Seats: 10 – Right-wing populist, neoliberal, conservative

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