



By: TA | AP Brief

# PM Ishiba faces a possible loss in key elections in Japan



Japanese were voting Sunday for seats in the smaller of Japan's two parliamentary houses in a key election with Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and his ruling coalition **facing** a possible defeat that could worsen the country's political instability.

Voters were deciding half of the 248 seats in the upper house, the less powerful of the two chambers in Japan's Diet. Early results were expected Sunday night.

Ishiba has set the bar low, wanting a simple majority of 125 seats, which means his Liberal Democratic Party and its Buddhist-backed junior coalition partner Komeito need to win 50 to add to the 75 seats they already have.

That is a big retreat from the 141 seats they had pre-election, but media surveys predict big setbacks for Ishiba.

A poor performance on Sunday would not immediately trigger a change of government because the upper house lacks the power to file no-confidence against a leader, but it would certainly deepen uncertainty over his fate and Japan's political stability. Ishiba would face calls from within the LDP party to step down or find another coalition partner.

Soaring prices, lagging incomes and burdensome social security payments are the top issues for frustrated, cash-strapped voters.

Stricter measures targeting foreign residents and visitors have also emerged as a key issue, with a surging right-wing populist party leading the campaign.

Sunday's vote comes after Ishiba's coalition **lost** a majority in the October lower house election, stung by past corruption scandals, and his unpopular government has since been forced into making concessions to the opposition to get legislation through parliament. It has been unable to quickly deliver effective measures to mitigate rising prices, including Japan's traditional staple of rice, and dwindling wages.

U.S. President Donald Trump has added to the

pressure, complaining about a lack of progress in trade negotiations, and the lack of sales of U.S. autos and American-grown rice to Japan despite a shortfall in domestic stocks of the grain. A 25% **tariff** due to take effect Aug. 1 has been another blow for Ishiba.

Ishiba has resisted any compromise before the election, but the prospect for a breakthrough after the election is just as unclear because the minority government would have difficulty forming a consensus with the opposition.

## Voters are turning to populist parties

Frustrated voters are rapidly **turning** to emerging populist parties. The eight main opposition groups, however, are too fractured to forge a common platform as a united front and gain voter support as a viable alternative.

The emerging populist party Sanseito stands out with the toughest anti-foreigner stance with its "Japanese First" platform that proposes a new agency to centralize policies related to foreigners.

The party's populist platform also includes anti-vaccine, anti-globalism and favors traditional gender roles.

Conservative to centrist opposition groups, including the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, or CDPJ, the DPP, and Sanseito have gained significant ground at the Liberal Democrats' expense.

The spread of xenophobic rhetoric in the election campaign and on social media has triggered protests by human rights activists and alarmed foreign residents.

The LDP has almost continuously dominated Japan's postwar politics, contributing to its political stability and social conformity.

Voters are divided between stability and change, with some voicing concern about escalating xenophobia.

Yuko Tsuji, a 43-year-old consultant, who came to a polling station inside a downtown Tokyo gymnasium with her husband, said they both support the LDP for stability and unity and voted “for candidates who won't fuel division.”

“If the ruling party doesn't govern properly, the conservative base will drift toward extremes. So I voted with the hope that the ruling party would tighten things up,” she said.

Self-employed Daiichi Nasu, 57, who came to vote with his dog, said he hopes for a change toward a more inclusive and diverse society, with more open immigration and gender policies such as allowing married couples to keep separate surnames. “That's why I voted for the CDPJ,” he said. “I want to see progress on those fronts.”