

JAPAN: LDP and Kishida look solid after first half of unified local elections

A tenacious performance in the first half of the nationwide unified local elections on 9 April has left the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in a comfortable position ahead of the second half on 23 April and added some momentum to Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's gradual political rebound. Incumbents aligned with the ruling LDP-Komeito coalition triumphed in six of nine high-profile prefectural gubernatorial races. The LDP also maintained its seat-numbers in the 41 sets of prefectural assembly elections—taking 1153 (51%) of the 2260 contested seats—as well as in several municipal mayoral elections. At the prefectural level as nationally, the LDP remains the hegemonic political force in almost every part of Japan.

The major exception is in the Kansai region, where the populist right-wing Ishin no Kai strengthened its grip on its Osaka heartland. Running on a platform of decentralization and deregulation, Ishin held onto the top posts in both Osaka prefecture and city, and for the first time flipped the governorship in adjacent Nara prefecture amid LDP vote-splitting. Ishin also claimed its first-ever assembly majorities in both prefectural and municipal Osaka, performed strongly in Hyogo prefecture (Kobe), and picked up several new seats in prefectural assemblies around the country. Overall, it more than doubled its prefectural assembly seat tally nationwide to 124.

Elsewhere, the LDP's junior coalition partner Komeito underperformed its election targets, seemingly due to demographic decline in the Soka Gakkai religious group from which it draws support. The main progressive opposition Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP) rose 7 seats to 185, the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) fell 24 to 75 seats, and the centrist Democratic Party for the People (DPP) stayed at 31 seats. A record 316 female candidates were elected in prefectural assembly elections, though this still amounted to only 14% of all seats.

Provisional takeaways

- Voter turnout was at a record low of 42%, a reminder that the LDP's electoral 'successes' since December 2012 are in no small part due to voter disengagement and (mostly) amateurish opposition parties.
- Ishin's wins solidify its predominance in central Japan. Under a future LDP leader, Ishin could become a truly viable alternative coalition partner option if Komeito's electoral strength diminishes, though the latter's value to the LDP comes from its nationwide reach and efficient voter turnout machine as much as raw seat numbers.
- The Nara loss is more likely to hurt hard-right economic security minister Sanae Takaichi than Kishida since her actions helped cause the vote split. The right wing of the LDP remains fragmented and on the defensive since the death of figurehead Shinzo Abe in July 2022, factors that help centrist premier Kishida in terms of intra-party politics.
- If the LDP again performs solidly in the [upcoming elections on 23 April](#) and the prime minister chairs a successful G7 summit in his Hiroshima hometown on 19 to 21 May, speculation is bound to increase about an early general election before Kishida faces re-election as party president in September 2024.

[Client Portal >>](#)