

20 June 2025

After surviving the Diet session, Ishiba now braces for electoral test

Key takeaways

- Prime Minister Ishiba Shigeru will escape from the ordinary session of the Diet without facing a no-confidence motion and will avoid calling a double election.
- Nevertheless, the upper house campaign is critical for Ishiba, since losing the ruling coalition's majority would be difficult for the prime minister to survive.
- He appears to have the upper hand heading into the campaign, with public opinion shifting in his favor and the opposition parties struggling to deliver an effective message to the public — but the situation remains fluid.

The ordinary session of the Diet will come to a close on Sunday, 22 June with Prime Minister Ishiba Shigeru avoiding a no-confidence motion that would likely have triggered double elections for the lower and upper houses of the Diet in July. As [anticipated](#), our base case scenario – **Prime Minister Ishiba leads the ruling coalition into the House of Councillors elections on 20 July** – will come to pass.

To be sure, Ishiba had a challenging Diet session, having to engage in protracted negotiations with multiple opposition parties to pass the budget, which was revised multiple times; face accusations of violating campaign finance law; grapple with the Trump administration's tariffs and the contentious negotiations that have followed; and struggle to contain surging rice prices as part of a broader rise in the cost of living. Nevertheless, he emerges from the Diet session in a stronger position. While he has rivals and critics within the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), they have been unable to mount an organized challenge to his leadership. His approval ratings, while still underwater, have recovered from their lows, arguably because dissatisfied supporters of the ruling coalition appear to be returning home.

How popular is the Ishiba government?

A ten-day moving average of the Ishiba government's support, weighted by sample size and adjusted for the age of the poll.

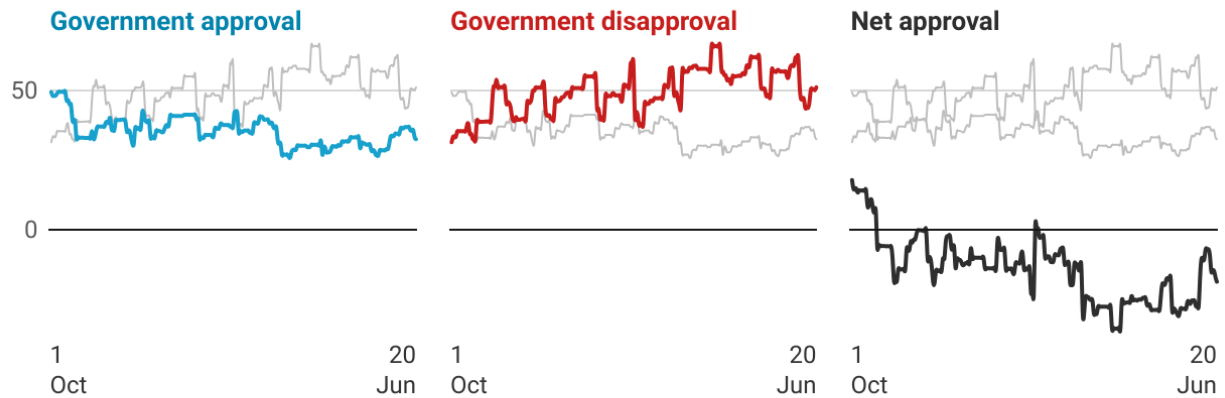
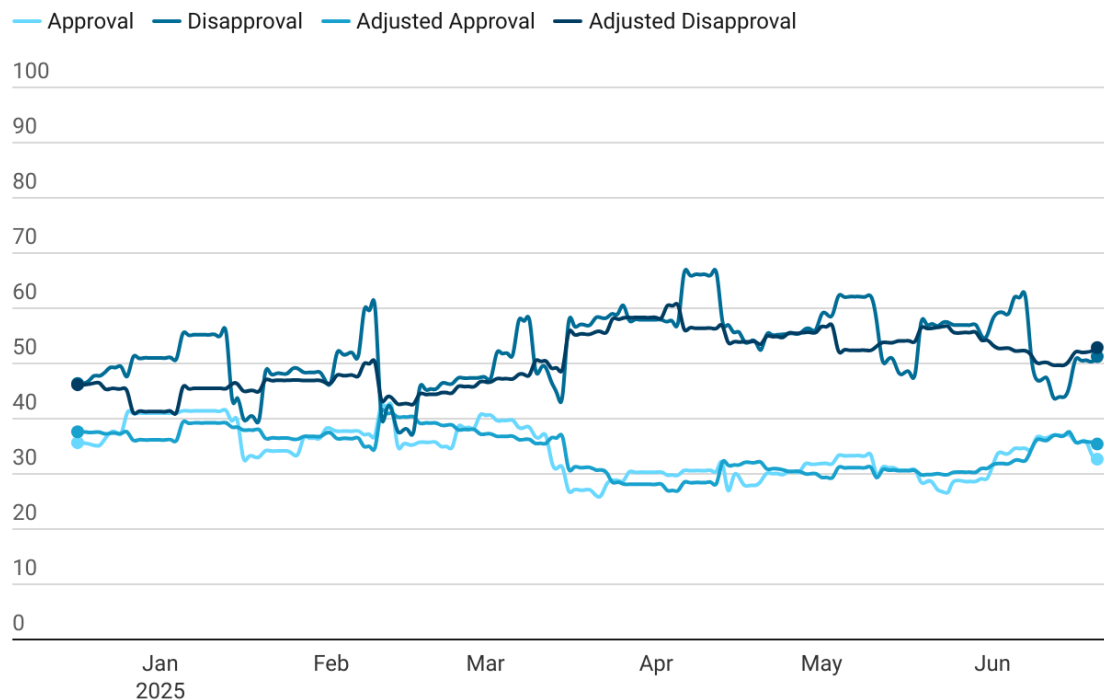


Chart: Tobias Harris for observingjapan.substack.com • Created with Datawrapper

The Ishiba government's support, adjusted for house effects

Correcting for each pollster's biases, the trend lines are the same but some of the big jumps are smoothed out.



Data since December 17

Chart: Tobias Harris for observingjapan.substack.com • Created with Datawrapper

Perhaps most importantly, the opposition parties enter the upper house campaign looking increasingly incapable of dealing a major setback to the LDP and Kōmeitō next month. While deciding against a no-confidence motion was likely the right decision for Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP) leader Noda Yoshihiko – in light of the likelihood that his party was not ready to contest a general election with the Ishiba government – it has left Noda vulnerable to criticism from within the CDP and has highlighted the degree to which the party has struggled to connect with voters. The Democratic Party for the People (DPFP), having surged past the CDP to become the most popular opposition party earlier this year, has lost ground as criticism has grown of DPFP leader Tamaki Yūichirō's leadership, most notably of his decision to recruit controversial former CDP lawmaker Yamao Shiori as a DPFP upper house candidate, a decision reversed in the face of relentless criticism from DPFP lawmakers and supporters. While some fringe opposition parties of the left and the right have seen some gains in polls, albeit from low bases, opposition parties are generating little enthusiasm with one month until the upper house elections. Indeed, with polls showing ruling party supporters more supportive of the government, falling support for the opposition parties, and a growing share of the electorate inclined to support no party, it is possible that the upper house election could feature low voter turnout, while would amplify the impact of the ruling coalition's organized vote. As such, although the ruling coalition is defending a sixteen-seat majority in the House of Councillors, it may be difficult for the opposition to pick up enough seats to prevail.

With less than two weeks until the upper house campaign begins on 3 July, the ruling and opposition parties are now looking for any source of advantage that could shift the outlook for the upper house elections. The opposition parties, frustrated with the government's resistance to an opposition proposal to provide relief to households by rescinding a long-standing temporary gasoline surcharge, moved to overcome the government's resistance this week by taking the unprecedented step of submitting and passing a motion to remove a committee chair, the LDP lawmaker chairing the financial affairs committee, and replace him with a CDP lawmaker who enabled the gasoline tax proposal to move through the committee and the lower house. While the government-controlled upper house is unlikely to pass the bill before the session ends on Sunday, this maneuver enables the opposition parties to point the government's obstruction of the gasoline tax legislation as a sign of a “do nothing” Ishiba government.

Meanwhile, even as the parties battle in the Diet, they are also in the final days of the campaign for the Tokyo metropolitan assembly elections, which will be held on Sunday, 22 June. While the elections for the 127-seat chamber are not a perfect analogue for the upper house campaign, they will be a useful test of the LDP's efforts to rebuild its brand; the DPFP's ability to expand its footprint, despite its declining national support, as it seeks to enter the Tokyo assembly; and voter interest in the DPFP's social media-fueled populism more broadly, as Ishimaru Shinji, the populist runner-up in Tokyo's gubernatorial election last year, has created a new regional party fielding forty-two candidates in this election. With more than 11.5mn voters in Tokyo, the metropolitan assembly elections will provide useful insight into the electorate's mood ahead of the upper house elections.

Ultimately, in what has already been recognized as a de facto election to choose the national government – since Ishiba is unlikely to survive losing an upper house majority – the key test for the upper house campaign will be whether the prime minister can make the case that national stability depends on the ruling coalition winning, or whether the opposition can tap into and mobilize public resentment about the rising cost of living and other issues. For now, Ishiba's position looks better than anticipated, but the speed with which his fortunes have improved suggest that the political situation remains fluid and could turn again as the upper house vote nears, particularly with ongoing [questions](#) about trade talks with the United States and new reports of tensions surrounding US demands for more defense spending.