

## Legislative Records: The Japanese National Diet in 2002

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The Koizumi Administration got off on the right foot with a high approval rate over 85 % in April 2001, and swept Upper House Election held three months later (Inoguchi, 2002). However, it lost the support of legislators, media, and constituents because of his failure to get the reform process off the ground. Most salient of the legislative records is that the batting average of the cabinet sponsored bills has experienced a dramatic fall in the 153rd (27 September to 7 December 2001) and 154th (21 January to 31 July 2002) sessions, registering the second lowest figure for the last decade. Clearly the Prime Minister's legislative coalition has been significantly weakened (see Table 1; see Table 2 for the distribution of seats by political party).

In the 153rd session Diet, the focus of the debate was on the Japanese response to the September 11 terrorist attacks and the supplementary budget for economy stimulating and employment security. The September 11 terrorist attacks on US in 2001 inflicted deep grief on Japanese citizens and prompted the decision for further cooperation in anti-terrorism. Special counter-terrorism bills, which were advocated by the ruling coalition parties, allowed Self-Defense Forces (SDF) warships to provide logistical support to US-led forces in action under the Diet resolution. With the approval of the Diet, the Japanese government very promptly dispatched maritime SDF escort vessels, minesweeper tenders, and support vessels to the Indian Ocean.

The supplementary budget of the order of three trillion yens (25 billion US dollars), which was accompanied by two trillion yens (17 billion US dollars) cut in spending, mainly covered expenditures for developing safety nets for unemployment and small businesses, promoting computer-aided administration and measures against BSE (mad cow disease) problem. Two trillion yen were cut from the distribution of the local allocation tax and the reserves of public works.

Other than these two bills, the major bills passed during the session were the Peace Keeping Operations Cooperation Law revision, the Special Law for Electronic Balloting, the Special Temporary Law for Employment, and the Financial Revitalization Law revision.

After the 153rd session, the cabinet decided on the consolidation and rationalization plan of government-affiliated firms. For Prime Minister Koizumi the privatization of government-affiliated firms is a high priority promise. A number of firms have been placed on the privatization path. However, the privatization of road-related firms is strongly opposed by road policy-focused lawmakers; the definite plan is entrusted to the third party institution.

During the 154th session, Prime Minister Koizumi faced an uphill battle. Highly popular but somewhat erratic Foreign Minister Makiko Tanaka was replaced in February, 2002. The dismissal of Tanaka caused the approval rate for the Cabinet to plummet from 77.6% to 46.9%. It was a severe blow to Koizumi who had relied on her high popularity.

The fall in the approval rate for the Prime Minister meant the loss of support for the Prime Minister and activated the centrifugal activities of policy activists (*zoku-giin*). Of four major bills of the 154th session – Health Insurance, Postal Services, Privacy-Protection, Emergency Defense Bills – the former two bills were effectively blocked by policy activists. Notably, the Postal Services Bill, which would allow entries of private firms into the mail delivery service at least in principle were severely opposed. To have the bills passed, Koizumi had to bypass the preliminary legislative review process, within the governing coalition.

A series of legislators' scandals revealed during the sessions also worked against Prime Minister Koizumi. Former LDP's secretary general Koichi Kato and chairman of the House of Councilors (HoC) Yutaka Inoue resigned from the Diet. Kiyomi Tsujimoto, chairman of the SDP's policy board, also resigned accepting liability for misappropriating her secretary's salary, and former Foreign Minister Makiko Tanaka had her LDP membership suspended for two years for the same reason. And, Muneo Suzuki, Chairman of the Committee on Rules and Administration, House of Representatives (HoR) was arrested by the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office for taking of a bribe for a favor given. Discussions on these scandals delayed the deliberations on the annual budget and other bills. To prevent recurrences of such scandals, the bill to revise the law against favors-for-influence deals was passed.

Opposition parties and media have withdrawn their previous support for the Koizumi Administration. The Privacy-Protection Bill and Emergency Defense Bill were effectively blocked in this Diet session by opposition parties and the media for fears of infringing on constitutional rights. The Privacy-Protection Bill, the Human Rights Protection Bill, and the Juvenile Protection Bill were dubbed as 'media regulation bills'.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reform was a high priority in this Diet session as well. One lawmaker (Muneo Suzuki) and two bureaucrats from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were arrested. More recently the incident in Shenyang in China, in which five North Korean refugees who sought asylum in the Japanese Consulate General were forcibly taken away from the Consulate-General by the Chinese

security police, was criticized in the Diet. The reform proposal was finally submitted by Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi in August 2002.

### References

- Takashi Inoguchi, 'Japan's Upper House Election of 29 July 2001,' *Government and Opposition*, 37:pp.38–54.  
Mikitaka Masuyama, 'The Diet 2001,' *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 2:247–251.

**Table 1.** *A Summary of Legislative Records 2001: Passage Rates by Bill Sponsorship*

	Cabinet Bills		HoR Bills		HoC Bills	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
153–154	139	87.8	112	24.1	32	6.3
(154)	(106)	84.0	(91)	16.5	(23)	4.3
150–152	120	94.2	92	31.5	39	5.1
146–149	186	95.2	76	31.6	37	10.8

Notes: Data of the 153–154 Diet sessions are based on the website of HoR. Those of the 146–149 and 150–152 Diet sessions are from Masuyama (2001). Entries include bills that are carried over from the prior sessions.

**Table 2.** *Power Balance in the Diet*

House of Representative	#	%	House of Councilors	#	%
LDP	237	49.4	LDP Conservative	116	47
Komei	31	6.5	Komei	24	9.7
Conservative	7	1.5			
DPJ	126	26.3	DPJ	60	24.3
Liberal	22	4.6	Liberal	8	3.2
JCP	20	4.2	JCP	20	8.1
SDP	19	4	SDP	8	3.2
21st Century Club	4	0.8			
Independent	12	2.5	Independent Party	6	2.4
Vacancy	2	0.4	Independent	5	2
Total	480		Total	247	

Notes: Entries are as of September 2001. LDP: Liberal Democratic Party; DPJ: Democratic Party of Japan; JCP: Japan Communist Party; SDP: Social Democratic Party.