

CHUBU CONNECTION

Foreigner suffrage, separate surnames stir passions in poll runup

Whether to grant permanent foreign residents voting rights for local-level elections and allow married couples to keep their respective surnames have become contentious issues ahead of the July 11 Upper House election.

The ruling Democratic Party of Japan, which advocates the introduction of foreigner suffrage and separate surnames for married couples if desired, faces strong opposition from conservatives in the Liberal Democratic Party and small parties, including its own ruling bloc partner.



Conservative colors: A female citizens group opposed to granting foreign residents voting rights and allowing married couples to keep their respective surnames holds a rally in front of JR Nagoya Station. CHUNICHI SHIMBUN

Aichi Prefecture voters, however, are puzzled by the conservatives' fervor because the topics have yet to stir national debate.

"If we give foreigners the right to vote (in a disorderly manner), it would threaten Japanese tradition and national security," said Hiroyasu Inoue, 62, of the city of Kariya.

A citizens group led by Inoue has called on assemblies to oppose foreigner voting rights. In response, more than 20 have approved written opinions or adopted statements either to object to such suffrage or to take a cautious approach. "We are closely monitoring each candidate's opinion, regardless of

the parties," said Inoue.

The LDP and small conservative parties set out to oppose the ideas in their platforms, vying with the DPJ, which has liberal views on these issues. Some homemakers, who used to be the last to become involved in politics, now speak to people at the weekly rally of Inoue's group held at Kanayama Station in Nagoya.

"The pride of this country that has been built up by the Yamato (Japanese) race must be passed down to our children, otherwise there will be no future for the country," said Masahito Fujikawa, 49, an LDP-backed candidate in the Aichi electoral district.

Fujikawa, 49, also spoke to an audience of about 200 at a rally staged by a women's group in front of JR Nagoya Station in early June, drawing applause. Members of the group handed out leaflets to passersby while holding banners to protest granting suffrage to foreigners and allowing separate surnames for married couples.

Aiming to appeal to conservative ranks, small parties, including Kokumin Shinto (People's New Party), which is still in a coalition with the DPJ, and Tachiagare Nippon (Sunrise Party of Japan), whose members bolted from the LDP and fear being overshadowed by the LDP and DPJ, are clearly demonstrating their conservative stance in the runup to the election.

Candidates from the major parties in the Aichi district, other than Fujikawa of the LDP, who are clearly against giving foreigners voting rights include Michiyo Yakushiji, 46, of Your Party.

Nobuko Motomura, 37, of the Japanese Communist Party, and Mitsuko Aoyama, 62, of the Social Democratic Party, meanwhile support foreigner suffrage because foreign residents pay taxes and are part of their communities.

The two DPJ candidates differ in opinion. "One option is to open the door for foreigners after having enough discussions," said Yoshitaka Saito, 47, who is supportive, while Misako Yasui, 44, is against the measure.

Meanwhile, foreign residents expressed concerns in a divisive debate on foreigner suffrage. "Brazilian residents are not as

interested in the voting rights as Japanese people see it as a problem," said Hideo Alcides Tanaka, 49, of the Brazilian Association of the city of Toyohashi, Aichi Prefecture. He is concerned the debate over suffrage could become a political focal point that triggers a move to exclude foreigners from society.

"This is the issue of Japanese democracy and how Japanese think of living together with Korean descendants in Japan despite the history (of Japanese oppression). It is for the Japanese to decide how to handle the issues," said Do Sang Tae, a Korean descendant and chairman of a nonprofit organization in Toyohashi.

This section, appearing Saturdays, features topics and issues from the Chubu region covered by local daily Chunichi Shimbun. The original article was published June 21.

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