

The Japan Times **NEWS**

NATIONAL / POLITICS

Major parties submit bill to lower voting age to 18 next year

KYODO

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The nation's top political parties submitted a bill Thursday to amend the electoral law to lower the voting age for national elections to 18 from 20.

Six parties, including the Liberal Democratic Party-Komeito ruling coalition and the Democratic Party of Japan, the main opposition force, submitted the bill to the House of Representatives for passage during the current Diet session, which runs through June 24.

If the bill passes, 18- and 19-year-olds will have get first chance to vote in next year's House of Councilors election, unless the House of Representatives is dissolved before then. Some 2.4 million people aged 18 and 19 are expected to become voters next year if the proposal becomes law.

The voting age was last changed in 1945, when it was lowered from 25 to 20.

The parties that submitted the bill have agreed that the voting age for referendums to amend the Constitution should also be lowered to 18, to complement the change that is made to the electoral law.

The proposed amendment also includes a provision to send minors to public prosecutors in cases of serious crimes against electoral laws that compromise the fairness of elections.

Following the Upper House election next year, suffrage is set to be granted to 18- and 19-year-olds for gubernatorial and other elections. The change is expected to be accompanied by educational campaigns to encourage young people to participate more in politics.

The minimum age for being appointed to electoral management committees, which oversee elections, will also be lowered to 18 from 20.

But the minimum age for lay judge duty or to become a member of a prosecution inquest committee is set to remain at 20.

The voting age for referendums on constitutional changes is set to drop from 20 to 18 in 2018, four years after a revision to the national referendum law took effect in June last year.

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