

**RESTRUCTURING JAPAN'S NATIONAL
POLITICS FROM OSAKA: THE CHALLENGE
OF MAYOR HASHIMOTO TORU**

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Executive Summary

1. Hashimoto Toru, the charismatic mayor of Osaka city, is spearheading a regional revolt against the established political parties centered in Tokyo and threatening to unravel the strongly centralized state established by the Meiji Restoration in 1868.
2. He aims to restructure Japan's administrative and political system by first merging Osaka city, Osaka prefecture and Sakai city into a greater Osaka metropolitan region and then forge a super Kansai state (combining Osaka with other prefectures in the Kansai region) for greater economies of scale, ridding bureaucratic duplication, and achieving greater regional autonomy.
3. Hashimoto advocates the direct election of the prime minister, the scrapping of the Upper House, the honoring of the national flag and anthem, and opposes the restarting of nuclear power stations close to Osaka.
4. In March 2012, Hashimoto launched the *Ishin Seiji Juku* (Restoration Political School) to recruit students running on the label of his local party *Osaka Ishin no Kai* (Osaka Restoration Association) for the forthcoming Lower House General Election slated in 2013.
5. According to an April 2012 public opinion poll and simulation of the forthcoming Lower House Election, Hashimoto's local party is poised to win 57 seats — all 48 seats in the single electoral districts of the Kansai region and another 9 seats in the proportional representation component of the Lower House in the same region.
6. If this comes to pass, Hashimoto may well hold a casting vote in Japanese politics by forging a ruling coalition with other parties. Given the unpopularity of the two major political parties (the ruling Democratic Party of Japan and the opposition Liberal Democratic Party), it will be difficult for them to win a majority of seats each in the next Lower House Election.

7. Hashimoto's political movement is gathering momentum in 2012. Leading politicians and political parties of different ideological hues and stripes are seeking to bandwagon with Hashimoto.
8. To Hashimoto's admirers, his political challenge from Osaka to the central government in Tokyo may remake and revitalize Japan which is facing its "third lost decade" of economic stagnation and political malaise. To Hashimoto's detractors, he is a demagogue and a potential dictator with no practical experience of leadership beyond local governance in Osaka.
9. The unpopularity of the two major parties, DPJ and the LDP, and the poor results of their reform agenda to change Japan mean that the mantle of reform will now be worn by maverick Hashimoto. While the ascendance of Hashimoto makes good political drama, it may result in greater political gridlock in Japan.