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# What Brings the High Approval Rate of the Suga Cabinet?

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Almost all results of public opinion surveys conducted by the media show over 60% approval rate to the newborn Suga Cabinet. Only a few months ago, nobody expected Mr. SUGA Yoshihide would take prime ministership, because the ordinary impression of him was a modest Chief Cabinet Secretary who had devoted himself to support the long-running ABE administration. To say the least, he was far from a charismatic political leader as to gain wide popularity among the people. Accordingly, such high approval rate at the beginning is unbelievable and surprising. Then what brings such high approval rate?

Here, we should look at and analyze his policy promises presented at the recent Liberal Democratic Party leadership election. While some of his policies were rather risky as seen too China-friendly or others were neoliberalistic in economy that would force people and businesses a painful changes, he presented the several appealing policies no one would oppose, of cell phone rates reduction and the second special payment of 100,000 yen as one of the assisting measures to cope with COVID-19. As the public opinion survey results show, if the majority of Japanese people really support the Suga Cabinet, the most likely reason is that they favor his so-called 'haphazard fiscal policy.' Based on such recent trend of people in Japan, some important aspects and problems in today's politics can be pointed out.

Firstly, the majority of people make evaluation of the Cabinet, whether for or against, based on the policies laid out as the election promises, rather than the personality of politicians. Main interests of people are whether those policies presented would benefit their daily lives, or, whether contribute to safety of their society.

The second point is that there are policies nobody would object. When people recognize the given circumstances unreasonable or irrational, it is natural for them to demand the politicians to improve the situation as soon as possible. For example, the above-mentioned policy of reduction of cellular phone rates is such a typical case, because it is considerably higher than the global average rates. In other words, such kind of policies should be regarded as a public consensus and taken into account by all the political parties regardless of their differences in political principle and stances. In the present situation, however, only a candidate or a party who is the first to announce

those popular policies in the election campaign can have the clear advantage over their rivals, while the other candidates or parties apt to hesitate voicing the same policy out of long habit of making counterproposal.

The third important point is that, besides some popular policies that could expect almost everyone's support, the remaining policies --- whether they have been promised or not--- does not always reflect public opinion in favor. This problem is similar to the 'package sales:' voters are not able to make every single policy choice one by one. For example, the Suga Cabinet's policy promise package seems to be mainly composed of 'appealing policy + pro-China policy + neoliberal economic policy.' Although the Prime Minister SUGA seems to have gradually modified his unpopular pro-China attitude by reinforcing the relations with the United States since he assumed the office, it can be forecasted that he would probably maintain his basic policy principle of advancing globalization, without a cautious reconsideration, as some reports that the Government of Japan is already willing to relax the entrance regulation of foreigners from all over the world.

All these things reveal that there are several substantial questions and subjects pertaining to the existing political system: what criteria people set for their political choice? And if they make the choice based on the policy rather than personality of politician as their criteria, can the current structure of the political system designed to function precisely and sincerely enough to respond to such change of people's criteria? While the new cabinet appeals its strong intention for a 'reform,' what we really need is reformation on the political system for protecting the democracy of Japan. It seems that we are living in the era when the weight of political attention of people is shifting from personality to policies. In order to pace with this tide, it is necessary for us to improve and develop present democratic system more responsive to actual public opinion, common demands and wishes of people. And this must be regarded as our inevitable task for the future of human beings.

**(This is the English translation of an article written by KURANISHI Masako, Political Scientist, which originally appeared on the e-Forum "Giron-Hyakushutsu" of GFJ on September 25, 2020.)**