

22 September 2025

Koizumi enjoys significant advantages as LDP race begins

Key takeaways

- The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) race officially began on 22 September.
- While Koizumi Shinjirō and Takaichi Sanae start the race as the top tier, Koizumi is in a stronger position, with both the parliamentary party and grassroots supporters appearing to shift in his favor.

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) leadership race formally began on Monday, 22 September, with five candidates – **Koizumi Shinjirō, Takaichi Sanae, Hayashi Yoshimasa, Motegi Toshimitsu, and Kobayashi Takayuki** – launching bids for the LDP's presidency.

Koizumi and Takaichi enter the race as the presumptive frontrunners, particularly since the two candidates – who with outgoing Prime Minister Ishiba Shigeru made up the top tier of the nine-candidate field last year – enjoy significantly more public support than the other three candidates. However, when looking at who LDP supporters prefer, Koizumi has a sizable lead over Takaichi, suggesting that **the forty-four-year-old hereditary politician, currently serving as Ishiba's agriculture minister, is the favorite as of now.**

Koizumi begins the campaign with multiple sources of strength. **Simply put, Koizumi has ample room to improve on last year.** His popularity among party supporters suggests that he should outperform his disappointing results in voting among rank-and-file supporters last year – he received only 61 of 368 votes, a distant third – and **he could be well positioned to pick up Ishiba's grassroots supporters.** Meanwhile, his position among the 295 LDP lawmakers may be even stronger than in 2024, when he received 75 votes, the most of any candidate in the first round. This time, he will benefit not only from Ishiba's not being in the race, but also from reformist Kōno Tarō's decision

not to run (he has announced his support for Koizumi) and Finance Minister Katō Katsunobu’s decision not to run (he is running Koizumi’s campaign instead). **This is a sizable pool of lawmakers who will be more inclined to back Koizumi than Takaichi.** Finally, Koizumi has moderated some of his more progressive positions on social issues in a bid to [appeal](#) to more conservative lawmakers and in general is emphasizing the importance of unity and humility for leading the LDP out of its political crisis. There is a sense that both the parliamentary party and the grassroots party feel alarmed enough about the LDP’s future to gamble on elevating Koizumi, who would be Japan’s youngest postwar prime minister by a decade, to the premiership.

The state of the LDP leadership race

This table shows who LDP supporters are backing in the LDP leadership race in the latest polls, with overall support – including non-LDP supporters – in parentheses.

	Mainichi 9/20-21	Fuji-Sankei 9/20-21	Asahi 9/20-21
Koizumi	40 (25)	35.2 (25.7)	41 (24)
Takaichi	22 (21)	22.5 (28.3)	24 (28)
Hayashi	11 (10)	18.6 (11.1)	10 (9)
Motegi	5 (3)	5.3 (3.8)	8 (4)
Kobayashi	5 (2)	4.0 (4.0)	3 (5)
Undecided	17 (34)	14.4 (25.7)	11 (25)

Table: Japan Foresight LLC • Source: Mainichi Shimbun; Sankei Shimbun; Asahi Shimbun • Created with Datawrapper

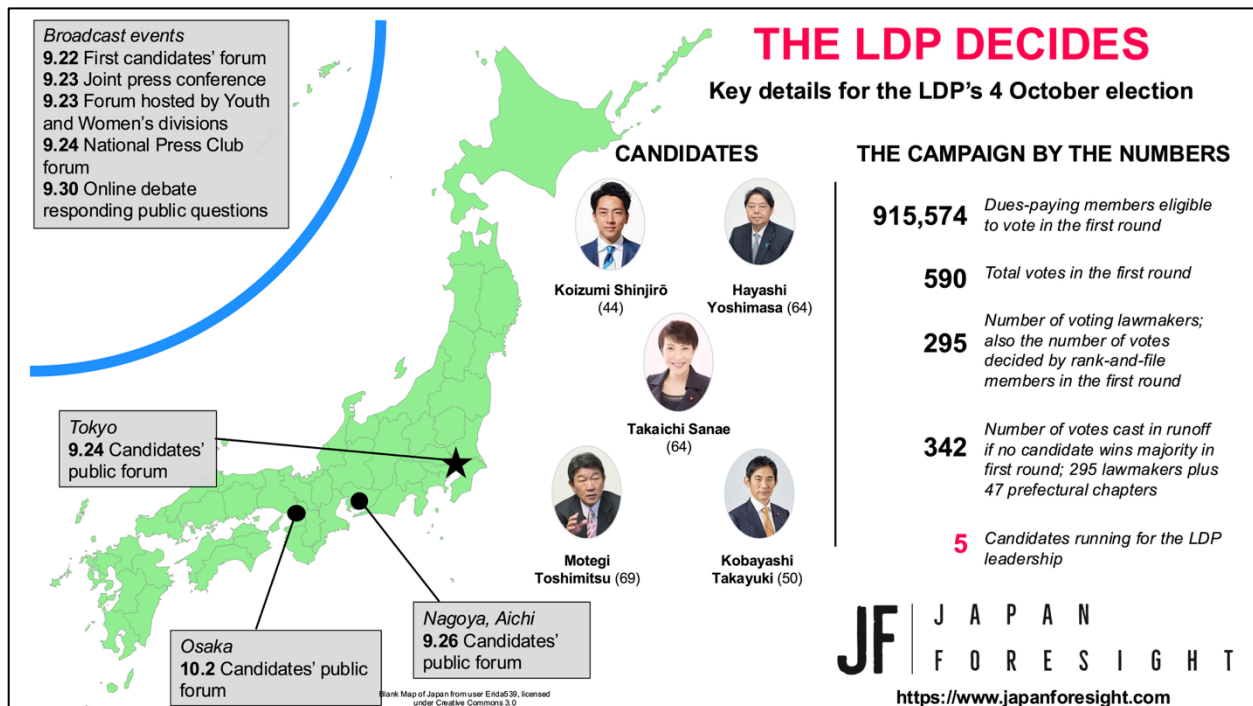
Takaichi, meanwhile, could struggle to match her performance last year for several reasons. The party’s electoral losses in the **2024 general election and the 2025 upper house election have been concentrated among the former Abe faction and the right wing** more broadly, meaning that Takaichi faces a less right-wing parliamentary party than last year. This may also describe the rank-and-file electorate, which is 13% smaller than in 2024, potentially reflecting the drift of conservative supporters from the LDP to other parties over the past year. **She also has to grapple with a divided right wing due to Kobayashi’s candidacy and may not be able to rely on Asō Tarō,** who helped propel her into the second round when he told his faction to support her. Asō’s support, however, may have stemmed more from a desire to beat his old rival Ishiba than to support Takaichi. While there have been some signs that she is prepared to moderate some of her positions – on fiscal policy, [for example](#) – her speech to launch her campaign on Monday was stridently right wing, suggesting **she**

may struggle to appeal to more moderate LDP lawmakers who are skeptical about her ability to unify the party, let alone work with the LDP's coalition partner Kōmeitō or bring another party into the coalition.

The upshot is that this appears to be Koizumi's race to lose. To be sure, it is possible that he could stumble before the vote but barring any major gaffes or errors – and he has looked more polished in his first appearances – **he has the best chance of breaking away from the field before 4 October.** And if he were to stumble, **it would likely favor not Takaichi but rather Chief Cabinet Secretary Hayashi Yoshimasa**, who is ranked third across recent polls and is competing for many of the same parts of the party as Koizumi.

What's next

The LDP will vote on Saturday, 4 October. Party rank-and-file members who have paid their dues for at least the past two years – now numbering 915,574 – will have until 3 October to vote. These votes will determine how the 295 votes for party supporters will be distributed, using proportional representation. The LDP's lawmakers will vote in person on 4 October. If no candidate wins a majority of the 590 votes in the first round, the party will immediately move to a second round with the top two candidates.



The party will host a series of forums and debates for the five candidates over the next twelve days, starting with a joint press conference and debate on Tuesday, 23 September. The overall number of party events is smaller than last year; candidates will have to do more campaigning on their own to bring their messages to voters. This may advantage both Koizumi and Takaichi, since they enter the race with a significant

advantage in name recognition and public support compared to the other three candidates who would likely benefit from more platforms to communicate with voters and contrast their positions with each other and the frontrunners.

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