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Koizumi shrugs off scandal, remains presumptive favorite

Key takeaways

- After polls showed that Koizumi Shinjirō's support was largely unaffected by a scandal that forced his communications director to resign, his status as the frontrunner is secure.
- His sizable lead among Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) parliamentarians – and Takaichi Sanae's seemingly soft support from lawmakers – could position Koizumi not only to finish first in the first round but to win a runoff comfortably.

With five days until the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) leadership election on Saturday, 4 October, Koizumi Shinjirō remains the presumptive favorite to win after he shrugged off the [mini-scandal](#) that forced the lawmaker serving as his campaign's communications director to resign.

New polls conducted over the weekend – after Koizumi's campaign admitted that it had encouraged supporters to submit pro-Koizumi comments during a streaming program – showed that Koizumi's strength among the party's rank-and-file supporters is holding steady despite concerns that the episode could trigger a shift away from him. While conservative Takaichi Sanae's position remains strong, Koizumi's support remains at roughly 30% with party supporters, which would be more than sufficient to land Koizumi in the runoff. Combined with his strength among LDP lawmakers – by some estimates Koizumi has more than double the Takaichi's support in the parliamentary party – the agriculture minister could be positioned to place first in the first round of voting on Saturday.

Koizumi would also be favored in a second round against Takaichi precisely due to his strength among the parliamentary party, since only parliamentarians and prefectural chapters would vote. Perhaps the most troubling sign for Takaichi is not Koizumi's

strength but the fact that she appears to be trailing even Chief Cabinet Secretary Hayashi Yoshimasa in support among the LDP's lawmakers; Hayashi has roughly 60 lawmakers backing him compared with only 40 or so declared for Takaichi. Given that Koizumi is far more likely to be the second choice of Hayashi's supporters than Takaichi is, Koizumi could enter the second round needing to gain only 30 or so votes to reach the majority line of 171, some of which would naturally come from the 47 prefectural chapters.

With only five days until the leadership election – and four until the party's rank-and-file supporters have to submit their votes – Takaichi is running out of time to achieve a race-altering endorsement (like Asō Tarō's late decision to instruct his faction to support her last year) or, less likely, secure an overwhelming lead among rank-and-file supporters that convinces some of the undecided lawmakers that she is a better option for the party. The final days of the campaign could see Takaichi try to stake out some attention-grabbing positions – over the weekend, for example, she said in a debate on television that it could be necessary to renegotiate the trade deal with the United States if the agreement turns out to be unequal – and, as has already been more apparent during the campaign, play up her chance to become Japan's first female prime minister, an argument she could use to try to improve her relatively weak support from female voters. Koizumi, meanwhile, will likely use the final days to fortify his lead with LDP lawmakers.

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