

27 January 2026

Campaign begins in two-front battle for Takaichi's future

Key takeaways

- The general election campaign began on Tuesday, 27 January, with 1285 candidates competing for 465 seats.
- Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae has raised the stakes for the campaign, warning that if her coalition cannot retain a majority in the lower house she will have no choice but to resign.
- She is simultaneously competing with the opposition Centrist Reform Alliance (CRA) for older voters and with multiple right-of-center parties for younger voters.
- In contrast to previous Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) prime ministers, Takaichi needs to raise turnout, particularly among younger voters, which could be a challenge given the weather, the timing during exam season, and their generally poor turnout.

This note marks the beginning of JAPAN FORESIGHT's coverage of the 2026 general election. Stay tuned for additional coverage.

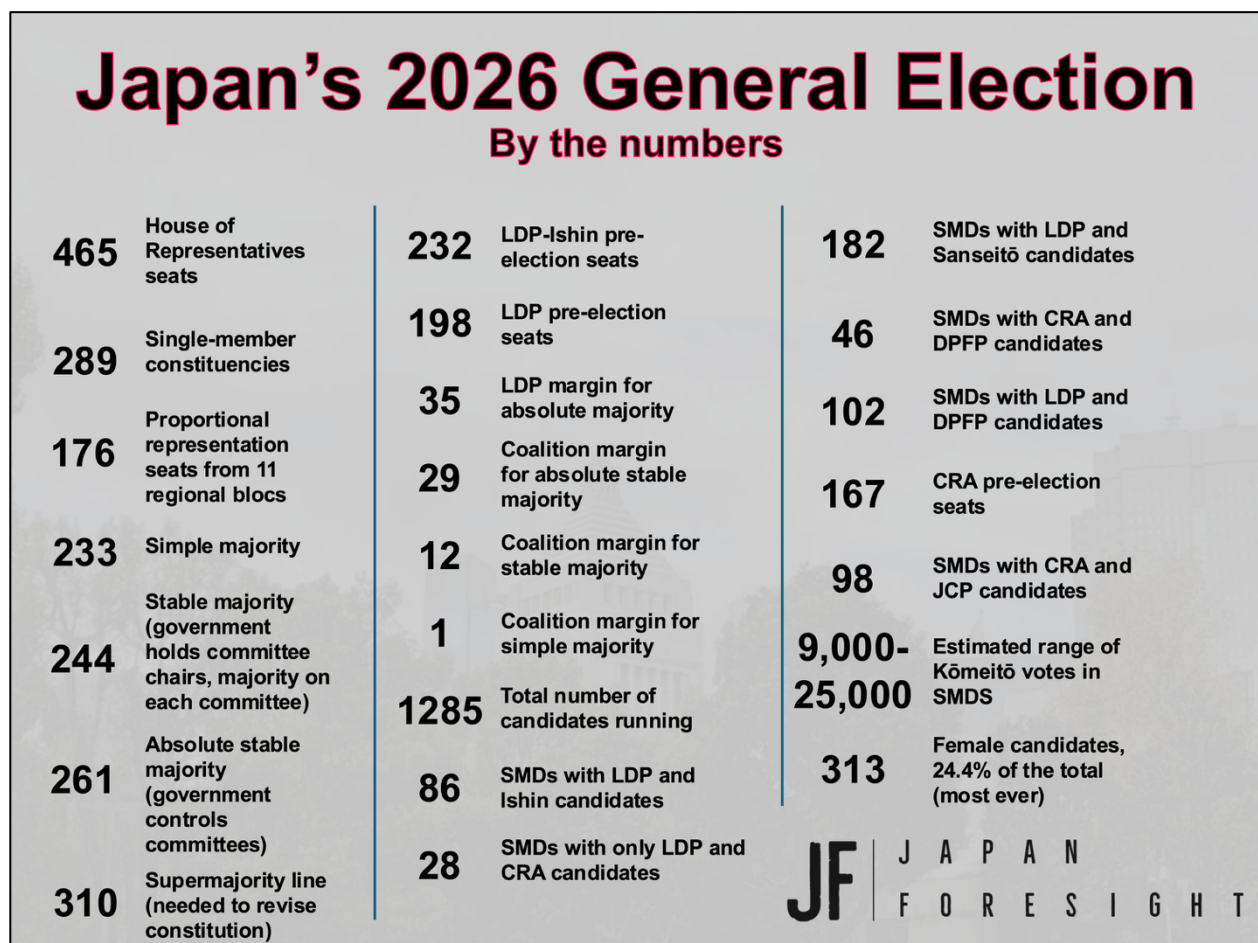
The House of Representatives campaign began on Tuesday, 27 January as **1285 candidates filed to run for the 465 seats in the lower house of the Diet**. The House of Representatives campaign began on Tuesday, 27 January as **1285 candidates filed to run for the 465 seats in the lower house of the Diet**. The election will be held on Sunday, 8 February, with early voting beginning on 28 January. Polls will close at 8pm on election day, though some polling stations may close earlier to adapt to snowy conditions.

The six major parties – the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Ishin no Kai, the opposition Centrist Reform Alliance (CRA), Democratic Party for the People (DPFP), the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), and Sanseitō – and several smaller parties will be

competing in what has emerged as **the most unpredictable general election campaign in recent memory.**

It also has increasingly important stakes, in that Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae, having gambled on a snap election, has indicated that **if the ruling coalition falls short of a majority – in other words, if the ruling coalition has a net loss of more than a handful of seats – she will have no choice but to step down as prime minister.** While this maneuver could be aimed at convincing her supporters who might be reluctant to vote or inclined to vote for other conservative parties to vote to keep her in power, it is nevertheless a pledge that could backfire given the number of factors beyond her control during the campaign.

Indeed, on the eve of the campaign, **her approval ratings, which had been steady at extraordinarily high levels throughout her tenure, experienced their largest decline since she took office.** Her net approval dropped by an average of 13.5 percentage points across four polls. Some of the largest drops appeared to be among older voters, voters who were already relatively cooler towards Takaichi than younger voters and who also vote at higher rates than the younger voters who back Takaichi at substantially higher levels.



This movement reinforces the extent to which Takaichi and the LDP will be fighting a two-front campaign.

She will need to limit defections among older voters from the LDP to the CRA – a party whose support is almost exclusively among older voters – beyond the support already lost with the end of the LDP’s coalition with Kōmeitō. Some of these voters are uneasy about her approach to foreign and security policy and fiscal policy – for example, her remarks about Taiwan have been less popular with older than with younger voters – so she will need to convince these voters that she is strong, stable, and not a radical departure from the status quo.

But she will also need to simultaneously mobilize younger voters, who are outside of the LDP’s traditional turnout infrastructure and generally vote at lower rates, while fending off competition for younger voters from Sanseitō (fielding 182 candidates, all against LDP candidates) and the Democratic Party for the People (DPFP). The latter parties have aimed their appeals and networks almost exclusively at younger voters and could enable Takaichi supporters to split their tickets in proportional representation voting (PR), diluting the LDP vote. Sanseitō is deliberately aiming at moderate LDP candidates and, as the victory of a Sanseitō-backed candidate in a gubernatorial election in Fukui prefecture Sunday showed, may be competitive for young voters who may like Takaichi but detest the LDP and the traditional political establishment. Meanwhile, LDP candidates will also compete in eighty-six single-member districts (SMDs) with Ishin no Kai candidates as they contend for – and perhaps divide – supporters of the government. **Ultimately, 113 SMDs will feature multiple conservative candidates, twenty-eight of which will feature candidates from all four right-of-center parties.**

To some extent, the CRA’s task is easier. If the party can retain the CDP’s votes from 2024 and add the bulk of Kōmeitō’s votes, it will strongly contend with the LDP in close races, particularly where LDP candidates are desperately competing with other conservatives for floating voters who can make up for the loss of Kōmeitō votes. The CRA’s more modest aims – it is looking merely to add to the 167 seats with which it enters the campaign – mean that the party needs only modest gains to deal a blow to the prime minister. **Of course, the CRA will have its own challenges,** as it needs to bring along a significant share of Kōmeitō voters while limiting the loss of left-wing CDP supporters to the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), which is running candidates in ninety-eight SMDs. That said, a JCP in long-term decline may be a less formidable threat to the CRA than the new parties of the right are to the LDP.

Ultimately, **the biggest question running through the campaign will be voter turnout.** Other things being equal, a larger, younger electorate will be more favorable for Takaichi, since it means a larger pool of voters to draw from to replace Kōmeitō votes. Holding a February election could also contribute to a younger electorate insofar as older voters in greying prefectures in Japan’s “snow country” could have a harder time voting, though this advantage could be offset by the February timing insofar as it

sits squarely during university entrance exam season (and by the reality that younger voters are lower propensity in every election). One positive sign for Takaichi is that NHK's latest poll showed that 58% say they will definitely vote, which is higher than the 54% who in 2024 said they would definitely vote, a number that was almost identical to eventual turnout.

The landscape may still ultimately favor Takaichi, who has attracted the admiration of many Japanese, but the prime minister's path to victory is not friction-less, requiring more than a few lucky breaks to deliver an unambiguous victory for her.