

9 January 2026

The snap election question

Key takeaways

- A Friday night news alert revealed that Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae is reportedly considering a February snap election.
- While there are arguments in favor of an early election, it could still be a gamble for Takaichi and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).
- How the prime minister and her allies respond to the report in the coming days will reveal whether how serious to regard the trial balloon.

JAPAN FORESIGHT has published a political risk outlook for Japan, Japan Risks 2026. The report is available [here](#).

Days after denying that she was contemplating an early snap election, the conservative *Yomiuri Shimbun* reported late Friday, 9 January that **Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae is considering dissolving the House of Representatives when the ordinary session opens on 23 January and calling a snap election for the first half of February**. Despite this report, however, it is far from guaranteed that she is determined to hold an early election. Other reporting suggests the prime minister will proceed cautiously given the risks around a snap election, highlighting some of the uneasiness about an early election within the ruling coalition and her own awareness of the risks.

If the prime minister is in fact considering a February general election, it may reflect **frustration with her inability to make headway in convincing the Democratic Party for the People (DPFP) to conclude a formal partnership with the government**.

Although the prime minister and her allies have been open about their desire for an expanded coalition, DPFP leader Tamaki Yūichirō has said little in return. The reality is that the LDP, having already made significant concessions to the DPFP, has few cards to play, leaving Takaichi's allies and the conservative press to call upon Tamaki to put

country before party. Essentially, she would be calling a snap election aiming to shake up the political situation to see if better options for her government emerge in the aftermath, whether by strengthening her hand vis-a-vis Ishin no Kai and the DPFP or by shaking up the relative strength of the LDP's potential partners.

There may be some logic to calling an election before the ordinary session begins in earnest. The prime minister and her allies could be anxious that she may face challenges this year that could erode her support. Meanwhile, the LDP may still have a window of opportunity with the Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP) and Kōmeitō still not having solidified an electoral coordination. Finally, as suggested [previously](#), if the CDP were to lose seats, the LDP could regain control of the lower house budget committee (and perhaps also the political reform special committee), removing a political irritant.

But a snap election could still be risky. Most importantly, the outcome is still far from certain. Most LDP candidates will have to grapple with the loss of Kōmeitō support and the threat of right-wing competition with Sanseitō. Meanwhile, Takaichi's approval ratings notwithstanding, her government has not made much headway advancing its agenda, the public does not see much cause for an election now, and political opponents will make much of the prime minister's putting her political interests ahead of the country's interests. After all, **an 8 or 15 February snap election would significantly compress the timeline for passing a budget before the end of the fiscal year and draw the prime minister's attention from international affairs at a sensitive moment.** (A prolonged budget debate would also impact Takaichi's window for visiting the US, since she would not be able to travel while the budget is still under consideration.)

Ultimately, the prime minister and her allies have to decide whether these risks are worth running for what could **at best be a marginal improvement in Takaichi's position.** In the LDP's best-case scenario – an overwhelming victory that secured an absolute majority in the House of Representatives for the LDP alone – **the government would still need to work with other parties to manage the upper house**, hoping that Takaichi, fresh off an electoral victory, could essentially overawe Tamaki and others into cooperating. In less rosy scenarios, **the LDP could still find itself dependent on Ishin no Kai**, which is already frustrated with the LDP and would prefer not to contest an election having little to show for its partnership and may be more stubborn in its demands after a snap election. She could even emerge from a snap election weaker, in that her intra-party rivals would question her leadership if the party were to underperform and she would, having just called a snap election, lose one of the prime minister's strongest tools for disciplining backbenchers. As Hagiuda Kōichi, one of her closest allies, suggested this week, **winning a snap election now – versus next year – would not guarantee that she would win reelection as LDP leader in 2027.**

As such, despite the *Yomiuri* trial balloon, there is still reason to be skeptical that Takaichi will opt for an early election. She may be consciously trying to use the threat of a snap election to browbeat Tamaki into a coalition, perhaps to safeguard the DPFP's

tax reform proposals. How she and her allies respond to the report – and whether skeptics within the ruling coalition go public with their concerns – in the coming days will reveal how determined the prime minister is to gamble next month. It bears watching whether she or her proxies deny the report over the weekend and early next week. A tepid denial or no denial at all would be a starting gun for a February campaign; a wave of public comment from LDP skeptics (including Takaichi allies like Hagiuda) followed by a firm denial would point to a later date. **A key indicator could be NHK's *Sunday Debate*, which this weekend (11 January) will feature a debate between Takaichi and the leaders of every other party.** If Takaichi uses this occasion to begin laying the rhetorical groundwork for a snap election, it would be a bullish sign for an early election.

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