



J A P A N

F O R E S I G H T

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What to watch for on election day (beyond the size of the LDP victory)

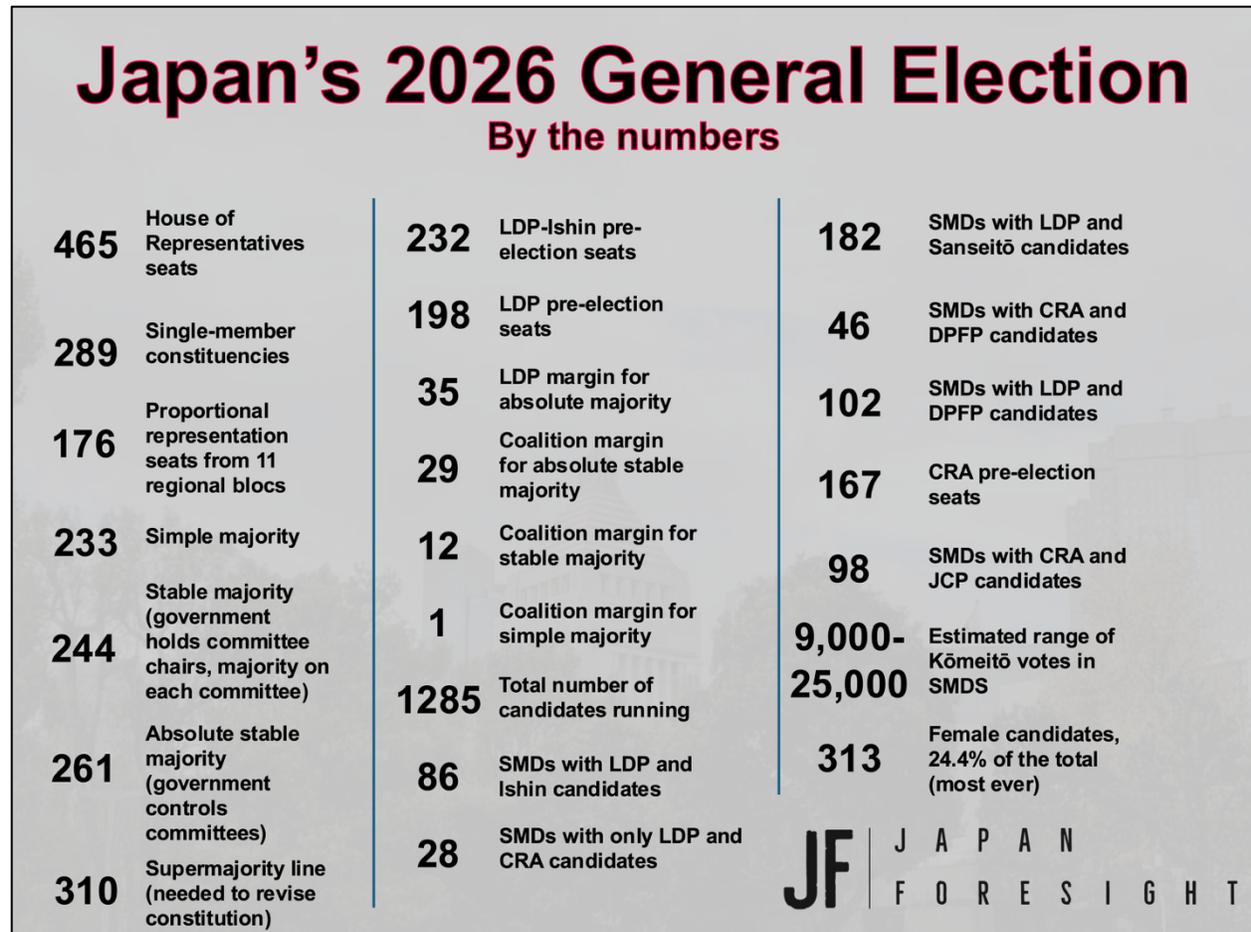
Key takeaways

- Although snowy conditions across much of Japan could impact turnout in competitive races, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) remains on track for a significant victory in the 8 February general election.
- The magnitude of the LDP's victory will have subtle implications for Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae's government, including her control of the Diet, her management of the LDP, and the LDP's partnership with Ishin no Kai.
- However, the opposition's performance – whether the Centrist Reform Alliance (CRA) exceeds expectations and whether the Democratic Party for the People (DPFP) and Sanseitō are able to weather the headwinds caused by Takaichi's popularity – will be highly revealing about the state of political competition in the coming years.

The general election campaign is in its final days, and the [outlook](#) has not fundamentally shifted. **Polls continue to show that the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) will likely secure an independent majority**, which, together with Ishin no Kai, could ensure that the Takaichi government is able to retain stable control of the Diet.

That said, **it appears increasingly less likely that the LDP and Ishin no Kai will win an exceptionally large victory that delivers them a supermajority (310+ seats) in the House of Representatives**. Instead, the more relevant milestones are whether the LDP itself reaches the **stable majority line (244 seats)** – which means control of the lower house committees and exactly half the seats on each committee – or the **absolutely stable majority line (261 seats)**, which could give the LDP itself majorities on the lower house's committees as well as the chairs. The implications of the differences between these outcomes are subtle and may matter more for Prime Minister

Takaichi Sanae’s control of the LDP itself – in short, whether the marginal victorious LDP candidates are her allies or not – than for her grip on the legislative process. **Of course, the absolute size of the LDP’s majority could also matter for the LDP’s leverage vis-à-vis Ishin no Kai**, though the LDP’s strength relative to Ishin no Kai is certain to increase regardless. Indeed, Ishin no Kai, which appears likely to lose some of its constituencies outside of Osaka, may emerge as an even more Osaka-centered party than before the election, limiting its national ceiling and value to the LDP as a partner.



Given the strong likelihood of a robust LDP victory, **the general election will be hugely important for what it reveals about the shape of the political opposition after the election.** If the Centrist Reform Alliance (CRA) rallies to compete and hold some of the closest races – for example, the party is defending twenty-one of the fifty-eight constituencies that had a margin of victory smaller than 5% in 2024 – and avoids the more apocalyptic forecasts showing the party finishing with a seat total below 100, **the party may have a foundation from which to rebuild instead of facing another round of splintering and reorganizing.** However, the party will likely face a leadership change regardless of the outcome and will still have to grapple with whether the CRA will continue with the merger of the CDP and Kōmeitō in the upper house as well as in

prefectures and localities, the latter being a particularly important question ahead of unified local elections in 2027.

Meanwhile, **another outcome to monitor is whether the anti-establishment parties of the right – particularly the Democratic Party for the People (DPFP) and Sanseitō – defy expectations and exceed their pre-election total (in the case of the DPFP) or near their seat target (Sanseitō). The DPFP in particular could face a post-election identity crisis.** The party has wavered between cooperation and competition with the Takaichi government, rejected cooperation with the CRA, and could lose roughly half of the constituencies it won in 2024. The party will no doubt be courted by the Takaichi government due to its twenty-five seats in the upper house, but the party could continue to face pressure from organized labor not to partner with the government formally and an electoral setback could lead DPFP leader Tamaki Yūichirō to consider whether the party's growth could require some kind of relationship with the CRA to forge a second large party that can compete in more regions and with voters of all generations. Meanwhile, **Sanseitō, having only two seats, will have a larger footprint in the lower house even if it falls short of its target of thirty seats; this could make it a potential ally for Takaichi in advancing certain issues, though the general election could be a lesson for the “anti-globalist” party that a more conservative LDP will necessarily limit its room to grow.** In the meantime, the party may bide its time deploying its nationwide network in local races, particularly in the 2027 unified local elections, an approach that will not only increase its presence closer to voters but also build a reserve of experienced candidates who can run in future national elections.

Finally, **this election presents an unpromising landscape for the small parties of the left.** Both the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) and Reiwa Shinsengumi are likely to lose seats as the system's center of gravity moves rightward. **In its own way, the fact that the small party that has attracted the most attention this campaign – Team Mirai, led by AI engineer Anno Takahiro – describes itself as “neither left nor right” but only focused on the future may in its own way be a sign that the left-right divides that have characterized Japan's politics for decades may be receding in importance,** not least because they do not resonate with younger voters as they do with older voters. The role of age gaps – the enormous differences in political sentiments between voters over 60 and under 40 – will remain enormously salient after the election as each party assesses the state of political competition.

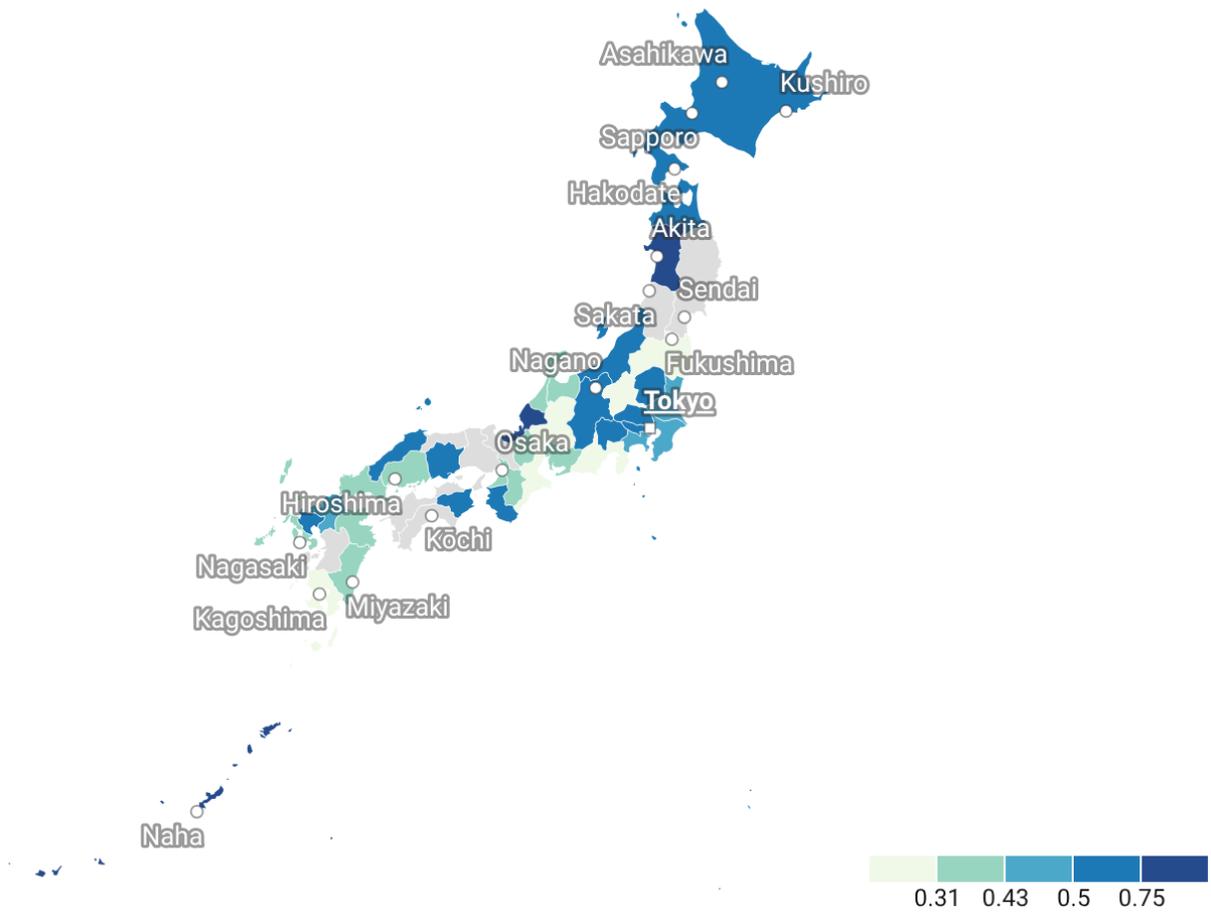
What to watch on Sunday

The first thing to watch heading into election day on Sunday, 8 February is the weather. Weather forecasts are calling for some of the **lowest temperatures of the season across much of the country as well as heavy snowfall in Hokkaido and along the Sea of Japan coast down Honshu,** as well as moderate snowfall in the greater Tokyo region. The weather **could wreak havoc with the outcomes of close races.** Early voting appears to be depressed in northeastern Japan amidst exceptionally heavy snowfall across northern Japan in recent weeks, which has killed dozens of

people. The adverse weather conditions in relatively older, rural parts of the country could mean that **even if overall turnout does not increase significantly, the electorate could be younger and more urban, favoring the prime minister on the whole**. The majority of the closest races from 2024 – 36 of 58 of races decided by less than five points and 28 of 60 races decided by five-ten points – were in prefectures from greater Tokyo north to Hokkaido, and polls suggest many of these races will be close again.

Japan's electoral battlegrounds

Where the most closely contested constituencies -- decided by fewer than ten percentage points in 2024 -- are concentrated



Map shows percentage of single-member constituencies in a prefecture decided by fewer than ten percentage points in the 2024 general election

Map: Tobias Harris • Created with Datawrapper

As such, many of the races to watch as indicators for how the general election will go are in this stretch of the country. **How quickly these races are called after the final polling stations close at 8pm – some polling places in snow country will close**

earlier – will be a useful indicator of whether the LDP will perform towards the upper end of projections or whether it could cede more ground to the opposition than anticipated.

Tokyo, which has thirty constituencies, is the single most important bellwether. Twenty of its thirty constituencies were decided by fewer than ten points in 2024, ten of which by fewer than five (three by less than a single percentage point). **It is essentially the laboratory where the competing theories of the election will be tested,** whether the CRA is able to consolidate the CDP and Kōmeitō votes in districts where the latter has been especially important for the LDP, whether the LDP can limit competition from the anti-establishment right, or whether the LDP can ride Takaichi's popularity with independents and young voters to victory. With twenty-nine of thirty constituencies featuring at least four candidates – Sanseitō candidates are running in all thirty, DPFP candidates in all but three, and even Ishin no Kai is running eleven in the capital – it could be a microcosm for political competition nationally. **The three populous prefectures of greater Tokyo – Chiba, Saitama, and Kanagawa – will be a useful indicator as well, as twenty-four of their fifty constituencies were decided by fewer than ten points (fourteen by fewer than five points).**

For the CRA, there may be no more crucial prefecture than Hokkaido. The CDP won nine of twelve constituencies in 2024, and the CRA panicked when it appeared that the LDP could dominate the prefecture. If the CRA performs better than expected in the prefecture, holding on to most of the prefecture's seats, it could point to a stronger performance overall for the CRA. **For different reasons, the other prefecture to watch will be Miyagi prefecture,** home to Sendai, Tohoku's largest city. **The CDP won four of five seats in Miyagi by an average margin of victory of 16% in 2024; if these seats fall to the LDP, and fall early, it would indicate that the CRA vote failed to coalesce** and would put many of the CRA's seemingly safe incumbents at risk across the country, **pointing to a larger LDP victory.**

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