# GR Japan Political Analysis Report

# LDP Elects Sanae Takaichi as New Leader: Paving the Way to Japan's First Female Premier

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The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) elected its first female leader, **Sanae Takaichi,** at its presidential election held on 4 October. Takaichi is now expected to also be elected Japan's first female Prime Minister when the Diet session opens, most likely on 15 October. A Prime Ministerial candidate does not need to secure the support of a majority of Diet members, but only to receive most votes among suggested candidates. Although the LDP holds a minority in both houses, it remains by far the largest party, and its nominee is likely to prevail as long as the opposition parties do not vote for the same alternative. Though attempts have been made, the opposition parties have failed to coordinate.

Beyond the historic significance of Japan's first female Prime Minister, Takaichi's victory also reflects a strong desire for the party to break with former party leaders and former Prime Ministers, **Shigeru Ishiba** and **Fumio Kishida**, to show voters something new and fresh and to reclaim conservative voters who have drifted away in recent elections.

## Presidential Election Results and Background

The LDP presidential election unfolded in two stages. In the first round of voting, Takaichi topped the LDP party-member (chapter) vote but placed third in the lawmaker vote. Although she gained the most votes in total, she fell short of securing a majority, leading to a runoff against Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries **Shinjiro Koizumi**. In the runoff, she overturned the lawmaker vote and was elected party president.

| First Round | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Sanae Takaichi |
| 2 | Shinjiro Koizumi |
| 3 | Yoshimasa Hayashi |
| 4 | Takayuki Kobayashi |
| 5 | Toshimitsu Motegi |

| Runoff Result | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Takaichi (185 votes) |
| 2 | Koizumi (156 votes) |

Backed strongly by the LDP's conservative base, Takaichi demonstrated overwhelming strength in the chapter vote. Overturning that result risked being seen as disregarding public opinion, along with expectations that the first female Prime Minister of Japan would symbolize change, this momentum helped her expand support among lawmakers in the runoff. By contrast, Koizumi, long considered the frontrunner, was perhaps making too much effort to be "electable," toning down his reformist and change agenda. The optics of LDP Diet members electing leader who wants to protect them at the expense of the "change candidate," seemed unacceptable for many. Additionally, Koizumi had to deal with a scandal during the campaign when his campaign staff were found soliciting "staged comments" online. The controversy spread widely on social media and may have contributed to his underperformance in the LDP chapter vote.

It is also noteworthy that the unexpectedly good performance of Chief Cabinet Secretary **Yoshimasa Hayashi** hurt Koizumi as well since both candidates competed for support from the party's moderate and liberal bases.

This LDP presidential election came in the wake of growing political instability following LDP's electoral defeats in the defeats in the House of Representatives election last year, the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly election in June, and the House of Councillors election in July.

Japanese politics has shifted from the "stable governance under the LDP-*Komeito* coalition" to a more unstable period where minority opposition parties hold decisive voting power. The previous LDP presidential election that brought Ishiba to power in September last year was the most crowded in history, with nine candidates running amid factional dissolutions triggered by political funding scandals. The Ishiba cabinet faced challenges from its inception, as Takaichi, who lost in the runoff, declined offers for senior party posts, while Minister for Economic Security **Takayuki Kobayashi** openly criticized the administration, deepening internal divisions. By September this year, turmoil over a request for a "snap presidential election," effectively a recall of the Ishiba administration, raised fears of a party split and ultimately forced Ishiba to step down.

Against this backdrop, this presidential race called for party unity, and candidates avoided divisive policy proposals. As a result, unlike the previous year, this election lacked lively policy debate and overall excitement.

## Takaichi's Profile and Support Base

Takaichi has been elected to the House of Representatives ten times and has held senior posts including Minister for Economic Security, Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications, and LDP Policy Research Council Chair. She is seen as having taken a hawkish stance on foreign and security policy, advocating energy policy reform and strong defense capabilities. Domestically, she places strong emphasis on "traditional family values" and firmly opposes the introduction of an optional separate surname system for married couples.

Within the LDP, many attribute recent electoral setbacks to Ishiba's weak leadership. Under former Prime Minister **Shinzo Abe**, the party enjoyed a loyal conservative base known as the "bedrock conservatives." However, this support began to erode when Abe was succeeded by Kishida, a member of the dovish *Kochi-kai* faction, and diminished further under Ishiba, who has long been seen as Abe's rival. The rise of the conservative-leaning *Sanseito*, which campaigned under the slogan "Japanese First," gave tailwind to Takaichi's candidacy.

In economic policy, Takaichi positions herself as a successor to Abe's "Abenomics," stressing continued monetary easing and aggressive fiscal spending. However, she has offered little detail on the "third arrow" of Abenomics, regulatory and institutional reforms intended to promote long-term growth.

## Outlook and Challenges for the New Administration

Looking ahead, Takaichi faces several immediate challenges. The key test for her will be policy negotiation with opposition parties to secure a majority and expanding the coalition. She is expected to pursue talks with the Democratic Party for the People and *Nippon Ishin no Kai* (Japan Innovation Party), with whom she shares common ground on policies such as raising the "income ceiling" for dependent deductions and abolishing the temporary gasoline tax.

In forming her cabinet, Takaichi will likely prioritize party unity, with potential appointments including Takayuki Kobayashi and other rivals from the presidential race. She will also need to factor in the influence of former Prime Minister **Taro Aso**, who leads the party's only remaining faction, maintaining the party stability in the near term. However, her likely appointment of Diet members who used to belong to Abe's faction, some of whom were linked to political funding scandals, to key positions in the party or in her cabinet is bound to draw criticism from opposition parties.

On foreign policy, Takaichi's hawkish stance risks provoking backlash from China and South Korea, where relations have recently improved, and may also test her relationship with coalition partner *Komeito*, whose pacifist principles often contrast with her security priorities. Striking a balance between consolidating conservative support at home and presenting a clean, credible image abroad will be among her most pressing challenges.

| Key Political Dates | |
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| Oct 13 | Osaka Expo Concludes |
| 15 | Appointing Next Prime Minister in Extraordinary Diet Session (TBD) |
| 26～ | ASEAN Summit (Malaysia) |
| 27～29 | U.S. President Trump Visits Japan (TBD) |
| 31～ | APEC Leaders' Meeting (KOR) |