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Japanese General Elections (February 8th, 2026)

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1. Introduction

The country of the rising sun went to polls in early February to vote on the elections for the House of Representatives (衆議院 – *Shūgiin*)[4]. This *snap election* was called by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi just after 3 months of taking office. Arguably the main reason for such a move was the fact that Takaichi's party, the Liberal Democratic Party (自民党 – *Jimintō*) had to negotiate most things with its coalition partner, the Japan Innovation Party (日本維新の会 – *Nippon Ishin no Kai*) which meant frequently conceding on policy important to the Liberals. Since Takaichi, the first ever female prime minister, had soaring approval rates, she took the chance to reinforce her party's position in the lower house, breaking the coalition gridlock and win the chance to comfortably legislate for the future. This call for snap elections can also be seen as a tactical move, since reinforcing the LDP's position results in avoiding parliamentary inquiries on the corruption scandal that was unravelled in the past few years.[5]

Table 1 - Main political parties

Party	Leadership	Political orientation and values
Liberal Democratic Party (自民党 – *Jimintō*)	Sanae Takaichi (高市早苗)	Center-right, conservative, nationalist, neoliberal, populist party
Japan Innovation Party (日本維新の会 – *Nippon Ishin no Kai*)	Hirofumi Yoshimura (吉村洋文) & Fumitake Fujita (藤田文武)	Centre-right to right, localism, economic liberalism party
Centrist Reform Alliance (中道改革連合 – *Chūdō Kaikaku Rengō*)	Yoshihiko Noda (野田佳彦) & Tetsuo Saitō (斉藤鉄夫)	Centre political party

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4 All terms in Japanese language are going to be presented between parentheses in the original Japanese and in the Latin alphabet though Hepburn Romanization. Table 2, its underlying result and foreign policy analyses shall be presented solely in English with Hepburn Romanization.

5 Catalinac, A. (2025) Money Politics Interrupts Liberal Democratic Dominance, Again. Asian Survey. 65 (2), pp. 175-188. doi: https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2025.65.2.175 (Accessed on: 25/05/2026)

Democratic Party for the People (国民民主党 – *Kokumin Minshutō*)	Yūichirō Tamaki (玉木雄一郎)	Centre to centre-right, conservative, reformist, pacifist party
Sanseitō (参政党)	Sōhei Kamiya (神谷宗幣)	Right-wing, ultraconservative, populist party
Japanese Communist Party (日本共産党 – *Nihon Kyōsantō*)	Tomoko Tamura (田村智子)	Left to far-left, socialist, pacifist party
Reiwa Shinsengumi (れいわ新選組)	Tarō Yamamoto (山本太郎)	Left-wing, progressive, populist party
Team Mirai (チームみらい)	Takahiro Anno (安野貴博)	Technocratic political party
Tax Cuts Japan and Yūkoku Alliance (減税日本・ゆうこく連合 – *Genzei Nippon – Yūkoku Rengō*)	Takashi Kawamura (河村たかし) & Kazuhiro Haraguchi (原口一博)	Right-wing, fiscal populist party

In these general elections, the main parties were: *a)* Takaichi's LDP with its focus on a proactive fiscal policy aiming at protecting Japanese households from the fears of growing inflation as well as a renewed interest on amending the Japanese constitution (日本国憲法 – *Nihonkoku Kenpō*) article 9[6] among establishing provisions for state of emergency; *b)* The Japan Innovation Party, led by Osaka governor Hirofumi Yoshimura and Fumitake Fujita, known for their fiscal austerity and calls for cutting bureaucracy as well as stance against corporate donations to political parties; *c)* The Centrist Reform Alliance made up from the merger between the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (立憲民主党 – *Rikken Minshutō*) and the LDP's former coalition partner *Kōmeitō* (公明党) on January 15th, 2026, focusing on social welfare, increasing wages, and tackling the wealth gap; *d)* The Democratic Party for the People led by Yūichirō Tamaki, a party focused on economic relief for the middle class with several measures to deal with inflation; and *e) Sanseitō*, led by Sōhei Kamiya, an ultraconservative populist party with an anti-immigration agenda, capitalising on the frustration with traditional democratic parties.

Finally, this election marks the birth of a new political coalition created in January 2026, the Tax Cuts and Yūkoku alliance, with veteran politicians Takashi Kawamura (former Nagoya mayor, MP in the previous legislature and deputy leader of the Conservative Party of Japan) and Kazuhiro Haraguchi (a former Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications and a veteran MP) at the helm. This new coalition has its origins in the merger between the Tax Cuts Japan party, created back in 2010 in Nagoya, and the Yūkoku alliance which was created after Kazuhiro Haraguchi left the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan.

2. Election Results

The snap legislative elections held in Japan on 8 February 2026 represented a particularly significant moment for understanding the recent evolution of the Japanese party system. More than a simple election for the renewal of the House of Representatives, the 2026 electoral process should

6 Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan: "Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes.
In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized."
See The Constitution of Japan (English translation), at the House of Representatives website at: https://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_english.nsf/html/statics/english/constitution_e.htm (Accessed 26/06).

be understood as the culmination of a cycle of instability that began after the 2021 elections, intensified by the governing coalition's loss of majority in the 2024 legislative elections, and deepened by the loss of control of the House of Councillors (参議院 – *Sangiin*) in 2025.

In 2021, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), then led by Fumio Kishida, managed to preserve its parliamentary majority in coalition with *Kōmeitō*, confirming the preference of the Japanese electorate for governmental stability in a context still marked by the political, economic and social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic[7]. In those elections, 105,320,523 voters were registered, of whom 58,893,807 cast ballots, corresponding to a turnout of 55.9% and an approximate abstention rate of 44.1%[8]. Nevertheless, that stability would gradually be eroded by political funding scandals, rising living costs, and the growing difficulty faced by the governing bloc in responding to internal and external economic and security pressures.

The 2024 legislative elections represented a significant rupture. Under the leadership of Shigeru Ishiba, the LDP–*Kōmeitō* coalition lost its majority in the House of Representatives, securing only 215 seats, thus falling short of the 233 required to secure an absolute majority[9]. In these elections, 103,880,749 voters were registered, with 55,930,899 ballots cast, corresponding to a turnout of 53.8% and an approximate abstention rate of 46.2%[10]. Although the defeat did not deprive the LDP of its status as Japan's largest political party, these results weakened, as we stated above, the LDP's legislative autonomy, forcing the government to seek *ad hoc* support from political forces outside the coalition.

The 2025 election for the House of Councillors further aggravated this fragility. The governing coalition also lost its majority in the upper chamber, placing the executive in an unprecedented situation of bicameral instability in recent years[11]. Electoral participation was, however, higher than that registered in the previous legislative elections: 103,591,806 voters were registered and turnout reached 58.51%, corresponding to an approximate abstention rate of 41.49%[12]. This higher electoral mobilisation should be interpreted in parallel with the growth of parties such as the Democratic Party for the People and *Sanseitō*, both of which benefited from dissatisfaction with the traditional governing bloc.

7 Oliveira e Sousa, E., Vieira, S. & Simões J. (2021). General (legislative) elections in Japan (31 of October 2021), POLIS, 4 (2). DOI: https://doi.org/10.34628/v9t4-k873 (Accessed on: 26/06/2026).

8 Inter-Parliamentary Union. (n.d.). Japan House of Representatives October 2021 election. *IPU Parline*. Avaliable at: https://data.ipu.org/parliament/JP/JP-LC01/election/JP-LC01-E20211031/ (Accessed on: 26/06/2026)

9 Murakami, S., Geddie, J. & Kelly, T. (2024). Japan's ruling coalition loses majority, election outcome in balance. *Reuters*. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-votes-election-expected-punish-pm-ishibas-coalition-2024-10-26/ (Accessed on: 26/06/2026); Inter-Parliamentary Union. (n.d.). Japan House of Representatives October 2024 election. *IPU Parline*. Available at: https://data.ipu.org/parliament/JP/JP-LC01/election/JP-LC01-E20241027/ (Accessed on: 26/06/2026).

10 Inter-Parliamentary Union. (n.d.). Japan House of Representatives October 2024 election. *IPU Parline*. Available at: https://data.ipu.org/parliament/JP/JP-LC01/election/JP-LC01-E20241027/ (Accessed on: 26/06/2026).

11 Katsumura, M. & Komiya, K. (2025). Japan's shaky government loses upper house control. *Reuters*. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/world/japans-shaky-government-loses-upper-house-control-2025-07-21/ (Accessed on: 26/06/2026); Yamaguchi, M. (2025). Ishiba's coalition loses majority in Japan's upper house election. *Associated Press*. Available at: https://apnews.com/article/japan-politics-election-ishiba-parliament-vote-fcc2fb4cce609240d1c2369bf4090e26 (Accessed: on 26/06/2026).

12 The Japan Times (2025). Voter turnout rises to 58.51% in Japan's Upper House poll. *The Japan Times* (Archived). Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20250723233223/https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2025/07/21/japan/politics/2025-upper-house-election-record-early-voting/ (Accessed on: 03/08/2026).

Table 2 – 2026 General Election results

Party	Multi-member constituencies / party lists		Single member constituencies		Mandates obtained (Total)
	Votes (%)	Seats	Votes (%)	Seats	
Liberal Democratic Party	21.026.139 (36.72%)	67	27.710.493 (49.09%)	249	316
Centrist Reform Alliance	10.438.801 (18.23%)	42	12.209.642 (21.63%)	7	49
Japan Innovation Party	4.943.330 (8.63%)	16	3.742.161 (6.63%)	20	36
Democratic Party for the People	5.572.951 (9.73%)	20	4.243.282 (7.52%)	8	28
Sanseitō	4.260.620 (7.44%)	15	3.924.223 (6.95%)	0	15
Team Mirai	3.813.749 (6.66%)	11	156.853 (0.28%)	0	11
Japanese Communist Party	2.519.807 (4.40%)	4	2.283.885 (4.05%)	0	4
Reiwa Shinsengumi	1.672.499 (2.92%)	1	255.496 (0.45%)	0	1
Tax Cuts Japan and Yūkoku Alliance	814.874 (1.42%)	0	354.617 (0.63%)	1	1
Independents	N/A	N/A	1.253.346 (2.22%)	4	4

Source: https://www.soumu.go.jp/main_content/001055230.pdf

It was in this context that Sanae Takaichi, the first woman to assume the office of Prime Minister of Japan, decided to call snap elections for the House of Representatives and the results were significant[13]. The LDP initially won 315 seats, later increasing its parliamentary control to 316 after an independent member joined the party. This allowed the party to surpass the two-thirds threshold on its own within the 465-seat House of Representatives. Together with the parliamentary support of the Japan Innovation Party, which won 36 seats, the governing bloc came to control 352 seats, representing a particularly broad parliamentary supermajority in the lower chamber[14]. The loser of this election, in broader terms, is the main opposition party, the Centrist Reform Alliance which went from 172 seats (148 of the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan plus Kōmeitō's 24 seats) to only 49 seats. Most of these seats were won in the multi-member constituency (party list). This is interesting, given that apart from the LDP, JIP and the new Tax Cuts and Yūkoku alliance coalition, most parties won more of their seats in the proportional block than in single-member constituencies. The LDP, by contrast, drew the bulk of its supermajority from the single-member tier (249 of its 316 seats), which underlines how the first-past-the-post component of Japan's parallel voting system disproportionately rewards the largest party. This means the single-member constituencies still are most relevant in awarding most seats to the winning party. In terms of participation, the 2026 elections registered 103,211,223 voters and 58,061,448 ballots cast, corresponding to a turnout of 56.3% and an approximate abstention rate of 43.7%[15].

13 Nakano, Y. & Szechenyi, N. (2026). Takaichi Dominates Japan's Lower House Election. *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. Critical Questions. Available at: https://www.csis.org/analysis/takaichi-dominates-japans-lower-house-election (Accessed on: 03/08/2026).

14 D'Ambrogio, E. (2026). Japan: Takaichi Sanae secures a landslide victory. *European Parliamentary Research Service*. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2026/782667/EPRS_BRI(2026)782667_EN.pdf (Accessed on: 03/08/2026); Inter-Parliamentary Union (n.d.). Japan House of Representatives February 2026 Election. IP*U Parline*. Available at: https://data.ipu.org/parliament/JP/JP-LC01/election/JP-LC01-E20260208/ (Accessed on: 03/08/2026).

15 Inter-Parliamentary Union (2026). Japan House of Representatives February 2026 Election. *IPU Parline*. Available at: https://data.ipu.org/parliament/JP/JP-LC01/election/JP-LC01-E20260208/ (Accessed on: 03/08/2026).

3. Foreign Policy Analysis

Regarding the foreign policy analysis of these results, we must first look at two of the issues discussed in these elections: 1) Restoration of pride on Japanese symbols; and 2) Relations of Japan with the ally USA and the tense neighbour China.

The first of these hot topics was the debate on the issue of the law to criminalise the desecration of the Japanese flag. Framing the issue as a question of honour, Takaichi stated: "*We need [the law] to protect Japan's honor, and I will surely realize that law.*"[16]. These words resonated with the plan of Sōhei Kamiya, leader of *Sanseitō*, to curb migration[17], dubbing this the Japanese-First initiative. Although less vocal, the Innovation Party agreed with the stance to limit the percentage of foreigners working and residing in Japan.

The issue of preserving Japanese people and Japanese culture as central and pivotal to the State was one that produced hard divisions with left to far-left parties like the Japanese Communist Party espousing a more cosmopolitan view of Japanese society, while centre-right to far-right parties focusing more on containing migration, to preserve social unity, and criminalising symbols of the State to preserve a sense of shared sacredness.

Although international issues were also debated, it is important to notice that Japanese "*voters are laser-focused on economic issues*"[18], making all other matters secondary for those aiming to be elected[19]. Noting the almost null discussion on diplomatic and foreign policy matters one editorial of the reputed *The Mainichi* went as far as to write that "*with the return of U.S. President Donald Trump to power, Japan's diplomatic strategy is under restructuring pressure. Despite this, foreign policy debates during the House of Representatives election have been lackluster*"[20].

The Japanese political analyst Kajiwara Takamoto defined the priorities of Japan regarding foreign policy and diplomacy during the General Election. According to him on one side the key issue was the degree of integration of Japanese Foreign Policy into USA's *Pivot to the Pacific* Strategy. On the other hand, "*China, North Korea and Russia have been stepping up military activities around Japan. China's rapid military buildup in particular is shaking the security balance in the region*" [21], and that demands a choice between one of two options: cooperation or confrontation.

The Liberal Democratic Party presented a nuanced policy of mending the relation with Russia and strengthening partnership with the United States of America, while keeping a vigilant position about China. The Innovation Party of Japan defended a more interventionist approach in the issue of Taiwan, as a way to indirect confrontation with Beijing and to cushion the policy priorities of

16 The Yomiuri Shimbun (2026). Japan parties launch battle of words ahead of Lower House election. *The Asia News Network*. Available at: https://asianews.network/japan-parties-launch-battle-of-words-ahead-of-lower-house-election/ (Accessed on: 06/06/2026).

17 Semans, H. (2026). Conservative parties push for capping of foreign resident population. *The Japan Times*. Available at: https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2026/02/05/japan/politics/foreigner-measures-election/ (Accessed on: 05/06/2026).

18 Kosuke, T. (2026). Japan's Defense Policy Accelerates as Public Debate Lags Behind. *The Diplomat*. Available at: https://thediplomat.com/2026/02/japans-defense-policy-accelerates-as-public-debate-lags-behind/ (Accessed on: 07/06/2026).

19 Nakamura, K. (2026). Japan party leaders clash over consumption tax in debate ahead of election. *Kyodo News*. JAPAN Wire. Available at: https://english.kyodonews.net/articles/-/69248 (Accessed on: 01/06/2026)

20 Mainichi Japan (2026). Debates over Japan-US alliance, diplomatic autonomy needed in general election. *The Mainichi*. Available at: https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20260130/p2a/00m/0op/008000c (Accessed on: 01/07/2026).

21 Takamoto, K. (2026). National security in focus as Japan goes to vote. *NHK World*. Available at: https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/backstories/4581/ (Accessed on: 07/06/2026).

Washington to the region. *Sanseitō* was concerned with keeping good relationship with Washington and against the propositions of accommodation with Russia and with South Korea. The one issue that united most parties was the need to keep a watchful eye regarding North Korea's growing belligerency.

The first debate had a minor discussion about the relocation of a military base used by Washington, but no fundamental issues were discussed by party leaders, despite all parties having substantial information regarding their diplomatic positioning and foreign policy goals if they would win the office. Economy and Migration truly smashed foreign policy and diplomacy discussions.

The second debate of the General Election was marked by the discussion around migration policy[22] and the definition of "worthy migrants", focusing on skilled labourers as a priority to the state or focusing on finding a suitable cap-number (nominal or percentual). Interestingly, the two debates between party leaders of the parties with parliamentary representation were marked by *fait-divers* of Prime Minister Takaichi.

In the first debate, Takaichi said "*she would step down immediately if the ruling bloc fails to secure a majority in the upcoming House of Representatives election*"[23], turning the election into a plebiscite to her leadership of the Liberal Democratic Party. The second debate was oddly marked by Takaichi's absence: "*Citing arm injury, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi on Sunday canceled at the last minute her planned appearance on a live party leaders' debate*"[24]. The fact that Takaichi cancelled the debate but not her public agenda led to a furious rebuke by most party leaders from the opposition.

22 Kyodo News (2026). Japan election debate stalls over definition of "immigration". *Kyodo News*. JAPAN Wire. Available at: https://english.kyodonews.net/articles/-/69922 (Accessed on: 08/06/2026).

23 Xinhua (2026). Japan's Takaichi pledges to resign if ruling bloc loses majority in upcoming snap election. *Xinhua*. Available at: https://english.news.cn/20260126/b197537987e74d91a0d22351837e195c/c.html (Accessed 04/06/2026).

24 CGTN (2026). Japanese PM's last-minute live debate cancellation draws opposition criticism. *CGTN*. Available at: https://news.cgtn.com/news/2026-02-01/Japanese-PM-s-last-minute-live-debate-cancellation-draws-criticism-1KpsX8NoJGg/p.html (Accessed on 02/06/2026).