



# Political outlook report

12 September 2024

## Executive summary

- Prime Minister Kishida disbanded his Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Diet faction in the wake of a political funds scandal that emerged last November. Other factions subsequently announced their dissolution, with the exception of the Aso faction. Kishida aimed to restore public support for his administration by dismantling the faction-based political system, which had long symbolized the LDP. However, public distrust in politics remains strong, and Kishida's approval rating has not recovered.
- Faced with the possibility of defeat in the next House of Representatives election, sentiment within the LDP shifted against Kishida. Amid this backlash, on 14 August he announced that he would not run in the September LDP presidential election.
- The official campaign period for the leadership contest will begin on 12 September and conclude with voting and ballot counting on 27 September. Opinion polls show Shinjiro Koizumi and Shigeru Ishiba leading a field of nine prospective candidates. Other likely contenders include Sanae Takaichi, Taro Kono, Takayuki Kobayashi, Yoshimasa Hayashi, Toshimitsu Motegi, Katsunobu Kato and Yoko Kamikawa. The contest is expected to emphasize selecting a new face for the party ahead of a potential House of Representatives election this autumn.
- This will be the first LDP presidential election in which faction dynamics do not play a major role, with multiple candidates who previously belonged to the same faction expected to enter the race. Many Diet members have announced support for candidates who previously belonged to a different faction, further underscoring the LDP's departure from faction politics. Lawmakers will look to select a popular president who can improve the party's standing ahead of the anticipated snap election. Candidates backed by influential party members are also expected to perform well in the leadership contest.



- It is likely that no candidate will secure a majority in the first round of voting, triggering a run-off between the top two candidates. In this scenario, the candidate who can better appeal to supporters of defeated candidates will secure an advantage.

## Outlook for the LDP presidential election

- After a Cabinet meeting held on 15 August, Kishida actively urged lawmakers interested in participating in the election to put their name forward, stating that he wanted to see “a free debate.” In press conferences held the same day, the Minister for Digital Transformation Taro Kono; the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Ken Saito; and the Minister for Foreign Affairs Yoko Kamikawa all touched on possible leadership bids.
- Prospective candidates in the LDP presidential election must be nominated by 20 Diet members before they can declare their candidacy. The endorsement of party heavyweights such as Taro Aso, Yoshihide Suga and Fumio Kishida is likely to be a key factor influencing the election outlook.
- Kobayashi officially announced his candidacy on 19 August, followed by Ishiba on 24 August and Kono on 26 August. As of 12 September, Hayashi, Motegi, Koizumi, Takaichi, Kato and Kamikawa have entered the race. Koizumi, who has secured the support of former Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, held a press conference on 6 September to announce his bid. Takaichi ran in the last presidential election held in 2021 with the backing of former Prime Minister Abe. Although she lost access to that support following his assassination, she appears to have solidified support primarily among conservative members.
- A total of 734 votes are up for grabs in the presidential election. Of these, 367 are individual votes cast by Diet members, while the other 367 comprise votes from rank-and-file party members, calculated using a proportional weighting system. If a candidate gains a majority in the first round of voting, he or she will be elected as the new party president. However, should no candidate gain a decisive majority in the first round, the top two candidates will participate in a run-off ballot. In the run-off, all LDP Diet members are allocated one vote, while the 47 LDP prefectural chapters are allocated one vote each. In such a scenario, the outcome depends on which of the top two candidates is most successful in gaining the support of candidates defeated in the first round of voting.



- According to media polls conducted in late August, Koizumi and Ishiba are perceived as best suited to be the next leader of the LDP. An Asahi Shimbun survey found both Koizumi and Ishiba backed by 21% of respondents, followed by Takaichi at 8%, Kamikawa at 6%, Kono at 6%, and Kobayashi at 5%. In a Yomiuri Shimbun survey, Ishiba led with 22%, followed by Koizumi at 20% and Takaichi at 10%. Candidates popular with voters or supported by influential party members are thought to have an advantage in the leadership contest.
- In the wake of the political fundraising issue, the Abe faction, Nikai faction, and Kishida faction all decided to disband, while the Motegi faction has transitioned into a policy group. Meanwhile, Hiroshige Seko, former Secretary-General of the LDP's Upper House caucus, resigned from the LDP following punishments issued over the scandal in April. Instead of backing candidates with common factional lineage, many Diet members have endorsed candidates who previously belonged to different factions.

## Outlook for the possible snap general election

- An extraordinary Diet session will likely be called within a few days of the LDP leadership election on 27 September. The new president will then be appointed prime minister by the Diet and will announce the members of his or her Cabinet. The subsequent political schedule will depend on developments in the Diet and other factors.
- At the time of writing, the most likely scenario is that a general election is called immediately after the new Cabinet is launched. After the inauguration of a new prime minister, the government is likely to move to enact revisions to the *Public Offices Election Act* during the extraordinary Diet session. The prime minister would then dissolve the Diet and schedule a general election in mid-October. In this case, the official campaign period could potentially begin on 15 October with voting to take place on 27 October or begin on 29 October with voting on 10 November. Key themes likely to dictate the campaign include the feasibility of true change within the LDP and regaining public trust. However, the current term of House of Representatives members is until autumn 2025. Depending on the situation in the Diet, this gives some leeway to allow for changes in the timing of the dissolution and snap election.

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