



SHIGERU ISHIBA, THE NEW PRIME MINISTER OF JAPAN: THE GAP BETWEEN IDEALS AND REALITY

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Abstract

After three years under Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, Japan selected Mr. Shigeru Ishiba as its new Prime Minister on September 27, 2024. This decision followed a runoff election between Shigeru Ishiba, the former defense minister, and Sanae Takaichi, the economic security minister, as none of the nine candidates in the first round secured a majority.

This paper draws on various sources, including internet media, television programs, newspapers, and insights from respected journalists, advisors, and scholars, to examine the Japanese political landscape with a focus on the 2024 prime ministerial election. The objective is to explore the claims made by Shigeru Ishiba, Japan's newly elected Prime Minister, as well as the positions held by his political opponent, Sanae Takaichi. Additionally, it analyzes the reactions and commentary from media outlets and experts.

What emerges from this exploration is that while many politicians speak confidently about their visions for the future, there appears to be a gap between their ideals and the realities they face. This study aims to shed light on the actual state of Japanese politics, primarily through coverage by the media, television, and experts. How, then, is the balance between ideals and reality being managed? Finally, when viewed from a sociolinguistic perspective, what insights can be gained? With these points in mind, the discussion will aim to bring these issues into sharper focus.

Keywords

Japanese Prime Minister, Journalism, Political landscape, Sociolinguistic analysis

Introduction

After three years under Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, Japan selected Shigeru Ishiba (67) as the new president of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) on September 27, 2024. This occurred following a runoff election between Shigeru Ishiba, the former defense minister, and Sanae Takaichi (63), the economic security minister. The runoff was necessary as none of the nine candidates in the first round secured a majority. Besides Ishiba and Takaichi, the other candidates included LDP Secretary-General Toshimitsu Motegi (68), Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi (63), Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa (71), Administrative Reform Minister Taro Kono (61), former Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato (68), former Economic Security Minister Takayuki Kobayashi (49), and former Environment Minister Shinjiro Koizumi (43).

Method

This paper draws on various sources, including internet media, television programs, newspapers, and insights from respected journalists, advisors, and scholars, to examine the Japanese political landscape with a focus on the 2024 prime ministerial election. The objective is to explore the claims made by Shigeru Ishiba, Japan's newly elected prime minister, as well as the positions held by his political opponent, Sanae Takaichi. Additionally, it analyzes the reactions and commentary from media outlets and experts.

What emerges from this exploration is that while there are many politicians who speak confidently about their visions for the future, it also appears that there is a gap between their ideals and the realities they face. This study aims to shed light on the actual state of Japanese politics, primarily through coverage by the media, television, and experts. How, then, is the balance between ideals and reality being managed? Finally, when viewed

from a sociolinguistic perspective, what insights can be gained? With these points in mind, the discussion will aim to bring these issues into sharper focus.

Japanese prime minister election

The election vote was restricted to ruling LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) lawmakers and 1.1 million grassroots members—less than 1% of Japan's eligible voters. Compared to countries like the U.S., where the voter base is far broader, Japan's eligible voter pool for selecting the prime minister is notably limited. To reiterate, only 1% of Japan's eligible voters participated in the election to choose the country's leader. This process contrasts with systems like that of the U.S., where all registered citizens can vote in presidential elections.

During the first round of the election, no candidate secured a majority (i.e., more than half of the votes), which was expected due to the division of votes among several candidates. As a result, the final decision came down to a runoff between the top two vote-getters, Shigeru Ishiba and Sanae Takaichi. In the runoff, Ishiba won with 215 votes, defeating Takaichi, who received 194 votes. Although the margin was narrower than many anticipated, Ishiba's victory was decisive. In the end, veteran politician Ishiba, who had previously served as LDP secretary-general, defeated economic security minister Takaichi to win the runoff election.

At his inaugural press conference, Shigeru Ishiba emphasized that one of his top priorities would be to restore voter trust in the LDP, which had been seriously damaged by the political slush funds scandal (*uragane mondai*). He stated, "We must be a party that abides by the rules, and we must create a system that allows the people to verify whether or not we are following them."

In his inaugural news conference, Ishiba made the following comment.

Kokumin o shinji yuuki to magokoro o motte shinjitsu o katari, kono nihonkoku o moo ichido, mina ga egao de kuraseru, anzen de anshin na kuni ni suru tame ni, zenshin zenrei o tsukushite mairimasu.

(I believe in the people and will speak the truth with courage and sincerity. Together, we can create a Japan where everyone can live with smiles again, making it a safe and secure country. I, Shigeru Ishiba, will dedicate myself wholeheartedly to this cause. Thank you for your support.)

It appears that Ishiba has a very strong determination to lead the country of Japan in one of the most difficult times in Japan, a time when international issues in other nations including the Middle East (e.g., Iran, Israel, Hamas, Hizbollah) are taking center stage.

Even though Ishiba won the election, we must keep in mind that Ishiba won by a very narrow margin of victory among Diet members (i.e., Ishiba's 215 votes versus Takaichi's 194 votes), and Ishiba may face an extremely fragile future. Some people may argue that Ishiba's victory signaled the end of factional politics or *habatsu seiji* in Japan. Unless he achieves strong victories in the Lower and Upper House elections in the near future, Ishiba may not be able to form a stable government. The frequent government changes in Japan generally make it difficult for Japanese leaders to tackle long-term policy goals or to develop trusted relations with other leaders. With less influence from various factions, or *habatsu kaitai*, the prime minister is expected to exercise more political power, but stability depends on support ratings from the general public.

Mainichi Shinbun (2024b) reported that Prime Minister Ishiba has decided that the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) will not officially endorse certain party members in the upcoming general election, as the LDP is believed to be involved in a money scandal. While this decision has sparked opposition within the party, six of the LDP members in question have been identified. They are the following members who are all influential in the LDP: Koichi Hagiuda, former chair of the Policy Research Council (Tokyo District 24, Abe faction); Hirofumi Shimomura, former Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Tokyo District 11, Abe faction); Yoshihide Nishimura, former Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry (Hyogo District 9, Abe faction); Tsutomu Takagi, former chair of the Diet Affairs Committee (Fukui District 2, Abe faction); Hiromi Mitsubayashi, former Deputy Minister (Saitama District 13, Abe faction); and Katsuei Hirasawa, former Minister for Reconstruction (Tokyo District 17, Nikai faction). For example, Katsuei Hirasawa claims that there are many aspects of the decision-making process that are difficult to understand. It is clear that Prime Minister Ishiba is expected to skillfully and smoothly coordinate within the party, including addressing such internal issues.

Interestingly, we have to note that Ishiba has been constantly criticized as an anti-LDP politician. Sankei (2024c) reported the following comment made by Ishiba himself.

Ishiba shi wa "Jiminto no naka ni inagara Jiminto o hihan shite iru kara da. 'omae, Jiminto no naka ni inagara, nan da, ushiro kara tama o utsu no ka yo' to iu yoo na koto o moo nanzenkai, nanmankai iwareta koto ka" to giin seikatsu o furi kaetta.

(Reflecting on his political career, Ishiba said, "It's because I was criticizing the Liberal Democratic Party while being part of it. I've been told things like, 'Hey, you're in the LDP, why are you shooting from behind?' thousands, if not tens of thousands of times.")

It is clear that Ishiba has, in the past, been repeatedly told by fellow LDP members that he is "shooting from behind" while being part of the party. This indicates that he has faced significant criticism from his colleagues.

In this paper, we question whether the next prime ministers, including Ishiba, can effectively implement political reforms (e.g., reforms related to the money scandals). Furthermore, new leaders will also need to address rising costs related to military spending, child care, and climate change, among other issues.

Takaichi's comment

As a politician who came close to winning the election, Takaichi (economic security minister) might be considered as one of the most hawkish contenders in future elections. It is noteworthy that she does not have the support of the late premier Shinzo Abe, with whom she shared conservative views on security issues. Takaichi, who has harshly criticized China's expanding military assertiveness, said she will focus on boosting Japan's strength in the fields of diplomacy, defense, the economy, technology, intelligence and human capital. Let me cite what Takaichi has said to the general public in a political meeting in 2024. The citation is a little long, but it shows her strong commitment to how the country of Japan should be protected if she were to become the prime minister of Japan (Takaichi, 2024a)

Watashi wa kuni no kyūkyoku no shimei wa kokumin no minasama no seimei to zaisan o mamoru koto, soshite ryōdo ryōkai, ryōkuu, shigen o mamoru koto. Soshite nihonkoku no shuken to meiyo o mamoru koto da to kangaete orimasu. Soshite, kono kyūkyoku no shimei o hatasu tame ni, totte mo taisetsu na koto wa moo ima sugu torikunde, soogouteki na kokuryoku o tsuyoku shite oku koto de gozaimasu.

(I believe that the ultimate mission of the nation is to protect the lives and property of its citizens, as well as to safeguard its territory, territorial waters, airspace, and resources. It is also to uphold the sovereignty and honor of Japan. To fulfill this ultimate mission, it is essential to immediately work on strengthening our overall national power.)

Furthermore, Takaichi specifically clarifies what she means by "national power" in Japan. She gives specific examples in her statement as follows:

Soogoo teki na kokuryoku to ha nanzo ya to iimasu to, kore wa gaikooryoku de ari, booeiryoku de ari, keizairyoku de ari, gijyutsuryoku de ari, jyoochooryoku de ari, subete ni kyootsuu suru no ga jinzai ryoku dsu. Kono muttsu no chikara o honki de tuyoku shiyoo to omottara, jyookan ga arimasu. Sore wa keizai seichoo desu. Dakara konkai no soosenkyo de watashi wa uttae shite orimasu keredo mo, akumademo dokomademo, keizai seichoo o oimotomete mairimasu.

(So, what is overall national power? It consists of diplomatic power, defense power, economic power, technological power, and informational power. And the common element in all of these is human resources. If we truly want to strengthen these six powers, there is one condition. That condition is economic growth. Therefore, as I have been advocating in this presidential election, I will pursue economic growth relentlessly, no matter what.)

For example, she has periodically visited the war-linked *Yasukuni* shrine that honors war criminals along with the war dead, a source of diplomatic friction with China and South Korea, both of which suffered from Japan's wartime aggression. Calling *Yasukuni* an important place, maintains that she will continue to visit the shrine. She also pledged to remove a buoy that China has installed in the waters around the Tokyo-controlled, Beijing-claimed *Senkaku* in the East China Sea.

With respect to the China and Taiwan issue, Takaichi made the following rather strong statement. She argues that if China were to try to "invade" Taiwan using their military forces, it may create what she calls "*sonritsu kiki*" or an existential crisis for the Japanese people. Observe what she says below (Mainichi Shinbun, 2024c).

Chuugoku ni yoru Taiwan no kaijyoo fuusa ga hassei shita baai no jitai nintei ni tsuite toware sonritsu kiki jitai ni naru.

(If China imposes a maritime blockade on Taiwan, it will be recognized as an existential crisis.)

The security-related laws define situations such as "important influence situations," "existential crisis situations (*sonritsu kiki jitai*)," and "armed attack situations." If a situation is recognized as an "existential crisis situation" that threatens Japan's survival, limited exercise of collective self-defense becomes possible.

This essentially means the possibility for the Japanese government to act **decisively** to protect Taiwan using the Japanese military power along with the United States. "*Sonritsu kiki*" (existential crisis) has significant political implications, especially in the context of Japan's security policy, regional dynamics, and its relationships with other nations. Japan has obviously been very careful about the Taiwan situation. Whether or not Japan uses military power to protect Taiwan is still a controversial matter for the Japanese government and its people.

Having discussed what Ishiba and Takaichi both have proposed in their speeches, let us turn to one of the important policy agenda items proposed by Ishiba—the Asian NATO plan-- which has been discussed by several Diet members and commentators.

Asian NATO

To begin, we have to say that some of the newly elected Prime Minister Ishiba's security policy ideas have significant and alarming implications.

Ishiba has floated the idea of creating an Asian version of NATO as a way to deter China.

He has also indicated the possibility of nuclear weapon sharing with the United States and the introduction of nuclear weapons into the region to establish a deterrence against the nuclear capabilities of China, Russia and North Korea.

If Ishiba sticks to his "personal opinion" without considering the constraints of Japan's pacifist Constitution, national consensus or regional realities, his security policy agenda could instead increase regional tensions and threaten national security.

Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba at a news conference held at the prime minister's office on Oct. 1 after forming his Cabinet (Asahi Shimbun, 2024a)

It is quite interesting to observe that the idea of Asian NATO, which is the most fundamental proposal by Ishiba, was never mentioned in his *shoshin hyoomei enzetsu*. This is a "policy speech" or "statement of policy" delivered by a political leader, typically at the beginning of a new session of the legislature in Japan. This speech outlines the government's policies, priorities, and vision for the future. It serves to communicate the leader's agenda to both lawmakers and the public, setting the tone for the government's actions and legislative efforts. The speech often addresses key issues facing the country and can include plans for economic growth, social welfare, foreign relations, and other important topics. The most interesting fact is that Ishiba never mentioned this idea of "Asian NATO" at all in the speech. This seems to indicate that Ishiba may not be too serious about the proposal, even though he may still consider it interesting.

In the following sections, I will describe and examine the comments and opinions of various experts and journalists.

Akiko Iwata, Journalist and former NHK commentator

Akiko Iwata, former NHK television commentator made a very interesting and instructive comment (Iwata, 2024a). Incidentally, NHK (*Nippon Hoosoo Kyookai*) is Japan's national public broadcasting organization. It provides a wide range of programming, including news, documentaries, educational shows, and entertainment. Funded by viewer fees rather than advertising, NHK aims to inform and educate the public while maintaining impartiality.

Interestingly, Iwata was a former close aide to Prime Minister Abe and a highly respected news reporter. Please observe her comments along with an English translation. The comment clearly indicates why Takaichi was not able to secure her final trial in the runoff election.

Kyoo wa toujitsu no mae, do no koocho mo hitori hitori ni saigo no onegai desu to denwa o kakete irun desu ga, Takaichi san, "short male" datta soo nan desu ne, to shoogen.

(This time, the day before, every candidate was calling each person individually, saying 'This is my final request,' but it's been reported that Ms. Takaichi sent a short message (SMS) instead.)

Iwata further continues her speech with the fact that the e-mail was extremely "**short**" rather than the more extended longer message (Iwata, 2024b). Observe her comment as below.

Ee? Kono saigo no onegai de short male desu ka?" te iu tokoro mo attari shite. Netsui to ka hisshi sa tte tsutaware ba hito no kokoro mo ugoku mono desu kere do mo to igai na Takaichi shi no "shissaku" wo shiteki shite ita.

(There were also reactions like, 'What? A short message for this final request?' Passion and desperation, if conveyed, can move people's hearts....," pointing out the unexpected 'misstep' by Ms. Takaichi.)

Furthermore, Iwata mentioned the following "honest" comment made by Takaichi. Please examine Takaichi's comment as follows.

Yowami wa yoku shiteki sarete imasu ga, hitotsu kiai ga warui to iu tokoro. Yoru no nomikai ga negate ka na to omoimasu.

(Sanae Takaichi said with a laugh, "My weakness has often been pointed out, and it's probably that I'm not very good at socializing. I'm not great at attending evening gatherings.)

This comment indicates that Takaichi may not be a person who enjoys socializing with other politicians, although she has been effective in communicating political proposals including her China-Taiwan stance. Thus, Takaichi may be well-known for her political agendas, while her socializing habits receive less of the spotlight.

Takeru Morinaga, Economy specialist

Highly respected economy specialist and professor at Dokkyo University, Takeru Morinaga, argues that Ishiba may face difficult times ahead. Morinaga points out that the election was like a *deaigashira no jiko* (Bunka Hoosoo, 2024). This essentially means the *deaigashira no jiko* is almost a head-on collision or a chance accident. It is a sudden encounter, often unexpected or coincidental, like a collision that happens when two people or things meet suddenly. This indicates that Ishiba was not able to secure his political position in the first-round election. As it has been mentioned, Takaichi was the first choice in the first-round election. In the first-round election, Ishiba received 154 votes while Takaichi received 181 votes. However, Ishiba was able to secure his second run-off election due to the possible fact that many opponents of Takaichi decided to vote for Ishiba simply because they personally did not like the idea of Takaichi, a woman, becoming prime minister, the leader in Japan's political arena. In the final round, Ishiba received 215 votes while Takaichi received 194 votes.

Morinaga further continues to argue his point in the following statement. Please pay close attention that Ishiba seems to lack influential politicians or his close friends (*nakama*) as his cabinet members. This situation may be problematic for Ishiba and his political future. Observe Morinaga's influential statement below:

Seiji no sekai tte iu no wa dorodoro no ningen kankei de ugakashite ikanakereba ikenai no de, inochi o hatte demo Ishiba Shigeru no tame ni ore wa ikun da tte iu hito wa inain desu. Tabun konkai no sokaku de mo shuryuuha to iu ka keiken no aru hito ga hotondo haitte nakute, Ishiba san nozoite, 19 nin kakuryoo ga irun desu kedo, uchi 13 nin ga hatsu nyuukaku nan desu. Yoosuru ni chikara no aru kakuryoo ga inai.

(Politics is filled with complex, messy interpersonal dynamics. The point is that there is no one who would say, 'I'll go for Ishiba Shigeru, even if it costs me my life.' This time around in the cabinet reshuffle, there aren't really many experienced members, except for Ishiba-san. There are 19 ministers, but 13 of them are entering the cabinet for the first time. In short, Ishiba's cabinet has very few ministers who are truly effective politicians.)

Yukihiro Hasegawa, Journalist from Tokyo Shinbun Newspaper

Yukihiro Hasegawa has a long and distinguished career in journalism, contributing to many significant news stories and editorials. He is a former staff writer for the highly respected Tokyo Shinbun newspaper as well. He argues that Ishiba is an unprecedented politician of forked tongue or *nimaijita*. In other words, Ishiba is an opportunist who adjusts his or her stance based on what benefits him at a given moment. Such politicians are typically referred to as duplicitous opportunists or two-faced opportunists. One clear example is the fact that Ishiba decided to have a general national election very quickly on October 27th instead of waiting for a later date, as most people were expecting. He was considering postponing the election until the security issues around the globe (e.g., Middle East crisis) had been resolved. However, unexpectedly, Ishiba changed his mind, to hold the election much earlier in order to maintain support from the general public, without conducting the usual "budget committee meeting" or *yosan iinkai*, prior to the election. Ishiba suddenly, and with little notice, made this decision, which shocked many.

Sankei Shinbun (2024a) printed their editorial page as follows. Please note their harsh criticism against the Ishiba administration. Pay close attention to the very first Japanese expression *Seiken no zento wa tanan to iu hoka*

nai (The future of the administration is nothing but uncertain). The word *tanan* (difficult), in this case, means ‘amazingly difficult and challenging.’”

Seinken no zento wa tanan to iu hoka nai. Shushoo no toonai kiban wa zeijyaku sono mono de, jinji de mo kyotoo taisei ga kizuketa to wa ii gatai. Anzen hoshoo kankyoo ga masumasu kibishisa o masu naka, saishoo to shite handan no okure ya ayamari wa yurusarenai.

(There is no other way to describe the future of the administration but difficult. The Prime Minister's support within the party is extremely weak, and it is hard to say that a united front has been established even in personnel matters. As the security environment becomes increasingly severe, delays or mistakes in the Prime Minister's decisions cannot be tolerated.)

Hasegawa argues that Ishiba has been making himself as “*katamomi naikaku*.” This expression of “*katamomi naikaku*” translates to “one-sided cabinet” in English. It refers to a situation in which a cabinet or government administration is heavily dominated by members from one particular faction, party, or group, often leading to a lack of balance or representation of diverse viewpoints within the government. For example, he points out that so called *senryakuteki gokei kankei* has been originally proposed by the ministry of foreign affairs. This a Japanese term that translates to “strategic reciprocal relationship” or “strategic mutual benefit” in English. The concept often refers to diplomatic or economic relationships between nations that are designed to be mutually beneficial, with a focus on long-term strategic interests.

One of the most notable uses of this term is in the context of Japan-China relations. In 2006, Japan and China agreed to pursue a *senryaku-teki gokei kankei* to foster cooperation and reduce tensions. The goal was to create a balanced, stable partnership that would benefit both countries, with cooperation in areas like trade, regional security, environmental issues, and energy.

This relationship stresses the importance of “reciprocal” actions, where both parties stand to gain strategically, rather than just one benefiting at the expense of the other. Although the term sounds very positive and relevant, in reality, at this time, China has been receiving all the benefits from Japan, but Japan has been receiving few benefits, if any, from China in a reciprocal manner. Although Japan's ministry of foreign relations advocates such types of strategic relationships, in real terms, the Japan-China “strategic mutual benefit” relationship is not creating the bonds desired between the two countries.

Asahi Shinbun (2014a) points out that Ishiba is not making good on his promise to restore trust in politics even though Ishiba claims that he strongly advocates this as his main point, which is *kokumin no nattoku to kyookan*. This phrase literally means “the people's understanding and empathy.” This phrase is often used in political or social contexts to express the idea that policies or decisions should be made in a way that not only makes sense to the public but also resonates “emotionally,” fostering a sense of shared understanding and connection (see also Mainichi Shinbun, 2024a, and Daily Shincho, 2024).

Observe the following statement from Ishiba's speech in the Diet.

Seiji e no shinrai o tori modoshi, nattoku to kyookan o itadaki nagara, anzen anshin de yutaka na nihon o sai kouchiku suru

(To restore trust in politics and, with the understanding and empathy of the people, (we need to) rebuild a safe, secure, and prosperous Japan.)

His claim about *shinrai* (trust) and *nattoku* (understanding) are just words so far, since nothing has been accomplished to date by the Japanese cabinet.

Hasegawa as well as some other commenters argue that Ishiba is “*darashi naikaku*.” This phrase means Ishiba's cabinet is “an incompetent and irresponsible cabinet.” This expression is critical of the perceived inefficiency and unresponsiveness of Ishiba's governing cabinet.

Takahashi Yoichi, Policy advisor

Yoichi Takahashi is a prominent Japanese economist and policy advisor. He was born in 1955 in Tokyo and has a strong academic background, graduating from both the mathematics and economics departments at the University of Tokyo. His expertise spans a wide range of fields, including fiscal policy, taxation, and economic reform.

Takahashi worked in Japan's Ministry of Finance (formerly the Ministry of the Treasury) for several decades, holding key roles such as Director of the Capital Planning Division. He also served as a policy advisor during the Koizumi and Abe administrations.

Since retiring from the government in 2008, Takahashi has remained an influential figure in economic discourse. He is currently a professor at Kaetsu University and leads a policy think tank. He is also a bestselling author, a media commentator, and runs a popular YouTube channel that discusses economic issues among others.

In the Tosupo Web (2024), Takahashi made a very harsh comment saying that the previous prime minister Abe's style is very different from what Ishiba's style used to be before the election. Compared to the Abe era (in particular, his second term which is 2012-2020), Takahashi made it clear that Ishiba has completely changed his political agenda after the election. Ishiba is now very different from what he used to be. Observe the following comment:

Yoosuru ni zenbu hogo ni shita. Soosaisen no toki ni "Ishiba A" was there, but now Ishiba is "Ishiba B", and Ishiba is completely a different figure. He cannot change his style in this manner. Everything is over now.

(In short, everything has been scrapped. During the party leadership election, 'Ishiba A' was there, but now Ishiba has become 'Ishiba B'—a completely different figure. He can't change his style like this. It's all over now.)

In short, he completely disregarded everything. During the party leadership election, he was Ishiba A, but now he's turned into Ishiba B—he's a completely different person. There's no way he can make a comeback. It's over. Ishiba has lost what he was before, and now he is an amazingly different politician, according to Takahashi who has been carefully observing how Japanese politics has been evolving.

Takahashi also made another opinion/suggestion regarding the general election which will be coming on the 27th of October, 2024. Takahashi talks about who should be in the LDP photo poster. Observe the following comment made by Takahashi.

Soo senkyo de kooho sha to too kanbu ga utsuru "niren poster" de wa, Ishiba shi yori Koizumi Shinjiro ya Takaichi shi no hoo ga ninki ga aru.

(In the 'two-panel poster' featuring candidates and party executives for the general election, it is noted that Shinjiro Koizumi and Takaichi Sanae are more popular than Ishiba Shigeru.)

Essentially, what Takahashi predicts is the observation that Ishiba is **not** popular enough to be added in the "two-panel poster," which really indicates who the general public will likely vote for. In other words, Ishiba will be behind the two other politicians in opinion polls, even though he is the prime minister of Japan and is supposed to represent the LDP in the general election. Ishiba does not represent the main figure for the Japanese people, despite him being Japan's highest ranking politician.

Shiro Tazaki, Journalist and former editor at Jiji Press

Shiro Tazaki is a well-known Japanese political journalist with extensive experience covering the country's political landscape. He began his career at *Jiji Press* in 1973 and has since become one of Japan's most prominent political commentators. Tazaki appears at various newspapers and TV as a prominent political commentator. In one of his observations, Tazaki analyzes why Takaichi (economic security minister) was not able to gain final support in the cabinet selection process. In the following *Nikkan Sports* (2014) report, Tazaki comments that Takaichi was quite upset with the outcome.

Observe Tazaki's comment in the following Japanese along with its English translation.

Kachi gumi ga yuusen sarete iru jinji. Kachigumi bakari ga yuusen sarete ite, make gumi no Takaichi jinei no hoo wa reiguu sarete iru, to shiteki. Ishiba shi to kessen toohyoo o tatakai yabureta Takaichi Sanae keizai anpo soo o shien shita giin ya guruupu wa reiguu sareta jinji.

(The personnel appointments are prioritizing the winners. Overall, when looking at the cabinet members, it's clear that only the winning faction is being prioritized, while the losing faction, such as the Takaichi camp, is being treated coldly, one source pointed out. Lawmakers and groups that supported Sanae Takaichi, who fought in the runoff election and lost to Ishiba, were given unfavorable treatment in the appointments.)

This passage highlights the favoritism in political appointments, with the "winning" faction (Ishiba's group) being prioritized, while those aligned with Takaichi, who lost to Ishiba, are sidelined. In other words, Takaichi and her group were not given the positive assignment in the cabinet selection.



(Picture taken from Suponechi Annex, 2024)

Furthermore, Tazaki made an interesting observation based on the photo picture which was taken as the first photo of the new cabinet. In the attached photo, you can observe an interesting scenario with respect to the appearance about Ishiba's trousers. The photo of the first cabinet members shows that Ishiba's trousers had **slipped down**, making it an embarrassing photo.

This describes a situation where the prime minister's pants were improperly positioned during an official photoshoot, resulting in an unflattering or awkward image. This situation with slipped down pants has not been observed in any former photoshoot in all of the postwar period. This is a remarkably embarrassing picture for Japanese history.

Tazaki ridiculed the photo to represent the

non-attentive and careless, but severe mistake taken by Ishiba or his aids. Tazaki referred to the incident as an indication of *darashi naikaku* (incompetent cabinet). Following Tazaki, another commentator, Takahashi made the following comment:

Ishiba san hara ga dete pantsu ga ochite sasupendaa nakute beruto ka na. Ikkoku no shushoo dakara, mita me wa taisetsu da yo.

(Mr. Ishiba's belly is sticking out, his pants are falling down, and he's not wearing suspenders—maybe just a belt? Since he's the Prime Minister of the country, appearance is important.)

This expresses concern over the appearance of a political figure (likely referring to Shigeru Ishiba) and emphasizes the importance of maintaining a presentable image, especially for someone in such a high-ranking position.

One interesting observation is the fact that defense minister Nakatani, who is standing next to Ishiba, also has trousers which appear to be falling down. We do not know what occurred in the photo taking session, but the actual photo is indeed intriguing.

Toru Hashimoto, Former Governor of Osaka

Former Governor of Osaka Prefecture, former Mayor of Osaka City, and lawyer, Mr. Toru Hashimoto observed that the general election, which is planned for the 27th of October, is “absolutely ridiculous,” meaning it should not be held sooner than what the Japanese people were expecting (Daily Sports, 2024). Hashimoto stated as follows.

10 getsu 27nichi soo senkyo. Akimassen! Kono mama dattara kazamuki kawatte, jimintoo makeru kamo shiremasen yo. Moo ikkai chotto kangae naoshite kudasai.

(The October 27 general election, this won't work! If things stay as they are, the tide might turn and the Liberal Democratic Party could lose. Please reconsider things one more time.)

Hashimoto, who previously held official positions in the government, clearly stated that the plan to have the general election (October 27) does not work. If the election is held as planned, he argues that the LDP may lose its political influence and power. This could result in a change of government, Hashimoto predicts.

Yoichi Masuzoe, Former governor of Tokyo

Yoichi Masuzoe, the former governor of Tokyo, made the following remarks criticizing the Ishiba cabinet (Gendai Business, 2024). Masuzoe named Ishiba's cabinet as the cabinet which came about by the process of elimination. Overall, the passage is critical of Ishiba's new government, suggesting that his rise to power was due to the elimination of other options. For example, Takaichi was not chosen in the final run-off election. In this sense, Masuzoe says, Ishiba's start has been disappointing, and his cabinet is packed with his close associates rather than a diverse group of leaders. Observe what Masuzoe stated in the following comment:

“Shookyo hoo naikaku.” New prime minister of Ishiba Shigeru has the very disappointing start. Kakuryoo jinji wa sokkin darake.

(Ishiba’s cabinet is essentially called the “Elimination Method Cabinet.” Ishiba’s cabinet is a very disappointing start. The cabinet is full of close aids of Ishiba himself.)

According to Jiji (2024a), Japan is far behind other countries in the number of female leaders who are cabinet members. In the 2024 Gender Gap Index released by the World Economic Forum, the country ranked 118th out of 146 nations. While this is an improvement from last year's rank of 125th, it remains the lowest among the group of Seven (G7) Advanced Nations. The country has barely made progress toward its self-imposed goal of increasing the number of female leaders. This issue highlights the country's struggle to improve gender equality, despite a slight improvement in its global ranking. It specifically points out Japan’s failure to significantly increase female leadership positions.

Sociolinguistic analysis: rapport, solidarity and involvement

In the area of sociolinguistics, one of the most influential political theories has been proposed by several sociolinguists including Tannen (1989) and Bateson (1972). Their theory regarding speech analysis is the fact that speech involvement between speakers and listeners will send a metamessage or rapport among speakers and listeners by fostering a shared understanding of communicative conventions and a common world of discourse. Bakhtin (1981) asserts all language is “dialogic”, emphasizing the shared discourse goal of involvement as a joint venture between speakers and listeners (see also Duranti, 1986). It is essential to note that understanding in conversation is indeed facilitated, even enabled by an emotional experience of interpersonal involvement. In essence, conversation is a dialogic joint venture between participants, with rapport and emotion playing significant roles. With this analysis in mind which uses “emotion” as a pivotal role, we can examine the effectiveness of Ishiba’s speech style with the general public, including politicians.

We have to keep in mind the content Ishiba has been emphasizing in his speeches (e.g., Tooyoo Keizai, 2024). In an article by Ishiba published by the Hudson Institute, Ishiba made the following remarks on the idea of an Asian NATO. Observe the following comment:

Ima no Ukuraina wa asu no Asia. Rosia o chuugoku, Ukuraina o taiwan ni okikaereba, Asia ni NATO no youna shuudanteki jie taisei ga sonzai shinai tame, soogo booei no gimu ga naitame, sensoo ga boppatsu shiyasui jyoutai ni aru. Kono jyookyoo de chuugoku o nishigawa shokoku ga yokushi suru tame niwa Asia ban NATO no soosetsu ga fukaketsu de aru.

(Today's Ukraine is tomorrow's Asia. If we replace Russia with China and Ukraine with Taiwan, we see that Asia lacks a collective security framework like NATO, and without a mutual defense obligation, it is more prone to the outbreak of war. In this situation, the creation of an Asia version of NATO is essential to deter China by the Western allies.)

Ishiba strongly argues that Asian NATO is crucial to bring peace to Asian countries including Japan, due to the fact there is no self-protection treaty among Asian nations. It is interesting to point out that Ishiba has made no remark about the Asian NATO proposal in his *shoshin hyoomei enzetsu* (policy speech) to the people of Japan. He completely ignored and did not mention at all the Asian NATO concept in any of his official speeches. Journals such as Tooyo Keizai as well as other commentators including Hasegawa agree that the proposal is merely a meaningless “poem.” Nobody except Ishiba is making arguments for the concept of an Asian NATO.

Is Japan prepared to invoke a collective self-defense and enter the conflict as a direct participant?" The answer is very simple. Japan has no interest and ability to carry out such a concept as an Asian NATO. To put it frankly, one could say that Ishiba is a “hypocrite” who lies and says irresponsible things.

Does Ishiba create a sense of solidarity or common shared feeling with the general public? The answer is obvious. No, he does not. He is so far away from any Japanese person who can produce an emotional experience of interpersonal involvement that any solidarity or support from the public is almost non-existent. The concept of an 'Asia NATO' also is highly likely to end up as just “empty rhetoric.” It’s failure to materialize will likely match other similar initiatives which remain mere political slogans.

Conclusion

This paper points out the following: First, Ishiba was able to become the new Prime Minister of Japan after a closely contested battle. However, his path forward is extremely challenging. Specifically, he faces opposition from non-mainstream factions within the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), negative opinions from various experts and

the media, and even the need to retract some of his own statements, putting him in a difficult position. Furthermore, at the core of these issues is the argument that the focus should not be on eloquently speaking about future ideals, but rather on how those ideals can be executed and whether Ishiba possesses the substantial ability to make them a reality. One veteran secretary of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) murmured, "In this leadership election, many lawmakers voted for Ishiba out of reluctant support. There aren't that many lawmakers who are actively supporting Ishiba, so if an 'Ishiba ousting' movement starts, **his downfall will likely be quick.**" (Minkabu, 2024)

Ultimately, the question remains whether Ishiba truly has the capacity to carry out these plans. In Japanese, there is an expression, *koritsu muen*, which essentially means 'isolated and without support.' It describes a situation where a political figure or group is completely alone, with no allies or assistance. This often implies that the individual or party has lost political backing, influence, or connections, leaving them vulnerable and ineffective in pursuing their goals or defending their position. It conveys a strong sense of political isolation and abandonment (e.g., Jiji, 2024c; Yuukan Fuji, 2024; Kyodo, 2024; Asahi Shinbun, 2024b). We will continue to watch Ishiba closely to see how and whether Ishiba can successfully push forward his political agenda in such a challenging political environment in Japan today.

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