

CPG



*Asian Governance Foundation*  
– AGF –

AR Asia in  
Review

## Asia in Review event series on elections in 2024

Online Panel Discussion

### “Where is Japan Heading Post-Kishida?”

4 October 2024, 2:30-4:00 pm ICT (GMT+7),  
online via Zoom video teleconferencing



THAMMASAT  
UNIVERSITY

GOETHE  
UNIVERSITÄT  
FRANKFURT AM MAIN



Universität  
Münster



Auswärtiges Amt



Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst  
German Academic Exchange Service

## **Synopsis**

Following Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's decision not to seek re-election in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) presidential election on September 27, both the party and the country are preparing for new leadership within Japan's most powerful political party. The winner in the September 27 election will become prime minister given that the LDP-led coalition and its junior coalition partner control both chambers of parliament, which will elect the country's new leader on October 1.

The upcoming webinar will analyze the election of the new LDP president, focusing on the new leader and the implications for Japan's domestic politics and foreign policy in the post-Kishida era.

## **Background**

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida became leader of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in September 2021 and assumed office as Prime Minister in October 2021. However, his tenure has been fraught with challenges and controversies, resulting in a difficult period for both him and the party. Growing dissatisfaction and increasing pressure from within the LDP and the public eventually led Kishida to announce in August 2024 that he would not seek re-election as LDP president, paving the way for new party leadership and, effectively, a new prime minister.

Kishida followed long-term Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who was assassinated in July 2022 by the son of a member of the Unification Church. The fatal shooting brought renewed scrutiny to the influence of the religious group, which has long been involved in Japanese politics and is known for supporting conservative politicians, particularly LDP members. Reports surfaced that the group provided campaign volunteers and financial support to LDP candidates, especially those aligned with its ultra-conservative social agenda. These revelations severely damaged the LDP's credibility, leading to a significant decline in public trust.

The political climate worsened with the emergence of a slush fund scandal in November 2023. It was revealed that members of the LDP's two largest factions – the Seiwa Seisaku Kenkyūkai (Seiwakai) and Shisuikai factions – had failed to report over USD 4 million in campaign funds, instead funneling the money into illicit slush funds. This scandal led to the dismissal of several high-ranking officials and further eroded public support.

Despite Kishida's achievements in reshaping Japan's foreign policy, dissatisfaction with his leadership continued to grow over domestic issues such as his birth rate policies, which were widely seen as ineffective, and the looming threat of economic stagnation. Criticism

from within the LDP mounted, with former Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and other party members voicing doubts about Kishida's ability to reverse the sliding approval ratings of the LDP, which dropped to a historic low of 19% in May. In a recent survey conducted in August, 56% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the performance of the Kishida administration over the past three years, rating it either “somewhat poor” or “poor.”

The upcoming LDP presidential election is taking place in this context of crisis and transformation. A record number of nine candidates have officially launched their campaigns to lead Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), aiming to succeed Kishida as the next party leader and prime minister.

- Former defense minister and LDP Secretary-General **Shigeru Ishiba** is one of the public favorites and is known for his expertise in security, agriculture, and regional revitalization. It is his fifth bid to become LDP chief.
- Former Minister of Environment **Shinjiro Koizumi**, son of former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, is considered as less experienced, but seen by supporters as a fresh face for the party with a promise to push forward political and regulatory reforms.
- **Taro Kono**, the current Minister for Digital Transformation, is known for his reformist approach and social media presence, aims to modernize Japan’s bureaucracy, while
- **Yoshimasa Hayashi**, Chief Cabinet Secretary and former foreign minister, offers a more traditional leadership style, with his experience in diplomacy, education, and agriculture.

The race also includes two female candidates:

- Foreign Minister **Yoko Kamikawa** and
- Economic Security Minister **Sanae Takaichi** who vowed to make Japan "stronger and richer."
  
- Former Economic Security Minister **Takayuki Kobayashi**, and
- former Health Minister **Katsunobu Kato** are entering the race for the first time.
  
- Lastly, **Toshimitsu Motegi**, LDP Secretary General, pledges to avoid tax hikes while boosting defense spending.

Currently **Sanae Takaichi** is leading the race according to latest polls, with **27.7** percent of LDP supporters considering her the most suitable to be Japan's next prime minister, followed by **Shigeru Ishiba** with **23.7** percent and **Shinjiro Koizumi** with **19.1** percent.

## Speakers

### **Yukihisa Fujita**



H.E. Yukihisa Fujita is a veteran politician who served, inter alia, as Japanese Vice Minister of Finance, a Member of the House of Representatives, member of the House of Councilors, as well as a former Shadow Foreign Minister. Currently, H. E. Fujita serves as Chairman of the International IC (Initiatives of Change) Association of Japan. He is also Visiting Professor at the Gifu Women's University, Japan. He is also a Member of the Distinguished Expert Panel of CPG's Peace and Security Center (CPSC).

### **Grant Newsham**



Colonel (ret.) Grant Newsham is a Senior Research Fellow at the Japan Forum for Strategic Studies. Grant is a former U.S. Marine, who served in the Indo-Pacific for decades, including in intelligence and liaison roles, and who was instrumental in establishing Japan's amphibious force. He currently serves as a corporate and governmental advisor and lecturer on Asia/Pacific defense matters and business risks posed by political instability and money laundering as well as organized crime, where he is a leading expert on Japan's organized crime groups. He is the author of *When China Attacks: A Warning to America*, published last year with Regnery Publishing.

## **Agenda**

- 2:30 - 2:35 p.m.**      **Welcoming Words**  
*Henning Glaser*, Director, CPG
- Panel Discussion: *Where is Japan Heading Post-Kishida?***
- Panelists
- 2:35 - 3:30 p.m.**      *Yukihisa Fujita*, Chairman of the International IC (Initiatives of Change) Association of Japan; member of CPSC's Distinguished Expert Panel; former Vice Minister of Finance, Japan
- Grant Newsham**, Senior Research Fellow, Japan Forum for Strategic Studies, USA
- Moderation:
- Duc Quang Ly**, Project Manager/ Deputy Editor in Chief, Asia in Review, CPG
- 3:30 - 4:00 p.m.**      **Open Forum Discussion**
- Afterwards**              **Concluding Remarks**