



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



POLICY BRIEF

The Evolving Grammar of Power in Japan

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Volume XI, Issue 25

September 30, 2026



Delhi Policy Group

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www.delhipolicygroup.org



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Cover Images:

1. PM Takaichi addresses the press following the Cabinet reshuffle on September 17, 2026. Source: [Prime Minister's Office of Japan](#)
2. PM Takaichi and senior ministers at the first meeting of her new Cabinet on September 17, 2026. Source: [Prime Minister's Office of Japan](#)
3. The new LDP executive team, led by President Sanae Takaichi, pledges to work together to realize its policies; September 17, 2026. Source: [LDP Website](#)

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The Evolving Grammar of Power in Japan
From Factions to Functions: What Takaichi's Second Cabinet Reshuffle Reveals
About the Changing LDP

by
Ashok Kumar Chawla

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The Evolving Grammar of Power in Japan

From Factions to Functions: What Takaichi's Second Cabinet Reshuffle Reveals About the Changing LDP

by

Ashok Kumar Chawla

Japanese politics rarely changes through a single dramatic break. More often, its grammar evolves gradually, through institutional adaptation, shifting political calculations and the accumulation of small but consequential adjustments.

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's second Cabinet reshuffle offers a revealing example of this long term trend. Its significance lies less in the number of new faces than in the political logic behind the choices. Most strikingly, when asked whether she had considered the balance among the LDP's former factions, she responded unequivocally:

"I gave absolutely no consideration to the 旧派閥のバランス *Kyū habatsu no baransu* - balance among the former factions."¹

To another question, she emphatically replied: "It has absolutely nothing to do with next year's 総裁選挙 *sōsai senkyo* - the LDP presidential election."

The statement matters not because factions have entirely disappeared - they have not - but because it signals a change in what they mean for the organisation of power.

From Factions to Functions

The old question in LDP politics was often: which political group should receive a position in the Cabinet or Party hierarchy?

The emerging question is increasingly: which individual LDP member can deliver the policy required of the government?

Takaichi has explained that she personally reviewed questionnaires submitted by LDP Diet members, regardless of the number of times they had been elected. She considered expertise, awareness of policy challenges, motivation, policy proposals, initiative, passion and the ability to deliver results. She also placed emphasis on politicians with demonstrated electoral strength, arguing that those who could secure

¹ Sanae Takaichi, "Prime Minister Takaichi's Press Conference," September 17, 2026, Prime Minister's Office of Japan (Kantei), Q&A session.
[<https://japan.kantei.go.jp/105/speech/202609/0917kaiken.html>]

their seats without repeatedly returning to their constituencies would have greater capacity to concentrate on governing.

This approach gives new meaning to the Japanese political concept of 適材適所 (布陣) *tekizai tekisho (fujin)* – putting the right person in the right position (in the lineup). Takaichi had used this expression when forming her first Cabinet in October 2025.² In the reshuffle, however, it appears less as a general managerial principle and more as a method of political organisation.

The distinction matters. A faction-based system distributes political resources through collective strength. A function-based system distributes them according to what individual politicians can contribute to the government's objectives.

That does not eliminate factional influence. It changes the mechanism through which influence operates. The phrase *tekizai tekisho* has acquired a more concrete political meaning. There is a political foundation beneath this approach.

The February 2026 general election gave the LDP-JIP coalition a strong parliamentary mandate, with the LDP winning 316 seats and the JIP 36. Takaichi herself secured 193,708 votes, or 87% of the vote, in Nara's Second District.³

These results do not eliminate internal political constraints, but they give the Prime Minister considerable political space to organise her government around her preferred criteria.

Her approach can, therefore, be understood as a combination of inherent strength, political strength and political determination: the electoral authority to make personnel choices with greater autonomy, and the determination to shape the prevailing political winds rather than simply accommodate them.

This is one reason the recent Cabinet reshuffle should not be read merely as a personnel readjustment exercise. The 人事 *jinji* - personnel politics - is becoming part of the architecture through which Takaichi is organising the government itself. Personnel as Political Architecture.⁴

The reshuffle also demonstrates how Takaichi is combining renewal with continuity. Several ministers were retained because their portfolios require continuity, particularly in foreign affairs, trade, defence, fiscal policy, and the Growth Strategy.⁵

² Sanae Takaichi, Prime Ministerial Press Conference, 21 October 2025, following the formation of the Takaichi Cabinet, Prime Minister's Office of Japan (Kantei).

[<https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/104/statement/2025/1021kaiken.html>]

³ [2026 House of Representatives election results, Nara 2nd District – Election.com](#)

⁴ [Second Takaichi Cabinet reshuffle – Prime Minister's Office of Japan](#)

⁵ Official list of Minister, Second Takaichi Cabinet.

At the same time, new appointments were made with an emphasis on expertise and immediate policy effectiveness.

Three of the four politicians who had competed against Takaichi in the previous LDP leadership contest were retained in government. Takaichi said that she had confirmed that the positions they continued in were the positions they themselves preferred and that they had demonstrated their abilities. This is a subtle but important form of political accommodation. Rather than eliminating potential rivals, the government can absorb their political capital and expertise within the governing structure.

The result is not a faction-less LDP. It is an LDP in which political capital can increasingly be incorporated through individual roles rather than collective factional allocation.

That is also why the reshuffle should not be interpreted simply as preparation for the next LDP presidential election. Takaichi explicitly rejected that explanation in her press conference. The more interesting question is what kind of political system is being built underneath that denial.

Hayashi and the Politics of Position

The treatment of LDP liberal Yoshimasa Hayashi provides an instructive contrast.

Hayashi left the Cabinet, even as several other former leadership rivals remained. Takaichi declined to explain this individual decision. Outside commentary, however, noted that being excluded from the Cabinet could give Hayashi greater freedom to organise politically ahead of the next leadership contest.⁶

The important point is not whether Hayashi's departure should be interpreted as a strategic move by either side. It is that being inside or outside government is becoming a different kind of political resource.

A Cabinet post provides access, visibility and an institutional platform. Being outside can provide greater freedom of movement. Neither position is politically empty.

In that sense, the reshuffle illustrates a broader change in 党内力学 *tōnai rikigaku* - the internal dynamics of the party. Political positioning is no longer determined only by factional affiliation. Office, expertise, electoral strength, policy identity and freedom of movement can each become separate sources of influence.

[<https://japan.kantei.go.jp/105/meibo/daijin/index.html>]

⁶ [TBS report on Hayashi and the reshuffle, September 17, 2026](#)

Continuity Without Succession

There is another layer to this story.

The continued presence of senior figures associated with the older LDP architecture, including Taro Aso (remains Party Vice President), Shun'ichi Suzuki (remains Secretary-General) and other experienced party leaders, Yasutoshi Nishimura and Koichi Hagiuda, shows that institutional continuity remains important. And, this is where the connection with Shinzo Abe becomes relevant. But continuity should not automatically be confused with succession.

The emerging arrangement is better understood as continuity without a predetermined succession line.

Older political networks continue to possess organisational memory, relationships and influence. At the same time, the Prime Minister is demonstrating that these networks need not determine every personnel decision.

This produces a more fluid political environment: the old architecture remains part of the system, but its ability to dictate the distribution of government positions appears more limited.

The result is not a clean replacement of the old order. It is a gradual rebalancing between organisational inheritance and individual political function.

Coalition Politics Moves Inside Government

The appointment of Hiroshi Nakatsuka, former Secretary-General of the Japan Innovation Party, as Minister in charge of Regulatory Reform adds another dimension.

Takaichi herself described the appointment as symbolising the LDP-JIP coalition entering a “new stage.” The coalition is, therefore, no longer simply an electoral or parliamentary arrangement. It is becoming part of the internal machinery of government.⁷

This matters because coalition politics can also accelerate the movement from factional allocation toward functional allocation. The governing question becomes not only which LDP group receives a position, but which political actor, inside either coalition partner, can advance a particular policy objective.

⁷ [Takaichi's September 18, 2026 press conference — Prime Minister's Office of Japan](#)

The boundary between party management and policy management consequently becomes less distinct.

The Takaichi Model: Evolution, Not Rupture

The deeper significance of the reshuffle lies here.

Japan's LDP has not suddenly become faction-less. Nor has the old political architecture disappeared. What appears to be changing is the relative importance of factions as the primary mechanism through which political power is organised.

The emerging pattern is more layered:

- factions and long-standing networks continue to provide relationships and organisational memory;
- individual expertise and policy capability increasingly determine access to specific portfolios;
- electoral strength provides political room to exercise greater discretion;
- coalition relationships are becoming embedded inside the governing structure; and
- political positioning outside government can itself become a resource.

These elements overlap rather than replace one another.

This is consistent with a broader feature of Japanese politics: transformation usually occurs through 積み重ね *tsumikasane* - the accumulation of incremental changes, rather than through institutional rupture.

Takaichi's second reshuffle, therefore, may be less about breaking with the LDP's past than about changing the way its inherited political resources are used.

The LDP is becoming less dependent on factions as the primary mechanism for organising political power.

That distinction may prove more consequential than the reshuffle itself.

Japan does not usually announce transformation.

It prepares for it, gradually, systematically, and rationally.



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