

Sanae Takaichi and the LDP's Pseudo-Democratic Elections

The Third Asia Newsletter (2026)

Dear friends,

Jumping up and down like a fangirl called on stage by their favourite celebrity, Sanae Takaichi, Japan's 104th prime minister, was all smiles standing next to US President Donald Trump aboard the USS George Washington. The image was symbolic of the decades long postwar US-Japan alliance, where Japan continues to serve as an ever more subservient client state and unsinkable aircraft carrier for the US empire.

On 8 February, just months after Takaichi took office, a snap election was held during a severe snow storm in most parts of the country, which overlapped with school entrance exams. Many argued that this was the worst time for political campaigning and casting ballots, but Takaichi paid no attention. After all, the timing was as deliberate and strategic as the elections themselves.

A Progeny of the LDP Tradition

Most of postwar Japanese politics can be described, without exaggeration, as a 'one-party dictatorship' by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) – enabled by US imperialism and the vested interests of a plutocracy of money and power. This signifies US postwar international policy of anti-communism, its exoneration and co-optation of war criminals and dictators for the sake of hegemony, and its rehabilitation of fascists. Japan's LDP is no exception, functioning as a pseudo-government protecting Washington's interests over its own citizens.

In October 2025, when Sanae Takaichi was sworn in as the new prime minister, critical online media were fast to point to this uncanny 'tradition' of the LDP. In 1994, a young female politician's name and photograph, together with a message of recommendation, was printed in colour on a book praising the exploits of Nazi leader Adolf Hitler's 'election strategy' in Japanese. The author of the book was LDP's former public relations director and the young female politician was none other than Sanae Takaichi. After condemnation from human rights groups and citizens, the book was banned. Similar streaks of neo-fascist, ultra-right tendencies abound the LDP, and Takaichi has often been categorised as belonging to its core.



Nakamura Hiroshi (Japan), *The Base*, 1957.

Election as Tool for Distraction

The use of snap elections to manufacture and distort the public will when the tide is turning against the ruling LDP was a common practice by figures like the late Prime Minister Shinzō Abe. In July 2022, Abe was assassinated by a Moonies Cult survivor. Abe also happened to be Takaichi's political paragon. Snap elections have also been used when crucial legislation proposed by the LDP, in favour of US imperialism, could not pass a majority vote through congress.

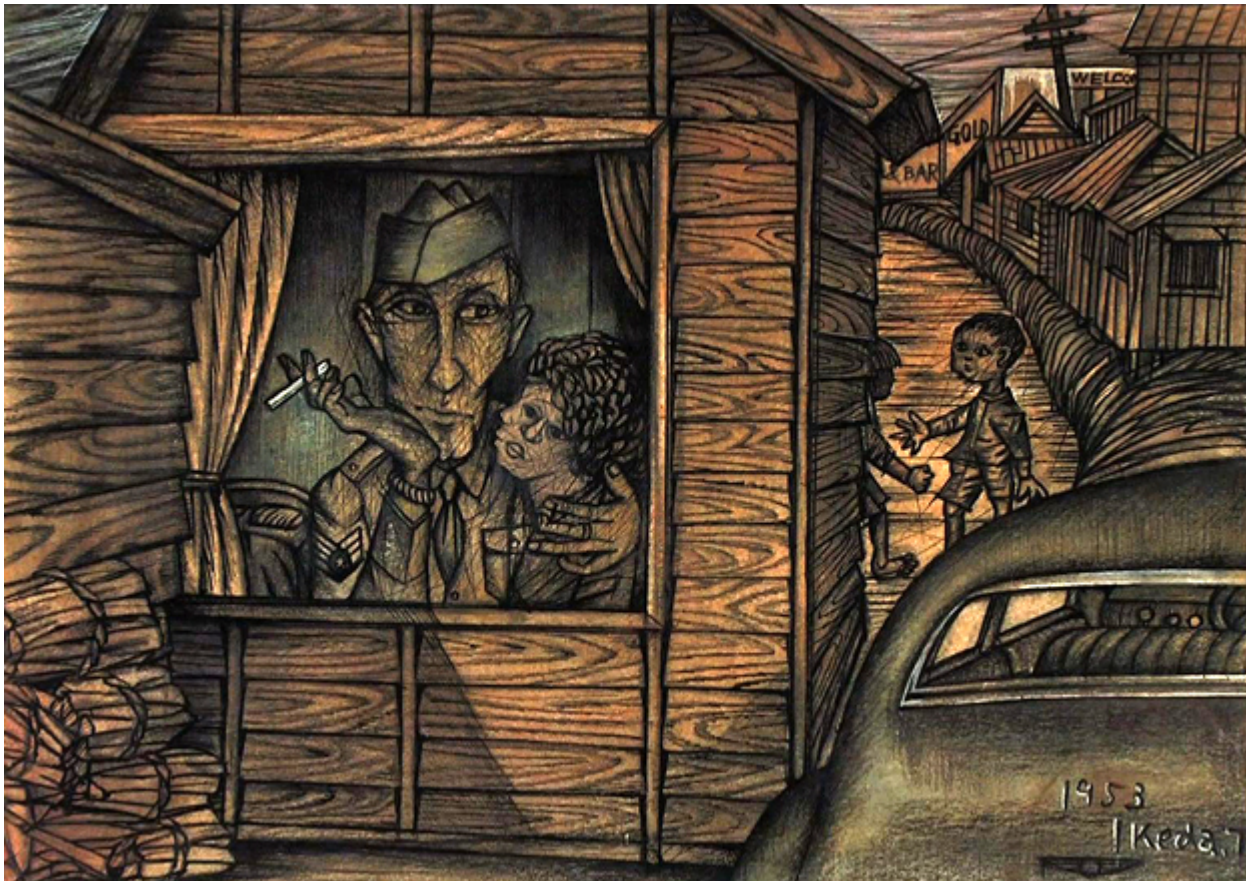
Back in 2005, Prime Minister Junichirō Koizumi faced strong opposition from factions within his party when he attempted to privatise the Japan Post Office. Koizumi declared a snap election to, in his own words, 'Destroy the (old-guards of) LDP' and 'reform Japan'. In reality, the elections were used to realise his long-kept promise to Washington to open Japan Post's \$3.1 trillion fund to Wall Street's moneyed interests. Via a media frenzy campaign lacking any substantive political debate, voters were flooded with emotive imagery and manoeuvres: Koizumi won a landslide victory and successfully privatised Japan Post, allowing Washington to usurp enough capital to sustain its war on Iraq.

The Result of Takaichi's Election

Prior to 8 February, pre-election polls showed the prospect for Takaichi to win and secure a two-thirds supermajority in the 465-seat Lower House were high. While some media reports tried to highlight ties between her and the Moonies Cult or the controversial 'slush funds', social media was saturated with content depicting Takaichi as 'determined and well-spoken', 'an independent, strong female leader', and a 'breath of fresh air'.

Many young social media content creators posted videos praising her character and image as a groundbreaking female prime minister. It was later verified that much of these posts were scripted, user-generated content, paid for by Takaichi's campaign via recruitments on online job forums.

The snap election was held before Takaichi's high approval rating of some 70% could decline, and the results were grim yet expected: the LDP won a two-thirds supermajority in the Lower House, giving Takaichi enough power to advance her ultra-right policy agenda with virtually zero opposition. This includes the late Abe's pledge to amend Japan's so-called Peace Constitution and other ultra-right, neo-fascist policies like the anti-espionage act, flag-desecration act, and amendment to the Imperial Household Law.



Ikeda Tatsuo (Japan), *American Soldier, Child, Barracks*, 1953.

Persistent Xenophobia

It is worthwhile to take a step back and examine LDP and Takaichi's victory in a historical context. Together with their shadow government, the Nippon Kaigi (Japan Conference), the LDP has spent decades funding ultra-right grassroots movements – most notably by intervening in public education through the revision of history textbooks since the early 1990s. They adamantly spread false narratives that sanitize imperial Japan's atrocious history of genocide and other crimes against humanity. These include the outright denial of military and government involvement in cases like the use of 'comfort women' and the Nanjing Massacre.

Formerly fringe ultra-right political parties have sprouted in recent years by latching on to this sanitized meta-narrative set forth by the LDP with their own versions of xenophobic, neo-fascist and conspiratorial claims. As witnessed during the most recent elections, these fascist, ultra-right politicians – spawned from the LDP themselves – continue to spread hate-speech targeting various minorities including immigrants, Okinawans, Chinese, Zainichi Koreans, and Koreans.

Online ultra-right commentary quickly forms mobs to stifle critics of US military bases in Okinawa or the US-Japan security alliance and increased militarisation of the Japanese Self-Defense Force as ‘un-patriotic’ or a ‘Chinese Communist spy’.

Takaichi, her cabinet, and other policymakers have shown no interest in tackling such tendencies in Japanese society nor desisting from outright aggressive behaviour. This can be seen as a natural consequence of her political evolution through the ranks of the LDP and has manifested more recently in her controversial statements regarding Taiwan.



Minoru Kinjo (Okinawa, Japan), *Untitled*, n.d.

The Power of Illusion

Although the results of this recent election garnered media headlines across the world as an overwhelming ‘landslide’ win for Takaichi and the LDP a closer look at the mechanics behind the scene sheds light on a different picture.

As Australian academic Gavan McCormack notes, Japan’s electoral system has been fraught with an illusory representation of votes since the single-seat constituency system was implemented under pressure by the US and business elites in 1994. Under the current system, voter results have been skewed to only benefit the ruling LDP. The LDP’s majority of seats in the Lower House often do not proportionally reflect the true number of votes won (Table 1).

Table 1

LDP Electoral Performance, (2005–2026)

Year	Vote		Seats
2005	48%		73%
2012	43%		79%
2014	48%		75%
2017	48%		74%
2026	49%		86%

Okinawa Times (15 February 2026)

The results of the 2026 election follow a pattern of disproportional representation, given the fact that the overall approval rating of the LDP is only 31.5%. Other scholars have pointed out how the single-seat constituency system erodes democracy by making it harder for opposition parties to gain power, amplifying the ruling party’s seats beyond their popular vote share.



Tetsuya Ishida (Japan), *Soldier*, 1996.

The State vs. Local Government

One of the key questions where people's democratic voices have long been ignored and violently suppressed by the Japanese central government and Washington is the question of Okinawa. The small chain of islands, home to indigenous Ryukyuans, still hosts approximately 75% of all US military bases in Japan despite making up less than 1% of the country's land mass.

The people of Okinawa have voted against the construction of a new US military base in the pristine Oura Bay, but have continued to face virulent state oppression. After a referendum and numerous elections where local people explicitly opposed the construction of a new US military base in Henoko, the central government has resorted to a war of attrition against citizen groups leading the resistance, now mostly comprised of pensioners.

Okinawa Governor Denny Tamaki continues to confront the Japanese government and Washington with the local will to seek solutions through dialogue. His term as governor ends this autumn, meaning a new electoral battle awaits. How the LDP's landslide victory in Prime Minister Takaichi's snap election will affect the will and dignity of Okinawan civil society – which has sustained its resistance movement through grassroots democracy for decades – rests not only in the hands of the Japanese people, but in the hands of people worldwide who seek peace and liberation.

Warmly,

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Disclaimer: The views expressed by the author do not necessarily reflect the views of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research.