

Institute of Chinese Studies

# WEDNESDAY SEMINAR

*Japan at the Ballot  
Box: Domestic Politics  
and Foreign Policy  
Choices*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Speaker:**  
**Titli Basu**

4 February 2026

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**Speaker:** Dr. Titli Basu, Associate Professor, Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

**Chair:** Prof. Srabani Roy Choudhury, Professor, Japanese Studies, Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

**Venue:** Zoom Webinar

- The seminar examined Japan's domestic politics and foreign policy imperatives in the lead-up to the February 2026 Lower House elections. Dr. Titli Basu argued that the elections mark a decisive moment linking domestic political stability with foreign and security policy outcomes. The speaker noted that effective leadership is critical amid demographic decline, fiscal constraints, and heightened geopolitical uncertainty. Domestic political coherence was posited as the foundation for strategic decision-making. The election was framed not merely as an internal political contest, but as one with regional and global implications.
- The speaker analysed the leadership of Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae, emphasising both her symbolic significance and substantive political positioning. While public attention has focused on her persona and gender, the speaker stressed her growing diplomatic visibility and assertive rhetoric. Her statements on Taiwan were highlighted as reflective of strategic continuity with earlier security thinking rather than radical departure. At the same time, her remarks exposed Japan to diplomatic and economic backlash from China. Leadership style thus emerged as a key variable shaping external perceptions.
- The central argument was that the elections function as a personal referendum with regard to the Prime Minister's legitimacy. Despite high cabinet approval ratings, declining support for the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has created political fragility. Dr. Basu noted that a clear Lower House majority is essential for policy coherence, legislative effectiveness, and long-term governance. Without electoral

consolidation, Japan risks policy paralysis. The possibility of a return to “revolving door” leadership was identified as a serious concern.

- The speaker highlighted shifting domestic political dynamics, including coalition fragmentation and the erosion of the LDP’s post-war dominance. The exit of the LDP’s long-standing coalition partner, the *Kōmeitō*, and the formation of a new alliance with the *Nippon Ishin no Kai* (Japan Innovation Party) altered electoral calculations. These developments have increased uncertainty within Japan’s political system. Internal factionalism within the LDP was also noted as a constraint on leadership authority. Domestic instability was thus linked directly to limits on strategic ambition.
- On foreign and security policy, Dr. Basu argued that domestic political outcomes condition Japan’s ability to manage alliance expectations from the United States. Growing pressure for burden-sharing, coupled with uncertainty surrounding US leadership, has raised strategic stakes for Tokyo. Relations with China were described as structurally tense, with limited room for rapid improvement. The speaker also discussed Japan’s re-calibrated engagement with the Global South following the Ukraine war. Economic capacity was underscored as the ultimate constraint on strategic choices.
- In her remarks, the Chair, Prof. Srabani Roy Choudhury highlighted the unique sociopolitical dimensions of the elections, particularly the unprecedented public visibility of a female leader. She noted the growing role of youth engagement, social media influence, and personality-driven politics in shaping voter behaviour. Coalition splits, adverse winter conditions, and electoral turnout uncertainties were also identified as key variables. The Chair cautioned that failure to secure a Lower House majority could result in domestic and foreign policy instability. She emphasised that the election carried significant implications for Japan’s international standing.
- The seminar concluded by underlining that Japan’s strategic effectiveness ultimately depends on economic recovery and financial stability. Weak currency performance, bond market volatility, and debates over fiscal stimulus versus monetary restraint were identified as pressing challenges. Without economic consolidation, Japan’s

foreign and security ambitions will remain constrained. The speaker and the chair both stressed that leadership continuity, economic governance, and calibrated diplomacy are essential at this juncture. The election was thus presented as pivotal for Japan's domestic resilience and global role.

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