On the Premise of Local Consent: Nuclear Power in Japanese Candidate Manifestos at the 2024 and 2026 Elections

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Interim Storage Facility, Fukushima Prefecture. Credit: Prime Minister's Office of Japan, 2025

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Abstract

Japan has committed itself to expanding nuclear power. Whether that commitment is delivered depends less on Tokyo than on the coastal districts where the reactors stand, because a restart requires the consent of the host prefecture and municipality. This consent rests on non-binding safety agreements rather than on law. This report asks what the national politicians who represent those districts (and don't have the de facto veto, unlike the local governments) actually promised their voters.

This report analyses 1,724 candidate manifestos from the five main parties in the 2024 and 2026 general elections, together with the 110 regional manifestos of those parties that correspond to the 11 regions of Japan. Each is recorded by whether it mentions nuclear power, whether it names a specific plant and what position the candidate takes.

Nuclear power was not a leading issue at either election. Most candidates did not raise it. This report finds that geography determines both who raised it and what they said. A nuclear plant in the district roughly doubles the chance that a candidate writes about nuclear power. It makes those who do far more likely to name a specific plant rather than discuss energy policy in the abstract. However, proximity also constrains the content. Across both elections, not one candidate standing in a nuclear plant district endorsed nuclear power without attaching a condition, while every candidate who did endorse it unconditionally was standing somewhere with no reactor in it. Near the plants, it arrives hedged and most often with the same phrase: on the premise of local consent.

The party-level evidence runs the other way. At both elections, the governing party committed itself to nuclear power in exactly one of its 11 regional manifestos and in

the most nuclear-dense region. Proximity to a nuclear plant is the one thing that makes the party speak and the one thing that makes its candidates hedge. The regional manifesto carries no individual signature; the candidate manifesto is signed off by the politician who later has to represent the local voters' interests.

For Dutch readers, the implication is in the contrast between two electoral systems. As the Dutch Second Chamber elects all 150 MPs nationwide at-large, whatever opposition to nuclear should reflect more principled partisan stances, rather than particularistic demands from local constituents.

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I have no conflict of interest.

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1. Project purpose

Americans would say "all politics is local" (Shapiro 2006). This refers to the fact that in single-seat district electoral systems, each legislator represents a defined geographic area and caters to locals' needs. However, what happens if these needs conflict with the party's national policy? This report examines this tension in the context of campaigning in Japanese electoral districts that have nuclear power plants.

Japan has decided to expand nuclear power. Are the pro-nuclear legislators who represent the districts with the plants willing to go on record to show their support?

1.1 Research questions

In a Japanese general election, every candidate standing in a single-seat district is given space in an official bulletin, printed at public expense and delivered to every household in the district. We call these candidate manifestos. This report asks what they say about nuclear power.

The corpus is every manifesto produced by a candidate of Japan's five main parties in single-seat districts at the two most recent general elections: 1,724 candidate manifestos in total. Each one is sorted by whether it mentions nuclear power and, where it does, by the position the candidate takes. The report asks two questions:

(1) Does the presence of a nuclear power plant in or near the electoral district change what a candidate says about nuclear power?
(2) How far do candidates of the same party differ from one another on nuclear power?

The first question is about local responsiveness: whether Japanese politicians adjust a national policy position to fit the district they represent. The second is about party discipline: how much room a party leaves its candidates on a contested issue. Neither question asks why nuclear power is a minor campaign issue in 2024 and 2026. That it is a minor campaign issue is taken as given.

1.2 Why this matters

The Netherlands is expanding nuclear power. Dutch policy now combines extending the operating life of the Borssele plant with the construction of new plants, most notably the plans to build plants near Eemshaven in Groningen (Rijksoverheid 2026). Wherever those plants are eventually sited, the binding constraint will not be the technology or the regulator but the consent of the community that has to live beside them, mediated through the local politicians this community elects. However, the biggest difference between the Netherlands and Japan here is that in the Netherlands, there is no "local" MP in the Second Chamber for a voter to complain to. The Dutch House of Representatives (HoR) elect all 150 members in a nationwide at-large constituency. In theory, this should encourage Dutch MPs to focus more on national instead of local issues than their Japanese counterparts. No MP should be able to hold the major parties hostage because their constituents are against living near a nuclear power plant.

There is also a reason of a different kind, as most democracies do not keep a record of what individual candidates promise their constituents. Japan does. Japan is one of the few places where a question about local responsiveness can actually be answered from evidence rather than inferred from survey data (e.g. Catalinac 2016; Müller and Fujimura 2025). The answer travels to countries where the same question cannot be asked directly.

1.3 What a candidate can campaign on

What politicians choose to say is shaped by two kinds of influence. Institutional factors are the official rules and structures of a political system: the form of government and the electoral system. In parliamentary systems like Japan and the Netherlands, the government depends on the support of a majority in the HoR[1], so members of governing parties are under pressure to support the cabinet, because the government may fall if it loses that majority. Non-institutional factors are influences that are not written into any rule: political traditions, values and expectations about how politicians ought to behave.

Among the institutional factors, the electoral system matters most for the question this report asks, as roughly 60% of Japan's HoR seats are elected through plurality single-seat districts, in stark contrast with most continental European democracies that rely more on proportional representation (PR). In a closed-list PR system where voters choose a party and the party pre-determines the list order (e.g. Spain and roughly 40% of Japan's HoR[2]), a candidate's future depends on the party leadership, and it makes sense to campaign on the party brand (Carey and Shugart 1995; Crisp et al. 2004). In a fully open list PR system where voters choose a candidate on a list and preference votes alone determine the order of election (e.g. Finland), a candidate has an incentive to build a personal reputation. In a plurality single-seat district system where each district elects a single member and the candidate with the most votes wins (e.g. UK), a candidate's career depends on carrying one specific place, which gives them an incentive to focus on local issues instead of national ones.

[1] It just so happens that lower houses of both Japan and the Netherlands share the same name in English: the House of Representatives.
[2] Most Japanese parties' lists in the HoR use candidates who are dually listed in both single-seat districts and PR blocks and use a "best-loser" mechanism based on the single-seat district vote share to determine the list order.

The Japanese HoR combines two of these. Since the 1996 general election, it has been elected under a parallel system. A voter casts two ballots. One ballot elects 289 members, one from each single-seat district, on the British model. The other elects 176 members from closed party lists in 11 regional blocks. The block sizes range from 6 members in Shikoku, the smallest of Japan's four main islands, to 28 members in Kinki, the western region containing Osaka, Kyoto and Kobe. The two tiers are counted separately; a party's underrepresentation in the districts (e.g. 4% of the district vote share but only 1% of district seats) is not compensated by its list seats. This is why Japan's main electoral system is called mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) as opposed to Germany's compensatory mixed-member proportional (MMP). The split between single-seat district seats and PR seats in the Japanese HoR is roughly 62% to 38%. Combined with the fact that even elected PR block politicians are often dually listed in single-seat districts, the majority of Japanese lower house MPs identify with a specific single-seat district. Therefore, they have to balance between toeing the party line and catering to constituent needs.

That gives a candidate four broad things to campaign on, set out in Table I.

Vote for me because…	**I'm a great candidate**	**My party (leader) is great**
Personal qualities	I have the right experience and character to represent this constituency.	Our party leader is the right person to be prime minister.
Policy	I will fight for what this constituency specifically needs (e.g. to construct a specific hospital).	My party's national programme will make you better off.

Table I: Four things a candidate can ask voters to vote for (own work)

The two cells in the upper row are both forms of what the literature calls personalised vote-seeking: asking for a vote on the basis of a person rather than a programme. Some scholars make a distinct between a candidate campaigning on their personal qualities or their party leader's qualities (Van Holsteyn and Andeweg 2012). Japanese elections supply examples of each. In 2005, then Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro[3] turned a general election into a referendum on his own postal privatisation programme (bottom-right box) and his personal popularity (top-right box). For the purposes of this report, both count as appeal to the party because it draws attention away from the individual candidate.

This report is concerned mainly with the lower row: policy. The distinction that matters is between a candidate who advocates something particularistic (bottom-left box) and a candidate who restates the party's national position (bottom-right box). A candidate who writes about the restart of a named power plant in her own district is doing the former. A candidate who reproduces her party's standard formula on energy policy, as Japanese Communist Party (JCP) candidates often do, is doing the latter. Counting which candidates do what is the core of this report.

1.4 What this research can show that surveys cannot

A considerable body of research already asks whether living near a nuclear power plant changes what people think about nuclear power. Almost all of it relies on public opinion surveys, in Japan and elsewhere (Cale and Kromer 2015; Rehdanz et al. 2017; Uji et al. 2021). Those studies tell us what voters believe. This report examines something different: how politicians balance the preferences of local voters on nuclear power against the position of their party. It uses campaign documents that politicians wrote themselves.

[3] In this report, Japanese names are listed in the East Asian order, with the family name coming first.

Survey respondents can hold a view without acting on it. A candidate who puts opposition to a specific nuclear plant in print is making a commitment that can be quoted back at them. What they choose to write is evidence about how much latitude their party allows them.

This report is not about whether Japan will use more nuclear power. It is about whether the people who have to defend that decision in the nuclear plant districts are prepared to put their names to it.

2. Background

Japan imports the overwhelming majority of its primary energy. This dependence is the origin of its nuclear programme. The first Japanese nuclear plant to supply electricity consistently to the grid was the Tokai plant in Ibaraki Prefecture, which began doing so in 1966 (Agency for Natural Resources and Energy 2018). Expansion accelerated sharply after the 1973 oil crisis. Nuclear power became the centrepiece of a national energy-security strategy.

Japan's nuclear plants were built in small coastal towns that were paid to host them. In those districts, nuclear power is not an abstract national question. It is a local argument with jobs and municipal budgets on one side and evacuation routes on the other.

One instrument of that strategy matters a great deal. In 1974, Japan adopted the three so-called power source development laws, which levy a charge on electricity bills nationwide and channel the proceeds into grants for municipalities that agree to host generating facilities. Host towns receive infrastructure projects. The design deliberately made hosting a nuclear plant financially attractive to ageing and depopulating coastal communities. It is a large part of the reason Japanese plants are sited where they are (Aldrich 2008). The consequence is that a nuclear district contains not only people who fear the plant but also people whose livelihoods depend on it. Nuclear power is a local issue in Japan with organised interests on both sides, which is why a candidate's choice of words in such a district is worth reading closely.

2.1 The Fukushima nuclear disaster and its aftermath

By early 2011, Japan had 54 commercial reactors supplying roughly 30% of its electricity. Official plans envisaged raising that share to about half by 2030. On March 11th, 2011, a magnitude 9.0 earthquake off the north-east coast generated a tsunami

that killed around 20,000 people. At the Fukushima Daiichi plant, the wave disabled the backup power needed to cool the reactors. Three cores melted down, and around 150,000 people were evacuated. It was the most consequential event in postwar Japanese energy policy (Samuels 2013).

The shutdown that followed was gradual rather than immediate. 11 operating reactors in the affected region shut down automatically on the day. The rest went offline progressively as they reached scheduled maintenance and were not permitted to restart; the last of them, Tomari-3 in Hokkaido, shut down in May 2012, leaving Japan without any nuclear-generated electricity for the first time since 1970. A new and formally independent regulator, the Nuclear Regulation Authority, was created later that year. The first reactor to satisfy its standards, Sendai-1 in Kagoshima Prefecture, restarted in August 2015.

The LDP had lost power in 2009 to the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which was in office when the disaster struck and later committed itself to phasing nuclear out. In December 2012, the LDP returned to government under Abe Shinzo, who supported nuclear power, and LDP-led administrations have held office ever since. It would be misleading, however, to attribute the nuclear restart to one prime minister or party. It has been carried by a durable coalition of interests that scholars of Japan call the "nuclear village": the electric utilities, the trade ministry, the construction firms, the business federations, the electric power workers' unions and the host municipalities (Kingston 2012; Aldrich 2008), The practice of senior officials retiring into posts at the industries they formerly regulated reinforced the "village." Nuclear power supplied about 8% of Japan's electricity in 2023, roughly a quarter of its pre-2011 share (International Energy Agency and World Bank 2025).

Public opinion has moved as well. Since 2022, higher energy prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and renewed anxiety about supply security in the Middle East

softened opposition to restarts. A poll published by the Asahi Shimbun in February 2026 found 51% in favour of restarting nuclear plants and 35% opposed (Isoda 2026). With a firmly pro-nuclear Takaichi in the PM's office governing with a large parliamentary majority, the nuclear share of Japan's electricity is likely to keep rising. How fast it rises depends not only on Tokyo but also on how the argument goes in the coastal districts where the nuclear plants actually stand.

2.2 LDP's Dominance

The LDP has been dominant in Japanese politics: governing continuously from 1955 to 1993, in government again from 1994 to 2009 and in power ever since 2012. During its first long spell, it presided over the postwar economic expansion that made Japan the world's second largest economy in the 1980s. The LDP's dominance has rested on a set of structural advantages. I list four here.

The first is organised local support. LDP politicians built koenkai: personal support associations that recruit voters through neighbourhood and occupational networks and provide services to members all year round. A koenkai belongs to the individual politician, not to the party; it is expensive to build and often inherited along with the seat (e.g. the son would take over when the father retires from politics). Opposition candidates have rarely had anything comparable (Curtis 1971; Krauss and Pekkanen 2011).

The second is the use of public money as an electoral instrument. Pork barrel politics means directing public spending to a particular locality mainly because it wins votes there, rather than because it is the best national use of the money. In postwar Japan, this meant roads, bridges, ports, rail links, agricultural works and indirect payments to communities that agreed to host power plants. Holding office gave the LDP control

of the distribution. Opposition parties, largely shut out of national government, could not offer the same (Scheiner 2006).

The third is an unequal electoral map. Rural districts have long been overrepresented relative to their populations, so a rural vote has counted more than an urban one. The Supreme Court has repeatedly found the disparity, also known as malapportionment, to be unconstitutional. However, reapportionment has been slow and politically contested. Because the party's base has been rural, malapportionment translates directly into a seat advantage. This ultimately results in spending directed at overrepresented places (Horiuchi and Saito 2003).

The fourth is campaign finance. Political funding scandals in Japan over the decades reveal the systemic advantages, legal or not, LDP enjoys in acquiring political donation over the other parties: the Lockheed affair in 1976, the Recruit share-dealing scandal in 1988, the Sagawa Kyubin affair in 1992 and the most recent slush fund scandal. The last one occurred in 2023: it emerged that LDP factions had been selling tickets to fundraising events and returning unreported income to individual legislators. The scandal forced Prime Minister Kishida Fumio from office and was a principal cause of the party's loss of its majority at the October 2024 election. The slush fund scandal was perhaps the most popular topic for opposition politicians to invoke in the 2024 general election candidate manifestos, decreasing the amount of text dedicated to any other topic including energy.

2.3 Candidate manifestos

While party manifestos are widely available through cross-national databases such as the Manifesto Project (Lehmann et al. 2025), no global database exists for the manifestos of individual candidates because such material is difficult to collect systematically. Japan and Taiwan are the only established democracies that maintain a systematic and unbroken public record of candidate manifestos.

The Japanese mechanism is straightforward. At a general election, the electoral commission gives every registered single-seat district candidate a fixed amount of space in an official election bulletin, printed at public expense and delivered to households across the district. Parties contesting the 11 PR blocks may also submit block-level versions. A party is free to produce different texts for different regions. In the two elections examined here, the LDP made more use of that option than the other four parties, which generally reproduced a single national text across all blocks. Figure I shows what a candidate bulletin looks like: the entry submitted by Ishiba Shigeru, then prime minister, for Tottori 1st district at the 2024 election. A candidate manifesto typically includes the candidate's photo, name, party affiliation, promises and accomplishments.



Figure I: Ishiba Shigeru's candidate manifesto in the 2024 general election (Tottori 1st district)

Because the record is systematic and complete, Japan has become a standard case for studying campaign behaviour at the level of the individual candidate. Amy Catalinac (2016) used it to trace the effects of the 1994 reform. Stefan Müller and Naofumi Fujimura used it to test whether what candidates promise in a campaign predicts what

they subsequently pursue in parliament, in particular the committee leadership posts they seek (2025).

3. The five parties in the two most recent general elections

This report analyses the two most recent general elections: October 2024 and February 2026. The report looks at all single-seat district candidates ran by the five parties that consistently earned at least 4% of the valid national votes in both single-seat districts and PR block in both elections: LDP, CDP, Ishin (also known in English as Japan Innovation Party), the Democratic Party for the People (DPFP) and JCP. The far-right Sanseito is excluded despite it doing better than the JCP in the 2026 election in both seat share and vote share, as it earned less than 4% vote share in both single-seat districts and PR block in 2024.

3.1 The 2024 and 2026 general elections

As Japan is a parliamentary system like the Netherlands, a governing party can replace its leader between elections. A new prime minister in that position typically dissolves the HoR early in order to secure a popular mandate. The HoR has a four-year term, but it rarely runs to a full term; both elections analysed here are snap elections.

The first followed the resignation of Kishida Fumio amid the party funding scandal described above. Ishiba Shigeru won the LDP presidency in September 2024, became prime minister on October 1st, dissolved the HoR eight days later and held the election on October 27th. It did not work as intended: the LDP and their governing partner Komeito lost their combined majority for the first time since 2009. The LDP-Komeito coalition managed to continue their coalition as a minority government.

After LDP's underwhelming performance in the July 2025 upper house election, Ishiba resigned. Takaichi Sanae then won the party leadership race to became LDP president and therefore prime minister. Komeito left the coalition due to LDP's rightwards shift

under Takaichi, and Ishin took its place. Takaichi governed for roughly three months at the head of a minority coalition, dissolved the HoR on January 23rd and won the election on February 8th decisively: the LDP took 316 of 465 seats, the largest single-party result of the postwar era. (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2026; Center for Strategic and International Studies 2026).

Two general elections, 16 months apart, fought on exactly the same electoral map. Whatever changed between 2024 and 2026, it was not the districts.

There is also a methodological reason for choosing this pair. The district map is identical across the two elections. In 2022, single-seat district boundaries were heavily modified in some prefectures to adjust for population change. This took effect at the 2024 election (Nikkei 2024). Comparing 2024 with 2026 therefore holds district boundaries constant, so any change in what candidates say cannot be an artefact of redrawn constituencies.

3.2 The five parties

I analyse single-seat district candidates from the five parties that took at least 4% of the valid vote in both the district and the PR tiers at both elections: LDP, CDP/CRA, Ishin, DPFP and JCP. Table II gives the number of candidates each party fielded in single-seat districts.

	LDP	CDP/CRA	Ishin	DPFP	JCP	Total
2024 candidates	266	207	163	41	213	890
2026 candidates	285	202	87	102	158	834
Combined total	551	409	250	143	371	1,724

Table II: Single-seat district candidates fielded by the five parties at the two general elections (Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2024; 2026)

For this report, CRA is treated as the successor of CDP, although technically CRA was formed by a merger of the CDP with Komeito in the HoR. During the long period of LDP-Komeito coalition, Komeito was seen as a moderating centrist force that kept LDP's right-wing factions in check. Its candidates arrive at the 2026 election with a different history and relationship to the LDP government's energy policy. In parallel, Ishin crossed the floor: an opposition party in 2024, it was the LDP's coalition partner by 2026. Any difference observed between the two elections could therefore reflect this realignment rather than local adaptation. I take this into account when comparing across these two elections.

4. How I did the research

The corpus consists of 1,724 candidate manifestos, representing every single-seat district candidate fielded by the five parties at the two elections, as set out in Table 2. Alongside these, I also collected the PR block party manifestos that each party published: 55 documents for the 2026 election and the same number for 2024. Then, a party's own commitment in a region can be compared with what its candidates in that region wrote. Each candidate manifesto is sorted[4] into one of three categories: those that do not mention energy at all, those that mention energy but not nuclear power and those that mention nuclear power. Within the third category, I record whether the candidate names a specific power plant. For example, the CDP candidate in Niigata's 2nd district in 2024 wrote specifically about her opposition to restarting the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant that stands in her district, whereas her co-partisan in Tokyo's 15th district promised to "strongly promote a carbon neutrality that does not rely on nuclear power" without naming any plant. Both oppose nuclear power, but only one is speaking about a particular plant.

1,724 documents represent single-seat district candidates from the five parties at both elections. I coded all. Nothing in this report is inferred from a survey.

For the manifestos that do mention nuclear power, I record the candidate's position. I use a five-point scale that ranges from 1 (fully opposed) to 5 (fully support). I also code a special case of 0 in which candidates mention that they did something related to nuclear in their past (e.g. serving on the nuclear power legislative committee) but did not talk about their views on nuclear power policy. The full rules for coding with worked examples of each category are in the appendix.

[4] I handcoded the majority of the 2024 manifestos by reading and copying down the sentences in which key words are mentioned. For the rest of the 2024 manifestos and the 2026 manifestos, I asked ClaudeAI to conduct optimal character recognition (OCR) to convert the image to text and then search for the key words among the text. I confirmed the OCR's accuracy by manually checking some of the manifestos.

The keyword list contains 14 categories covering climate, energy sources, electricity, energy conservation and the 2011 disaster; it is reproduced in full in the appendix. I set its boundaries before coding began, using two criteria: a term had to bear a direct rather than an associative relationship to electricity generation, and it had to be specific enough not to generate a large volume of irrelevant matches. On those grounds, I excluded things like references to natural disasters in general, petrol prices, motorways, extreme weather, "the environment" and the atomic bombings of 1945. I did record advocacy for lowering electricity prices, since electricity is what a nuclear plant produces. I also recorded dams and floodgates because of their connection to hydroelectric power.

The 1945 atomic bombings were mentioned more often than usual at these two elections, given the increased salience of national security. They were typically invoked by pacifist candidates opposed to higher military spending and to the possibility of hosting American nuclear weapons. That is a question about nuclear weapons rather than nuclear power. Conflating the two would blur the analysis, but the relationship between the two kinds of nuclear rhetoric can perhaps be a topic for future research.

5. Analysis of the 2024 general election

The 2024 corpus consists of the 890 single-seat district manifestos listed in Table 2, together with the 55 PR block manifestos that the five parties published in their own names, 11 blocks for each party. That gives 945 documents.

In the four districts where a nuclear plant was actually generating electricity during the 2024 campaign, not one governing-party candidate wrote a single word about nuclear power.

Nuclear power was not a leading issue in October 2024, and the aggregate figures show it. 42% of the 890 district manifestos contain none of the 45 keywords listed in the appendix. A further 31% mention energy or climate but never nuclear power. 27% mention nuclear power. That distribution is what a low-salience issue looks like, and it is the background to this section rather than its finding. Space in an official bulletin is limited: a candidate has roughly one page and has to choose perhaps six to eight things to put on it. In this campaign the cost of living, the party funding scandal and defence took most of that space. Table III shows the details.

Party	Candidates	(a) No energy terms	(b) Energy, not nuclear	(c) Nuclear power	(c) share
LDP	266	120	121	25	9.4%
CDP	207	101	72	34	16.4%
Ishin	163	123	35	5	3.1%
DPFP	41	9	24	8	19.5%
JCP	213	18	25	170	79.8%
All five parties	**890**	**371**	**277**	**242**	**27.2%**

Table III: The 2024 single-seat district manifestos, sorted three ways, by party (own work)

The party differences are the first thing the table shows. The JCP mentions nuclear power at a rate more than four times that of any other party: 4 of every 5 of its candidates, which follows from the party's standing commitment to zero nuclear power. The other four parties sit between 3% and 20%. Ishin is the quietest by a wide margin, with 5 mentions across 163 candidates, and 123 of those 163 wrote nothing about energy or climate at all. The DPFP has the highest rate of the four non-communist parties, but that rate rests on only 8 manifestos out of a field of 41.

5.1 Does a nuclear plant in the district change what a candidate says?

I classified every single-seat district by whether it contained a nuclear plant, using the categories set out in Appendix Part 7. On that basis, 14 single-seat districts contained the 18 nuclear plants in Japan.[5] These 14 districts come from 14 different prefectures.[6] Fukui 2nd district had four plants, and Aomori 1st had two. Of the 18 plants, 6 plants were operating during the 2024 campaign, with 3 of them from Fukui 2nd. I classified 11 plants as "non-operating," which means they are either temporarily offline, in decommissioning with the possibility of being restarted or in the process of being constructed. The Fukushima plant is classified as fully being decommissioned with practically no political chance of being restarted again, thus meriting a separate colour code in the following map.

[5] I counted Fukushima Daiichi and Daini as one single plant for the purpose of this report.
[6] Each prefecture has a minimum of 2 single-seat districts (Yamanashi, Fukui, Wakayama, Tottori, Shimane, Tokushima, Kochi and Saga) and a maximum of 30 single-seat districts (Tokyo).

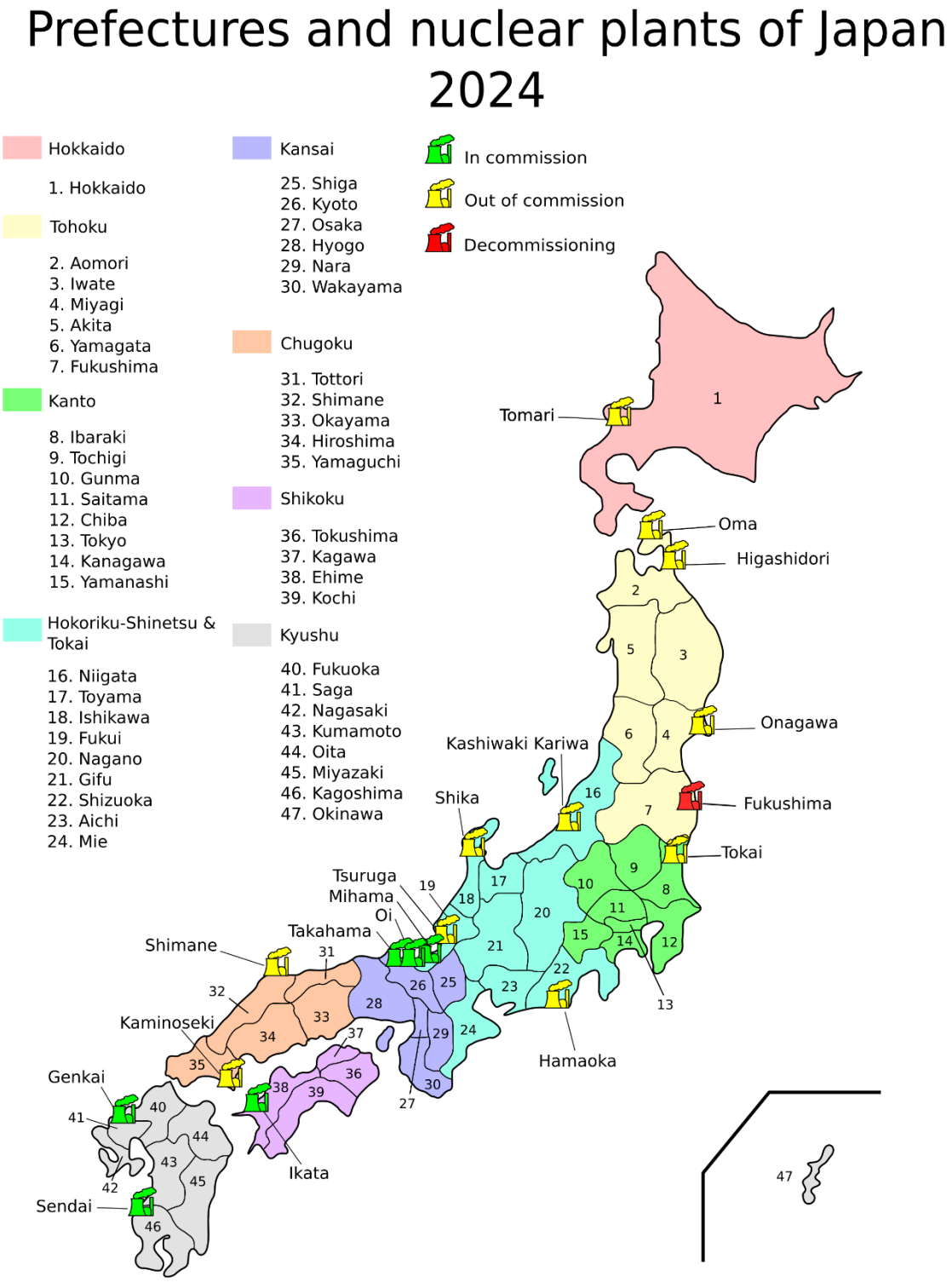


Figure II: Map of the status of nuclear power plants during the 2024 Japanese general election (Credit: Jetske van der Wilt)

Not counting the special case of Fukushima 4th, the five parties fielded 36 candidates across 13 nuclear plant single-seat districts. Exactly half of them mentioned nuclear power, against 221 of the 851 candidates, roughly 26%, in districts with no reactor. The difference of 24 percentage points is unlikely to be an accident of sampling. In Fukushima 4th, all three candidates from the main parties (LDP, CDP and JCP) mentioned nuclear power. Proximity to a reactor roughly doubles the chance that a candidate raises the subject at all. That is the first half of the answer to the first research question: on an issue that is quiet nationally, geography decides who speaks.

Proximity also makes candidates more concrete. 36 of the 242 manifestos (roughly 15%) that mention nuclear power name a specific plant. In nuclear plant districts the rate is 8 of 18, or about 44%; elsewhere it is 27 of 221 (about 12%). Naming a plant is the clearest marker available of the particularistic appeal described in Section 1: it is a statement about a place rather than about a policy.

That marker needs a qualification. Of the 36 manifestos that name a plant, only 9 name one inside the candidate's own district. 27 of the 36 come from JCP candidates, and they cluster by prefecture rather than by district: 4 Shizuoka candidates name the Hamaoka plant, 3 Ishikawa candidates name the Shika plant, 4 candidates across Tottori and Shimane name the Shimane plant, and 6 candidates across Ehime, Tokushima and Oita name the Ikata plant. A prefectural federation writing one text and distributing it would produce exactly this pattern.

The second half of the answer concerns direction rather than frequency, and it is the more consequential of the two. Table IV breaks the 242 nuclear-mentioning manifestos down by position and by district type.

District type	Districts	Candidates	Mention nuclear	1	2	3	4	5	0	F
Contains a nuclear plant	13	36	18	10	2	1	4	0	1	0
Decommissioning only	1	3	3	1	0	2	0	0	0	0
No nuclear plant	275	851	221	172	16	2	14	8	6	3
Total	**289**	**890**	**242**	**183**	**18**	**5**	**18**	**8**	**7**	**3**

Table IV: Position on nuclear power among the 242 district manifestos that mention it, 2024, by district type. Codes as defined in Appendix Part 3: 1 is firmly opposed and 5 firmly supportive; 0 is a manifesto that mentions nuclear power without stating a position, and F one that refers only to fusion (own work)

Not one candidate standing in a district that contains a nuclear plant took the unqualified pro-nuclear position. All 8 candidates who did are in districts with no nuclear plant in them. Of the 18 candidates in nuclear plant districts who mentioned nuclear power, 12 opposed it, 1 was ambiguous, 1 mentioned it without taking a position, and 4 supported it — every one of those 4 attaching an explicit condition. Taken on its own this is a weak result: 0 out of 18 against 8 out of 221 is not statistically distinguishable from chance. Its weight comes from the fact that it recurs at the 2026 election, that it holds inside the governing party, and that it holds within prefectures, where party and election are held constant.

That pattern is clearest in the LDP. The party fielded candidates in 12 of the 13 nuclear plant districts. 3 of those 12 mentioned none of the 45 keywords, 4 mentioned energy but not nuclear power, 1 mentioned nuclear power only in a biographical line listing membership of the Diet's special committee on nuclear issues, and 4 took the qualified pro position. None took the unqualified one. Meanwhile the LDP ran 253 candidates in districts with no nuclear plant, 19 of whom mentioned nuclear power, and all 6 LDP candidates who called for nuclear power without attaching any condition were among them.

The sharpest version of the finding concerns the four districts where a reactor was actually running during the campaign. Those four districts returned 11 candidates from the five parties. 4 of the 11 mentioned nuclear power: three JCP candidates and one CDP candidate. Not a single LDP candidate standing in a district with a working reactor wrote anything about nuclear power at all. In Ehime 3rd, which contains the Ikata plant, and in Saga 2nd, which contains the two operating Genkai reactors, the LDP candidates used none of the 45 keywords. In Kagoshima 3rd, which contains the two operating Sendai reactors, the LDP candidate mentioned energy but not nuclear power. The LDP did not field a candidate in Fukui 2nd.

Some within-prefecture comparisons show interesting variations. In Saga Prefecture, the LDP candidate in the 1st district campaigned on "raising self-sufficiency through a balanced use of nuclear power and renewables" with no qualifier attached, while the LDP candidate in the 2nd district, which contains Genkai, said nothing about energy at all. In Ishikawa Prefecture, the LDP candidate in the 1st district called for "the restart of nuclear power plants and energy security." The actual nuclear plant stands in the 3rd district, whose own LDP candidate did not mention nuclear power. In Niigata Prefecture, the LDP candidate in the 1st district endorsed nuclear power as part of an optimal energy mix without conditions, while the candidate in the 4th district, which contains Kashiwazaki-Kariwa, wrote that he would accept the restart of the nuclear plant "on the premise of local consent" and only where experts had given permission.

One district cuts against the pattern. In Shizuoka 3rd, which contains the Hamaoka plant, the LDP candidate campaigned openly on "aiming for a safe and secure restart of the Hamaoka nuclear power plant". He is the only LDP candidate in the whole 2024 corpus to name a nuclear plant in his own district and ask for its restart. Hamaoka had been offline since 2011 and its safety review was still in progress at the time, so a restart was a live local prospect rather than a settled fact.

Niigata 4th is the other district where the argument was conducted in the open. The LDP candidate took the qualified pro position described above. His CDP opponent was the former governor of Niigata from 2016 to 2018 and opposed restarting the plant throughout his governorship. The CDP candidate wrote that he would not permit the restart of Kashiwazaki-Kariwa unless the three verification inquiries into the Fukushima accident were resumed and completed, and he would pursue a genuine zero nuclear policy including a prefectural referendum mechanism.

5.2 How much do candidates of the same party differ?

The second research question asks how far candidates of one party diverge from each other. Table V gives the positions of all 242 nuclear-mentioning district manifestos by party, with the mean and standard deviation for the candidates who took a substantive position.

Party	Mention nuclear	1	2	3	4	5	0	F	Mean	Std dev	Range
LDP	25	0	0	2	10	6	4	3	4.22	0.65	3–5
CDP	34	13	16	3	0	0	2	0	1.69	0.64	1–3
Ishin	5	0	2	0	1	1	1	0	3.25	1.50	2–5
DPFP	8	0	0	0	7	1	0	0	4.12	0.35	4–5
JCP	170	170	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.00	0.00	1–1
All five parties	**242**	**183**	**18**	**5**	**18**	**8**	**7**	**3**	**—**	**—**	**1–5**

Table V: Position on nuclear power by party, 2024 single-seat district manifestos. The mean, standard deviation and range are calculated over positions 1 to 5 only, excluding the no-view (0) and fusion-only (F) codes (own work)

Discipline of direction is close to complete in four of the five parties. Every one of the 170 JCP candidates who mentioned nuclear power opposed it firmly, with no variance whatever. No LDP candidate opposed nuclear power anywhere in Japan; the party's

range runs from 3 to 5, which is to say from ambiguity to unqualified support. No CDP candidate supported it anywhere; that party's range runs from 1 to 3. The DPFP is tighter still, with 7 of its 8 candidates using a single formula, "the restart of nuclear power plants that meet safety standards."

Ishin is the exception, and by a wide margin. Its 4 candidates who took a substantive position are spread across the full width of the scale, from a candidate in Fukuoka 1st who argued that Japan should "aim as far as possible for a society that does not depend on nuclear power" to a candidate in Tokyo 7th who called for "the development and replacement of innovative reactors" and a responsible nuclear fuel cycle. A standard deviation of 1.50 on a 5-point scale, from 4 speakers, is not a party line at all. It is 4 candidates saying what they individually thought.

Discipline of content gives a different ordering. The JCP is in a class of its own with a standard deviation of exactly zero across 170 candidates, but that uniformity is a fact about drafting rather than about agreement: as the plant-naming pattern above shows, these texts are issued at prefectural federation level and reproduced. 170 candidates did not independently arrive at the same sentence. The CDP, by contrast, is unanimous in direction but genuinely varied in strength, splitting 13 to 16 between firm and moderate opposition, with 3 candidates who wrote about nuclear power without indicating which outcome they wanted.

The third measure qualifies the first two rather than adding to them. A party's directional record is only as strong as the number of its candidates who spoke. The LDP has no dissenters anywhere in Japan, but only 18 of its 266 candidates expressed any position at all, so what that record shows is not that its candidates agree but that almost none of them were willing to be quoted. The same caution applies more sharply to Ishin, whose apparent disorder rests on 4 speakers out of 163. It applies to the JCP as well: 18 of its 213 candidates used none of the 45 keywords, and a further

25 mentioned energy without mentioning nuclear power, even though the party pledged zero nuclear power in all 11 PR blocks. Measured discipline is a statement about the candidates who chose to speak, not about the party as a whole.

5.3 What the party manifestos in PR blocks said

Alongside the candidate manifestos, each of the five parties published a manifesto in each of the 11 PR blocks: 55 documents written by party headquarters rather than by candidates. Table VI sets them out.

Party	Blocks mentioning nuclear power	Position taken	Blocks with no energy terms at all
LDP	1 of 11 (Hokuriku-Shinetsu)	5 Firmly supportive	8
CDP	0 of 11	–	0
Ishin	0 of 11	–	11
DPFP	0 of 11	–	0
JCP	11 of 11	1 Firmly opposed	0

Table VI: The five parties' PR block manifestos, 2024, by whether they mention nuclear power (own work)

The JCP put nuclear power in all 11 of its block manifestos, in every case as zero nuclear power, and in 6 blocks it named the local plant as well: Shimane, Kashiwazaki-Kariwa, Tokai No. 2, Hamaoka, Onagawa and Ikata all appear in the block text for the region that hosts them. No other party came close. The CDP and the DPFP mentioned energy in all 11 of their blocks and nuclear power in none of them. Ishin published 11 block manifestos containing none of the 45 keywords at all, which is to say that the party said nothing about energy or climate anywhere in the country.

The LDP mentioned nuclear power in exactly 1 block out of 11: Hokuriku-Shinetsu, the block containing Niigata, Ishikawa and Fukui. The key nuclear plants here are

Kashiwazaki-Kariwa, Shika and reactors along the Fukui coast. It is the most nuclear-dense region in Japan, and it is the only region where the governing party committed itself in writing to a "clean energy strategy" that includes restarting reactors and reprocessing. In the other 10 blocks, it said nothing about nuclear power. In 8 of those, it said nothing about energy at all.

Read against the candidate data, this produces the asymmetry that is the most important structural result in this report. At candidate level, proximity to a nuclear plant made LDP candidates quieter and more heavily qualified. At party level, proximity to a plant is the one thing that made the party speak. The two are not contradictory. The regional manifesto is written in Tokyo and carries no individual signature, while the candidate manifesto is signed by a person who has to campaign in the district and live there afterwards.

In 2024, the governing party advocated nuclear power most freely where there was no plant to advocate for and hedged wherever there was one. It committed itself in writing in exactly one region of the country: the region with the most reactors in it.

6. Analysis of the 2026 general election

The 2026 corpus consists of 834 single-seat district manifestos and 55 PR block party manifestos: 889 documents. Working with both levels at once matters, because it allows the same question to be asked of a party and of its candidates: what the party committed itself to in a region, and what its candidates in that region actually wrote.

The most heavily qualified pro-nuclear sentence in the governing party's entire 2026 corpus was written by the candidate for the district that hosts the largest nuclear power plant in the world.

As in 2024, most candidates did not raise the subject. Of the 834 district manifestos, 45% contain none of the 45 keywords listed in the appendix. 36% mention energy or climate but never nuclear power. 19% mention nuclear power at all. Nuclear power was not a leading campaign issue in February 2026 either, so these proportions are the expected baseline rather than a result. What makes this election worth examining closely is that everything which should have raised the subject had moved in the same direction, and it was still not raised. The Niigata governor had consented to restarting Kashiwazaki-Kariwa three months before the campaign (World Nuclear News 2025). Its Unit 6 started up on January 21st, tripped the next day and came back on February 9th, the day after polling (World Nuclear News 2026). Prime minister Takaichi had made nuclear expansion central to her energy policy. Table VII shows the categorisation of the 2026 candidate manifestos.

Party	Candidates	(a) No energy terms	(b) Energy, not nuclear	(c) Nuclear power	(c) share
LDP	285	130	130	25	8.8%
CRA	202	118	60	24	11.9%
Ishin	87	56	24	7	8.0%
DPFP	102	21	75	6	5.9%
JCP	158	53	10	95	60.1%
All five parties	**834**	**378**	**299**	**157**	**18.8%**

Table VII: The 2026 single-seat district manifestos, sorted three ways, by party (own work)

The party differences in that table are substantial. The JCP mentions nuclear power at roughly five times the rate of the next highest party. The other four sit between 5.9% and 11.9%. The rest of this section asks what lies behind those numbers.

6.1 Does a nuclear plant in the district change what a candidate says?

To answer the first research question, I classified every single-seat district by whether it contained a nuclear plant during the campaign period: that is, between the dissolution of the HoR on January 23rd and polling day on February 8th. There were still the same 13 nuclear plant districts as the 2024 general election. This time, two plants that had been non-operating in the 2024 election became operating during the 2026 election: the Onagawa plant in Miyagi 4th and Shimane plant in Shimane 1st. Figure III shows the 2026 nuclear plant map.

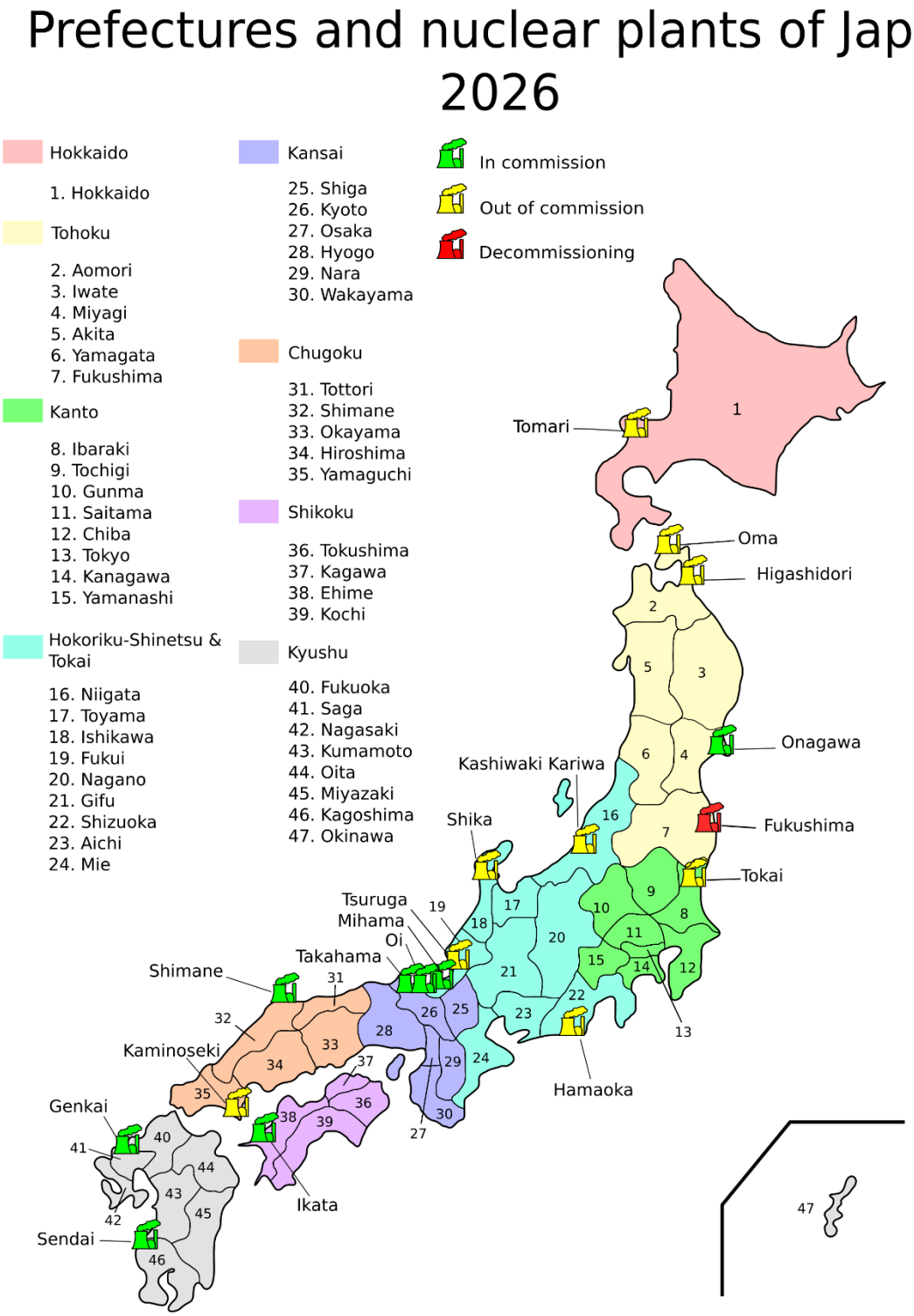


Figure III: Map of the status of nuclear power plants during the 2026 Japanese general election (Credit: Jetske van der Wilt)

The five parties fielded 32 candidates across the non-Fukushima 13 single-seat districts. 37.5% mentioned nuclear power, against 17.8% in districts with no plant. The near 20 percentage point difference is significant. Restricting the comparison to the 7 districts with an operating reactor pushes the rate higher still: 43.8%. In Fukushima 4th, three of the four main party candidates mentioned nuclear power. So in 2026, as in 2024, proximity to a nuclear plant makes a candidate substantially more likely to raise the subject.

Proximity also makes candidates more concrete. Among those who mentioned nuclear power, 5 of the 12 in nuclear plant districts named a specific power plant, against 19 of the 142 elsewhere — 42% against 13%. Naming a plant is the clearest available marker of a particularistic appeal.

Of the 25 manifestos that named a plant, 6 named a plant inside the candidate's own district. 13 named a plant elsewhere in the same prefecture, and 6 named one in a different prefecture — three of those being genuine near-neighbours across water and inside evacuation-planning zones (a candidate in Oita naming Ikata in Ehime, one in Tottori naming Shimane, one in Hakodate naming Oma in Aomori). The remaining three being references to Fukushima as an important historical event rather than as a local issue. 19 of the 25 namings came from JCP candidates, and they cluster by prefecture rather than by district.

The more striking result concerns direction rather than frequency. Table VIII breaks the 157 nuclear-mentioning manifestos down by position and by district type.

District type	Districts	Candidates	Mention nuclear	1	2	3	4	5	0	F
Contains a nuclear plant	13	32	12	5	3	1	2	0	1	0
Decommissioning only	1	4	3	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
No nuclear plant	275	798	142	95	9	2	9	12	10	5
Total	**289**	**834**	**157**	**101**	**12**	**4**	**11**	**12**	**12**	**5**

Table VIII: Position on nuclear power among the 157 district manifestos that mention it, by district type (own work)

Not one candidate standing in a nuclear plant district took the unqualified pro-nuclear position. Of the 12 candidates in nuclear plant districts who mentioned nuclear power, eight opposed it, one was ambiguous, one mentioned it without taking a position, and two supported it with an explicit condition attached. 0 out of 12 against 12 out of 142 is not statistically distinguishable from chance on its own. What gives it weight is that this is the second election in a row to produce it, on the same electoral map, with the parties realigned in between.

That pattern is clearest in the LDP. The party fielded candidates in 12 of the 13 nuclear plant districts. 2 of those 12 mentioned none of the 45 keywords. 7 mentioned energy or climate but not nuclear power. One mentioned nuclear power only in a biographical line, listing membership of the Diet's special committee on nuclear issues. 2 took the qualified pro position. None took the unqualified one. Meanwhile the LDP ran 272 candidates in districts with no plant, 21 of whom mentioned nuclear power. All four LDP candidates who called for restarts without attaching a condition were among them.

The within-prefecture comparisons can be revealing. In Kagoshima Prefecture, the LDP candidate in the 1st district campaigned for energy security "including nuclear power" with no safety qualifier attached; the LDP candidate in the 3rd district, which contains the two operating Sendai reactors, did not mention nuclear power at all. In Ishikawa Prefecture, the LDP candidate in the 1st district supported restarting plants that have passed regulatory review; the LDP candidate in the 3rd district, which contains Shika, said nothing on the subject. In Shizuoka, the LDP candidate in the 5th district, who chairs his own party's special committee on nuclear regulation, promised to deliver restarts of plants confirmed safe; the LDP candidate in the 3rd district, which contains Hamaoka, said nothing, in an election held sixteen days after the regulator had scrapped Hamaoka's safety review and sent it back to the beginning. In Fukui Prefecture, the DPFP candidate in the 1st district took the unqualified pro position, while the 2nd district, which contains seven operating reactors and is the most nuclear-dense constituency in Japan, elected a CRA candidate who took the qualified anti position.

The closer a governing-party candidate stands to an actual nuclear plant, the less they seem to say about nuclear power, and the more heavily qualified it is when they say anything. At least three explanations could exist. The first is local responsiveness in the strict sense. A host district contains organised interests on both sides: jobs, contracts and municipal revenue associated with hosting a nuclear power plant on one side, and evacuation plans and accident risk on the other. A candidate gains little by taking a public side in an argument their constituents are already having. The second is that nuclear power is cheap to support in the abstract and expensive to support in the concrete. A candidate in Tokyo can promise lower electricity bills through restarts without anyone asking which plant. The third is about the chances of winning. Several of these host districts are safe LDP seats, and a candidate who is going to win comfortably has little reason to campaign on anything contentious.

One single-seat district breaks the silence. Niigata 4th contains the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant. It is the only district in the country where two candidates from opposing parties both took a substantive position on nuclear power. The LDP candidate supported restarting plants whose safety has been confirmed, "on the premise of local consent": the most heavily conditioned pro-nuclear sentence in the LDP's entire 2026 corpus. His CRA opponent, Yoneyama Ryuichi, promised to revive the three verification inquiries into the Fukushima accident, to create a prefectural referendum mechanism and to move towards zero nuclear power. Yoneyama governed Niigata as its prefectural governor from 2016 to 2018 and opposed restarting the plant throughout; he now represents the district that contains it. During the entire campaign period, Unit 6 stood shut down, having started up on January 21st and tripped on a control-rod alarm the following day. In the one constituency where the issue could not be avoided, both major candidates engaged with it. We could say that the governing party's candidate hedged harder than any of his co-partisans.

Shizuoka 3rd district offers the mirror image. Chubu Electric disclosed on January 5th that it had acted improperly in setting the design-basis ground motion for Hamaoka. The regulator suspended the review on January 6th and returned it to zero the next day. Of the three candidates from the five parties who stood there, exactly one referred to it: the JCP candidate, who wrote that "the data-falsifying Hamaoka plant should be decommissioned." A local event of unmistakable salience, 16 days before dissolution, moved one candidate out of three. Candidates can respond to local nuclear events. Most choose not to.

6.2 How much do candidates of the same party differ?

The second research question asks how far candidates of one party diverge from each other, and which parties hold their candidates to a line. Table IX gives the positions of all 157 nuclear-mentioning district manifestos by party, together with the mean and

standard deviation on the five-point scale for the candidates who took a substantive position. I looked at direction, content and silence (or lack of).

Party	Mention nuclear	1	2	3	4	5	0	F	Mean	Std dev	Range
LDP	25	0	0	3	7	4	7	4	4.07	0.73	3–5
CRA	24	6	12	1	1	0	4	0	1.85	0.75	1–4
Ishin	7	0	0	0	1	4	1	1	4.80	0.45	4–5
DPFP	6	0	0	0	2	4	0	0	4.67	0.52	4–5
JCP	95	95	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.00	0.00	1–1
All five parties	**157**	**101**	**12**	**4**	**11**	**12**	**12**	**5**	**—**	**—**	**1–5**

Table IX: Position on nuclear power by party, 2026 single-seat district manifestos. The mean, standard deviation and range are calculated over positions 1 to 5 only, excluding the no-view (0) and fusion-only (F) codes (own work)

The first is discipline of direction: does any candidate contradict the party's position? By that measure four of the five parties are close to perfect. Every one of the 95 JCP candidates who mentioned nuclear power opposed it firmly, with no variance whatever. No LDP candidate opposed nuclear power anywhere in Japan; no Ishin or DPFP candidate did either. The single exception is the CRA, which fielded candidates on both sides: 6 firmly opposed, 12 moderately opposed, 1 ambiguous and 1 who supported restarting plants. It is the only one of the five parties whose candidates do not all point the same way.

The second is discipline of content: do candidates say the same thing? The JCP is in a class of its own, with a standard deviation of exactly zero across 95 candidates. But that uniformity is a fact about drafting rather than about agreement. Most of those 95 texts are repetitions of a formula issued at prefectural federation level, and the party's regional block manifestos carry the same words. The LDP, by contrast, is unanimous in direction but visibly split on strength: seven candidates attached explicit conditions:

safety confirmation, regulatory clearance and local consent. four attached none, and three wrote about nuclear power without indicating which outcome they wanted.

The third measure qualifies the other two. The LDP's perfect directional record rests on 14 of its 285 candidates expressing any position at all, and a party with no dissenters and that few speakers has not demonstrated that its candidates agree. The same applies, less dramatically, to Ishin and the DPFP, whose apparent unanimity rests on 5 and 6 speakers respectively. It applies to the JCP too, in a way that is easy to miss: 53 of its 158 candidates, a third of the party's field, mentioned none of the 45 keywords, even though the party's regional pledge in all 11 blocks was zero nuclear power. Parties may well be content to let their candidates judge for themselves whether the subject is worth the space. The point is that measured discipline is a statement about the candidates who spoke.

CRA's internal spread is the most consequential finding of the three. CRA was formed by the merger of the CDP with Komeito, and one might expect a merged party to show exactly this kind of dispersion in its first election. The 12 moderately opposed manifestos are the only 12 of that kind anywhere in the corpus, all using variants of a single house formula about "a society that does not depend on nuclear power," so the party clearly does have a line. The 6 firm opponents and the one supporter are the deviations from it. However, this is less about CRA absorbing Komeito's influence than the fact that the major centre-left party in Japan since the DPJ-era has always been plagued by ideological infighting. Former PM Noda Yoshihiko comes from the centrist faction and took the main centre-left party into both general elections. This is in contrast to Edano Yukio, who helped create the party in 2017 as an explicitly more left-wing anti-LDP opposition party to the centrist offshoots from the remnants of DPJ. Edano was CDP leader 2017-21 and has remained active post-leadership as a progressive voice in the party. All this is to say that Japan's main centrist/centre-left anti-LDP party has always been a big tent that has divergent views on salient issues

such as nuclear power. Dutch readers might take note of this as we will observe how Progressief Nederland reconciles its intra-party differences on nuclear moving forward.

6.3 What the party manifestos in PR blocks said

Alongside the candidate manifestos, the five parties published party manifestos in the 11 PR blocks: 55 documents written by party headquarters. These are set out in Table X.

Party	Blocks mentioning nuclear power	Position taken	Blocs with no energy terms at all
LDP	1 of 11 (Hokuriku-Shinetsu)	4 Moderately supportive	9
CRA	0 of 11	–	11
Ishin	1 of 11 (Kinki)	5 Firmly supportive	9
DPFP	0 of 11	–	0
JCP	11 of 11	1 Firmly opposed	0

Table X: The five parties' regional block manifestos, 2026, by whether they mention nuclear power (own work)

JCP puts nuclear power in all 11 of its block manifestos, in every case as "zero nuclear power." No other party came close. CRA mentioned nuclear power in none of its eleven. More remarkably, none of its 11 block manifestos contained any of the 45 keywords at all, meaning the party said nothing about energy or climate in any region of the country. The DPFP mentioned energy in all blocks and nuclear power in none. The LDP and Ishin each mentioned nuclear power in exactly one block.

The LDP's single nuclear pledge again appears in Hokuriku-Shinetsu PR block. Ishin's single nuclear pledge appears in Kinki, the PR block containing Osaka, Kyoto and

Kobe. Kinki has no nuclear plant. It consumes the electricity that Fukui generates. Ishin's pledge there is unconditional with no qualifiers: restart the plants.

16 months later, with a far larger governing majority and a prime minister who had made nuclear expansion her own, nothing about the local pattern had changed. Proximity to a nuclear plant still made a candidate more likely to raise the subject and still made it impossible to endorse without attaching a condition.

7. Conclusion

Nuclear power was not a leading issue at either election. Most candidates did not raise it. The finding is what determines which candidates raise it and what they are able to say when they do. Across 1,724 candidate manifestos, both are governed by geography. A nuclear plant in the district roughly doubles the chance that a candidate writes about nuclear power. It makes those who do far more likely to name a specific plant rather than discuss energy policy in the abstract. However, proximity also constrains the content. Across both elections, not one candidate standing in a district that contains a nuclear plant took the unqualified pro-nuclear position, while every candidate who did was standing somewhere with no nuclear plant in it. Support for nuclear power is unconditional only where nothing is at stake. Where something is at stake, it arrives hedged, and the hedge is always the same: safety confirmation, regulatory clearance and "on the premise of local consent."

The party-level evidence completes the picture and points the other way. Each party publishes a manifesto in each of the 11 PR blocks. At both elections the LDP committed itself to nuclear power in exactly 1 of its 11, and at both elections it was the same one: Hokuriku-Shinetsu, the most nuclear-dense region in Japan. Proximity to a nuclear plant is the one thing that makes the party speak and the one thing that makes its candidates hedge. The regional manifesto is written in Tokyo and carries no individual signature; the candidate manifesto is signed by someone who has to represent the district in parliament if they win.

What a Dutch reader should take from this

The electoral system contrast between Japan and the Netherlands was the impetus for this research project. A Dutch MP is elected on a nationwide list and holds no district. No Dutch MP pays a personal electoral price for a position on Borssele or Eemshaven.

The constraint documented in this report therefore does not operate inside the Dutch HoR in the same form. That is not the same as saying it does not exist. Local interests in the Netherlands are carried by provincial and municipal government, which holds formal planning powers that Japanese local government lacks. In July 2024, a GroenLinks provincial deputy in Zuid-Holland opened a two-year study into siting a small modular reactor in the Rotterdam port area, using national money his own party's parliamentarians had voted against (Tiekstra 2024). The gap between a national party line and local conduct is visible in both countries. Japan's distinctive contribution is that it can be counted.

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Appendix: coding scheme and decision rules

This appendix sets out the coding instrument in full.

1. Keyword categories

A manifesto enters the analysis if it contains at least one term from the 14 categories below.

No.	Keyword category
1.	climate change / climate emergency / climate risk
2.	global warming
3.	carbon reduction
4.	pollution
5.	energy (in general)
5a.	nuclear
5b.	fossil fuel
5c.	petroleum (only in the context of producing electricity)
5d.	natural gas
5e.	hydro
5f.	solar
5g.	wind
5h.	hydrogen
5i.	biomass
6.	renewable energy (in general)
7.	energy conservation
8.	carbon capture
9.	dam / floodgate
10.	electricity
11.	electric vehicles

12.	March 2011 earthquake / tsunami / nuclear meltdown
13.	"digital green", or "green" in the context of societal transformation
14.	SDGs

Table XI: Keyword categories recorded from candidate manifestos

2. The three-way sort

Every manifesto is assigned to exactly one of three categories:

1. No mention of energy. The manifesto contains no term from any of the 14 categories.
2. Energy but not nuclear. The manifesto contains at least one term from the list but does not refer to nuclear power (category 5a) or to the 2011 nuclear accident (category 12).
3. Nuclear power. The manifesto refers to nuclear power or to the 2011 accident.

Manifestos in the third category receive one further binary code: whether the candidate names a specific power plant or reactor. A reference to "the nuclear plant in our prefecture" counts as naming a specific plant where only one plant exists in that prefecture; a reference to "nuclear power" in the abstract does not.

3. Position on nuclear power

Manifestos in category (c) — those that mention nuclear power — are placed on a five-point scale of support, with two codes that sit outside the scale. The scale runs from firm opposition to firm support and is applied to the candidate's stated position on nuclear power as a source of electricity.

1. — Firmly opposed. Immediate or urgent cessation. Zero nuclear power, opposition to restarts and to new build, decommissioning, "at the earliest possible date". Example: "Stop the restart of the Shimane and ageing reactors; zero nuclear power."

2. — Moderately opposed. Gradual reduction with no deadline attached. “Aim for a society that does not depend on nuclear power", “in the long term”, “move away from”. Example: “Restore the three verification inquiries and create a prefectural referendum system, advancing towards zero nuclear power.”
3. — Ambiguous. A substantive statement about nuclear power that indicates no direction. Example: a promise to revise evacuation plans for a combined earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident, without expressing a view on restart; or a pledge to “optimise the power mix and nuclear regulation”.
4. — Moderately supportive. Support for restart or continued use, with an explicit reservation stated: safety confirmation, clearance under the new regulatory standards, or local consent. Example: “Reactors whose safety has been confirmed should be restarted, on the premise of local consent.”
5. — Firmly supportive. Support for restart, new build or expanded use with no reservation attached, argued from energy security, electricity prices or self-sufficiency. Example: “We will advance the restart of nuclear power plants and bring your electricity bills down.”
0. — No view expressed. Nuclear terminology appears only in a biographical or career context and the candidate states no position on nuclear power. This code is reported separately throughout and is never averaged into the scale.

F. — Fusion only. The manifesto refers to nuclear fusion and to no aspect of fission power. Fusion generates no electricity in Japan today and commits a candidate to nothing about the reactors currently in dispute, so these are recorded outside the scale rather than as support for nuclear power. Like code 0, they are excluded from means and standard deviations.

Where a manifesto contains statements pointing in different directions, both are recorded and the manifesto is flagged as internally mixed rather than forced into a

single value. Where a manifesto combines a position on fission with a reference to fusion, it is coded on the fission statement and the fusion reference is noted.

Two features of this scale deserve comment. It is a scale of position, not of intensity: a candidate who devotes an entire manifesto to opposing nuclear power and one who includes a single line receive the same code. And the distinction between 4 and 5 rests on the presence or absence of a stated reservation.

4. Terms considered and excluded

The boundaries of the keyword list were fixed before coding began. Three criteria were applied: a direct rather than associative relationship to electricity generation, sufficient specificity to avoid a large volume of irrelevant matches across 1,724 documents and consistent applicability by a single coder.

Natural disaster (in general) — excluded: an extremely common theme in Japanese campaign material with no specific link to electricity generation. Including it would have produced a very large number of false positives.

Petrol tax and petrol price — excluded: transport fuel rather than electricity generation. Both were unusually salient at these two elections as a cost-of-living issue in their own right, which would have made them a poor proxy for energy-policy engagement.

Motorways, extreme or unusual weather, and "the environment" — excluded: too broad to discriminate between candidates who engage with energy policy and candidates who do not.

Gas explosion — excluded: a public safety matter, not an energy-policy statement.

Nuclear weapons and the 1945 atomic bombings — excluded: a question about defence policy rather than about electricity generation.

Electricity price — included: electricity is the product of a nuclear plant, so advocacy on electricity prices is an engagement with generation policy.

Dam and floodgate — included, with reservations: the connection runs through hydroelectric power and is weaker than for the other included terms.

5. Template-language check

For each party at each election, the text of every candidate manifesto is compared with every other manifesto from the same party and election, after removing candidate names, place names and photographs. A party whose candidates all say the same thing about nuclear power may be a party with unusually disciplined and like-minded candidates, or it may be a party whose head office wrote the text. These two possibilities have opposite implications for the second research question. Where a party's manifestos are found to be substantially templated, its apparent cohesion is reported as an artefact of central drafting.

6. Use of automated tools and verification

OCR and sentence extraction for a minority of the 2024 corpus and all of the 2026 corpus were performed with a large language model (LLM). The model was used for two tasks: converting scanned images to Japanese text and returning every sentence containing a term from the keyword list in Table 3. It was not used to summarise manifestos.

7. Classification of districts by the presence of a nuclear plant

This classification uses four categories: reactors in operation, reactors awaiting a restart decision, reactors under construction and reactors covered by a live construction plan that has not been abandoned. Reactors in decommissioning are excluded.

On that basis, from October 2024 to February 2026, 13 single-seat districts contain a non-decommissioning nuclear plant: Hokkaido 4th, Aomori 1st, Miyagi 4th, Ibaraki 5th, Niigata 4th, Ishikawa 3rd, Fukui 2nd, Shizuoka 3rd, Shimane 1st, Ehime 3rd, Yamaguchi 2nd, Saga 2nd and Kagoshima 3rd. Four districts had operating nuclear plants during the 2024 election campaign: Fukui 2nd, Ehime 3rd, Saga 2nd and Kagoshima 3rd. For the 2026 election campaign, in addition to the original four from 2024, two more districts' plants became operating: Miyagi 4th and Shimane 1st.

District boundaries follow the redistricting adopted in November 2022, which took effect at the 2024 election. Reactor status and siting were taken from the Japan Atomic Industrial Forum's status table for February 9th, 2026, cross-checked against the Nuclear Regulation Authority, the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy and the operators' own disclosures. Municipality-to-district assignments were taken from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications redistricting materials and the relevant prefectural and municipal election commissions.