

An Analysis of the Factors Explaining Shigeru Ishiba's Continuity at the Helm of Government

Tokyo, August 22, 2025

Dr. Ritter Diaz, International Consultant

Introduction

This analysis note examines the factors that have enabled Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba to withstand immediate calls for his resignation following the Liberal Democratic Party's loss of its Upper House majority in the July 20 election. Despite his weakened political position, Ishiba has managed to delay internal pressure from both his party and the opposition thanks to a **dense diplomatic agenda, favorable public opinion trends, the delay of the electoral review process, and the practical interests of opposition parties.**

At the same time, Ishiba's involvement in delicate tariff negotiations with the United States — particularly regarding **the implementation of tariffs on Japanese automobile exports and the interpretation of the \$550 billion investment commitment** — underscores the risks that a sudden leadership change would entail. Taken together, these diplomatic, domestic, and institutional buffers explain why Ishiba remains in office despite persistent calls for him to step down and take responsibility for the electoral debacle.

An Intense Diplomatic Agenda

Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba is pursuing an intense diplomatic agenda that allows him to contain and deflect the pressures calling for his resignation. Below are some of the most relevant commitments of Japanese diplomacy:

- Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) (August 20–23) with 50 African leaders.
- Bilateral meeting with South Korean President Lee Jae Myung (August 23).
- Meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (late August).
- Visit of Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni (September, discussions on Ukraine).
- United Nations General Assembly (September 23, New York).
- ASEAN Summit (Malaysia), APEC Summit (South Korea), and G20 Summit (South Africa) in October.
- Quad and Japan–China–South Korea trilateral summits scheduled for late 2025.

This international calendar grants Ishiba a measure of legitimacy to remain in office, arguing that Japan cannot afford a political vacuum during high-level international commitments.

Domestic Factors and the Election Review

a. Public Opinion

- Polls show that most voters do not demand Ishiba's immediate resignation, preferring government stability and continuity to tackle inflation by reducing the gasoline tax and keeping rice prices low.

b. Opposition Strategy

- The Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP), the main opposition party, has not advanced a censure motion, reflecting a moderate stance toward the political crisis.
- Broadly speaking, opposition forces recognize the instability that a sudden resignation could provoke and prefer to wait for the LDP's electoral review before pressing for leadership change.
- Moreover, a weakened Ishiba is functional for the opposition, as it provides greater negotiating leverage in domestic legislation — especially in discussions on reducing the gasoline tax and promoting other social policies and economic reforms.
- For this reason, opposition leaders see it as more advantageous to negotiate with Ishiba than risk facing a successor with a harder political line.

c. The Election Review of the Upper House Defeat

- The LDP's electoral review, now postponed until early September, is a formal process in which party leadership and factions analyze the causes of the electoral defeat.
- This review is politically decisive: it often determines whether a sitting prime minister can continue in office or if leadership change is necessary to restore party confidence.
- Ishiba's immediate fate largely depends on the tone and conclusions of this review. Until it is completed, most party members and opposition figures are refraining from drastic moves, giving him breathing space.

d. LDP Factional Calculations

- Party factions are delaying succession battles until after the electoral review.
- Japan's international commitments provide the LDP with a temporary justification for postponing leadership change.

Economic Factor: Tariff Negotiations with the U.S.

- Ishiba emphasizes his critical role in negotiations with Washington over U.S. tariffs on Japanese automobiles as a reason to remain in office.
- The U.S. has promised to reduce auto tariffs to 15%, but Japan must carefully monitor effective implementation.
- A major sticking point: Japan's \$550 billion investment commitment in the U.S. linked to the deal. Washington claims 90% of that amount will be equity investment; Japan insists

only 1–2% will be equity, with the remainder consisting of government loans and guarantees.

- At present, no written document provides certainty about these negotiations, leaving the agreement fragile and dependent on Trump's wishes and Ishiba's diplomatic maneuvering.
- The prevailing view is that a sudden leadership change could jeopardize Japan's economic interests by undermining this delicate negotiation.

Conclusion

In sum, Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba's continuity is explained by the convergence of several key factors: his active diplomatic agenda, which makes immediate resignation impractical; the relative support of public opinion and the cautious stance of the opposition on the domestic front; and the delay of the LDP's electoral review, which grants him temporary political space. Added to this is the delicate situation of unfinished tariff negotiations with the United States, tied to a major Japanese investment and the politically sensitive automotive sector. Together, these elements strengthen the argument that Japan cannot afford an abrupt leadership change without risking its strategic interests in both economic and political domains.