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Underrepresentation of women in politics in Japan: Continuing the weak voice in parliament

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Abstract: The paper investigates why political representation of women in the Japanese Diet has not progressed as anticipated. Although Womenomics policy has been implemented successfully by the government in recent years in Japan, it has been argued that Womenomics policy does not adequately address other aspects of female representation, including women's political participation. To examine this, the current study, which is based on a qualitative research method, used semi-structured interviews with women MPs from several different political parties in Japan and with academics specializing in women's issues and Japanese politics. Based on these interviews, it was noted that the patriarchal social structure still prevalent in Japan was the main barrier to understanding the significance of women's political representation in Japan, suggesting that there has been no advancement in the representation of women in politics as a result of an inability to appreciate the value of women's involvement in politics. However, an ongoing failure to remove the barriers that prevent women who are interested in politics from taking part in political life from doing so is another reason why women's political representation has not improved in Japan. Component investigation of this can be assessed across three stages. Women's interest in politics is the first of these, as women specifically struggle with issues such as a lack of family and spousal support. In the second stage, the systemic limitations that affect women's political decisions and interests, include the extreme overworking culture in Japan and the lack of female role models in politics must be considered. The male-dominated political system and party structures that effectively prevent women from participating in politics after they have passed the first two stages of entry to the Diet must then be seen as a third set of barriers.

Keywords: Japan, women's representation, politics, electoral system of Japan, Womenomics

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Недостаточная представленность женщин в политике в Японии: сохранение слабости «женского» голоса в парламенте

Х. Эльмаджи

Аннотация. В статье исследуется, почему политическое представительство женщин в японском парламенте не развивалось так, как ожидалось. Несмотря на то, что в последние годы правительство Японии успешно осуществляло политику в области «вименомики», часто можно услышать мнение, что политика «вименомики» не учитывает должным образом другие аспекты представительства женщин, включая участие женщин в политической жизни. Для изучения этого вопроса в настоящей работе, основанной на качественном методе исследования, использовались полуструктурированные интервью с женщинами-депутатами от нескольких различных политических партий в Японии и с учеными, специализирующимися на женской проблематике и японской политике. На основе этих бесед было отмечено, что патриархальная социальная структура, все еще преобладающая в Японии, является главным препятствием для понимания значения политического представительства женщин в Японии, что свидетельствует о том, что никакого прогресса в представленности женщин в политике не было достигнуто ввиду невозможности оценить значимость участия женщин в политике. Вместе с тем неизменные неудачи в устранении препятствий, мешающих интересующимся политикой женщинам принимать участие в ней, является еще одной причиной, по которой политическая представленность женщин в Японии не повысилась. Этот комплексный феномен может быть рассмотрен на трех уровнях. Интерес женщин к политике является первым из них, поскольку женщины сталкиваются с тем, что их семья и супруги не поддерживают их интерес к политической деятельности. На втором этапе – системные ограничения, влияющие на политические решения и интересы женщин, включающие в себя крайнюю степень культуры переработок в Японии и отсутствие в политике женских ролевых моделей для подражания. Политическая система и партийные структуры, в которых доминируют мужчины, фактически препятствующие участию женщин в политической жизни после того, как они прошли первые два этапа и прошли в парламент, должны рассматриваться как третий уровень преград.

Ключевые слова: Япония, представленность женщин, политика, избирательная система Японии, «вименомика» (Womenomics).

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Introduction

Women's studies have been one of the most prominent topics in recent years. Despite considerable political, social, and technological advancements in recent decades, women continue to face gender inequality in most nations worldwide, in some form or another. One of the countries with the highest level of gender disparity is Japan. According to the World Economic Forum's 2017 Global Gender Gap Report, Japan ranked 114th out of 144 nations surveyed regarding economic involvement, educational possibilities, prosperity, and political empowerment, down from 111th in 2016 [Murakami 2017]. While Japan has achieved chiefly gender equality regarding welfare, education, and health care, there is still a significant disparity between men and women regarding labor force participation and political representation [Schwab et al. 2017]. Despite the implementation of a so-called Womenomics program in recent years, aimed at assuring women's involvement in the labor field [Takeda 2018], there is no national policy to boost women's political representation. Japan's acceptance of the UN's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has not had significant impact on political participation of women.



Figure 1: The percentage of seats held by women in Japan's Diet from 1998 to 2021

Source: World bank, 2021

Only 5 percent of Japanese lawmakers were female in 1997, rising to 11 percent in 2009 before falling to 8 percent in 2012 and in 2013, 9 percent in 2015 and 2016, and 10 percent in 2017 and in 2021 (as shown in Figure 1). As can be seen from the figure 1, the proportion of women in politics has climbed slightly in specific years while declining in others [World Bank 2021].

| Rank | Country | |
|------|---------------|-------|
| 1 | Rwanda | 61.3% |
| 2 | Cuba | 53.2% |
| 3 | Bolivia | 53.1% |
| 4 | Mexico | 48.2% |
| 5 | Sweden | 47.3% |
| 13 | Spain | 41.1% |
| 16 | France | 39.7% |
| 30 | Italy | 35.7% |
| 39 | Britain | 32.0% |
| 47 | Germany | 30.9% |
| 62 | Canada | 26.9% |
| 73 | China | 24.9% |
| 78 | United States | 23.5% |
| 121 | South Korea | 17.1% |
| 131 | Russia | 15.8% |
| 136 | Egypt | 14.9% |
| 165 | Japan | 10.2% |

Figure 2: Women in National Parliament (Lower or Single House)
(Members of the G7 are highlighted in yellow)

Source: [Gender imbalance 2020]: Japan's political representation by women lowest in G20 (2020) nippon.com. <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-data/h00409/gender-imbalance-japan%E2%80%99s-political-representation-by-women-lowest-in-g20.html>

In comparison to countries that have secured gender equality in parliament, it is apparent that Japan has made no substantial progress in terms of political representation for women (as shown in Figure 2). Since 1947, when women first began to participate in politics in Japan [Sheel 2003], there has been no significant advancement. While Womenomics policies have been implemented and the government has succeeded in implementing policies aimed at increasing women's participation in the labor force in recent years [Chanlett-Avery & Nelson 2014], I argue that similar success has not been achieved in terms of increasing women's political representation because Womenomics is unable to adequately address these other issues such as political participation of women. Despite these studies, conclusions, and recommendations, women's political representation in Japan has made little progress. The goal of this study is to uncover the causes of the lack of progress of women's representation from the standpoint of politicians and academics.

Literature review

Many scholars have addressed several angles on the topics of women's underrepresentation in politics, and a sound body of literature has emerged as a result of this work. In both national and international comparative studies, several researchers have attempted to analyze the importance of women in politics, the effects of under-representation of women on democracy, the reasons

why women do not take up sufficient space in politics, and the effects of women in politics on developing solutions to women's problems. In this context, Siaroff [2000] compared the number of women in cabinet positions across 28 industrialized, democratic countries, correlating these with the results of their most recent national elections. Siaroff [2000] thus claimed that factors such as cultural-economic aspects, party programs and ideologies, and electoral systems all influence women's representation rates in parliaments. That paper also discussed the "Scandinavian Effect", which examines why women enjoy a higher representation levels in Scandinavian legislatures [Siaroff 2000]. The electoral process is one factor that affects the presence of women in politics, according to Rosen [2017]. Unlike other comparative studies, Rosen [2017] examined women's underrepresentation in politics in both developing and then developed countries at encouraging women's representation, discovering that some developing countries are more successful because of their adherence to national gender quota regulations. Some voting procedures exclude female candidates, while others enable a higher proportion of female candidates to be elected. Election and party quotas control the selection and placement of women on political party candidate lists, and reserved seat quotas secure that female candidates gain a certain number of seats in the legislature. Because they have control over the actual distribution of parliamentary seats, reserved seat quotas guarantee women's representation in a way that elections and party quotas do not [Rosen, 2017].

Rule [1987] noted that the party list-proportional system is a woman-friendly system used in countries divided into those with political means and those with political conditions. Additional evidence also suggests that boosting women's presence in politics can help women's issues be more effectively defended and advanced in parliament [Rule 1987], while, according to Wangnerud [2009], there is a relationship between rising female representation and effective representation in parliament. A rise of the women's number in parliament naturally widens women's political arenas, and female politicians may be assumed to support women's interests in politics, thus working to improve women's positions.

Other researchers believe that there is also a link between women's political representation and their engagement in the labor force. Female labor force participation, according to Togeby [2011], has both political and social implications. According to traditional political science, women's perspectives are less integrated into political life, due to a lack of interest and participation in politics created by conservative, moral, and authoritarian approaches, and a lack of post-materialist values and political interactions with the men in their lives, particularly their fathers and husbands. These conservative approaches are rife with prejudice and intolerance, and female political behavior should not be characterized basing on such assumptions, however: instead, women's political participation can be expected to increase as their social and economic status changes and, importantly, improves [Togeby 1994].

In the context of the global investigation of politics and gender, examination of the women's representation in politics has been identified as a crucial issue that many researchers have sought to explore and evaluate [Eto 2010]. Interestingly, Japan has not participated in this academic arena, despite contributions from most other globally developed countries, and the absence of a Japanese feminist political science perspective from which to address the issue of women's representation or link it to broader global discussions is a clear deficiency [Eto 2010]. Nevertheless, since the 1980s, there have been some attempts to determine the factors that have led to the underrepresented status of women in politics in Japan, notwithstanding the small number of women who have been elected to office there, and a number of relevant factors have emerged in the existing literature.

Eto [2010] examined how all of the factors noted earlier in this chapter have a serious impact on the underrepresentation of Japanese women, identifying the biggest barrier, however, as women's resistance to having a larger political presence, a position supported by social norms

and political culture in Japan. According to Eto [2010], the foundation for improving women's underrepresentation must thus be the development of strong female voices advocating for additional women's representation. She also contends that even though additional relevant variables such as social policy and women's movements have not previously gotten much consideration, these should also be addressed, because woman-friendly social policy is essential to encourage women to participate in public activities to guarantee that they can combine their designated gender roles with their activities outside of the home [Siim 2000]. The Japanese campaign system, which is candidate-centered [Miura 2018], has also been identified as an obstacle to women's participation, alongside the election system in the country more generally. The high cost of running for Diet seats in elections has frequently been highlighted as one of the main obstacles for women who want to serve in the Diet [Dalton 2015]. Socio-political structure is also commonly referred to in earlier research as a factor influencing the presence of women in politics in Japan. According to Eto [2010], for many years, women themselves, political parties, and the public in general, all typically believed that politics was men's business, due to Japan's male-dominated political landscape, and it was not until the 1980s that the Japanese public first began to realize the significant role of women's participation in politics. Similarly, Dalton [2015] noted that the paucity of women in politics in Japan is mainly due to Japanese society being controlled by men, so that women are generally uninterested in politics, seeing no place there for them. Dalton [2015] also claimed that Japanese political parties are sexist institutions that reinforce this male-dominated political system.

In another work, Dalton [2020] explores the situation in Japan, provides a succinct history of women's involvement in politics, investigates the reasons for the persistent gender discrepancy in Japan's political representation and categorizes the institutional and cultural obstacles to full political engagement for women into two categories. The election system is one of the most notable instances of institutional impediments.

Women's under-representation in politics, gender quota procedures, and the relationship between democracy and women's representation, both in Japanese politics and globally, have all been studied extensively in the literature. By doing this, such studies have attempted both to address why there are so few women in parliament and to determine the reasons for this under-representation. As most previous studies focused on historical periods prior to 2012, however, unlike past studies, this study concentrates on current process, particularly following the implementation of the Womenomics policy in 2012.

Methodology and time frame

This study adopted a qualitative approach utilizing two different types of data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with female politicians in Japan's Diet and associated experts, in order to develop a better understanding of the unique experiences and obstacles that women politicians from various political parties encounter in Japan. These interviews, which featured four female politicians working as representatives in the Japanese Diet, as well as two experts with a special interest in issues of gender and women in politics (see Table 1), were done in October, November, and December 2018. The four parliamentarians were from Komeito, a center-right party; the Japanese Communist Party, which had the highest rate of female members in the Diet ¹at the time; the Democratic Party for the People, a right-wing party; and the Constitutional Democrat Party of Japan, a center-left party [Gender imbalance 2020]. As an additional source of data, newspapers, official publications, and specialized journals were used to acquire secondary information.

¹ The female lawmaker rate is 25,00% (lower house) and 35,7% (upper house) (as of March 1, 2019) [Gender imbalance 2020].

Table 1: The Participant Details of the Interviews

| Interviewee Number | Sex | Affiliation | Occupation |
|--------------------|--------|---|-----------------|
| 1 | Female | Constitutional Democratic Party (Rikken Minshu-to) | Parliamentarian |
| 2 | Female | Democratic Party for the People (Kokumin Minshu-to) | Parliamentarian |
| 3 | Female | Japanese Communist Party (Nihon Kyōsan-tō) | Parliamentarian |
| 4 | Female | Komei Party (Komeito) | Parliamentarian |
| 5 | Female | Hosei University | Academic |
| 6 | Male | Temple University Japan | Academic |

This study spans the period from 1980 to 2021. The year 1980 was chosen as the starting point, as this was the year Japan joined the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) [Hayashi 2013], which includes an item advocating for the equal opportunity for women to engage in politics [Liu & Boyle 2001]. Nevertheless, this research is mainly focused on the process after 2012, as this was the point at which the Womenomics policy was implemented, and thus the point at which women increasingly began joining the workforce [Chanlett-Avery & Nelson 2014].

Theoretical framework

Socioeconomic factors and patriarchy

The starting point for this piece is the study of women, as carried out in tandem with research into feminist theories and studies. Based on this approach, women's attitudes toward certain occupations are not fixed by biological characteristics, instead being stereotyped by social expectations that people will assume the cultural roles enforced upon them [Mikkola 2008]. The feminist movement, which was founded on the belief that women and men should have equal opportunities and rights, is commonly divided into three schools. The first of these is liberal feminism, which contends that women are commonly forced into inferior positions to males in terms of fundamental rights and freedoms, including citizenship and equal opportunities, and that their status should be made equal to men's [Dikici 2016; Tong 2018]. Liberal feminists say that it is this social disparity that limits women to the home, often defined as the "private" or "reproductive" environment, which then becomes a trap, limiting their options. Women thus remain condemned to inferior status in society as a result of ongoing restrictions and limitations. As a result, liberal feminists argue that women, even those confined in this "private domain," should be granted the same rights as men, including access to education, employment, and politics. However, the political implications of this idea have prevented many women from breaking free from their traditional positions [Tong 2018].

While liberal feminism seeks to achieve gender equality in the public sphere through the application of laws and regulations, radical feminists believe that the private sphere, where the patriarchy wields the most power and which is far more difficult to observe and govern, lies at the heart of feminist politics. The universality of patriarchy is the major argument raised by radical feminists, who note that the patriarchal structure of society discriminates against women regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or class. While Marxist and Socialist feminist ideas also employ similar

rhetoric about the oppression of women, there are differences between their concepts. Marxist feminists interpret women's oppression as being a result of economic oppression, rooted in worker abuse: they thus dispute radical feminism's claims that all women in all societies are crushed to the same degree, noting that while women may face common problems and experiences, such as sexual harassment and rape, their reactions tend to vary from society to society. Marxist theory, according to these socialist feminists, explains the economic exploitation of women while failing to focus on female oppression, which is caused by the patriarchal capitalist system. Socialist feminists note that even women who work for the government in the same position as men are also obliged to labor in the private sector, caring for children or doing housework, and that this dual work structure is imposed on women by the patriarchal structure [Dikici 2016; Güneş 2017].

Representation: descriptive and substantive

Based on a belief that women have distinct political objectives and behaviors to men, and hence constitute a separate political group, the necessity of women's representation becomes readily apparent. The theory of the politics of presence, which is this work's other theoretical framework, supports this, being predicated on the existence of a relationship between descriptive representation, that is, the number of women present in a political organization, and substantive representation, which specifies the effect those women have by being there. This suggests that women must achieve a specific proportional representation in order to actively participate in the political process in Japan, as they represent a distinct group identity in terms of their shared experiences with respect to issues such as child care, abortion access, and labor force participation. Based on this, gender disparities may still limit how far equality may progress in society, but equal political participation must be acknowledged as critical to progressing as far as possible down the road to equality [Lovenduski & Norris 2003; Mansbridge 1999; Wängnerud, 2009].

Critical mass

The inextricable link between representation and democracy is one of the most contentious topics surrounding women's representation. However, based on the equality principle and the need for effective engagement of women in politics, increasing the rate of female representation in politics is critical [Dahlerup 2006]. To make significant changes in the political decision-making process, women must achieve a critical mass, not only with respect to the number of women in parliament, but also in terms of effective involvement in political decision-making [Dahlerup 2006]. According to studies, the crucial ratio is at least 30%. When the proportion of female politicians reaches at least 30%, women can meaningfully participate in the political decision-making process; anything less than 30% representation means that women are confined to only a symbolic presence. In order to achieve this critical mass ratio and to include women in political life, several countries now use quota applications, and in Japan, at least 30% of the Diet members must be women in order to allow them to play an effective and substantive role [Dahlerup 2006]. Increased female political presence is a crucial step in addressing women's issues, based on the beneficial impact of substantive representation. Other research has also revealed that female candidates are more effective in dealing with women's concerns in parliament because they benefit from having similar experiences and are thus more sensitive to women's needs than male candidates [Mansbridge 1999]. This strongly suggests that more women should be engaged in political decision-making, and, more specifically, requires women to achieve a critical mass of representation in order to actively participate in the legislative process [Dahlerup 2006]. In this setting, women in Japan must reach a certain number in order to participate equally in politics and decision-making processes.

Findings and results

It was observed that the primary obstacle to comprehending the significance of women's political representation in Japan was the patriarchal social structure still present today, implying that there has not been any advancement in the representation of women in politics as a result of an inability to recognize the importance of women's involvement in politics. However, another reason women's political presence in Japan has not increased is the continued inability to eliminate the factors restricting politically minded women from participating in political life.

Factors leading to underrepresentation of women in Japanese politics

The sphere of politics is one of the many sectors that has contributed to Japan's ongoing and extensive gender disparity. Women in Japan received the right to vote at the same time as women in Norway and Sweden; however, since that time, Japan has significantly fallen behind these countries in terms of political representation for women.

Many variables in politics contribute to women's underrepresentation and failure to achieve the necessary degree of advancement. This section thus examines some of the reasons for the current state of stagnation.

The following questions were asked during the interviews with female politicians:

1) How did you get involved in politics?

2) It appears that running for office in Japan necessitates a significant quantity of financial resources.

How did you deal with this during your (first) run for office?

3) What kind of challenges have you faced in your political career as a woman?

4) Is the ratio of women politicians in Japan at the intended level, or is the rate of female representation in parliament still insufficient? What is the reason for this?

5) What factors have contributed to women's underrepresentation in politics in Japan?

6) Does your political party have a plan, project, or proposal to increase the number of female members of parliament?

The percentage of female representatives in politics was not at the required level according to all participants, with the optimum ratio of women in politics being most commonly set at 50%. However, due to the difficulty of achieving this ratio, all participants also agreed that women should account for at least 30% of the total, to promote diversity in parliament and to ensure that women are not a minority group with a purely symbolic presence. Part of the reason why few women participate in the Japanese legislative process has to do with "supply" and "demand": there are few women willing to enter politics, while public demand for female legislators is low. The fundamental causes of women's relative insignificance in politics are often defined as the social roles and behaviors demanded by society [Krook 2010], and this demand dimension was identified as the most crucial factor impeding their progress by all female MPs who took part in these interviews. Women in Japan, they claim, often have no political ambitions, and thus find it difficult to be politically motivated. On being asked how they personally became engaged in politics, only one said she became involved on her own initiative; all of the others had been invited by their parties to represent them. The biographies of two of the participants who got their start in politics in this way are thus offered below.

A representative from Komeito Party stated that;

"I was consulting with a private company before I became actively involved in politics. I received offers from my party because of my success in my work, and my political life began."

A representative from Constitutional Democratic Party stated that;

"I had an interest in politics at the local level. After adopting the law on gender equality, I received offers from my party, which I accepted."

1.1. Inadequate family support

Regarding family support, all women participants said their families had negative attitudes toward women becoming politicians. They added that there is a widespread belief that women cannot continue to serve as politicians while caring for their children. It indicates a clear correlation between gender attitudes in politics and sentiments in Japanese society.

The following is how the participants described the situation:

A representative from Democratic Party for People stated:

“When women deal with politics, they are afraid they cannot balance the family and their political life. Also, their spouse and their spouse’s families do not want them to be politicians.”

Some participants also shared personal examples, claiming that the family factor had a preventative effect on women.

A representative from Constitutional Democratic Party stated that:

“When I was first invited to enter politics, my family was very much opposed to the idea. Over time, however, I have made them comfortable with the idea that.”

Women’s loss of enthusiasm for politics can be attributed to their lack of political desires. Though most women would prefer not to participate in politics individually, several institutional and systemic barriers prevent them from doing so, as previously mentioned. There is a link between women’s political representation and the lack of gender equality at the income level. Being a politician necessitates a lot of campaigning and promotion, which necessitates much money. However, the wage disparity between men and women and the fact that women rarely reach the upper levels of corporations hurts women economically, stifling any political ambitions. Indeed, having a wealthy and well-known family appears to be a must for women to enter politics, as any political campaign will require significant financial assistance [Cigane & Ohman 2014].

1.2. Long working hours make it difficult to strike a work-life balance

Lengthy working hours have been linked to gender inequality in previous studies, with long working hours exacerbating the power and status gap between men and women at work. Long-hours culture tends to limit women’s professional options and contributes to general gender inequality and the gender pay gap. Women have difficulty reconciling their professional obligations with domestic responsibilities, such as housekeeping and child care [Nemoto 2013]. Following WWII, Japan witnessed fast economic expansion, and the Japanese have become known around the world for their great work ethic. In today’s society, diligence and discipline, as well as the practice of working long hours, are highly appreciated ideas.

However, these beliefs, as admirable as they may appear, have very serious social implications. Long-hours stress causes substantial physical and psychological problems in workers, which can lead to *karoshi*, or “overwork death” in extreme cases [Weller 2017]. Women, too, suffer from extended working hours, as they struggle to match a demanding work environment with family life and child care, and are frequently compelled to pick one over the other. After having children, many women quit their jobs and became housewives [Holloway 2010]. Working hours are seen as a major issue and stumbling block for women who want to be politicians. The participants all stated that their work hours were excessively long.

Representative from Democratic Party for People stated:

“You know that in Japan there are long shifts in all working areas. In politics, this is one of the long-term business areas. But this can sometimes create difficulties for women. You know that women have special periods each month and during this period we can have a lot of pain. I had to attend long-term meetings when I was new to politics, and I had one of these special periods and I had a lot of pain. All my colleagues were male around me, and I couldn’t explain my situation. I had a hard time.”

Representative from Constitutional Democratic Party stated:

"I have a little child. Especially in the summer, I have difficulty in balancing my responsibilities around child care and my job. There are festivals in almost every part of Japan. In my electoral district, there is a festival on the local level every day and these festivals continue until late at night. I leave my child at home and join these festivals every day until late. If I don't join, there is a perception in my constituency that I don't care about them. I don't have time for my child and he needs me. I find it difficult to balance home and work."

1.3. The absence of female role models in politics

Some researchers are strong proponents of increasing the number of female politicians in Japan, claiming that by doing so, unfavorable stereotypes about women in politics will be challenged and dissipated, and a more positive attitude will emerge. It is also believed that successful female politicians may promote the interest in politics among young women. Furthermore, the existence of women in politics may alter the perception that women are unsuitable for politics [Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007]. In the context of Japan, some participants claimed that a lack of successful role models is one of the reasons why women are uninterested in politics, based on their own experiences. They also remarked that their presence inspires fresh female candidates for political office.

Representative from Democratic Party for People explained this situation as follows;

"When I first started in politics, a group engaged in agriculture in my constituency had prejudiced me because I was a woman, and there was no female politician to whom I could turn as a role model. But thanks to my work in this process, the prejudices stemming from being a woman against me have changed and positive thoughts about female politicians have emerged. We will have a female candidate at the age of 34 in the upcoming elections. There is no bias against her because during the 8 years I've been working, I have changed this prejudice."

According to the representatives' statements, the lack of women politicians who can act as role models creates a vicious circle regarding women's political presence. At this stage, boosting the number of women in politics through policies such as gender quotas will provide an adequate atmosphere for the next generation of female politicians.

1.4. Political party structure and ideology

Political parties are one of the fundamental aspects that determine the candidates submitted for election in many kinds of politics, hence shaping a country's political agenda [Ballington, Davis, Reith, Mitchell, Njoki, Kozma, and Powley 2012]. Women's active engagement in legislative processes for gender equality and agenda can be ensured in this context by women holding significant roles in political parties [Caul 2001]. The Japanese political structure, particularly the organization of its political parties, is one of the elements influencing active involvement of women in politics. From the perspective of female politicians in Japan, the first element impacting parties is their ideological structures. The Liberal Democratic Party and the Komeito Party, which are currently in power in Japan, have conservative structures and represent relatively right-wing views, whereas the Constitutional Democrat Party and the Japanese Communist Party, which are currently not in power in Japan, represent more left-wing views [Dalton, 2015].

According to various studies, the majority of women elected in Europe and North America have come from political parties with leftist or centrist ideology. In Japan, political parties' views on women vary according to ideology, and these views are similar to those seen in many other nations in Europe and North America, where more conservative parties appear to take a position that is less supportive of gender equality [Lovenduski & Norris 2003]. The situation in Japan is similar, and the Liberal Democratic Party, which has been controlled for many years in Japan, has a lot of anti-gender rhetoric [Eto, 2016]. While increasing the number of women in politics is vital to assure women's participation in political decision-making, descriptive representation does not guarantee substantive

representation [Mansbridge 1999]. Parties' ideological approaches become even more crucial at this point. A political representative of the Japanese Communist Party explained how political parties' ideological approaches influence women's perspectives:

*"The increase in the number of women representatives in the Japanese political system may not be a remedy for the effective representation of women in parliament and the solution of women's problems. What is important here is the increase in the number of female representatives of the party. For example, according to the political representatives of the Liberal Democratic Party, the regulation should continue to be enforced based on the necessity for women to use their surnames after marriage. According to this party, this is not a problem."*²

Nevertheless, some study has found that conservative female politicians may help find answers to women's issues and that conservative female politicians are more sympathetic to women's problems than conservative male politicians [Campbell, Childs, & Lovenduski 2010]. According to the interviewees, women understand each other because they share comparable daily experiences. As a result, female politicians may be more effective than male politicians in addressing women's issues. However, it is impossible to be influential in politics without achieving a critical mass, and female politicians' techniques and rhetoric during political discussions differ from those of male politicians.

The scenario was described by a representative from Constitutional Democratic Party as follows:

"The political approaches of female politicians are different from male politicians. Female politicians have less partisan tendencies than male politicians. I think that with the increase in the number of female politicians in the parliament, a more cooperative political environment can be created that the dominant competitive discourse in politics will change."

A patriarchal social order exists in every area, and it is most visible in political parties. However, the overall environment precludes women from participating in practice politics, and their presence in politics is often limited to a symbolic level due to the male-dominated political system [Dalton 2015; Eto, 2010]. Political parties should be aware of the need to support female candidates to gain female voters.

According to a Komei Party political representative, the situation is as follows:

"My political life started upon the proposal from my party, and I had no difficulty in the process of being elected as a representative. However, male politicians do not allow female politicians to make high-level politics; even if women are elected, they cannot progress in their political careers."

According to the theory of presence, political representatives' approaches and priorities toward women and men on problems alter depending on their interests. A rise in the proportion of women in parliament is mirrored in corporate culture, political expression, and political goals in this setting [Dahlerup 1988 cited in Dahlerup 2006; Norris & Lovenduski 2003]. Our idea was paralleled in the discourses of all participants in this study. According to all of the political figures interviewed, Japan's male-dominated and competitive political atmosphere will likely evolve into one that allows for more significant compromise as women's representation in parliament increases.

According to Norris and Lovenduski [2003], a small minority group can only be symbolic; it is influenced by the mainstream group and must conform to it. In this context, due to the low number of women in the Japanese Diet, they are a minority and must follow the rules set by the men in their party.

² The politician tried to explain the effectiveness of political parties' ideologies in addressing issues affecting women. However, it is worth noting that politicians from the Liberal Democratic Party tend to hold conservative views, including a more traditional approach to gender roles and women's rights. Therefore, for them, the right of women to choose their surname poses an issue, as it challenges the traditional notion of the male surname as a family name. This perspective is consistent with the party's overall conservative stance on social issues.

1.5. Electoral systems

A country's electoral system is a key structural variable that both affects the need for female candidates in politics and influences women's representation in politics [Lovenduski & Norris 2003; Paxton, Kunovich, & Hughes 2007; Rosen 2013; Siaroff 2000], and Japan is no exception [Eto 2010; Miura 2018]. The existing literature highlights a number of factors relevant to this influence, with one of the primary causes of the underrepresentation of women in politics in Japan being identified as the electoral system there [Iwanaga 2008]. In Japanese political system, members are chosen to serve in the Diet, national parliament in Japan. The Diet consists of an upper house (the House of Councilors) and a lower house (the House of Representatives). The lower house is the most powerful of the two [Fahey 2009].

The electoral system used in Japan is a mixed one that combines single-member districts with proportional representation [Okura 2021]. Voters in Japan's mixed system cast two ballots: one for a candidate for a single member district (SMD) and the other for a political party in one of 11 districts with proportional representation (PR). Under this system, 295 candidates (or about 62% of the total 475 Lower House members) are elected from SMD areas, and 180 candidates (or about 38% of the total 475 Lower House members) are selected from PR blocs. The results of SMD elections have a greater impact on the overall result due to the higher percentage of SMD seats [Kubo & Lee 2017].

The first-past-the-post (FPTP) voting method is used for the SMD elections. According to this regulation, there is only one round of voting in an election, and the district's most popular vote-getter is declared the district's sole representative. A candidate must make sure that all of his or her opponents fall short in order to win the lone seat in the district [Salmond 2006]. The House of Representatives in Japan uses the majoritarian voting system known as first-past-the-post (FPTP) and the greater importance of FPTP in House of Representatives offers considerable barriers for women [Miura, 2018] because in this system, a candidate is chosen to represent a single-member constituency in the legislature by receiving the most votes in that constituency. Because of these factors, SMD elections are contested and challenging to win. In addition, a candidate's capacity to win votes is a key factor in determining his or her chances of winning in SMD elections, when each district voter casts a ballot for a single candidate. Candidates who have established a strong voter base in their districts (usually incumbents) typically have an advantage and access to resources needed to win an election, such as recognition among voters and an electoral fund, while female candidates seldom possess these advantages in Japan [Kubo & Lee 2017; Martin 2008].

The Japanese election system, according to all interviewees, is thus one of the variables limiting the current ratio of female representatives, an opinion expressed by the political representative from the Komeito Party as follows:

"General elections to the House of Representatives are the only way and a difficult way for those who want to embark on politics on their own. It is especially harder for women."

Results

Women's participation in all parts of life, including economics and politics, is critical not only for promoting human rights but also for promoting sustainable development based on equality [Ballington et al., 2012]. However, in countries where the patriarchal social order is still outwardly dominant, women's inferior social, political, and economic conditions remain stubbornly entrenched. Despite the fact that most women currently prefer not to engage in politics on an individual basis, there are a number of institutional and systemic hurdles that hinder them from doing so in Japan even where they would otherwise make that choice. Women's political underrepresentation and the absence of gender equality in terms of income levels are closely related [Cigane & Ohman 2014]. Significant levels of campaigning and self-promotion are required to become a politician, which costs a lot of

money, and the wage gap between men and women, as well as the reality that few women work at the highest levels of corporations, means that, economically, women's conditions automatically stifle any aspirations for political office [Cigane & Ohman 2014]. As any political campaign requires major financial support, it is thus necessary for women to come from wealthy and well-known families if they want to enter politics [Cigane & Ohman 2014].

However, as political representatives must act as legislators, the presence of women in politics and their active participation in decision-making processes has the potential to bring about top-down change; any increase in the number of female political representatives means that women's active participation in politics would be better ensured, allowing women's issues to take their rightful place in politics and potentially improving economic, political, and social cohesion in Japan [Mansbridge 1999; Wängnerud 2009]. Women's participation in the Diet would enable a larger share of the agenda to be allocated to women's issues, according to the interviewees in this work. They claimed, however, that this was not currently possible due to the fact that female legislators are in the minority, forcing them to adhere to the current male-dominated political framework. According to Dahlerup [2006], increasing women's participation in politics will enhance women socially while also allowing political ideas and goals to be changed. This is where the notion that women can best represent women in politics comes from. according to Philips [1998], as childrearing, work and education, workforce involvement, sexual harassment, and violence all affect men and women differently. Female politicians are perceived to be in similar situations to their female counterparts, facing similar concerns and issues, which makes them arguably better qualified to deal with these issues than male politicians. Women in positions of power are thus assumed to encounter identical experiences and obstacles to women in other sectors of society [Phillips 1998]. Female representatives should thus be chosen to represent female voters, according to the interviewed representatives, as women representatives and women in other parts of society share similar experiences and difficulties, and women political representatives thus understand women's problems better than men.

Discussion

This paper investigated the reasons why equal representation of women in politics in Japan has not yet been achieved. In this context, interviews with Japanese women politicians and academics with expertise in Japanese politics were conducted, which made it clear that the lack of consideration for the significance of women in politics and a failure to address the reasons contributing to women's lack of involvement in politics were the main reasons why women in Japan are not represented in politics at the desired and necessary level. It was suggested that women in Japan who are interested in politics must go through a three-step process, with several distinct deterrents arising at each stage. In the first stage, personal reasons, such as inadequate support from family and spouses, have a significant impact, while in the second stage, systemic elements such as the long work hours prevalent in Japanese culture also have an impact on women's participation in politics. Due to the existing party structures and the male-dominated political system, however, even female politicians who has successfully completed the first two stages remain constrained in the third stage. To sum up, low female representation in politics is clearly due to a lack of political aspirations, as well as an absence of family and state support, a lack of female role models, long working hours, difficulties sustaining a positive balance between work and life, patriarchal constructions, the voting system, party ideologies, and the widespread discrimination against women in the workplace that still exists in modern-day Japan.

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