RIETI Discussion Paper Series 22-E-113

Voters' Perceptions and Evaluations of Dynastic Politics in Japan

MIWA, Hirofumi
Gakushuin University

KASUYA, Yuko
Keio University

ONO, Yoshikuni
RIETI

The Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry
https://www.rieti.go.jp/en/

RIETI Discussion Paper Series 22-E-113
December 2022

Voters' perceptions and evaluations of dynastic politics in Japan*

Hirofumi MIWA
Gakushuin University

Yuko KASUYA
Keio University

Yoshikuni ONO
Waseda University
Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry

Abstract

Political family dynasties are a staple part of Japanese politics. According to one study, Japan has the fourth highest number of dynastic politicians among democratic countries, after Thailand, the Philippines, and Iceland. As a result, many scholars have qualitatively studied how these political families are born and managed. In contrast to the abundance of qualitative research, however, very little quantitative research has focused on how Japanese voters view political dynasties. To understand this question, we conducted two nationwide surveys. Our major findings are that while the majority of respondents dislike dynastic candidates, they also value specific attributes of dynastic candidates, such as their political networks, their potential for ministerial appointments, and their ability to bring "pork projects" to their constituencies. These results serve as benchmark information on dynastic politics in Japan. They are also distinct from the findings of existing studies that Japanese voters are neutral about whether a candidate is from a dynastic family in voting decisions.

Keywords: Japan, political representation, conjoint experiments, legacy candidates
JEL classification: D72, D73, D91

The RIETI Discussion Paper Series aims at widely disseminating research results in the form of professional papers, with the goal of stimulating lively discussion. The views expressed in the papers are solely those of the author(s), and neither represent those of the organization(s) to which the author(s) belong(s) nor the Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry.

This study is conducted as a part of the Project "Advanced Technology and Democracy: Does new technology help or hurt democracy?" undertaken at the Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry (RIETI). The authors are grateful for helpful comments and suggestions by Discussion Paper seminar participants at RIETI.

Introduction

The prevalence of *seshu* politicians—those who belong to political family dynasties—is allegedly one of the root causes of the dysfunction of Japanese politics. Former Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga (who served from 2020 to 2021), known as a self-made politician, wrote public commentaries in 2009 arguing that "*seshu* politics should be dismantled" (Suga 2009a); otherwise, Japanese politics is considered doomed and his party Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) "will be dead" (Suga 2009b). In his view, family dynasties impede healthy political competition and the entry of new talent into politics, precluding the ruling party from implementing reforms because *seshu* politicians represent entrenched interests. Pundits and journalists have repeatedly made similar diagnoses, starting around the 1970s up until today.[1] Some also argue that *seshu* politics violate democratic norms; in a democracy, every person should presumably have an equal opportunity to hold elective office, such that elected positions should not be "inherited" from a family (Ichikawa 1990; Matsuzaki 1991; Smith 2018).

Despite the calls to eliminate family dynasties, both for practical and normative reasons, they continue to be pervasive. In a cross-national comparison, Japan ranks number four of the world's dynastic political systems after Thailand, the Philippines, and Iceland (Smith 2018, 5). In the most recent House of Representatives (HoR) election held in 2021, about 30% of LDP candidates belonged to a family dynasty (Jiji Press 2021).[2] Against this backdrop, many scholars have studied political dynasties in Japan, focusing on various aspects such as their demographic attributes, electoral performance, and policy consequences (reviewed below). However, the voters' views toward dynastic politicians represent a notable gap in this literature. How do citizens perceive dynastic politicians? Do they prefer dynastic candidates over nondynastic politicians? Addressing these questions is an essential but missing piece of the scholarship on *seshu* politics.

We conducted two nationwide online surveys to understand how Japanese voters evaluate dynastic politicians. Our main finding is that, on average, Japanese voters negatively assess *seshu* politicians. At the same time, voters also value specific attributes of dynastic candidates, such as their political networks, their potential for ministerial appointments, and their ability to bring pork projects to their constituencies. These results serve as the benchmark information on dynastic politics in Japan. They

[1] Journalistic coverage of dynastic politics became noticeable starting with the 1973 HoR election, when approximately one third of the candidates were legacy candidates, which was widely reported in the media (Aoki 1979; Nakado 1976).

[2] This news article defines *seshu* candidates as those who have a father/mother, father/mother-in-law, or grandfather/mother who served as a Diet member or those who inherited their district from a relative in the third degree of kinship who served as a Diet member.

are also distinct from the findings of existing studies that Japanese voters are neutral about whether a candidate is from a dynastic family in voting decisions (Horiuchi et al. 2020; Smith 2018).

In the following, we first review existing research on Japanese dynastic politics and highlight the importance of studying voters' views of dynastic politicians, which is the focus of this article.[3] We then report and discuss the results of two surveys conducted on Japanese voters. The first examines how voters perceive the presence of dynastic politicians in politics and the stereotypes they hold about them. The second survey, using conjoint analysis, probes the extent to which Japanese voters favor dynastic politicians. We conclude by discussing the implications of our findings for Japanese democracy.

What Do We Know About Japan's Dynastic Politics?

Two terms often appear in the Japanese language literature on dynastic politics—politics characterized by the involvement of families who have more than a single member holding elective office. The first is *seshu*, which literarily translates as generational inheritance or hereditary, referring to candidates, MPs, and politics in general. The second term is *nisei*. This term means the second generation, which is usually attached to a person (candidate or MP) but does not characterize politics as *seshu*. Unfortunately, probably because these two terms are part of the Japanese vernacular and used in various contexts, there does not appear to be a consensus among scholars writing in Japanese about the definition of these terms.[4]

Smith (2018, 4), which provides one of the most thorough studies of Japan's dynastic politics, offers the following definitions:

> [A] *legacy candidate* is defined as any candidate for national office who is related by blood or marriage to a politician who had previously served in the national legislative or executive office of any family that has supplied two or more members to national-level political office (presidency or cabinet). If a legacy candidate is elected, he or she becomes a *legacy MP* and creates a *democratic dynasty*, which is defined as any family that has supplied two or more members to national-level political office.

Smith (2018, 21) also defines a subset of the legacy candidate as heritage candidates as follows:

[3] For a good review of the comparative literature on dynastic politics, see Smith (2018).
[4] For the various definitions of *seshu* and/or *nisei*, see Taniguchi (2008, 80, fn. 80).

> [A] candidate who immediately succeeds a family member in the same district after inheriting a jiban [personal support base], and its kōenkai [personal support] organization can be defined as a *hereditary candidate*.

In this article, we follow Smith's definition of legacy politicians and use the term interchangeably with the Japanese language equivalent *seshu*. However, we avoid using hereditary candidate/MP, because doing so might cause confusion. "Hereditary" literarily means *seshu* in Japanese. If one translates this terminology into Japanese, legacy and hereditary candidates are both *seshu* candidates.[5]

To clarify this semantic convolution, we provide below a six-fold classification of dynastic politicians using the Reed-Smith Japanese HoR Elections Dataset (Smith and Reed 2017), on which Smith's study is also based.[6]

- Type 1: the politician is related by blood or marriage (e.g., child, grandchild, sibling, spouse, son-in-law, or other such close relatives) to a politician who had previously served in the national legislature (either chamber), or executive (cabinet), regardless of district, or continuity;
- Type 2: being Type 1 and his/her nearest family predecessor is either father, mother, in-laws, or adoptive father/mother;[7]
- Type 3: being Type 1 and his/her nearest family predecessor is either father or mother;
- Type 4: the candidate directly succeeded his or her relative in the same district;
- Type 5: being Type 4 and his/her nearest family predecessor is either father, mother, in-laws, or adoptive father/mother; and
- Type 6: being Type 4 and his/her nearest family predecessor is either father or mother.

Following Smith's definitions, Type 1 is a legacy candidate/MP, which squares nicely with the Japanese term *seshu* in a broad sense. However, Smith's definition of "hereditary" refers to Type 4 politicians in our classification. A native Japanese speaker may call them *seshu*, but no Japanese equivalent distinguishes the Type 1 and Type 4 politicians. For this reason, we only use the term

---

[5] For example, Taniguchi (2008) employs the term "hereditary" to refer to what Smith defines as "legacy" politicians.

[6] They correspond to the Reed-Smith database's variables as follows: Type 1: PRE MP = 1, Type 2: PRE MP = 1 and PREDRELATION = 1*,* 2*,* 6*,* or 7, Type 3: PRE MP = 1 and PREDRELATION = 1 or 6, Type 4: SESHU = 1, Type 5: SESHU = 1 and PREDRELATION = 1*,* 2*,* 6*,* or 7, and Type 6: SESHU = 1 and PREDRELATION = 1 or 6.

[7] The Reed-Smith codebook does not specify if "nearest family predecessor" is a member of the Diet; thus, this term may include politicians at other levels.

legacy, but not hereditary candidate/MP, in this article.

Our classification also helps clarify the difference between the Japanese terms commonly used in this literature—*seshu* and *nisei*. As mentioned above, the latter's direct translation is second-generation politicians. In our scheme, Type 6 is the equivalent of *nisei*. For example, former prime minister Shinzo Abe is a Type 6 politician; his father, Shintaro held many cabinet posts as a high-ranking LDP politician. Shinzo grew up in Tokyo but "inherited" Shintaro's district in Yamaguchi Prefecture.

Meanwhile, Seiko Noda, a high-profile LDP female legislator, belongs to Type 4. She is an adopted granddaughter of a politician (Uichi Noda) who held many cabinet posts and inherited Uichi's district in Gifu prefecture. In this regard, she is a *seshu* MP but not *nisei*. In Smith's classification, Abe and Noda are in the same category (hereditary MP). However, the labels attached to them in Japanese are often different, and our scheme can capture this difference.

What have we learned about Japanese legacy politicians thus far? Time-series statistics about how many run and won are available in Smith (2018, 52) using Smith and Reed (2017). We replicate his finding using the same dataset but apply the six-fold classification discussed above. Figure 1 presents our compilation. It reveals that the number of *seshu* MPs increased over time, peaked in the 1980s, and then saw some decline since the 2000s. In the most recent election for which data is available, about 27% of the HoR members are legacy MPs. At the same time, *nisei* MPs (Type 6) constitute less than half of the legacy (*seshu*) MPs.

Existing studies also found the following demographic details about dynastic politicians: roughly 70% belong to the LDP, and after the 1994 electoral reform, around 70% of them come from the single-member district tier, while the remaining proportion is elected through the PR tier. At elections, dynastic candidates have a higher winning margin, higher re-election rates, are elected in less urbanized districts, and are more frequently re-elected than their nonlegacy counterparts (Iida et al. 2010; Smith 2018). Fukumoto and Nakagawa (2013) found that novice legacy candidates have almost the same incumbent advantage for obtaining votes as nonlegacy incumbents re-running among the LDP nominees.

Legacy MPs are wealthier, more frequently possess a job background of being a legislative staff member before running for office, and get elected for the first time, on average, at a younger age than nonlegacy politicians (Ichikawa 1990; Iida et al. 2010; Inaida 2009; Smith 2018). They almost have the same level of education as nonlegacy MPs (further details discussed later). Findings on their chances of assuming ministerial posts are mixed: Iida et al. (2010) reported no discernible difference, while Taniguchi (2008) found some positive effects among the LDP candidates. Further, Smith (2018,

Ch.6) showed that legacy MPs whose relatives served in the cabinet had a greater chance than nonlegacy and legacy MPs who did not have relatives who had held ministerial portfolios. Regarding their performance as legislators, they are better at bringing pork to their districts (Asako et al. 2015; Iida et al. 2010; Taniguchi 2008) but less productive in drafting legislator-sponsored bills (Ono 2000).

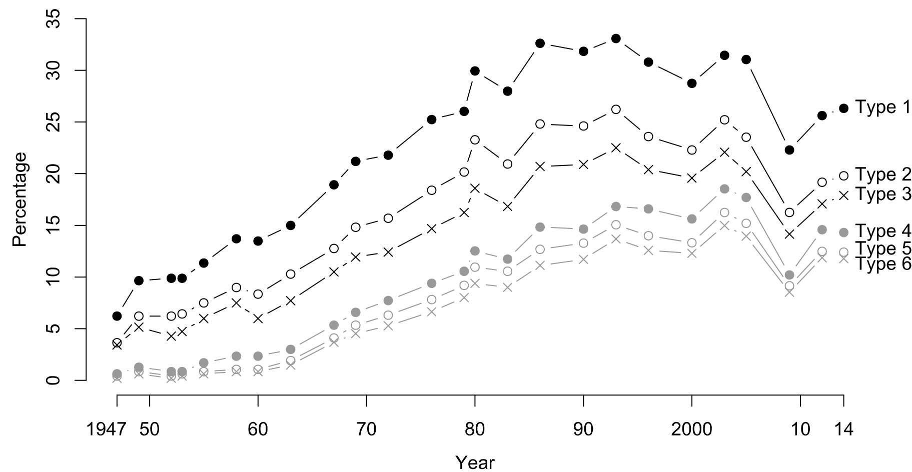

Figure 1. Trends in the percentage of legacy MPs in the Diet based on various definitions of the term *seshu*.

Note: The percentages of various types of legacy winners (Type 1 to 6) at the general elections from 1947 to 2014.

Source: Smith and Reed (2017).

On the causes of their relatively sizable existence, scholars nearly unanimously indicate the influence of political institutions, specifically, the electoral systems and the LDP's organization (Ichikawa 1990; Matsuzaki 1991; Taniguchi 2008; Smith 2018). Regarding the electoral system, the single nontransferable vote (SNTV) system, used from the 1947 election until 1993 for the HoR elections, created incentives to cultivate the "personal vote." Under this system, 3–5 candidates can be elected from one district, while voters can cast only one nontransferable vote. Major parties such as the LDP usually fielded more than two candidates in each district, which created intraparty competition among the LDP candidates running in the same district. The imperative to cultivate the personal vote led to the creation of *koenkai*, a personal support organization attached to an individual candidate, and *jiban*, a geographic territory where a candidate cultivated his or her personal support base. Since politicians personally own *koenkai* and *jiban*, it is up to them (not the party) to decide who should inherit these institutions. Incumbents' sons, daughters, or talented sons/daughters-in-law became frequent choices as heirs. Relatedly, the decentralized nature of the LDP's party organization and nomination processes made it possible for *koenkai* and *jiban* to be passed down family lines.

The empirical examination of voter perception of and preference for legacy candidates is notably absent from the literature on Japanese dynastic politics. Theoretically, Smith (2018, 77) presumes that voter preference can be included in the calculation of party leaders in nomination decisions. Put differently, the preferences of voters and party leaders who influence the nomination process have been assumed to be the same. However, we consider that this theoretical assumption needs to be empirically verified.[8] Empirically, Horiuchi et al. (2020) and Smith (2018) analyzed voters' perceptions of dynastic politicians in their general analyses of voter preferences. Using conjoint experiments, they reported that voters are "largely indifferent to dynastic ties" (Smith 2018, 212) in their evaluation of fictitious candidates. At the same time, they found that LDP supporters, compared with DPJ supporters, hold slightly more positive preferences for dynastic politicians. Their findings corroborate many field-research-based studies that report LDP voters involved with *koenkai* organizations prefer legacy candidates (Ichikawa 1990; Matsuzaki 1991). However, their conclusions that voters, on average, are indifferent may counter the often-heard criticisms against dynastic politicians voiced by various segments of the population, such as journalists and pundits. Thus, further research is needed to understand how Japanese voters view legacy politicians.

In sum, while a good deal of information about Japan's dynastic politics has been unearthed, there has not been much research on what Japanese voters think of legacy politicians. Understanding this issue is important in assessing political representation in Japan. If voters have negative attitudes toward legacy politicians but are given no choice but to vote for them, there will be a disjuncture in the line of political representation. We will next examine this question.

Perceived Prevalence and Stereotypes of Legacy Politicians

To understand how Japanese voters perceive legacy politicians, we conducted a survey in March 2020.[9] We recruited respondents from the sample of voting-eligible adults in Japan drawn by Rakuten Insight, Inc., a major Japanese survey company. In recruiting respondents, we matched the demographics with the population census based on sex, age, and region of residence. A total of 3,673 people responded to our survey, but we removed inattentive respondents who failed to correctly answer two attention-check questions embedded into our survey in analyzing the data. This resulted in 2,978 valid responses.

In our survey, we asked four questions about legacy (*seshu*) politicians: (1) estimated share, (2)

[8] Smith's primary example in making this assumption is the case of the U.S. elections that use primaries, which is not the case in Japan.

[9] Replication files are available at the Harvard Dataverse (URL will be added here).

presence, (3) personal traits, and (4) issue expertise. The first two questions examined the prevalence of legacy politicians among the respondents, whereas the latter two asked about stereotypes involving legacy politicians. In this section, we first present the results of the responses to the first two questions to tease out the extent to which Japanese voters perceive the presence of legacy politicians. We then show the results of the responses to the latter two questions regarding the stereotypes of legacy politicians to clarify respondents' views of legacy politicians.

Estimated share and presence

As shown in Figure 1, legacy politicians account for approximately 30% of Diet members under the broadest definition. However, while stories about *seshu* politicians or politics are frequently reported in the Japanese media, such statistical figures are rarely communicated to the general public. In such an information environment, how do Japanese voters perceive the degree to which the Diet members are legacy politicians? And which voters overestimate or underestimate the prevalence of legacy politicians? We consider that measuring the perceived presence of legacy politicians among voters will help us estimate the importance of the role of dynastic politics in Japan. Thus, to answer these questions, we asked the following question (in Japanese):

> "In the Diet, there are so-called legacy (*seshu*) politicians who were elected by taking over their constituencies from their fathers or other relatives who once served as Diet members. What do you think is the percentage of seats held by legacy politicians in the HoR today? Please answer by guessing the number that you think is correct."

Respondents answered this question on a scale from 0% to 100%. The left panel of Figure 2 is a histogram of their responses, which shows a significant variation in perceptions. The estimated percentage of legacy politicians in the Diet varies across respondents, with a mean and median of 48%. In a separate survey conducted around the same time, we also asked approximately 3,000 Japanese voters similar questions to estimate the percentage of women members in the lower house of the Diet. Its results are shown in the right panel of Figure 2. Since women account for only about 10% of the total number of representatives, many respondents mistakenly believe that there are more women than there really are. Comparing these results with the case of legacy politicians, we found that many respondents mistakenly believe that the percentage of legacy politicians is even higher than that of women legislators.

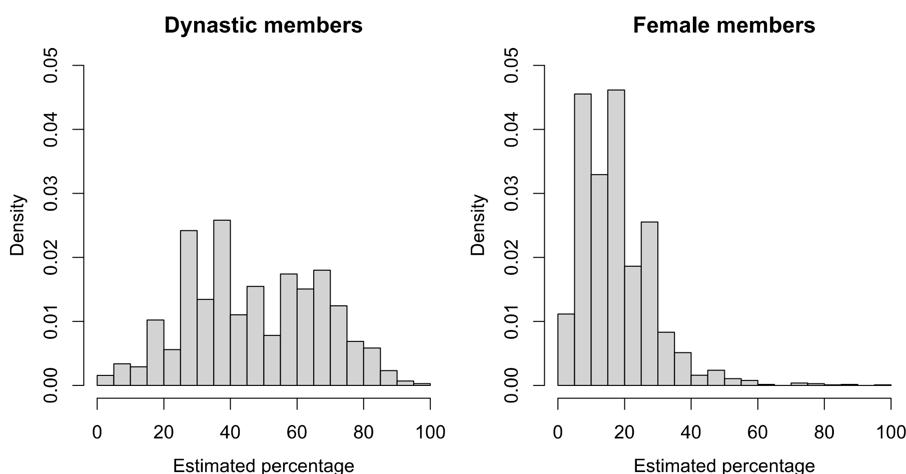

Figure 2. Distribution of the estimated percentage of legacy members (left panel) and women members (right panel) in the Diet.

Interestingly, many respondents do not remember whether they had ever had a legacy member of the HoR elected from their district. When we asked this question in our survey, 52% of respondents said they did not remember, whereas 31% said they had seen legacy members elected from their districts. This suggests that many voters overestimate the presence of legacy politicians in Japanese politics, mistakenly believing that there are many legacy politicians in the political arena, even though they have rarely seen one elected from their own district. Additionally, it further suggests that voters perceive dynastic politics to be more prevalent in Japan than they actually are.

We next ran a series of regressions using each respondent's estimated percentage of legacy politicians as the dependent variable to determine *who* among the respondents perceived the presence of legacy politicians as higher or lower.[10] The results are shown in Table 1. We estimated several models: Model 1 includes only demographic variables, Model 2 adds variables for party and ideological preferences, and Model 3 adds additional variables for political trust and efficacy. Finally, Model 4 includes a dummy variable for whether the respondent has ever seen a legacy politician elected from his or her district—"Elected: yes" or "Elected: no" (reference category for those who did not remember).

[10] The details of this analysis, including the definitions of variables, are shown in Online Appendix B.1. We also confirmed that the conclusion remained largely unchanged when using the deviation of each respondent's perceived percentage of legacy members from the actual value (see Online Appendix C).

Table 1. Estimated coefficients of linear models in which the dependent variable is each respondent's estimated percentage of legacy members in the Diet.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	26.91*	29.72*	30.96*	32.10*
	(3.23)	(3.62)	(3.93)	(3.90)
Female	0.63	0.53	0.33	0.48
	(0.76)	(0.77)	(0.78)	(0.78)
Age	0.90*	0.93*	0.99*	0.94*
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)
Age (squared)/10	−0.09*	−0.09*	−0.10*	−0.10*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Middle education	−0.21	−0.28	−0.75	0.67
	(1.01)	(1.01)	(1.01)	(1.01)
Higher education	0.84	0.59	0.34	0.12
	(0.87)	(0.88)	(0.88)	(0.88)
LDP support		−2.40*	−1.08	−1.33
		(0.88)	(0.93)	(0.92)
Non-LDP right party support		−2.29	−1.46	−1.20
		(1.47)	(1.50)	(1.48)
Left party support		−0.03	−0.28	−0.40
		(1.17)	(1.19)	(1.18)
Conservative self-placement		−1.07*	−0.78	−0.71
		(0.48)	(0.49)	(0.49)
Ideological extremity		1.77*	1.57*	1.44*
		(0.63)	(0.63)	(0.63)
Political trust			−1.17*	−1.23*
			(0.39)	(0.39)
External efficacy			−1.31*	−1.26*
			(0.39)	(0.38)
Internal efficacy			0.33	0.34
			(0.29)	(0.29)
Elected: yes				3.98*
				(0.85)
Elected: no				−2.28*
				(1.01)

* $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed)

Note: "Elected: yes" indicates a dummy variable for having seen legacy members elected from their districts, and

"Elected: no" indicates a dummy variable for not seeing legacy members elected. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. "Age (squared)" was divided by 10 for the purpose of presentation.

We found a clear curvilinear relationship between respondents' age and the estimated share of legacy members in the Diet. According to Model 1, respondents aged 52 years showed the highest estimates of the percentage of legacy members, with younger and older age groups showing lower estimates.[11] The results of Models 2 and 3 indicate that respondents who identify themselves as progressive and those who have a lower level of political trust or sense of external political efficacy tend to estimate a higher percentage of legacy politicians, while the opposite is true for LDP supporters (compared with independents).[12][13] Moreover, Model 4 reveals that respondents who answered that legacy members had been elected from their districts were likely to provide higher estimates than those who could not answer this question, and the contrary is true for those who said that no legacy members had been elected in their districts. However, the statistically significant correlations between the level of political trust or sense of external political efficacy and the estimated percentage of legacy politicians may be due to respondents' beliefs that there are many legacy politicians in the Diet, which, in turn, lowers the level of political trust or sense of external political efficacy.

Stereotypes

How do Japanese voters view these legacy politicians? We next examine stereotypes that voters hold about legacy politicians before revealing voters' overall evaluations of such politicians.

Our survey asked about two stereotypes regarding legacy politicians: personal traits and issue expertise. In the case of personal characteristics, we listed twelve traits and asked respondents whether they thought each attribute was, in general, more applicable to legacy or nonlegacy MPs. The three response options given to respondents were "More applicable to legacy members," "No difference between legacy and nonlegacy members," and "More applicable to nonlegacy members." For issue expertise, we asked a similar question about politicians' capability of handling ten policy

[11] We visualize this relationship in Online Appendix B.2.

[12] Differences were also found between LDP supporters and leftist party supporters (the latter were more likely to estimate a higher percentage of legacy legislators), but were significant only at the 10% level. When ideological self-placement and ideological extremity were excluded from Model 2, this difference became significant at the 1% level.

[13] Although both the coefficient of ideological extremity and ideological self-placement were significant in Model 2, the predicted results shown in Online Appendix B.3 indicate that conservative respondents are not likely to estimate the prevalence of legacy members higher than centrist respondents.

areas. Again, the following three response options were offered to respondents: "Legacy members are better," "There is no difference between legacy and nonlegacy members," and "Nonlegacy members are better."

Figure 3 indicates how voters' impressions of the personal traits of Diet members vary depending on whether or not they have family-dynastic ties. The left panel of the figure shows the cumulative proportion of the response results. The dark, middle, and light gray areas indicate the percentage of respondents who answered, "More applicable to legacy members," "There is no difference between legacy and nonlegacy members" and "More applicable to nonlegacy members," respectively. The right panel illustrates the differences in the percentage of respondents who answered, "More applicable to legacy members" and "More applicable to nonlegacy members." The dots represent point estimates, and the line segments represent 95% confidence intervals.

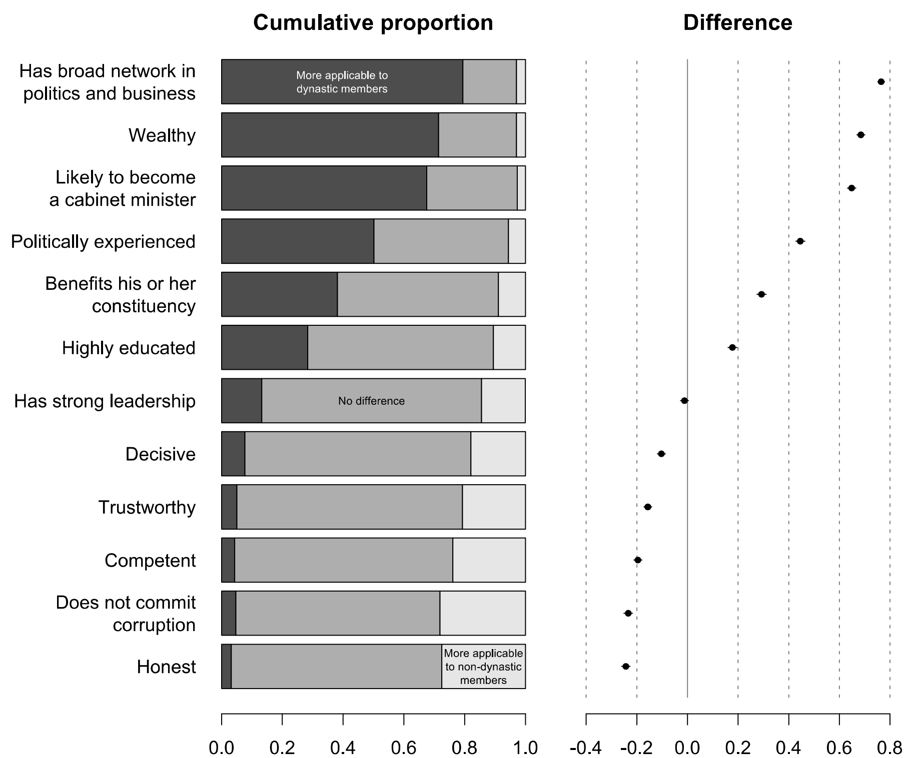

Figure 3. Trait stereotypes about legacy politicians held by Japanese voters.

Note: The left panel shows the stacked bar chart of responses to the questions about trait stereotypes. The right panel shows the differences in the percentage of respondents who answered, "More applicable to legacy members" and "More applicable to nonlegacy members." The dots represent point estimates, and the line segments represent 95% confidence intervals.

From this figure, it can be observed that respondents, on average, have both positive and negative

stereotypes of legacy politicians. Voters tend to infer that legacy MPs are highly educated and have more political experience than nonlegacy MPs and that legacy MPs benefit their constituencies. They also consider that legacy MPs have a broader network in politics and the business world, are wealthier, and are more likely to become cabinet members than nonlegacy members. In contrast, legacy MPs scored lower on personality traits and integrity, such as "honesty," "immunity to corruption," "competence," "trustworthiness," and "decisiveness."

Some of these stereotypes are consistent with empirical facts: generally, Japanese legacy MPs are more likely to be appointed to the position of a cabinet minister (Smith 2018; Taniguchi 2008), more experienced at pork barreling (Asako et al. 2015; Iida et al. 2010; Muraoka 2018; Taniguchi 2008), and more likely to serve longer terms (Iida et al. 2010).

Regarding education, voters' stereotypes of legacy MPs' educational attainment are consistent with empirical findings on college degrees—more legacy MPs are college degree holders than their nonlegacy counterparts (Smith 2018). However, there is little difference in the prestige of the university they graduated from (Iida et al. 2010). The wealth of legislators is another dimension that requires a nuanced interpretation: legacy MPs are, on average, wealthier, as correctly perceived by voters. However, legacy MPs' average level of wealth is distorted by some outliers, such as the extremely wealthy Hatoyamas and Asos (Smith 2018, 66).

Figure 4 reports issue stereotypes about legacy MPs held by Japanese voters. Legacy MPs are supposed to be better at diplomacy and at handling public works. They are also generally considered slightly superior in national security matters and industrial policy than nonlegacy MPs. However, Japanese people are likely to favor nonlegacy MPs when considering the remaining policy areas—especially child welfare, the declining birthrate, and education.

We briefly examined how the stereotypes of legacy MPs shown above are heterogeneous, varying by respondents' basic demographics.[14] There are some striking differences between young and old respondents: older respondents were more likely to possess images of legacy politicians' broad networks, abundant assets, rapid promotion, and pork barreling than young respondents. Because the watershed of these differences was around the age of 50, we speculate that voters who experienced the 1955 system, in the last period when the percentage of legacy MPs reached its peak, tended to form their impression of legacy politicians. The differences by respondents' gender and educational level were minor. However, it is notable that, in general, compared with respondents with lower levels of education, those with higher education tended to consider that nonlegacy MPs have more favorable

[14] The details of this analysis and results are shown in Online Appendix D.

personal traits and to rate nonlegacy MPs more highly regarding their expertise on various issues.

These results indicate that, as a whole, Japanese voters hold a variety of stereotypes about legacy politicians concerning personal traits and issue expertise; however, we suggest that caution is needed in interpreting the results. First, even though statistically significant differences were observed, we should not overemphasize these stereotypes because more than half of the respondents chose "no difference between legacy and nonlegacy members" for all but a few personal characteristics. That is, many voters may be indifferent to whether a politician is a legacy or not in their image of personal attributes and issue expertise.

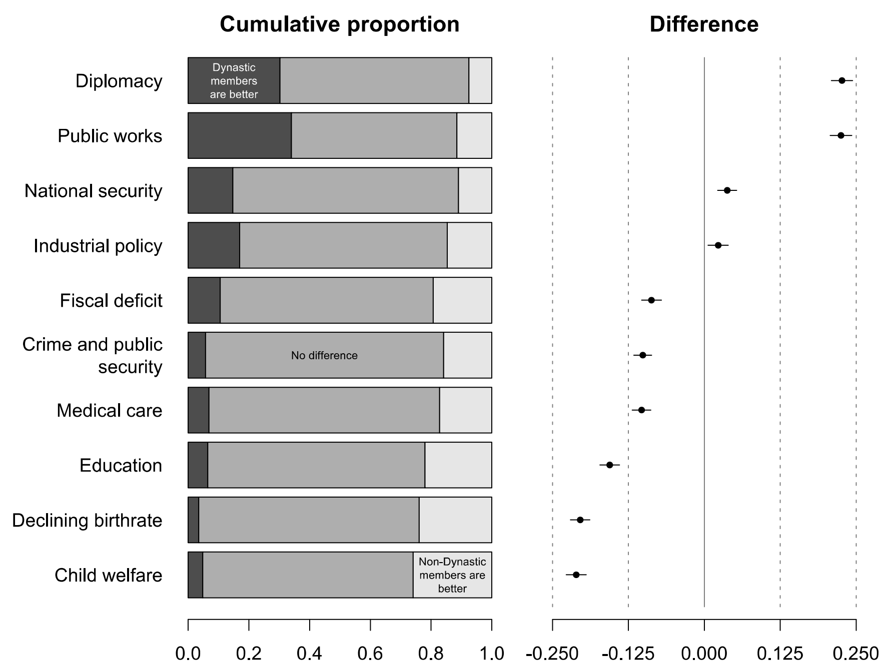

Figure 4. Issue stereotypes about legacy politicians held by Japanese voters.

Note: The left panel shows the stacked bar chart of answers for the questions of issue stereotypes. The right panel shows differences between the percentages of those who consider "legacy members are better" and "nonlegacy members are better." Dots represent point estimates, and the segments represent 95% confidence intervals.

Second, our survey was descriptive and was not designed to identify the causal effects of politicians' legacy status on voters' perceptions of politicians. Specifically, we acknowledge that voters' stereotypes of legacy politicians detected in our survey may be partially mixed with stereotypes of LDP politicians since, in reality, most (but not all) legacy MPs are LDP members.[15] We still believe

[15] This possibility can be inferred from the fact that the LDP has also strong issue ownership on diplomatic and security policies (Taniguchi et al. 2018) and that non-LDP leftist parties emphasize welfare issues (Kim 2020), corresponding to the results of the issue stereotypes.

that our results reflect some critical aspects of the legacy politician stereotypes because voters perceive about 20%–30% of opposition party members to be legacy politicians. For example, according to the UTokyo-Asahi Survey conducted from March to April 2022, the ratio of legacy politicians in each political party as perceived by voters was 51.57% for the LDP, 27.95% for the Constitutional Democratic Party, and 17.47% for the Japan Innovation Party, respectively (The UTokyo-Asahi Survey 2022). In other words, Japanese voters do not necessarily believe that only the LDP has legacy politicians. However, our survey does not allow us to directly examine stereotypes toward legacy politicians separately from stereotypes toward LDP politicians. Future research should analyze voters' stereotypes of legacy politicians in more detail by isolating them from their party stereotypes using research designs such as conjoint experiments.

Evaluation of Legacy Politicians

As demonstrated above, Japanese voters exhibit positive stereotypes toward legacy politicians on some dimensions and negative stereotypes on others. So, then, how do voters *rate* legacy politicians? It is difficult to answer this question by analyzing observational data alone (e.g., comparing the election-winning rates of legacy and nonlegacy candidates) because various unobserved and unobservable factors are potentially confounding factors (e.g., name recognition and funding ability) correlated with candidates' legacy status and their success. Therefore, we take an experimental approach to answering this question by conducting a conjoint experiment.

Randomized conjoint experiments introduced to political science by Hainmueller et al. (2014) are an experimental survey technique in which researchers simultaneously manipulate multiple pieces of information on specific subjects, show respondents the information in a table format, and ask them to evaluate the subjects. While this experimental design has several advantages over a single-treatment survey experiment, in this particular case, the most important is that this design enables us to disentangle composite treatment effects (Dafoe et al. 2018); for example, simply telling respondents that a candidate has dynastic family ties may make them guess that this candidate is affiliated with the LDP, which contaminates the effect of dynastic family ties with that of the LDP label. A conjoint experiment allows us to "control" party labels by manipulating legacy status and party affiliation simultaneously.

Horiuchi et al. (2020) implemented a conjoint experiment in a survey of Japanese citizens to reveal the effects of candidates' personal attributes on voters' support. They asked respondents to choose the more preferred candidate from a pair of hypothetical candidates. Their profiles included various personal attributes, including legacy status. Horiuchi et al. (2020) found that the effect of candidates'

family dynastic ties on their probability to be chosen by respondents was almost negligible. In an exercise that compared nondynastic and dynastic candidates, the former were slightly favored, but the difference was minimal. These results led Horiuchi et al. (2020) and Smith (2018) to conclude that Japanese people were indifferent to the legacy status of politicians.

However, our analyses of trait stereotypes demonstrated that Japanese voters hold severe negative stereotypes of legacy politicians regarding their trustworthiness, competence, and integrity, which have been considered important elements of politicians' valence (e.g., Franchino and Zucchini 2015; Stone and Simas 2010). Therefore, contrary to Horiuchi et al.'s (2020) findings, we considered that Japanese voters might dislike legacy politicians. In addition, the research design of Horiuchi et al. (2020) may have produced inaccurate results regarding respondents' attitudes toward legacy politicians.[16] In particular, it is likely that the design of their conjoint table (illustrated on page A10 in their Appendix) did not adequately inform respondents about the candidate's legacy status, which may have led to underestimated findings on it.[17] Therefore, we conducted a conjoint experiment with some modifications to their design.

In each task of our conjoint experiment, we showed respondents a single candidate profile and asked them to rate the candidate's favorability using an eight-point scale from "not favorable at all" to "very favorable" (the larger the outcome variable is, the more favorable a candidate is). Candidate profiles were provided by an itemized form and included eight attributes—legacy status, gender, age, education, occupation, hometown, political experience, and party affiliation. These attributes and their levels are similar to those used in Horiuchi et al.'s (2020) experiment. However, instead of presenting them in a tabular format, we presented them in bullet points and in complete sentences (see Figure A.9 in Appendix E.1).[18] This ensured that respondents were fully informed of the

[16] We do not think that the difference between our results and those of Horiuchi et al. (2020) is primarily due to bias in the respondent sample in our survey, because the effects of attributes other than legacy status are similar and consistent between the two studies.

[17] We also think that the uniform profile distribution with a forced-choice design in Horiuchi et al. (2020) is likely to underestimate the effect of having dynastic ties, because even for respondents who absolutely dislike candidates whose parents were cabinet ministers, they had to choose such a candidate with a 25% chance given that some candidate pairs (both) have such an attribute. Another problem with Horiuchi et al.'s (2020) design is that the possible age range for candidates was 30 to 79 years, which is inconsistent with the minimum age of 42 years for a member of the House of Councilors who has been elected 3 or more times. This was likely to have confused some of their respondents. Our design, on the other hand, aligns the age range of the candidates with the actual situation and distribution, from 42 to 67 years.

[18] The exception is that, while Horiuchi et al. (2020) separated the information of candidates' political experience into "previous terms served" and "experience (incumbency)," we summarized it to a single attribute with the levels "no experience as a Diet member," "have served as a Diet

candidate's attributes, including legacy status.[19] The levels of the legacy status attribute were "his or her parents had no political experience," "his or her parent was a local politician," "his or her parent was a Diet member," and "his or her parent was a cabinet minister." Following de la Cuesta et al. (2022), we adjusted the marginal distributions of profiles to the real-world distributions to improve external validity.[20] We made respondents repeat this task ten times for the HoR election and another ten times for the House of Councilors (HoC) election, randomizing the order of elections across respondents; thus, 20 candidates were rated per respondent.[21] Because there were no significant interactions between the effects of legacy status and the election types, we analyzed the pooled data of both HoR and HoC candidates.[22]

We estimated the average marginal component effect (AMCE) of each attribute level by employing a linear regression with dummy variables for the attribute levels. The AMCE represents the effect of the concerned attribute level on the outcome compared with the baseline level, marginalizing out the remaining attributes (Hainmueller et al. 2014). We estimated the linear regression parameters by the ordinary least squares method and computed CR2 standard errors clustered by the respondent. The number of respondents was 1,126, and the number of observations was 22,520.

Figure 5 shows the AMCEs of candidates' dynastic family ties. The dots represent the point estimates of AMCEs, and the segments represent their 95% confidence intervals. We set the level of no dynastic ties to the baseline and estimated the AMCEs of the remaining levels. We can see from Figure 5 that, compared with nonlegacy candidates, having a parent with political experience significantly decreased candidates' likeability, especially those whose parent was a former cabinet minister. The absolute size of the AMCE of ministerial dynastic status is substantial; it is nearly equal to that of graduating from the University of Tokyo (the top university in Japan, compared with a high

---

member for six years so far," and "have served as a Diet member for twelve years or more so far" for the reduction of respondents' cognitive burden. Moreover, we slightly changed the levels of some attributes from Horiuchi et al.'s (2020) design to avoid creating profiles with impossible combinations of attribute-levels and to adjust the profile distribution to the real-world data. We show the details of our conjoint design in Online Appendix E.1.

[19] In Horiuchi et al.'s (2020) conjoint experiment, the candidate's "parental position" was presented in the table, so it is suspected that respondents may have overlooked the word "parent" and took it as the candidate's own position.

[20] The frequency of the dynastic attribute levels was set to 85.3%, 3.6%, 4.2%, and 6.9% for "his or her parents had no political experience," "his or her parent was a local politician," "his or her parent was a Diet member," and "his or her parent was a cabinet minister," respectively.

[21] This setting differs from that of Horiuchi et al. (2020), in which one respondent answered for either HoR or HoC candidates. Moreover, we did not make it clear that hypothetical candidates were running for a district or proportional representation seat; that is, our experiment does not replicate Horiuchi et al.'s (2020) experimental treatment about electoral systems.

[22] We report the result of separate analyses for HoR and HoC candidates in Online Appendix E.3.

school) and that of 12 years or more experience in office (compared with no political experience).[23]

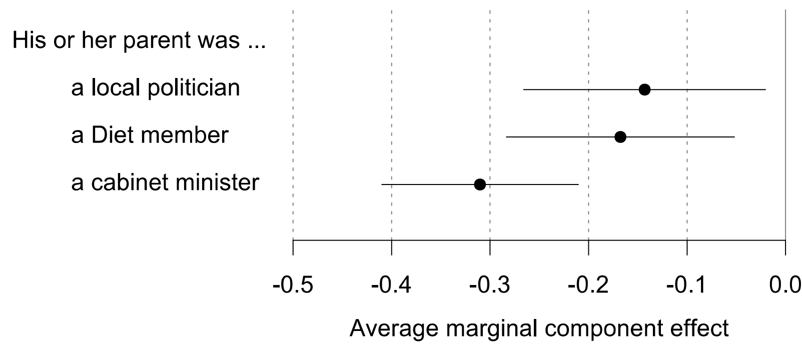

Figure 5. Estimated average marginal component effects of candidates' legacy status onvoters' favorability toward candidates.

Note: The baseline level is no dynastic family ties. Dots represent point estimates, and segments represent 95%confidence intervals.

Further, we examined heterogeneity in the effects of candidates' dynastic family ties depending on respondents' characteristics. We found that older respondents penalized legacy candidates more than young respondents, which aligns with the results we previously showed that older citizens are more likely to have negative stereotypes of legacy politicians' traits. Moreover, while the remaining respondents severely disfavored them, LDP supporters did not necessarily dislike legacy candidates, which seems to reflect that a large proportion of legacy MPs belong to the LDP. The results also showed suggestive tendencies that women respondents and respondents with high confidence in their political knowledge are likelier to dislike legacy candidates than their counterparts. Still, such differences did not reach statistical significance.[24]

From the results of our conjoint experiment shown above, we conclude that Japanese voters generally penalize politicians with dynastic ties, and this tendency is especially pronounced for older people and those who do not support the LDP.

Conclusion

In this article, we examined Japan's dynastic politics from the voters' perspective, an angle that has been understudied in the existing literature. Our principal findings can be summarized as follows.

[23] We report the results for other attributes in Online Appendix E.2. Our results were substantially similar to Horiuchi et al.'s (2020) except for the AMCEs of dynastic status.

[24] The detailed results of the analyses of heterogeneous effects are shown in Online Appendix E.3.

First, Japanese voters tend to overestimate the proportion of legacy MPs, and their views of such politicians reflect positive and negative stereotypes. On the purportedly positive side, voters tend to view legacy MPs as being better networked, wealthier, more highly educated, having more political experience, more likely to become a cabinet member, and more likely to bring more pork to their constituencies than their nonlegacy counterparts. On the negative side, legacy politicians are viewed as less decisive, less trustworthy, less competent, and more corrupt than their nonlegacy peers.

Second, and more importantly, we showed that Japanese voters negatively evaluate legacy status. Contrary to the existing studies (Smith 2018; Horiuchi et al. 2020), candidates with political parents are viewed less favorably than those without legacy status. This tendency was more pronounced among older voters, although LDP supporters did not necessarily dislike legacy candidates.

Our findings raise the perplexing question of why voters continue to vote for legacy candidates in real elections. We suggest several possible reasons. First, legacy candidates are nominated and elected because they have lucrative political networks. For example, their predecessors arrange for them to be nominated by party leaders, or they are favored by officials of local LDP branches (Smith 2018, Ch. 4), which can result in a more effective voter mobilization by LDP machines. Second, legacy candidates may have financial advantages over new entrants without dynastic ties. For example, they may inherit their predecessors' political funds without paying any inheritance tax or gift tax following their predecessors' death (Asahi Shimbun 2020). Such funds can fortify the operations of *koenkai* to mobilize voters. Third, in elections in the real world, carrying the LDP party label may dispel the negative image of being a legacy candidate. As Horiuchi et al. (2018) suggested, when the opposition is weak, LDP candidates are able to win, regardless of their personal attributes.

Investigating the gap between voter preferences and the actuality of Japanese politics appears to be not limited to dynastic politics. Recent studies found a similar gap in voters' preferences for younger politicians compared with older politicians (Eshima and Smith 2022; McClean and Ono 2020) and indifference for women candidates (Schwarz and Coppock 2022). In reality, older politicians prevail, and women politicians are in short supply in Japan. Future research should address these gaps as interconnected issues, and the possible explanations we provided above may be a useful starting point.

References

Aoki Y (1979) Giinshoku no seshu ni tsuite: Dai 33 kai Shugiin senkyo no baai [On the legacy politicians: The case of the 33rd HoR election. *Hyoron/Shakai Kagaku* 15: 105–112.

Asahi Shimbun (2020) Hatoyama Knio moto Somusho no izoku, isan 7 oku en shinkoku more, Kokuzei shiteki [The National Tax Agency pointed out that the family of former Minister of

General Affairs Kunio Hatoyama had failed to declare an inheritance of 700 million yen]. https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASN1D52S1N1DUTIL008.html, accessed on Jaunary 29, 2022.

Asako Y, Iida T, Matsubayashi T and Ueda M (2015) Dynastic politicians: Theory and evidence from Japan. *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 16(1): 5–32.

Dafoe A, Zhang B and Caughey D (2018) Information equivalence in survey experiments. *Political Analysis* 26(4): 399–416.

de la Cuesta B, Egami N and Imai K (2022) Improving the external validity of conjoint analysis: The essential role of profile distribution. *Political Analysis* 30(1): 19–45.

Eshima S and Smith DM (2022) Just a number? Voter evaluations of age in candidate choice experiments. *Journal of Politics* 84(3): 1856–1861.

Franchino F and Zucchini F (2015) Voting in a multi-dimensional space: A conjoint analysis employing valence and ideology attributes of candidates. *Political Science Research and Methods* 3(2): 221–241.

Fukumoto K and Nakagawa K (2013) Tokuhyo no keisho ni taisutu seshu no koka: Setou tohyo, kohosha tohyo to no hikaku [The impact of legacy status on electoral performance]. *Senkyo Kenkyu* 29(2): 118–1128.

Hainmueller J, Hopkins DJ and Yamamoto T (2014) Causal inference in conjoint analysis: Understanding multidimensional choices via stated preference experiments. *Political Analysis* 22(1): 1–30.

Horiuchi Y, Smith DM and Yamamoto T (2018) Measuring voters' multidimensional policy preferences with conjoint analysis: Application to Japan's 2014 election. *Political Analysis* 26(2): 190–209.

Horiuchi Y, Smith DM and Yamamoto T (2020) Identifying voter preferences for politicians' personal attributes: A conjoint experiment in Japan. *Political Science Research and Methods* 8(1): 75–91.

Ichikawa T (1990) *Seshu Daigishi no Kenkyu [A Study on Heritage Legislators]*. Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Shinbunsha.

Iida T, Ueda M and Matsubayashi T (2010) Seshu giin no jissho bunseki [Empirical study of dynastic politcians]. *Senkyo Kenkyu* 26(2): 139–153.

Inaida S (2009) *Seshu Giin: Kozo to Mondaiten [Dynastic Politicians: Structures and Problems]*. Tokyo: Kodansha.

Jiji Press (2021) Seshu koho wa 131 nin [The number of dynastic candidates is 131]. https: //www.jiji.com/jc/article?k=2021101901402, accessed on January 29, 2022.

Kim YJ (2020) Issue ownership and electoral rule: Empirical evidence from Japan. *Government and Opposition* 55(1): 147–162.

Matsuzaki T (1991) *Nihon-gata Demokurashi no Gyakusetsu: Nisei Giin wa Naze Umareru no ka [The Paradox of Japanese-style Democracy: Why Do the Second-Generation Politicians Prevail?]*. Tokyo: Fuyukisha.

McClean C and Ono Y (2020) How do voters evaluate the age of politicians? RIETI Discussion Papers Series 20-E-069. https://www.rieti.go.jp/jp/publications/dp/20e069.pdf.

Muraoka T (2018) Political dynasties and particularistic campaigns. *Political Research Quarterly* 71(2): 453–466.

Nakado M (1976) Shakaiteki zokusei kara mita giin no daihyosei [Representativeness of legislators viewed from their social attributes]. *Soshioroji* 21(1): 35–67.

Ono Y (2000) Kokkai giin no rippo katsudo [Legislative activities of the Diet members]. In: Ikuo Kabashima Seminar, the Faculty of Law, the University of Tokyo (ed.) *Gendai Nihon no Seijika Zo (1) [Portrayal of Contemporary Japanese Politicians]*. Tokyo: Bokutakusha.

Schwarz S and Coppock A (2022) What have we learned about gender from candidate choice experiments? A meta-analysis of 67 factorial survey experiments. *Journal of Politics* 84(2): 655–668.

Smith DM (2018) *Dynasties and Democracy: The Inherited Incumbency Advantage in Japan*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Smith DM and Reed SR (2017) The Reed-Smith Japanese House of Representatives elections dataset. Harvard Dataverse, V1. https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/QFEPXD.

Stone WJ and Simas EN (2010) Candidate valence and ideological positions in U.S. house elections. *American Journal of Political Science* 54(2): 371–388.

Suga Y (2009a) Seshu seigen no danko ga Nihon no mirai wo hiraku [Dismantling of dynastic politics opens Japan's future]. *Shincho 45* 28(7): 48–55.

Suga Y (2009b) "Seshu" wo yuruseba Jiminto wa shinu [LDP would be dead if legacy politicians continue]. *Bungei Shunju* 27(8): 206–211.

Taniguchi M, Kaneko T, Takamiya H, Tsukiyama H, Asano T and Kawaguchi H (2018) Nisen junana nen Tokyo Daigaku Taniguchi kenkyushitsu-Asahi Shimbun kyodo chosa [The 2017 UTokyo-Asahi survey]. *Kokka Gakkai Zasshi* 131(9·10): 801–831.

Taniguchi N (2008) Diet members and seat inheritance: Keeping it in the family. In: Martin SL and Steel G (eds.) *Democratic Reform in Japan: Assessing the Impact*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

The UTokyo-Asahi Survey (2022) *2022 nen Tokyo Daigaku Taniguchi kenkyushitsu Asahi*

Shimbunsha kyodo yoron chosa kodobukku [The codebook for the 2022 UTokyo-Asahi voter survey]. http://www.masaki.j.u-tokyo.ac.jp/utas/utasindex.html (accessed on October 31, 2022).