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A record number of women were elected to the Lower House of the Japanese Diet in 2005. Forty-five women now have seats in the 480 member chamber, bringing the percentage of women representatives in the Lower House to 9.4%. The strong performance of women is at least partially related to Prime Minister Koizumi’s decision to run several women against postal reform rebels in high profile districts. However, since the late 1980s, the number of women in the Diet has been increasing. Data from the 2005 Cabinet White Paper for Planning Gender Co-operation (Danjyo Kyōdō Sankaku Hakusho) reveal that the percentage of women winning seats in the Lower House has increased from 1.4% in 1986 to 7.3% in 2000 before jumping to 9.4% in the last election (see figure 1). In contrast to the increases in the number of women representatives in the Lower House, the number of women in the Upper House has declined since the so-called “Madonna Boom” of 1989 when a record number of Socialist women were elected under the leadership of Doi Takako. Women constituted 17.5% of the representatives elected in 1989. In the last Upper House election, however, women only won 12.4% of the seats contested (see figure 2). This paper seeks to explain these trends in the number of women representatives in the Diet. Is the general upward trend in female representation the result of the creation of institutions that support women running for office or is the gradual increase better explained by incumbency effects following elections where party leaders supported a larger number of women for office? Moreover, what obstacles remain and influence the comparatively low percentage of women elected to the Diet?

In Japan, all candidates are said to face three main obstacles—jiban (building a constituency), kanban (publicity/name recognition), and kaban (money). The question is
whether these obstacles are more difficult for women to challenge. Moreover do women face any additional obstacles that inhibit their ability to run for office? This paper illuminates the institutional and cultural obstacles women candidates face when running for national office in Japan. It also seeks to understand how women candidates and organizations that support women candidates overcome these obstacles. In particular, it will explore the activities of so-called “back-up schools” sponsored by organizations like the Ichikawa Fusae Memorial Association and campaign funding organizations for women such as WINWIN to identify the strategies employed to elect candidates at the local and national levels. Interviews with women who are members of the National Diet and representatives from the aforementioned organizations reveal that while back-up schools and funding organizations do help women overcome some of the obstacles that stand in the way of running for national office in Japan, the institutional structure of political parties as well as political and social norms still represent formidable obstacles for women who aspire to be politicians. To date, the leadership of Doi Takako and Koizumi Junichirō has played a significant role in the election of women to national office. Women candidates from any one party have had the most success at the national level when party leaders have made the election of women a priority.

WOMEN AND NATIONAL OFFICE IN JAPAN

Women Diet members have not been the focus of many scholarly studies. Instead, most studies have explored the involvement of women in local level activism. Many scholars who limit their focus to local level politics and activism claim there are too few female representatives at the national level to hold any amount of power or to exercise

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2 Aiuchi (2001), Darcy and Nixon (1996), Iwai (1993), Iwamoto (2001), and Ogai (2001) are exceptions to this statement. These scholars analyze the involvement of women at the national level.
influence. Members of this school argue that the local level, not the national level, is the
main arena for women and their influence over policy in Japan (Eto 2005; Gelb and

Traditionally, politics has not been the realm of women in Japan. Many women,
especially middle class, educated women, however, do become active in community
activities and organizations, such as local PTAs, consumer movements and citizen/protest
movements (Iwao 1993: 242). These women initially join these groups in accordance
with their roles as wife and mother, expressing concern over issues that directly affect the
household, including education, the environment, and food safety (Iwao 1993: 244). If,
however, in the process of participating in these groups women begin to challenge
society’s dominant image of women and their role, the likelihood of their involvement in
the political realm will increase (Pharr 1981: 12-13). Indeed, many of these women
realize that they can only affect real change by becoming part of the political decision
making process, at least at the local level (Iwao 1993: 244).

Several scholars have found a connection between local level organizations, social
movements, and involvement in politics (Eto 2001; Gelb and Estevez-Abe 1998; Ogai
1999, 2004). A prime example of this relationship is the Seikatsu Club Co-op, a
consumer centered social movement promoting activism on food safety. The club has
been quite successful and over time developed network offshoots, the Seikatsu Networks,
which have been integral in the election of women to local level political positions in
certain geographical locations (Gelb and Estevez-Abe 1998: 270-271; Ogai 2004: 99-
100). The members of the Networks also exert influence over the local bureaucracy due
to the policy expertise fostered by the organization (Gelb and Estevez-Abe 1998: 274).
By organizing their efforts into social movements and participating at the local level through activism, these women develop a unique sense of citizenship based both on their experience as women and housewives and their concern with issues connected to daily life (LeBlanc 1999: 196). This type of involvement provides the foundation for Japanese women, particularly on the local level, to motivate large grassroots support bases for desired candidates or policies (Iwao 1993: 244).

Clearly activism at the local level and social movements have had an impact on electoral politics. For example, as we shall see below Doi Takako’s vital support networks in her campaign to increase the number of women in politics, particularly on the national level, were local housewife organizations, civic leaders and feminists (Iwao 1993: 230). Indeed, women’s organizations play a critical role in getting voters to the polls and are much better at such activities than male-dominated organizations (Steel 2004: 241). Scholars who have focused solely on local activism, however, have not fully explored the extent to which women’s organizations aid candidates for national office in overcoming the cultural and institutional constraints they face. In this paper I highlight the constraints facing women candidates for national office. Then, I explore how campaign organizations for women and back-up schools prepare these candidates to challenge these constraints. I argue that the failure to tie funding to specific gender policies has limited the effectiveness of these organizations. While such organizations have provided important tools and resources to women candidates running for office, these activities have not been sufficient. For the most part, women candidates have had the most success when a party leader has made electing women a priority. A look at Doi’s and Koizumi’s support of women candidates will illustrate this point.
INSTITUTIONAL AND CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS FACING WOMEN

Women who consider running for national office face several barriers at three different stages: self selection, party selection, and voter selection (Matland 2002: 1). Most of these barriers are either institutional or cultural.

The Effects of the Electoral System

The electoral system influences the desire and ability of women to run for office at all three stages. Electoral systems in general establish incentives and constraints for parties, candidates and voters. An exploration of the Lower House’s old multiple member district system as well as its new combined single member district/proportional representation system reveals how some of these incentives and constraints have remained constant while others have changed.

For the LDP, especially, the multiple member district (MMD) system with a single nontransferable vote (SNTV) in place in the Lower House from 1947-1993 created incentives to compete based on a personal vote, not on policy.³ Under this system 2-6 representatives were elected in 129 districts. In order to gain a majority in the Lower House which had 511 seats, a party needed to win two seats in each district on average. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was the only party that had enough resources to field multiple candidates in each district.⁴ LDP politicians (as well as JSP politicians) created kōenka, personal support organizations, to respond to the incentives and constraints created by the electoral system.

³ The fact that Japan is a parliamentary system where politicians vote down party lines and therefore have identical voting records also provides incentives to compete based on pork and personal favors instead of policy.

⁴ In fact, the JCP was the only other party to field one candidate in every other district. Other parties only ran multiple candidates in regions where their support base was strong.
Kōenkai play a critical role in helping candidates respond to one of the main obstacles they face when running for office—jiban (building a constituency). As we shall see below, women have found it difficult to cultivate the personal connections to local politicians and businesses necessary to support kōenkai. The old electoral system rewarded those who could gain the personal vote. Very few women had entered politics before the momentum of incumbency had taken hold under this system. Incumbents with established kōenkai proved very difficult to unseat, as is the case in all systems that favor the personal vote (Darcy and Nixon 1996: 14).

Women were expected to perform better under the new combined single member district (SMD)/proportional representation system (PR) adopted in 1994. While single member districts pose some obstacles to women since SMDs favor incumbents and provide incentives to gather the personal vote, in general, proportional representation systems favor women, if parties are willing to prioritize electing women as has been the case in several European countries (Matland 2002). The proportional representation system adopted by Japan is similar to the German system in that candidates who lose in the single member constituencies can be elected through the proportional representation

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5 One of the largest totals of women elected to the Diet, however, actually occurred in the 1946 Lower House election (Ogai 1996). Darcy and Nixon argue that women did better in this election because a different electoral system was in place. In this election Japan was divided into 53 multiple member districts with 4-14 representatives elected in each. Moreover, voters were given more than one vote depending on the number of representatives elected from their district, with voters in districts electing 4-10 representatives receiving 2 votes and voters in districts electing more than 11 representatives receiving 3 votes. Many speculate that voters were more likely to use their additional votes on women candidates. Once Japan adopted the SNTV system, women no longer were able to benefit from a second or third vote. The single vote was more likely to go to a male candidate (1996: 5-7).

6 The expected degree of increase predicted varied. Darcy and Nixon argue that the new system “will only marginally increase the number of women elected to the House of Representatives” (1996: 3). In contrast, Ogai (2001) provides evidence of women performing strongly in the single member constituencies in the 1996 and 2000 elections (209).
This provision provides incentives for candidates to challenge well-entrenched incumbents (Reed 1995). Candidates who benefit from this system have been termed “zombies” because the PR list resurrects them from the dead (Krauss and Pekkanen 2004). These so-called “zombies” who tend to be older male candidates can also have the effect of moving women further down the PR list. Because ranking on PR lists can be and has been connected to candidates’ performance in single member districts some observers predicted women would do less well than could have been the case with different PR rules (Darcy and Nixon 1996: 16-17).

The revisions to the Public Office Election law have made it more difficult for independent conservative candidates to run for office, closing a potential path to office for women who find it difficult to gain party endorsement. Single member constituencies favor party endorsed candidates. Even if independent candidates have strong, independent kōenkai, they are unlikely to have enough funding and voter support to challenge the officially endorsed LDP candidate (Taniguchi 2006). With single member constituencies a candidate needs a larger portion of the vote share. In addition, official party candidates receive government sponsored party subsidies. Independent candidates are denied such funds. Official party endorsement is the best way to be competitive in an SMD. The barriers to women facing women who seek party endorsement are considered after a discussion of the factors that influence self selection.

**Factors that influence the self selection of women**

In general, electoral systems influence women’s self selection to run because electoral rules influence candidates’ assessment of their chances of winning. As in the United

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7 In Germany’s system of personalized proportional representation, the SMD contests allow voters to pick individual representatives who are apportioned seats as part of the overall percentage of votes the party receives in the PR contest. SMD candidates secure seats independent of the PR vote in Japan.
States, incumbents are formidable opponents and difficult to unseat in single member districts. Running for an open seat versus challenging an incumbent in the single member district contests involves a very different calculus for potential candidates. The decision to challenge an incumbent is made easier with party endorsement and monetary support. With proportional representation incumbency can be less of a factor if parties choose to place female candidates higher up on the list.

Funding regulations also influence a woman’s decision to run for office. The Political Funds Control Law has undergone two major revisions in postwar Japan—one under Prime Minister Miki in 1975 and another under the anti-LDP Hosokawa coalition government in 1994. The stated goal of both revisions was to reduce the incentives for money politics in Japan. The current funding regulations passed in 1994 pose a variety of incentives and constraints to women who wish to run for office. The revised Political Fund Control Act provides party subsidies. These subsidies were supposed to lessen the burden on the individual. One would expect that such reform would make it easier for women to run, since women generally have less access to private funding. But, in order to benefit from these subsidies a candidate needs to receive party endorsement. As we shall see below, several barriers to party endorsement exist for women.

Especially in the LDP, the burden of raising funds falls on the individual candidate. A survey of LDP (Lower House) Diet members revealed that the money received from the LDP prefectural branch offices through the party subsidy provision only covers 14% of the average politician’s annual expenses (Taniguchi 2006). Candidates in the single member district systems continue to rely on kōenkai to cultivate the personal vote (Krauss and Pekkanen 2004). Building and maintaining kōenkai is expensive. Noda
Seiko, a former member of the LDP who was kicked out of the party due to her position on postal reform, reflected on the barriers that financing campaigns posed for women who wished to run with LDP endorsement:

In the conservative party, it [campaigning] is all self-financed. The amount that the party gives us is really not much, and so in Japan, members receive election and daily operation support not from individuals but from companies. The corporate culture is a male one. So companies do not bother giving money to women. Thus, it is difficult collecting donations. The reason why men can run again and again even if they lose is because they are able to receive so many donations. In contrast, if women use up donations [from companies], they do not receive additional donations. As a result, they cannot run in the next [race]. (personal interview, 10 June 2005)

According to Noda, women are held to a higher standard if they are able to run for office—that is, they often only get one chance. Moreover, women often do not have connections to the most likely funding sources.

Whether or not a woman decides to run for office is also influenced by cultural and social norms. As we shall see, women in Japan tend to think of politics as distant from their lives (Iwao 1993; LeBlanc 1999). Even if women become more interested in politics through their involvement in local activism, certain gender expectations remain. Specifically, a tendency still exists to see a woman’s role as being that of a “good wife, wise mother”. Several interviewees pointed to a woman candidate’s family as being a large obstacle to running for office (Nishimoto, personal interview, 28 March 2005; Yamaguchi, personal interview, 24 March 2005). If a woman runs for office the question raised for the politician’s family as well as the public is who is going to take care of the family. This question never emerges for men running for office.8

8 Until recently a large portion of female politicians were either single, divorced or middle aged with grown children. Recent recruits, however, have had young children. First-term LDP member of the Upper House Arimura Haruko thinks it is important for women to do “normal” things like get married and have children in addition to their career (personal interview, 10 June 2005). Many new members of the LDP are wives
Factors that influence party selection of women

Gaining party support has been difficult for women in Japan. At this stage women face barriers related to party structure and norms. In particular, the rules and/or norms governing candidate recruitment and nomination play a large role in excluding women. No party in Japan currently has quotas for women. Party quotas for women ensure that women will be included. Indeed, quotas have helped increase the number of women in parliament in several European countries (Kittilson 2006). The now defunct Japan New Party had a 20 percent quota for women. Significantly, however, the party was unable to find enough women to meet this quota in the 1993 election. Women only constituted five percent of the candidates supported by the party. The difficulty in recruiting women reflects the barriers they face in building a kōenkai and cultivating the personal vote (Darcy and Nixon 1996: 15).

Even if parties do not have quotas, clear and open selection criteria and processes aid women who seek party endorsement. The more open the process, the more able any candidate is able to adopt an appropriate strategy for securing the party’s nomination (Matland 2002: 4). As we shall see, though, in Japan candidate selection has gone on behind closed doors, especially in the LDP.

Party gatekeepers play a key role in the selection of candidates (Matland 2002: 1). Who the gatekeepers are and their attitude towards women influence the extent to which women are tapped as candidates. The position of gatekeepers varies by party. Potential gatekeepers include party leaders, faction leaders or local party officials. Below I will

and mothers in addition to being politicians. In a way this fact allows them to fit in with the party’s conservative conception of women.
consider the recruitment and nomination procedures and the role of gatekeepers for the two largest parties in Japan—the LDP and the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ).

*The LDP’s candidate selection*

The LDP’s party structure, rules and norms have not favored women candidates. Nomination and recruitment rules and norms, factions, *kōen kai* and conservative ideology have all proven barriers to entry to the LDP for women. Since its inception LDP endorsement has been guided by the following principles: (1) endorsements only are to be granted to candidates with a realistic chance of being elected; (2) unofficial endorsements are not to be given and the party is not to endorse more candidates than the district magnitude; (3) incumbents are to receive priority; (4) indicted criminals are not to be endorsed; (5) recommendations from LDP branch offices are to be considered (Cox and Rosenbluth 1996: 261). Under the old multiple member district system the LDP established an Electoral Strategy Committee to avoid over-nomination. This committee is composed of twelve members with factional representation proportional to faction size. The LDP president and vice president also serve on the committee (Cox and Rosenbluth 1996: 261; Shiratori 1988: 171). The consideration of official candidates is a bottom up process with the Electoral Strategy Committee considering recommendations from the local branch offices. The Electoral Strategy Committee passes its recommendation along to the Executive Council. If the Executive Council is unable to resolve who should receive official party endorsement in any of the districts, the decision is left to the five major party officials—the LDP president, vice president, secretary general, PARC chairperson, and Executive Council chairperson (Shiratori 1988: 172-3). Under the old multiple member district system factional balancing was a major decision rule in
determining official endorsements. After incumbents, second generation politicians or candidates who could demonstrate strong support in a given district were given priority (Woodall 1996: 108). In the multiple member district system it also was common for LDP members who did not receive official party endorsement to run as independents provided they had a sufficient personal support network of their own. The LDP would issue these independents a certificate of party membership and retroactively give these candidates party nomination if they won a seat in the election (Shiratori 1988: 172). This practice increased the number of conservative candidates running in any district and favored candidates with resources and connections to establish their own local political machines in the constituency (Shiratori 1988: 175).

Under both the old and new electoral systems, local party branch offices, factions and kōenkai have played a key role in the recruitment and nomination process in the LDP. Women faced barriers to entry in all three areas. Local branch offices as well as factions are very patriarchal. Iwamoto notes that one of the largest obstacles potential women candidates face is “the aged male gatekeepers who select candidates in almost all the districts” (2001: 226). Very few women have the type of experience rewarded by local party gatekeepers and/or factions when considering who to recruit and endorse as a potential LDP candidate. The favored career paths of LDP politicians are in the civil service or politics. The LDP often recruits bureaucrats, local and prefectural assembly members or political assistants to politicians (Ogai 2001: 208). Far fewer women are bureaucrats or local politicians due to similar gender barriers in these professions as in national politics.9

9 Bochel et al (2003) discuss barriers women face in politics at the local level.
\textit{Kōenkai} are difficult for all aspiring LDP politicians to build, but women face even greater obstacles because they often are excluded from the old boys networks that are crucial to the creation of these organizations.\textsuperscript{10} These connections come from education, work and family. Women who graduate from elite universities and work in the aforementioned careers do have some connections, but even so their networks are not as extensive as those of men. Women without this pedigree do not have these connections. If women candidates are married, they likely moved to a region based on their husband’s career. This common practice denies them family connections in the district where they live and would run for office (Bochel et al 2003: 27). Due to the personal allegiances \textit{kōenkai} foster, these organizations often are passed from a retiring politician to a family member or a former political assistant. Daughters and wives have occasionally inherited a \textit{kōenkai}, but the norm has been to pass these personal support groups on to a male representative of the family or a male political assistant. Still, of the three main paths most likely to lead to recruitment in the LDP until Koizumi women had fared best as second generation politicians (Ogai 2001: 209).

Many predicted that \textit{kōenkai} would become obsolete under the new electoral system. The hope was that under the combined SMD/PR system candidates would compete on policy, not personal favors and connections. The logic of competition in single member districts continues to reward candidates with \textit{kōenkai} (Krauss and Pekkanen 2004). The critical role of \textit{kōenkai} in both the old and new electoral systems favors candidates with money or connections to money. The LDP gives its candidates very little organizational

\textsuperscript{10} Arimura Haruko, an LDP first term Upper House member, sees this exclusion from old boys network as an advantage once in office. She explains, “Women unlike men are free from the old boys network. This fact allows women to judge policies on whether they are good or bad/right or wrong for their constituents” (personal interview, 10 June 2005).
or financial support. This fact has made it difficult for women to run as LDP candidates because they have fewer political connections to build their own kōenkai as well as less experience to prepare them to become Diet members (Iwai 1993: 115).

Factions also present obstacles to women who seek LDP endorsement. Under the new electoral system, factions fight to receive party endorsement when open seats become available in the single member constituencies because such openings provide an opportunity for a faction to increase its overall strength in the LDP (Park 2001: 438). The factions of the LDP president and secretary general often are able to recruit more potential candidates because these candidates realize these officials have greater weight in deciding party endorsements (Park 2001: 438). Candidates who receive LDP endorsement, however, have an incentive to keep their factional affiliation a secret during the election so as to secure more votes (Köllner 2004: 94). Since no faction has made it a priority to increase its number of women members, many of the same constraints to recruitment and nomination as under the old electoral system remain.

Even if these structural barriers did not exist, the conservative ideology of the LDP acts as a deterrent to the recruitment of female candidates. The LDP has not advocated progressive gender policies. LDP sponsored legislation tends to support women in their traditional gender role (Ogai 2001: 209). As a result, the LDP does not have much to offer many potential women candidates. Not surprisingly, historically the SDP (formerly the JSP) and the JCP have attracted more women (Aiuchi 2001: 221; Ogai 2001: 209).

Figures 3 and 5 illustrate the effects of the various constraints on the selection of women candidates in the LDP since the implementation of the new electoral system. Until Koizumi’s recruitment of women candidates in 2005, the LDP had the second
fewest women candidates in both single member district and proportional representation constituencies in most elections. In most instances the Komeitō was the only party with fewer women candidates than the LDP.\textsuperscript{11} While the LDP has supported very few women for office, its success rate for the women it has endorsed is quite high in comparison to other parties as shown in Figure 7 for single member districts and Figure 8 for proportional representation. The Komeitō’s success rate for women in proportional representation was higher than the LDP’s in 2003 and 2005. As Figure 7 illustrates, however, the LDP’s success rate in single member districts is much higher than other parties running women candidates in these elections. One should not read too much into the high success rate of women candidates in the LDP given the small number of candidates. Indeed, as Figure 4 and Figure 6 illustrate the total number of women elected in the LDP under the new electoral system has been quite small with the exception of the 2005 election.

\textit{The DPJ’s candidate selection}

In contrast to the LDP, the DPJ, the largest opposition party in Japan, has a party structure, rules and norms that have been slightly more favorable to women candidates. Unlike the now defunct Japan New Party, the DPJ did not incorporate quotas for women as part of its party platform. It did, however, establish certain institutions and rules to attract more women to the party as candidates. Specifically, it has a recruitment program for women and provides some open training classes to potential women candidates. If women decide to run as DPJ candidates, the party provides funding to help them get their

\textsuperscript{11} In the 1996 Lower House election the Socialists also ran fewer candidates than the LDP in proportional representation constituencies.
campaigns off the ground. Its highest profile members also are committed to campaigning on the behalf of women candidates (Aiuchi 2001: 221). Stump speeches by well-known politicians aid all candidates in overcoming *kanban*, the need for publicity when campaigning.

The DPJ, like the LDP, contains factions. The two major institutionalized factions in the DPJ have ties to labor unions. In general, DPJ factions, like factions in the LDP, are interested in recruiting new members and provide campaign assistance in order to aid in the election of their members (Köllner 2004: 100). As with the LDP, though, DPJ factions have not made the recruitment of women a priority.

Party gatekeepers in the DPJ pose less of a constraint on women candidates than in the LDP. In 2001 Aiuchi predicted “the current lack of strong leadership in the DPJ is expected to facilitate the incorporation of traditionally underrepresented groups like women and youth (2001: 221).” For recruitment this suggests that party leaders are not actively seeking one type of candidate. In this sense, the old boys network might be less of a factor in party nominations. Strong leadership, however, could help ensure that women candidates were actively recruited and that quotas for women candidates became part of the party platform, something Aiuchi’s assertion does not consider.

The DPJ’s Committee for Gender Equality oversees the recruitment of women for party nomination. DPJ candidates are recommended by local party officials or representatives of DPJ supporting organizations such as unions. Candidates also can express their interest in receiving the DPJ’s endorsement through the party’s open recruitment program (Aiuchi 2001: 221-2). The open recruitment program offers the

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12 In 2000, the DPJ provided approximately $10,000 to its women candidates (Aiuchi 2001: 221).
greatest opportunity for the entry of women. Still, only ten percent of the applicants through this program were women in the 2000 Lower House election cycle, illustrating the reluctance of women to self select themselves as potential candidates (Aiuchi 2001: 222).

In comparison to the LDP, though, the DPJ has attracted and supported more women candidates in both single member and proportional representation contests in most elections as illustrated in Figures 3 and 5. In fact, the LDP only has supported more PR candidates in the 2005 election when Koizumi and the LDP placed 25 women candidates on its PR list while the DPJ placed 24 on its list. In all other elections the DPJ endorsed two to three times more women candidates than the LDP.

The success rate of women candidates in the DPJ has been much lower than that of LDP endorsed candidates, especially in single member districts (see Figures 7 and 8). The lower success rate for DPJ women candidates is highlighted by comparing the total number women candidates elected in the LDP and DPJ. Figure 4 shows the number of women elected by party in single member districts and Figure 5 shows the number elected by party in proportional representation. As illustrated in Figure 4, the DPJ only had a higher number of women candidates elected than the LDP in SMDs in the 2003 election. The DPJ, however, had more women candidates elected by PR in 1996 and 2003 as shown in Figure 6. Given that the DPJ ran a considerably larger number of women candidates than the LDP in these contests though the actual number of women elected is small and constitutes a weaker success rate.

The lower success rate for women in the DPJ is related to the fact that all DPJ candidates face certain constraints when running for office. The DPJ does not have
financial resources to match that of the LDP. Moreover, while DPJ candidates certainly have the best chance of mobilizing support to challenge LDP incumbents in single member districts, many potential candidates do not wish to fight this uphill battle. Women in the DPJ, like women in the LDP, face the additional constraint of building personal networks in the districts without the full time support of a spouse to foster these ties (Aiuchi 2001: 223).

Factors that influence voter selection of women

Finally, women candidates must convince voters to select them at the ballot box. While *jiban* (constituency), *kanban* (publicity), and *kaban* (money) influence self selection and party selection, these factors play a large role in gaining votes. As we have seen, a potential candidate may either withdraw consideration or find it difficult to get a party’s endorsement due to a deficiency in any of these three areas. Insufficient connections, name recognition and money, however, ultimately speak to how effectively a candidate can run a campaign and actually get elected. The obstacles facing women in terms of building a constituency and raising money have been considered in the discussion of self selection and party selection. Publicity is the third obstacle for all candidates. In this area officially endorsed women candidates, especially in the largest parties, might actually benefit from their gender.

Since women candidates have been somewhat of a novelty in Japan, they often have received more media attention than male candidates. The media coined the term “Madonna” during the 1989 Upper House election to characterize the large number of women candidates running as JSP candidates under Doi’s leadership. Sixteen years later in the 2005 Lower House election women candidates continued to be described using the
same term. Much to the frustration of many candidates, the media tends to focus on family or fashion more than substance (Arimura Haruko, personal interview 10 June 2005). Still, such coverage increases the name recognition of the women candidates running for office and ultimately can benefit the women running.

Are women candidates from any given party less likely to receive voter support than male candidates from the same party in Japan? Most research has focused on women as voters not voters’ attitudes toward women candidates (Martin 2004, Steel 2004, Watanuki 1991). Some evidence suggests that in Japan women candidates have been able to take advantage of gender expectations by emphasizing the feminine qualities of cleanliness and purity to get elected (Iwai 1993: 109). By doing so women have taken what could be seen as a gender obstacle and turned it into a resource to aid in their election. These characteristics have been particularly appealing to voters in elections following scandal (Iwao 1993). For example, Doi and the JSP women candidates she recruited all exploited the fact that as women they were different from the dirty politicians implicated in the Recruit Cosmos scandal. Scandals in Japan are frequent, though. Clearly something else is needed to overcome the barriers to running for national office in Japan. The following sections explore the role of women’s organizations, back-up schools, and party leadership. Ultimately, we shall see that party leaders are integral to the success of women candidates.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN’S ORGANIZATIONS AND BACK-UP SCHOOLS

A vibrant women’s movement aids women in overcoming the obstacles to getting elected at the national level. Women’s organizations that focus on gender issues provide women with the chance to gain administrative and political experience as well as the
opportunity to build a support base. An association with a reputable organization can provide legitimacy to a woman’s candidacy and even help an aspiring candidate gain party affiliation. The organizations in turn can provide resources such as a volunteer base or financial backing that can aid a woman candidate’s campaign (Matland 2002: 2).

The women’s movement in Japan organized around the issue of suffrage during the prewar period. The fact that women were granted suffrage in the postwar constitution meant that women no longer had a common political goal to organize around. Without a unifying issue the women’s movement has been fragmented throughout the postwar period. The various women’s movements that do exist in Japan all focus on women as mothers and strive to have women’s needs considered in the political realm (Eto 2005: 317).13

In this section I will consider the role of four different organizations in training, recruiting and supporting women for political office in Japan. Two of these organizations--the Seikatsu Networks and the Ichikawa Fusae Memorial Association--focus on supporting candidates at the local level. A third organization, a politics school sponsored by Madoka Yoriko, a DPJ Lower House representative, focuses on training women to run for office at all levels. Finally, WINWIN is a nonpartisan organization that provides financial backing to first-time women candidates running for office, mainly at the national level. All these organizations help women challenge the obstacles of building a support base and in the cases of the Seikatsu Networks and WINWIN financing a campaign. The key focus of the Seikatsu Networks, the Ichikawa Fusae Memorial Association and Madoka’s school, however, is increasing the political

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13 Eto considers three types of women’s movements: elite-initiated, feminist, and non-feminist participatory (2005: 316).
awareness of women and educating them on how to run a campaign. These services are an important first step but fall short of directly confronting some of the obstacles of gaining party endorsement at the national level.

The Seikatsu Club Networks help women overcome the obstacles of building a constituency and financing a campaign at the local level. The Networks are the political arm of the Seikatsu Club, a consumer group which was formed as a co-operative to purchase environmentally sound household products. The Seikatsu Club’s concern with safe household products has attracted housewives to its membership although as Gelb and Estevez-Abe point out much power is wielded by men who hold significant leadership positions (1998: 268). Over time the group’s activities have become more political as members began to realize that the securing safe products is greatly facilitated by government regulations that protect the environment. In order to directly influence politics at the local level the consumer group established a separate branch of the organization—the Networks—which directly focuses on getting members elected to local office. Candidates supported by the Networks benefit from the aid of volunteers from the Seikatsu Club. Seikatsu Club members provide an initial support base from which candidates can build an even greater backing. These candidates can also draw on the Seikatsu Club’s other resources helping them overcome the obstacle of financial backing. The Networks represent the success of a social movement translating its organizational power into political representation for women in the local areas where it is organizationally strong. Its success in these areas has been the focus of much scholarly investigation (Gelb and Estevez-Abe 1998; Le Blanc 1999; Ogai 1999, 2004).
The fact that the Seikatsu Networks focus on electing proxies at the local level partially is a reflection of the relationship between women and politics in Japan. As we have seen, women see politics as distant from their lives in Japan. Women, however, do show interest in education and the environment. Interestingly enough, though, they do not define these areas as political. Instead, they see these issues as being public issues (Steel 2004: 227). The Seikatsu Club provides housewives with a way to address these public issues, and the Networks offers a path to connect the experience gained in the cooperative to local politics. With such involvement, politics becomes less distant (Pharr 1981). However, very few proxies serving in local assemblies aspire to politics at the national level. The proxies see local politics as the most appropriate arena for influencing the policies they care about (Gelb and Estevez-Abe 1998: 271).

Unlike the Seikatsu Networks, the Ichikawa Fusae Memorial Association supports the Center to Promote Women’s Involvement in Politics to train candidates for local office and educate sitting local politicians without an explicit policy agenda. This association is named after Ichikawa Fusae, a leader of the prewar women’s suffrage movement and an independent member of the Upper House of the Diet from 1958 to 1981. The Ichikawa Fusae Memorial Association’s main goal is to promote “cleaner” politics and elections and to this end foster a greater involvement of women in the political arena (Bochel and Bochel 2004). Yamaguchi Mitsuko, the executive director of the Ichikawa Fusae Memorial Association explains, “In national elections, parties are responsible for advancing women. In local elections organizations [like the Ichikawa Fusae Memorial Association] need to support many qualified women through education” (personal
The association strives to increase the number of women serving as local assembly members across Japan.

The education provided by the Ichikawa Fusae Memorial Association’s so-called “back-up school” helps women challenge the obstacles of building a constituency, financing a campaign and gaining publicity. This education also builds participants’ self-confidence which allows them to reach beyond traditional gender expectations. The back-up school’s courses for new candidates focus on teaching them practical skills for running for office. Such campaigning know-how includes educating women on running a legal campaign, building a support organization, giving speeches and developing policy expertise. For example, since it is often difficult to collect individual financial contributions, the Ichikawa Association encourages women to ask for volunteer support instead. According to Yamaguchi, a band of volunteers working in your living room instead of in a costly campaign office near the train station can reduce many financial costs of running for office (personal interview, 24 March 2006). This type of support has shown results. Specifically, approximately 80% of the women who take classes at the Ichikawa Association and run win a seat in local assemblies (Yamaguchi Mitsuko, personal interview, 24 March 2006).

The Ichikawa Association’s back-up school is not one of kind. Several variations of this type of educational resource exist. For example, DPJ politician Madoka Yoriko copyrighted her “politics school”. Madoka decided to create this school after her first election because she was disappointed by what she perceived to be a lack of interest in politics by women. According to Madoka, the broad goal of her politics school is “to create a network for women and get them excited about making policy” (personal
interview, 27 March 2006). Madoka resists the notion that women’s expertise should only stem from their role as housewives. According to Madoka, women need to have a more macro-view of policy making which includes foreign policy and defense as opposed to a micro-view that centers on women’s issues such as the environment and education (personal interview, 27 March 2006). The school does not focus exclusively on candidate training and recruitment. Instead, it seeks to educate and excite more women about politics.

For those interested in running for office, Madoka’s politics school offers the same type of educational services as the Ichikawa Fusae Memorial Association. The school teaches women how to run an election campaign and educates them on various policy issue areas. This type of education challenges the obstacles women face in the same way as discussed above with the Ichikawa Association’s back-up school. To date, one hundred three participants in Madoka’s politics school have been elected to office at the national, prefectural, ward, city, town, and village levels combined (Madoka Yoriko, personal interview, 27 March 2006). Only two of the participants have been elected to national office, though, suggesting that education alone is not enough to confront the obstacles women face when running for the Diet.

WINWIN is a nonpartisan organization focused on raising funds to support first-time women candidates running for office, mainly at the national level. WINWIN models itself on EMILY’s List in the United States which has had great success at nationalizing races for Congress by mobilizing financial support for pro-choice female Democrats. The key innovation of EMILY’s List has been to exploit the willingness of pro-choice

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14 This figure includes politicians with prior experience who participated in the school. Not all school participants are first-time politicians (Madoka Yoriko, personal interview, 27 March 2006).
women across the country to financially support candidates running in districts other than their own (Sarah Brewer, personal interview, 19 June 2006).

WINWIN has not been as successful as EMILY’s List at challenging the financial obstacles faced by female candidates precisely because it lacks a unifying policy issue to mobilize support around. WINWIN is already fighting an uphill battle since there is no custom of individual contributions in Japan. Without a unifying issue, the steering committee’s decisions of who to provide financial backing to simply appears ad hoc. In some cases the organization has supported candidates who did not need financial backing. The lack of transparency in the decision making process has disillusioned many of the contributors who initially offered financial support (Ogai Tokuko, personal interview, 24 March 2006). As a result, this organization is struggling.

While all these organizations attempt to challenge the obstacles faced by women running for office, most of them only have achieved limited success, and this success largely has been limited to the local level. As we shall see, to date women in the JSP and LDP have had the largest success at the national level when party leaders have decided to prioritize their election.

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

Party leaders have played a large role in elections when there have been significant increases in the number of women running for office and winning. Specifically, Doi’s support of women candidates in the JSP in the 1989 Upper House election and Koizumi’s commitment to seeing women elected in the 2005 Lower House election directly led to dramatic increases in female representation in the Diet.
The success of women in both the 1989 Upper House and 2005 Lower House elections was closely associated with the popularity of the party leaders who selected the candidates and the political climate during the election. These successes have not been the result of changes made to the institutional rules and norms for recruiting and nominating candidates in either party.

Doi, the head of the JSP in 1989, was extremely popular with the public and attracted a large amount of media attention as the first female party leader. Doi used her popularity and campaigned for the women her party endorsed in the 1989 Upper House election. She led the crusade against the consumption tax and money politics—both associated with the LDP. Interestingly, the JSP selected these women to run for office in 1989 out of desperation. In all, ten of the twelve women endorsed by the JSP won seats. The party did not expect their phenomenal success and did not have a strategy to exploit the new perspective these women brought to office. The party did not have quotas for women or any other institutions to ensure the high level of nomination of women in the future (Iwai 1993: 114).

A combination of tools and personal attributes aided Doi in securing unprecedented electoral success for female JSP candidates in the 1989 Upper House election. Significant resources included media attention, public opinion, and her support base. These resources combined with her vision allowed her to overcome obstacles presented by the JSP party organization, electoral process and attitudes toward women.

The environment was favorable for Doi’s “Women Changing Politics” campaign in 1989. The 1989 Upper House election followed shortly after one of the largest political scandals in Japanese history, the Recruit Cosmos stocks-for-favors scandal. The public
was disillusioned with LDP money politics and was open to alternatives. Doi’s manipulation of public opinion and media coverage allowed her to exploit the scandalous image of the LDP and promote an image of women JSP politicians as “clean” (Ogai 2001: 209). While women were already conceived culturally as “clean,” Doi’s speeches emphasized this fact. She used a window of opportunity, created by the Recruit scandal, to highlight the Socialist candidates’ image of cleanliness with the scandal-ridden images of the LDP members.

The outbreak of the Recruit scandal, however, did not guarantee her successful campaign for women candidates. The scandal opened a window of opportunity for Doi to exploit. The resources available to her and the way she used these resources through her vision are largely responsible for the success of the campaign.

Media coverage and public opinion became vital resources for Doi’s campaign to elect women candidates to the Diet. Doi’s selection as JSP party chairperson drew significant media attention and raised the public’s awareness of the possibility of female involvement in politics (Iwamoto 2001: 225). During her tenure as party head, Doi commanded a tremendous amount of coverage in the media, evident in the numerous pictures and articles about Doi in this time period (Stockwin 1994: 21). Women were motivated by Doi and began to think, “If Doi can do it, so can I” (Iwao 1993: 232). Doi presented an image of “reassurance” and “approachability” (Stockwin 1994: 31). These qualities aided in her public appeals.

Doi’s positive media exposure resulted in an increase in public support. This public support then allowed her to challenge the cultural stigma associated with women who were involved in politics. Doi used the positive cultural conception of women as “clean”
to her advantage by presenting herself and her candidates in accordance with these traditional values. Her refreshing campaign style mobilized public opinion in her favor as well as earned her a large support base among women (Iwao 1993).

Media coverage and popular public opinion also increased her power within the JSP, a party plagued by factionalism with splits between left, right and center groupings. During the height of her popularity she became indispensable in party electioneering. Doi was able to maintain her position of leadership as long as she could demonstrate that her popularity translated into more votes for the JSP. The media attention, public support, and electoral successes gave her outside legitimacy that she was able to use to rise above internal disputes within the JSP, at least in the short term (Stockwin 1994: 25).

Doi’s “Women changing politics in Japan” can be considered a success in 1989 due to the immediate gains in the number of women politicians. The press dubbed this influx of women politicians on the national scene as the “Madonna Boom”. However, according to Iwamoto, Doi resigned the Chair of the JSP after “perceiving her own failure in realizing the dream of “Women Changing Politics in Japan” (Iwamoto 2001: 226).

Doi’s evaluation of her failure seems to be based on the fact that the newly acquired women in the JSP did not lead to overall JSP success. In a personal interview, Doi gave the following assessment of the Madonna Boom:

I must say that it [the Madonna Boom] did not last very long. In the election of 1989, a historic thing happened. The opposition party won more seats than the ruling party. The Diet begins by nominating somebody for the Prime Minister, but we had to wait until the election for the House of Representatives in 1990. Unfortunately, the result of the election of 1990 was that the ruling party won over the opposition party. I was designated as premier for the House of Councilors, but Mr. Kaifu was designated as premier for the House of
Representatives and became Prime Minister, so the effects of the Madonna boom in terms of the period of time were very short. (personal interview, 26 May 2005)

Doi classifies the Madonna Boom as a failure because the JSP began to fall apart shortly after the 1989 election. However, this failure does not discount the record-breaking number of women candidates she recruited and helped get elected.

Doi’s Madonna Boom helped increase the acceptance of women in the political realm, a trend that continues today. Fukushima Mizuho, the current head of the Social Democratic Party (formerly referred to as the JSP), explained the significance of the Doi-led Madonna Boom in this way:

Until that time politics was considered a man’s world. After [the Madonna Boom] there was a feeling that politics was near and that one can change politics. When Doi became the leader of the JSP, I shook her hand. Maybe that was the reason why I became a politician. (personal interview, 24 May 2005)

Doi’s campaign for women confronted the cultural barriers that stated that a woman’s place was in the home. While the Madonna Boom resulted from Doi and other Socialist women emphasizing the traditional image of women as clean in a time fraught with scandal, the Madonna Boom can be seen as a significant step in getting women involved in politics at the national level even if the perception of these women was informed by traditional values.

Like Doi, Koizumi played a crucial role in the election of women in the 2005 Lower House election. Koizumi created an environment that was favorable for the election of women candidates. Passing comprehensive postal reform was his top priority. A significant number of LDP members, however, opposed this legislation. His postal reform bill barely passed the Lower House in July 2005 with 37 LDP members voting against it. Koizumi threatened to use one of his most powerful formal powers as prime
minister and dissolve the Lower House if the Upper House rejected the bill. Despite this threat, the bill failed in the Upper House due to LDP rebels who voted against it. Many predicted Koizumi would not follow through with his threat, but he proved them wrong. He did dissolve the Diet, kicking the rebels who had voted against his postal reform package out of the party. This election turned into a referendum on change in general and postal reform in particular. Women candidates nicely fit into this theme of change.

As the gatekeeper for party endorsements in this election Koizumi gave LDP support to a record number of women. Twenty-six women won as LDP candidates. This more than doubled the eleven women elected to the Lower House in 2003. Eleven of these women were selected as “assassins” to replace rebels who had voted against Koizumi’s postal reform package in single member district contests. The LDP under Prime Minister Koizumi’s leadership also placed women in the first slot in the PR ranking in seven of the eleven regional PR lists. As Christensen points out, the selection of women supported his reformist image and symbolically suggested he was indeed changing the LDP by selecting nontraditional candidates to run for office (2006: 509). Only five non-incumbent/non-former incumbent, non-assassin female candidates ran in single member districts that were not part of the postal reform controversy, however, suggesting that the increased number of women candidates was not indicative of a structural change in party recruitment procedures but rather a reflection of Koizumi’s personal quest to punish LDP rebels (Christensen 2006: 508).

Koizumi’s reformist (anti-LDP) stance helped him recruit these candidates to the traditionally conservative party, allowing him to partially challenge the ideological obstacle that had prevented the LDP from attracting women candidates in the past. It is
important to note, however, that many of the women he recruited were quite conservative. Others, however, were enticed by Koizumi’s promise to change the LDP. For example, Representative Tokashiki Naomi, one of Koizumi’s recruits referred to in the media as “Koizumi’s children”, explained, “I had gotten offers from the LDP in the past, but I thought the party was old-fashioned. After hearing Koizumi, I thought the LDP was changing, and I thought that I might be able to contribute” (personal interview, 28 March 2006). Tokashiki went on to explain that her character matched Koizumi’s. According to Takashiki, when Koizumi campaigned for her the constituents in her district witnessed this compatibility and supported her (personal interview, 28 March 2006).

Koizumi’s decision to support women in a high profile manner directly influenced the success of these “assassins”. For example, Representative Nishimoto Katsuko recognizes that her success was related to the fact that Koizumi put women at a higher rank on the PR list. Knowing how important this ranking was to her success she acknowledges that her re-election partially depends on what Koizumi’s successor’s approach will be. It is not clear that his successor will support women in the same way (personal interview, 28 March 2006). Clearly, Koizumi’s support of the women nominated by the LDP was critical.

Koizumi’s leadership skills provided women candidates with additional resources to challenge obstacles to election. Specifically, Koizumi’s popularity, positive media coverage, and effective speaking skills brought more publicity to these female candidates, one of the three critical elements to getting elected in Japan. Koizumi’s position within the LDP was weak. He did not have the backing of a powerful faction, and his policies challenged most of the senior power wielders in the party. As a result, throughout his
tenure as prime minister Koizumi used his popularity with the public to pressure LDP members to conform to his policy priorities. The LDP kept him at the helm because he delivered electoral victories. When his second postal reform package failed in 2005, his public support ratings were at personal low hovering around 50 percent support. His decision to dissolve the Diet and his crusade to punish the LDP rebels reinvigorated his public appeal and caused his support ratings to soar. His willingness to endorse female candidates and lend his popular appeal to them by campaigning for them helped them get elected.

Significantly, Koizumi did not select these women based on a policy agenda supporting gender issues. Instead, as mentioned earlier he seemed to be drawn to women candidates because they symbolically increased his reformist credentials (Christensen 2006: 509). Koizumi exploited the non-traditional nature of these female candidates. Based on the experience of the JSP Madonnas whose election was also tied to the political environment and the personal charisma of a leader, one can speculate that the standards used to assess the women politicians will change in the next Lower House election. The current first-term women politicians will be evaluated based on their performance as politicians, not their approach to politics (Iwai 1993: 108-9). Lower House Representative Tokashiki Naomi is aware the evaluative criteria are likely to change. When asked how the next election will differ from the previous one she explained, “[In the previous election] the local people did not vote for my policies; they voted for my image and my possibilities. In the next election, I want them to vote on what I have done” (personal interview, 28 March 2006). Tokashiki embraces the chance to run on her record. It is not clear, however, how the women assassins supported by
Koizumi will fare now that he is no longer the party leader. Some observers predict a similar outcome to Doi’s 1989 Madonnas—failure to get re-elected once the environment has changed and the charismatic appeal of the leader that led the women to victory has faded (Christensen 2006: 512). Absent structural changes in party recruitment and candidate selection being instituted by the LDP, the success of female candidates in 2005 simply remains the result of Koizumi’s leadership and popular appeal.

CONCLUSION

Two of the most significant increases in the number of women in the Diet occurred when a party leader made the election of women a priority thereby easing the normal constraints women face in receiving party endorsement. The fact that Doi and Koizumi represent different parties underscores the importance of leadership in bringing women to office. While it is impossible to determine the effects of the recent election of Koizumi’s assassins, it is significant to note that the number of women elected to the Upper House following the 1989 Madonna Boom dropped from 17.5% to 10.3% in the 1992 Upper House election, suggesting that the election of Socialist women was not the result of structural party change in the JSP. The women elected in 1989 were not up for re-election until 1995, but the JSP was not able to maintain the momentum in electing women to office in the election following the Madonna Boom.

Looking at the experience of other countries, implementing quotas for women seems to be the best way to increase their presence in national legislative bodies. Quotas, however, have not been seriously considered by most political parties in Japan. The now defunct Japan New Party did have a quota for women, but significantly it was unable to find enough women candidates to meet it in the elections it contested. Proportional
representation electoral systems also favor women candidates. The move from a MMD system to a combined SMD/PR electoral system in 1994 marked a step in this direction. Increasing the number of women in the Diet was not one of the motivations behind this proposal, though. Instead, the PR element was promoted to protect the smaller parties which the MMD system had fostered.

The number of women in the Diet has increased since electoral reform in 1994. One of the most significant leaps in numbers in the Lower House came with Koizumi’s assassins in the 2005 Lower House election. As we have seen though, Koizumi’s purpose in supporting women candidates was not to promote gender equity in the Diet or specific gender policy. Koizumi’s main motivation was to unseat the rebels who had voted against his postal reform package. His choice of women candidates carried some of the same symbolism as the Madonnas in the 1989 Upper House election.

Back-up schools and campaign organizations have provided women with resources to challenge some of the obstacles of running for political office. These resources, however, have only increased the number of female representatives at the national level on the margins. Indeed, two of the most significant increases in the number of women elected to the Diet occurred when party leaders made the election of women a priority. The success of women with the support of Doi and Koizumi will remain isolated phenomena though until institutional changes in the electoral system and/or party nomination and recruitment are implemented.
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