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# Gendered Reactions to Women Politicians in Japan: The Role of Media Use and Political Cynicism

By LEE Jinah\* and LEE Kwangho\*\*

## Abstract

This study draws on data from a survey of Japanese voters' attitudes toward women politicians. We explored voters' perception of personal traits and issue competencies of women politicians, focusing on the role of media use and political cynicism. The results revealed that women politicians were perceived as lacking political ability and as being able to more competently deal with welfare issues rather than governance issues. Media use affected voters' perceptions of the integrity of women politicians and their competency in welfare issues, indicating that the Japanese media reinforces gendered reactions to the personal traits and issue competencies of women politicians in Japanese politics.

## Introduction

Politics has not been a women's realm in Japan: women's political representation has lagged far behind that of men, despite the remarkable success of women in a wide range of fields over the past decades (Iwanaga, 2008). According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the world average for women legislators was 22.6% as of November 1, 2015, with the Nordic countries at the top (41.1%). Japan ranks 116th out of 190 countries with 9.5%, representing for the 45 women among the country's 475 seats. Other G7 countries rank higher than Japan, ranging from 19.4% in the U.S. to 36.5% in Germany. Asian countries, such as China (23.6%) and Korea (16.3%), are also higher than Japan.

A recent statistics by Japanese Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office showed that the ratio of women in parliament decreased to 7.9% in the 2012 general election, ending the increasing trend that had been present in the general elections since 2000. In addition, the proportion of women candidates running for election was 15.0%, a 1.7% decrease from the previous general election. In the latest general election, held in December 2014, both the percentage of assemblywomen elected (9.1%) and ran

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for election (16.6%) were slightly increased.

There have been a few women serving as members of the cabinet as well, where they were often placed in charge of issues that women were viewed as being good at handling, such as issues related to the environment, consumerism, and education. In a recent cabinet reshuffle, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe appointed five women to further his efforts toward achieving a gender-equal society. Although the number of female ministers at that time was equal to the number of Koizumi's cabinet in 2001, the main posts that belong to male ministers have been maintained. In addition, two female ministers resigned owing to the scandals, which resulted in voters' negative impression on women politicians. Furthermore, there have been only a few women party leaders so far; only the Social Democratic Party, formerly the Socialist Party, has elected women leaders, including Takako Doi and Mizuho Fukushima.

Political culture, structural barriers, and political institutions lead to a gender imbalance in democratic politics (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). Deep-rooted gender biases and stereotyped attitudes in Japanese society have been also identified as crucial factors for the absence of women from Japan's political arena. Recent news of men politicians' sexist remarks toward an assemblywoman came as a shock to the Japanese people in the middle of the government's enthusiastic push for "Womenomics", a major reform strategy of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The Tokyo Metropolitan assemblywoman Ayaka Shiomura of Your Party confronted a few men politicians' harsh sexist comments on her marital status while addressing the issue of women's delayed marriage and childbirth in the Metropolitan Assembly. This incident clearly shows how pervasive the deep-rooted gender biases and stereotyped attitudes are in Japanese politics and society.

With the exception of high-profile women politicians, most women find it difficult to obtain sufficient political resources, mainly due to their lack of political experience and the gendered political culture. The male-oriented culture within the Liberal Democratic Party, a long-term dominant party in the postwar Japanese society, has certainly affected the gendered imbalance in politics. In the Japanese political arena, the so-called "Sanban" (meaning the three 'ban's)—the "Jiban" (constituency), "Kanban" (reputation), and "Kaban" (election funds)—is often described as the primary political resources needed to run for election, which generally work to men politicians' advantage.

The gendered depiction of women politicians in the media is also a significant factor in reinforcing a gendered attitude toward woman politicians (Kahn, 1996; Everitt & Gidengil, 2003). Given voters' limited access to women politicians, the media's framing of women politicians is the primary basis on which voters build their attitudes toward them. Previous studies have examined the structural problems and the election system in regard to women's political underrepresentation in Japan (e.g. Iwanaga, 2008; Eto, 2010), but there have been relatively few studies that have

investigated the effects of the political culture and media coverage on women's political representation in Japan.

The current study seeks to investigate gendered reactions to women politicians in Japan in terms of voters' perceptions of women politicians' personal traits and issue competencies, with a specific emphasis on the role of media use for political information (hereafter media use) and political cynicism. For the purpose of this study, the following literature review primarily focuses on gendered mediation and on voters' views of women politicians.

## The Gendered Framing of Politicians in the Media

Studies on the media's portrayals of women politicians in western countries have consistently shown that the media differentiates between men and women politicians by emphasizing the feminine personal traits of women politicians, as well as their lack of experience and qualifications in the political field. This gendered media framing leads voters to evaluate both the leadership and ability of women in politics differently than their men counterparts (Kahn, 1996; Norris, 1997). Norris (1997) found that, overall, women leaders in politics received slightly less coverage than men, and that news media highlighted the lack of political experience, expertise, and qualifications among women leaders by continually framing them as outsiders. At the same time, news headlines and leads about women's leadership were likely to focus on the breakthroughs of the first women while highlighting the role of women leaders as agents of change in countering political corruption (Norris, 1997).

Likewise, in their analysis of the U.S. in 1992, the so-called "Year of the Woman," Carroll & Schreiber (1997) found that the news media presented women as having political views that differed from those of their men counterparts, which primarily focused on typical women's issues. In addition, women's issues were likely to be portrayed as "what women do collectively or the problems they share as women" (Carroll & Schreiber, 1997, p.145), whereas women's efforts on traditional masculine issues received less coverage, and women's influence on these issues tended to be limited to their individual efforts (Carroll & Schreiber, 1997). Similarly, Kahn (1996) pointed out that the media did not fully cover the campaign appeals made by women candidates, even though women candidates emphasized their ability and experiences in their campaigns. On the other hand, the media coverage for men candidates was more likely to correspond to their campaign messages.

Furthermore, the "game frame," a typical form of election coverage that portrays campaigns as mere games rather than as a discussion of political views, tends to consist of masculine narratives (Mendelsohn, 1993; Sampert & Trimble, 2003), and this media practice affects the way that the media portrays women. In an analysis of the coverage of the 2000 Canadian federal election campaign, Sampert &

Trimble (2003, p.217) found that headlines employed masculine expressions, such as “fires, attacks, battle, race, blitz, tackle, skate, and hammer” when issues were depicted in terms of a horse race. The headlines highlighted the party leaders’ own views on issues rather than the issues themselves, and men leaders received more attention in the headlines than either their parties or the women leaders with whom they were competing. In addition, headlines on the lone woman leader were presented in order to “entertain” rather than to “inform” (Sampert & Trimble, p.220), by focusing on her lifestyle, personality, and feminine concerns that were irrelevant to her qualifications as a political leader.

In their recent study on the 2006 elections in the United States, Canada, and Australia, Kittilson & Fridkin (2008) revealed that women candidates were portrayed using gender-stereotyped language, such as having warm and weak leadership, whereas men candidates were described as aggressive and strong leaders. In addition, newspapers emphasized men candidates in terms of typical male issues, such as the economy and foreign policy, a finding that is consistent with previous research conducted in 1990s.

Similar patterns in the media framing of women politicians have been shown in the East Asian context as well. In an analysis of the news discourse on women officials in Hong Kong, Lee (2004, p.220) pointed out that the Hong Kong media tended to describe women officials as perfect women and ideal role models for women, and criticized the approach for serving “the ideology of perfect women,” which does not indicate gender equality in society as a whole.

The case of Korea is worth noting, since Korea has experienced a rapid change in terms of women’s participation in politics, brought about by the introduction of a quota system for women’s representation, and by the election of their first woman president. Lim, Ahn, Kim, & Yu (2010) analyzed newspaper coverage on women politicians by focusing on Keun-hye Park, from the conservative ruling party, who is now the first women elected as president. A liberal newspaper centered on the political conflicts surrounding her and had skeptical attitudes toward her ability as politician. On the other hand, a conservative newspaper had a tendency of portraying her positively, but primarily in terms of human-interest stories such as her popularity and voters’ loyalty to her. Hyun & Kim (2005) analyzed the media’s portrayals of the 2004 general election in Korea, in which the presence of women politicians increased following the revision of election law. Media highlighted two prominent women politicians while employing frames consistent with those found in Norris (1997), such as outsiders, agents of change, and breakthroughs. The other frame was related to a conflict within a political party concerning a woman politician; the media blamed her for the conflict, although there were structural problems within the party.

As for the Japanese political arena, we would like to focus on the House of Counsellors election in 1989 and on the two House of Representatives elections in

2005 and 2009 that women have been highlighted. Doi Takako, the first woman party leader in Japan, played an important role in the 1989 House of Councillors election, in which many women candidates were elected under her leadership. The image of women as agents of change, coupled with the emphasis on social issues, worked to the advantage of women candidates in the 1989 election, at which time voters' political mistrust was increasing due to the political scandals made by the Liberal Democratic Party (Iwai, 1993). Women candidates attracted unprecedented attention from the media. However, their increased presence in the election was described as a "Madonna Boom," by focusing on their gender and by portraying their appeals on social issues—including the consumption tax in particular—as the collective efforts of women candidates, which is consistent with Carroll & Schreiber (1997).

More recently, the 2005 general election's highlighting of women candidates was mainly due to the election strategy of the Liberal Democratic Party. Forty-three assemblywomen were elected to the parliament, accounting for 9.0% of the seats. However, people regarded this as the Liberal Democratic Party's strategy of seeking public favor in order to win the election (Aiuchi, 2007). Although the term "Koizumi Children," used in this election to refer to newly elected diet members of the Liberal Democratic Party, is not limited to assemblywomen, the young members' victory in the election was portrayed as a result of then Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's popularity and his positive image as a challenger to old politics, rather than as a result of their own ability.

Women were also extensively spotlighted in the 2009 general election, owing to the Democratic Party's strategy of fielding women candidates for election, with a specific emphasis on their image as agents of change. Fifty-four assemblywomen were elected in the 2009 general election, accounting for 11.3% of all seats. However, the Japanese media focused on gendered images, calling the assemblywomen "Ozawa girls" after Ichiro Ozawa, one of the most influential of the party's politicians at that time. Additionally, in this context, the expression "girl" apparently implies a lack of experience and qualifications, suggesting that women candidates' victories were guided by the strong leadership and popularity of Ozawa, and by the strategies of a male-dominated party. Voters also evaluated the breakthrough of women politicians as not resulting from the women's own ability and qualifications, but rather from the outcome of the efforts of Democratic Party to confront the ruling coalition party, which lost people's support mainly due to the pension scandal (Lee, 2011).

## Voters' Perception of Women's Leadership in Politics

It is obvious that widespread gender stereotypes are a crucial factor hindering women's representation in democratic politics. With limited information, people are

likely to rely on such heuristics as gender or appearance when judging others, and the same is true of evaluating candidates, particularly when voters have limited access to them. Notably, gender cues play an important role in people's decision making—including voting behavior—which lead voters to differentiate between male and female candidates (Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Ladd, 1997). Chang & Hitchon (1997) pointed out that voters possess prior schemas of political candidates in which men are typically leaders: voters tend to view male candidates based on this political leader schema, whereas they are likely to employ a traditional gender schema when evaluating women as politicians.

In a review of studies on the images of men and women candidates, Kahn (1996) suggested that voters are likely to prioritize male traits more than the traits of their women counterparts when judging candidates' political qualifications. Similarly, gender stereotypes that are based mainly on personal traits, including women's compassion and men's aggressiveness, lead voters to make a distinction between men and women candidates in terms of their expertise and ability as politicians (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). Specifically, voters tend to consider men as better at handling the military, foreign policy, the economy, and so on, whereas women are likely to be viewed as competent in traditionally feminine issues, such as education, health, the environment, and helping the disabled and elderly (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Kahn, 1996).

Experimental studies have more clearly revealed such biases and schemas in voters' perceptions of political candidates according to their gender (Alexander & Andersen 1993; Huddy & Terkildsen 1993). Iyengar, Valentino, Ansolabehere, & Simon (1997) found that women candidates were judged as more credible on typical women's issues, while men candidates were viewed as more competent on traditional men's issues. Furthermore, candidates' genders led voters to pay attention to and recall different messages in political campaigns. Hitchon & Chang (1995) suggested that people are more likely to recall women candidates' family and appearance than their campaign activities. On the other hand, they more accurately remember the campaigning activities of men candidates.

However, some stereotypical attitudes, as well as some images of women in politics, work to the advantage of women candidates, according to the electoral situation. Dolan (2005) noted that women's image as outsiders led voters to perceive women candidates more favorably. Furthermore, when issues such as education and health care are salient in an election, people's tendency to be influenced by gender stereotypes would tip the balance in favor of women candidates (Kahn, 1996). Considering these studies together, it is necessary to take into account the political and electoral situation in order to determine how, and the extent to which, gender stereotypes affect the evaluation of women candidates.

To summarize, studies have shown that the media depicts men and women politicians in different ways by focusing on the masculine qualifications of

leadership in politics. On the other hand, positive media framing of women politicians does exist by describing women as agents of change who are morally superior to their counterparts (Carroll & Schreiber, 1997). Political parties have a tendency to take advantage of these images of women, particularly in the democratic countries where there is a strong sense of political distrust.

## Research Purpose and Methodology

This study examines voters' perceptions on women politicians and the predictors of those perceptions, focusing on the role of media use and political cynicism in the Japanese context. The personal traits of women politicians, such as compassion and honesty, might lead voters to view women as competent on welfare and social security issues, while men candidates' image as strong, knowledgeable leaders encourage voters to consider men as better at handling the economy, military, and foreign policy (Kahn, 1996). Given the public's high reliance on the media for political information, it is predicted that gender-biases in media coverage will affect voters' stereotyped reactions to women politicians.

In addition, it is expected that people with a higher degree of political cynicism view women politicians as more competent while expecting women politicians to act in their role as agents of change. There is a strong sense of political cynicism among voters in democratic countries, including Japan, in recent times, mainly due to the distrust and sense of dismay over long-standing, male-dominated politics. Such negative political attitudes would lead voters to expect women politicians to change politics. Based on these discussions, this study formulated two hypotheses, and two research questions, as follows:

H1: There is a difference between the perceived personal traits of men and women politicians.

RQ1: To what extent are media use and political cynicism associated with the perceived personal traits of women politicians?

H2: There is a difference between the perceived issue competencies of men and women politicians.

RQ2: To what extent are media use and political cynicism associated with the perceived issue competencies of women politicians?

The data were collected from an online survey issued by a major Internet research company in December 2009, when women were spotlighted in the general election of the same year. A total of 518 respondents, sampled in accordance with the census population in the metropolitan areas by sex and age, participated in the online survey. The data consist of 268 male and 250 female voters with an average age of 39.6 years ( $SD = 10.9$ ). Respondents were asked about their media-use



behavior, political knowledge and cynicism, and the perceived personal traits of politicians and their issue competencies, as follows:

*Media use.* Using a five-point scale, respondents judged, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (absolutely), the extent to which they acquired political information from the media, including public and commercial television broadcast news, newspapers, magazines, the Internet, and interpersonal communication. Considering the different reporting styles of broadcasters in Japan, this study separately measured public and commercial television news viewing for political information. Taniguchi (2002) identified different types of political reporting in commercial and public broadcasting in Japan: compared to *NHK*, *TV Asahi* was likely to employ strategic and negative frames on politics. In addition, commercial broadcasting in the recent elections has tended to focus on women candidates' personal characteristics, such as age, personality, and attire. Male respondents tended to obtain more of their information through mass media, such as *NHK* news, newspapers, magazines, and the Internet (Table1). It was interesting that female respondents obtained political information through interpersonal communication more than male respondents, which is consistent with previous research (Bystrom, Banwart, Kaid, & Robertson, 2004).

*Political knowledge and cynicism.* Political knowledge was measured using a five-point scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very knowledgeable). With regard to political cynicism, respondents were asked to rate on two five-point rating scales measuring the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with such statements as

Table 1: T-test for differences in political knowledge and cynicism, and media use between men and women respondents

	<i>M(SD)</i>		<i>t(df)</i>
	Men Respondents	Women Respondents	
<i><u>Political knowledge and cynicism</u></i>			
Political knowledge	3.50( .92)	2.91( .92)	-7.33(516)***
Political cynicism	3.92( .80)	4.01( .74)	1.28(516)
<i><u>Media use for political information</u></i>			
NHK news viewing	3.33(1.15)	3.09(1.26)	-2.23(516)*
Commercial television news viewing	3.92( .89)	3.87( .95)	-.66(516)
Newspaper reading	3.22(1.28)	2.92(1.38)	-2.60(516)*
Magazine reading	2.50(1.11)	2.24(1.13)	-2.64(516)**
Internet use	3.72(1.02)	3.40(1.13)	-3.37(501.16)**
Interpersonal communication	2.69(1.02)	3.01(1.10)	3.41(516)**

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$

“politicians are untrustworthy” and “politicians only care about their own interests over public policy,” which were based on Pinkleton, Austin, & Fortman (1998) and Pinkleton & Austin (2004). The second item was modified from “politicians only care about themselves or special interests” (Pinkleton & Austin, 2004). We combined the two items into the political cynicism scale ( $\alpha = .711$ ). The higher the score, the more cynical the respondents were reported to be. As shown in Table 1, male respondents demonstrated a higher knowledge. There was no significant difference in political cynicism of male and female respondents.

*Perceived personal traits of politicians and their issue competencies.* The scales used for the personal traits of politicians are based on Kahn & Gordon (1997) and Brettschneider, Neller, & Anderson (2006). Kahn & Gordon (1997) suggested that voters considered two main traits, such as competence and integrity, in their voting behavior. Competence is defined as traits such as being knowledgeable, leadership, experience, and intelligence, whereas integrity refers to the honesty, morality, and trustworthiness of the candidate (Kahn and Gordon 1997, p.62). Brettschneider, Neller, & Anderson (2006, p.491) identified four trait-dimensions of politicians: their problem-solving abilities, leadership qualities, integrity, and non-political or personal characteristics. We asked respondents to evaluate the following traits of men and women politicians, respectively, with a scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (absolutely): expertise, leadership, experience, competence, trustworthiness, honesty,

Table 2: Paired t-test for differences in perceived personal traits of men and women politicians

	<i>M(SD)</i>		<i>t(df)</i>
	Men Politicians	Women Politicians	
Trustworthiness	2.70( .93) <	2.98( .83)	-6.58(517)**
Honesty	2.36( .91) <	3.07( .86)	-15.16(517)**
Incorruption	2.45( .85) <	3.15( .86)	-16.84(517)**
Meticulousness	2.37( .83) <	3.48( .83)	-23.03(517)**
Morality	2.56( .88) <	3.18( .80)	-14.19(517)**
Compassion	2.52( .82) <	3.27( .85)	-17.23(517)**
Expertise	3.12( .95) >	2.97( .86)	3.16(517)*
Competence	2.94( .88) <	3.05( .78)	-2.80(517)*
Decisiveness	3.11( .94) >	2.78( .79)	7.19(517)**
Strength	3.17( .97) >	2.68( .82)	9.93(517)**
Leadership	3.19(1.00) >	2.62( .77)	11.52(517)**
Experience	3.15( .89) >	2.62( .78)	12.15(517)**

\* $p < .01$  \*\* $p < .001$

incorruption, compassion, strength, meticulousness, morality, and decisiveness. In regard to issue competencies, the respondents judged, on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (absolutely), the extent to which men and women politicians were able to deal with the following issues: economic measures, social security, environmental issues, foreign affairs, taxes, childcare and education, employment issues, national security, trade issues, and political reforms. These issues were chosen based on Kahn (1996) and on an examination of the political and social issues present in the recent Japanese elections.

## Findings

It was examined whether there is a difference between the perceived personal traits of men and women politicians (H1). The results in Table 2 indicate that respondents viewed men politicians as having traditional masculine traits, such as expertise, strength, leadership, experience, and decisiveness. In contrast, women politicians were perceived more favorably for feminine traits, such as compassion, reliability, honesty, incorruption, meticulousness, and morality.

For the subsequent analysis, a principal-components factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted for the 12 items used to assess the personal traits of women politicians (Table 3). Two factors were extracted on the condition that the eigenvalues were above 1. Only one item, competence, had similar factor loadings on both factors and did not contribute to a simple factor structure. Another principal-components factor analysis of the remaining 11 items using varimax rotations produced two factor solutions, “integrity traits” and “ability traits.”

Table 3: Rotated factor matrix of perceived personal traits of women politicians

	Factor1	Factor2
Morality	.831	.222
Incorruption	.829	.236
Compassion	.816	.191
Meticulousness	.791	.149
Honesty	.781	.235
Trustworthiness	.747	.391
Strength	.128	.818
Leadership	.204	.817
Experience	.178	.814
Decisiveness	.332	.744
Expertise	.433	.571

Table 4: Multiple regression analyses predicting perceived personal traits of women politicians

	Integrity	Ability
<i>Demographic variables</i>		
Gender	-.124**	-.133**
Age	.014	-.067
Education	-.020	-.001
<i>Political knowledge and cynicism</i>		
Political knowledge	-.025	-.037
Political cynicism	-.181***	-.221***
<i>Media use for political information</i>		
NHK news viewing	-.024	.004
Commercial television news viewing	.203***	.036
Newspaper reading	.124*	.066
Internet use	.067	.114*
Magazine reading	-.004	.018
Interpersonal communication	.015	-.003
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.086***	.061***

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$

<sup>a</sup> Gender was coded male=1, female=0

<sup>b</sup> Education was coded high education(college/university)=1  
middle high education(high school)=0

Integrity traits comprised the following six items: morality, incorruption, compassion, honesty, meticulousness, and trustworthiness. Ability traits consisted of five items: strength, experience, leadership, decisiveness, and expertise. The study combined the items of each factor into one variable, respectively(integrity:  $\alpha = .913$ , ability:  $\alpha = .855$ ). The integrity and ability traits corresponded to the traditional female and male traits, suggested by Kahn (1996, p.143) based on the stereotyping literature: female traits include “those that are consistently associated with women (e.g., warmth, compassion, honesty),” whereas male traits are “those traits that are seen as characteristic of men (e.g., strong leadership, knowledge, intelligence).”

We conducted multiple regression analyses in order to examine the extent to which media use and political cynicism are associated with the perceived personal traits of politicians (R1). Table 4 presents the results of the multiple regression analyses for the perceived personal traits of women politicians, including the integrity and ability traits. The results revealed that gender ( $\beta = -.124$ ,  $p < .01$ ), political cynicism ( $\beta = -.181$ ,  $p < .001$ ), media use such as commercial television news viewing ( $\beta = .203$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and newspaper reading ( $\beta = .124$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were

Table 5: Paired t-test for differences in perceived issue competencies of men and women politicians

	<i>M(SD)</i>		<i>t(df)</i>
	Men Politicians	Women Politicians	
Childcare and education	2.13( .77)	< 3.71( .91)	-30.78(517)**
Social security	2.66( .92)	< 3.14( .93)	-10.55(517)**
Environmental issues	2.72( .85)	< 3.20( .92)	-10.44(517)**
Foreign affairs	3.02(1.03)	> 2.57( .85)	9.64(517)**
Tax	2.80( .95)	2.77( .85)	.74(517)
Economic measures	2.80( .98)	> 2.69( .86)	2.54(517)*
Employment issues	2.76( .97)	< 2.84( .89)	- 2.00(517)*
National Security	3.10( .98)	> 2.51( .83)	12.59(517)**
Trade issues	3.03( .94)	> 2.53( .79)	11.85(517)**
Political reform	2.99( .96)	> 2.62( .83)	8.66(517)**

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .001$

significant predictors of women politicians' integrity traits. For women politicians' ability traits, gender ( $\beta = -.133, p < .01$ ), political cynicism ( $\beta = -.221, p < .001$ ), and Internet use ( $\beta = .114, p < .05$ ) were significant predictors. Women, and those with low political cynicism, were more likely to view women politicians as having integrity and ability traits. In addition, some interesting results were found in the relations between media use and perceived personal traits: traditional media use, such as commercial television news viewing and newspaper reading for political information, is positively associated with the perceived integrity traits of women politicians, while Internet use for political information is positively related to the perceived ability traits of women politicians.

Next, we investigated whether there is a difference between the perceived issue competencies of men and women politicians (H2). The results of a paired t-test of the perceived issue competencies of men and women politicians demonstrated similar patterns to those of previous studies (see Table 5), indicating a gendered perception on the issue competencies of men and women politicians. Specifically, men politicians are perceived as more competent than women politicians with regard to issues such as national security, trade issues, foreign affairs, economic measures, and political reform. In contrast, women politicians are assessed as more competent than men politicians on issues such as education, social security, and the environment.

Regarding issue competencies, there are certain issues for which either men or women are traditionally regarded as being better able to address (Kahn, 1996): male

issues are those that men are viewed as more capable of handling, such as foreign policy, defense, and economics, whereas female issues consist of those that women are regarded as more competent at addressing, including environment and social issues. Issues were divided according to the following procedure in order to investigate this distinction. A principal-components factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted for the ten items for the perceived issue competencies of women politicians. Although two factors were extracted from ten items on the condition that the eigenvalues were above 1, two items, “tax” and “employment,” had similar loadings on both factors. After excluding these two items, another principal-components factor analysis of the remaining eight items using varimax rotations produced two factor solutions, shown in Table 6. Based on Kahn’s (1996) results of the traditional masculine and feminine issues, the two factors were labeled “governance issues” and “welfare issues.” Governance issues consisted of five items: national security, trade issues, foreign affairs, economic measures, and political reform. Welfare issues comprised three items: education, social security, and environmental issues. The study combined the five items of the first factor into governance issues. Three items from the second factor were also combined into welfare issues. Alphas for the two variables were .917 and .869, respectively.

To examine the relationship between media use, political cynicism, and the perceived issue competencies of women politicians (R2), another set of multiple regression analyses were conducted. As presented in Table 7, the results showed that political cynicism ( $\beta = -.137, p < .01$ ) and media use such as commercial television news viewing ( $\beta = .189, p < .001$ ) and newspaper reading ( $\beta = .145, p < .01$ ) are significant predictors for the perceived competencies of women politicians on welfare issues. Age ( $\beta = -.076, p < .1$ ) was marginally significant. As for governance issues, gender ( $\beta = -.123, p < .01$ ) and political cynicism ( $\beta = -.267, p < .001$ ) were significant.

Table 6: Rotated factor matrix of perceived issue competencies of women politicians

	Factor1	Factor2
National security	.866	.195
Trade issues	.862	.225
Foreign affairs	.828	.251
Political reform	.778	.358
Economic measures	.735	.458
Child care and education	.163	.875
Social security	.317	.848
Environmental issues	.373	.798

Table 7: Multiple regression analyses predicting perceived issue competencies of women politicians

	Welfare	Governance
<i>Demographic variables</i>		
Gender	-.071	-.123**
Age	-.076+	-.037
Education	-.008	.063
<i>Political knowledge and cynicism</i>		
Political knowledge	-.003	-.061
Political cynicism	-.137**	-.267***
<i>Media use for political information</i>		
NHK news viewing	-.008	-.036
Commercial television news viewing	.189***	.049
Newspaper reading	.145**	.078
Internet use	.032	.065
Magazine reading	-.007	.049
Interpersonal communication	.032	.027
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.073***	.090***

+ $p < .1$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$

<sup>a</sup> Gender was coded male=1, female=0

<sup>b</sup> Education was coded high education(college/university)=1  
middle high education(high school)=0

The study predicted that those with a higher level of political cynicism view women politicians as more competent than men politicians, as a result of their expectation that women politicians play a role as agents of change. Contrary to this expectation, the results showed that political cynicism was negatively associated with the perception of women politicians' competencies in both types of issues: those respondents with a low level of political cynicism viewed women politicians' competencies as high when dealing with both welfare and governance issues. Media use, including commercial television news viewing and newspaper reading for political information, was positively related to the perceived competencies of the women politicians on welfare issues. There were no significant associations between media use and perceived competencies of women politicians in the governance issues.

## Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrated that a deep-rooted gender bias exists

toward politicians among Japanese voters. With regard to the personal traits of politicians, men politicians were considered as having typical masculine ability traits—such as expertise, strength, leadership, experience, and decisiveness—while women politicians were regarded as having feminine integrity traits, including compassion, reliability, incorruption, meticulousness, and morality. The results of their issue competencies showed similar gender differences: men politicians were perceived as more competent in governance issues—such as national security, trade issues, foreign affairs, economic measures, and political reform—whereas women politicians were viewed as being better able to deal with welfare issues. The overall results of the analysis of the gendered perceptions of personal traits and issue competencies of men and women politicians were consistent with those of previous studies, which were mostly conducted in western democratic countries. Additionally, the female respondents had a tendency to support women politicians by evaluating women politicians' integrity and ability traits, and their competence in so-called masculine issues, higher than the male respondents did.

It was predicted that political cynicism would increase positive attitude toward women politicians through the expectations that women politicians play a role as agents of change and have integrity as politicians, but the findings showed that political cynicism negatively affected evaluations of personal traits and issue competencies of women politicians. This result might imply that political cynicism among Japanese voters has already entered critical stage: political cynicism and inefficacy among voters that they cannot influence politics at all are becoming chronic on the background of high political distrust.

Furthermore, political cynicism might interact with gender stereotypes toward women politicians. Political cynicism affected voters' perception of ability traits of women politicians more than integrity ones, and voters' perception of competencies of women politicians in governance issues more than welfare ones. These results indicate that voters do not expect women politicians' leadership as agents of political reform, even though they evaluate women politicians' integrity as politicians and competencies in several issues to some extent.

With regard to media use, voters who acquired political information from the mass media, including commercial television and newspapers, viewed women politicians as more competent in welfare issues. There was no significant relation between mass media use and the perceived competence of women politicians in governance issues, most likely as a result of the mass media's tendency to focus on welfare issues when covering women politicians, which means that mass media reinforces the gendered reactions to women politicians' competence in traditionally female issues.

In addition, traditional media use, such as commercial television news viewing and newspaper reading for political information increased voters' perception of integrity trait of women politicians. The findings can be interpreted as the effects of



media framing. Repeated access to gendered representations of women politicians in the media might reinforce stereotypical perceptions about them, and then such perceptions might be activated and retrieved when voters need to imagine, evaluate, and decide to cast a ballot. On the other hand, Internet use for political information was positively associated with voter's perception of ability traits of women politicians. This finding might be resulted from the effect of age, but its effect on perceived ability traits of women politicians was not significant in this study. It is needed to further examine the relationship among age, Internet use, and the evaluation of women politicians. The results also indicate that changing media environment including the Internet and social media would play a significant role in the voters' views and attitudes toward women politicians. Continuous studies are needed to examine the issues related to women politicians and the media in an effort to achieve women's equal participation in politics.

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