

Electoral Rules, Legislative Institutions, and Responsible Party Government*

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Abstract

Among the key features of “responsible party government” is contestation between government and opposition and accountability of cabinet ministers to parliament. However, the institutional determinants of this model of legislative organization are ambiguous. We use extensive data covering millions of committee speeches in Japan to document how new electoral incentives following a party-strengthening electoral system reform to the lower chamber of parliament immediately shifted legislative behavior toward responsible party government: speeches by ministers increased, speeches by unelected bureaucrats decreased, and discursive accountability between ministers and opposition legislators increased. Notably, this behavioral shift also occurred in the upper chamber, which was not directly subject to the electoral reform. Subsequent administrative reforms expanding junior ministerial roles and placing explicit limits on bureaucratic participation reinforced the effects in both chambers. These findings shed new light on the institutional underpinnings of responsible party government in general, as well as its progressive development in Japan. (150 words)

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Political theorists often argue that representative democracy functions best with “responsible” political parties (e.g., Schattschneider, 1942; Rosenbluth and Shapiro, 2018).¹ As a model for translating the preferences of citizens into governmental action, *responsible party government* requires that parties compete for votes on the basis of distinct policy platforms, and that the electoral fortunes of candidates rise or fall collectively based on the reputation and legislative performance of their parties. In the legislative arena, it means strong intraparty discipline in voting (e.g., Kam, 2009), centralization of agenda-setting power in the cabinet or majority-party leadership (e.g., Cox, 1987; Cox and McCubbins, 1993, 2005), contestation between the government and opposition members of parliament (MPs) in debates (e.g., Eggers and Spirling, 2014), and party leaders who, as the face of the party to the electorate, aim to clearly and consistently convey and defend its core messages (e.g., Proksch and Slapin, 2012, 2015). Although most famously exemplified by the Westminster systems of the United Kingdom and its former colonies (e.g., Rhodes, Wanna and Weller, 2009), elements of the model can apply to any system.

If some consensus exists that responsible party government is something normatively good for democracies to achieve, less is understood about how to actually achieve it. The electoral and legislative behaviors of politicians and parties are influenced by a variety of country-specific contextual factors (*viz.* history and culture), but also incentives created by political institutions. Parliamentarism, for example, encourages the development of strong, disciplined legislative parties because the survival of the executive depends on the sustained majority support of parliament (e.g., Döring, 1995; Strøm, 2000); electoral institutions influence the number and size of parties (e.g., Duverger, 1954; Shugart and Taagepera, 2017), and whether voting behavior in the electorate will be candidate-centered or party-centered, with concomitant effects on legislative behavior (e.g., Carey and Shugart, 1995; Carey, 2007); and legislative institutions, such as confidence vote procedures (e.g., Huber,

¹See also Ranney (1954), and chapters in Przeworski, Stokes and Manin (1999).

1996), dissolution powers (e.g., Goplerud and Schleiter, 2016), committee structures (e.g., Mattson and Strøm, 1995), and bicameralism (e.g., Tsebelis and Money, 1997), are also important determinants of behavior.

In this study, we consider the relationships between electoral and legislative institutions and a core feature of responsible party government: the accountability of executive appointees (cabinet ministers) to parliament. *Ministerial accountability* means that individual ministers are answerable to parliament, and through parliament to the public, for all actions and decisions taken by the government within the policy jurisdictions of their ministries. As former UK Deputy Prime Minister Lord Herbert Morrison notes in describing the classic case of Westminster, “Somebody must be held responsible to Parliament and the public. It has to be the Minister, for it is he, and neither Parliament nor the public, who has official control over his civil servants” (Morrison, 1959, p. 323).

Building on prior research using legislative text data to study the historical development of responsible party government in the UK (Eggers and Spirling, 2014), we operationalize the concept of ministerial accountability in two ways: first, as the overall share of *ministerial activity* (i.e., speeches) in legislative committees; and second, as the share of speech that entails back-and-forth dialogue with opposition MPs—which we call *discursive accountability*.² In contrast to Eggers and Spirling (2014), who examine incremental-but-accumulating changes over time, we exploit a series of sharp reforms to Japan’s institutional environment that were explicitly aimed at developing a Westminster-style version of responsible party government. First, a 1994 electoral system reform for the House of Representatives (the lower chamber of the bicameral National Diet) replaced a candidate-centered single non-transferable vote (SNTV) system with a more party-centered mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) system combining one electoral tier with British-style first-past-the-post (FPTP)

²Eggers and Spirling (2014) refer to this latter behavior as “ministerial responsiveness.” We use discursive accountability to avoid confusion of “responsiveness” with other concepts in the representation literature (such as policy responsiveness).

elections in single-member districts (SMDs) and a second tier with closed-list proportional representation (PR). This reform was followed in 1998 and 1999 by administrative and legislative reforms which consolidated ministries and created new junior ministerial positions responsible for crafting, articulating, and defending the policies of the ministries in place of unelected government bureaucrats.

We explain why Japan’s reforms were expected to generate a shift toward responsible party government, due in part to the new electoral incentives for governing and opposition parties alike to stake out clear policy positions and have their leaders personally defend them in parliamentary discourse. We then examine the empirical record using extensive data on nearly eight million speeches in committees of both chambers of the Diet from 1947 to 2016. Because the reforms occurred in stages, and because the first reform applied only to the lower chamber, we have the opportunity to more clearly elucidate the relationship between changes in electoral and legislative institutions and changes in the patterns of ministerial accountability.³

Our empirical analysis reveals a significant shift toward responsible party government: ministerial activity increased, bureaucratic activity decreased, and discursive accountability between ministers and opposition MPs increased. These changes appeared before the administrative reforms codifying the new rules in ministerial accountability, and arguably before party-centered voting began to take serious hold in the electorate. This finding complements the argument of Cox (1987) with regard to the development of responsible party government in 19th century Britain, where franchise extension and the creation of competitive SMD elections first led to an increase in legislative activity by MPs, creating a plenary bottleneck and a need to centralize agenda-setting authority in the cabinet—even

³Most other investigations of institutional effects on legislative speech focus on cross-sectional comparisons (e.g., Proksch and Slapin, 2012; Bäck and Debus, 2016; Giannetti and Pedrazzani, 2016). Two notable studies similarly consider patterns in speech before and after electoral system reforms: Proksch and Slapin (2015, Ch. 8, pp. 163-173) examine participation of MPs in budget debates in New Zealand following electoral system reform in 1996, and Høyland and Søyland (2019) examine the similarity of speech by MPs within parties (based on content) before and after a 1919 electoral system reform in Norway.

prior to the development of significant patterns of party-centered voting in the electorate (cf. Eggers and Spirling, 2014). The case of Japan differs in its starting point, process, and speed of change, but the upshot shares many important similarities.

The empirical patterns we uncover through our analysis make several additional contributions to the literatures on institutions and legislative organization, and Japanese political development. First, we find that the reforms caused equally sharp changes in the upper chamber, the House of Councillors, despite the fact that the electoral reform applied only to the House of Representatives, and that a 2001 electoral reform introducing open-list PR for a portion of upper chamber seats should have theoretically weakened the effect of the party-strengthening lower chamber reform. This wholesale shift in behavior across chambers speaks to several studies of bicameralism and its potential contagion effects on party organization and parliamentary governance (e.g., Cox, Rosenbluth and Thies, 2000; Druckman and Thies, 2002; VanDusky-Allen and Heller, 2014), and has not been documented in any previous study of Japanese legislative behavior or the effects of the reforms. We further document that the effects are evident across all types of committees—including the powerful Budget Committee, which had already featured relatively greater ministerial participation in debates prior to the reforms—and that the effects were evident in the post-reform governments led by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), but intensified during the brief alternation in power between 2009 and 2012, when the government was led by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ).

Second, although the Westminster-oriented motivations behind Japan's reforms were understood in advance (Ozawa, 1994; Ramseyer and Rosenbluth, 1993), and the subsequent strengthening of the power of the prime minister and cabinet has been chronicled in numerous qualitative accounts (e.g., Takenaka, 2002; Estévez-Abe, 2006; George Mulgan, 2015), we are the first to use quantitative data on the actual legislative activity of different

actors in the Diet to verify this important shift.⁴ In doing so, we contribute more than just “mere description” (Gerring, 2012), or an empirical validation of common knowledge. We answer the descriptive questions of *who* was involved, *what* was changed, and *how* the changes were made, but also provide a novel argument as to *when* the observed shifts occurred and *why*. In contrast to existing accounts that stress the entrepreneurialism or media savviness of individual leaders—particularly LDP Prime Minister Koizumi Junichirō (2001-2006)—in exploiting new institutional powers (e.g., Estévez-Abe, 2006; George Mulgan, 2017), our extensive data make it possible to paint a more comprehensive picture of the effects of reform on the legislative behavior of multiple types of actors. Indeed, we demonstrate that the effects of the electoral system reform on ministerial accountability were evident years before Koizumi first took office.⁵

Institutions and Responsible Party Government

Ranney (1954, p. 12) concisely describes how responsible party government should function, at least in its Westminster form. First, there should be at least two (and preferably only two) unified and disciplined parties. Each of these parties formulates a platform of policies, and candidates from these parties compete for votes in their districts on the basis of these policies and their plans to implement them if elected. Each voter chooses the candidate whose platform he or she prefers most, and the party winning a majority of seats gains the entire power of government, as well as responsibility for its performance. When the next election comes, voters evaluate whether they approve or disapprove of the governing

⁴Other studies have focused on private member bills (Ono, 2015), committee assignments (Fujimura, 2015), and government versus opposition rhetorical divisions (Curini, Hino and Osaki, 2018). Matsumoto and Matsuo (2010) look descriptively at the number of speeches by different types of MPs across time and a selection of committees.

⁵This does not mean that other important changes, such as the use of the Prime Minister’s Office in policy formulation, did not occur until Koizumi’s term in office, only that patterns in ministerial accountability had already begun to change.

party's performance, and vote accordingly.⁶

The theoretical foil to responsible party government is usually the member-centered model of legislative organization that characterizes the so-called “textbook” United States Congress (Shepsle, 1989), albeit with considerable debate over the adherence to the model at different points in history (e.g., Binder, 1996; Aldrich and Rohde, 2001; Schickler, 2001). In the member-centered model, legislative behavior revolves around individual MPs and their personal reelection interests (e.g., Mayhew, 1974). Parties help members cooperate to achieve mutually beneficial deals (Aldrich, 2011), but to the extent that leaders can influence legislative outcomes, it is through control over committee assignments and other indirect means (e.g., Cox and McCubbins, 1993; Schickler and Rich, 1997; Cox and McCubbins, 2005). The disparate electoral incentives of individual members results in weak intraparty discipline and a decentralization of policymaking and agenda-setting power to backbenchers and committees, where each member can best pursue his or her own reelection goals (e.g., Shepsle and Weingast, 1987; Weingast and Marshall, 1988).

Cox (1987) carefully describes the historical development of the British House of Commons from a member-centered model to responsible party government. In the early 1800s, new political issues stemming from economic development, an enlarged electorate due to suffrage expansion, and electoral reforms reducing most districts from two-member districts to SMDs and eliminating uncompetitive “rotten” boroughs, encouraged an increase in legislative activity by reelection-focused MPs. This increase in activity created a legislative bottleneck in plenary sessions, creating a classic tragedy of the commons problem with regard to legislative participation that caused collective harm to all members. Abdicating more and more control over the legislative agenda to the cabinet helped to solve

⁶Although aspects of the responsible party government model relating to party organization and legislative behavior can also apply to parties in multiparty systems and coalition governments, the core features of cabinet dominance and accountability to parliament are most exemplified by Westminster-style parliamentary systems—where plurality-rule electoral competition in SMDs often (though not always) results in two, single-party governing alternatives for voters to compare and evaluate in elections (Duverger, 1954).

this problem and gave rise to what Bagehot (1867) calls the “efficient secret” of cabinet dominance over executive and legislative powers. As voters began to realize that power rested with the cabinet, they increasingly based their voting behavior on which party they preferred to see in control of government, as their vote for their local MP was the only way to influence government formation under the parliamentary rules in place.

In their quantitative analysis of the legislative speech records of the House of Commons, Eggers and Spirling (2014) evaluate the implications of Cox’s argument for the empirical patterns in ministerial accountability over time, finding that the shift toward increased responsiveness of ministers to opposition MPs coincided with increases in the government’s agenda-setting power, culminating around 1902. Eggers and Spirling (2014) argue that the opposition parties acquiesced to the steady reduction in their legislative policymaking power because of the increasing legislative opportunities to hold the government accountable through questioning, while appealing to voters to put responsibility for government in their hands at the next election.

The path to responsible party government taken in the UK is not, however, the only institutional route available.⁷ In the case of France, for example, Huber (1996) argues that responsible party government is facilitated by the legislative institutions of the “package vote” and the “confidence vote procedure.” Elsewhere in Western Europe, the introduction of PR elections in the late 1800s and early 1900s centralized power with party leaders and increased party cohesion since leaders could use their influence over candidate nominations to party lists to enforce discipline (e.g., Cox, Fiva and Smith, 2019; Manow and Schröder, 2019; Høyland and Søyland, 2019).⁸ In short, responsible party government can be encouraged by reforms to either the electoral or legislative rules of the game, or both. Understanding the diversity of institutional influences on legislative organization, and the

⁷For a comparative overview of government agenda-setting powers, see Rasch and Tsebelis (2011).

⁸The solution in the US at different points in time has been to cede greater control to party leaders over decisions like who sits on important committees (e.g., Cox and McCubbins, 1993; Schickler and Rich, 1997; Cox and McCubbins, 2005; Sin, 2015).

relative effectiveness of different institutional arrangements at creating responsible party government, thus remains an important research agenda for political science.

In the next section, we introduce the case of Japan to this comparative research agenda, describing the institutional environment and legislative process in the Diet, and how and why the reforms of the 1990s came to be introduced. A key distinction of the Japanese case is that, unlike most other cases we have described, the important power struggle was not simply between party leaders versus backbenchers (e.g., Proksch and Slapin, 2012), or government versus opposition (e.g., Eggers and Spirling, 2014), but also between government ministers versus bureaucrats—and who would have more influence and responsibility for policymaking.

Legislative Politics and Institutional Reform in Japan

From 1947 to 1993, members of the House of Representatives were elected using the SNTV system in multimember districts (MMD), where the average district magnitude (M) was four seats, each voter cast a single vote for a candidate, and the top M candidates in the district were elected. Any party aspiring to win a majority of seats thus needed to nominate more than one candidate in each district, and such intraparty competition resulted in candidates from the larger parties, particularly the LDP, campaigning predominantly on the basis of their personal attributes or behavior rather than a commitment to their parties' policy platforms.

Japan in this period can be characterized as an extreme form of a member-centered model of party politics, at least for the dominant LDP, which ruled uninterrupted from its founding in 1955 until 1993. In contrast to the conventional image of the member-centered model in terms of legislative organization and policymaking, however, much of the work in drafting bills occurred *outside* of the legislature and its committees, by government bureau-

crats in the ministries and agencies. This process involved input from advisory councils and LDP politicians in the party's internal Policy Affairs Research Council, the structure of which mirrored the policy jurisdictions and organization of the ministries. Rather than a top-down, cabinet-led process, policymaking under the LDP was characterized by a bottom-up process led by politicians from "policy tribes" with expertise or interests in different policy areas, in cooperation with bureaucrats (Inoguchi, 1987).

Prime ministers had some agenda-setting power in terms of foreign policy, but the Prime Minister's Office was understaffed, and factional constraints kept his leadership weak, resulting in little more than a reactionary role in policymaking (Krauss and Pekkanen, 2011). Other cabinet ministers were similarly weak, since regular reshuffling for the purpose of dividing the spoils across factions and members for their reelection goals ensured that few were in their positions long enough to develop much policy expertise or push their own initiatives.

Once legislation was introduced to the Diet, the bulk of scrutiny over the bills was conducted by opposition parties, whose members could delay the process through legislative tactics such as preventing or slowing deliberation in committees or in the upper chamber, the House of Councillors (e.g., Cox, Masuyama and McCubbins, 2000; Fukumoto, 2000). The formal committee stage of deliberation in the Diet thus served primarily as an arena for opposition MPs to ask questions about the bills, and the government frequently relied on bureaucrats (who had been most influential in drafting them) to supply the answers.

The 1994 Electoral System Reform

Growing political dissatisfaction with this system, and a number of high-profile corruption scandals in the late 1980s and early 1990s, led to calls for electoral system reform as a remedy to the pathologies created by candidate-centered nature of competition under the SNTV system (e.g., Ozawa, 1994). The LDP lost its majority in the 1993 general

election, and an eight-party coalition of non-LDP parties made electoral reform the key policy priority of the new government. Reformers ultimately agreed on an MMM system that would combine two parallel tiers of electoral competition: one a British-style FPTP system in SMDs; the other a closed-list PR system in regional MMDs. This system was a compromise between reformers who hoped to create Westminster-style politics in Japan—party-centered election campaigns, with two strong, cohesive parties that alternate regularly in government—and smaller parties that would be unable to compete in a pure FPTP system (Reed and Thies, 2001). The reform bill was passed in 1994 and went into effect with the 1996 general election.

Political scientists and reformers alike expected several outcomes to result from the electoral reform. First, the introduction of SMDs was designed to shift the electoral focus from candidates to parties and generate more national policy-centered campaigns based around two main parties, while still allowing for small parties to gain some representation in the Diet. The rise of two-party competition in SMDs was also expected to produce alternation in government, as voters would increasingly view elections as a choice between keeping the incumbent government or opting for its main opposition alternative. Ramseyer and Rosenbluth (1993, p. 197) anticipated that “In its organization and functioning, the LDP would grow to resemble more closely British parties. Personnel, electoral strategy, and policy decisions would be centralized.”

The electoral reform eliminated intraparty competition, which dramatically reduced the candidate-centered nature of elections, while simultaneously increasing the importance of party image and national policy platforms in campaigning and voting (e.g., Reed, Scheiner and Thies, 2012; McElwain, 2012). Although the eight-party coalition was short-lived, and the LDP came back into power in 1994 (now in coalition with other parties), eventually the fragmented opposition coalesced around the DPJ, which was founded in 1996. Despite initial party system upheaval, two-party competition began to clearly take shape in the

FPTP tier by 2000, with the LDP and DPJ capturing over 80 percent of the votes and seats in most districts. By 2003, both parties also began to produce pre-election manifestos to present their programmatic policy goals to the electorate. Voters, for their part, began to shift their attention in elections from candidates to parties. Alternation in government finally was achieved in 2009, when a DPJ-led coalition defeated the LDP (which would nevertheless return to power three years later).

Administrative Reform and the Diet Revitalization Law

Following the 1994 electoral reform, a series of reforms in 1998 under the LDP-led government restructured the organization of the cabinet by collapsing certain jurisdictions that were especially associated with “pork barrel” projects into a smaller number of ministries, and consolidating coordinating authority in the Prime Minister’s Office and Cabinet Office. These reforms also created two new types of junior ministerial positions to be held by elected MPs: vice minister and parliamentary secretary. An additional “Diet Revitalization Law,” passed in July 1999, eliminated the routine practice of senior bureaucrats answering questions in the Diet on behalf of cabinet ministers (the “government committee member” system), although bureaucrats could still be asked to participate in Diet committee hearings as “expert witnesses.”⁹ The law also created a Committee on Fundamental National Policies, which meets in a joint session of both houses.¹⁰ This new joint session committee was designed to function as an arena for debates between party leaders, much like the British Prime Minister’s “Question Time.”

⁹The full name of the law is the “Law to Revitalize Diet Deliberations and to Establish a Policymaking System under Political Leadership.” It was promulgated on July 30, 1999, and went into effect in 2000. See Takenaka (2002) and George Mulgan (2015, pp. 35-38) for more details. In the brief transitional period between the enactment of the Diet Revitalization Law in 2000 and the creation of new junior ministerial positions of vice ministers and parliamentary secretaries in 2001, the previously weak parliamentary vice ministers were increased in number and tasked with filling the role. The introduction of junior ministers is said to have been pushed by reformer Ozawa Ichirō as part of negotiations for his Liberal Party entering into coalition with the LDP in 1999.

¹⁰In our analyses, we exclude speeches from this and other joint session committees, focusing only on how the reforms affected behavior in the traditional committees of each chamber of the Diet.

These reforms, which went into effect in 2000 and 2001, can thus be seen as an intensification of the objectives of the electoral reform—by restructuring legislative institutions in response to the new electoral environment, the institutional designers reinforced the intended move toward responsible party government by giving ministers more formal institutional support to facilitate party-focused competition and accountability, as well as cabinet-led policymaking.

The strengthened policymaking role of the Prime Minister’s Office became most apparent under Prime Minister Koizumi Junichirō (2001-2006), who successfully pushed for postal privatization and other liberalizing reforms despite opposition from entrenched interests in his party and the bureaucracy (e.g., Estévez-Abe, 2006). However, his successor in office, Abe Shinzō, subsequently backpedaled from some of these reforms under pressure from rural members of the party. When it took control of government in 2009, the DPJ pushed for even greater concentration of power in the cabinet, and aimed to champion “politician-led” policymaking and cabinet accountability.¹¹ However, after consecutive setbacks due to foreign policy missteps, the March 11, 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and Fukushima nuclear meltdown disaster, and internal party disagreement over a consumption tax increase, the DPJ found itself out of power in 2012, replaced by the LDP with Prime Minister Abe back in control for a second time.

From here, we outline our theoretical expectations as to how these developments and the shift toward responsible party government should be reflected in legislative behavior—in particular with regard to ministerial accountability. In so doing, we present our empirical expectations in a fairly general sense, but also note specific applications to the Japanese case.

¹¹The DPJ’s 2009 election manifesto advocated five principles, the first three of which directly aimed to enhance responsible party government: (1) From government abdicated to the bureaucracy, to politician-led government in which the ruling party holds full responsibility; (2) From a two-track system in which policy-making proceeds in parallel in government and in the ruling party, to a unitary system of Cabinet-centered policy-making; (3) From the ministries’ pursuit of their own compartmentalized interests to the pursuit of the national interest led by the Prime Minister’s Office.

Implications for Ministerial Accountability

We consider the implications of Japan’s reforms for ministerial accountability by adapting two concepts from the existing literature: ministerial activity (e.g., Proksch and Slapin, 2012, 2015) and discursive accountability (e.g., Eggers and Spirling, 2014). With regard to ministerial activity, we expect that ministers should speak more following the electoral system reform (Reform 1), and that ministerial speech should increase further following the administrative reforms (Reform 2). We will discuss how we specifically define each reform period when we turn to the empirical analysis.

Participation of Ministers and Bureaucrats in Debates

In the Proksch and Slapin (2012, 2015) model, electoral institutions are the key variable driving leaders’ delegation decisions. In systems that produce strong incentives to cultivate a personal vote, such as Japan’s pre-reform SNTV system (Carey and Shugart, 1995), we should see less ministerial activity. In contrast, in systems where a strong party brand is incentivized by the electoral system, such as Japan’s post-reform MMM system, we should see *more* speaking by ministers, as the cabinet becomes the “face” of the government party or parties for voters, and takes responsibility for articulating and defending its policies. Thus, an electoral system reform that increases the importance of parties relative to individual candidates, as in the case of Japan, should affect legislative behavior in the following way:

The proportion of speech by ministers will increase after each institutional reform.

If ministers are speaking more, the implication is that some other group is speaking less. In most parliamentary systems, and in the conceptual logic of Proksch and Slapin

(2012), the shift should mean a reciprocal reduction in speaking by backbenchers, who are no longer the focus of voters' accountability decisions. However, the Japanese case is different in that backbenchers previously exerted influence through the party's extraparlimentary policymaking organ, PARC, rather than through the Diet committees, which were predominantly an arena for opposition questioning of the government.

The shift towards ministerial accountability in Japan should thus be revealed in a more particular fashion: whether ministers or bureaucrats answer for government policy to these opposition questions.¹² Prior to the administrative reforms, bureaucrats answering for particular policies constituted many of the speeches delivered in committees, and this was seen by the reformers as undesirable as it indicated a lack of vibrant accountability between parties, and a missed opportunity for the government to directly defend its policies. In his influential book calling for reform, former LDP MP turned opposition leader Ozawa Ichirō was explicit (Ozawa, 1994, p. 58): "Cabinet ministers and parliamentary vice-ministers should reply to Diet interpellation in their specific areas of expertise; bureaucrats must not be given this role. In a democracy, it is politicians who have ultimate responsibility for decision making. It is they who must be called to answer, not bureaucrats. With politicians handling Diet interpellation, they would, by necessity, study policy more seriously." We therefore expect:

The proportion of speech by bureaucrats will decrease after each institutional reform.

The 1999 Diet Revitalization Law and subsequent administrative reforms were explicitly designed to address this goal by creating a new type of junior minister (vice minister) for each ministry to defend its policies to the Diet. Even in the Reform 1 period, there might still be a decline in the volume of speech by bureaucrats as ministers began to

¹²An additional particularity of the Japanese case is that the post-reform period coincides with the emergence of coalition governments; hence, backbenchers in coalition partners' parties now have reason to speak in committees for the purpose of monitoring and policing the coalition bargain.

face electoral incentives to speak more in order to craft the party's collective image. The reforms to administrative and legislative institutions, in effect for the Reform 2 period, should *amplify* the initial effect of the electoral system reform by creating the institutional arrangements needed to reinforce the preceding behavioral changes.

Discursive Accountability Between Government and Opposition

The development of responsible party government also suggests a change in the discursive dynamics of speaking behavior, in that speech should be deliberately targeted at facilitating the differentiation of parties based on programmatic platforms. Opposition parties will want to interrogate ministers on government policy in order to draw a contrast and offer an alternative vision for the electorate, and by engaging in partisan clashes with the governing parties, all sides are forced to justify and defend their particular programmatic stances, which leads to a reinforcement of their party labels. The most common accountability mechanisms for opposition parties are parliamentary interpellations and other forms of questioning on the floor and in committees.

Eggers and Spirling (2014) suggest a subtle dimension of how ministerial accountability of this sort should affect speaking behavior, examining what we refer to as discursive accountability. This concept seeks to capture the extent to which parties hold each other accountable in parliamentary debates, by looking at the back-and-forth between parties in debates.¹³ Eggers and Spirling (2014) show that as party-centered competition in the United Kingdom became more important over time, debates became increasingly structured around partisan exchanges where the remarks of a government minister were answered by an opposition MP (rather than being answered by a backbencher of their own party). The key implication is that as a polity moves toward a responsible party government system with ministerial accountability, we should observe higher levels of discursive accountability,

¹³More traditional measures of parliamentary behavior, such as the frequency of parliamentary questions Wiberg (1995), also reflect the idea of discursive accountability.

since such back-and-forth partisan contestation will become an increasingly crucial part of electoral competition.

Translated to our purposes and the Japanese case, we consider the following question. Given that a speaker in a committee debate is an opposition MP, who is most likely to respond to them? We expect ministers to replace bureaucrats in the crucial government-opposition dynamics that characterize discursive accountability under responsible party government:

The proportion of discursive accountability by opposition MPs vis-à-vis government ministers and junior ministers [bureaucrats] will increase [decrease] after each institutional reform.

Expected Effects Across Chambers

The case of Japan also presents an opportunity to consider how electoral and legislative reforms might affect behavior in different chambers of a bicameral system. Japan's House of Councillors is among the more powerful of upper chambers around the world, and has a similar structure to the House of Representatives in terms of committees and the legislative process. All legislation must pass in identical form through both chambers, with three exceptions in which decisions of the House of Representatives take precedence: the designation of the prime minister, ratification of treaties, and matters of the budget.¹⁴

The effects of bicameralism on legislative behavior and policy outcomes can often be subtle and challenging to assess empirically (e.g., Tsebelis and Money, 1997; Heller, 2007). One issue is that strategic actors in either chamber might adapt their behavior or operating rules to the institutional or partisan environment of the other chamber (e.g., in anticipation of conflict), muddying the expected behavior that might be observed under similar

¹⁴If there is disagreement across chambers on all other types of legislation, the House of Representatives can override the House of Councillors with a two-thirds majority vote of present members.

institutions in a unicameral setting (e.g., Sin, 2015).

In our case, the expected effects of Japan's institutional reforms with regard to the House of Councillors are potentially ambiguous, since the electoral reform of 1994 applied only to the House of Representatives. In the House of Councillors, members are elected in a mixed-member system combining 47 prefectural districts that elect between one and six members each (either FPTP in SMDs or SNTV in MMDs), and a single national tier with seats allocated proportionally to parties. From 1983 to 1998, the national tier featured closed-list PR. Beginning in 2001, open-list PR was introduced. In theory, the electoral system of the House of Councillors—with SNTV rules and intraparty competition for many of its prefectural races, as in the pre-reform House of Representatives—should be expected to push legislative behavior toward the member-centered model (e.g., Carey and Shugart, 1995; Carey, 2007), in countervailing force against the party-centered electoral incentives introduced in the House of Representatives. The shift to open-list PR in 2001 should theoretically introduce *even greater* electoral incentives to deviate from the responsible party government model in the upper chamber (but it is important to note that although open-list PR creates intraparty competition over preference votes, parties still exercise control over which candidates appear on their lists).

Nevertheless, there are also reasons to expect the electoral reforms in the House of Representatives to generate behavioral effects that spill over to the House of Councillors. One reason is that only the House of Representatives maintains the confidence relationship with the cabinet, so changes in power relations and legislative behavior should be more responsive to institutions in that chamber. When these changes involve extensive restructuring of the cabinet and party organizations, it is reasonable to expect that actors in these arenas would streamline their standard operating procedures to a single set of behaviors. Indeed, such a logic fits the argument of VanDusky-Allen and Heller (2014), who show that parties centralize candidate selection in bicameral systems precisely to ensure that their

members in each chamber are responsible to the same principal.

Because the House of Councillors plays an important role in policymaking, dissident activity by backbench members in that chamber can potentially obstruct the policy goals of the cabinet or obscure the party's collective brand. Party leadership thus has strong incentives to centralize control over members in both chambers. This suggests that any movement toward ministerial accountability in one chamber should permeate both chambers insofar as a lack of accountability in one chamber might undermine the entire project of reforming the political system and crafting strong party brands to win elections. Because winning elections to the House of Representatives determines which party takes control of government, the party-level effects of electoral reform in this chamber should be dominant.

This logic implies that the electoral reform in the House of Representatives should also affect behavior in the House of Councillors, even before the administrative reforms institutionalized the increased role of cabinet ministers. The administrative reforms affected both chambers, which should further synchronize behavior, even despite the fact that the upper chamber's shift to open-list PR coincided temporally with the second set of reforms. Thus, we expect to see an identical pattern of effects in both chambers: (a) a rise in ministerial accountability in Reform 1 period, and (b) an increased effect in the Reform 2 period.

The electoral system reform in the House of Representatives should produce similar effects in the House of Councillors.

With these expectations in hand, we now turn to the empirical analysis of legislative speech across institutional environments and reforms to the Diet.

Data and Structure of Speech in the Diet

Our data come from the National Diet Library records of parliamentary debates.¹⁵ Running from 1947 to 2016, the data consist of approximately 7.77 million speeches (5.43 million in the House of Representatives; 2.34 million in the House of Councillors) across 1,456 committees (681 in the House of Representatives; 775 in the House of Councillors). We group the data into periods corresponding to each new cabinet (97 in total, including reshuffled cabinets that retain the same prime minister), beginning with the first cabinet of Prime Minister Katayama Tetsu (May 24, 1947 – March 10, 1948) and ending with the second reshuffle of the third cabinet of Prime Minister Abe Shinzō (inaugurated August 3, 2016).

The Role of Committees in the Diet

Existing quantitative research on speech has focused almost exclusively on plenary floor debates.¹⁶ Although plenary debates capture an important part of the legislative process in many parliamentary systems, there are two reasons to focus on committee debates. The first is contextual, in that the vast majority of important debates in Japan occur in committees. The second is that committee debates allows us to consider whether patterns vary depending on the relative importance or policy scope of the committee.¹⁷ In the case of Japan and many other systems, committees are deliberately designed to shadow ministerial jurisdictions, which likely increases the ability for members to both specialize in that jurisdiction as well as monitor the corresponding minister. By contrast, plenary

¹⁵<http://kokkai.ndl.go.jp/> accessed on 1 August 2017.

¹⁶See, *inter alia*, Proksch and Slapin (2012, 2015); Eggers and Spirling (2014); Bäck and Debus (2016).

¹⁷Some parliamentary systems are exceptions, with much of the debate occurring on the floor of the chamber as a whole, or where committees are set up in an *ad hoc* fashion. Mattson and Strøm (1995) provide a summary of provisions in Western Europe, although some reforms have occurred in the intervening period, such as in the British House of Commons.

debates may sometimes be characterized by highly limited or orchestrated debates that gloss over detailed policy disagreements.¹⁸

Opposition parties use committee debates to scrutinize the government's policies. Even if this activity is ineffective in terms of changing those policies (because of party unity in legislative voting), it serves as an important mechanism through which parties can compete against one another to establish their distinctive reputations. The relative balance between how much of this party contestation occurs in committees versus the plenary floor depends on a variety of subtle institutional factors; however, the Japanese case is useful in that its committee structure has remained relatively stable, with an important role for committees in legislative discourse, if not policy outcomes.

Unlike in many European systems, the nexus of parliamentary activity in Japan occurs more in the committees than in plenary sessions. Debates on the plenary floor are often vacuous and stylized (even compared to European floor debates), and most MPs tend not to participate *at all* in floor debates, as it is mostly ministers who speak. Exogenous factors are responsible for this particular equilibrium of speaking activity: reformers during the U.S. Occupation of Japan (1945-1952) deliberately designed the Diet to have strong committees, which were explicitly based on the reorganized U.S. Congress following its major reforms in 1946 (Baerwald, 1974). Thus, committee jurisdictions were set up to shadow the major ministries, committee hearings were required to be open to the public, unlike in many European democracies (see Mattson and Strøm, 1995), and committees were endowed with relatively generous support staff. In practice, the allocation of speaking time to parties within committees is negotiated by committee directors (*riji*) prior to each meeting, with a norm of opposition parties getting a disproportionately larger share of committee time.

Most parliamentary systems have something analogous to a "Prime Minister's Question

¹⁸Another major role for committees is the policing of coalition bargains in multiparty governments (e.g., Martin and Vanberg, 2011).

Time” (e.g., oral questioning of the government and its ministers) (Wiberg, 1995). This event tends to be highly covered in the media as the most visible site of party contestation and in many countries is televised. In most European democracies, this debate occurs in the plenary session and is usually entrenched in the standing orders as a regular event. However, up until the creation of the Committee on Fundamental National Policies in 2000, in Japan this activity occurred in meetings of the televised Budget Committee for the House of Representatives (Baerwald, 1974). One plausible reason for why this institution developed in committee, rather than in the plenary session, was that the designers of Japan’s parliamentary institutions during the Occupation were unaware of the crucial function of a government question time, and thus did not provide for this in plenary debates; yet, as Japanese politicians discovered that this type of contestation was important, they subverted the committee structures to create this institution within an existing departmental committee. Thus, for the Japanese case, studying speaking activity in committees gives us an informative look into legislative behavior in general and how it reflects the demands of the institutional environment.

Finally, to outline the particulars of the Japanese committee system in detail, the pre-reform period involved approximately twenty major standing committees that directly and deliberately shadowed the major ministerial portfolios. A large number of smaller and ad hoc committees and subcommittees for certain bills and jurisdictions existed throughout the period we cover. MPs are assigned to particular committees, but substitution (i.e., an MP being replaced by another for a particular meeting) is common. This is sometimes used for time management, and sometimes to provide a way for MPs to speak in committees to which they do not formally belong. The structure of the committee system remained fairly stable until the second set of reforms we discuss (Reform 2 in 2001), when the committee jurisdictions were reshuffled to match the administrative reshuffling of the ministries, although otherwise the formal powers and institutional arrangements of committees has

remained stable.

Categorization of Speakers

For our purposes, the Diet records provide a crucial bit of information by reporting the titles of speakers. We classified these titles into one of six types: “Bureaucrat,” “Minister,” “Junior Minister,” “Committee Chair,” “Government MP,” and “Opposition MP.”¹⁹

Individuals coded as “Bureaucrat” include civil servants in government ministries, as well as representatives of the judiciary and other special agencies called to testify as explanatory witnesses.²⁰ “Minister” is often labeled in the record as state minister, in addition to specific ministerial titles. We also include the Prime Minister in this category. “Junior Minister” corresponds to vice minister, parliamentary secretary, or parliamentary vice minister. The “Committee Chair” category include both chairs and deputy chairs, and is important to separate from rank-and-file MP speakers because a large portion of speech in committees is the administrative business conducted by chairs, and most chairs and deputy chairs are members of the governing parties. Within the rank-and-file categories of “Government MP” and “Opposition MP,” we include all other committee members from the governing or opposition parties, respectively, who are elected MPs but do not hold any cabinet or committee leadership positions requiring them to speak as part of the formal capacities of their office. Using this classification scheme, we can test the empirical validity of our theoretical expectations related to who speaks and whether this speech exhibits patterns of discursive accountability.²¹

¹⁹Our classification scheme also includes an “Other” category which encompasses outside individuals (i.e., non-MPs and non-bureaucrats) who are called to testify during committee meetings, and whose remarks are transcribed alongside the comments by MPs. Such speakers (e.g., company presidents, outside experts, or representatives of interest organizations) are denoted by a wide variety of idiosyncratic titles and make up the “Other” category, which represents only a small fraction of speech in the records.

²⁰One ambiguity is that, due to the previous government committee member system, “government member” can refer to either bureaucrats (80% of cases) or junior ministers (20% of cases). For these titles, we look to see whether the name matches an MP in the relevant Diet; if so, we code the individual as a junior minister, otherwise, we code him or her as a bureaucrat.

²¹Appendix Tables A.1 and A.2 list the fifty most frequent suffixes in the records for each chamber, and

Empirical Evidence of Reform Effects

This section empirically tests our theoretical expectations for how speaking behavior should vary across Japan’s institutional periods. To begin, Figure 1 provides a broad descriptive overview of the types of speakers engaged in activity in committees of each chamber from 1947 to 2016. The figure plots the proportions of each type of speaker across all committees inside a given cabinet. At this stage, we present the entire range of the data for all periods, with the vertical line in each subplot marking only the enactment of the electoral system change in 1996. Each column is a type of speaker, with the top panel covering speech in the House of Councillors and the bottom panel covering the House of Representatives.

Notably, this descriptive presentation of the data already illustrates a major change in speech by ministers, junior ministers, and bureaucrats. Although there is a fairly large proportion of bureaucratic activity in the pre-reform period—around 20-30% of speeches—there is a marked decline following the electoral system reform. In tandem, the data show an increase in speaking by ministers and junior ministers. This is important for understanding how a move toward ministerial accountability matters for internal legislative behavior, as it suggests that extra-parliamentary reforms (e.g., to the electoral system) fed into a shift in parliamentary behavior (more ministers speaking) in order to deal with the new incentives generated by these external reforms.

The activity of opposition MPs is fairly constant across time in aggregate terms and is the largest category of activity (around 50% of all committee speeches). Meanwhile, the proportion of speeches by government backbenchers increased somewhat relative to the pre-reform period, which is consistent with the idea that MPs in coalitions, which have

how we classify them into speaker groups. A small amount of measurement error in categorizations results from MPs entering or exiting positions in the middle of a session, or from errors in the recorded suffixes in the official records—these represent a trivial number of cases (“noise”) among the millions of observations in the data.

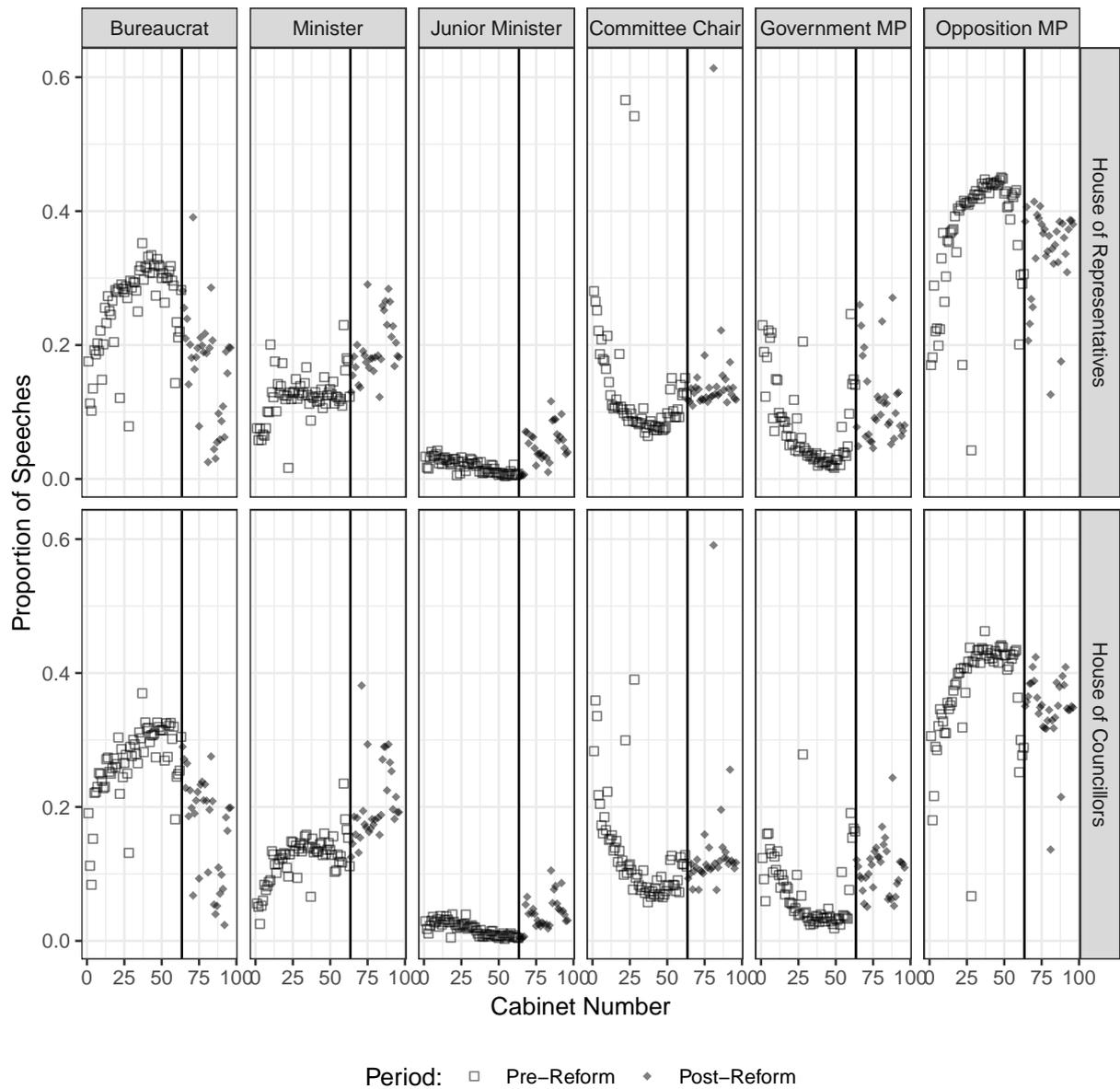


Figure 1: Descriptive Trends in Activity of Speaker Types Over Time

Note: This figure shows the proportion of speeches delivered by MPs in each of the six groups of speakers. The vertical line separates the periods before and after the electoral reform went into effect. Cabinets are numbered from 1 (Katayama First Cabinet) to 96 (Abe Third Cabinet, First Reshuffle) using standard conventions for designating new cabinets in Japan.

become common since the electoral reform, might use committees to monitor each other or distinguish themselves and their policies for voters (Martin and Vanberg, 2011).²²

Speaking Activity of Different Groups in Committees

We can explore these patterns more rigorously in a regression framework. For the purposes of our main analyses, we define the Reform 1 period as beginning with the *enactment* of the new electoral rules during the Second Cabinet of Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryūtarō, inaugurated November 7, 1996. The Reform 2 period begins with the full enactment of the administrative reforms with the Second Reshuffle of the Second Cabinet of Mori Yoshirō, inaugurated January 6, 2001. Rather than using the entire pre-reform period, we define the Pre-Reform period for comparison as the period beginning with the First Cabinet of Suzuki Zenkō, inaugurated July 17, 1980. This time period offers a symmetrical window for comparison to the post-reform periods, and is also a period in which legislative norms and behavior were relatively institutionalized and stable (unlike earlier periods of the pre-reform era).²³

There are approximately twenty major standing committees as well as a variety of *ad hoc* subcommittees or standing committees of varying tenures. To measure activity, we pool the data across all meetings held by each committee during each cabinet period, and then calculate the proportion of speeches in this committee-cabinet unit of observation that is given by speakers of each of the six groups outlined above (Bureaucrat, Minister, Junior Minister, Committee Chair, Government MP, and Opposition MP). We then estimate separate regressions for each speaker type with the following model:

²²Figure A.1 shows a zoomed-in version of these descriptive patterns, with clear demarcations of different political and institutional events.

²³Appendix Figures A.2 and A.3 provide results with alternative period specifications, defined in Table A.3, based on (1) the passage (rather than enactment) of each reform bill; (2) Reform 1 beginning with the LDP's loss in 1993 (before the passage of the electoral reform in 1994); and (3) the main enactment-based cutoffs but with an extended time period for the pre-reform era. The results are consistent across all of these alternative periodization schemes.

$$y_{it} = \alpha_i + \beta_{R1}z_{it} + \beta_{R2}w_{it} + \epsilon_{it}$$

where y_{it} is the proportion of speech by each type of speaker; i denotes the unit of observation (e.g., committee) and t denotes the time of the observation (cabinet). β_{R1} and β_{R2} represent the change in the Reform 1 and Reform 2 periods, respectively, versus the pre-reform period where z_{it} and w_{it} are indicator variables that capture whether observation it is in either the Reform 1 or Reform 2 periods, respectively. α_i represents committee fixed effects. All models include robust standard errors clustered on committee to deal with potential correlation between observations inside units. The committee fixed effects control for constant and unobserved unit-specific (committee-specific) heterogeneity, which means that the coefficients of interest, the effect of the reforms, reflect within-unit changes in committees that existed in multiple periods. This is important so that our estimates are not picking up variation that results from, for example, new types of committees with systematically different jurisdictions or prerogatives being created after the reforms.

Figure 2 shows the estimated changes in the proportion of activity by speaker type after each reform. Looking first at the left panel, we note a marked decline in bureaucratic activity in both reform periods, with an intensification of the decline in the second reform period. We also see an increase in ministerial activity—of both cabinet ministers and junior ministers—confirming our first and second expectations regarding speech by ministers versus bureaucrats as Japan moved toward responsible party government. Recall also that a major feature of the second reform period was the creation of vice ministers and parliamentary secretaries to aid in policy formulation and deliberately speak in place of bureaucrats, strengthening the previously weak role of the pre-reform parliamentary vice ministers. The middle panel of Figure 2 shows that junior ministers begin to speak noticeably more in the Reform 2 period as speech by bureaucrats further declines.

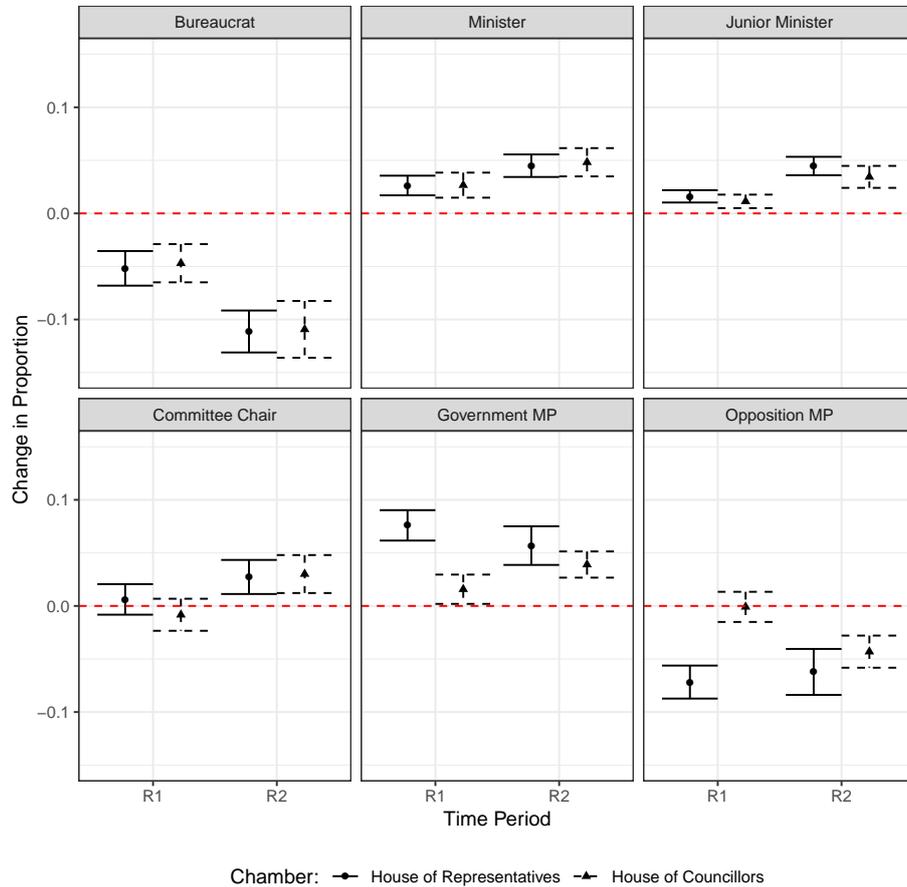


Figure 2: Changes in speaking activity following reforms in the Japanese Diet

Note: Figure shows the estimated effects of Reform 1 and Reform 2 from separate regressions for the speaking activity of six groups of speakers, across all committees. The coefficients indicate the estimated change in proportion of speech by each type of speaker compared to the pre-reform period.

The fact that we observe similar changes in speaking activity the House of Councillors following the 1994 electoral reform—which only applied to the House of Representatives—is also notable. We have argued that the incentives introduced by the electoral reform required deliberate changes on the part of party leaders to build and enforce more disciplined, cohesive, and programmatic parties. The results for the House of Councillors suggest similar shifts in members’ behavior, despite the electoral environment in that chamber being unaffected by the first reform. This suggests that the implementation of responsible party government in Japan required not merely formal institutional reforms but also internal restructuring of the parties to focus on projecting a policy-focused and disciplined brand. This reorganization of strategy at the party level to respond to new incentives in House of Representatives elections spilled over into party behavior in the other chamber.

To summarize these findings, we see strikingly similar patterns of change in *both* chambers even though the major institutional reform (defining the first reform period) only affected the lower chamber. The administrative reforms to strengthen the Prime Minister’s Office and cabinet (defining the second reform period) were applied in both chambers, with ministers claiming more speaking time. This corresponding shift suggests that in bicameral systems, the upper chamber is not insulated from the political pressures of the lower chamber when those pressures affect the incentives of the party leadership and government. Thus, even if upper chamber members do not face the same electoral incentives as their lower chamber colleagues, the need to create a unified party reputation for the electoral advantage of the party in *one* chamber—in this case, the more important chamber in terms of executive-legislative relations—can cause shifts in behavior in *both* chambers, despite otherwise constant or countervailing institutional environments.

Discursive Accountability

We now evaluate how the reforms affected patterns in discursive accountability, using the concept as developed in Eggers and Spirling (2014) to examine the back-and-forth of parliamentary debates. To measure this concept, we examine who responds when an opposition MP speaks, looking at dyadic combinations of consecutive speakers in debates. For each committee-cabinet unit of observation, we take the number of dyads featuring an opposition MP followed by each type of speaker. We then divide this number by the total number of opposition speeches, excluding the last speech in each debate as there is no subsequent speaker. This gives us a measure of the proportion of speech that features back-and-forth between the opposition and ministers that is characteristic of ministerial accountability and responsible party government. Our regression specifications are otherwise identical to the previous analysis.

Figure 3 shows the results. As with our previous analysis, the baseline comparison for behavior is the pre-reform period from 1980-1996, and the coefficients reflect the changes in types of discursive accountability in the Reform 1 and Reform 2 periods relative to this pre-reform period. The results illustrate a clear shift in patterns of discursive accountability. Relative to the pre-reform period, a bureaucrat is less likely to speak following an opposition MP in the Reform 1 period in the House of Representatives, whereas cabinet ministers are more likely to do so. In the Reform 2 period, this shift is further augmented. The patterns are again similar in the House of Councillors, suggesting that the electoral reform that initially affected only the House of Representatives in fact influenced behavior across the entire political system.

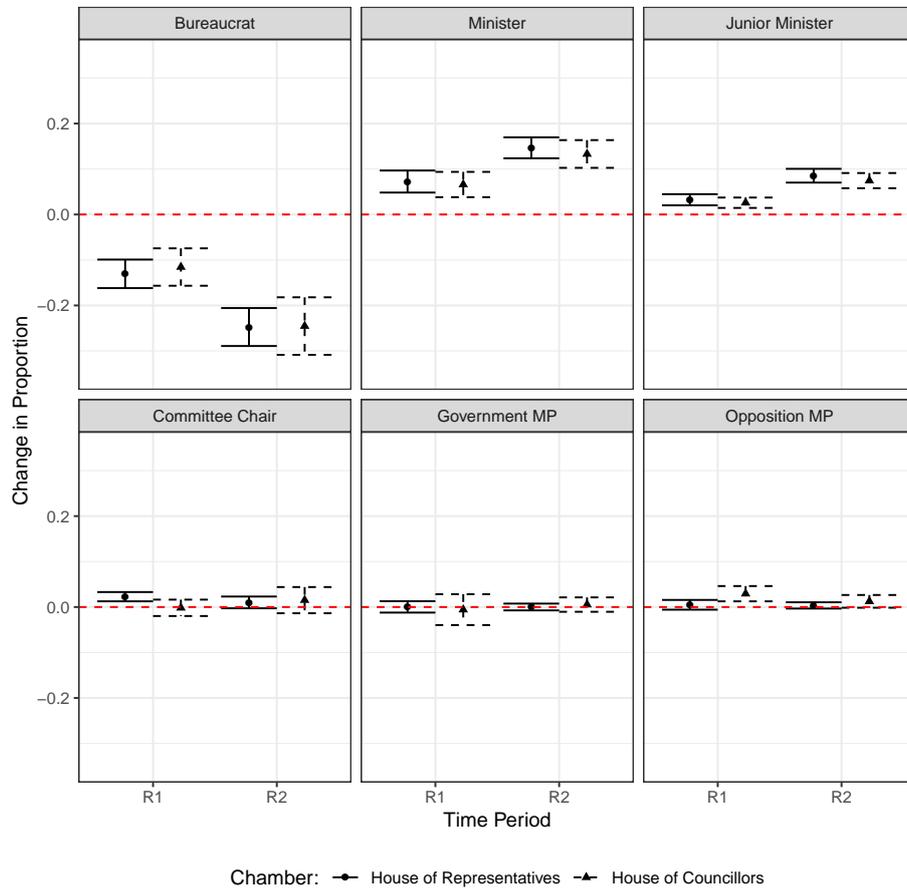


Figure 3: Changes in discursive accountability following reforms in the Japanese Diet

Note: Figure shows the effect of reforms on discursive accountability. It focuses on the probability that a speech by an opposition MP is followed by a speech by each of the six groups of speakers, across all committees. The coefficient represents the change in probability relative to the pre-reform period. All models include committee fixed effects and robust standard errors clustered on committees

Disaggregating Committees and the DPJ Government

Additional analyses speak to the robustness and validity of our main findings. First, one concern might be that pooling the data across all committees masks important variation in the effect of the reforms. As previously noted, the Budget Committee was always an important arena for ministerial accountability, as it historically hosted a version of “Prime Minister’s Question Time,” even in the pre-reform period.

Indeed, ministerial activity in the Budget Committee was generally higher in the pre-reform period (around 30% of speeches compared to less than 10% in other types of committees). Similarly, in terms of discursive accountability, a speech by an opposition MP was followed by a speech by a minister nearly 60% of the time in the Budget Committee in the pre-reform period, triple the rate in other committees.²⁴ Relative to the other standing committees and ad hoc committees, the effects of the reforms on ministerial accountability in the Budget Committee might therefore be expected to be lower than the effects in other committees.

We examine this expectation by estimating the same regression model as our main findings, but disaggregating the sample by committee type: Budget Committee, Standing Committees (excluding Budget), and Other Committees. These results, reported in Figure 4, are qualitatively similar to the pooled results reported in Figure 2 and Figure 3. Although ministerial accountability in the Budget Committee was already high relative to other committees, the proportion of ministerial activity nevertheless increased further after each reform, and activity by bureaucrats decreased.²⁵

²⁴Figure A.5 shows descriptive patterns on the proportion of speakers and discursive dyads of speakers from key groups.

²⁵The effects on ministerial activity in the first reform period are positive, but not statistically significant, given that this estimation is based on a single committee. Appendix Tables A.4 and A.5 give details of the standing committees in each chamber over time, and how we deal with name changes and modifications over time for the purpose of including as many committees in the fixed effects regressions. Figures A.6 and A.7 provide results that are further disaggregated into each major standing committee.

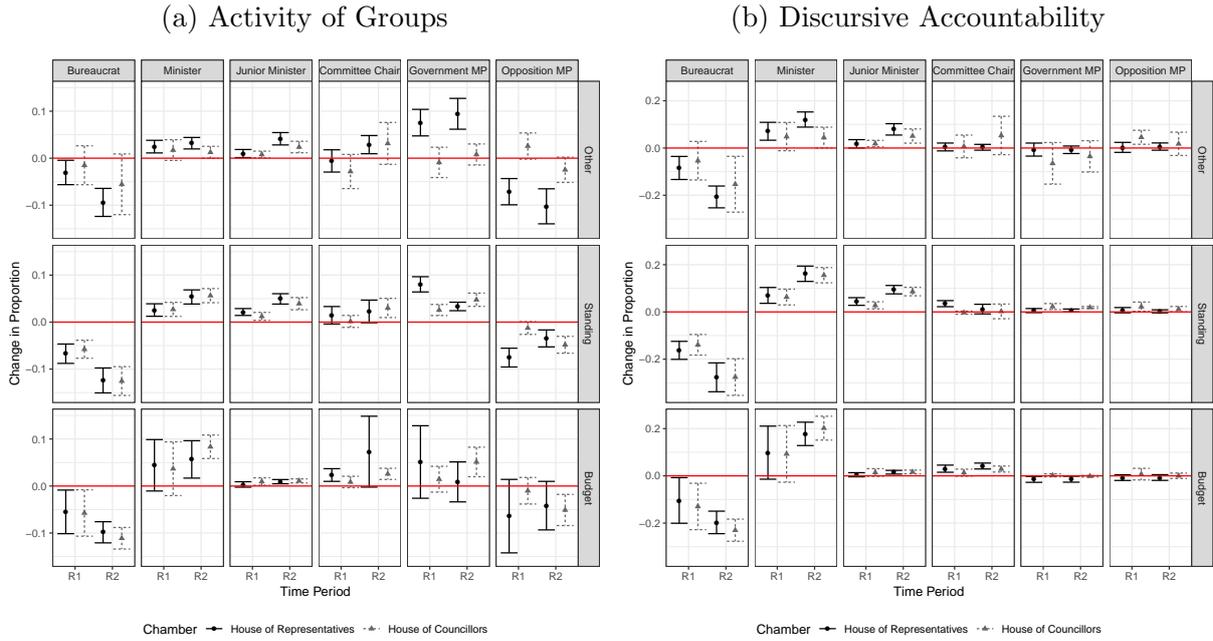


Figure 4: Disaggregating the Results by Committee Type

Note: Figure shows the proportion of speech by each type of speaker in each reform period, disaggregated into three types of committee: Budget, Standing (non-Budget), and Other.

A second concern might be that the large changes we have estimated for the Reform 2 period are driven entirely by the three years in government of the DPJ and its coalition partners, from 2009 to 2012. As noted, the DPJ was particularly focused on taking control and responsibility over policymaking away from bureaucrats and centralizing the process with the cabinet. To examine how the patterns we have documented vary across LDP and DPJ-led governments, we divide the Reform 2 period into three separate periods: Reform 2 (pre-DPJ, 2001-2009), DPJ (2009-2012), and Post-DPJ (2012-2016).

Figure 5 shows the results disaggregated into these periods coinciding with partisan turnover in the government. These results confirm that the shift in behavior indeed accelerated during the DPJ's time in government, with ministers speaking more and bureaucrats speaking less, with similar shifts in discursive accountability. However, the figure also makes clear that the effects also applied to the LDP governments that came before and

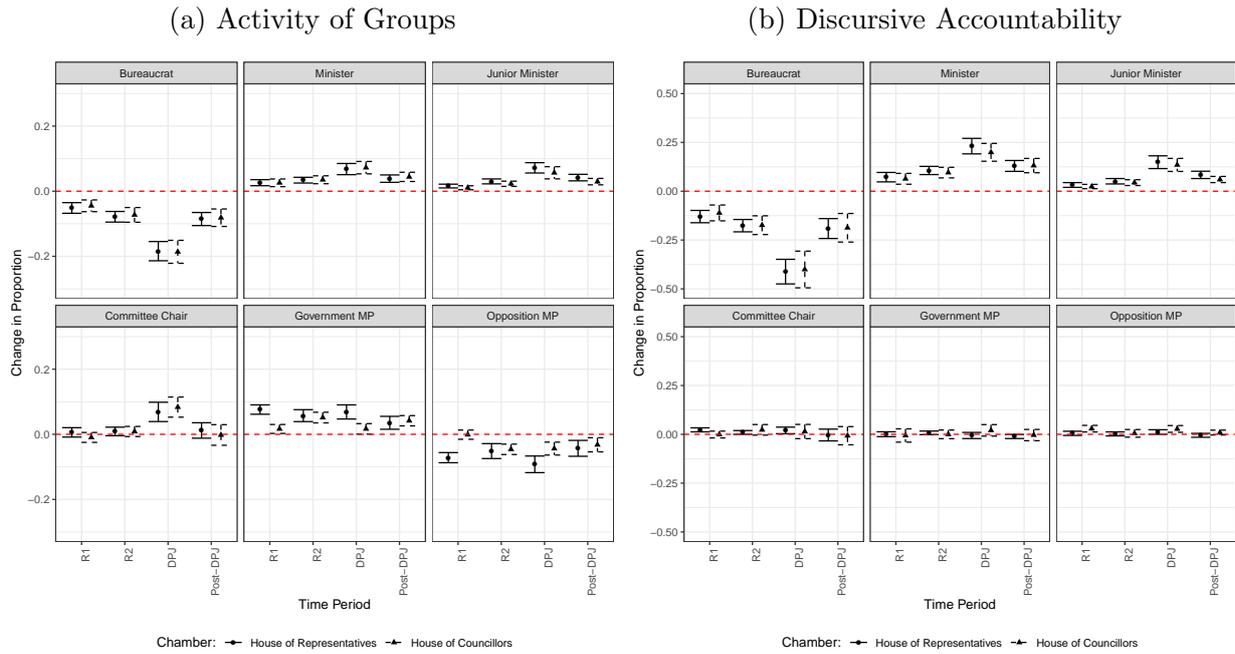


Figure 5: Disaggregating the DPJ Government in the Second Reform Period

Note: The results in this analysis use the same specifications as in Figures 2 and 3, respectively. All models include committee fixed effects, committee-clustered standard errors, and report the 95% confidence interval around the coefficient representing the change from the pre-reform period. The Reform 2 (R-2) period from the earlier analysis is divided into three periods to represent the pre-DPJ period, the period under a DPJ-led coalition government, and the LDP-led governments after the DPJ.

after the DPJ governments. In other words, it is not that case the shift toward responsible party government we have documented for the post-reform period was driven solely by the alternation in power and the three years of non-LDP rule.²⁶

Conclusion

One of the most important questions in political science is how and why institutions affect legislative behavior across democracies. Institutional effects on legislative behavior matter because they structure the nature of representation and the kinds of policy outcomes produced in the democratic process connecting voters to the government through elections

²⁶Figure A.7 and Figure A.8 provide results for each outcome variable that are disaggregated into each cabinet for a more fine-grained, but noisier, picture of the changes.

and legislative actions.

We have examined how major institutional reforms in Japan—to the electoral system and to the institutions of government and parliament—led to radical shifts in legislative behavior. Our analysis of millions of committee speeches has documented that the introduction of party-centered electoral incentives following the 1994 electoral system reform in the House of Representatives led to an increase in ministerial accountability to parliament, and a decrease the reliance on bureaucrats for defending and justifying government policies. In addition, discursive accountability increased—questions and speeches by opposition MPs began to be addressed by ministers, rather than bureaucrats. Furthermore, when these behavioral incentives arise in one chamber of bicameral parliaments—particularly the chamber that is most directly connected to the executive through the confidence relationship—party leaders have strong reasons to standardize behavior across chambers. Taken together, these findings are consistent with how we would expect parties to organize a legislature when competition is structured around strong and coherent party brands.

Although Japan’s hoped “Westminsterization” and a full transformation to a model of responsible party government is still incomplete in many respects—most notably the limited alternation in governing parties since the reforms—our findings point to positive evidence that the reforms have had a significant impact on legislative behavior. Reformers’ vision of creating more responsible, programmatic parties and cabinet dominance in policymaking has been translated into meaningfully different patterns of parliamentary behavior.

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