

Youth political representation in an aging Japan

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Politicians Are Often Much Older Than Their Constituents



Joe
Biden
(80)



Donald
Trump
(77)

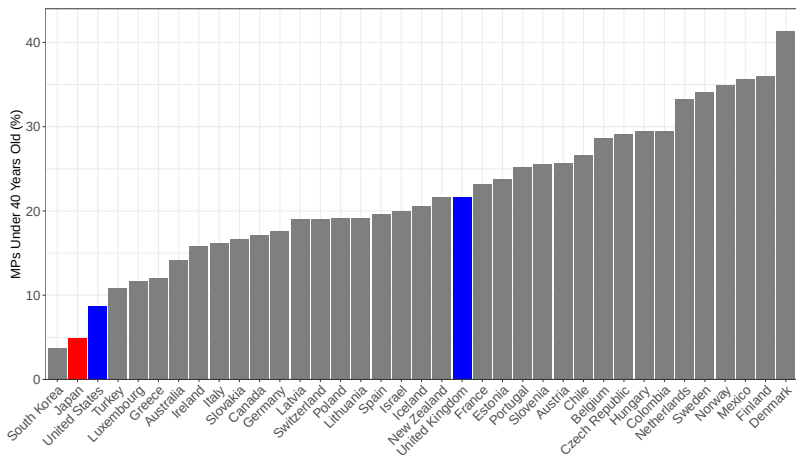


Yoshihide
Suga
(74)



Fumio
Kishida
(66)

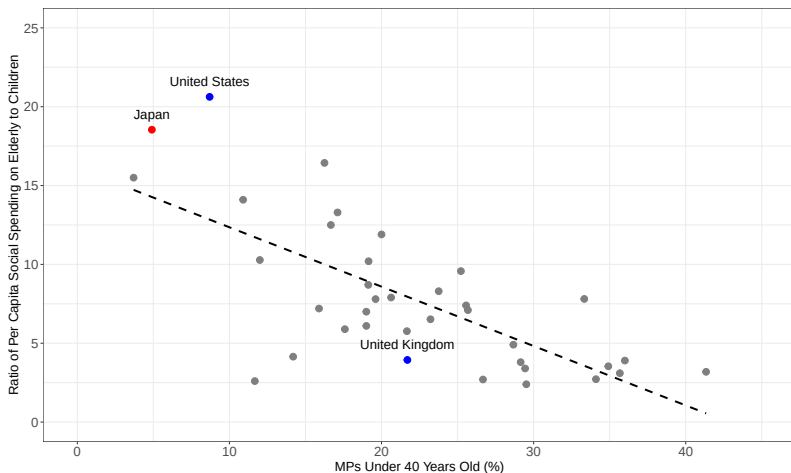
Youth Representation in Comparative Perspective



Notes: Inter-Parliamentary Union (2021); McClean (2023).

Japan ranks second to last in the OECD in the percentage of members of parliament (MPs) under 40 years old

Youth Representation and Social Spending



Notes: Inter-Parliamentary Union (2021); OECD Social Expenditures Database (2022); McClean (2023).

OECD countries with lower percentages of MPs under 40 tend to have higher ratios of social spending on the elderly to children

Book Project Questions

1. Why are younger politicians so rare in some electoral contexts, and not others?
2. Do younger politicians promote social policies important to young people more than older politicians?

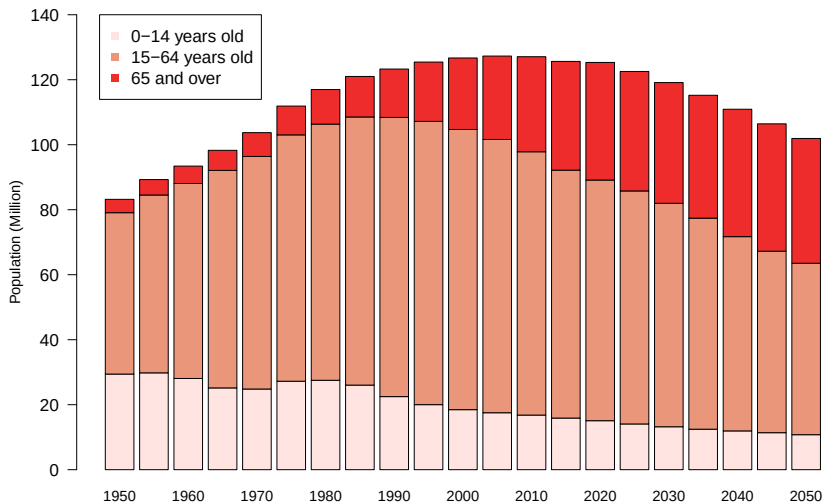
Three Main Takeaways

1. Silver democracy is not destiny
2. A politician's age is pivotal in shaping their preferences for social spending
3. Greater youth representation may reduce rather than exacerbate intergenerational conflict

Why Are Younger Politicians So Rare in Japan?

Japan's "silver democracy" is sustained by institutions,
not elderly voters as is often assumed

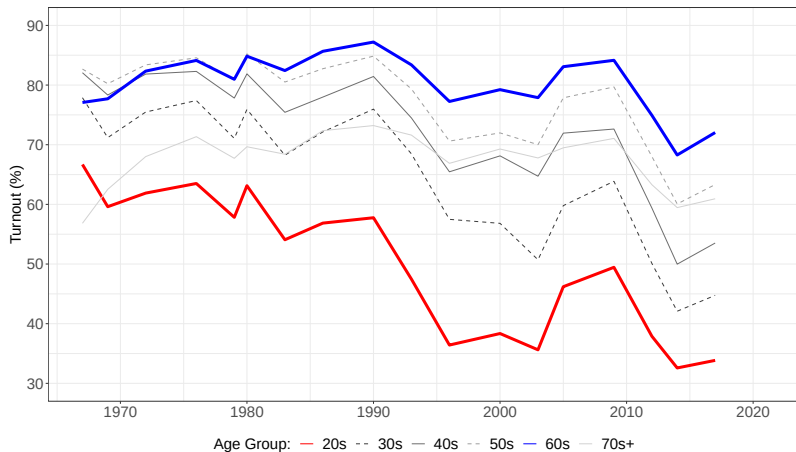
Rapidly Aging Population



Notes: National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (2017).

Older people are making up an increasing share of the population...

Declining Youth Turnout



Notes: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2018).

...while younger people are turning out to vote less and less

Growing Concerns About Intergenerational Inequality



Source: Mainichi Shimbun, Mar. 7, 2016.

Will older politicians ignore social policies favored by young people?

But Voters (Including Older Voters) Like Young Candidates



Notes: Images purchased from Shutterstock and manipulated using FaceApp.

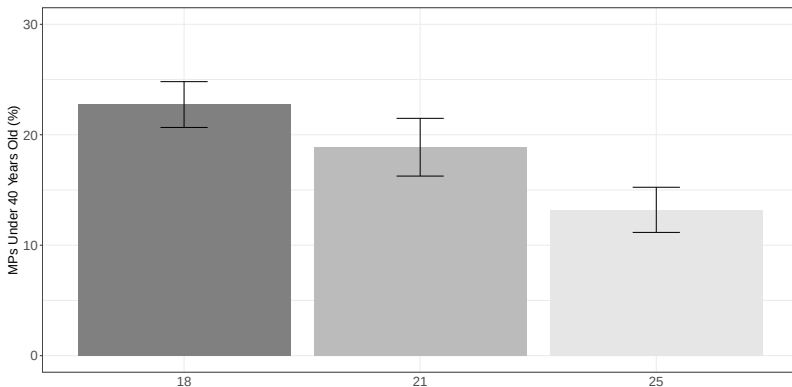
Survey experiments and observational data show that voters, including older voters, are very supportive of younger candidates

Japan's Institutions Limit Youth Representation

Japan's institutions create a setting where younger people face disproportionately higher costs to running for office

1. Barriers that distinctly affect younger people
2. Barriers that similarly affect younger and older people, but younger people have fewer resources to overcome them

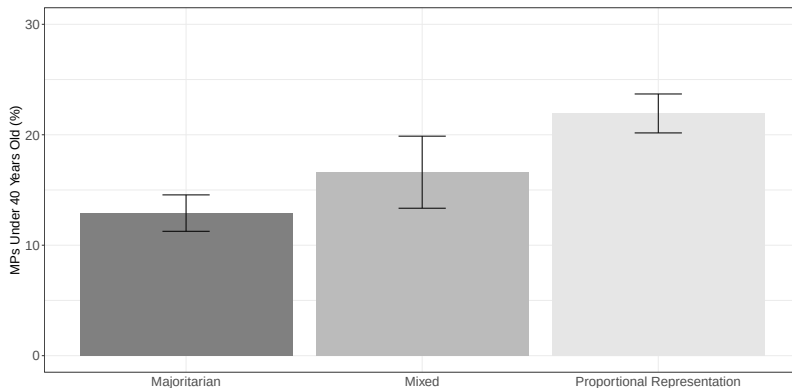
Cross-National Evidence: Minimum Age of Candidacy



Notes: Original data on the lower/unicameral house in 68 democracies (2000–2018).

Young MPs are less common when eligibility ages are higher...

Cross-National Evidence: Electoral System



Notes: Original data on the lower/unicameral house in 68 democracies (2000–2018).

...and in majoritarian or mixed electoral systems

Which Institutions Matter Most? (In Progress)

Recently, some scholars and experts have focused on reforms that **increase the benefits** of holding office
(e.g., salary, pension system)

However, young people appear to be more responsive to reforms that **reduce the costs** of running for office
(e.g., public funding, candidate leave and reinstatement system)

Does Youth Underrepresentation Matter for Social Policy?

Yes, younger politicians are more likely than older politicians to promote social spending on child welfare for younger families

Evidence: Young Mayors in Japan



Source: *Financial Tribune*, May 13, 2016.

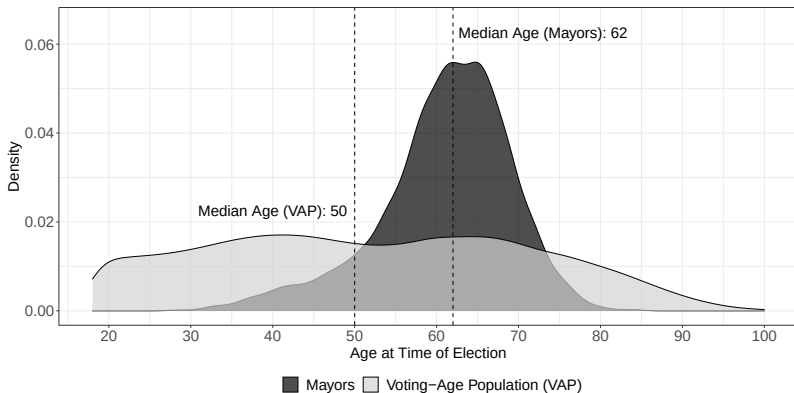
Mayors have significant discretion over social spending

Japanese Municipal Elections Dataset (JMED)

JMED: Over 200,000 mayoral and municipal assembly candidates in nearly 20,000 elections (1999–2021)

- ▶ Data on names, age, gender, partisanship, incumbency, vote totals, turnout
- ▶ For mayors: family structure, career background, party support

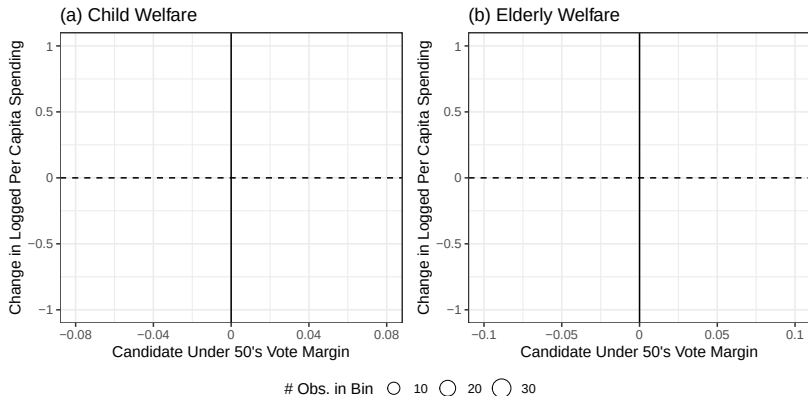
Age Distribution of Voters and Mayors



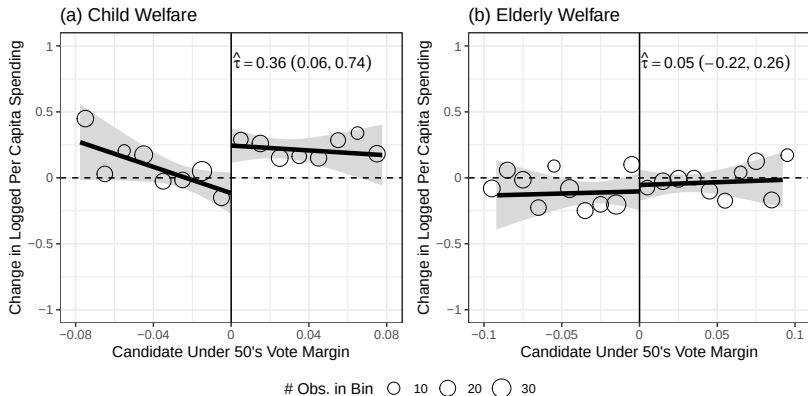
Sources: JMED (2020); Statistical Handbook of Japan (2020).

Half of the voting-age population is under 50
compared to 10% of elected mayors

Young Mayors and Social Spending



Young Mayors and Social Spending



Young mayors increase spending on child welfare
but do not reduce spending on elderly welfare

Additional Findings

These spending patterns are even more pronounced among young mayors with **recent personal experience** raising young children

The spending predominantly targets long-term infrastructure investments, such as building childcare centers, which suggests the **longer time horizons** of young mayors may be important

Three Main Takeaways

1. Silver democracy is not destiny
2. A politician's age is pivotal in shaping their preferences for social spending
3. Greater youth representation may reduce rather than exacerbate intergenerational conflict over social welfare

Book Project

Silver Democracy: Youth Representation in an Aging Japan

1. Silver Democracy
2. Youth Representation in Comparative Perspective
3. Political Institutions and Youth Representation in Japan
4. Voter Biases and Young Candidates
5. Campaigning on Social Policies for Young People
6. Young Politicians and Social Spending
7. Broader Implications for the Welfare of Young People

Thank You!



To find out more about my research, please go to:
www.charlesmcclean.com