

Article: “The Governor's Race in Hokkaido: The Election of a Female Governor and its Impact”

Author: Masako Aiuchi

Issue: Jan. 2004

Journal: *PS: Political Science & Politics*



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along the lines of community service? This question has important gender implications. As women are more likely to serve at the school board level than in any other level of government, whether or not they see school board service as the first step in a longer political career has serious consequences for the political pipeline argument. Is service on the school board more likely to be viewed as a stepping stone by women, perhaps because it is more accessible to them than other offices, than by men? Or do women view school board service as a separate track altogether? At the heart of this issue is political ambition and whether men and women run for political office for different reasons.

The data for this study come from a cross-sectional, national survey of school board candidates drawn from a random sample of school districts that I conducted in 1998 (N=671; 55% response rate). I find that among the respondents to the national survey, 38% were women, which is close to the national average of women currently serving on school boards. In many ways, women and men candidates are similar in terms of their socioeconomic backgrounds. Women school board candidates (23%), however, are almost twice as likely as men candidates (12%) to come from a professional education background, which is consistent with previous studies on the background of school board members. Of all survey respondents, 62% won their races. When broken down by gender, women candidates won 65% of their races, compared with 61% of men—a difference that is not statistically significant. Moreover, when additional controls are introduced in a logistic regression analysis, gender remains insignificant (instead, incumbency is the major explanatory variable in predicting the success of school board candidates). However, women candidates do fare better in at-large elections than men, which is not surprising given that previous research indicates that there is a tendency for women to be elected in “at-large” or multi-member district elections at both the municipal and state legislative level.

Although women are just as likely as men to win when they decide to become school board candidates, men and women appear to weigh different factors in their decision to run for school board. Women are more likely than men to rely on the encouragement of family and friends before they seek out a

school board position, which suggests that family obligations weigh heavier on the minds of women candidates. Indeed, women are more likely than men to say that having children in the schools is what prompted their decision to run for school board in the first place.

This study finds that other important gender dimensions exist when it comes to political ambition. Men are significantly more likely than women to say that they run for school board with the hope of both gaining political experience as well as affecting local education policy. Women, meanwhile, are more likely to indicate that the social reasons, such as working with like-minded individuals on a school board, are what propelled their decision to become school board candidates. In some ways, these findings run counter to other work on political ambition and higher political office, in which the “ambition gap” appears to be closing between men and women and that women are even more likely than men to say that issues are what matter in their decisions to become engaged in politics.

Of course, the findings from this study might demonstrate that school board elections are a unique case when compared to other sorts of elections. While men are more likely than women to say that gaining political experience for a run for higher office was important in their decision to become a school board candidate, the fact remains that relatively few men or women feel that this reason was important. Both men and women are more likely to indicate that social and community reasons are what prompted their candidacies. Although men may be more ready than women to use school boards as the first step in their political pipeline, the chances of candidates of either sex doing so are slim. Those individuals who wish to recruit well qualified women (or men) to run for higher political office may wish to do so from other arenas besides school boards.

The Governor’s Race in Hokkaido: The Election of a Female Governor and its Impact

—Masako Aiuchi,
Hokkaido Asaigakuen University

In April 2003, Hokkaido voters elected their first female governor,

Harumi Takahashi, during the 15th General Local Election. She became the fourth female governor in Japan, following those governors elected in Osaka, Kumamoto, and Chiba. The election of a female governor is quite a recent phenomenon in Japan, and there are both similarities and differences in the political conditions that supported this development in each prefecture. Recent efforts to devolve power from the national government have increased the power and responsibility of the prefectural governments in general, and of governors specifically. Both constituencies and political scientists are concerned with whether women will make a difference as governors during this critical period. This paper examines Harumi Takahashi’s election as Hokkaido governor, focusing on the political party’s recruiting process as well as the campaign strategies used by her followers. This campaign, like many others, raised the question of whether a candidate’s gender should be emphasized to appeal to voters.

Nine people, two of them women, campaigned for the office of governor of Hokkaido. In the beginning of the campaign, Takahashi and her followers were reluctant to emphasize her gender. The other female candidate, Takako Itoh, was a former Diet member and third-time challenger in the governor’s race who chose to target the general public and not take up feminist issues. When several opinion polls showed voters were dissatisfied with the candidates’ vague policy perspectives, Takahashi’s camp swiftly changed its strategy, specifically taking up women’s issues to target female voters. In her manifest, Takahashi tried to distinguish herself from other candidates by declaring she would develop legislation to support child rearing and give financial aid to women entrepreneurs.

The exit poll showed that the majority of women voted for male candidates; thus, the candidate’s gender did not have a strong impact on voter choice in the Hokkaido governor’s race. Takahashi failed to mobilize women partly because her career as an elite bureaucrat and her affiliation with a conservative party gave many feminists the impression that she was simply “a man with a skirt on.” Ultimately, Takahashi’s victory was brought about by the Clean Party’s decision to endorse her at virtually the last moment of the race.

Takahashi's campaign drew considerable media attention because both her background and the recruiting process employed led Hokkaido voters to recall the successful campaign of Fusae Ohta of Osaka, the first female governor in Japan. Like Tokahashi, Ohta was a career bureaucrat, and being an elite METI woman had a strong impact on the recruiting process in both cases. Fusae Ohta was elected following her predecessor's resignation due to a sexual harassment scandal involving one of his campaign workers. In that race, the political parties carefully calculated the anti-male and anti-populist sentiments among Osaka voters.

Japan's second female governor, Yoshiko Shiotani, was elected in the prefecture of Kumamoto in April 2000, two months after Ohta's election in Osaka. Shiotani was the lieutenant governor of Kumamoto before her election as governor. Unlike Ohta and Takahashi, Shiotani did not come from an eligibility pool comprised of career elites. When the incumbent governor suddenly passed away, the local political network asked Shiotani, a devout Christian with many years of service in the welfare institution, to run for office. Although she ran as an independent, Shiotani had the endorsement of the conservative LDP and the Clean Party. The extensive involvement of community and women's organizations in her campaign contributed to her landslide victory.

Akiko Domoto was elected in Chiba in March 2001, making her the third female governor in Japan. She was the first woman governor who ran and won the election as a real independent, that is, without receiving the endorsement of any major political party. Her success can be partly attributed to the active involvement of women's rights organizations and other civic groups in her campaign. Although Domoto did not serve as lieutenant governor, she was formerly a member of the House of Councilors. As the head of the small political party, *Sakigake*, she had been championing women's causes, human rights, and environmental issues, was well known by Chiba voters, and often appeared on television. Feminists and other activists evaluated Domoto's performance highly, so when she decided to run for governor to challenge the male- and money-dominated political culture of Chiba, she could reasonably expect moral and practical support from women and younger people.

With the exception of Domoto, female governors in Japan have two dis-

tinctive features: appointment as a lieutenant governor and elite status in the ministries of the central government. Both Ohta of Osaka and Shiotani of Kumamoto were lieutenant governors before they were elected governors. Shiotani moved directly from one office to the other in the same prefectural government, whereas Ohta served as lieutenant governor in the prefecture of Okayama before being elected as governor of Osaka. Lieutenant governorship seems to grant women running for governor greater credibility. The METI that sent Ohta and Takahashi to the governor's office serves as a mechanism for career women interested in politics to gain access to political office.

That people with elite status in the ministries of central government comprise an eligibility pool for governor is true for both women and men seeking governorship in Japan. It is possible that the increased entry of women into a nontraditional sphere such as central bureaucracy, and their subsequent promotion to the executive position, will enhance women's political recruitment, thus promoting their entry into the even more untraditional sphere of the governor's office.

There are also similarities in the electoral settings in which Ohta, Shiotani, Domoto and Takahashi entered the governor's office. These women ran for office in the context of a male-dominated political culture, sometimes during crises caused by their male predecessors. For example, there was a sexual harassment scandal in Osaka, a sudden death in Kumamoto, corruption in Chiba, and extreme distrust of the prefectural government in Hokkaido. Although the candidate's gender did not seem to have a discernible impact on voter choice, women candidates provided a compelling alternative to "politics as usual" in these gubernatorial elections, at least from the perspective of the candidates' recruiters.

The four women governors recently developed a proposal to the Japanese government calling for more effective enforcement of the "Violence Against Women Act." The jointly submitted proposal suggests that women governors are united in their defense of women's rights and protection of women's interests *as women*, thus implying that "women represent women." Although Takahashi and other women in political office regularly face this common assumption during their tenure, further research is needed to determine whether women governors actu-

ally represent women, particularly because electing women to the governor's office is such a recent phenomenon in Japan.

Has the Closed Door Opened for Women? The Appointment of Women Ministers in Japan

—Yoshie Kobayashi
University of Hawaii, Manoa

When Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro appointed five women ministers to his cabinet, the decision not only surprised the Japanese, but also foreign observers who had criticized the nation for its dearth of women in politics. His appointments increased the representation of women ministers to 22%, the highest in Japanese political history.

Because backlash against the gender equality policy is widespread, it is unlikely that the increase of the number of women ministers resulted from social demand or the rectification of gender inequality in Japan. This paper addresses the question of why, despite the antagonistic political situation in 2001, Prime Minister Koizumi appointed five women to the cabinet. In this paper, I consider the likelihood of the number of women ministers increasing, or at least remaining stable, in the near future. I also discuss those factors that both promote and hinder the appointment of women ministers in post-war Japan, including legal restrictions on appointment and the history and conditions under which women ministers have been appointed in Japan.

The first hypothesis I examine is that the more women there are in the Diet, the more likely it is that the number of women ministers will increase. My analysis indicates that although an increase in women Diet members may help increase the appointment of women ministers, it is neither a necessary precondition for their appointment nor an inevitable consequence of women's increased representation in the two legislative houses.

My second hypothesis suggests that the male-oriented political recruitment process hinders women's ability to be appointed to the cabinet. The data reveal that women Diet members were appointed to the cabinet most often, but there was also a notable increase in the number of women cabinet members appointed in the 1990s and 2000s who were ex-bureaucrats. In general, women