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Re-Evaluating Gender Reforms in Non-Western Nations: A Case Study of Women’s Empowerment in Japan

By Maryam Al kubati

Abstract
This paper focuses on Japan, a socioeconomically advanced, developed democracy which has relatively low women’s representation within the national parliament. This case demonstrates the lack of systematic relationships between human development and women’s political participation. Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, since resuming office in 2012, has recognized the under-representation of women in the labor market and has subsequently promoted “Womenomics” as one of the three structural reform policies for reviving the Japanese economy. This study will examine the impact that the prime minister’s Womenomics strategies have had on the representation of women in the national parliament. The author collected and compared Prime Minister Shinzō Abe’s English translated speeches between 2012 and 2016 (the timeframe during which she conducted her master's dissertation). The contents were analyzed to identify the usage of the term “women” in relation to “Womenomics” and the actualization of the government’s target to increase the number of women in all leadership positions to 30% by 2020. This case study also gives an insight into understanding the impact that heads of state and governments can have on women’s representation in politics as well as identifying the most effective top-down gender reforms for culturally and politically conservative societies. This article outlines the historical context of the Womenomics policy in Japan, provides a critical analysis of the implementation strategies, and analyzes the contents of speeches and statements given by Prime Minister Abe since resuming office in 2012. It concludes with an assessment of the viability of Womenomics for Japan considering findings, progress and socio-structural obstacles thus far.

Keywords: Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, Womenomics, Speeches

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Introduction

This article focuses on Japan, a socioeconomically advanced country and stable democratic regime with a relatively low representation of women in politics (Inter-Parliamentary Union [IPU], 2016). Japanese women have one of the highest literacy rates in the world (OECD, 2014) as well as some of the longest life expectancy rates, yet they are lagging behind many developed and developing countries in women’s parliamentary representation (IPU, 2016). Recognizing the common culture-based justifications that exist to explain women’s absence in politics, this paper seeks to explore beyond explanations that categorize Japan as a “patriarchal”, “culturally conservative” or “male-dominated” society (Dalton, 2014; Macnaughtan, 2015). Two prime ministers have initiated gender reforms and promoted women’s empowerment in Japan: Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (2000–2005) and Prime Minister Shinzō Abe (2012 to date). This paper examines the different approaches and positive actions that Prime Minister Shinzō Abe has proposed since resuming office in December 2012 and focuses on his progress in creating a society in which “all women can shine” (subete no josei ga kagayaku nihon e). This paper analyzes all the speeches and statements given by Prime Minister Shinzō Abe between 2012 to 2016 and compares how the word “woman/women” is mentioned to the actualization of Womenomics targets set by the current government.

Womenomics Strategy and Positive Action

Positive action, also known as affirmative action, has been defined by the Ministry of internal affairs and communication of Japan to include:

1) Actions for either men or women such as “actions only applicable to women”, actions that treat women more favorably than men or actions that are applicable to both men and women.

2) A time span in which the actions would be implemented such as temporary action until the gender gap is eliminated, or an action that would be continued even after the gender gap is eliminated because the action had other purposes than the elimination of the gender gap.

When focusing on constituents of positive action, they are classified into the following categories:

a) A quota system;

b) A time-goals approach (an approach that sets up a certain target on expanding women’s participation as well as timetable for attaining such target in order to make efforts to achieve the target);

c) Encouraging women to sign up for a certain program, providing training or better environments for women;

d) Providing work-family balance or child-rearing support.

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2 In 2000, 49% of 25-34-year-old women had a tertiary qualification; by 2012, 61% of women of that age did—well above the OECD average (45%) and larger than the proportion of Japanese men of that age who had the same level of education (56%).

3 The average life expectancy of women in Japan is 86.39% as of 2010.

4 Japanese politician and member of Japan’s leading political party, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Shinzō Abe was prime minister of Japan twice (2006–07 and 2012 to date).

5 I use “positive action” rather than “affirmative action” in this article as used in official United Nations documents and also used in official English translations of Japanese policy documents. The Japanese equivalent of “positive action” is “sekkyokuteki kaizen sochi”. Often it is simply transliterated as “pojitibu akushon”.

6 The white paper report by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication in Japan.
Decades of economic stagnation has been a longstanding problem facing Japan. Also, by 2060, the population is predicted to shrink by 30% and the elderly ratio expected to reach 40%. Consequently, women’s active participation in the workforce is vital for the economy, having the potential to increase Japan’s GDP by nearly 13% if female employment is boosted. In 1999, Kathy Matsui advocated for a policy for women known as “Womenomics,” positioning it as a strategy that could improve the situation of Japanese women and the Japanese economy. Womenomics demonstrates how economic benefits and social progress can be achieved in any society where women have equal access to participation in the economy. Prime Minister Shinzō Abe promoted a multi-faceted reform strategy upon resuming office in December 2012, in an effort to revive Japan’s economy after decades of stagnation. Among these strategies was his promise to promote Womenomics as policy to increase the percentage of women in leadership positions.

In January 2014 at the World Economic Forum’s Annual Meeting in Davos, Prime Minister Shinzō Abe stated in his keynote speech:

“…Japan's corporate culture, by contrast, is still one of pinstripes and button downs. After all, the female labor force in Japan is the most under-utilized resource. Japan must become a place where women shine. By 2020 we will make 30% of leading positions to be occupied by women. In order to have a large number of women become leading players in the market we will need a diverse working environment.”

Prime Minister Abe mentioned several “Key Performance Indicators” (KPIs) for his Womenomics agenda:

1. A target was set to increase female representation in leadership positions by 30% across Japan by 2020.
2. Female labor participation rate (ages 25-44) was 68% in 2012. A target was set to increase it to 73% by 2020.
3. The percentage of women returning to work after their first child was 38% in 2010. A target was set to increase the percentage to 55% by 2020.
4. A target was set to reduce the number of children on daycare waiting lists (22,741 waitlisted children as of April 2013) by increasing the number of childcare facilities by 2017.
5. A target was set to increase the percentage of fathers who take paternity leave from 2.6% in 2011 to 13% by 2020.

Theoretical Framework

This paper examines the strategies that heads of state and governments have implemented through a top-down approach at the national level to empower women. The principal theoretical framework used in this article consists of heads of state and governments as the main actors, gender reforms (such as Womenomics) as institutional mechanisms and feminist/non-feminist theories as supporting evidence. To construct the theory for this case study, I first contemplated the disparities that exist in the achievements of descriptive women’s political representation in the national parliament of Japan. I identified two variables that explain the disparities in women’s participation.

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7 See Goldman Sachs report “Womenomics 4.0: Time to Walk the Talk”.
8 Ibid.
representation of national parliaments in Japan: Prime Minister Abe’s strategies to increase women’s representation in the labor market, and an analysis of Prime Minister Abe’s speeches focusing on Womenomics. I identify these variables as my independent variable. As for the dependent variable, I utilize women’s political representation in the national parliament of Japan. For the intervening variable, I chose the impact of gender reforms on women’s political representation. I will now move to the most important aspect of my theory-building process, which will be identifying the theories and literature that exist to explain the role of the state in women’s empowerment. Theories of gender and state as well as theories of descriptive representation are used as the main theories of this research. I assessed the relationship between heads of states’ top-down gender reforms and their impact on the percentages of women in the parliament. This relationship was explained using our intervening variable, the impact of gender reforms on women’s political representation, which mediates the relation between our dependent and independent variables.

**Literature Review**

In this case study, a number of feminist/non-feminist theories that identify the state’s role in improving gender relations will be used to support the findings in this paper.

**Gender and State Theories**

Feminist theory at its inception in the 1970’s paid little attention to the role of the state in gender relations. This was because mainstream politics and the state at that time were under major critique due to their fundamentally patriarchal nature. This made participants of new women’s rights movements highly suspicious and distrusting of the government. This resulted in an under-theorization of the role of the state in gender relations as an analytical consequence of distrust of mainstream politics by women’s rights activists. Nonetheless, this began to change in the mid-1980s, when a re-examination of the significant roles of the state in the structuration and institutionalization of relations between genders, and in creating and policing the frontiers between public and private spheres, emerged (Mottier, 2004).

Wayne (1998) primarily describes gender theorists’ annotation of the state as a negative entity and adverse view of its role. He points out how socialist theorists, as well as radical theorists, viewed the state as an instrument of domination in the hands of the ruling class, while liberal theorists, including scholars such as Catherine McKinnon, viewed the state as a monolithic entity which institutionalizes the interest of dominant groups. Regarding the socialist theories, domination was perceived as coming from a capitalist perspective through bourgeois classes, while the radical theorists viewed male citizens as dominant oppressors. Generally, the state was seen as a patriarchal instrument which institutionalizes and promotes male domination. (Mottier, 2004). This view has continuously been challenged by several scholars and, as a result, this perspective changed after the 1980’s. Scholars, particularly Scandinavian authors such as Drude Dahlerup (1987), Birte Siim (1988) and Helga Hernes (1984; 1987) questioned two aspects of the state: whether the impact of the state on gender relations should be posited in negative connotations alone and whether the state is amply conceptualized as a homogenous actor (Mottier, 2004). Drude Dahlerup (1987), Birte Siim (1988) and Helga Hernes (1984; 1987) argue that the welfare state has a positive effect on gender relations in that it reduces the financial dependency of women on men. Liberal theorists similarly defend the state, but from a different perspective. They conceptualize the liberal state as a neutral mediator between groups rather than as an instrument
of male domination (Waylen, 1998). Other Western theorists indicate alternative aspects of gendered power relations, focusing on institutionalization within the state, which they argue admits the promotion of women’s rights, either by way of official actions or independently by women themselves. Thus, either the state itself chooses to empower and further women’s status through incorporating women’s demands or feminist bureaucrats working from within the state system choose to promote women’s rights and improve women’s status. (Stetson and Mazur, 1995; Mottier, 2004). Consequently, it is essential that one does not classify the relation between state and gender primarily as positive or negative without considering its historical complexity, its variations within different political contexts such as liberal democracy, colonialism or state socialism, and its dynamic relationship to gendered power relations (Waylen 1998:7, Mottier, 2004).

This paper focuses on top-down gender reforms by heads of state and governments as a trajectory that will open more doors for feminists and feminist movements to push pro-gender agendas onto the state thereby resulting in improved gender reforms and policies. Feminists will be able to use these reforms as a stepping stone to further women’s rights and promote gender equality demands. In the case of Japan, having Womenomics as a top-down strategy for empowering women can be considered a blessing in disguise since it provides the opportunity for feminists and women’s organizations to push for more pro-gender policies and demands that might have otherwise been neglected by previous heads of governments who had little to no interest in female empowerment, nor had a core economic policy focusing on women. While this study recognizes and discovers the limitations and somewhat complex rhetoric of Prime Minister Shinzō Abe’s Womenomics policy, this paper highlights that this form of state-sponsored empowerment strategy, irrespective of its drawbacks and limitations, will indirectly instigate women’s empowerment and create opportunities for stronger feminist movements and alliances that will promote women’s political, social and economic rights. It will also provide more opportunities for women’s agencies and organizations to interact and pressure the state towards realizing their gender equality demands. Overall, this will open more doors for further discourse and negotiations related to women’s empowerment and gender equality issues in Japan (Schieder, 2014, pp. 55-58).

Descriptive Representation, Critical Mass Theory

This study will discuss critical mass as one of the descriptive representation theories. Critical mass theory focuses on minorities, a categorization which applies to women. The theory’s main concept demonstrates that, “as women grow more numerous in legislative chambers, they will increasingly be able to form strategic coalitions with one another to promote legislation on women’s issues”9. Critical mass theory cannot be discussed without bringing up two scholars who have dominated the field and are commonly cited as the sources of the concept. Kanter and Dahlerup are the main authors of critical mass theory and both offer unique perspectives on women’s behaviors in minority situations10. This study will further employ their analysis on the mechanisms that are needed for women’s political empowerment.

Dahlerup (1988) states that, although there are many areas whereby an increase in percentage or an increase in the number of women in politics would have an impact on political behaviors, there is little support for a direct relationship between an increase in the number of women and visible changes in each of these areas. She believes that critical acts, or initiatives that change the position of the minority, would lead to further changes. She goes further to explain that critical acts include introducing quotas, gender equality legislation, institutions and recruitment of more women.

**Theories of Neo-Liberal Economy**

In accordance with models constructed by scholars on neo-liberal economic transformations around the world, arguments exist that feminism and free-market economics shift the political focus to a national economic agenda, rather than to one with a core interest in improving the lives of working women (Schieder, 2014, pp. 55-58). This can be related to Japan’s case, in which Womenomics was introduced as one of the key strategies for revitalizing the Japanese economy. The theory of Womenomics was originally coined by Kathy Matsui in 1999. Prime Minister Shinzō Abe has adopted her theory as a policy since his return to office in 2012, advocating for women’s empowerment as a strategy to revitalize the stagnant economy (Macnaughtan, 2015). Kathy Matsui (2014) debated that equality for women would encourage social progress and positively benefit a society’s economy. Certain authors argue that the Japanese society maintains strong gendered norms and these trigger difficulties that hinder the realization of gender equality and Womenomics as a policy (Macnaughtan, 2015). Helen Macnaughtan (2015) continues to argue that the Womenomics policy is theoretically sound; however, gendered norms and practices will continue to act as barriers to its realization. She further points out that Prime Minister Abe’s government itself is flawed, with gender bias at its core. Ueno (2013) argues that Womenomics as a policy underlines how a state may aim at empowering and improving women’s lives; however, a top-down approach to policy implementation only provides access at the elite level. This enables the elite class to break the glass ceiling at work, but it disregards the remaining majority of women and men with insecure jobs, thereby widening the gap between elite and non-elite workers.

**National Parliament of Japan**

The Lower House (衆議院 Shūgiin) is a pivotal institution of Japan’s national decision-making processes (Eto, 2013). The lack of women’s representation in the lower house has been consistent throughout the post-war period, and this consistently low representation embodies women’s powerlessness within the political domain (Eto, 2013). According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), global statistics of women’s representation in the lower or single house position Japan 57th in the world with 9.5 percent of representation as of 2016, the lowest among all OECD countries (see Figure 1). The international comparison published by the IPU shows that Japanese women are performing poorly in comparison not only to developed countries (see Figure 1) but to many developing countries as well (Eto, 2013). Table 1 illustrates a detailed timeline of women’s parliamentary representation in Japan between the years 2000 and 2015. In accordance with the Fourth Basic Plan of Gender Equality, the government has requested that political parties consider introducing positive actions to increase the number of female candidates in national and other elections (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet, 2016). Since this request was not

enforced by any sanctions for non-compliance, nor were any electoral reforms such as legislative or party quotas introduced, it has yet to produce any successful outcomes. Electoral quotas are far from being implemented and this can be highlighted as one of the factors for low women’s representation in Japan’s national parliament.

**Figure 1: A Comparison of Percentages of Women in the Lower House of Japan and OECD Countries**

Note: Data refer to 1st December 2016. Countries marked with an asterisk (*) had legislated quotas (i.e. quotas implemented via the legislative process) in place in 2016.


**Table 1: A Timeline of the Percentage of Elected Female Members of Japan’s National Parliament Between 2000 and 2015**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prime Ministers of Japan and Gender Reforms

After World War II, the United States of America and other allied advisers enacted a new constitution establishing social and political reforms, which included improving the legal status of women in Japan. Aside from suffrage, this was the first form of equal rights given to Japanese women granted through law and constitution.

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (2001–2006)

From 2001 to 2006, Junichiro Koizumi served as the 56th Prime Minister of Japan. He was a leader of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Japan’s ruling political party. He retired from politics when his term in parliament ended in 2009. He was also one of the first Japanese prime ministers promoting gender equality, and in October 2005 he created an exclusive ministerial position that would further empower women, appointing a minister of state for social affairs dealing primarily with gender equality (Koizumi, 2006). At the end of 2005, a revised Basic Plan for Gender Equality was approved by the cabinet. This plan set a few new specific targets for promoting gender equality which included 30 percent women in leadership positions and all fields of society by the year 2020 (Koizumi, 2006). Likewise, the gender equality offices worked closely and collaborated with all entities such as feminist groups, local governments, non-governmental organizations and other concerned members of society when executing administrative functions to ensure that their interests were represented (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet, 2006). Under the Koizumi administration there were more women serving as members of the House of
Representatives (衆議院 Shūgiin) than at any other time in Japan’s history (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet, 2006).

**Prime Minister Shinzō Abe (2012–Present)**

Prime Minister Shinzō Abe is a Japanese politician and leader of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), who served as a Prime Minister between 2006 and 2007 and was re-elected to office in 2012. He is the third-longest-serving Prime Minister in post-war Japan. He has discussed a new strategy of reviving the economy after decades of stagnation through his “Abenomics” policy. One of the three strategies introduced under Abenomics as a policy is Womenomics (from women and economics), a strategy aimed at engaging the government and the people of Japan to utilize the potential of women in revitalizing the economy (Song, 2015). Many critics have doubted this policy, referring to it as simple rhetoric; scholars such as Ayako Kano and Vera Mackie (2013) have argued that, “[regarding] his actual policy decision, ‘womenomics’ is a policy for recharging the economy and refortifying the nation, not for improving the situation of women.” Prime Minister Abe attempted to match Prime Minister Koizumi’s administration by appointing five women ministers to his cabinet. This lifted Japan’s position as measured by women serving as Cabinet members from 29th to 11th; however, unfortunately, this achievement was short-lived when two of the five ministers suddenly resigned over violations of voting laws and the inappropriate use of political funds (Abe, 2014). Many advocates of women’s rights in Japan remain cynical of Prime Minister Abe’s underlying interests in empowering women, due to a statement he made during his first term in office (September 2006–September 2007) whereby he declared gender equality to be a threat to Japanese culture and family values. Since returning to office, he not only has rebranded himself and his policies as advocating for women’s empowerment but also boasted about hiring more women to his cabinet in his 2013 speech (World Assembly for Women (WAW), 2014).

**Methodology**

A mixed approach was implemented for this paper. Content analysis was utilized as the main methodology of research, employing ATLAS.ti software as the tool for analyzing the contents of all speeches and statements collected. All scripts were downloaded from the official website of the Prime Minister of Japan and his Cabinet. The software used to analyze the data for this research was ATLAS.ti. It is an excellent software program that allows the integration of all media and files. It assists in documenting every coding step, including matching specific text areas in the content with user-specified codes. It allows the user to conduct further analyses such as analyzing the frequency distribution of words used in the documents or contents examined and allows for transparency and documented coding. As a result, this software was very useful in conducting this research. For example, it was useful for analyzing and matching the number of times Prime Minister Abe repeated “women” related terms in his speeches so as to identify what he has said in public in comparison to its actualization as per targets set by his government for Womenomics.

12 See https://japan.kantei.go.jp/98_abe/statement/index_e.html for all speeches and statements by Prime Minister Shinzō Abe from 2012 to date.
Secondary sources were collected online as the other data source in this paper. Statistics from international non-governmental organizations and governmental institutions such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the World Bank and OECD and data published by the Gender Equality Bureau Office in Japan were all used in this paper for analytical purposes.

*Issues of Reliability and Validity*

As for the quantitative approach, designs focus on credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. One of the weaknesses to this form of quantitative research is that with content analysis, researcher bias has a potential threat to validity in the studies conducted, subsequent from selective observations, selective recording of information and selective reporting of information, allowing personal views to affect data interpretation. To avoid this, I implemented two methods: investigator triangulation and reflexivity.

The investigator triangulation method was used to avoid bias in analyzing the speeches since different people can have different interpretations, which open doors for questioning. This was conducted in three steps to ensure reliability and validity of data analysis. The first step was collection of data, the second step was was categorizing and coding the phrases and sentences in all speeches, and in step three, an “outside evaluator” was asked to review steps one and two of the data analyzed by the author (identifying themes and sub-themes from the speeches based on the evaluator’s interpretation of the contents of all speeches). This step is vital to ensure the validity of data and avoid bias and human error during data analysis (coding) by the author. As the author, I was then able to check the level of agreement between the categories and codes I had created to that of the observer. This enhanced the validity of the coding I had made, and feedback enabled me to re-categorize and re-code the contents based on the observer’s input. The categorization of the all the documents and their contents were redone based on disparities recognized. As for the second method, reflexivity, it is a strategy used to enhance the outcome of the analysis and uphold bias-free interpretation. This is important because I had to actively engage in critical self-reflection about any potential for bias (self-awareness and methods to control bias) to ensure that no issue was overlooked.

*Data Analysis and Interpretation Codes (Sub-Theme)*

In ATLAS.ti, these are the terms used when categorizing the contents of any document into themes and sub-themes. For this paper, “codes” are the categories given to phrases or sentences in the speech and statement documents where the word “women” was mentioned. This helped highlight the main aspects that the Prime Minister addresses and also assisted in dividing the contents further into sub-themes. Twenty-one (21) codes were created for all the speeches analyzed.

*Code Groups (Main Themes)*

Since the “codes” (sub-themes) identified were many (21) they were further re-categorized into “code groups,” also known as “main themes” in this article.

As a result, the main themes will be explained rather than the sub-themes due to space limitations for this paper. Of all the speeches and statements given by the prime minister between December 2012 and September 2016, only sixty (60) of them had any reference to “women” as shown in Table 2. Based on the content analysis of these sixty (60) speeches, I was able to recognize and identify the main aspects of women’s empowerment that Prime Minister Shinzō

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13 For detailed coding of the sub-themes created by the author see Appendix 2.
Abe focuses on. I went on to define and code each phrase and statement where he mentions “women” into main themes and sub-themes (code groups and codes, respectively). I categorized any content about “women” and/or “Womenomics in Japan” into five (5) code groups (main themes) and these five groups were further sub-categorized into twenty-one (21) codes (sub-themes) due to the vast contents of his speeches. These categories of code groups and codes are summarized in Table 3.\(^\text{14}\)

### Table 2: Number of Speeches by Prime Minister Abe Concerning Women Between 2014 and 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Speeches (Documents)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012/2013</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author

### Table 3: All Codes/Code Groups and Quotes Coded Based on Prime Minister Shinzō Abe Speeches Between 2012 and 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Code Groups (main themes)</th>
<th>Codes (sub-themes)</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Womenomics–Politics</td>
<td>• Womenomics-women in politics.</td>
<td>“In addition, I have created the post of Minister in Charge of Support for Women's Empowerment and Child-Rearing. The mission of the Abe administration includes creating a country in which women are dynamically engaged and in which it is easy for them to raise children. In accordance with the principle of starting near to home with the person...&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^\text{14}\) For this paper, sixty (60) of the English documents published on the website of the prime minister of Japan and his cabinet between December 2012 and September 2016 were collected and analyzed. ATLAS.ti was utilized as the content analysis software to categorize the sentences and phrases in all documents into codes (sub-themes) and code groups (main themes).
who suggested it, I have asked highly competent women to fill two of the LDP’s four executive positions. In this assignment of personnel as well, I proactively appointed women on the basis of merit.”

“I reshuffled my Cabinet on September 3rd. In particular, my appointment of five women as Cabinet ministers received a great deal of attention, and that number is said to be equal to the highest number ever in Japan. In fact, I also appointed a woman to the important post of Chair of the Liberal Democratic Party’s Policy Research Council, so to be accurate, I should state that this is the highest number ever.”

“Many women wish to continue to engage in satisfying work as long as possible. A large number of women are also working hard to be active within their companies in pursuit of promotion. At the same time, the reality in Japan is that 60 percent of women quit their jobs after the birth of their first child.”

| 2. Womenomics–Challenges | • Womenomics-challenges facing Abe’s government  
| | • Womenomics-challenges of childcare for mothers  
| | • Womenomics-challenges of the aging society and declining population  
| | • Womenomics-women in science and technology  
| | • Womenomics-academia |

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15 Press Conference by Prime Minister Shinzō Abe on Wednesday, December 26, 2012.  
17 Ibid.
3. Womenomics–Government’s Solutions and Actions

- Womenomics—(mothers/childcare issues) new measures and incentives provided to companies;
- Womenomics–government policies that render and support women issues;
- Womenomics—increasing number of women in executive positions;
- Womenomics—international conferences, seminars, symposia on women empowerment;
- Womenomics–Japan’s collaboration with international organizations to empower women;
- Womenomics—new measures and incentives provided by government to support women;
- Womenomics—solutions for mothers re-entering the workforce and childcare issues;
- Womenomics—supporting women affected by natural disasters and their inclusion in disaster risk reduction and reconstruction;
- Womenomics—supporting women entrepreneurship and joining the workforce;

“Saying I would like all listed companies to appoint at least one woman to their boards, I have been urging the Japanese business community to take concrete actions towards appointing women to executive positions. Female directors have emerged one after another at financial institutions, trading companies, and other business categories that in Japan have heretofore been considered male workplaces.”¹⁸

“We will eliminate waiting lists for day-care centers for small children and provide assistance so that women who leave their jobs at some point are able to return to work multiple times.”¹⁹

“Moreover, we have great news today. UN Women will open a Japan Office next year. Japan will further enhance its coordination with the UN through this new office.”

¹⁸ Ibid.
¹⁹ Economic Policy Speech by H.E. Mr. Shinzō Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, on Wednesday, June 19, 2013.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4.</th>
<th>Womenomics–Government’s Solutions and Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Womenomics-change in male-oriented way of thinking;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Womenomics-creating working environments that are suitable for women;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Womenomics-inclusion of men and women to help empower women;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Womenomics-Japanese women quitting work;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Womenomics-men and women both sharing childrearing/childcare responsibilities;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Japan’s men are also starting to change. Since last year, male corporate managers including Mr. Yoshimitsu Kobayashi, Chairman of Mitsubishi Chemical Holdings Corporation, and Mr. Hidetoshi Sakuma, President of The Chiba Bank, both of whom are participating in this year’s WAW! have declared they will take actions that enable women to demonstrate to the greatest possible extent the potential they hold, and they have been engaged in ongoing efforts to expand the circle of acceptance.”

“Japan also wants to emulate this, but our greatest barrier is a working culture that endorses male-centered long working hours. If men themselves do not awaken to this fact and take action, we will not be able to eliminate this bad practice. First of all, we will expand a corporate culture that values working efficiently within a limited number of hours. Husbands will also actively take childcare leave and couples will share responsibility for household chores and child rearing. We will make this the ordinary practice in Japan.”

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5. Womenomics–Women’s Empowerment

- Womenomics-women’s empowerment

“Creating an environment in which women find it comfortable to work and enhancing opportunities for women to work and to be active in society is no longer a matter of choice for Japan. It is instead a matter of the greatest urgency.”[^22]

“I believe that each of these choices is valuable, and that all of these paths are valid. I wish to support women who are following with confidence the path they chose. I will work to take on all issues that hinder women’s active engagement.”[^23]

Source: Author

1. Womenomics–Politics

This sub-theme of coding is the most relevant to our research and was used as a category whenever the Prime Minister addressed Japanese women in politics, women’s political empowerment and women in the national legislature.

2. Womenomics–Challenges

This sub-category of coding was used every time the Prime Minister mentioned or acknowledged any challenge facing Womenomics or women in Japan.

3. Womenomics–Government’s Solutions and Actions

This sub-theme of coding was used as a category whenever the Prime Minister mentioned policies, bills and positive actions as solutions to the problems concerning Japanese women. It also includes solutions proposed to companies, businesses or organizations to help create better working environments for Japanese women.


This sub-theme of coding was used as a category whenever the Prime Minister highlighted and recognized social issues and obstacles that hinder or prevent Japanese women from joining the labor market such as “men not sharing household and child rearing responsibilities,” “working conditions like long working hours,” “lack of daycare and child care facilities,” “women quitting their jobs after giving birth,” etc.

5. Womenomics–Women’s Empowerment

This sub-theme of coding was used as a category whenever the prime minister mentioned Japanese women’s potential or the need to support women’s potential and abilities. This sub-category does

[^22]: Address by Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, at The Sixty-Eighth Session of The General Assembly of The United Nations on Thursday, September 26, 2013.

not focus on any particular issue but is used whenever women issues are mentioned generally. After an overall analysis, this was the most commonly used theme from all sixty (60) documents collected. For this code group (main theme) he pointed out women’s issues vaguely; the issues he usually mentions under this theme include but are not limited to “the importance of supporting women’s potential,” “having a society where women can shine” or “importance of empowering women.”

Summary
As we can see from Table 3 above and in Appendix 4, from the five (5) main themes, Prime Minister Shinzō Abe mentions “women in politics” the least of all. In 2013, he mentioned it three (3) times, in 2014 six (6) times, but by 2015 and 2016, he hardly mentioned any issues relating to women in politics of Japan. Nonetheless, he does recognize and mention social issues and challenges facing women in Japan. Furthermore, there are many initiatives, or positive actions he has proposed as solutions to these issues. However, we can see that in 2014 and 2015, Prime Minister Shinzō Abe addressed women’s issues and Womenomics as a policy more frequently than in 2016. In 2016 overall, there were relatively fewer statements mentioning women or Womenomics in his speeches compared to previous years. This raises the question of how reliable and consistent his strategy will be in empowering women in Japan.

As per the codes (sub-themes) in Table 3 and Appendix 5 (showing number of times each code was mentioned every year), the issues that the prime minister focuses on with regards to women in Japan are apparent. The most commonly mentioned sub-theme is “Womenomics—women’s empowerment”; this category consists of general issues facing women in Japan without any specific or concrete action proposed as a solution. He commonly talks about having a society where women can shine or increasing women’s participation as part of his Womenomics strategy. Nonetheless, other recurrent categories include supporting women’s entrepreneurship and joining the workforce, incentives introduced by governments to support women and mothers, policies introduced to support women, solutions for mothers re-entering the workforce and issues related to child care.

Conclusion
My analysis has shown that although Womenomics is posited as a strategy to increase women’s participation in all fields by 2020, Prime Minister Abe prioritizes certain fields to empower women over others. Japan has the lowest percentage of women in the lower house, classifying it as one of the most male-dominated political classes among in the OECD. While different targets have been recommended to increase women’s representation in organizations, large companies, political parties etc., there is little fervor for positive action in the political arena that would lead to an increase in women’s political representation. Acknowledging that it has been almost four years since Womenomics was introduced as a strategy, the analysis has shed light on the issues he most frequently mentioned in his speeches and statements. This study discovered that most of the time, the overall content of his speeches has only vaguely addressed women’s issues, generally mentioning “the importance of supporting women’s potential” or “having a

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24 See Appendix 4 and 5 for analysis of all speeches given by Prime Minister Shinzō Abe between 2012 and 2016 showing how many times each code and code group were repeated by year.
society where women can shine”. This can certainly justify why many critics call out his rhetoric and question the viability of the Japanese government’s strategy.

Nonetheless, we must not overlook the other important findings which include areas of Womenomics that he addressed frequently. He has certainly communicated the challenges facing women often and continued to mention it year by year. He has equally spoken about solutions his government has proposed or initiated to empower women. His government has managed to encourage companies to revise policies and create better working environments for women.

However, his administration has made little progress towards women’s representation in politics, especially in comparison to other OECD countries in which electoral gender reforms such as quotas have been introduced. Currently, the Prime Minister has not specified any substantial action plan or sanctions for non-compliance with gender reforms, and only rarely has he mentioned or communicated the importance of women in politics. This illustrates that the focus for Womenomics does not prioritize women’s political empowerment.

He has focused on and succeeded in increasing child-care facilities, eliminating child-care waiting lists and providing other solutions to issues facing Japanese women (re-entering work force, entrepreneurship etc.). Therefore, it is evident that Prime Minister Abe has put more emphasis on employing women into the economic sphere rather than the political one. Although Womenomics focuses on empowering women, it inclines more towards a neoliberal marketization structure rather than a feminist call for emancipation from sexism. Prime Minister Shinzō Abe should be able to promise women that his economic policies guarantee more than neo-liberal restructuring of work and will be able to eliminate harassment and prejudice from their working environments (Schieder, 2014). To some extent, it is expected that he would focus more on the 40 percent of Japanese working women who quit their jobs after giving birth as the main problem at hand.

Nevertheless, for his Womenomics strategy to succeed, he needs to include more women in the decision-making process to provide solutions alongside men in policies that affect their lives. Likewise, for his gender reforms to be sustainable they should be followed through with strict penalties and sanctions for non-compliance.

Finally, it can be said that based on the results of these analysis, Prime Minister Shinzō Abe has little interest in the political empowerment of women in Japan. His main focus in Womenomics over the past four years has been towards addressing the challenges facing women, increasing child-care facilities and eliminating waiting lists, proposing solutions to companies for pro-gender working environments, supporting women’s potential in the labor market and introducing bills and policies to guarantee its implementation. He has prioritized women’s empowerment with regards to Japanese women becoming actively engaged in the labor market.
References


Inter-Parliamentary Union, I., 2016, PARLINE database on national parliaments. Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016.


Appendix 1: ATLAS.ti Codes Created by Author for All of the Speeches Analyzed

Appendix 2: ATLAS.ti Code Groups Created by Author for All of the Speeches Analyzed
Appendix 3: ATLAS.ti Codes and Code Groups Created by Author

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Group</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Womenomics-Politics</td>
<td>Womenomics- (Mothers/Childcare issues) New measures and incentives provided to companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Womenomics-Challenges</td>
<td>Womenomics- Challenges facing Abe's government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Womenomics-Government's solutions and actions</td>
<td>Womenomics- Challenges of childcare for mothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Womenomics-Recognizing social issues</td>
<td>Womenomics- Challenges of the aging society and declining population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Womenomics-Women's empowerment</td>
<td>Womenomics- Change in male-oriented way of thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Womenomics- Creating working environments that are suitable for women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Womenomics- Government policies that render and support women issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Womenomics- Inclusion of men and women to help empower women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Womenomics- Increasing number of women in executive positions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Womenomics- International conferences, seminars, symposiums on women empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Womenomics- Japan's collaboration with international organizations to empower women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Womenomics- Japanese women quitting work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Womenomics- Men and women both sharing childcare responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Womenomics- New measures and incentives provided by government to support women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Womenomics- Solutions for mothers re-entering the workforce and childcare issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Womenomics- Supporting women affected by natural disasters and their inclusion in disaster risk reduction and reconstruc...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Womenomics- Supporting women entrepreneurship and joining the workforce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Womenomics- Women in Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Womenomics- Women in science and technology</td>
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<td>Womenomics- Women's empowerment</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Womenomics-Academia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Result: 21 of 21 Code(s)

Appendix 4: ATLAS.ti Number of Times Code Groups Were Repeated by Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Theme/Category</th>
<th>2013-No. of repetitions</th>
<th>2014-No. of repetitions</th>
<th>2015-No. of repetitions</th>
<th>2016-No. of repetitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Womenomics-Politics</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Womenomics-Challenges</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Womenomics-Government's solutions and actions</td>
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<td>Womenomics-Recognizing social issues</td>
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<td>Womenomics-Women's empowerment</td>
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</tr>
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</table>
## Appendix 5: ATLAS.ti Number of Times Codes Were Repeated by Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-theme/category</th>
<th>2012-2013 No. of repetitions</th>
<th>2014 No. of repetitions</th>
<th>2015 No. of repetitions</th>
<th>2016 No. of repetitions</th>
<th>(2012-2016) Total number of phrases in sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Womenomics- (Mothers/Childcare issues)</td>
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