Institutional Change and Legislative Speech: The Creation of Responsible Party Government in Japan*

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Abstract

Responsible party government is characterized by programmatic party platforms and collective accountability to voters. In the legislative arena, it means voting cohesion, centralization of agenda-setting power and control over speaking time, and contestation between government and opposition. We investigate the evolution toward responsible party government in Japan, where institutional reforms in the 1990s strengthened the policymaking power of party leaders vis-à-vis backbenchers and unelected bureaucrats, and increased party-based accountability. Using extensive text data from all parliamentary committee speeches between 1947 and 2016, we document how electoral system reform in 1994, and subsequent administrative reforms expanding junior ministerial roles and increasing the policymaking power of the cabinet, dramatically shifted legislative behavior: speech by ministers and junior ministers increased, speech by bureaucrats decreased, and discursive accountability (ministers and opposition members responding to one another in debates) increased. The empirical evidence provides a clear illustration of how electoral institutions shape legislative behavior. (150 words)

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Introduction

Legislative behavior in representative democracies can range along a spectrum between two stylized models. At one end lies a "gains from trade" model (Mayhew, 1974), which views electoral and legislative behavior as revolving around individual MPs and their personal reelection interests. In this model of legislative organization, the role of political parties is to help members cooperate in order to achieve legislative bargains for their personal gain—such as the delivery of particularistic benefits that are useful for credit-claiming—but these parties largely lack the independent power to structure legislative outcomes (Aldrich, 2011). In the legislative arena, the gains-from-trade model often means a lack of discipline among party members, an inability of party leaders to prevent dissident members from speaking and taking positions that run counter to the party leadership, and a greater decentralization of policymaking power from the executive, or party leadership, to individual backbenchers and legislative committees (e.g., Shepsle and Weingast, 1987; Weingast and Marshall, 1988). To the extent that party 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). This model is often used to describe the United States Congress—with some amount of debate over where on the spectrum the case falls at different points in history—but it also applies to many historical cases of parliamentary regimes (Cox, 1987; Cox, Fiva and Smith, 2019).

At the other end of the ideal-typical spectrum is the "responsible party government" model.[1] This model sees parties in the electoral arena as competing for votes on the basis of distinct policy programs and their plans to implement those programs if elected. Parties are composed of ideologically cohesive members whose electoral fortunes rise or

[1]The term was popularized by the Report of the Committee on Political Parties, of the American Political Science Association (1950).

fall collectively based on the reputation, popularity, and legislative performance of the party. In the legislative arena, as a result, responsible party government means strong party discipline in voting, centralization of agenda-setting power in the cabinet or party leadership, contestation between government and opposition in debates, and a larger share of speaking time allocated to party leaders, who represent the "face" of the party to the electorate (e.g., Cox, 1987; Kam, 2009; Eggers and Spirling, 2014). Although most exemplified by Westminster-style parliamentary systems—where electoral competition in single-member districts (SMDs) often means two, single-party governing alternatives—aspects of the model related to party organization and legislative behavior can also apply to parties in multiparty systems and coalition governments.

A growing body of research examines the relationship between political institutions and the type of model that predominates in legislative behavior. Relative to presidential systems of government, for example, parliamentarism encourages the development of strong, disciplined parties because the survival of the executive (cabinet) depends on the sustained legislative support of the governing parties (e.g., Döring, 1995; Strøm, 2000). Even within parliamentary systems, electoral institutions can also influence legislative organization through the incentives for candidates and legislators to cultivate a personal basis of support with the electorate, beyond the support derived from party affiliation. Electoral systems featuring weak party control over ballot access, the absence of vote pooling at the party level, or intraparty competition should, theoretically, lead to personal-vote-seeking legislative behavior by individual MPs—at the expense of responsible party government (Carey and Shugart, 1995).[2] When the electoral system puts greater emphasis on a party's policy platform and its leaders' reputations in voters' evaluations, members will benefit from delegating greater authority to leaders in policymaking to effectuate the party's

[2]Note that electoral system incentives for individualistic behavior can potentially be counteracted if leaders control the distribution of valuable post-electoral prizes, such as committee chairmanships and cabinet positions (Martin, 2014), so electoral system effects should not be regarded as entirely deterministic.

programmatic policy pledges.

A handful of studies have documented a relationship between party-centered electoral systems and parties' legislative cohesion in roll call votes (e.g., Hix, 2004; Carey, 2007; Cox, Fiva and Smith, 2019). Here, we focus instead on the relationship between institutional contexts, including the electoral system and legislative institutions in parliament, and patterns in legislative speech. Speeches on the floor and in committees represent an important component of the policymaking process in all democracies. Legislators make speeches for multiple purposes, including debate, deliberation, and defense of policies (e.g., Bächtiger, 2014; Proksch and Slapin, 2015), and this communication may be targeted to multiple potential audiences, including voters, interest groups, other legislators or leaders in their own party or coalition, or legislators in opposing parties (e.g., Maltzman and Sigelman, 1996; Martin and Vanberg, 2008). Beyond the question of *why* MPs speak, the question of *who* speaks—or, who is allowed to speak—is also important.[3]

Existing research has tested the relationship between institutions and legislative speech using two broad approaches. First, a handful of cross-national or cross-sectional studies compare patterns in legislative speech under different electoral and administrative institutions (e.g., Proksch and Slapin, 2012, 2015; Bäck and Debus, 2016; Giannetti and Pedrazzani, 2016), and attribute variation in behavior to those institutional differences. In a seminal contribution, Proksch and Slapin (2012) focus on the speaking behavior of party leaders and backbenchers, arguing that leaders will allow dissenting backbenchers to express their (ideologically diverse) opinions in legislative debates in political systems where party reputation matters less for individual members' reelection prospects. Where party reputation and legislative unity matters more, leaders will be more controlling of speaking time in order to prevent the dilution of the party's message and collective reputation.

[3]For example, in an exploration of patterns in speaking among individual MPs in Sweden, Bäck, Debus and Müller (2014) find that women speak less often than their male counterparts, particularly on issues related to the economy, transportation, and technology.

A second approach considers the evolution of behavior in a particular case in response to incremental-but-accumulating changes that either increase the power of party leaders or shift the locus of competition to parties, or both (e.g., Eggers and Spirling, 2014, 2016*a*,*b*). Although both approaches are valuable, cross-sectional studies may struggle to decisively identify the effect of the posited institutions on the outcomes of interest versus unobserved case-specific factors. Looking at the evolution of behavior that evolves gradually or in response to an accumulation of incremental reforms may also be affected by unobserved factors that are shifting or trending in the same period, or the gradual replacement of members with qualitatively different members, again making it more difficult to say conclusively that institutions themselves are the cause of the change in behavior.

We adopt a different approach by focusing on a series of institutional reforms in Japan explicitly designed to move politics toward a responsible party government model. The first reform was a 1994 electoral system reform for the House of Representatives, the lower chamber of Japan's bicameral National Diet. This reform replaced the candidate-centered single, non-transferable vote (SNTV) system used since 1947 with a new, more party-centered, mixed-member system combining SMDs and proportional representation (PR). The electoral reform was followed in 1998 and 1999 by administrative reforms to the structure of the bureaucratic ministries, which at the same time created new junior ministerial positions responsible for crafting and articulating the policies of the ministries in place of bureaucrats. The first reform in 1994 created a sharp and discontinuous change in the electoral incentives facing parties and MPs, which was followed by a rapid reorganization of party structures and the introduction of the second reform. Importantly, both reforms induced sharp changes in legislative behavior vis-à-vis pre-reform patterns.

Through the case of Japan, we are able to illustrate the evolutionary progress of what happens to legislative behavior when a democracy adopts institutions that are intentionally designed to shift the locus of electoral competition from individual members to parties—in

other words, reforms aimed at the creation of responsible party government. When party reputations and programmatic policy platforms become salient for the electoral fortunes of party members, these members may be willing to set up party-strengthening institutions (e.g., Cox and McCubbins, 1993, 2005) and these new institutions should be expected to gradually reshape the nature of legislative behavior, and democratic representation more broadly, in observable and important ways.

To illustrate the evolution toward responsible party government in Japan, we make use of extensive data on the text records of all parliamentary speeches in legislative committees from 1947 to 2016 and leverage variation within chambers and across committees. Our analysis shows clear evidence that each of the reforms shifted behavior in ways that are consistent with theoretical expectations. Prior to the reforms, government policy was often articulated, and defended vis-à-vis opposition interpellations, by unelected bureaucrats rather than party leaders or ministers. This was in part because ministers were more concerned with their own reelection needs than with leading their ministries, and in part because positions were reshuffled regularly to give more members (within intraparty factions) a chance at credit-claiming opportunities and the prestige and perquisites of serving in cabinet, at the expense of the development of expertise in their policy jurisdictions (see Ono, 2012; Pekkanen, Nyblade and Krauss, 2014).

After the 1994 reform, the personal electoral success of all MPs, including cabinet ministers, became more closely tied to their parties' reputations and legislative successes, and the prime minister and other cabinet ministers increasingly became the public face of the party. As a result of these new incentives, ministers began to speak more, and delegate speaking responsibility to bureaucrats less. Moreover, the pattern in discursive accountability shifted from one of opposition back-and-forth with bureaucrats, to one where ministers and opposition MPs engage in debate directly. Importantly, these patterns began to appear after the 1994 electoral reform, even before the administrative reforms which

deliberately aimed to reduce speech by bureaucrats, and they are also evident for the House of Councillors, the upper chamber of the Diet, which did not experience the same electoral reform,[4] reinforcing the idea that the reforms pushed the entire political system toward a model of responsible party government.

While our approach does not aim to test or identify the causal relationship between Japan's institutional changes and legislative behavior,[5] our analysis provides clear empirical evidence of the major shifts in legislative behavior that occurred in expected ways following these major reforms. In this regard, our approach is most similar to recent studies employing new large-scale text-based data to analyze major historical changes in political behavior (e.g., Eggers and Spirling, 2014). Our study also relates to several recent studies showing a shift toward a responsible party government model of electoral or legislative behavior following historical electoral system reforms in Japan and European parliamentary democracies (Reed, Scheiner and Thies, 2012; Catalinac, 2018; Cox, Fiva and Smith, 2019).

Institutions and the Legislative Process in Japan

From 1947 to 1993, members of the House of Representatives were elected using the SNTV electoral system in multimember districts (MMD), where each voter casts a single vote for a candidate in a district of magnitude (M), and the top M candidates in the district are elected. The average M was four seats. Any party aspiring to win a majority of seats therefore needed to nominate more than one candidate in each district. Such intraparty competition resulted in candidates campaigning predominantly on the basis of their per-

[4]The House of Councillors experience an electoral reform in 2001, with the national tier of its mixed-member system changing from closed-list to open-list proportional representation. This change, if it were to have an effect at all, would actually encourage personal-vote-seeking behavior, and would thus create a bias against the direction of the effect we observe.

[5]Indeed, the electoral reform and subsequent administrative reforms were an endogenous outcome of the push by political reformers hoping to bring on responsible party government.

sonal attributes or behavior rather than a commitment to their parties' policy platforms.

Japan in this period could thus be characterized as an extreme type of the gains-from-trade model of party politics, at least for the dominant Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which ruled uninterrupted from its founding in 1955 until 1993. In terms of policymaking, much of the work in drafting bills occurred behind the scenes, by government bureaucrats in the ministries and agencies. This process involved input from advisory councils (*shingikai*) and LDP politicians in the party's internal Policy Affairs Research Council (*seimu chōsa kai*), 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 (*zoku giin*), in cooperation with bureaucrats (Inoguchi, 1987). By the time draft legislation arrived in the formal committees of the Diet, it had achieved the consensus of LDP backbenchers, bureaucrats, and party leaders, leaving the Diet's committees as an arena primarily for opposition politicians to ask questions about the bills.

After the postwar U.S.-led Occupation (1945-1952) purged a large number of candidates who were active during the wartime period, conservative party leaders, in particular Shigeru Yoshida, actively recruited high-level bureaucrats to run as candidates.[6] These ex-bureaucrats focused on building up personal support organizations (*kōenkai*) for their reelection and were more than happy to delegate policymaking authority to their friends back in the ministries (Muramatsu, 2010). Prime ministers had some agenda-setting power in terms of foreign policy, and could use foreign pressure (*gaiatsu*) to press for policy changes in some areas. However, the prime minister's office was understaffed, factional constraints kept his leadership weak, and they often played little more than a reactionary

[6]When the purge was lifted, politicians like Ichirō Hatoyama returned; yet when Hatoyama's Democratic Party merged with Yoshida's Liberal Party in 1955 to form the LDP, the incumbent former bureaucrats from the Liberal Party remained a major force in the party.

role in policymaking (Hayao, 1993). Ministers were similarly weak, as regular reshuffling ensured that few were in their positions long enough to develop expertise or push their own initiatives. Once legislation was introduced to the Diet, opposition parties could delay the process through legislative tactics (e.g., Mochizuki, 1982; Cox, Masuyama and McCubbins, 2000; Fukumoto, 2000), such as preventing or slowing deliberation in committees or in the upper chamber, the House of Councillors.[7]

Growing political dissatisfaction with this system, and a number of high-profile corruption scandals in the late 1980s and early 1990s, led to a call for electoral system reform (e.g., Ozawa, 1994). Reformers debated several variations on a mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) system (Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001) that would combine two parallel tiers of electoral competition: one a British-style first-past-the-post (FPTP) system in SMDs; the other a closed-list PR system in regional MMDs.[8] The MMM system that was ultimately adopted in 1994 and went into effect in 1996 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 (Otake, 1996; Kawato, 2000; Reed and Thies, 2001).

Political scientists and reformers expected several outcomes to result from the electoral reform (e.g., Ramseyer and Rosenbluth, 1993; Ozawa, 1994; Cowhey and McCubbins, 1995). 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 (Duverger, 1954), while still allowing for small parties to gain some rep-

[7]Other studies of the legislative process in Japan have focused on issues which we will not directly take up here, such as the use of private member bills for credit-claiming purposes (Nemoto, 2013; Ono, 2015), the assignment of legislative committee memberships and leadership roles (Pekkanen, Krauss and Nyblade, 2006; Fujimura, 2015), the intensity of government and opposition rhetorical divisions (Curini, Hino and Osaki, 2018), and the influence of election proximity on patterns in participation by individual members (Fukumoto and Matsuo, 2015).

[8]In the first election under this system in 1996, there were 200 seats in the PR tier. This number was reduced before the 2000 election. The number of SMDs was reduced from 300 to 295 in 2014.

resentation in the Diet. The rise of two-party competition in SMDs was also expected to produce alternation in government. 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; Catalinac, 2016). Eventually, the opposition parties coalesced around the Democratic Party of Japan (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 preelection 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).

Following electoral reform in 1994, a series of reforms in 1998 restructured the organization of the cabinet by collapsing certain jurisdictions that were especially associated with "pork barrel" projects into a smaller number of ministries. These reforms also created two new types of junior ministerial positions to be held by elected MPs: vice minister (*fukudaijin*) and parliamentary secretary (*seimukan*). 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, or *seifu iin seido*), although bureaucrats could still be asked to participate in Diet committee hearings as "expert witnesses."[9] The law also created a Committee on Funda-

[9]The full name of the law is the "Law to Revitalize Diet Deliberations and to Establish a Policymak-

mental 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."

These reforms, which went into effect in 2000 and 2001, can thus be seen as an intensification of the objectives of the electoral reform[11]—by restructuring legislative institutions in response to the new electoral environment, the institutional designers reinforced the move towards responsible party government by giving ministers more formal institutional support to facilitate party-focused competition and accountability, and politician-led policymaking.[12]

With these two reforms as critical junctures, we can thus group legislative politics in Japan into four broad periods: (1) an early period prior to the foundation of the LDP in 1955; (2) the "1955 System" from 1955 to 1993, when the LDP first lost power; (3) the period from 1994 to 2001 following electoral reforms (we will call this the "Reform 1" system); and (4) the post-2001 period where the new party system had time to stabilize and party-led politics were augmented with administrative reforms (we will call this the "Reform 2" system). From here, we outline our theoretical expectations as to how the development of responsible party government should be reflected in legislative behavior.

ing System under Political Leadership" (*Kokkai shingi no kassei-ka oyobi seiji shudō no seisaku kettei shisutemu no kakuritsu ni kansuru hōritsu*). 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 (*fukudaijin*) and parliamentary secretaries (*seimukan*) in 2001, the previously weak parliamentary vice ministers (*seimujikan*) were increased in number and tasked with filling the role (George Mulgan, 2000, p. 198).

[10] In our analyses, we exclude speeches from this committee, focusing only on how the reforms affected behavior in the traditional committees of the Diet.

[11] In fact, the introduction of junior ministers is said to have been pushed by reformer Ichirō Ozawa as part of negotiations for his Liberal Party entering into coalition with the LDP in 1999.

[12] Very few studies systematically examine changes in legislative behavior before and after these reforms. Nemoto (2013) looks at private member bills over time, finding that they have increased since electoral reform, and that members who introduce the bills have a higher probability of getting promoted to cabinet (with the causal mechanism somewhat uncertain). Focusing only on the House of Councillors (1956 to 2004), Fukumoto and Matsuo (2015) find that members who are up for election (given staggered terms) have lower attendance as the election nears, but speak longer when they do attend.

In so doing, we present our hypotheses in a fairly general sense, but also note specific applications to the Japanese case.

Legislative Behavior with Responsible Parties

To illustrate our theoretical expectations, consider an ideal-typical responsible party government system. The canonical example is the United Kingdom. A long literature has discussed various institutional configurations that characterize these systems, such as agenda-setting power resting in the hands of the governing party (e.g., Döring, 1995; Cox and McCubbins, 2005), the investiture of executive authority in a centralized cabinet led by senior party leaders (Cox, 1987), and the enforcement of party discipline through a strong whip (Hazan, 2003; Kam, 2009). In short, in the ideal-typical responsible party government model, we should expect that government ministers dominate the legislative process. Furthermore, the government should be able to implement its policy program with minimal obstruction by opposition parties. Finally, parties should be fairly unified inside and outside of the legislature.

A recent literature has begun to examine the implications of institutional arrangements, particularly electoral systems, on legislative behavior—most prominently parliamentary speech. Proksch and Slapin (2012, 2015) conceptualize observed speech as the outcome of a strategic interaction between party leaders (who we conceptualize here as ministers for the governing parties) and backbenchers. Leaders control access to the plenary floor (either formally through institutionally endowed positions or informally through their seniority in the party). Delegating speaking time to backbenchers helps train these members' skills in legislative politics to make them more qualified candidates for leadership in the future. Ministers also might favor delegation of speaking time since they must engage in the business of governing and thus have other demands on their time. Backbenchers wish to

speak because they have incentives to cultivate a personal reputation to facilitate their reelection, or to express their preferences on policy. Crucially, however, leaders will be wary of delegating to backbenchers who might "go rogue" and speak off message, thereby undermining the party's electorally valuable "brand."

In the Proksch and Slapin (2012, 2015) model, electoral institutions are the key variable driving the leaders' delegation decisions. In systems where a strong party brand is incentivized by the electoral system (e.g., closed-list proportional representation), we should see *less* delegation to backbenchers. By contrast, in systems that produce relatively greater incentives to cultivate a personal vote, e.g., FPTP systems or Japan's pre-reform SNTV (Carey and Shugart, 1995), we should see more ministerial delegation to backbenchers. Although Proksch and Slapin (2012, 2015) do not link their argument directly to the concept of responsible parties, there is a clear mapping between the two categories. Thus, shifting electoral systems towards the responsible party government model should affect behavior in the following way:

> *H1a:* A move towards responsible party government should increase ministerial speaking.

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 toward responsible party government should mean a reciprocal reduction in speaking by backbenchers, who are no longer the focus of voters' accountability decisions. In the Japanese case, however, the shift towards responsible party government and its effect on accountability should be revealed in a more particular fashion: whether ministers or bureaucrats answer for government policy.[13] Prior to the 2001 administrative reforms, bureaucratic officials justifying particular policies constituted many of the

[13]An 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.

speeches delivered in parliamentary committees. This was seen by the reformers as undesirable as it was illustrative of the lack of the vibrant accountability between parties, and a missed opportunity for the government to directly defend its policies.

In his influential book calling for these major reforms in Japan, key reformer Ichirō Ozawa (1994, p. 58) was explicit: "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."

The 1999 Diet Revitalization Law and subsequent administrative reforms were explicitly designed to address this by creating a new type of junior minister (vice minister) for each major ministry to defend its policies to the parliament. Even in the first reform period (1994-2001), there might still be a decline in the volume of bureaucrats speaking in parliament as ministers face incentives to speak more. The reforms in 2001 should therefore *amplify* this effect by creating institutional arrangements to reinforce the preceding behavioral changes and represent an additional push towards a responsible party government system. In general, we expect:

> *H1b:* A move towards responsible party government should decrease speaking by bureaucrats.

The development of responsible party government also suggests a party-focused dimension of speaking behavior—i.e., speech should be deliberately targeted toward facilitating the differentiation of parties based on programmatic platforms. We consider how this might reveal itself in two dimensions. First, recall that the key normative dimension of parliamentary government and responsible party government is that ministers are *accountable* to the legislature for government policies. In other words, ministers must appear in parliament to defend the actions of their ministry to criticism from parliamentarians. Thus, we should

expect that opposition parties more often use the tools at their disposal to interrogate and hold ministers accountable to parliament. The most common accountability mechanism for opposition parties are parliamentary interpellations and other forms of questioning. 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.

Eggers and Spirling (2014) suggest a more subtle dimension of how responsible party government should affect speaking behavior, examining what we refer to as "discursive accountability."[14] This concept seeks to capture the extent to which parties can hold each other accountable in parliamentary debates, and can be operationalized as a "systematized concept" (Adcock and Collier, 2001) by looking at the back-and-forth between parties in debates.[15] Eggers and Spirling (2014) show that as party competition in the U.K. 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 with increasing frequency (rather than being answered by a backbencher of their own party). Translated to our theoretical framework, the key implication from their analysis is that as a polity moves towards a responsible party government system we should see higher levels of discursive accountability, since such back-and-forth partisan contestation will become an increasingly crucial part of electoral competition.

When thinking about discursive accountability in the back-and-forth of debates, there are at least two ways to consider how to measure accountability. First, there is the "relative" measure that Eggers and Spirling (2014) employ. They consider speeches in a debate as ordered from first to last and use this to create a Markov transition matrix: given

[14]Eggers and Spirling (2014) use the phrase "responsiveness." Although we have no objection to this phrase, its association with other concepts in the representation literature (such as dynamic policy responsiveness) might lead to ambiguity, and thus we use a distinct phrase.

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

that the current speaker is a government minister, what is the probability of the following speaking being either another government minister, a government backbencher, or an opposition member? Changes in this measure capture relative responsiveness insofar as it represents transition probabilities *conditional on* the previous speaker being a government minister.[16]

Yet, we might be also interested in the "absolute" level of accountability. There could be high relative levels (e.g., a minister is usually followed by an opposition speaker), but if ministerial speeches were comparably rare, then the frequency of high-level government-opposition exchanges may be reasonably limited and thus not especially illustrative of a high level of accountability.[17] Thus, we suggest looking at the proportion of "speaker dyads" (e.g., the speaker at time $t-1$ and time t across the entire chain) that show a discursive accountability relationship. This could be thought of as an extension of analyzing the marginal speaker frequencies (e.g., how often do ministers speak) to include a richer concept of the partisan contestation that may occur.

Turning to the Japanese case, we would expect both relative and absolute discursive accountability to increase in the post-reform periods. This should manifest itself in the crucial government-opposition dynamic, with the key change being who answers for the government: ministers and junior ministers, or bureaucrats? We posit the following complementary expectations:

H2a: A move towards responsible party government should lead to an increase

[16]Note that Eggers and Spirling (2014) only consider the identity of the speaker responding to a minister; however, the converse should also be informative: given that an opposition member speaks, who is likely to speak after? Depending on the theoretical question at hand, the entire transition matrix may be informative.

[17]Furthermore, there could be an ambiguity in the decline in relative discursive accountability. Imagine that we saw that relative minister-opposition responsiveness decreased; this might mitigate against a responsible party government theory until one notes the following possibility—the proportion of speaking dyads (e.g., the speaker at time $t-1$ and the speaker at time t) that are "responsive" (i.e., minister-opposition) may have *increased* although a proportionally greater increase in "non-responsive" dyads (i.e., minister-government backbencher) generates a decline in their measure.

in discursive accountability by opposition MPs vis-à-vis government ministers and junior ministers.

H2b: A move towards responsible party government should lead to a decrease in discursive accountability by opposition MPs by vis-à-vis bureaucrats.

The Evolution of Parliamentary Speech in Japan

Our data come from the National Diet Library records of parliamentary debates.[18] 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), beginning with the first cabinet of Prime Minister Tetsu Katayama (May 24, 1947 – March 10, 1948) and ending with the second reshuffle of the third cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzō Abe (inaugurated August 3, 2016). In the analysis to follow, we also distinguish between the most important committees (the Budget Committee and key standing committees) and other committees, and separately analyze changes in behavior in these committee types.

Existing quantitative research on speech has focused almost exclusively on plenary floor debates.[19] Although this captures an especially stark and stylized part of the legislative process, it neglects to examine what happens in arguably the more common type of debate—committee debates.[20] In the case of Japan and many other systems, committees are deliberately designed to shadow ministerial jurisdictions, which likely increases

[18] `http://kokkai.ndl.go.jp/` accessed on 1 August 2017.

[19] See, *inter alia*, Proksch and Slapin (2012, 2015); Eggers and Spirling (2014); Bäck and Debus (2016); Tzelgov (2014*a*,*b*); Herzog and Benoit (2015).

[20] An exception may be some parliamentary systems, especially Westminster ones, where much committee debate occurs on the plenary floor by the chamber "acting" as a committee as a whole or where legislative 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, e.g., in the U.K.

the ability for its members to both specialize in that jurisdiction as well as monitor the corresponding minister. By contrast, plenary debates may sometimes be characterized by highly limited or orchestrated debates that gloss over detailed policy disagreements. In systems that have something approximating responsible party government, a major role for committees is often the policing of coalition bargains in multiparty governments (Martin and Vanberg, 2004, 2005, 2011).

However, opposition parties also use committees to scrutinize the government. Even if this is reasonably ineffective in terms of changing policies (because of party unity in legislative voting), it serves as an important venue 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 postwar institutional structure has remained constant, 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. It is also important to note that there are exogenous factors that likely explain this particular equilibrium of speaking activity. Historical accounts note that the Occupation reformers deliberately created 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 proportionately larger share of committee time.

Most parliamentary systems have something analogous to a "Prime Minister's Question 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 1955 System 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 sys-

tem 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 remained stable.

For our purposes, the Diet records provide a crucial bit of information by recording the status of the speakers. We classified these titles into one of five types (as well as an "Other" category): "Bureaucrat," "Cabinet Minister," "Junior Minister," "Backbencher," and "Opposition."[21] Outside individuals (i.e., non-MPs) are permitted to speak during committee meetings, and their remarks are transcribed alongside the comments by MPs. Such non-bureaucratic outside 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. Using this classification scheme, we can test our hypotheses related to who speaks and whether this speech exhibits patterns of discursive accountability.

Empirical Evidence: Speaking Behavior in Different Periods

This section tests our hypotheses on their associated outcome measures across Japan's institutional periods. To begin, Figure 1 provides a broad descriptive overview of the

[21] Examples of individuals coded as "Bureaucrat" are those titled explanatory witness (*setsumei-in*) and government witness (*seifu sankō-nin*). "Cabinet Minister" is often labeled in the record as state minister *kokumu daijin*. We also categorized the Prime Minister (*naikaku sōri daijin*) under this label. "Junior Minister" is vice minister (*fukudaijin*), parliamentary secretary (*daijin seimukan*), or parliamentary vice minister (*seimujikan*). Within the rank-and-file "Backbencher" category, we include committee member (*iin*), and subcommittee member (*bunka-in*), but also committee chair (*iinchō*) and director (*riji*). One ambiguity is that, due to the previous government committee member system, "government member" (*seifu iin*) 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.

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 data for all periods, with the dotted line in the figure marking the 1994 electoral system reform. 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, the descriptive data already illustrate 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 towards responsible party government 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 MPs speaking) to deal with the new incentives generated by these external reforms and programmatic electoral competition.

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 become common since the electoral reform, might use committees to monitor each other or distinguish themselves and their policies for voters.

Activity of Different Groups in Parliamentary Committees

We can explore these patterns more rigorously in a regression framework. A plausible identification strategy given our data is to use a fixed effects approach, i.e., control for constant and unobserved unit-specific (committee-specific) heterogeneity. This approach

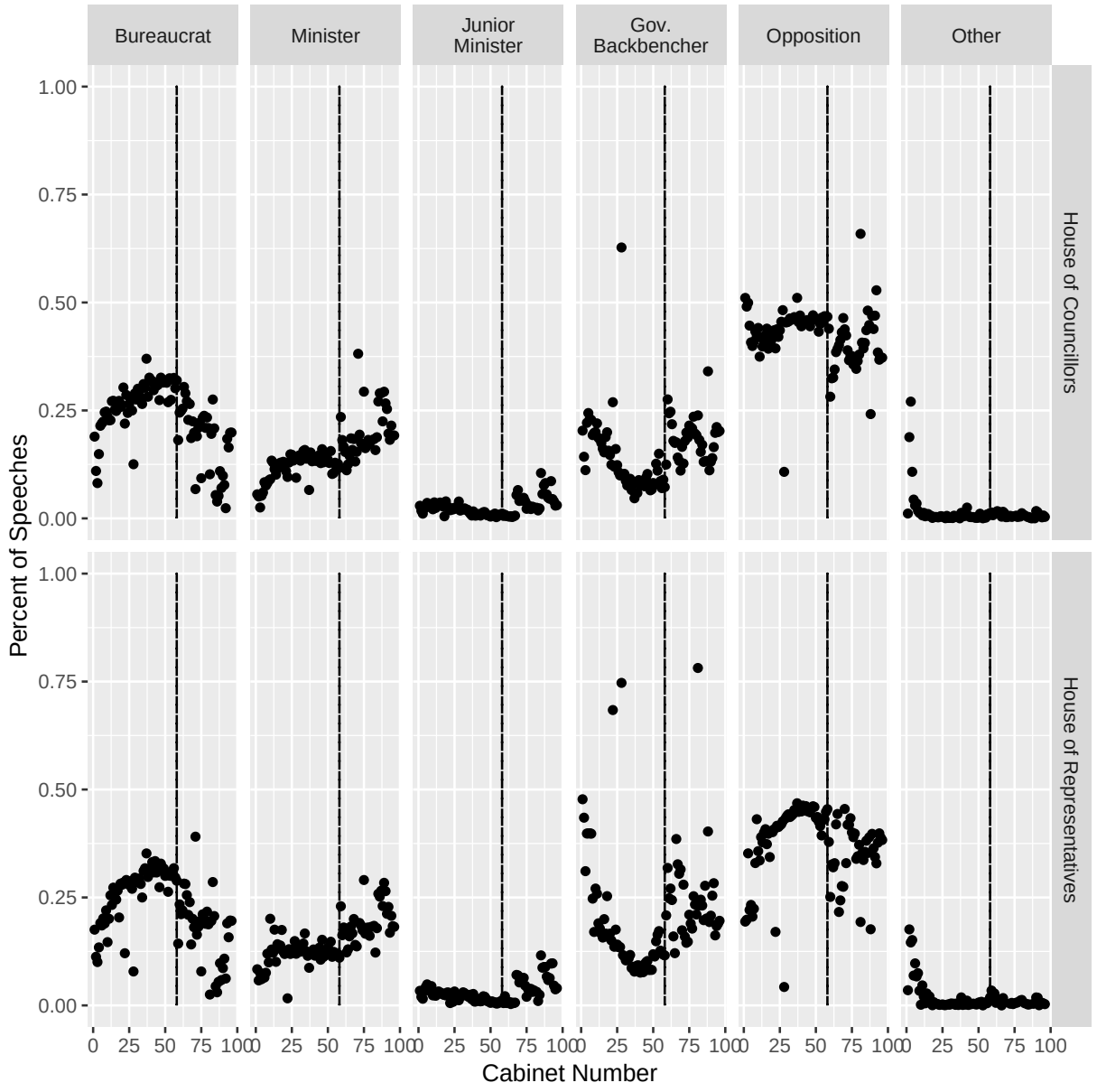

Figure 1: Trends in speaker type over time in the Japanese Diet

Note: *This figure shows the proportion of speeches delivered by MPs in each of the six groups (which exhaustively categorize all speeches delivered in the Diet). "Other" includes all outside witnesses or speakers whose identity could not be matched to one of the other categories. The vertical line separates the post-reform period. Cabinets are numbered from 1 (Katayama 1st cabinet) to 96 (Abe 3rd cabinet, 1st reshuffle) using standard conventions for designating new cabinets in Japan.*

means that the coefficients of interest, the effect of the reforms, are only estimated using those committees that existed in multiple periods by leveraging the within-unit change.

Formally, the regression model can be written as:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha_i + \beta_1 R_1 + \beta_2 R_2 + \epsilon_{it}$$

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), and R_1 and R_2 are dummies for the Reform 1 and Reform 2 periods. We drop observations from the pre-1955 period for this analysis, so the baseline comparison is committee speech during the 1955 System period. All models include robust standard errors that are clustered on committee to deal with potential correlation between observations inside units.

There are approximately twenty major standing committees as well as a variety of *ad hoc* subcommittees or standing committees of varying tenures. We collapse the speech data to get an aggregate measure of behavior inside a committee (what proportion of speeches are given by speakers from each group) and create a panel dataset where committees i are measured across time t (governments). We split committees into three salient types: (1) the Budget Committee; (2) Standing Committees; (3) Other Committees. We estimate effects separately for these subtypes where appropriate.[22]

Figure 2 shows the predicted proportions of activity by speaker type in each of the regressions. Looking first at the left panel pooling committees together, we note there is a marked decline in bureaucratic activity in both reform periods, and the decline intensifies in the second reform period. As this result comes from a fixed effects regression, it reflects changes in speaking behavior in committees that existed in both periods, suggesting an adaptation to the new institutional environment. We also see an increase in ministe-

[22]For the results that examine the Budget Committee, we use robust standard errors, but clustering on the unit of observation is not possible. The global intercept corresponds to the fixed effect.

(a) All Committees

(b) Committees by Type

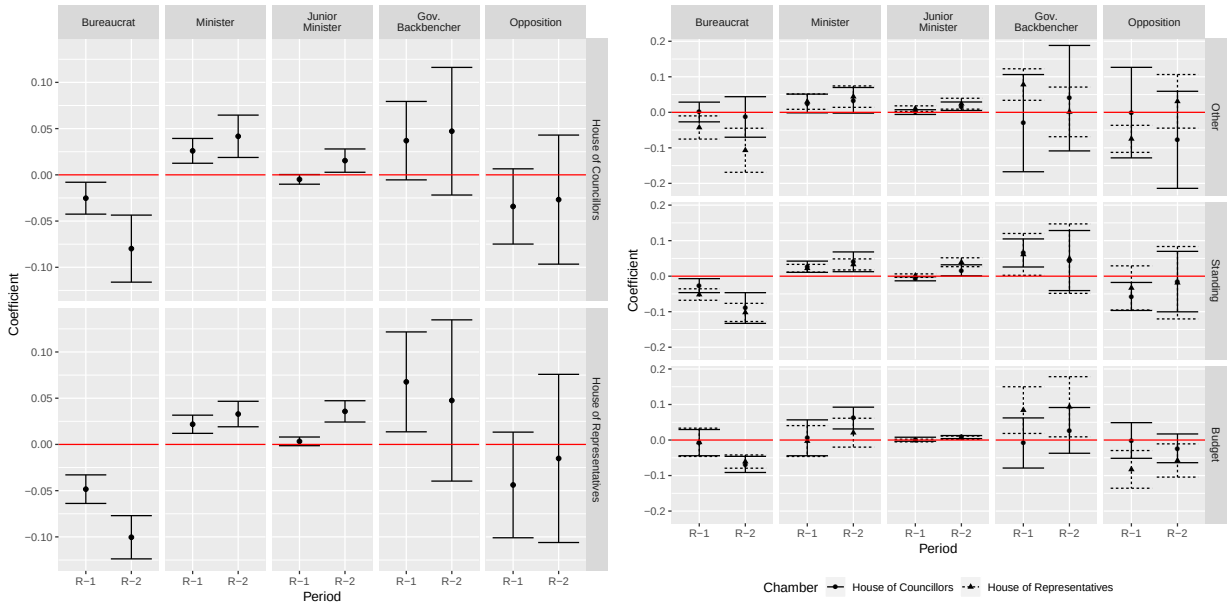

Figure 2: Changes in speaking activity following reforms in the Japanese Diet

Note: *The left panel (Figure 2a) shows the effects for models estimated on five categories of MPs: Bureaucrats, Ministers, Junior Ministers, Government Backbenchers, and Opposition MPs, for all committees. The coefficient indicates the expected change in proportion versus the pre-reform (1955 System) period. The right panel (Figure 2b) shows the results of the fixed-effect regression when committees are split into three types (Budget Committee, Standing Committees, and Other Committees). Each panel indicates the group under consideration.*

rial activity across both levels (cabinet minister and junior minister), confirming our first hypothesis regarding party leaders versus bureaucrats.

The right panel of Figure 2 disaggregates the results by committee type. As expected, the results indicate a general decrease in bureaucratic speaking, including (in the Reform 2 period) in the Budget Committee, which had lower levels of bureaucratic activity to begin with. Other types of committees also witnessed a marked decline in bureaucratic activity as the reforms progressed, with the exception of non-standing committees in the House of Councillors.

In terms of ministerial activity, we see again that in the Budget Committee, which has always had more ministerial activity (consistent with its historical role as the venue for Prime Minister's Questions), the changes in the post-reform period are negligent for the House of Representatives,[23] but increase steadily as the reforms progress in other jurisdictions. This, and the similar pattern for junior ministers (outside of the Budget Committee), shows that the reformers' vision largely came into being:[24] institutional changes led to markedly different patterns of activity in the legislature in a way that replaced bureaucratic activity with activity by responsible and accountable politicians.

The fact that we observe changes in the House of Councillors following the 1994 electoral reform—which only applied to the House of Representatives—is also notable. In our above discussion, we have argued that the shifts in MP behavior required the deliberate changes of the party leadership to build and enforce more disciplined, coherent, and programmatic parties. The results for the House of Councillors suggest similar shifts in members' behavior, despite a constant electoral environment.[25] This suggests that the implementation of

[23]If one looks at the Prime Minister specifically, we see that he is quite active in the Budget Committee, although speaks very rarely (indistinguishable from zero) in other committees. Interestingly, the PM's activity in the Budget Committee increases in the post-reform periods and this again confirms our theoretical expectations.

[24]Detailed disaggregation shows that if we focus only on the parliamentary vice ministers and parliamentary secretaries (excluding vice ministers), the increase in activity still holds.

[25]In fact, the electoral rules for the House of Councillors moved *against* responsible party government

responsible party government in Japan required not merely formal institutional reforms but also internal restructuring of the political 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 the results, 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 and Cabinet (defining the second reform period) were applied in both chambers, with ministers claiming increasing speaking time. This corresponding shift suggests that in bicameral systems, the upper chamber cannot be considered to be 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 in *both* chambers to the electoral advantage of the party (in both chambers) can cause shifts in behavior despite constant institutional environments.

Discursive Accountability

We now evaluate how the reforms affected patterns in discursive accountability. First, we consider the simple question of who answers (for the government) when an opposition MP speaks, looking only at dyadic combinations. In other words, given that an opposition MP speaks at time t, who speaks at time $t+1$? This tests a "relative" measure of discursive accountability. Figure 3 applies a regression model similar to our earlier analyses of group speaking behavior. Instead, we model the probability of each of the five groups speaking at time $t+1$ conditional on the speaker at time t being an opposition MP. As with our

as the system became more candidate-centered after reforms introducing open-list PR in 2001.

previous analyses, the baseline comparison time period for behavior is the 1955 system. The coefficients show the change in the Reform 1 and Reform 2 periods relative to the pre-reform 1955 system period.

(a) All Committees (b) Committees by Type

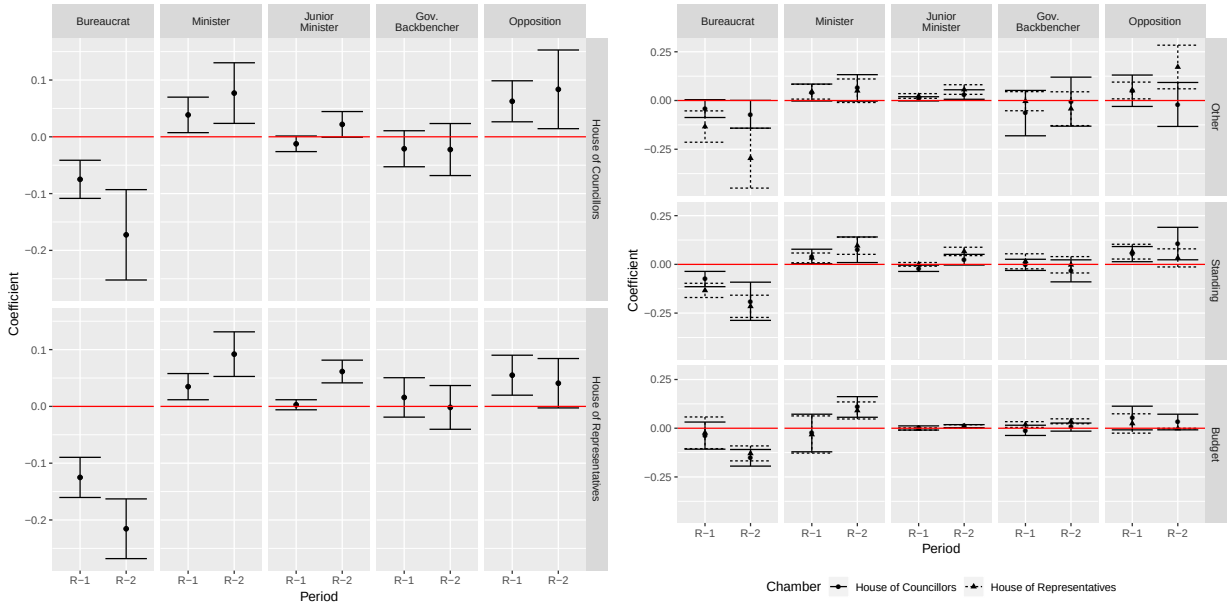

Figure 3: Changes in discursive accountability following reforms in the Japanese Diet

Note: *This figure examines the role of discursive accountability. It focuses on the probability that given the speaker at time t is an opposition MP, what is the probability that each of the five categories of speakers responds (i.e., speaks next). The coefficient represents the change in probability versus the pre-reform period (1955 system). All models include committee fixed effects and clustered standard errors. The left panel (Figure 3a) shows the effects for models estimated on five categories of MPs: Bureaucrats, Ministers, Junior Ministers, Government Backbencher MPs, and Opposition MPs, for all committees pooled together. The right panel (Figure 3b) shows the results of the (fixed-effect) regression when the committees are split into three types (Budget Committee, Standing Committees, and Other Committees). Each panel indicates the group under consideration.*

The results illustrate a clear shift in patterns of discursive accountability. Relative to the pre-reform 1955 system period, a bureaucrat is about 12 percentage points less likely to speak following an opposition MP in the Reform 1 period in the House of Representatives, whereas ministers are about 2.5 percentage points more likely to do so. In the Reform 2 period, this shift accelerates, with bureaucrats over 20 percentage points less likely to respond to opposition MPs, and ministers nearly 10 percentage points more likely to respond.

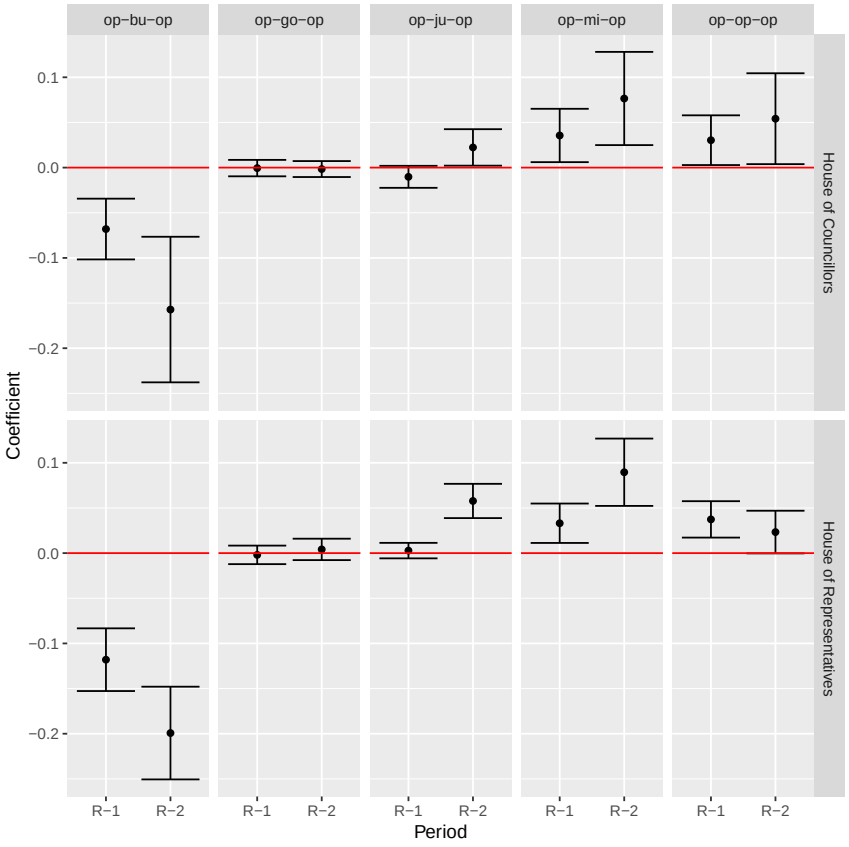

Figure 4: Changes in discursive accountability for selected triples of speakers

Note: *This figure examines discursive accountability with selected triples of speakers where the speaker at time t and $t+2$ is an opposition MP. The coefficient represents the change in probability in that triple appearing in the text record relative to the pre-reform 1955 system period. All models include committee fixed effects and clustered standard errors. All committees are pooled. The top (bottom) panel shows the effects for models estimated on the House of Councillors (House of Representatives).*

The patterns are again similar in the House of Councillors, suggesting that the reforms changing incentives initially in the House of Representatives affected behavior across the entire political system. Split into three types of committee (Budget, Standing, Other), we again see that the largest shifts occurred in the Budget and Standing Committees.

An additional way to examine discursive accountability is to look at "triples" of speakers, not just dyads, to consider the "absolute" level of accountability. Figure 4 reports the coefficients from the previous fixed-effects regression on a selected set of triples (i.e.,

speaker t, speaker $t+1$, speaker $t+2$) where the speaker at time t and $t+2$ is an opposition MP.[26] We see that the results are clear; as soon as the first reform took effect, there was a huge drop in the number of triples involving opposition MPs vis-à-vis bureaucrats (i.e., a decline in "opp-bur-opp") and a correspondingly large rise in back-and-forth speech by opposition MPs vis-à-vis ministers ("opp-min-opp"), and junior ministers ("opp-ju-opp"), especially following the second reform. There is also an increase in all-opposition triples ("opp-opp-opp"), which may correspond either to increased intra-opposition scrutiny or "tag-teaming" in questioning the government. Triples involving government backbenchers ("opp-go-opp") exhibit no changes.

All told, these results support our second set of hypotheses regarding changes to the patterns in discursive accountability following Japan's shift toward responsible party government. Not only are ministers speaking more and bureaucrats speaking less (Hypotheses $1a$ and $1b$), the shift also reflects a specific change in who is responding on the part of the government to parliamentary inquiries and critiques by opposition MPs (Hypotheses $2a$ and $2b$).

Conclusion

We have examined how major institutional reforms in Japanese politics—to the electoral system and to the institutions of government and parliament—led to radical shifts in legislative behavior. From a starting point in the pre-reform period that reflected an extreme version of a decentralized, MP-centered gains-from-trade model of legislative politics, where bureaucrats played an outsized role in answering for the government's policies, Japan's reforms have pushed patterns of behavior towards a cabinet-centered and party-leader-

[26] These selected triples exhibit the most interesting shifts. Other, less common, combinations such as opposition MP – junior minister – junior minister are more rare to begin with and exhibit no significant changes following the reforms.

dominated model of responsible party government.

Our analysis of millions of speeches in the Diet record spanning these major reforms finds that MPs, and especially ministers, began speaking more in parliament, decreasing the reliance on bureaucrats to defend and justify government policies. In addition, discursive accountability increased—MPs from opposition parties and leaders from the governing parties speak more in succession (responding to each other's arguments) after the reforms. All in all, these changes are all consistent with how one would expect parties to organize a legislature when competition is structured around strong and coherent party brands, unlike in the pre-reform period.

Although Japan's hoped "Westminsterization" and a full transformation to a responsible party model 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. The reforms to realize a vision of more responsible, programmatic parties has translated into meaningfully different patterns of parliamentary behavior.

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