Women's political participation and patriarchal norms: Understanding why Rwandan women managed to maintain their seats in the government and why Japan trails other nations in Women's political representation

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Abstract: This study examines why Rwanda's women have managed to maintain their seats in political institutions and why Japan trails other countries in terms of women's representation in political bodies. First, both Japan and Rwanda are patriarchal societies, where women have historically been treated as subservient to men; and the political sphere was in the male domain. Both societies were confronted with war and genocide at different times, during which women suffered and sacrificed themselves for post-conflict recovery. This study indicates that in both countries, women fought for their rights as political actors with limited success in Japan and tremendous success in Rwanda. The differences in the outcomes of women's battles in both societies are due to different factors, such as women's solidarity and political engagement by the government. The two elements created a conducive social and political environment, enabling Rwanda's women to increase and maintain their seats in top leadership positions, while the absence of these two factors in Japan reduced the efforts of those who aspired to increase women's political rights.

Keywords: women, political representation, patriarchy, Japan, Rwanda

Introduction

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "everyone has the right to take part in the government of his/her country. As such, women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but is also seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account" (UN 2002:128). In this sense, the development of a society is the result of people's participation. In other words, there is no true governance, democracy, or development without equal participation of women and men in all spheres and at all decision-making levels (Karl 1995). However, in many societies, women have historically been excluded from the development process. Power relationships that prevent women from leading fulfilling lives operate at many levels of society, from the most personal to the most public.

In Rwanda and Japan, patriarchal norms have been at the forefront in limiting women's participation in political positions. Although both countries differ in social, economic, and political contexts, what they have in common are cultural norms and values that underpin unequal power relations between men and women and between boys and girls (Abbott 2009). This implies that women's positions in both countries have been subservient to men, which translates into men's dominance and women's subordination. Consequently, gender inequalities have not been seen as unjust but rather as respected social norms (MIGEPROF 2010). As patriarchal societies, gender regimes in both countries influence the distribution of gender roles; and the latter appear to be naturally based on sex, while being

socially constructed. Gender-based role distribution interacts with power. Young boys are initiated to decide for the family once their fathers are absent; while young girls must take care of chore-related activities. This influences not only the relationships between men and women within the family and their community but also their differences in social, economic, and political positions（Rombouts 2006; Bayisenge 2023）.

In Rwanda, women have historically been predominantly confined to the domestic sphere, while men have monopolized the public and political arenas. Political decision-making at the community and national levels was almost exclusively the province of men, and mainly of older elite men. With consequent unequal power relations, gender-based discrimination is considered normal（Izabiriza, 2003）. In 1961, women were granted the right to stand for elections. The post-independence regimes were characterized by a discriminatory policy based on gender, ethnicity, and so on, which reinforced women's discrimination in politics and the decision-making process. The first female parliamentary party served in 1967. However, before the war in the early 1990s and genocide of 1994, women never held more than 18% of seats in parliament（Powley 2005; Mutamba 2005）.

War and genocide affected men and women differently. Men were the main targets of war and genocide. As a result, many of them were killed in 1994 as a consequence of the genocide, others fled to neighboring countries and never returned to Rwanda, and another proportion went into prison on charges of perpetration of the event. Consequently, in the aftermath of the genocide, women constituted around 70 per cent of the Rwandan population（Powley 2003）. This situation inevitably changed the position of women in Rwanda's post-genocide reconstruction process. Women had to assume different roles, some of which were normally performed by men, such as heading the household, financial provision, community organization, and leadership（Izabiriza, 2003）. Although it is argued that changing gender roles may strengthen women's capacities and organizational capabilities, thus leading them to take on more public roles during or after conflict（Hassim 1999）; questions arise as to whether this is the only reason or factor that can justify the tremendous increase in the number of Rwandan women in leadership positions in the post-genocide government. If that is the case, why is Rwanda's situation different from other post-war cases such as Japan, which, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union（IPU 2024）, has so far had the lowest number of women in the House of Representatives?

In the mid-20th century, Japan was involved in the Pacific War during which many civilians lost their lives. As articulated by the IPU（2024）, despite the fact that in the first post-war Lower House election in Japan in 1946, 39 female politicians（8. 4%）were elected; the following year, the electoral system was changed（to the disadvantage of women candidates）, and 15 female politicians（3. 2%）were elected. This has pushed the number of women in the Lower House to be stagnant; until 1986, the proportion of women in the lower house remained between 1. 2% and 2. 6%. Although the percentage of women in Japan's House of Representatives（the Lower House）increased from 10. 8%（in 2021）to 15. 7% in the general election on October 27, 2024, Japan's ranking of women in the Lower House, since they gained the suffrage in 1946, remains low among the G7 countries and its neighbors such as China（26. 5%）, the Republic of Korea（20. 0%）, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea（17. 6%）. Drawing from this background, the questions addressed in this paper are why Rwanda's women politicians managed to maintain their seats in the post-genocide government and why Japan trails the rest of the world in terms of female representation; even though both countries are patriarchal societies. What can Japanese women learn from their counterparts in Rwanda? These questions are discussed in the first and second sections of this study.

1. Women's Solidarity and Political Leadership in Japan

The research question in this section is, "Why does Japan trail the rest of the world in women's political representation?" By looking at the history of Japanese women's struggles, this section shows why they have failed to

increase their number in parliament（National Diet[1]）and change the patriarchal norms in the country[2].

1. 1. Current Status of Gender Equality and International Evaluation of Patriarchal Values in Japan

In the general election held on October 27, 2024, the percentage of women in Japan's House of Representatives（Lower House）increased from 10. 8%, in 2021, to 15. 7%. Although this is the highest figure since Japanese women gained suffrage in 1946[3], their proportion in the Lower or Single House is still low, according to the IPU（2024）. As mentioned earlier, this figure is the lowest among the G7 countries and lower than in the neighboring countries.

Although Japan is a G7 member and the fourth largest economy in the world（2024）, it ranked 118th out of 146 countries and lowest among the G7 countries in the 2024 Global Gender Gap Index（World Economic Forum 2024）. The Japanese government has claimed to be making efforts to end discrimination against women; however, it has not amended the Civil Law to allow the selective system to maintain separate surnames for married couples, despite the fact that the majority of public opinion polls do not oppose the amendment and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended it in 2003, 2009, 2016, and 2024[4]. Many foreign researchers, including the Nobel Prize-winning economist Claudia Goldin, have urged the abolition of patriarchal norms in Japan; but the government and conservative politicians, including female Diet members, want to retain them.

A time-series comparison of the G7 Gender Gap Index shows that, with the exception of Japan, the G7 countries have gradually closed the gender gap. France and Italy have made significant improvements compared to this country. In 2006, the Gender Gap Index of these three countries was very close（among 115 countries, Japan's score was 0. 645（79th）, France's 0. 652（70th）, and Italy's 0. 646（77th）; but the latter two had improved their scores, while the former had not[5].

Although the 1996 UNDP Report stated that "Japan lags behind in gender equality, and women's participation in decision-making outside the home remains low"（UNDP 1996）; and this situation has not changed drastically, women have not always followed men in Japan's history. A Chinese historical text, *The Records of the Three Kingdoms*, written in the third century C.E., gives us the name of Himiko, the shaman queen of the Yamatai kingdom in ancient Japan who lived until around the year 248 C.E. It is thought that before the fourth century C.E., thirty to fifty per cent of the rulers in Japan were women（Seike 2020）. Female rulers and emperors existed throughout Japanese history until the Meiji Restoration. The women in the country's history have worked hard for their families, communities, society, and the state.

1. 2 Women's Solidarity for Political Rights in Pre-War Japan

After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan made great efforts to be westernized. Women were pressured to conform to the ideals of being "good wives and wise mothers,[6]" which restricted their actions and appearances. Nevertheless, many female activists fought for women's rights in Japan before the Second World War. One of them was KUSUNOSE Kita（1836-1920）, a widow and the registered head of a household in Kochi Prefecture. When Kita was denied the right to vote for district assembly members, she insisted, "it is strange that even despite paying taxes, I do not have the right to vote because I am a woman. Rights and responsibilities should go together"（Kumon 2006）. Her activities influenced activists in the Freedom and People's Rights Movement; and the very first women's suffrage in Japan was granted in 1880 at two districts of Kochi Prefecture[7].

The Imperial Constitution of Japan（1889）reinforced patriarchal values in Japanese society; and the Civil Law（1898）made married women legally incompetent, except for widows. They were required to obtain their husbands' consent for certain legal acts.

Japanese female leaders understood that women's solidarity is very important to their emancipation. HIRATSUKA

Raicho（1886-1971）[8] and ICHIKAWA Fusae（1893-1981）[9] were prominent female leaders in Japan. In 1918, Raicho, Fusae, and others founded the New Women's Association（*Shin Fujin Kyokai*）, whose aims included the reform of Article 5 of the Peace Police Law which prohibited women from joining political associations and organizing or attending political assemblies. Their petitions were repeatedly rejected; however, in 1922, Article 5 of the Peace Police Law was amended in the Imperial Diet, and women were allowed to attend and organize political assemblies in that year. Although the New Women's Association was dissolved in December 1922, the solidarity of Fusae and other women led to the formation of the League for Women's Suffrage（*Fusen Kakutoku Domei*）in 1924（renamed in 1925）[10].

Female Japanese leaders were very active in lobbying, but Prime Minister INUKAI Tsuyoshi, who agreed to grant women the suffrage, was assassinated in 1932 by young naval officers（the May 15 Incident）. Militarism was strengthened and women's associations were encouraged to cooperate during the war.

1. 3 Women's Solidarity in Post-War Japan

In August 1945, Japan was defeated in the Second World War. Many cities were burned by the U.S. firebombing. Many families lost their houses and property; and many lost the family members who took care of them.

Under the occupation of the General Headquarters（GHQ）, the first post-war general election was held in 1946. All men and women aged 20 years and above acquired the right to vote. Women won 39 of the 466 seats in the House of Representatives. In the 1946 House of Representatives election, a large constituency system and block voting system（limited vote）were introduced. The block voting system encouraged many voters to choose female candidates as their second or third choice（Ogai 2005）. Furthermore, because of the purge of politicians based on the "Removal and Exclusion of Undesirable Personnel from Public Office" directive issued by GHQ on January 4, 1946, all existing political parties except the Japan Communist Party could not prepare an adequate number of male candidates. These factors contributed to the victory of many female candidates in 1946.

After intense discussions among legislators and amendments of articles, the Constitution of Japan was promulgated on November 3, 1946, and enforced on May 3, 1947. Article 14 of the Constitution of Japan stipulates that all people are equal under the law and that there shall be no discrimination in political, economic, or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status, or family origin. Furthermore, Article 24 states that marriage shall be maintained through mutual cooperation, with the equal rights of husbands and wives.

Under the new Japanese Constitution, the House of Representatives was elected in 1947. This time, the number of women winning seats dropped from 39（8. 4%）to 15（3. 2%）because of the following reasons: the electoral system was changed from a large-constituency system to a medium-sized constituency one, the voting system was changed from block voting to single nontransferable vote, and a strong negative campaign was carried out against women legislators. Since then, the proportion of women in the House of Representatives moved between 1% and 3% for a long time[11].

The book *Women in Japan – The Development of the Women's Movement*, written by the female activist TATEWAKI Sadayo in 1957, shows how Japanese women worked together to protect their families from starvation after the war and protect their fundamental human rights in the 1950s. Under the military occupation, Japanese mothers demanded that the GHQ and their government spend money on food and not on rearmament.

The women, as mothers and workers, came together to oppose price rises and gender discrimination in employment; demonstrated against rearmament, nuclear testing, and the Vietnam War; demanded childcare and education support; and fought for the anti-pollution movement in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. While the country's women showed their solidarity on these issues, it seems that they were not positive about increasing the number of

female politicians in solidarity. Instead, they tended to vote for male politicians who fought for these issues. Even in trade unions, male members insisted that they could represent women's interests and resisted the creation of women's division in their unions (Tatewaki 1957). Many Japanese still adhere to patriarchal norms. Political parties broke with Japanese women's solidarity[12]. Each political party has its own women's association[13].

In 1985, Japan ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, amending the Nationality Law to allow the nation's women to pass their nationality on to their children; and enacted a new law, the Equal Employment Opportunity Act, which banned discrimination based on gender in the recruitment, employment, assignment, and promotion of workers.

1. 4 Political Leadership and Women's Solidarity since 1990s

Through face-to-face interviews with female parliamentarians in Rwanda and Japan, Toda and Bayisenge (2020) found that female politicians in both countries suffered not only from patriarchal values and mindsets but also from home care work. Although Rwandan society is still patriarchal, the increased number of female MPs in the Lower House contributed to the change in laws underpinning patriarchal norms (especially with regard to women's access and control over property, education, and gender-based violence) and changed the community's attitude toward women's abilities and leadership skills. What causes these differences between the two nations where patriarchal mind-sets are still deeply rooted? The findings of this study demonstrate that the state's political commitment and women's political organizations in Rwanda laid the foundation of the achievements. This subsection shows whether we can identify a state's political commitment (or political leadership) and women's political organizations (or women's solidarity) in Japan since the 1990s.

In 1995, the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, exercised a big impact on not only the government but also on NGOs in Japan. Several organizations worked to increase the number of women in politics (Toda 2024); but this movement has not spread nationwide.

The Basic Act for Gender-Equal Society was enacted in 1999; and the Basic Plan for Gender Equality was formulated in 2000. The Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office is "mandated with the formulation and overall coordination of plans for matters related to promoting the formation of a gender-equal society, as well as promoting the Basic Plan for Gender Equality and formulating and implementing plans for matters not falling under the jurisdiction of any particular ministry" (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office 2016)."

The Act on Promotion of Gender Equality in the Political Field was enacted in May 2018. This law requires political parties to field the same number of male and female candidates in national and local elections. This legislation was solely designed to set principles and has no provision for penalties[14]; hence, it is not clear if it will increase the number of female members of parliament (in the National Diet) and the local assemblies.

The Japanese government has set numerical targets for the Third Basic Plan for Gender Equality (2010). It said, "women's participation in the field of politics is an important task to make efforts to achieve the objective of raising the proportion of female election candidates for the House of Representatives and House of Councillors to 30% by 2020" (Gender Equality Bureau 2020). Now Japan has a new target to raise the proportion of female election candidates to 35% by 2025 in the Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality (2023).

As previously stated, general elections were held in 2024; and the percentage of female candidates increased from 17. 7% (2021) to 23. 36% (2024). Of the 314 female candidates, 73 won the election.

The following are the percentages of female candidates of political parties who won more than 5 seats out of the 465 seats in the 2024 general election (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2024):

〈Ruling Parties〉

Liberal Democratic Party: 16. 1%（55 female candidates）

Komeito: 16. 0%（8 female candidates）

〈Opposition parties[15)]〉

The Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan: 22. 4%（53 female candidates）

Nippon Ishin（Japan Innovation Party）: 17. 7%（29 female candidates）

Democratic Party For the People 21. 4%（9 female candidates）

REIWA SHINSENGUMI: 34. 3%（12 female candidates）,

Japanese Communist Party: 37. 3%（88 female candidates）

When we compare the percentage of female candidates in the opposition parties with that of the ruling parties, we can easily see that among the latter, the Liberal Democratic Party and Komeito had the lowest percentage of female candidates. In addition, no political parties followed the Act on Promotion of Gender Equality in the Political Field.

Therefore, this law is welcomed as an important step forward. However, it seems to be difficult to increase the number of women legislators in Japan without the prime minister's political leadership amending the Act and including a provision for penalties or adopting a gender quota system within the legislature, as in other countries.

1. 5 Solidarity of Women and Political Leadership in Okinawa Prefecture

The author had once mentioned grassroots efforts to increase women's participation in politics in Saga Prefecture（Toda 2024）. The "Society for Increasing Women's Participation in Saga" is a local NGO in that Prefecture in Kyushu Island was founded in 1996, a year after the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. This Society works very hard to increase the number of women in local assemblies in the Saga Prefecture. In 2022, the society started to hold seminars once a month for six months to teach women how to win an election. There were 11 participants, two of whom became candidates and won the election（Society for Increasing Women's Participation in Saga 2023）. The local prefectural government is also keen to promote women's political participation. Thus, we can say that there is solidarity among women and political leadership in Saga Prefecture[16)].

This subsection describes another grassroots effort by women in Okinawa Prefecture. Okinawa, formerly the Ryukyu Kingdom（1429-1879）, was conquered and annexed as Okinawa Prefecture in 1879. In 1945, Okinawa experienced US military operations that caused "far greater disruption, destruction, and casualties than any previous violent historical episode in the archipelago, and cannot be regarded by the people as anything but a calamitous disaster"（Bennett 1946）.

Japan regained its sovereignty in 1952. However, Okinawa remained occupied by the USA until 1972. Therefore, the women over there had to fight for their human rights against the United States Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands until that year; and against the Japanese government to date[17)].

US military rule took a lot of land from the people of Okinawa, most of whom were farmers. Women and girls of Okinawa have been subjected to severe sexual violence by American military personnel[18)]. Okinawan women have had to fight against many problems for themselves and their families. In 1948, the Okinawa Prefectural Women's Federation（*Okinawaken Fujin Rengokai [Okifuren]*）was founded, which demanded an adjustment of the wage gap between male and female teachers, establishment of public nursery schools, maternity protection for female workers, gender equality, and improvement of working conditions. The Okinawa Women's Group Liaison Council（*Okinawaken Fujin Dantai Renraku Kyogikai [Fudankyo]*）[19)] was founded in 1967; and has been fighting for "peace,

equality, and development", particularly for the advancement of women.

Following the reversion of Okinawa from the U.S.A. to Japan, the women there worked together to resolve issues such as price hikes, medical administration, prostitution, male lineal succession of mortuary tablets (*Ihai*), the deployment of the Self-Defense Forces, sexual violence against women, the status of stateless children, and discrimination against dual-income couples of civil servants employed by prefectural governments (Okinawa Women's Comprehensive Center 2024; Okinawa Prefecture 2022).

Women of Okinawa worked very hard and in solidarity for their human rights; and the Okinawa Prefectural Government has helped their movement. In particular, former Governor OTA Masahide (b. 1925, d. 2017, held office from 1990-1998) encouraged women to participate in the decision-making processes. His political leadership is still praised by female leaders in Okinawa.

While many prominent female leaders and movements have been very active, women's participation in politics is still low because of patriarchal norms in Okinawa; and female leaders understand this problem. For example, one of the women's organizations, Women's Wing of Okinawa (*Okinawa-ken Josei no Tsubasa*), "which aims to bring Okinawa a gender-free society through overseas study tours," (Women's Wing of Okinawa, 2024) has made efforts to increase female politicians in local assemblies[20].

2. Women's resilience to men's dominance in post-genocide Rwanda

This section discusses the question why Rwanda's women politicians managed to maintain their seats in the post-genocide government. It henceforth draws on the factors which justify the maintenance of political power by female politicians in a patriarchal context such as Rwanda. To start with, it is worth noting that the study used two sources of data: primary data, whereby different opinions were collected using semi-structured interviews among female politicians; and secondary data collected through reviews of different government documents as well as research reports.

As mentioned above, women made up 70% of the population in the aftermath of the genocide; and they had to accomplish different roles that were previously attributed to men. The government took this radical change in women's gender roles as an opportunity and treated them as key forces in the reconstruction process (Izabiliza, 2003; Powley 2005). However, a few years later, a significant number of men who had fled the country and those who were temporarily imprisoned returned home and resumed their usual roles as heads of household and decision makers. For some scholars, this would have affected the rhythm of women's political participation; as public spaces have mainly been a men's domain. Nevertheless, women's seats kept increasing, particularly in the Lower Chamber, from 48. 8 % in 2003 to 63. 8 % in 2024 (Gender Monitoring Office 2019; IPU 2024). The following paragraphs discuss the different factors underlying the increase in women's seats and their resilience to men's power or patriarchal norms in post-genocide government.

2. 1 Women's organizations as the arena of solidarity and political competitiveness

Women's organizations have been regarded as critical to advancing the rights, solidarity, and empowerment of their members. Based on this assumption, Rwanda's women organized themselves as a strategy to advance their leadership capacities.

Rwanda's women's solidarity was rooted in the late 1990s during the Liberation War by the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), the national ruling party, after the end of the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994. During the battles by the RPF (1990-1994), women played an important role; they fought alongside men, carried guns, braved the enemy, actively participated in peace talks between fighters, and mobilized the resources needed for the liberation struggle

(Burnet, 2008). Their involvement in the Liberation war was a milestone in their post-war solidarity and the fight to advance women's rights as political actors.

When the genocide had ended, and the RPF took power in July 1994, it recognized women's bravery, to which was attributed 25. 7% of the seats in the Lower Chamber (by nomination) in the transitional government; that is, between 1994 and the elections in 2003 (Akanga, 2007; Mutamba, 2005). Holding such strategic positions, women served as role models, which also helped develop confidence among other women and opened up possibilities for increasing women's roles in decision-making. Furthermore, during this period, women politicians worked together as the first step toward forging solidarity and unity among themselves. They created different organizations that served as platforms to facilitate the exchange of ideas and collaboration between different groups of women.

Examples of women's organizations in Rwanda are namely:

- The Unity Club, which is a forum for top women leaders and spouses of top leaders in government, aims to create unity among the top women who are able to spread a message of unity and reconciliation throughout communities.
- Forum for Women Parliamentarians (FFRP), whose primary mission was to facilitate the unity of female members of parliament, irrespective of their political parties, to deal with their challenges as women. As highlighted by the women parliamentarians whom we interviewed through this forum, they accomplished different roles aimed at amending discriminatory laws and examining the proposed laws using a gender-sensitive lens.
- The National Women's Council was also created as an administrative structure and platform enabling women from the grassroots level to the national level to influence the policy arena. Thus, they have representatives in political entities from the cell (the lowest administrative entity) to the national level via the National Women's Council.

Our research participants underlined that the synergy of these organizations is the main site for women's meetings and exchanges in the push for changes in policy and legal frameworks. In particular, the National Women's Council coordinates meetings and training of ordinary women from various backgrounds with those who are in top leadership positions. Here, the emphasis is mainly on the younger generation, both girls and boys (in schools), to reinforce their leadership skills and enhance the transformation of gender knowledge regimes that underpin patriarchy.

2. 2 State commitment or the political will: the back-born of women's success in leadership position

To understand the reasons that justify the success of Rwanda's women in their political battle over the past 30 years, it is important to reflect on the political support they have enjoyed from the government, especially the President of the Republic himself, who always recognized the role of women in the battle during the liberation war as well as in the reconciliation process. In his own words, he always underlines that, "Rwanda has chosen to give women value in order to support the development of our country." As women constitute the majority of the population; for him, occupying political positions is not only a right like other citizens but also natural (Powley 2005).

As underlined above, in Rwanda, women have historically been predominantly confined to the domestic sphere, while men have monopolized the public and political spheres. The political regimes in Rwanda that preceded the 1994 genocide were characterized by a discriminatory policy based on gender and ethnicity, which reinforced women's discrimination in politics and the decision-making process (Debusscher and Ansoms 2013). However, post-genocide leadership took women's involvement in politics as an opportunity for sustainable development in the country; and gender equality became a political priority. The government immediately embarked on policies and legal reforms to eliminate the existing discriminatory measures against women.

To start with, it is worth noting that Rwanda is a signatory to different international instruments which uphold women's human rights. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Platform for Action adopted at the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) (Gender Monitoring Office 2019; Powley 2003). In line with these frameworks, the government expressed its commitment by granting at least a 30% quota for women in all decision-making as enshrined by the Constitution of 2003 and revised in 2015. To achieve this, the government established different strategies including an electoral system known as "triple balloting" that is at the district level. The system aims to include women and youths, two groups that were previously excluded from political leadership. This electoral system allows women to win more seats in the local government (District, Sector and Cell levels) as well as in the Lower Chamber (Powley 2003).

This is because each voter is allowed to vote what is called a general candidate, a woman candidate and a candidate for youth. Thus, one, two or three female candidates can be selected depending on the sex and age. This means that a young girl can vote for the general candidate (representative of all categories of the population), the youth candidate, and the female candidate. Women vote for the general ballots and women's representatives, and so on. Consequently, the system provides more chances for women to win more than 30% of the seats as they can compete and win on 2/3 of the three ballots compared to their counterparts, who compete only on 1/3. As a result, the number of women in the Lower Chamber has been incrementally increasing from 48. 8% in 2003, 56. 4% in 2013, 64% in 2018, and 63. 8% in 2024 (IPU 2024). For all these years, the total number of seats in the Lower Chamber of Rwanda's Parliament varied between 70 and 80 members, both women and men, and the reserved seats of 30% were between 21 and 24 seats. This indicates that women could compete with men, and won more seats than the reserved seats.

When she was asked about what might be the reason why the number of women kept increasing particularly in the Lower Chamber, one of the participants in this study, who was a member of the Women's Council at the district and entered the Parliament later on, underlined that, "an electoral structure of triple ballots in parallel with the National Women's Council constitute the key pillars underlying a tremendous and continuous increase of the number of women in post-genocide leadership positions at all levels (local and national)." She noted that, even if men now are there and they are also competitive, the political system through which the government opened the door for women in politics is solid; and once women are there, they prove to be effective leaders, which increases the trust of the community (Interview with a female member of the Lower Chamber, Kigali; June 2024).

2. 3. Does women's political representation in Rwanda have a future?

As described above, women's solidarity and the government's political will are regarded as key factors underpinning women's political participation and the increased number of female candidates in the Lower Chamber. In line with this, however, one can raise questions about how this progress is sustainable, whether gender normativity rooted in patriarchy has been transformed, and how young girls can empower themselves to take the lead in future.

While interviewing female parliamentarians on the sustainability of women's political leadership in Rwanda, their common argument was that its future relies on two elements: the conducive political environment resulting from the legal and policy reform enhanced since the transitional period; and the continuation of women's empowerment or the interrelation between those who are in leadership positions and young girls.

For almost 30 years, women in decision-making positions have fought for legal reforms that would support women's rights, emancipation, and empowerment. As reported by the Gender Monitoring Office (2019), the following are the key policies or legal frameworks initiated in the last three decades to enhance the promotion of

women and gender equality:

- The Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda of 2003, revised in 2015, enshrines the principles of gender equality and women's rights; and provides for a minimum of 30% quota for women in all decision-making organs.
- Girls' Education Policy 2008: The overall objective of the Girls' Education Policy is to guide and promote sustainable actions aimed at the progressive elimination of gender disparities in education, training, and management structures.
- National Gender Policy 2010: This policy envisages setting Rwandan society free from all forms of gender-based discrimination; and creating an environment in which both men and women equally contribute to and benefit from national development goals.
- National Policy against Gender-Based Violence, 2011: The overall objective of the policy is to progressively eliminate gender-based violence by developing a preventive, protective, supportive, and transformative environment.
- Law No. 43/2013 OF 16/06/2013 Governing Land in Rwanda: Similar to inheritance, land reform in Rwanda supported women and men in having equal rights and enjoyment over their landed properties. Thus, both men and women have land titles registered in their names, which has facilitated women's access to loans from financial institutions and their engagement in income-generating activities.
- Law Nº27/2016 of 08/07/2016 Governing Matrimonial Regimes, Donations, and Successions: In 1999, a gender revolution, especially in terms of equal accessibility to and management of family patrimony, was realized through the law on matrimonial regimes, donations, and successions, which was later revised in 2016. The law states that boys and girls have the same right to inherit property from their parents.

Although women have different needs and interests (as they are not a homogeneous group), such legal frameworks and many others that cannot be enumerated here have shaped their benefits from their representatives. Furthermore, as some female politicians interviewed noted, the success of this policy change increased trust in women as effective leaders in the community and in a conducive socio-political environment. On the one hand, this has a great impact on the gender norms from which their leadership has been undermined, especially when they hold a top position or when they have to confront their male counterparts. On the other hand, it boosted the intrinsic role modeling by women politicians vis a vis the young girls or those who want to enter the political career. In addition, via their political structures, such as the National Women's Council, women politicians collaborate with civil society organizations (especially those involved in promoting gender equality) to offer different training to young women (in schools) to enhance their interest in politics as well as the leadership capabilities for those who start their political careers.

Conclusion

This study attempted to answer two main questions, namely:

- What justifies Rwandan women's resilience to male dominance embedded in patriarchal norms and values; and how they managed to dominate decision-making bodies, particularly the Lower Chamber?
- Why does Japan trail the rest of the world in terms of women's political representation?

To answer these questions, this study attempts to describe the historical battle of women in both countries, their successes and failures, and the factors that explain each side of the coin. For Rwanda, the paper pointed out different factors, such as women's solidarity, the government's political will in promoting women and gender equality, a conducive legal framework, and the empowerment of women at different levels, which contributed to the success of women's leadership and the increase in their seats in decision-making bodies. This study ascertains that the same

factors ensure the sustainability of women's political participation in Rwanda. Although that country remains a patriarchal society, the involvement of women in top leadership positions constitutes an entry point for the transformation of gender knowledge regimes that underpin patriarchal or male dominance.

While Japanese women fought for political rights in solidarity before the Second World War, after it they enjoyed the right to vote and worked together on other important issues rather than increasing their number in politics. Women interested in political issues looked for male politicians who seemed to share their views and voted for those male politicians. Why does Japan trail the rest of the world in terms of women's political representation? Looking at the case studies of the Saga and Okinawa prefectures, we found that, in Japan, there is not enough political leadership in the central government and political parties to achieve gender equality. Political parties have also disrupted the solidarity among female politicians. There is still a strong belief that there is no need for women to stand together because men can represent the former's opinions and interests. However, most importantly, Japanese women are not having solidarity across the country to abolish patriarchal norms. It will take a long time to change the patriarchal mindset of conservative Japanese people; hence, political leadership for gender equality is needed.

Endnotes

1）The National Diet of Japan has an upper house, the House of Councillors, and a lower house, the House of Representatives. See the website（https://www.sangiin.go.jp/eng/, https://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/index.nsf/html/index_e.htm）. This section focused on the House of Representatives.

2）Not all women, including female politicians, want to abolish the patriarchal norms in Japan. Some women use the patriarchal norms to keep their status.

3）The second highest figure is 11. 3%（2009）.

4）To enforce married couples to have the same surnames is not the tradition in Japan. Civil law which required the couples to have the same surnames was enacted in 1898. Now a couple who wants to marry legally must chose husband's or wife's surname, and more than 90% of couples choose husbands' surname. Recently, even the Japan Business Federation（*Keidanren*）strongly urges the government to introduce the selective system to keep separate surnames for married couples.

5）In 2024, among 146 countries, while Japan ranked 118th with a score of 0. 663, France ranked 22nd with a score of 0. 781, and Italy ranked 87th with a score of 0. 703. The situation is improving very slowly in Japan. Japan ended Child Marriage in 2022. Until March 2022, boys could marry at age 18 and girls at age 16, with the consent of their parents. In March 2018, Japanese government decided to revise the civil code. The minimum age of marriage at 18 for both women and men had been set in April 2022.

6）As the case of the Maria Luz incident（1872）showed, women from poor families were sold and worked as prostitutes, and there was a strong class stratification in Japan at that time. Owing to space limitations, the situation of women in all classes is not mentioned in this section.

7）In these districts, female heads of households who had paid taxes could vote until the central government of Japan enacted the new law in1884, which allowed only male heads of households who had paid taxes to vote for district assembly members（The Secondary Study Group for Revitalizing Local（Town and Village）Assemblies 2016）.

8）As an opinion leader, Raicho launched a feminist magazine, "Bluestocking（*Seito*）." See the website（https://www.ndl.go.jp/portrait/e/datas/380/）.

9）Fusae served as a member of the House of Councillors from 1953 to 1971, and from 1974 to 1981（5 terms, 25 years）. See the website（https://www.ndl.go.jp/portrait/e/datas/506）.

10）Although these women's movements showed the women's solidarity at that time, female socialists, including YAMAKAWA Kikue, criticized it because they believe that male political leaders used women's suffrage to lure these women（called petit bourgeois women）on their side（Tatewaki 1957; Yamakawa 2011）.

11）A new electoral system for House of Representatives was introduced in 1996. Members of the House of Representatives are elected through a system of single-member constituencies and proportional multi-member constituencies. Since then, the

proportional representation has helped to increase the number of women in Parliament.

12）For example, the bipartisan organization, the Diet Women Club（*Fujin Giin* Club）founded in 1946 by ICHIKAWA Fusae, who could not be a candidate because of the purge by GHQ mentioned before, was collapsed because female politicians of Japan Socialist Party withdrew from it（Ogai 2005）.

13）Once the author interviewed a female politician, who was a member of political party. She said that a male member of that political party told her, "You should not be in solidarity with female politicians from other political parties. It is not good for male politicians if female politicians stand out."

14）In France, all parties are required to nominateequal number of male and female candidates. If parties present less than equal numbers for the National Assembly, they will be imposed a financial penalty for violations.

15）Political parties are listed in descending order according to number of seats.

16）The number of women in local assemblies in Saga Prefecture increased from 24（6. 0%）in 2013 to 44（12. 0%）in 2022（Saga Prefecture 2024）.

17）For example, the Koza Uprising took place in 1970. See the website（http://www.peace-museum.okinawa.jp/yogawari/us/testimony/r413/#Contents-7）.

18）In 1995, a 12-year-old girl was kidnapped and raped by three US service personnel. Approximately 70% of US military bases concentrate in Okinawa, and sexual assaults against women and girls of Okinawaby US military personnel have not ended until now. See the website（https://apjjf.org/2016/11/takazato）.

19）In 1999, it was renamed *Okinawaken Joseidantai Renraku Kyogikai*（*Jyodankyo*）. A total of 22 women's organizations joined it（April 2024）.

20）Interview with some female leaders in Okinawa, September 12, 2024

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女性の政治参加と家父長制の規範：なぜ日本はルワンダよりジェンダー“後進国”なのか

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戸　田　真紀子

〈要旨〉

本稿の目的は、ルワンダと日本がともに家父長制社会であるにもかかわらず、なぜ前者では女性の政治参加が進み、後者では進まなかったか、という歴史的・政治的背景を明らかにすることにある。日本とルワンダは、その歴史にも国の規模にも大きな違いがあるが、ともに戦争や大量虐殺といった「危機」を原因として、女性が社会の担い手になる時期があった。ルワンダ・日本両国の女性議員などへのインタビューを通して明らかになったことは、女性の連帯と政治的指導力の有無が、両国の状況の違いを生み出したことである。日本の戦後は1945年以降であり、ルワンダのジェノサイド後は1994年以降である。日本における女性の政治参加については、戦後初の衆議院選挙で39名の議員が当選したものの、大選挙区制から中選挙区制に、（２～３名の）制限連記制から単記制に変更されたことが大きく影響し、政治参加の進展は阻まれてしまった。家父長制社会の価値観を否定するための女性の連帯がなかったことも大きな要因である。他方、ルワンダの女性の連帯は、ルワンダ愛国戦線の結成時にさかのぼる。ジェノサイド終結後のルワンダ社会では、さまざまな女性団体が活動を始め、特に若い世代（男女を問わず）に対して、リーダーシップ教育を行い、ジェンダー意識の変革を促した。草の根レベルから国政レベルまでの女性の連帯が生まれた。さらには家庭、地域から国家レベルまでの「再建」に寄与したことで大統領から評価、支持を獲得し、新しい法律の制定や制度の構築に支えらたことで、ルワンダの女性たちは、政治の担い手としての場所を男性に明け渡すことはなかったのである。ルワンダにおいては、現在の女性リーダーが次の世代の女性リーダーを育成することに力をいれていることも特筆すべきことである。

キーワード：女性、政治代表、家父長制、日本、ルワンダ

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