

Alienated, independent and female: Lessons from the Japanese electorate

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Abstrak

Analyses of past national election studies have categorized male independents as alienated and strategic, while women independents are apolitical and apathetic. These same analyses led to a wide acceptance of the strong relationship between resource mobilization and changes in political attitudes and voting behaviour. This paper revisits this early characterization of women voters to assess the extent to which increased access to education and economic resources since the late 1970s has narrowed the gap between men and women, producing equal rates of men and women independents who are alienated and strategic. This effort is of particular importance given the increasing pool of unaffiliated voters within the Japanese electorate, with the proportion of women who are unaffiliated exceeding that of men. My research reveals that resources do not explain as much of the variation in political attitudes in the late 1990s as they did 20 years earlier. This finding demands that we re-evaluate widely accepted predictors of women's voting behaviour to offer explanations for why our observed outcome departs from what theory would lead us to expect. More immediately, attitudes held by this important segment of the electorate highlight important strategic choices for Japanese parties.