Discussion of:
“Empowering Women Through Radio”

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Can sustained exposure to US-influenced JBC radio content affect political and family decisions?

Focus on 1946-1952 outcomes, after which private media competition emerged.
Main takeaways

Effects of wide-reaching radio programming:

• Increases women’s political participation (initially).
• Increases the vote share and election of women candidates.
• Reduces women’s fertility.
• (Doesn’t affect marriage or labor force participation.)

Argues that this reflects norm shifts.
A lot to like!

Lots of interesting data.

Clever identification of access to radio.

Robustness checks anticipating most concerns.

Quantitatively large (and hopeful) empowerment effects.

...ultimately, an important addition to literatures on:

- Influence of foreign/“liberation” mass media content (Armand et al. 2020; Garcia-Arenas 2016; Peisakhin and Rozenas 2018), albeit in less competitive environment.

- Women’s electoral mobilization (Brule and Gaikwad 2021; Cheema et al. forthcoming; Chong et al. 2018; Goyal 2022; Prillaman 2021), but far more macro.

- Determinants of fertility decisions.
Main comments

1. Empirical strategy.
2. Isolating content effects.
3. Community or elite driven change?
4. Is this really norm change?
Empirical strategy I

- Residualized field strength
- Radio subscription
- Post-WW2 content

SR outcomes
Empirical strategy II

Importance of temporal variation could come through more.

- Similar to Adena et al. (2015): radio content switches.
- ...diff-in-diff with causal cross-sectional effects?
- ...restricts potential exclusion restriction violations.

Can outcomes be more local? – administrative district level is only required for the first stage.

More predetermined covariate balance checks would be good, including for differential pre-trends.
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Could you exploit geographical sources of differential exposure to particular content (that wouldn’t affect radio subscription)?

- Differences in timing of (re)broadcasts across Japan?
- Differences in local structure of the day affecting content consumption, e.g. conventional lunch times, (women’s) commute length, men’s return times?
- Differences in local program advertising?
- Differences (and changes) in relatability/relevance of program content, hosts, etc.?
Community or elite-driven change?

Current story: radio $\rightarrow$ mass norm shift/belief updating $\rightarrow$ mass behavior?
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Current tests don’t fully dismiss this, but could do more:

- Emphasize that prefecture ($\approx$ electoral district) FEs leverage differences in behavior for a given set of candidates, and thus holds common features of candidate “quality” fixed.
- Identify districts where women candidates came from $\rightarrow$ test for effects on number of locally-sourced (district-matched) candidates.
Is this norm change?

Missing a theory of (prescriptive or descriptive) social norms:

- Is behavioral change driven by social sanctions, desire to conform to national identity, behavioral complementarities?
- Spatial dynamics: *national* identity + norm spread explains declining turnout differential, but why do/should fertility differentials not decline over time (after taking longer to materialize)?

No direct or indirect evidence of changing second-order beliefs.

- More educated being more responsive \( \neq \) no learning.
- Can surveys show second but not first order belief change?
- Changes in gendered costly behaviors?
- If prescriptive norms, is there evidence of sanctions in local newspapers etc.?
- Areas where social sanctions/incentives are strongest?
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