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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Populism and the print media: the case of Japan

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Abstract

Japan has experienced many of the factors associated with populism, but has not experienced an upsurge of populism in national-level politics. We posit that the dominant frames in the Japanese print media coverage of populism form a crucial and overlooked part of the explanation for the absence of populism. Our qualitative human-coded analysis of quality and tabloid coverage demonstrates that overall, the Japanese newspapers act as gatekeepers and set an agenda that is unfavorable for right-wing populism. The press engage in 'media populism' and frame populism – and alternatives to the status quo more generally – as a threat. Moreover, the print media are not hostile to immigrants in ways that populists could leverage.

Key words: Agenda-setting; populism; print media

1. Introduction

Populist movements have surged spectacularly across many parts of the world in recent decades. Some of these movements experienced a brief flash of popularity and then declined, whereas others managed to embed themselves into the existing political landscapes. Understandably, given their success, academic studies tend to focus on why populism – particularly right-wing populism – has emerged.

Japan, in contrast, seems to be immune from this wave since no populist movement has been successful on the national stage.[1] Although to be sure, this is a hotly debated issue that rests on the definition of populism: commentators do label some national and regional politicians as populist, but as discussed later, this is entirely dependent on the highly contested definitions of populism that have been developed in and outside Japan (see also Hijino, 2020). This paper uses one of the standard definitions of populism, rather than one that relies on Japan-specific understandings of populism, in order to allow cross-national comparison.

Why is Japan such an outlier when it comes to national-level populism? Comparative studies imply that both leftist and rightist populists benefit from similar opportunity structures and cross-national research has identified individual-level 'demand-side' and aggregate-level 'supply side' factors to explain the rise of populist parties, leaders, and movements. Demand-side explanations focus on why citizens are attracted to populism: some researchers emphasize the role of economic grievances that political and economic crises, such as post-industrialist economic restructuring and globalization, produce (Kriesi, 2018). Others focus on feelings of displacement or nativist attitudes linked to immigration levels (e.g., Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008) or on the motivations for individual-level populist attitudes, including the framing mechanisms that can activate populist attitudes (Bos *et al.*, 2011; Akkerman *et al.*, 2014; Spruyt *et al.*, 2016). 'Supply side' explanations emphasize the strategies of

[1]We contextualize our case study of one case, selected on the dependent variable, against a background of theories developed from the study of other cases.

populists, such as their positioning, institutional barriers to entry, and the media-driven creation of a 'populist zeitgeist' (Mudde, 2004; Hameleers and Vlienenthart, 2020).

Previous research on Japan has stressed the absence of demand-side factors that presumably reduces the demand side. These include low levels of immigration (Zakaria, 2016); the absence of wealth disparities; low levels of nativism due to the comparative lack of cleavages coupled with low levels of unemployment (Noble, 2017); the social dimension of class being muted in East Asia, leading to the absence of class-based ideological frameworks (Hellmann, 2017); protectionist trade policies (Lind, 2018); and a combination of institutional constraints, organizational barriers, and ideational issues prevent 'populist' local politicians from developing their local success (Hijino, 2020).[2]

However, changes in all of these factors suggest that they provide a partial explanation for the absence of populism in national politics in Japan. Two decades of repeated recessions have given way to – at best – sluggish growth, stagnant wages, and fluctuating unemployment rates. Immigration too, is increasing, trade policies have liberalized, and disparities in wealth distribution have widened. Moreover, the salience to voters of policy preferences and framing of enemies – the 'ideational issues' that Ken Hijino (2020: 249) describes – does change over time and these issues need not be limited to narrow sectors of the electorate. Yet populism has not taken hold.

As Rob Fahey and his coauthors accurately note (2018: 1), some of the contestation over the term and its emergence in Japan arises from the parallel development of literatures on populism. But this is not simply differences in 'Japanese and Western literature,' as they imply, since there is scant agreement on how to define populism in either of these literatures. In addition to which, media, political actors', and popular usage of the term differ. In this paper, to allow cross-national comparison, we do not use Japan-specific definitions of populism that focus on theatricality and outsider status (Otake, 2003). Instead, we rely on definitions developed outside Japan: populism is people-centered and politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) (that should not be constrained); and that the sovereign people oppose the status quo in which (corrupt) elites govern (Taggart, 1996: 32; Kitschelt, 2002; Mudde, 2004; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012: 8; Spruyt *et al.*, 2016; Hellmann, 2017).

In addition to the relevance of some supply and demand factors, most research on Japan has overlooked the role of the media. We argue that the dominant media frames in press coverage of populism and of public issues form one crucial and overlooked part of the explanation for the absence of populism. Analysts claim that some European media, particularly tabloids and private broadcasters, provide a favorable stage for populists and their ideas (Hameleers *et al.*, 2017; Hameleers and Vliegenthart, 2020) in the ways that they frame leaders and represent refugees and migrant groups. Even though some differences exist across European media, and between tabloids and midmarket newspapers (Blinder and Allen, 2016), overall, they tend to opt for common representational patterns (Eberl *et al.*, 2018).

In contrast, we argue that the Japanese print media contribute to a zeitgeist that is unfavorable to populism by using the term 'populist' as a pejorative term. This 'second-level agenda-setting' ('how to think about' issues) has broader implications: the media apply the term to particular politicians, policies, and administrations that offer an alternative to the status quo by denigrating them as populist. In doing so, the media, rather than taking a neutral stance, provide support for establishment politics since many of their targets for criticism are non-establishment actors and policies but they are not actually populist in mainstream academic understandings of the term. Moreover, we show that the Japanese print media do not sensationalize immigration, an issue that populists leverage, to the extent that European tabloid media do, instead they offer a variety of alternative frames. In other words, in Japan, the print media help maintain the status quo by (i) disparaging alternatives to establishment politics and (ii) offering alternative frames to the anti-immigration frame that rightist populists could leverage. We do not claim that the median voter uses either the term or concept of 'populism'

[2]Our focus in this paper is national politics (much research has already looked at the strategies of local 'populist' politicians, but for sure, content analysis of regional media coverage remains a fruitful avenue for research).

as a heuristic, only that the newspapers use the term pejoratively and in doing so provide a negative framework for understanding political actors and policies.

The media engage in what Benjamin Krämer (2014) describes as 'media populism' (as distinct from political populism). Krämer theorizes that the media circumvent politics and appear to speak directly to and for 'the people.' To do so, the media make the audience forget that media are organizations and that they entertain close relationships to political institutions, instead presenting themselves as mouthpieces of public sentiment in order to gain populist appeal. In common with European media populism, Japanese media purport to describe political phenomena from a neutral standpoint, but Japanese print media populism departs somewhat from Krämer's theory in that they are pro-establishment, framing establishment politicians and policies as typical and natural (this contrasts with the oppositional character that Krämer assumes European media take). To do so, the media use categories that are close to the assumed knowledge of the 'common people,' presented by the Japanese media not as a 'real life' antidote to the knowledge of elites alienated from the everyday world, as is the case in Krämer's formulation, but to demonize challenges to elite politics. In this sense, the Japanese print media are the antithesis of Krämer's assumptions that the media are prone to assuming an anti-institutional attitude.

We posit that media support for the state stems from the consensus that formed during the postwar era that prioritized economic growth. The postwar national consensus prioritized economic growth and powerfully conflated the requirements of rapid growth with the interests of the individual, placing a strong emphasis on working cooperatively and consensus. Yamakoshi Shuzo (2019: 7) makes a similar point, adding 'peace' to economic development and claiming that these national goals functioned to stabilize society since all members of society came to support these (see also Steel, 2019). The media system produced news content in this environment contributing to, and reinforcing, these values through news production and consumption (see Yamakoshi, 2019: 7). Media frames of populism thus tend to be non-polarizing, informing, and mobilizing public opinion within the established conservative framework.[3] This overall consensus trumps the ideological differences between the newspapers (and the television news networks to which they have strong links). Although this consensus seemed less certain as the economy faltered during the 'two lost decades,' as we shall see, the media were still wary of alternatives to the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) government. The diverse frames afforded public issues may, in addition, be partly due to (i) an enduring distrust of right-wing populism given Japan's authoritarian legacy and (ii) ownership structures that have not concentrated in Japan in the ways they have elsewhere (Nakamura *et al.*, 2016) (this concentration facilitates the dissemination of populist messages) (Blassnig *et al.*, 2019).

To explore our propositions, we analyze news frames of the 'populism' from 2009 to 2019 in selected progressive and conservative 'quality' newspapers; one weekly news tabloid, and three of the most widely read of the major daily tabloid sports newspapers. We selected these dates to cover the period of Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) rule. We then turn to a case study of media framing of a leftist populist, Yamamoto Taro and his party Reiwa Shinsengumi (known as Reiwa).[4] We assumed that the news media would report in line with their political stances, and progressive media would be more negative than the conservative media since Reiwa's rhetoric fits well with progressive media narratives on 'precarious' lives and growing inequality.

Our research fits with the wealth of research on populism that suggests that a single factor does not explain the emergence or success of populist movements, instead, recent work attempts to move us from attempting to identify a 'winning formula' to specifying a conceptual framework that includes the many factors that are conducive to populism and understanding the interplay between supply and demand-side factors (Mols and Jetten, 2020). Rather than a 'competing variables' approach to

[3]Laurie Anne Freeman claimed that the media are 'coconspirators' with the state, benefiting from close ties with official news sources (Freeman, 2000: 21).

[4]Reiwa won just over 4% of the vote which translated into two seats in the Upper House election only a few months after it was founded in 2019.

populism, we examine the environment, or zeitgeist, in which populism has failed to flourish (see also Berman, 2021).

This paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 outlines how supply side factors have changed whereas populist support has not correspondingly changed. Section 3 examines Japanese media choices within the context of theories of media and populism developed in Europe. Lastly, our case study of Yamamoto Taro shows that he fits with mainstream definitions of populist, in contrast to other politicians and policies described as such, his newspaper coverage has mainly been more positive from progressive than conservative media as he is a leftist populist and the issues on which he focuses fit with some progressive media frames.

2. Changes in the demand and supply sides of populism in Japan

Analysts claim that specific factors impede the growth of populism in Japan, but since these factors have changed, this implies that they are necessary, but not sufficient explanations for the absence of populism in the country. The '*globalization losers* thesis,' for example, suggests that individuals who lose out due to the processes of globalization and concomitant political change constitute potential populists (Kriesi *et al*., 2006). In Japan, public policies somewhat alleviated the effects of economic restructuring and globalization, contributing to, but not fully explaining, the low levels of latent populism. During Japan's high and moderate growth periods, this was certainly the case. Trade barriers in both the agricultural and industrial sectors protected the domestic economy, keeping employment rates high (Pempel, 1998).[5] Combined with social provision that was introduced during the 1970s, this meant a large underclass of unemployed or precariously employed did not emerge.[6] Particularly since the state 'upheld the social compact of extending benefits to dislocated workers,' lowering incentives for people to support populist leaders (Lind, 2018: 53).

Most of the protectionist trade policies and subsidies to domestic agriculture have been abolished (although some *de facto* protections remain; Lind, 2018: 66–67). For sure, the Japanese unemployment rate, at 2.8%, remains below that of all but one of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, particularly three of the four large continental countries (France, Spain, and Italy) (OECD, 2020a, 2020b). Despite these low levels, the rate has varied over time and Japan's 'Employment Ice-Age' caused much anxiety – but no upsurge in populism – even when the rate of change was steep.

Japan's postwar growth was quite egalitarian, leading some commentators to claim that this explains the absence of populism (Funabashi, 2017; Buruma, 2018). But contemporary Japan is neither more egalitarian nor more wealthy than countries in which populism has emerged. Japan can no longer claim to be a bastion of egalitarianism: wealth in Japan is not equally distributed. The Gini coefficient for Japan, at 0.339, is not especially low (OECD, 2020a, 2020b). And although the increasing proportion of elderly people contributes to the higher Gini coefficient, other measures show that Japan does not do comparatively well in the egalitarian stakes: the overall poverty rate, 0.157, is fairly high. The large proportion of the elderly does not explain this: the poverty rate of citizens of working age and below (65 and under) demonstrates that Japan is no outlier (OECD, 2020a). Regional inequality, too, is marked (Toyoda, 2013; Song, 2015). Moreover, wages are stagnant, leaving Japanese workers earning below the OECD average (OECD, 2020a, 2020b).

Other commentators assume that Japan's low immigration rate impedes the growth of populism (Zakaria, 2016). However, while Japan still has comparatively very low levels of non-Japanese residents, this is changing rapidly (Strausz, 2019; Liu-Farrer, 2020). Before the COVID pandemic, the

[5]A further contributory factor was that firms treated women workers as a low paid, flexible workforce (Brinton, 1993) that could pick up the slack in boom periods and be laid off easily during a downturn – a 'buffer' for the male permanent, lifelong core employees.

[6]State provision was augmented by corporate provision and women's labor in the family caring for children and elderly relatives – 'housewife welfare' (Estévez-Abe (2008) labels this social provision organized through companies 'functionally equivalent' to welfare state provision).

inflow of the non-Japanese population to Japan had increased rapidly during the previous decade (the Japanese increase was the sixth highest among all the OECD countries, regardless of population size) and analysts point to rate of change as potentially destabilizing. In terms of raw numbers alone, was the fifth highest of legal migrants (519,700) among all the OECD countries in 2018 (OECD International Migration Database, 2021). Particularly given the rapid rate of change, immigration to Japan, at least by itself, does not explain the absence of populism in the country.

Despite the increase in immigration, Japan is still ethnically and racially more homogeneous than many other countries. This, combined with the still-powerful myth of Japanese homogeneity, contributes to a lack of perceived threat – cultural or economic – among the majority. There is no groundswell of people who feel their social identity has been threatened by globalization. In Flanders, for example, populism is most strongly supported by 'stigmatized groups who face difficulties in finding a strong social identity' (Spruyt *et al.*, 2016), whereas in Japan, cultural polarization is limited; relatively few people feel that 'society is broken' or 'feel like a stranger' in their own country (Noble, 2017). In other words, there is little perceived threat to the majority's sense of 'normative order.'

The evidence does not support the views that the public favors the nativist movement or that the public opposes immigration (Lind, 2018: 67; Higuchi, 2020). In fact, Japanese people are more tolerant toward immigrants on a number of different measures than is the average for the other 26 countries in a recent Pew Global Attitudes Survey (2018).[7] Japanese people believe most immigrants want to assimilate (this resonates with more in-depth research on the Netherlands and the UK that shows a widespread consensus that cultural and social indicators of integration are the most important in immigration attitudes) (Sobolewska *et al.*, 2017). Even after the rise in immigration, only 13% of Japanese think fewer immigrants should be allowed: most people (58%) feel that immigration levels should stay about the same as they are now, according to the Pew Global Attitudes Spring Survey (2018). Framing the question slightly differently yields more agreement: 85% supported encouraging highly skilled people to immigrate and work in Japan (Pew, 2018).

Right-wing populism often, although not necessarily, pairs with xenophobia. Populists may be able to mobilize some of the 13% who oppose more immigration around anti-immigrant or anti-minority sentiment since feelings are complex: although most people don't oppose immigration, just under one-third of Japanese would not want immigrants for neighbors (according to the World Values Survey in 2019). But when Sakurai Makoto, a non-populist xenophobe tried to mobilize around nativist sentiments, he was fairly unsuccessful.[8]

Potential support for rightist populist parties in Japan is partially undercut by LDP economic policies and because LDP politicians already give voice to their views. On the first point, the LDP is a redistributive party that has distributed largesse to a wide variety of constituents (contributing to the LDP's longevity). Redistribution continues to cushion citizens from the various negative impacts of globalization, undercutting potential support for populism. The infamous public infrastructural projects, for example, continue to provide employment in the regions, alleviating rural wealth disparities. In some countries, economic restructuring prompted mainstream parties to move to the center of the ideological issue space in order to maximize their vote from the expanding middle class. Thus, individuals who were left behind economically also became inadequately represented by mainstream parties. The convergence of the mainstream parties around the median position left open a 'competitive space' that could be successfully exploited by non-mainstream parties or leaders (Kitschelt and McGann, 1997; Evans and Tilley, 2017). This includes populist parties of the left and right since

[7]Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Netherlands, Nigeria, Philippines, Poland, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Tunisia, UK, and the USA.

[8]His nativist group, *zaitokukai*, temporarily garnered support but after its collapse, Sakurai only managed to win 114,171 votes in 2016 Tokyo Gubernatorial Election. He then founded the Japan First Party (Nippon Daiichito) (JFP) which failed to attract much support (Higuchi, 2020). The Anti-Immigrant Day and marches they organized on 14 October 2018 failed to attract many people and were met with larger numbers of counter-protesters. Similarly, the National Party of Japan (*Nihon Kokuminto*), a small xenophobic political group has only managed two seats in local assemblies.

populists voice the concerns of the economically and politically left-behind individuals who are vulnerable in this system (Kitschelt, 1994; Mudde, 2007; Lind, 2018).

In Japan, on the other hand, although the main political parties have similarly converged around the position of the median voter (Kabashima and Steel, 2008) this did not open up a competitive issue space that populists could exploit since LDP representatives have a fairly broad range of ideologies. The party manages to crowd out the emergence of potential rightist populists on potential 'wedge' issues such as nativism. The University of Tokyo Asahi Shinbun Survey of Politicians (UTAS) (2017) shows, for example, that LDP representatives are split on the issue of whether Japan should push for 'foreign workers' to be admitted, with the majority – 58% – replying that they cannot say either way (almost 28% agreed or leaned toward agreement and almost 10% opposed or leaned toward opposing) (see also Strausz, 2019: chapter 6). While it is true, as Ken Hijino points out, that neither the LDP nor other mainstream parties espouse 'radical Right xenophobia, economic nativism, and disengagement from international institutions' (Hijino, 2020: 238), various high-profile LDP politicians do make racist and nationalist comments. This, and a restrictive immigration policy, signals to right-wing and nationalist voters that the LDP has their interests at heart. Even setting aside the racist 'gaffes,' as Ken Hijino notes, LDP rhetoric is generally 'tough' on immigrants, particularly illegal immigrants and 'law-breaking foreigners' (Hijino, 2020: 258). Moreover, as Higuchi Naoto (2020) claims, although nativist movements criticize the ruling right-wing establishment, they are actually an ideological 'detachment force' of the establishment in terms of the historical revisionism some sectors of the establishment promote.

The diversity of opinions among LDP representatives enables the party to crowd out the emergence of potential leftist populists, too. They have done so through longer term redistribution, as mentioned earlier, that mitigated the emergence of a large underclass. And since public spending is often an arrow in left-populists' quiver, the LDP's considerable increases in public social spending since the early 1990s compounds this (Steel, 2022). Virtually no LDP representatives (4%) support the idea of small government with lower levels of public provision (UTAS, 2017).

Besides this, Japanese citizens have a mixed bag both of populist attitudes and attitudes toward public issues that populists could potentially leverage. On one of the core populist components, antagonism toward elites, Japanese attitudes are similar to attitudes in the other countries in the sample. In total, 55% of Japanese feel that politicians are corrupt and 64% feel that elected officials don't care what people think (Pew Global Attitudes Spring, 2018). Only 40% of the population is 'satisfied with the way democracy functions,' placing Japan on the low side of the countries in the study. As scholars point out, however, distrust and dissatisfaction with democracy or with the political status quo can constitute a breeding ground for populism, but these attitudes are not direct measures of populist attitudes (Norris, 2005; Mudde, 2007). At the same time as citizens express dissatisfaction with politics, there is still a broad satisfaction with the economic situation. Despite real-wage stagnation continuing to be a problem and starting salaries for young people particularly low, a full 44% of adults think the current economic situation is good (compared with a mere 2% almost two decades ago) (Pew Global Attitudes Survey, 2018).

Other attitudes that may function as latent populist attitudes are also very similar in Japan to the attitudes of other countries in the study, according to the Pew Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey. Japanese feelings of external efficacy are similar: 62% of Japanese feel that no matter who wins an election, things do not change much. These attitudes could form a demand side for populism, given a framing mechanism that activates them. As Taniguchi and Mizushima (2018) argue, the root of populism lies in political alienation, when voters feel that they have no agency or are controlled by politics or democracy. Although they concur that populism is absent in Japan, they argue that it may emerge.

On the supply side, the barriers to entry are quite high. Both the extensive campaign rules and the electoral system[9] may impede the emergence of populist parties to some extent, but despite these,

[9]In Japan's mixed electoral system for the more powerful lower house, over 60% of the members (289) are elected from single-seat constituencies. The remaining 176 members are elected by the Party List system of proportional representation in 11 regional blocs that return between 6 and 30 members depending on the region's size and population.

many new parties have formed. And while it is true that the costs of developing nation-wide grassroots infrastructures are high, this should not be insurmountable, if the demand side is high.

3. Print media frames of populism and public issues

Despite these levels of latent populist attitudes and dissatisfaction with politics among the population, there has been no successful, wide-spread populist movement in contemporary Japan. Short-lived insurgencies that tapped into the reservoir of citizen dissatisfaction with politics – from both inside and outside the LDP – have existed. As have regionally based populist movements, such as Ishin no To (the Japan Innovation Party and its precursors the Osaka/Japan Restoration Association), but these have as yet failed to translate their support into broad nation-wide movements.

One crucial missing part of the explanation of why populism has not emerged is that the Japanese print media set an agenda in which populism is unattractive. This contrasts with the agenda that the European media set, either in general (Mazzoleni, 2014; Manucci, 2017) or through frames that vary by a newspaper's ideological lens (Zappettini, 2019). Much of the research tends to paint broad-strokes pictures of the relationship between populism and the media and analysts link, or even partially blame, the mediatization of politics to the success of populism in Europe (see Mudde, 2004; Krämer, 2014). This is due to the increased competition and commercialization in which news media compete over readers and viewers and tabloids in particular do so by focusing more on 'entertainment, simplifications, personalization, spectacular events, and scandals' (Hawkins *et al.*, 2017: 270). Since populist movements are often led by charismatic leaders who use provocative rhetoric and focus on emotive issues, this draws tabloid coverage. The ensuing personalized, entertaining, frames attract further attention to populists, and this coverage aids their rise (Mazzoleni, 2014). Leaders increasingly adapt their communication style and message to gain coverage and thus a reciprocal 'hybrid media system' has developed (Chadwick, 2013). Although this logic particularly affects tabloid media who reward sensationalist, entertaining leaders with coverage, quality media, too, are not immune to this.

Research has identified various ways that the media have aided the rise of populists. Mazzoleni (2003, 2014), one of the most prominent researchers in the field of media and populism, claims that the tabloids and quality media in Europe play two distinct roles in aiding the rise of populists. The 'quality' media are critical of populists, but this criticism inadvertently helps populists since it reinforces the 'us' and 'them' narrative that is a core component of populism. This criticism thus turns the media into 'powerful, if unwitting, allies of populist leaders' (Mazzoleni, 2003: 2). However, the tabloids cover populist leaders and public issues in sensationalist ways to appeal to sections of the public (Mazzoleni, 2003, 2008; Stewart *et al.*, 2003; Esser and Stömbäck, 2014). In contrast, other research finds that both tabloid and quality newspapers are negative toward populist parties (Kusters, 2017). Still others point to the tabloid media as one factor that helps explain the rise of anti-immigration sentiments which aids right-wing populists, particularly the media frames of refugees and economic migrants and of immigrant criminality (Couttenier *et al.*, 2019; Diehl *et al.*, 2021) or terrorism, or presenting immigrants as a threat to cultural identity and an economic burden (see Eberl *et al.*'s (2018) literature review of European media effects).

Japan has experienced some similar trends in mediatization as Europe, but most Japanese media have not reacted similarly. The Japanese quality ('establishment') newspapers and tabloids set an agenda that is unfavorable for populism. The media do not think that potential populist leaders or issues resonate with their readers, viewers, or advertisers. Much research assumes populist ideas must resonate with the public to be influential to the media (Wuttke *et al.*, 2020); we extend this assumption to suggesting that a reciprocal relationship exists between the media and readers, rather than the more passive media–public relationship that is implicit in much media-effects research.

The Japanese quality print media attempt to act as establishment gatekeepers by framing alternatives, not just populism, but alternatives to the establishment more broadly, in negative terms, thus

echoing Massoleni's claims that the media employ discursive devices to neutralize threats. Within this overall agenda, some differences do exist among the newspapers.[10]

Although we expect a diverse coverage of issues that populist leaders might leverage, we hypothesized that the conservative media either negatively frame or do not cover issues that fit with a leftist-populist agenda, such as immigration whereas the more progressive media are more likely to cover these issues positively. We are not attempting to identify a single variable, but to consider the ways in which media contribute to the zeitgeist. Although it is intellectually appealing to provide a parsimonious explanation for political phenomena, as others have argued, understanding the causes of populism – or lack thereof – requires embracing complexity (Mols and Jetten, 2020; Berman, 2021). Instead of attempting to identify a single explanatory variable, we point to the roles of the print media, and argue that in Japan, the print media do not exacerbate the demand side or connect the demand and supply side of populism, as happens elsewhere.

We do not analyze social media or television news in this paper, but the logic that underpins media frames – the interplay between newsworthiness and the construction of political messages shapes how campaigns are managed (to gain coverage) – extends to social media and to television news (Engesser *et al*., 2017; Mazzoleni and Bracciale, 2018). Particularly when campaigns directly use television and newspaper clips in their social media feeds and politicians use social media to generate controversy (see Hijino, 2020). And in turn, print media refer to campaign performance on social media ('Shoha no hen "Reiwa" "N-koku" ga hirei giseki kakutoku, seito ni henshin [A strange pairing! Reiwa and N-Koku win proportional seats and become political parties],' 2019).

4. Data

To analyze media framing of the term 'populism' we began with a search for the term populism (*popyurizumu*) between January 2009 and September 2019, to cover both the DPJ's term in office and the advent and first election of Reiwa Shinsengumi. We excluded all references to populism outside Japan. To analyze quality print media, we selected two national newspapers, the progressive *Asahi Shimbun* and the conservative *Yomiuri Shimbun* (Takagi, 1989; Kaneko, 2018).[11] These two newspapers have the largest circulation of the national newspapers,[12] enabling us to analyze the coverage that a large portion of the population consumes and trusts.[13] Among the tabloids, we selected the Shukan Shincho,[14] a mid-market weekly tabloid magazine, and one of the widest-read weekly tabloids (JMPA, 2008) that publishes sensationalized and infotainment-style news articles, including political news and gossip.[15] We also selected three of the more widely read of the major sports newspapers: the Nikkan Sports (known as the Nikkan), Sports Hochi, and Sankei Sports (known as Sansupo) ('Supo-tsu shinbun hikaku [A comparison of sports newspapers],' 2018). The sports newspapers mostly cover sports but devote a few pages to tabloid fare, such as entertainment, leisure, semi-naked photographs of women, and infotainment-style news articles.

For the case study, we focused on the period between April 2019 and September 2019, reflecting the founding and first election of Reiwa, since the public rely on the media for coverage of new parties, this period is crucial for first impressions. Here, we analyzed all articles that mentioned Yamamoto or Reiwa, regardless of whether they used the term populism.

[10]Our findings thus contrast with previous researchers who argue that membership in the press clubs, the exclusive groups of journalists formally attached to institutions such as the prime minister's office, party headquarters and ministries, decisively influences how journalists frame the news (Freeman, 2000).

[11]Accessed through *Kikuzo* II and *Yomidas Rekishitan*.

[12]The circulation of the Yomiuri's morning edition is 7 million and the Asahi's is 4.6 million (Asahi Shimbun Media Business Department, 2022; Yomiuri Shimbun Media Data, 2022).

[13]Japanese people still consider newspapers to be a reliable news source, awarding newspapers 69 out of 100 points in research conducted by the Japan Press Research Institute on Reliability (2018).

[14]Accessed at the Kyoto Prefectural Library.

[15]Accessed through Factiva.

4.1 Method

Both authors inductively coded the content of the articles from the 'quality' newspapers and then counted the frequencies of our codes into a quantified measure (in other words, we quantified qualitative data) (see Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007). We then identified five sets of inductive codes based on emergent themes in the articles (see Appendix A). Through this coding, we identified the following frames:

(i) a negative framing of populism as a general concept (with 10 codes) (directed toward politicians, to voters, or from politicians and other (e.g., 'fight against populism')
(ii) populism used as a specific criticism of people, policies, parties, administrations, and elections (five codes)
(iii) denying that specific people or policies are populist (e.g., 'there was no populism in the 2009 election')
(iv) a positive frame (e.g., 'populism is listening to people')
(v) other (e.g., 'Single Member Districts lead to populism')

For the case study of Yamamoto Taro and Reiwa, we identified *negative, positive, and other* codes (see Appendix B). The *positive frames* were:

(i) audience and audience affective response (perceptions from journalists) (e.g., the size of the crowds, how touched the listeners were)
(ii) direct quotes from citizens (including their direct affective response) (e.g., 'he's transmitting our anger and pain')
(iii) votes and support (e.g., 'he can do this much with only two seats')
(iv) Yamamoto's communications skills (e.g., 'like a conversation at a town meeting'
(v) other

The *negative frames* were:

(i) personal criticism of Yamamoto (e.g., 'irresponsible')
(ii) electoral loss
(iii) lack of support
(iv) other.

We first coded the content of the articles, compared codes, and then refined the codebook. This resulted in substantial agreement ($k = 0.8$ and 0.95, depending on the section), as measured by Cohen's inter-rater reliability statistic. Cohen's k was adopted to gauge the trustworthiness of our findings because it is a robust measure of inter-rater reliability of qualitative, categorical data. One of the authors and a research assistant used the same method to analyze the tabloid articles.

5. Findings: how the quality media frame 'populism'

Our findings show that the quality newspapers use the term 'populism' in various ways but they are mostly pejorative (Figure 1). We identified a general negative frame that uses populism as a concept that spans a continuum ranging from framing populism as 'pandering' to the public to dangerous mob rule. The general negative framing is a warning that is directed toward politicians, to voters, and from politicians (see Appendix A). This fits with Krämer's (2014) description of European media engaging in 'media populism' independently of any populist movement, circumventing the political system, and appearing to speak directly to 'the people' (Krämer, 2014: 49).

In the last decade, for example, the most common code within the negative framing in the quality print media was the 'reject populism' code. In total, 52% of those messages were directed toward politicians, many from ordinary citizens, the media thus appearing to transmit the sentiment of the

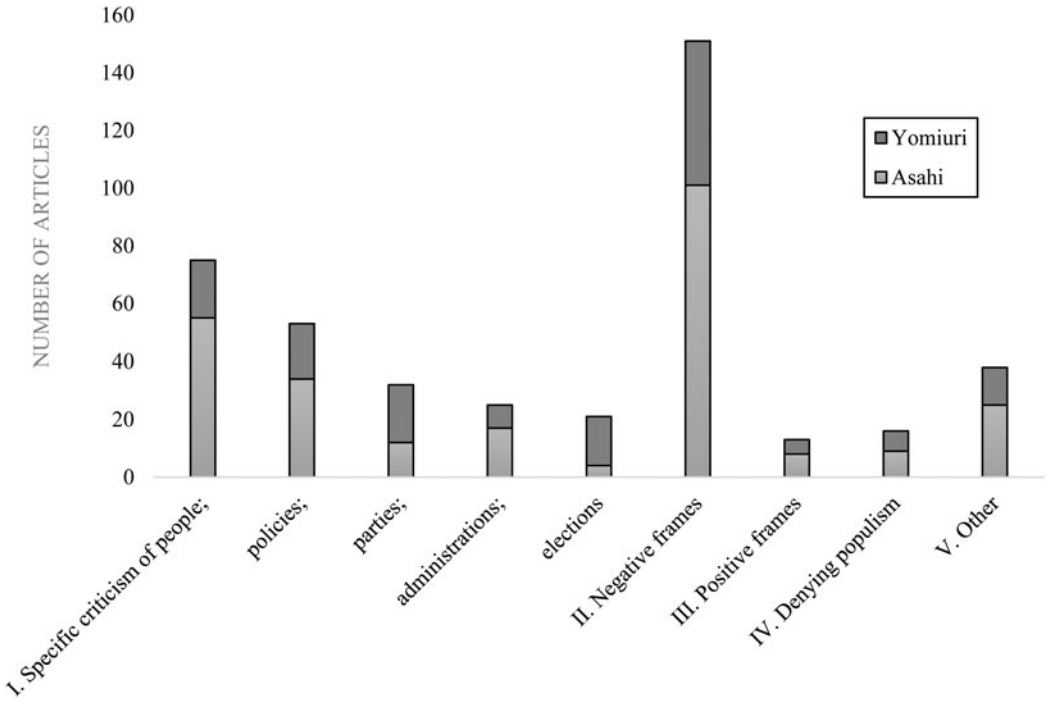

Figure 1. How the established print media frame populism 2009–2019.
Source: Asahi Shinbun (accessed through *Kikuzo* II) and Yomiuri Shinbun (accessed through *Yomidas Rekishitan*).

people. These frames were more common in the Asahi than in the Yomiuri, sometimes with the implication that populism is authoritarian populism and at other times, simply to dismiss a role for popular opinion in governance. In 2012, for example, the Asahi Shimbun published a 60-year-old businessman's hopes for the political system, 'I hope for a long administration [for the new prime minister], that does not opt for populism' ('The next choice [Tsugi no senko ha],' (2012). Similarly, the Yomiuri quoted one voter's concerns, 'I would like to vote without being swayed by populism' ('Kiryu 10 gatsu toka [9 October Reader's Letter],' 2017). A further 25% of the articles quoted politicians communicating their anti-populist stance directly to the public, such as that of Tsutomu Kuwazuru, an LDP Kagoshima Prefectural Assembly Member: 'I would like to discuss politics in an appropriate way, not descending into populism' ('Jiminto no gekidan [LDP Prefectural Assembly],' 2017). Fourteen articles contained 'struggle against populism-type' messages that were directed to voters.

Compounding this overall negative frame are frames of populism as a contemporary problem in Japan (used more by the Asahi than the Yomiuri), others that claim populism may emerge in the future, and that populism is a danger. Both newspapers framed populism like this, with the Yomiuri, for example, claiming, 'if populism delays appropriate policy decisions, this will greatly damage the economy' ('Chikyu wo Yomu: Heisei no Keizai Baburu Kouisho Kyokun no 30 nen,' 2019) and 'Economic growth leads to income disparities. This makes society unstable and populism takes over, which is a big problem and creates widespread unhappiness' ('Kaibou Zaikai [Dissecting the business-world],' 2019).

According to Krämer (2014), in this kind of reciprocal relationship, tabloids in particular take up the role of a political actor and pick up popular sentiments, in an attempt to maximize their own political influence and audience appeal, often via tactical, rather than a consistent behavior (Krämer, 2014: 50). Krämer also points out (2014: 50) that some authors assume that media logic in general is conducive to populism by 'fostering a sentiment of crisis, insecurity and social tensions.' Our

findings imply that Japanese tabloids and quality media behave somewhat differently than the European media: Japanese media do foster a sentiment of crisis, but the targets are alternatives to the establishment that are framed in a negative way, and in doing so, they show their commitment to the existing institutions and to maintaining the status quo.

This diffuse negative baseline frame forms a powerful environment for more specific, targeted use of populism as a criticism. The most common specific ways that the print media used the term populism was to criticize *particular individuals, parties, governments, policies, or elections* and the Asahi did this more often than the Yomiuri (Asahi: $n = 122$ to $n = 84$). Fitting with the Asahi's progressive stance, the people the Asahi most commonly targeted were rightist, regional politicians, although Koizumi Junichiro was high on the list (see Appendix A).

As were Hashimoto Toru (20 as opposed to 8) and Kawamura Takashi (10 as opposed to none) (see Appendix A). This lack of consistency in targets does seem to be an attempt to maximize their own political influence and audience appeal. As Ken Hijino notes, the local politicians who are described as populists all entered political life as outsiders (2019: 242) and present themselves as such.[16] Both newspapers used the term populist to label outsider-type politicians, although the Yomiuri did this much less across the board, including for LDP politicians and for rightists. One Yomiuri article on Hashimoto, for example, claimed that he, 'has always set goals that are not easily achievable and makes enemies as he fights against them. It can be called populism with a very strong element of demagoguery' ('Ronten Special: Nihon Ishin no Kai,' 2012). In doing so, this framing reflects Ikeda Nobuo's (2016) critique that 'Japanese-style populism' amounts to politicians irresponsibly pandering to public opinion and avoiding political decision-making on challenging issues. But it is also indicative of media populism whereby the media frame popular policies as irresponsible.

Denigrating outsider politicians and their ideas as 'populist' increases the difficulty they encounter in developing their base. The regional politicians often described as populist have not been able to develop their support networks beyond their regional bases. They benefit from media coverage, but at the same time, media frames undermine their positions. Particularly within the national ideology outlined earlier that stresses the importance of consensus and 'homogeneity.' While commercial media logic tends to prefer drama and conflict, the drama and conflict supplied by populists do not sit well with overall conservative consensus frames.

Koizumi Jun'ichiro is the most prominent national politician who was frequently disparaged as a populist. But media frames of Koizumi were not straightforward and he did benefit from other media frames and salience (Kabashima and Steel, 2007, 2008). Koizumi was occasionally described as a populist, but more often when he was running for LDP leadership, he was described as a reformer, an advantageous label when the same newspapers considered reform a necessity (with little debate over the appropriate kind of reform). By constructing reality in this way, the media primed citizens for the necessity of a reform-minded leader and necessity for reform became virtually a consensus issue: to be popular, politicians had to be reformists. Koizumi argued for a new approach to intransigent political and economic problems that only a 'reformist' could handle. The press agreed, portraying him as someone who could bridge the gap between the public and the LDP and reinvigorate its popular support. Crucially, Koizumi earned favorable coverage at a time when the LDP's survival was threatened and succeeded in positioning himself in the media as the solution to the LDP's declining popularity. The newspapers, in particular, framed the leadership election as a way for the LDP to regain the trust of the public: support for the 'outsider,' was in fact encouragement to the LDP to reform itself (and stay in power). This echoes Ellis Krauss' argument that the media criticize the state, but that this criticism helped maintain LDP dominance by ensuring that the LDP responds to changing public opinion, as expressed through the media, even if the response is sometimes belated (1996: 360).

[16]Recall that Barr (2009) convincingly argued, 'outsider status' should not be conflated or used interchangeably with 'populism.'

The Asahi described various policies as populist, but anti-nuclear power policies topped their list ($n = 9$) whereas the Yomiuri only described those once as populist. Newspaper use of populism in this context does not fit with previous work that demonstrates that the Asahi advocated denuclearization whereas the Yomiuri opposed it (Abe, 2015). Although note that frames changed over time (Weiss, 2020) and the print media published many articles, both opposing and supporting, nuclear power, without dismissing reform as populist. Various political finance reforms topped the Yomiuri list ($n = 9$).

Krämer also claims that the media exert symbolic power via the representation of society; this seems an apt description of how the Japanese media use the term populism as a specific critique. Although departing from Krämer's (2014: 49) formulation of media populism as anti-establishment, the Japanese media dismiss non-establishment politics as if establishment politics were typical and natural. The media certainly gave some favorable coverage to the DPJ, but this was not constant, as when the quality newspapers criticized the DPJ as populist. Lending weight to our hypothesis of the pro-establishment slant of the quality press, this framing did not break down entirely according to the newspapers' political slants. If so, the progressive Asahi would have been more supportive of the DPJ, but we found little evidence for this in terms of applying the 'populist' label. Both newspapers criticized the DPJ, DPJ administrations, specific DPJ leaders, and elections as populist (Asahi: $n = 18$ and the Yomiuri: $n = 24$). After the demise of the DPJ, the number of articles that mentioned populism dropped to six in the next 5 years (2014–2018) whereas the coverage of populism outside Japan increased considerably after 2015. This term was only rarely applied to the LDP, its politicians, administrations, or policies. The few times it was applied to LDP leaders, as noted, it was mostly used to critique outsider-type politicians, such as Koizumi.

The media overwhelmingly use populism pejoratively, but we did find 13 articles framed populism positively and these referred to populism as a general concept. Positive frames included a mention of 'policies that satisfy everyone' as populism by Masashi Mori, a candidate in the Toyama city mayoral election ('Toyama shicho-sen Kohosha no yokogao [Toyama City Mayoral Election. Candidate Profiles],' 2017).

Turning to the tabloids, some of the common tabloid frames of populism differ from those of the quality press.[17] Among the common tabloid mentions of populism in the Shukan Shincho were reviews of books on populism that frame populism negatively, which again, set a negative baseline for the term.[18] The Nikkan Sports frames were most similar to frames used by the quality press, but their mentions of populism were mixed. We expected that as a progressive outsider administration, the Nikkan would extend more favorable frames to the DPJ administration, but we found that this was not entirely the case. The Nikkan quoted politicians and commentators as a means to criticize DPJ policy as populist (anti-nuclear policy); a DPJ strategy (polling party members); and other politicians. Reflecting the conservative political stance of its parent company, one Sankei Sports article referred to populism in Japan negatively, describing the elections the DPJ won as 'stupid populist elections,' ('Kokuzoku gi-in wo haijo seyo [Oust Treacherous Politicians],' 2013). Sports Hochi's articles were a review of a book on Hitler and populism in South Korea.

6. Coverage of public issues

Repeated coverage of public issues that populists could leverage sets the issue agenda. It does so by rendering these issues easily accessible for individuals, since they are recent in memory and more likely to be retrieved (Zaller, 1992). The Japanese print media do not consistently frame the issue of immigration and immigrants with the levels of hostility that some European media do (Plasser and Ulram,

[17]We excluded very brief mentions of populism when they were not part of the article, such as authors' biographies whose previous books framed populism negatively, but note that these, too, were negative frames.

[18]The chapters of *Populism-The true identity of 'demons' that Blanket the World* (Yakushiin, 2017) discuss populism worldwide, including the Nazis, and then discuss populism in Japan (Osaka), before discussing the dangers of populism.

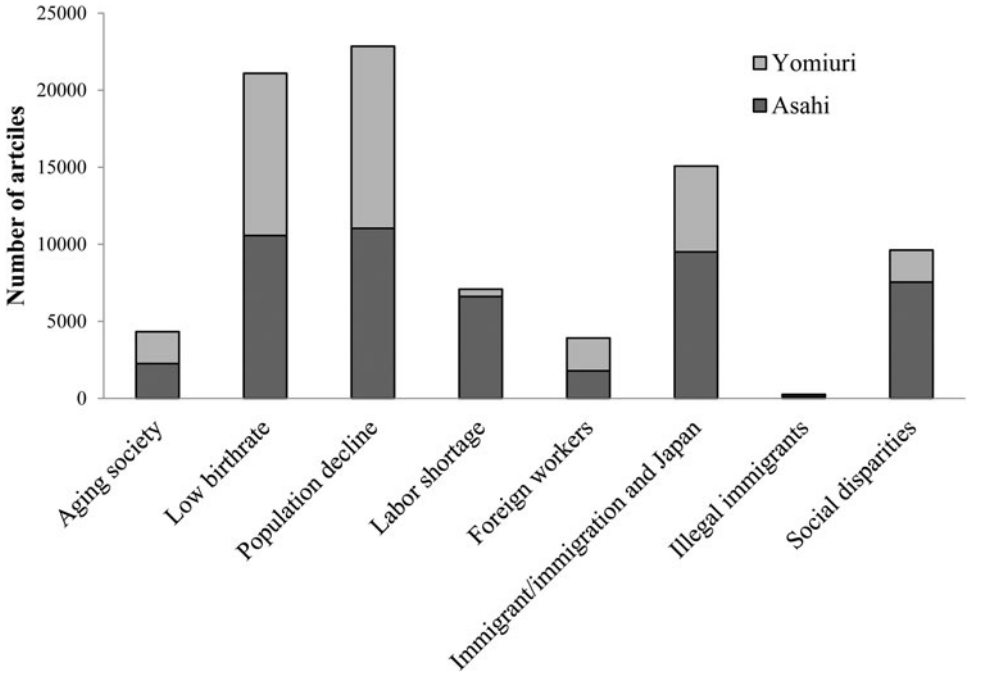

Figure 2. Agenda setting in the quality newspapers (2009–2019). Asahi and Yomiuri Shinbun (search terms: 高齢化社会、少子化、人口減少、労働力不足、外国人労働、移民or入国&日本、不法滞在者、格差 and 社会、不安定雇用).

2003)[19] or frame the increase in immigration as a 'crisis' in the ideologically charged way that some European media do (Krzyżanowski *et al.*, 2018). Instead, the Japanese media highlight various issues related to halting the shrinking population, one of which is immigration. In the last decade alone, repeated media coverage primes the public to think about the aging society and the falling numbers of births. Immigration, labor shortages (much more from the Asahi than the Yomiuri), and foreign workers, immigrants, and immigration are repeatedly covered but importantly, the Japanese tabloids do not typically or consistently frame immigrants as competing for native jobs, healthcare, council (public) housing, or school places (Figure 2). The tabloids published far fewer articles on these public issues than did the quality media (Figure 3) but similarly, although there were some negative frames, their frames varied, and their coverage of immigration was without the vitriol that some of the right-wing European tabloids reserve for immigrants. In practice, the salience of immigration-related topics on the media agenda is often conceptualized as the volume or intensity of reporting, compared to other policy topics (see Eberl *et al.*, 2018). Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate the lack of salience immigrants generally have in the print media. Japanese media immigration frames form part of the explanation for the low salience of populist politicians.

Cross-national studies on this topic conclude that the politicization of immigration is a top-down process, in which governing parties play a crucial role, and is not due to numbers of immigrants entering or levels of unemployment (van der Brug *et al.*, 2015; Grande *et al.*, 2019). Japanese media frames, in combination with the dissensus in opinion among LDP politicians and 'institutional fragmentation' among bureaucracies (Chiavacci, 2017; Strausz, 2019) means that elite cues vary and do not exacerbate immigration as a divisive public issue. This matters because research also shows that citizens respond

[19]Front page headlines in Britain's tabloids claim, for example, that 'Immigrants bring more crime,' 'Migrants spark housing crisis' (19 May 2016), 'They "swarm" on our streets' (accompanied by photographs of immigrants) (31 July 2015). See Gerard (2016).

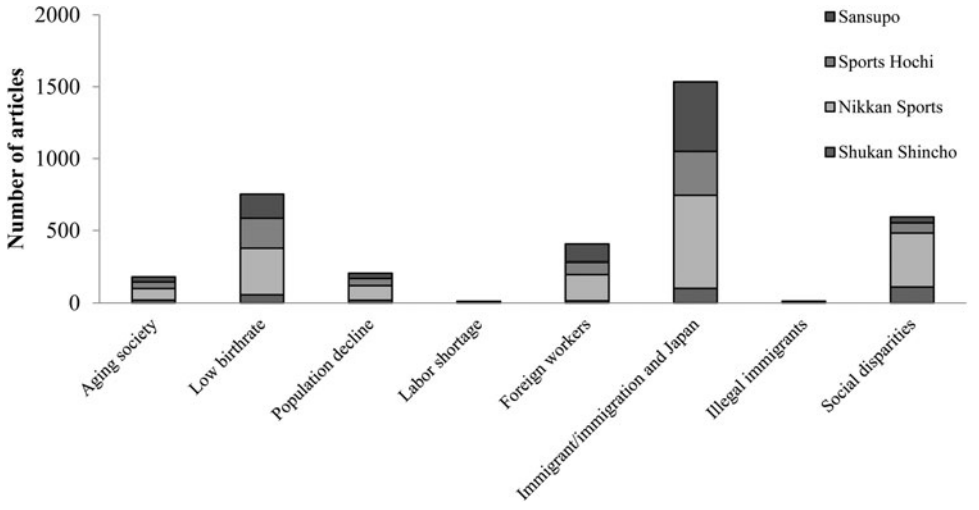

Figure 3. Agenda setting in the tabloids (2009–2019).
Source: Sports Hochi, Sankei Sports, Nikkan Sports, and Shukan Shincho (authors' own calculations).

to immigration information (Van Hauwaert and English, 2019; Goodman, 2021) and that changes in the valence or frame of that information (e.g., cultural as opposed to economic threat) can alter attitudes and policy preferences (Krzyżanowski *et al.*, 2018). The absence of a crisis frame is not simply due to low numbers of immigrants as before the COVID border restrictions, Japan was experiencing a wave of immigration. Although the numbers of migrants in Japan is comparatively low, making a crisis framing somewhat less tenable, the increase over time is steep. Print media coverage reflects the depoliticization of the topic. The low levels of nativist attitudes and the range of opinions among Japanese citizens on immigrants and immigration both shape and are influenced by the diverse media frames. For sure, the Japanese media have framed immigrants and crime together at particular times, for specific nationalities, and for specific cases (Kura, 2001; Matsumiya and Yogo, 2009; Takaya, 2018), but alternative frames are prominent. These include linking crimes committed by non-Japanese to human rights (Chiavacci, 2020). David Chiavacci (2020: 197) shows that after the mid-1990s, the four largest Japanese newspapers, moved toward a frame of foreigner crimes, but at the same time, an alternate frame was also prominent: the supposed 'rising tide of (Japanese) youth violence' (Hamai and Ellis, 2006) as was the 'shrinking population' frame.

7. Case study: Yamamoto Taro and the print media

Given the media's hostility to 'populism,' we could expect them to use negative frames in their reportage of Yamamoto Taro and Reiwa Shinsengumi, but in fact, media framing of Yamamoto Taro and Reiwa Shinsengumi contrasts with previous negative populist frames. Before analyzing the frames in detail, we begin with a quick overview of the key populist elements in Yamamoto's politics. As a charismatic outsider, Yamamoto is the archetypical *populist* leader – not populist in the pejorative way that the print media commonly use, but in the sense that some academics use it. This includes scholars outside Japan and scholars in Japan who offer specific definitions of 'Japanese-style populism' that centralize theatricality and 'outsider' status (see Otake, 2003, 2006).[20]

Yamamoto Taro's rhetoric, image, and style and are in the populist mold. Before entering politics, Yamamoto was a well-known award-winning television and film actor who began acting as a high

[20]Fahey *et al.* briefly mention some of the subsequent work that applies this definition to local-level political figures (Fahey *et al.*, 2021: 3)

school student.[21] After the Tohoku earthquake and nuclear accident in 2011, he started protesting against nuclear power, the energy choice of the establishment. He left his acting career in 2012 and ran for election in July 2013, winning a seat in the House of Councilors.[22] He then established Reiwa in April 2019, the 'left-wing populist party [that] has emerged in Japanese politics,' as Yahoo News plainly states (Ishido, 2019).

Yamamoto Taro and Reiwa pursue classic populist strategies and policies. Reiwa selected candidates with disabilities, sexual minorities, single parents, and part-time workers, immediately distancing the party from existing political elites. While Yamamoto does not use the term class, Reiwa constructs itself as a party in opposition to the elites. Ollie Hellmann argues that in East Asia, people do not discuss the social dimension of class so the populist approach of distinguishing economically marginalized people from the rich elite does not appeal to voters (Hellmann, 2017), but this is exactly what Yamamoto does.

Yamamoto's self-presentation includes direct appeals to 'the people,' and he presents himself as a new political leader looking to change politics. He communicates this directly to the people through Twitter and in-person appearances. Yamamoto's rhetoric is implicitly class-based, since he identifies with the marginalized and the struggling and rejects the political status quo (epitomized in the party slogan 'You are already working too hard. In reality, politics should be working hard for you'). He communicates this clearly through rhetoric and perfomativity: knowing how to work a crowd, emoting – appearing to feel their pain – and drawing his audience in during street corner campaign speeches.

Yamamoto's unconventional style symbolizes his unconventional approach to policies: a mutual reinforcing of style and substance. As Bernard Manin notes, voting on the basis of image is sometimes understood to be superficial and devoid of political content (as opposed to voting on the basis of detailed knowledge of policy proposals), but in fact, images are not free of political content (Manin, 1997: 227). When he sits on the cheaper, unreserved seats on bullet trains, for example, to travel, he is attempting to establish his 'of the people' bona fides (and shedding his movie star image), taking selfies with supporters (that are then shared through social media) (Kimura, 2019). When he wears polo shirts or casual shirts; with his spiked hair, his sartorial style distances Yamamoto from male establishment politicians, who generally wear dark suits. In other words, his sartorial distinction symbolizes his political distinction.

In terms of policies, Reiwa's policy platform includes 'unabashedly populist messages, such as abolishing the consumption tax and immediately halting all nuclear reactors' (Kimura, 2019). Reiwa's policies directly benefit ordinary people, and contrast with current policies enacted by the establishment. Most policies seek to ease the financial burden of the people, echoing the common populist narrative that politics should be an expression of the will of the people. Of the 17 key policies on Reiwa Shinsengumi's website (Reiwa Shinsengumi, 2019), seven directly address alleviating economic hardship (abolishing the sales ('consumption') tax, affordable housing, canceling scholarship debt, and fiscal financial policy) and three others do so by pledging to increase earnings (raising the minimum wage to 1,500 yen in every prefecture, raising wages in the primary sector, and subsidies).

Yamamoto Taro failed to be elected in the July 2019 Upper House election, since he had placed other candidates above himself on the proportional representation list. The newly formed Reiwa Shinsengumi won more than 2% of the entire vote share (Yamamoto, 2019). Two disabled candidates, Eiko Kimura and Yasuhiko Funago, won the election, garnering much media attention (the increased coverage of Reiwa Shinsengumi reflected their entry to the House of Councilors on 1 August 2019).

7.1. Print media coverage of Yamamoto Taro

To analyze how the quality newspapers and tabloids framed Reiwa's emergence onto the national stage, we analyzed articles from the party's founding to the entry of its politicians into the Upper

[21]Yamamoto was a movie star, but his populism is not the 'Movie Hero' populism that Hellmann (2017) claims is common in East Asia.

[22]Yamamoto's People's Life Party & Taro Yamamoto and Friends later became the Liberal Party (he left when the Liberal Party merged with the Democratic Party for the People).

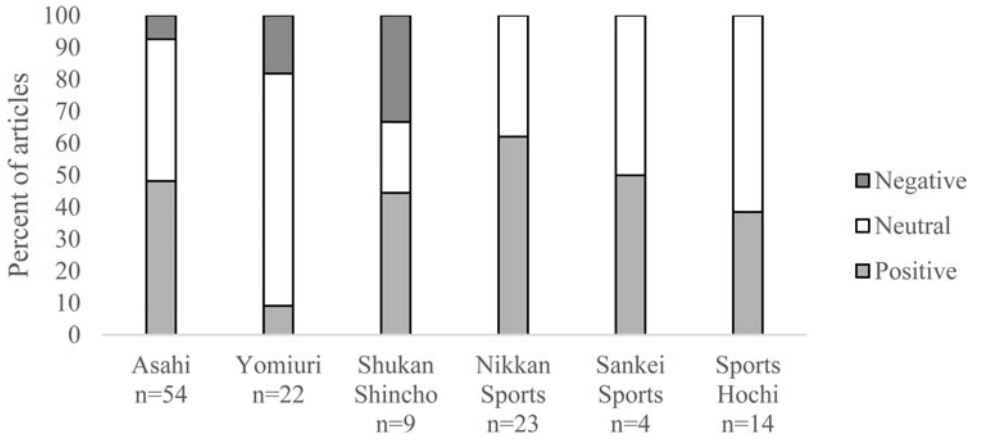

Figure 4. Media framing of Yamamoto Taro (% of each newspaper's articles) (April 2019–September 2019).
Source: Asahi, Yomiuri, Sports Hochi, Sankei Sports, Nikkan Sports, and Shukan Shincho (authors' own calculations).

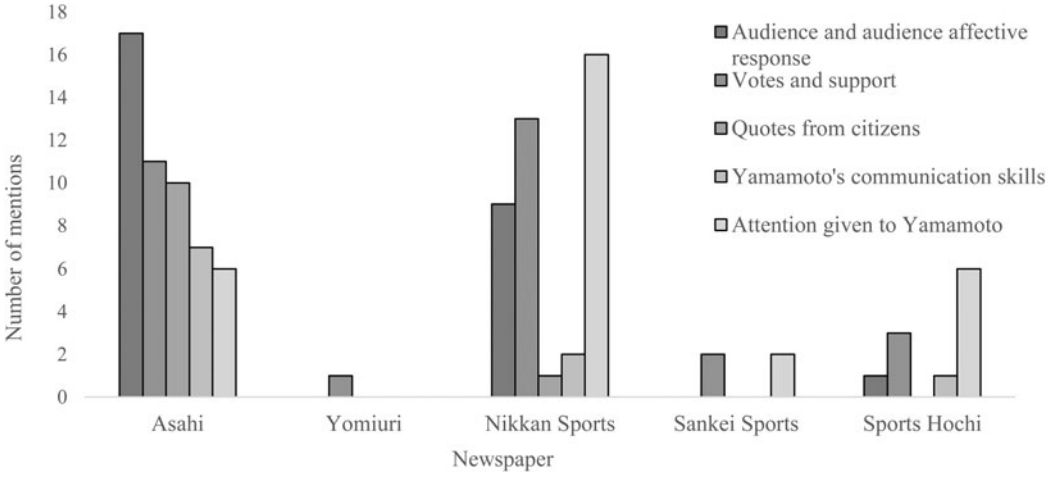

Figure 5. Positive media frames of Yamamoto Taro (number of mentions).
Source: Asahi and Yomiuri; Sports Hochi, Sankei Sports, Nikkan Sports, and Shukan Shincho (April 2019–September 2019).

House after the first election the party fought (1 April to 30 September 2019). As discussed earlier, our inductive method produced five positive and three negative frames (Appendix B).

7.2. Quality news frames

Although Yamamoto Taro fits with some of the standard academic understandings of populists, few articles described him as such. In contrast to the pejorative frames applied to other non-establishment politicians and policies, only 7% of both the Asahi's and the Yomiuri's articles about Yamamoto Taro were negative, most of the articles were either positive or neutral. In line with their political stances, most of the favorable articles were from the Asahi and the Asahi published more than double the number of articles than the Yomiuri. But the Asahi was not completely laudatory since four of the five negative articles were from the Asahi. The Yomiuri Shimbun was mostly neutral, whereas we would have expected the conservative Yomiuri to be more critical (Figure 4).[23]

[23]We coded an article as negative if the number of negative statements outweighed any positive statements and vice versa. Reports of the number of votes gained were coded as neutral, but positive when the number of votes was reported with a positive framing.

Media framing of Yamamoto and Reiwa fits with Krämer's formulation of media populism in which the media attempt to gain populist appeal. Krämer argues that media representation of society – from 'a seemingly neutral and independent standpoint,' presents categories and schemata that are as close as possible to the assumed knowledge of the 'common people,' presented as a 'real life' antidote to the knowledge of elites alienated from the everyday world (Krämer, 2014: 49). The quality media do so in part by including positive comments from citizens, the most common of which were about the audience at Yamamoto's street corner speeches during the 2019 Upper House campaign. The Asahi discussed the large crowds that gathered to hear Yamamoto and their reactions (such as applauding or cheering) and their affective response. Quotes from supporters included, 'I burst into tears,' and 'he is the only person who encouraged me.' And they also include supporters' comments on the votes the party won. Quotes from supporters included, 'a politician for the people,' 'I didn't think there was a politician like him,' and 'a reliable politician.' Yamamoto's communication skills such as communicating with his supporters 'as if he was at a town meeting,' his passion in his speeches, and the attention he was getting were commonly described in glowing terms (Takahisa, 2019). Less common narratives included how he listens to the minority, how he is 'throwing himself out there,' and how he is unlike other politicians.

7.3. Tabloid frames

Our analyses of the weekly tabloid, the Shukan Shincho and the three sports newspapers provide some evidence for our proposition that the political stance of the newspaper, rather than the quality-tabloid distinction, is important. After Reiwa formed, the Shukan Shincho published nine articles on the party. Only two articles used the term 'populism.' In one of these articles, the tabloid quoted a political analyst, Atsuo Ito, describing Reiwa Shinsengumi as a left-wing populist party and claiming that the party's popularity was entirely dependent on Yamamoto: 'Reiwa's destiny depends on how long Mr. Yamamoto's popularity and charisma can last' ('"Sori wo Mezasu" to iu "Yamamoto Taro" no Mohaya Waraenai "Shukinryoku 30 oku yen"! ["Yamamoto Taro" says he "aims for the premiership" – "His ability to raise 300 million yen" is no laughing matter],' 2019). In total, four articles were positive, two were neutral, and three were negative (see Figure 4). Although the number of positive and negative articles is similar, a closer look at each article reveals that the negative articles are much more powerful narratives than are the positive articles.

The positive articles about Yamamoto Taro in Shukan Shincho all focused on the campaign and the July election.[24] Two of the four articles praised Yamamoto for placing Kimura Eiko and Funago Yasuhiko ahead of him on the party list, describing this as a clever tactic (*kisaku*) and describing Yamamoto as generous (*futoppara*) for doing so ('Judgement: 100 Man-pyo no Yukue [Judgement: Whereabouts of 1 Million Votes],' 2019). Yamamoto comprised of a small section of each article. Three contained brief comments about Yamamoto at the beginning of the magazine, with a large picture of Yamamoto and a paragraph of about 250 characters describing the picture. One longer article dedicated one section of a page to Yamamoto, under the subtitle 'Two seats with a clever tactic: Yamamoto Taro taking "a base in Nagatacho" from the LDP' (2019).

In contrast to the more positive, shorter articles, two of the three articles were three-page-long articles entirely dedicated to Yamamoto, titled: 'Special Issue: "the Foolish Choice of the People" making Yamamoto Taro a Typhoon,' (2019) and 'Yamamoto Taro says he "aims for the Premiership" – His ability to collect 300 million yen cannot be laughed at' (2019). The first article begins by describing Yamamoto fairly positively, quoting a professor claiming that Reiwa Shinsengumi was successful because their point of view differed from that of other parties. He also mentions that Reiwa discussed the daily concerns of the people, and offered political solutions, with the article quoting Yamamoto's calls to make life easier in a campaign speech. However, the article goes on to describe at length

[24]These were Lobby: Unique Styles in House of Councils Election ['*Lobby: San-in-sen Sorezore no Ryugi*'] (July 2019), Madonna Candidates: A Heated Fight in the Cool Summe ['*Madonna Koho: Reika no Nessen*' (July 2019), '*Judgement: 100 Man-pyo no Yukue*' [Judgement: Whereabouts of 1 Million Votes] (2019), and Nightmare of the 'Reiwa Democracy' after the Fight ['*Tatakai Sunde "Reiwa Democracy" no Akumu*'] (August 2019).

Yamamoto's protests against nuclear power after the Fukushima Daiichi accident. The article includes a hostile 'person on the street' quote from a woman in her forties doing agricultural work in Fukushima, that Yamamoto 'talked about the vegetables in Fukushima as if they were poisonous' and says 'I will never forget him and never forgive him' ('Tokushu: "Yamamoto Taro" wo Taifu ni Sodateru Ritsuzen "Shugu no Sentaku" [Special Issue: "the Fools Choice" reveals the horror of making Yamamoto Taro into a Typoon],' 2019: 123). The term 'mob rule' (*shugu seiji)* is used multiple times in the article. Under the bold subtitle 'we are worried because it's clear and simple,' a professor, Tadashi Narabayashi, warns against Yamamoto: 'what he says is decent. However, that's why we have to be careful. The truth of Yamamoto is that he is sometimes very extreme. If he takes power, he might be like Hitler or Mussolini' ('Tokushu: "Yamamoto Taro" wo Taifu ni Sodateru Ritsuzen "Shugu no Sentaku" [Special Issue: "the Fools Choice" reveals the horror of making Yamamoto Taro into a Typoon],' 2019). The second article includes another quote by Atsushi Ito: 'Mr. Yamamoto gained so much attention and his past scandals (a child born out of wedlock) can be dug up. How much he can tolerate them will decide the result of the election' ('"Sori wo Mezasu" to iu "Yamamoto Taro" no Mohaya Waraenai "Shukinryoku 30 oku yen"! ["Yamamoto Taro" says he "aims for the premiership" – "His ability to raise 300 million yen" is no laughing matter],' 2019).

As expected, since their main focus is sports, the sports newspapers published fewer articles reporting Yamamoto and Reiwa's emergence and first election. The Nikkan Sports published the most ($n = 23$), and the Sankei Sports the least ($n = 4$) with Sports Hochi ($n = 14$) ranking in between the two (Figure 4).[25] The lack of articles on Yamamoto and Reiwa in the Sankei Sports could be seen as gate-keeping that corresponds with the political stance of its conservative parent company. Note that during the same period, for example, the Sankei Sports published 20 articles on the controversial politician Takashi Tachibana and his party N-Koku ('The Party to Protect the People from NHK,' the public broadcaster).

The tabloids tended to be divided by political stance, with the Nikkan being most positive. Half of the Sankei's articles were positive about Yamamoto, but this only amounted to two articles. Similarly, focusing on the positive frames and the number of mentions within these articles shows that the Nikkan was much more positive (Figure 4). The Nikkan focused most on the attention Yamamoto got, the audience, and votes won. The Sansupo's published few positive frames and Sports Hochi slightly more.

We argue that the print media provide frames that support establishment politics. In this case, the conservative print media ignored or criticized Yamamoto whereas the progressive media were more positive, perhaps not seeing him as a threat (Figure 5).

8. Conclusion and discussion

Japan has experienced most of the factors that are associated with populism elsewhere and at mostly higher rates (with the exception of immigration and unemployment, although both fluctuate and the rate of change is at times steep). In addition, citizens' latent populist attitudes and dissatisfaction with politics are comparable with those of citizens in countries where populism has taken root. But populism has not surged in national-level politics in Japan and local-level populists have not been successful in developing their support to the national level. In part, this is because the mainstream print media act as gatekeepers to populism and do not set an agenda in which populism could thrive. The press frame populism – and alternatives to the status quo more generally – as a threat, using the term 'populist' as 'a synonym for demagoguery, simplistic solutions or opportunism,' echoing the framing of some quality media in Europe (van Kessel, 2015). Moreover, the print media are not hostile to immigrants in ways that populists could leverage. Although there is some negative framing of immigrants, this is not to the same degree of hostility as some European tabloids evince. The salience of the shrinking population in media coverage is prominent, providing a powerful alternate frame that may make immigration more tenable.

[25]We coded an article as positive if it was wholly positive or contained more positive than negative statements and vice versa.

As discussed, media frames stem from, and contribute to, an overall national consensus that stresses the importance of unity. Additionally, Japanese media ownership structures have not concentrated in the ways they have elsewhere (this concentration facilitates the dissemination of populist messages). Japan's history of authoritarianism, too, may make journalists more wary of touting populist solutions or xenophobia. In contrast to claims about the European media, though, Japanese newspapers and tabloids do not play different roles regarding populism. The quality press use the term 'populist' to criticize politicians, administrations, parties, and policies that challenge or threaten the status quo.

Our findings show some evidence of 'media populism,' but these frames varied. The quality media were not especially critical of the left-wing populists Yamamoto and Reiwa. In this case, it appears that the quality media do not perceive Yamamoto as a threat to the status quo so the 'sentiment of the "people"' channeled in this case is fairly supportive, although the frames were somewhat in accordance with the political stances of the respective newspaper; the progressive Asahi and the Nikkan Sports mostly framed them positively whereas the conservative newspaper framed them more negatively.

This is not to claim that anyone the media describes as populist is doomed politically: the print media do not 'control' citizens, rather that they 'mediate' how reality, in this case, *political* reality is depicted and understood, as Lone Sorensen notes (2017: 140). This mediation involves a dialectic between a variety of actors, institutions, and the environments that support them (Couldry, 2008, cited in Sorensen, 2017). The frames offered by journalists are filtered through citizens' other experiences and through their own predispositions. When the print media denigrate political actors as populist, citizens do not adopt this wholesale and reject anyone described as populist, instead, this frame contributes to the overall zeitgeist. Some media-described populists have garnered national- and more particularly, local-level support. But the derogatory way the print media dismiss populism contributes to an overall environment that makes political life harder for media-described populists.

Our findings do not support the idea of all powerful mass media (see also Takeshita, 1997). Nor do we claim that media consistently engage in populism in their own right. As Krämer (2014: 57) accurately notes, we need to refine the concept of media populism to understand when populist media are a substitute for populism in the political landscape, when they contribute to its containment, and in what cases there is a symbiosis or positive feedback between them. In general, the Japanese print media engage in pro-establishment populism and belie Krämer's assumptions that the media are prone to assuming an anti-institutional attitude. Japanese media critiques of establishment politics are often 'supportive criticism,' encouraging the establishment to reform or change (and hold on to power). The Japanese print media generally contribute to the containment not just of populism, but of alternatives to establishment politics.

Data. Pew Global Attitudes Spring (2018).
The UTokyo-Asahi Survey (UTAS) (2017) conducted by Masaki Taniguchi of the Graduate Schools for Law and Politics, the University of Tokyo and the Asahi Shimbun.

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Appendix A: Dictionary – established and tabloid articles on domestic politics using the word 'populism' (1 January 2009 to 30 September 2019)

			Asahi	Yomiuri	Shukan Shincho	Nikkan	Sankei	Hochi
Criticism of a specific person/group/event	People	Toru Hashimoto	20	8		1		
		Junichiro Koizumi	7	4				
		Takashi Kawamura	10					
		Yuriko Koike	6	2				
		Shinzo Abe	5			1		
		Toshihiro Tanigawa	3					
		Ichiro Ozawa	1	2				
		Yoshihiko Noda	1	1				
		Yoshinori Kobayashi	1					
		Yukio Hatoyama, Naoto Kan		1		2		
		Mino Monta	1					
		Masayoshi Taihei		1				
		Yoshihide Suga		1				
	Policies	Political finance reform	2	9				
		Anti-nuclear power, restarting plants	9	1		1	1	1
		Stricter punishment	3	1				
		Financial, tax (incl. sales tax)	6	3				
			5	1				

(*Continued*)

Appendix A: (*Continued.*)

			Asahi	Yomiuri	Shukan Shincho	Nikkan	Sankei	Hochi
		Political reform, incl. direct election of PMs						
		Healthcare	2					
		Relocation of Futenma base		3				
		Public call for manifesto	1					
		Ministry of Finance		1				
		(DPJ) Polling members				1		
		Other ($n = 1$ per policy)	6					1
	Parties	DPJ		12			1	
		LDP	1	3				
		Your Party	2	2				
		Osaka/Nippon Ishin no Kai	5					
		Tomorrow Party of Japan		2				
		Unity Party		1				
		Kizuna Party	1					
		Ishihara's New Party	1					
		People's Life Party						1
		Party of Hope	2					
	Administrations	DPJ	5					
		Hatoyama, Kan, Noda	10	8				
		Hosokawa	1					
		Abe	1					
	Elections	*Seiken Kotai*	2	2				
		National elections (2009, 2012, 2019)	2	4		1	1	
		Gubernatorial and mayoral elections		10				
		Single issue election		1				
Negative frames		(To politicians) Fight against populism	27	13				
		(To voters) Fight against populism	10	4				
		(By politicians) Fight against populism	12	6				
		Recent Japanese politics	28	18				
		Concern that populism may happen in the future	13	4				
		Populism is a danger	3	4				
		We need to change the system to avoid populism	4					
		Emperor system can help stop populism		1				
		Other (scandals, be wary, understand, confusing)	4					
Denying specific cases of populism		No populism in 2009 election		1				
		There is no populism in Japan yet	2	3				
		The SDP is not populist		1				
		Specific people are not populist	2	1				
		Specific policies are not populist	2	1				
		Voters will not be confused by populism	3					
Positive frames		Populism is not necessarily bad	7	1				
		Populism is: listening to people; the base of politics; democracy, satisfies everyone	6	2				

(*Continued*)

Appendix A: (*Continued.*)

		Asahi	Yomiuri	Shukan Shincho	Nikkan	Sankei	Hochi
	We should reconsider what populism is		1				
	Populism doesn't happen easily		1				
Other	SMDs lead to populism	3	10				
	Other factors that lead to populism (referenda, regional politics, online voting, the Internet)	5	3				
	What is populism	10					
	Protest is populism	3					
	Populism and democracy	2					
	The DPJ is against populism	1					
	Democracy is dangerous	1					

Appendix B: Dictionary – positive frames of Taro Yamamoto

		Asahi	Yomiuri	Shukan Shincho	Nikkan	Sankei	Hochi
Audience	Audience size and response	10		3			
	Audience affective response	6					
	He was criticized at first but later his support increased	1					
	Votes, electoral progress	8	1				
	Mr. Yamamoto lost but two candidates won	3					
Quotes from citizens	Emotion-based	5					
	Impressions	5					
	'Politics for the people'	1					
Communication	Conversation, interaction,	7					
	Easy to understand	4					
Attention	Attention	6					
	Yamamoto's/passion, appeasement, trust	8	1				
	Listening to diverse voices	3					
	Other	10					

Appendix C: Dictionary – negative mentions of Taro Yamamoto

	Asahi	Yomiuri	Shukan Shincho	Nikkan	Sankei	Hochi
Personal criticism (attention seeker, performer, irresponsible, a populist, hard to trust, concern)	7					
Lost the election	11	3				
Lack of support	2					
Other	4					

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