

# Winning Elections with Unpopular Policies: Valence Advantage and Single-Party Dominance in Japan

(with Shusei Eshima, Yusaku Horiuchi, and Shiro Kuriwaki)



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## Abstract

An enduring puzzle in comparative politics is why dominant parties exist in liberal democracies and whether their success is because of popular policies or non-policy factors like valence. We consider the preeminent case of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and investigate whether its recent landslide electoral victories can be explained by voters' support for its policies. We first introduce a new measurement strategy to infer individuals' utility for parties' policy platforms from conjoint experiments, and compare this utility to vote choice. The results reveal that many voters support the LDP despite preferring the opposition's policies. To understand what accounts for this disconnect, we then experimentally manipulate party label and decompose its effect, finding that trust is an important non-policy factor motivating LDP voters. Together, our findings support the argument that the LDP's continued dominance is due to its valence advantage over the opposition, rather than support for its policies.

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No Registration Required

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