

The Dictator's Dilemma at the Ballot Box:
Electoral Manipulation, Economic Maneuvering, and Political Order in
Autocracy
A Book Proposal

Masaaki Higashijima*

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Contents

1	Overview of the book	2
2	Contributions and outstanding features	4
3	Chapter outline	6
4	Proposed length	11
5	Intended completion date	11
6	Market	12
7	Competition	13
8	About the author	15
9	References	15

*Associate professor of political science at the Graduate School of Information Sciences at Tohoku University (Sendai, Japan) and visiting research scholar in the Center for Political Studies at the University of Michigan. Email: masaaki.higashijima.d8@tohoku.ac.jp

1 Overview of the book

This book explores the manner in which authoritarian leaders design elections and the impact of those elections on political order in autocracies.¹ After the end of the Cold War, many countries achieved democratization; however, many authoritarian countries still survive in this era of democratization. Observing these resilient authoritarian regimes, comparativists have focused on the roles of political institutions in autocracies (e.g., legislatures and political parties). They argued that these institutions may help dictators to stay in power (e.g., Lust-Okar 2004; Magaloni 2006; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Gandhi 2008; Blaydes 2011; Svobik 2012). Among political institutions in authoritarian regimes, modern autocracies hold elections; however, these are not truly free and fair in various ways. Puzzled by the proliferation of authoritarian regimes with multi-party elections, scholars began to explore the reasons for which autocrats hold elections, ways in which they manipulate elections to maintain authoritarian rule, and the impacts of these elections on the political economy of authoritarian regimes.

Recent studies have indicated three roles of autocratic elections in prolonging authoritarian rule. First, researchers have contended that elections help dictators demonstrate a regime's invincibility to potential opponents (Magaloni 2006; Simpser 2013). Dictators can demonstrate that the regime is unshakable by winning elections while obtaining an overwhelming majority. They can prevent potential opponents from launching coups, defecting from the regime, and leading popular uprisings by doing so. Second, elections may also provide dictators with accurate information regarding the distribution of political support among the population. Election results inform dictators regarding the local popularity of ruling elites, which becomes one of the criteria for recruiting competent and loyal politicians (Blaydes 2011; Malesky and Schuler 2010; Reuter and Robertson 2011). Election results also provide information regarding the distribution of popular support for the regime and the popularity of opposition parties (Cox 2009; Miller 2012), thereby improving the efficiency of governance. Third, autocratic elections may also be useful in driving a wedge in the opposition camp (Lust-Okar 2004). Multi-party elections demand the opposition to decide whether to participate in them; Moderate oppositions may be likely to join regime-sponsored elections while radical

¹In this book proposal, I use authoritarianism, dictatorship, autocracies, and non-democracies interchangeably.

oppositions boycott them, which works as a divide-and-rule device for autocrats.

Although these studies advance our understanding of autocratic elections, they fail to address the following four problems adequately. First, although relatively free and fair elections enable autocrats to reap these benefits, such elections may generate opportunities for potential opponents to challenge the dictator. In other words, further research is needed to explore ways in which dictators design elections given the trade-off between political risks and the benefits of holding relatively clean elections. Second, due to the literature's excessive emphasis on the benefits of autocratic elections, current scholarship does not necessarily identify the conditions under which authoritarian elections backfire on dictators in the form of popular protests, leadership turnover, and the opposition's stunning election victory. In fact, another strand of research strongly suggests that election time also poses serious threats to dictators by provoking coups and mass collective action (Tucker 2007; Knutsen et al. 2016). Third, previous research has focused on the strategies adopted by dictators to manipulate election results and has not considered the relationship among different electoral strategies of dictators (e.g., blatant electoral fraud, institutional manipulation, and the maneuvering of macroeconomic policy). Finally, extant research does not explore the roles of state resources in the form of money and organizations in designing elections under dictatorships. This book project advances our understanding of the origins and effects of autocratic elections by focusing on the distribution of mobilization capabilities between dictators and other political elites.

The book proposes a new theory that illuminates the causes and consequences of autocratic elections by filling the gaps in the literature identified above. My theory of autocratic elections begins with the observation that dictators face a dilemma when designing elections: although manipulating election results through overt electoral fraud and majoritarian electoral systems enables autocrats to “artificially” score an overwhelming victory at the ballot box, those elections lose some of the important benefits that elections are expected to bring to dictators. I argue that under the constraint posed by this electoral dilemma, the extent to which a dictator is able to mobilize popular support through non-coercive means determines the degree to which heavily dictators rely on electoral manipulation. Specifically, dictators with the ability to provide economic rent to the citizenry can garner “voluntary” support from the masses without resorting to electoral chicanery such as election violence, electoral cheating techniques, and the manipulation of electoral institu-

tions. Therefore, dictators with such high mobilization capabilities are willing to adopt election processes that are less fraudulent and adhere to electoral systems with high proportionality. In other words, I suggest pre-electoral methods of deriving public support such as the manipulation of economic policy are a pertinent substitute for electoral manipulation techniques such as blatant electoral fraud and institutional manipulation. Dictators who refrain from electoral manipulation maneuver economic policy to “win big” in elections. My theory also predicts that when autocrats deviate from the equilibrium of autocratic election design in dealing with the electoral dilemma, autocratic elections are more likely to destabilize authoritarian rule via coups, popular protests, and the opposition’s election victory. This provides a response to the puzzle of autocratic elections: when do they unseat dictators?

2 Contributions and outstanding features

This book offers three major contributions to the studies on authoritarian politics, regime change, and electoral manipulation in developing countries. In the contemporary world, holding elections has increasingly become an international norm. Advanced democracies and international society take various measures to help developing countries improve their electoral integrity under the banner of promoting free and fair elections (Norris 2014, 2017). However, burgeoning research on elections in autocratic or mixed regimes provides two different perspectives about the phenomenon. Comparative political scientists of authoritarianism have largely emphasized the dark side of semi-competitive elections in autocracy, arguing that such processes might help autocrats stay in power (Magaloni 2006; Blaydes 2010). Contrastingly, scholars of regime change and international relations (IR) have contended that advancing electoral fairness is a necessary first step for a country to progress with democratization (Lindberg 2006, 2009) or lead to autocratic breakdown (Tucker 2007; Knutsen et al. 2016). IR scholars have argued that the likelihood of a change in leadership increases by strengthening international enforcements for holding free and fair elections (Kelley 2012; Donno 2013). While these studies are invaluable to understanding elections in authoritarian regimes, they do not explain why some elections stabilize autocracies yet others do not. By endogenizing the manners in which authoritarian leaders design elections in the face of the electoral dilemma, my

theory of autocratic elections reconciles these different views concerning elections in autocracy. In so doing, this book project contributes to the study of authoritarian political institutions – one of the most researched topics in comparative politics over the last decade.

Furthermore, scholars have revealed the various types of electioneering strategies that autocrats rely on to extend their rule, such as blatant electoral fraud (Simpser 2013; Little 2012; Rozenas 2016), manipulation of electoral rules (Lust-Okar and Jamal 2002), and pre-electoral distribution of economic favors (Shi and Svensson 2003; Magaloni 2006). However, few studies have considered the relationships among these different electoral strategies. It is reasonable to assume that autocrats should consider the costs and benefits of each electoral strategy and choose an optimal set of election techniques to maximize the prospect of holding onto power. Precisely predicting the electoral strategy that dictators are likely to rely on is invaluable for policymakers. This is because doing so makes it possible to effectively prepare for the likely electoral manipulations dictators use before monitoring elections. This book illuminates the strategies that authoritarian leaders are most likely to use to win in elections, thereby contributing to scholarly discussions on varieties of electioneering under autocracy, in addition to advancing methods for international election monitoring and foreign support for regime transformation in developing countries.

Finally, this book adopts mixed methods to explore the origins and effects of authoritarian elections. First, I conduct cross-national statistical analyses using original datasets of elections in authoritarian regimes, which demonstrate statistical associations among a dictator's mobilization capabilities, various electoral strategies, and post-electoral political conflicts. In so doing, cross-national statistical analyses examine external validity of my arguments. Second, these cross-national quantitative analyses are complemented by various case illustrations that are presented in each chapter of the cross-national analyses. Third, guided by eight months of fieldwork that I conducted in Central Asia between 2008 and 2014, this book presents structured in-depth case studies of Nazarbaev's Kazakhstan (1991-2007) and Akaev's Kyrgyzstan (1991-2005). These two similar authoritarian regimes desined elections in distinct ways that resulted in different fates for their respective authoritarian regimes. Using both quantitative and qualitative resources that I collected during my fieldwork in both countries, the comparative case studies demonstrate internal validity of my theory and illuminate causal chains linking a dictator's mobilization capabilities,

electoral manipulation techniques, economic maneuvering, and political order during the aftermath of elections.

3 Chapter outline

The chapter outline of this book is as follows:

Chapter 1 Introduction

Chapter 2 A Theory of Autocratic Elections

Chapter 3 Blatant Electoral Fraud

Chapter 4 Institutional Manipulation

Chapter 5 Economic Maneuvering

Chapter 6 Backfiring at the Ballot Box

Chapter 7 From Electoral Manipulation to Economic Maneuvering: Nazarbaev's Kazakhstan

Chapter 8 From Electoral Manipulation to Autocratic Breakdown: Akaev's Kyrgyzstan

Chapter 9 Conclusion

Part I: The Puzzles and Arguments

Chapter 1 Introduction: Why Elections in Authoritarian Regimes?

In this chapter, I define the subject matter explored in this book and posit research questions and research agendas explored in this book. I then provide a brief overview of my theoretical argument, research design, and main empirical findings while identifying the gaps in knowledge regarding the causes and consequences of autocratic elections. In so doing, I explain why it is important to improve our understanding of elections in authoritarian regimes. In addition to explaining the motivation for the book, this chapter reviews how the comparative politics literatures have discussed autocratic politics and its political institutions as well as electioneering strategies political leaders employ in the developing world.

Chapter 2 A Theory of Autocratic Elections

This chapter presents a theory of authoritarian elections underpinned with empirical evidence. It first details the electoral dilemma faced by autocrats and classifies autocratic elections according to degrees of electoral manipulation and electoral margins. Second, I specify two important electioneering strategies – electoral manipulation and economic maneuvering – and clarify the advantages and disadvantages of each. Third, I focus on the distribution of mobilization capabilities between the dictator and other political elites as a key determinant influencing the design of authoritarian elections. In so doing, I derive empirical implications that explain four important aspects of authoritarian elections: blatant electoral fraud, institutional manipulation, economic maneuvering, and post-election political conflict. Chapter 2 concludes with a cross-national investigation demonstrating that the distribution of mobilization capabilities is correlated with a dictator’s and his party’s electoral margins in presidential and parliamentary elections. Specifically, I suggest that the distribution of mobilization capabilities can be empirically captured by: (1) discretionary financial resources available to the dictator, (2) disciplinary political organizations that prevent ruling elites from exploiting financial resources and streamline economic distribution to citizens, and (3) the opposition elites’ capacity to mobilize the masses.

Part II: Cross-National Explorations

Chapter 3 Blatant Electoral Fraud

In this chapter, I explore the conditions under which autocrats resort to blatant electoral fraud as a form of electoral manipulation. I begin by reviewing the literature on electoral fraud. Based on my theory of autocratic elections, I then posit several hypotheses on the relationship between a dictator’s mobilization capabilities and involvement in blatant electoral fraud. Finally, I test these hypotheses using a cross-national dataset of blatant electoral fraud in authoritarian regimes with elections. Specifically, my cross-national statistical analyses indicate that dictators with abundant natural resources and weak opposition permit elections to be freer and fairer by relying less on blatant electoral fraud, such as election violence, electoral cheating, and undemocratic restrictions on electoral law. Furthermore, the negative impact of natural resources on electoral fraud increases

when dictators have dominant parties and large, less fractionalized dominant ethnic groups, both of which enable autocrats to discipline ruling elites and streamline economic distribution to the masses.

Chapter 4 Institutional Manipulation

In addition to blatant electoral fraud, autocrats can also manipulate electoral institutions according to their political needs. This chapter investigates the determinants of electoral system manipulation in parliamentary elections under electoral authoritarian regimes. I begin with a review of the literature on electoral system choice, and argue that existing studies exclusively focus on electoral system choice in democracies and their theories, therefore, cannot be applied to authoritarian contexts. Next, I discuss benefits and costs of both SMD and PR systems based upon the idea of the electoral dilemma, suggesting that SMD systems are good at maintaining the certainty of winning big via pro-regime seat premiums, whereas PR systems are useful to divide and rule the opposition and improve voter turnout by improving the credibility of the electoral processes. I then argue that dictators with abundant natural resources or those facing weak opposition adopt PR systems, whereas weak dictators rely on SMD systems to maintain overwhelming electoral victories. Using newly collected cross-national data on electoral systems in electoral authoritarian regimes, I demonstrate that both natural resource wealth and a weak opposition increase the likelihood that dictators will choose PR systems. The correlation between natural resources and PR systems becomes stronger if autocrats are supported by dominant parties. Additional cross-national statistical analyses also show that SMD systems are more likely to bias seat distributions in favor of ruling parties, reduce voter turnout, and unify the opposition.

Chapter 5 Economic Maneuvering

This chapter presents cross-national evidence of the economic maneuvering of dictators, namely, autocratic political business cycles (PBC). The theory of autocratic elections predicts the substitutive relationship between electoral manipulation and the maneuvering of economic policy: autocrats who can mobilize public support via the provision of pork and patronage rely less on manipulating election results by blatant fraud and electoral rules producing pro-regime seat bias. I first survey

the literature while introducing a number of PBC case studies reported in extant research. I then suggest that previous studies have often focused on only a single country or region and have not offered a convincing theory that enables an understanding of the conditions under which pre-election manipulation of policy instruments is more likely to occur in autocracies. Thereafter, I conduct cross-national statistical analyses using original fiscal balance datasets and autocratic elections to test whether elections in autocracies relatively free from electoral manipulation are positively correlated with fiscal deficits. Specifically, I find that election year fiscal deficits are more likely to occur if autocratic elections (1) allow opposition parties to participate, (2) involve less blatant electoral fraud, and (3) adopt PR systems.

Chapter 6 Backfiring at the Ballot Box

In this chapter, I empirically investigate the political consequences of autocratic elections. Autocratic elections backfire when dictators deviate from the equilibrium of autocratic election design in dealing with the electoral dilemma. I argue that there are two post-election scenarios when autocratic elections backfire on the dictator. On the one hand, when autocrats undersupply electoral manipulation, elections reveal the low popularity of the dictator, paving the way for ruling elites to launch a coup or for opposition parties to unexpectedly win elections. On the other hand, when autocrats oversupply electoral manipulation relative to their mobilization capabilities, the quality of the election deteriorates and thus cannot work as a credible tool to demonstrate a regime's strength, thus encouraging post-election protest movements. In contrast, when an autocrat successfully gauges the extent of electoral manipulation according to the amount of power resources he possesses, autocratic elections are likely to minimize both threats. A cross-national statistical analysis of autocratic elections tests these theoretical expectations.

Part III: Comparative Case Studies

In Part III (Chapters 7 and 8), I conduct comparative case studies of two Central Asian Republics, Nazarbaev's Kazakhstan (1991-2007) and Akaev's Kyrgyzstan (1991-2005). Both countries share similar histories, being former republics of the Soviet Union, and are similar multi-ethnic, clientelism-ridden societies, in addition to sharing similar political institutions that comprise pres-

idential systems with similar center-local relationships. However, the development of autocratic regimes in the two countries has followed distinct paths. Autocratic elections helped the dictator to consolidate his rule in Nazarbaev's Kazakhstan, whereas elections sparked popular protests and led to the breakdown of the autocratic regime in Akaev's Kyrgyzstan. How can we explain the different impact of elections in such similar countries?

Chapter 7 From Electoral Manipulation to Economic Maneuvering: Nazarbaev's Kazakhstan (1991-2007)

This chapter investigates the case of post-Soviet Kazakhstan, where the dictator successfully consolidated his authoritarian regime by strengthening pre-election economic maneuvering in the face of less fraudulent elections and more proportionally representative electoral system. During the 1990s, Kazakhstan experienced numerous instances of electoral malpractice. However, by the middle of the 2000s, President Nursultan Nazarbaev had become less inclined to use blatant electoral fraud and even decided to switch from an SMD electoral system to PR. Focusing on the distribution of mobilization capabilities between the dictator and political elites, I argue that the president's decision to shift electoral strategies from heavy-handed electoral manipulation to extensive, pre-election economic distribution, was made in order to achieve overwhelming electoral victory.

Electoral Manipulation to Autocratic Breakdown: Akaev's Kyrgyzstan (1991-2005)

In this chapter, I present a case study of Kyrgyzstan to illustrate how failure to strategically manipulate elections leads to popular protest. In stark contrast to Nazarbaev, President Akaev of Kyrgyzstan faced massive popular protests during the 2005 parliamentary elections, and he was ultimately forced to leave office. Why did the 2005 elections backfire on the president? As with the case of Kazakhstan, I describe how the distribution of mobilization capabilities changed from independence until the collapse of the Akaev regime in 2005. I first show that, while Akaev was relatively successful in mobilizing public support during the 1990s by using financial resources and clan alliances under relatively free and fair elections, the weakening regime encouraged him to be more inclined to practice electoral fraud by the early 2000s. I show that excessive electoral

manipulation and the announcement of the ruling party's electoral victory in the 2005 parliamentary elections sparked popular protests by opposition supporters who were united in a belief that the regime should not be strong enough to earn such an overwhelming election win.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

While autocratic elections are not the only aspect of authoritarian politics, they are a useful tool that autocrats have at their disposal to consolidate their rule. Through cross-national statistical analyses, illustrative cases around the world, and in-depth comparative case studies of the two Central Asian countries, this book demonstrated how authoritarian regimes design elections differently. Furthermore, it explains the variations in electoral manipulation, pre-electoral economic maneuvering, and post-electoral conflict by focusing on the distribution of mobilization capabilities between the dictator and other political elites. I discuss how the book's findings contribute to our understanding of the role of international society in improving electoral integrity and economic policy-making in authoritarian regimes. Finally, this chapter explains the implications of autocratic elections for democratization and suggests future research directions.

4 Proposed length

The manuscript – in a standard format with single-spacing, Garamond 12-point font, 1-inch margins – should be approximately 250 pages in length, including references and appendices. The main analytical chapters – Chapters 1-8 – include tables and figures, total numbers of which are 20 and 32, respectively.

5 Intended completion date

I have completed drafting the whole manuscript in November 2019. Part of Chapter 6 has been published as a book chapter (Higashijima 2015) in the study by Pippa Norris et al. eds, *Contentious Elections: From Ballots to Barricades*, New York: Routledge. A paper based on the idea of Chapter 3 has received the inaugural EIP-International IDEA award, offered by the Electoral Integrity

Project and International IDEA and published as a proceeding paper in the EIP working paper series (Higashijima 2014). Part of Chapter 4 is co-authored with Eric C. C. Chang of Michigan State University (MSU) as a journal article which is now under review in a peer-review journal. This book project began as my PhD dissertation submitted to MSU in May 2015, which had been funded by numerous grants such as those of the US National Science Foundation, the Suntory Foundation, and the Fulbright Commission.

6 Market

This book targets social scientists of elections and other political institutions, in addition to those interested in the study of political economy, democratization, authoritarianism, contentious politics, and developing countries. Few social scientists studying elections consider the origins and effects of authoritarian elections systematically. The book will be of interest to scholars in the fields of political science, economics, sociology, and international development, because the book unravels complicated features of institutions, economy and political order throughout the developing world. The book could be assigned to both undergraduate and graduate courses in each of these fields, including courses on comparative political economy, comparative political institutions, the political economy of development, democratization, authoritarianism, social movements, and post-communist politics.

This book may also appeal to a readership beyond academia, particularly in the areas of international election monitoring and democratization assistance. Policymakers are interested in electoral malpractice and electoral system design in authoritarian and mixed regimes and numerous NGOs devoted to documenting and addressing electoral manipulation throughout the developing world. Organizations such as the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), the U.S. Institute of Peace, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe study, observe, and access elections and democratization in developing countries. Government entities, such as the U.S. State Department, publish the human rights reports annually, which track electoral malpractices around the world. Individuals involved in these and other programs will benefit from the insights offered by this book.

In addition, active communities of scholars are engaged in studying electoral manipulation and autocratic politics, such as the Weiser Center for Emerging Democracies at the University of Michigan, the Electoral Integrity Project, the Varieties of Democracy Project, and several mini-conferences and workshop series on authoritarian politics and democratization within the field of political science. I am involved in these organizations and have published and presented my work at these venues in the past. I plan to use these networks to promote this book. Finally, my involvement in political science communities in the U.S., Europe, Central Asia, and Japan allows me to present this work to more general audiences within the discipline. Many of these meetings are open to the general public, increasing the book's potential readership.

7 Competition

As noted earlier, the supply of the scholarly output is limited despite the growing international attention to elections in authoritarian regimes and the increasing demand for theoretical insights of autocratic elections. There are at least two books currently available on the market that address some topics that I address in *The Dictator's Dilemma at the Ballot Box*.

1. Alberto Simpser. 2013. *Why Governments and Parties Manipulate Elections: Theory, Practice, and Implications*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

This is the only book-length work with a global scope that investigates why political leaders manipulate elections in authoritarian contexts and what effects such elections have on political stability. My book differs along several dimensions, pushing forward the frontier of the study. First, the most notable is that while Simpser's book only examines causes and consequences of blatant electoral fraud, my book also examines two other important electioneering strategies that autocrats take – institutional manipulation and economic maneuvering – and theorizes about the relationship among them as well as their effects on autocratic political order. Second, Simpser's book primarily focuses on the impact of electoral manipulation on consolidating authoritarian rule. In contrast, my book illuminates why some autocratic elections backfire on dictators by centering on the trade-off

between the certainty and credibility of election results. Third, Simpser’s book does not empirically investigate what determines the extent of blatant electoral fraud. His book’s primary concern is to explain why autocrats aim to win big with excessive electoral fraud. Consequently, his empirical focus is put on examining mechanisms through which winning big leads to regime consolidation without investigating the conditions under which autocrats manipulate elections in the first place. My book empirically examines the determinants of blatant electoral fraud (as well as those of other electioneering strategies) with both cross-national statistical analysis and comparative case studies.

2. Yonatan L. Morse. 2019. *How Autocrats Compete: Parties, Patrons, and Unfair Elections in Africa*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Morse advances a theory of electoral competition in autocracies based upon the post-Cold War experiences of sub-Saharan Africa. His book argues that autocrats with “credible ruling parties” that commit to wider constituencies are more certain in their own support and therefore can compete in elections with less manipulation. My book is different in a couple of important respects. First, Morse’s book regards ruling party organizations as the domestic source of public support for autocrats. In contrast, my book broadens theoretical perspective by taking into account two additional domestic factors influencing the dictator’s mobilization capabilities: discretionary financial resources and opposition strengths. Second, similar to Simpser’s book, Morse focuses only on a single dimension of electioneering strategy that autocrats rely on: blatant electoral fraud. By considering the dictator’s financial resources and opposition strength as the other dimensions affecting the distribution of mobilization capabilities in dictatorships, my book’s theory endogenizes both institutional manipulation and economic maneuvering as electioneering strategies available to autocrats. Third, while Morse’s book focuses on authoritarian regimes with multi-party competition in sub-Saharan Africa, my book’s theoretical and empirical scopes are much broader. My book’s theory focuses on authoritarian regimes with both non-competitive and competitive elections. In addition, empirical analyses of my book are drawn from cross-national statistical analyses of global data, while examining internal validity of my argument through focused, structured comparisons of the two Central Asian republics.

8 About the author

I am an associate professor of political science at the Graduate School of Information Sciences at Tohoku University, Japan and a visiting research scholar in the Center for Political Studies at the University of Michigan. I was a Post-Doctoral Max Weber Fellow at European University Institute and an assistant professor at Waseda University in Tokyo. My research interests include comparative political economy, autocratic politics, democratization, ethnic politics, civil conflict, and Central Asia. My articles related to these topics appeared in *British Journal of Political Science*, *the Journal of Politics*, *Political Behavior*, *Studies in Comparative International Development*, and *World Development*. I am the recipient of the inaugural EIP-IDEA Award, given by the Electoral Integrity Project and the International IDEA. My research was funded by numerous grants such as those of the US National Science Foundation, Fulbright Commission, and Suntory Foundation. My courses explore comparative politics, the political economy of developing countries, comparative democratization, and quantitative data analysis in social sciences. I hold a Ph.D. in political science from Michigan State University as well as a B.A. and a M.A. in political science from Waseda University in Tokyo.

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