

When conservative parties propose policies for caring fathers

Policy-framing analysis of parental leave reforms in Germany and Japan

Sho Sasaki

Abstract

Parental leave policies for fathers are introduced to promote father's caregiving and gender equality in childcare. Even though the majority of father-friendly policy reforms were led by social democratic parties, a few conservative catch-all parties also proposed policies to promote father's caregiving. How did conservative catch-all parties frame father's caregiving when they propose policy reforms that can contradict their conservative party ideologies? To address this question, the study draws on Verloo's Diagnosis-Prognosis framework for the policy-framing analysis. Statements of the conservative politicians were collected from parliamentary, ministry and party documents and analysed mainly by the qualitative framing analysis combined with frequency analysis. While the findings show contrasting policy-framing patterns, both parties successfully framed father's caregiving as compatible with conservative interests. This study contributes to our understanding of conservative framing strategies on policies for father's involvement in childcare as this is the first comparative analysis of policy-framing on father's caregiving by conservative catch-all parties. My study presents an analytical framework that can be applied by other researchers of parental leave policies for a more systematic comparative analysis.

Keywords: Policy Framing, Parental Leave, Caring Fathers, Japan, Germany

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1. Introduction

Parental leave schemes, which were originally designed for mothers, are modified to include fathers in many developed capitalist societies nowadays to encourage men's caregiving and equal distribution of childcare responsibilities at home (Duvander et al., 2019; Jou et al., 2020; Rocha, 2021). However, the introduction and development of parental leave policies for fathers often required difficult political processes as father's childcare involvement has often been contested by various political actors such as conservative political parties, religious groups and corporate powers, who stand for patriarchal gender norms (Mohun Himmelweit, 2023; Von Wahl, 2008; Och, 2019; Nakazato, 2019). Parental leave for fathers was first introduced and developed in Nordic countries, where Social Democratic parties took leadership in promoting father's caregiving for gender equality despite the contestation from the political right. While some developed capitalist democracies followed Nordic cases to expand parental leave policies for fathers, it was not the case for a long time in conservative gender regimes (e.g., Germany, Austria, and Japan) where governments intervene in the private sphere through social and family policies to reinforce the gendered division of labour (Shire & Nemoto, 2020; Nordenmark, 2018). Reflecting the rigid gender norm, parental leave in conservative gender regimes was characterised by generous leave periods and poor parental leave benefits, which led to disproportional uptake by mothers.

However, in recent years, some conservative catch-all parties in power carried out father-friendly parental leave reforms in line with the Nordic parental leave model that is characterised by its incentives for an equal share of caregiving such as high income-replacement rate and non-transferable father's quota (Cygan-Rehm, 2016; Nakazato, 2023). Catch-all parties are defined as parties that attempt to appeal to many different kinds of voters by representing diverse interests (Gauder & Wiliarty, 2020). In terms of family and childcare policies, conservative catch-all parties are required to balance their conservative ideology on patriarchal gender norms and feminist arguments for gender equality in caregiving. One of the main political strategies of political parties to justify their proposed policies is policy-framing. Policy-framing is the deliberate use of language

to stress specific values, facts and other considerations, in order to induce people to agree with proposed policies (Lee & Cho, 2018; Chaney, 2015). As father-friendly parental leave reforms can conflict with the policy preferences of conservative stakeholders within and outside parties as well as conservative voters, conservative catch-all parties would use policy-framing strategies to maintain the conservative support (Henninger & von Wahl, 2014; Och & Hasunuma, 2018). While existing literature has discussed neoliberal policy-framing by conservative catch-all parties on women's labour participation that emphasises its benefit for women's economic independence and national economic development (Och, 2019; Och & Hasunuma, 2018), few studies has addressed how these parties frame men's caring role in carrying out father-friendly parental leave reforms. Policy-framing on father's care is particularly interesting to examine as father's care can be contested severely by traditionalists who insist on the importance of mother's care for children. Conservative catch-all parties would need to frame the policy reforms strategically to satisfy different stakeholders and social groups to legitimise their policies. Therefore, in this paper, I will address the following research question:

RQ: How do conservative catch-all parties frame father's caregiving when they propose a policy reform which promotes the father's caring role?

To answer this research question, I will focus on two conservative catch-all parties, the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (hereafter referred to as CDU) and the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (hereafter referred to as LDP). Both parties contributed to maintaining post-war conservative gender regimes and protected conservative family values in these countries. Conservative parties in general are less likely to be motivated for the reforms addressing equal division of care, and even more so if they operate in conservative gender regimes, such as Germany and Japan. Therefore, it is puzzling how these conservative catch-all parties legitimised revisions of parental leave policy that encourage father's caregiving and gender equality in caregiving. At the same time, the policy-framing strategies of the CDU and LDP can differ as they had different party organisations and political environments in terms of female representation and electoral competitions.

Taking the above-mentioned similar feminist turns and different backgrounds into consideration, I set the following question as my supportive research question to articulate the common pattern as well as diverse strategies of policy-framing by conservative parties:

Supportive RQ: How did conservative catch-all parties in Germany and Japan frame father's caregiving given the differences in party organisations and political environments?

To address the RQs, I will analyse statements of conservative politicians that are collected from parliamentary, ministry and party documents, drawing on Verloo's Diagnosis-Prognosis framework of the framing analysis. This is the first study that compares two cases in developed democracies where conservative catch-all parties pushed for parental leave reforms to increase father's caregiving. The analysis shows how conservative parties justify promoting the father's caring role under the political environment of conservative gender regimes. The study has a clear empirical contribution to the literature on the politics of fatherhood which has rarely considered conservative parties to be advocates for father's caregiving.

The study is structured as follows. First, I will review the existing literature on the transformation of conservative catch-all parties in Germany and Japan, focusing on their adaptation of feminist arguments and father-friendly parental leave policies in recent years. Second, I will propose an analytical framework for the policy-framing strategies on father's caregiving. To examine policy frames of the conservative catch-all parties, I will carry out quantitative and qualitative frame analysis of statements and speeches on father's caregiving made by the CDU and LDP politicians. Third, I will analyse and compare the policy-framing patterns of both parties. Finally, I propose policy-framing strategies of conservative catch-all parties, with which they emphasise benefits for conservative voters and stakeholders to legitimise parental leave reforms.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conservative parties and their adoption of feminist arguments

The CDU and LDP have often been compared as successful conservative parties in developed democracies. Both of the parties have been in government for more than 50 years in total, which shaped the similar post-war settlements of respective countries, such as coordinated market economies and welfare states based on the male-breadwinner/female-caretaker model (Vogel, 2001; Yamamura & Streeck, 2003). However, the CDU and LDP changed their policy preferences in the first decades of the 21st century under the first Merkel's cabinet in Germany and the second Abe's cabinet in Japan. Och and Hasunuma (2018) argued that these parties have undergone the process of feminisation, in which conservative parties promoted women's interests through 'the integration of women and their concerns into our political parties and political institutions' (Childs & Webb, 2012, p. 1; Celis & Childs, 2014).

The feminisation of the CDU and LDP are similar phenomena with several differences in the causes. Both the CDU and LDP highlighted women's leadership roles in the field of economics and politics. In Germany, the Family Minister Ursula von der Leyen of the CDU proposed an introduction of the female quota, while Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe pushed women's advancement as one of his three pillars for economic growth under the name of *womenomics* (Assmann, 2014; Coleman, 2016; Hasunuma, 2015). At the same time, some researchers argued that the feminisation of the CDU and LDP are merely symbolic phenomena without substantial changes in their gender ideologies. The CDU successfully balanced patriarchal and feminist positions by using a symbolic policy designed to appear feminist but with little or no real effect (Wiliarty, 2010). On the other hand, policies for women's empowerment introduced by the LDP-led government consist of a patchwork of amendments reflecting a short-term numerical target and lack of consideration for gender equality (Nakazato, 2019). It shows the weak effectiveness and narrow scope of the LDP's gender policies (Och & Hasunuma, 2018; Shim, 2018).

In contrast with the similarity in the outcomes of feminisation, the existing research suggests several differences in the political backgrounds for feminisation of conservative parties. In Germany, the presence of a strong women's group within and outside the party and power competition against the political left promoted the adoption of women's interests to their policies (Gauder & Wiliarty, 2020). On the other hand, the LDP has not faced significant pressure either from the weak and fragmented women's movement or from the opposition parties of the Centre-Left, which failed to promote women's leadership (Gauder, 2015). Therefore, the feminisation of the LDP was driven mainly by economic woes and concerns about Japan's international reputation (Lambert, 2007; Och & Hasunuma, 2018)

In summary, the CDU and LDP are similar cases of feminisation of conservative parties, which are characterised by their focus on economic aspects of women's empowerment and symbolic adoption of feminist arguments. At the same time, it became clear that the causes of the feminisation are different between the CDU and LDP.

2.2 Father-friendly parental leave reforms led by conservative parties

As a part of their feminisation processes, the CDU and LDP adapted the idea of father's caring role and proposed policy reforms that promote father's involvement in childcare and gender equality in caregiving (Vogl & Krell, 2012; Nakazato, 2019). As a result of the policy reforms under the governments led by the CDU in Germany in 2007 and the LDP in Japan in 2014, new parental leave policies in both countries became similar in their increased incentive for fathers to take leave. In Germany, the new parental leave law (German: *Bundeselterngehalt- und Elternzeitgesetz*) introduced the income-related leave benefit up to 67% of the former average income for the shortened paid period of 12 months (Vogl & Krell, 2012). In addition, benefits were paid for an additional two months if the father takes two months of leave. The new parental leave policy encouraged men to take leave to care for their children and women to return to work quickly. The policy was different from the previous parental leave policies in Germany as it specifically focused on father's involvement in childcare, which challenges the essentialist social assumption that the capacity to care is the domain of mothers (Vogl & Krell, 2012; Joshi, 2021). While in Japan, the second Abe cabinet amended the employment insurance law

(Japanese: 雇用保険法) which raised the parental leave benefit up to 67% of former earnings with a maximum length of half a year. The new parental leave policy exempted recipients from income-tax and social insurance contributions, which provided a high incentive, especially for fathers who tend to earn more than mothers (Nakazato, 2023). By increasing parental leave benefits, the amendment was intended to change father's attitudes towards caregiving. At the same time, the CDU and LDP operated these reforms for different reasons. In Germany, feminist arguments for equality and father's movement for caring rights put pressure on the CDU to introduce care policies that support the father's caring role and gender equality in childcare (Joshi, 2021). While in Japan, the narrative of the reproductive crisis caused by a remarkable fertility decrease led the government to establish family-friendly laws and policies (Ishii-Kuntz, 2021). In this way, both the CDU and LDP carried out similar parental leave policy reforms for different motivations.

In this chapter, I have examined the feminisation of the CDU and LDP and their adoption of father-friendly parental leave policies. Based on the existing literature, I found out that the outcomes of the party transformation and father-friendly policy reforms have high similarities despite the contrast between the motivations and political situations of these parties.

3. Conceptual and Analytical Framework

Policy framing is a strategy used by political parties to stress specific values, facts and other considerations, in order to induce people to agree with proposed policies (Lee & Cho, 2018; Chaney, 2015). As for the policy-framing research, Verloo's framing analysis on gender sensitivity policies is widely referred to by feminist scholars who analyse the adoption of feminist policies by political actors (Verloo, 2016). The frame analysis is based on the constructionist understanding that policy frames are not descriptions of reality, but specific constructions that give meaning to reality, and shape the understanding of reality (Verloo, 2016). To carry out the policy-framing analysis, Verloo uses the Diagnosis-Prognosis framework, in which a diagnostic frame defines the issue that speakers formulated in the statements and a prognostic frame defines the solution to the issue. Verloo's framework divided the prognostic frame into two components, namely the abstract idea of the solution and the concrete action of the solution. Verloo assumes that policy proposals always contain implicit or explicit representations of diagnosis and prognosis (Verloo, 2016). Based on Verloo's framework, I arranged the Diagnosis-Prognosis framework that consists of three distinct but interrelated frame components, namely *issue formulation* as a diagnostic frame and *fatherhood model* and *action proposal* as prognostic frames. First, the issue formulation is a presentation of issues that should be addressed by proposed policies. Second, the fatherhood model shows the type of fatherhood that is presented by the political parties. Third, the action proposal defines the concrete measures that parties proposed to deal with the issues. This analytical framework allows me to analyse how conservative catch-all parties tried to shape the understanding of father's caregiving and navigate the policy discussion underpinning the parental leave policy reforms.

Table 1. Framework for policy-frame analysis on father’s caregiving policies

Frame	Diagnosis	Prognosis	
Frame component	Issue Formulation	Fatherhood Model	Action Proposal
Guiding Question	What is presented as an issue to be addressed?	What kind of father’s caregiving role is presented?	What kind of policy measure is proposed?
Codes	<p>-Feminist (Gender equality, Men’s Changing Attitude, Work-Life Balance)</p> <p>-Conservative (Child Welfare, Demographic, Economic)</p>	<p>-Main Caregiver (The father should take as much caring responsibility as the mother)</p> <p>-Supportive Caregiver (The father should help the mother with caring for children)</p> <p>-Up to Fathers (It is father’s choice how much caring responsibility he takes)</p>	<p>-Promoting/ Intervening</p> <p>-Enabling/ Non-intervening</p>

As a supplement to the Diagnosis-Prognosis framework, I created codes for each frame component based on several analytical concepts found in the literature review. In terms of the issue formulation, my analytical concepts are based on Och’s research on feminist claim-making by conservative parties. By analysing arguments on introducing father’s months by the CDU, Och suggested that conservative parties can adopt feminist policies to change gender roles for two reasons: for genuine feminist motivations to change gender roles or for the party’s own conservative interests (2019). As a parental leave policy reform to promote father’s caregiving is a part of the feminist policy, I expected that the CDU and LDP would connect the parental leave policy reforms with both feminist and conservative issues. Therefore, I devised two codes for issue formulation: *Feminist* and *Conservative*. In my analysis, I will code a statement as a feminist issue formulation if it challenges existing gender roles. For example, I code a statement on the poor work-life

balance as the feminist issue formulation, as it implies the need to change existing gender roles. On the other hand, I categorise a statement as the conservative issue formulation if it is about the conventional conservative interest that can be achieved by father's caregiving. For example, poor child welfare due to the lack of father's caregiving is categorised as the conservative issue formulation as child welfare is the issue not about the change in gender roles, but about the issue that was already claimed by conservative parties. There were six sub-codes devised from the data, with five sub-codes being used by both parties and one exception used only by the CDU. In relation to the feminist issue formulation, there are three sub-codes: *gender equality*, *men's changing attitude*, and *work-life balance*. The sub-code of gender equality is applied to the statement that explicitly problematised inequality between women and men and this sub-code was only used by the CDU. A statement is coded as men's changing attitude if it deals with men's willingness to take care of their children. The sub-code of work-life balance is applied to the statement that points out the lack of compatibility between work and caregiving for either women or men. On the other hand, sub-codes related to conservative issue formulation are *child welfare*, *demographic* and *economic*. A statement is coded with child welfare if it points out the negative effect on children caused by the lack of father's caregiving. The sub-code of demographic was applied to the statement which problematised the low-birth rate or showed an explicit intention to promote giving birth. Finally, the sub-code of economics was applied to the statement which points out economic issues such as the stagnant economic development at the national level or the lack of workplace at the individual level. Some statements are coded with both feminist and conservative frames. For example, the statement in which father's caregiving allows women to stay in the labour market can be coded as work-life balance and feminist frames, or as economic and conservative frames.

Compared to the diagnostic frames that examined diverse issues that are connected to father's caregiving, the fatherhood model would reveal different ideals on father's caregiving roles presented by conservative parties. Based on the literature below, I devised three codes: *main caregiver*, *supportive caregiver*, and *up to fathers*. The code of main caregiver is applied if the statement argues that the father should take as much caring responsibility as the mother. The code of supportive caregiver is applied if the statement

argues that the father should help the mother with caregiving. The code of up to fathers is applied if the statement argues that it is the father's choice how much caring responsibility he takes. In my analysis, I treated conservative parties' proposals on father's caregiving as a part of the parties' strategy to either change or maintain the existing gender regime. Gender regime, defined by Walby (2009, p301) as 'a set of inter-connected gender relations and gendered institutions that constitutes a system', promotes a specific type of gender roles and distribution of labour and care as a social norm in a domestic sphere. Conservative parties could advance a transformation of the gender regime that allows more equal distribution of childcare at home, by defining the ideal caregiving role of fathers in the narratives of parental leave reforms. For example, by recognizing the father's caregiving as equally important to the mother's, conservative parties can promote the dual-earner/dual-carer model that is more compatible with gender equality (Duvander et al., 2019; Rocha, 2021). On the other hand, fathers could be only recognized as supplemental caregivers to help mothers, which would promote the one-and-a-half-carer model (Wall & Escobedo, 2014; Rocha, 2021). By doing so, conservative parties can avoid criticism from conservative voters as the model promotes equal participation in labour but still tolerates unequal gender distribution of care. In contrast with the above-mentioned two examples, conservative parties would also prefer not to mention the ideal fatherhood and instead frame the father's caregiving role as something that fathers themselves should decide (Och, 2019). In this case, conservative parties do not intervene in the domestic gender regime directly. Based on these three distinct examples, I made three codes on the fatherhood model.

Finally, to analyse the proposed actions to be taken, I drew on fatherhood regime analysis by Hobson and Morgan (2002), who theorised two dimensions of fatherhood construction such as fatherhood obligations (what fathers have to do) and fatherhood rights (what fathers are entitled to do). I devised two codes for the action proposal, namely *promoting/intervening* and *enabling/non-intervening*, based on the following literature. In conservative gender regimes such as Germany and Japan, fatherhood was generally characterised by the fatherhood obligation as a breadwinner to provide financial support for children. In the proposal on father-friendly parental leave policies, father's caregiving can be framed either as fatherhood obligations or fatherhood rights. On one hand, the

view of father's caregiving as a fatherhood obligation would result in actively promoting changes in father's role with intervening measures such as governmental campaigns to give rewards or punishments to raise parental leave uptake by fathers. On the other hand, if father's caregiving is regarded as a fatherhood right, it would limit the scope of the reforms that allow fathers to choose to take parental leave. In this case, the reform focuses on enabling fathers to take parental leave without significant governmental intervention. The variation in the proposed actions brings differences in its policy effect, as the former case would directly promote gender equality, while the latter case only enables gender equality, which also leaves the possibility to maintain unequal gender roles (Brandth and Kvande, 2020).

4. Methodology

4.1 Research design

This study is a comparative analysis of the policy frames by the CDU and LDP, which is based on the Most Different Systems Design (MDS). The MDS is the research design in which cases are selected with the most variation in extraneous factors but with similar outcomes (Anckar, 2008; Yörük & Gençer, 2022). As differences cannot explain the similarities in the outcomes, it is possible to identify the similarity of the conditions as the cause of the similar outcomes (Anckar, 2008). The MDS is a suitable research design for the cases of the CDU and LDP, as there are similarities in their nature of conservative catch-all parties and the outcome of father-friendly policy reforms, while the CDU and LDP are different in many other aspects including party organisation and political climate. As broad-based catch-all parties, the CDU and the LDP created different mechanisms for internal balance between conflicting interests: the CDU created an internal representation system for its various constituencies including women, while the LDP maintained its internal balance through competing factions based on patron-client ties (Gauder & Wiliarty, 2020). Another difference is that the CDU was founded on Christian groups as their support base, while religious groups in Japan played a trivial role in supporting the LDP. Instead, the LDP has been supported and also contained some right-wing nationalist groups, which was much less prominent in the case of the CDU (Gauder & Wiliarty, 2020). However, the policy reforms that were led by the CDU-led government in 2007 and the LDP-led government in 2014 were similar in the outcome of increasing parental leave benefits to change father's attitudes on caregiving. I can expect that the aforementioned differences between the CDU and LDP lead to a different choice of policy frames to justify their policy proposals. At the same time, if both the CDU and LDP show any similarity in policy-framing strategies despite the given differences, the similarity in the choice of policy frames can be attributed to the nature of these parties as conservative catch-all parties. Therefore, the parental leave reforms by the CDU and LDP are suitable cases to determine the characteristic of policy-framing by conservative catch-all parties on father's caregiving.

In terms of the timeframe, I focused on the period between the formation of the cabinets led by each party and the enforcement of the new parental leave regulations in each country. This timeframe allows me to capture all the policy frames that are used from the point of the initial policy proposal until its enforcement. In Germany, the first Merkel cabinet was formed on November 22nd, 2005 and the new parental leave law (German: *Bundeselternzeit- und Elternzeitgesetz*) was put into effect on January 1st, 2007. While in Japan, the second Abe cabinet was formed on December 26th 2012 and the amendment of the employment insurance law (Japanese: 雇用保険法) came into effect on April 1st, 2014.

4.2 Data collection

The statements were collected from various documents including transcripts of parliamentary debates, policy position papers and manifestos from political parties, statements and speeches from conservative politicians, policy documents and press conference reports published by relevant government departments. All documents were publicly available online and the list of documents is presented in Appendix A. For the CDU, the documents were collected through the parliamentary document database, the database of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and the historical document database of the CDU at the website of the Konrad-Adenauer Foundation. For the LDP, I collected documents through the parliamentary document database, the website of the LDP and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. In order to identify the statements in which conservative politicians use policy-framing on father's caregiving in relation to the parental leave reforms, I searched for the statements in the above-mentioned documents with the keywords “parental leave” (German: *Elternzeit* or Japanese: 育児休業) and “father” (German: *Vater* or Japanese: 父親). To be counted as policy-framing, the politicians had to address father's caregiving with at least one frame component, such as issue formulation, fatherhood model, or action proposal. An individual statement can contain more than one policy frame. After the data collection, I identified 119 policy frames by the CDU politicians and 88 by the LDP politicians.

4.3 Data analysis

For the framing analysis, codes were devised through the following steps. To begin with, I created a priori codes for each type of policy frame (see Appendix B) based on the existing literature and tested them in the first round of empirical analysis to confirm that the codes are suited for the collected data. During the first round of the analysis, I found there was a variety of issue formulations that were used in diagnostic policy-framing. Therefore, I generated sub-codes by taking an open coding process from data to capture the variety of problems within feminist and conservative diagnostic frames (see Appendix C). Finally, the statements were coded by the author with the software NVivo. The data of the CDU and LDP were coded with the same set of codes for the comparative analysis.

After the coding, the coded data of each party were analysed separately as follows. First, the data was used for the frequency analysis of policy frames, followed by the interpretation of the coded data with reference to the contexts of each country. Finally, all the findings were put together for the discussion. The analysis was carried out in the original languages of the documents. In the following chapters, all the quoted texts are translated from German and Japanese to English by the author.

4.4 Ethical issues and limitations of the study

Regarding ethical considerations, I did not find any issues, as I only dealt with public documents that are available online. Besides, there are some limitations of the study. In terms of data collection, I did not include some information sources such as newspapers. This is due to the limited access to the newspaper archives of Japan and Germany. However, I expect that the lack of data in the newspaper articles does not influence the validity of the analysis significantly, as I still covered the records of major press conferences, in which Ministers of each country answered the questions from journalists.

In terms of data analysis, my study analyses three frame components with codes that are devised mostly a priori based on the existing literature. Therefore, there is a possibility that the study missed some frame components or codes in the analysis, which could be generated from the data. Even so, the study covers at least several relevant frame components and codes, which allowed me to describe the overall characteristics of policy-

framing strategies by the CDU and LDP, which is sufficient to answer my research question.

In this chapter, I tried to articulate the methodology that I used for the data collection and analysis, as well as its limitations. Based on the methodology mentioned above, I will analyse the data of each party in the next chapter.

5. Findings

5.1 The CDU

Diagnostic frame analysis (issue formulation)

The policy debate on the parental leave policy reform in Germany was led by Ursula von der Leyen, the Minister of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. Among the policy frames made by the CDU politicians, von der Leyen accounted for half of them. In general, the CDU politicians framed father's caregiving with feminist and conservative frames with almost the same frequency (see Table 2 below). The most frequently observed feminist frame by the CDU was work-life balance, which justified the new parental leave policy as a means to achieve better compatibility between work and care for both genders. Von der Leyen's statements clearly showed her focus on father's struggle to balance work and care in a demanding working condition:

“Fathers suffer from the double burden of family and work. For many men, balancing work and family commitments is a conflict.” (Ursula von der Leyen on 07 March, 2006)

Table 2. Diagnostic frame (issue formulation) mentioned by CDU

Issue Formulation	Sub-codes	Total	Percentage of Total
Feminist (51%)	Gender equality	8	10%
	Men's changing attitude	14	17%
	Work-life balance	20	24%
Conservative (49%)	Child welfare	15	18%
	Demographic	19	23%
	Economic	7	8%
		83	100%

The CDU politicians referred to men's changing attitude fourteen times to show that the party is responsive to the voter's demands. Drawing on several survey data, the CDU politicians repeatedly pointed out that more than half of the men under 44 years old showed positive attitudes towards taking parental leave and caring for their children. However, the CDU also named three barriers to men's caregiving, namely insufficient financial allowance, lack of understanding and support by employers, and women's assumption that men are not willing to take care. The CDU specifically named young men as the victims of these barriers and demanded structural reforms so that young men can fulfil their will for caregiving:

“Young men today want to be caring fathers and no longer just breadwinners.”
(Ursula von der Leyen on 25 April 2006)

In relation to the compatibility between work and care, gender equality was also mentioned repeatedly by the CDU politicians. Despite the less frequent appearance than other sub-codes, the CDU explicitly articulated that the father-friendly parental leave reform would effectively promote gender equality. Changing gender norms by promoting the caring role among fathers and the working role among mothers was introduced as a goal to increase incentives for fathers to take parental leave:

“Parental allowance is...a step towards more equality. It promotes fathers' responsibility for raising children... and it promotes the anchoring of mothers in their professional life if they want to.” (Hermann Kues on 3 November 2006, Stenografischer Bericht 827)

On the other hand, the CDU politicians mentioned all three conservative frames, with the demographic frame being used most frequently. The CDU problematised men's reluctance to have children as the cause for the low birth-rate in Germany. The CDU claimed that fathers cannot imagine being fathers in modern German society due to the persistent gender norm and the lack of support for father's caregiving by employers:

“New demographic studies show that more men remain childless than women. For many men, it is difficult to imagine life with a child in a world where the role of father is not taken seriously.” (Ursula von der Leyen on 19 December 2005)

On the other hand, referring to the demographic data in neighbouring countries, the CDU also argued that women’s labour participation correlated with the birthrate. By emphasising the positive effect of parental leave revision on women’s labour participation, the CDU managed to frame the policy reform as a solution to the demographic issues.

Child welfare, another typical conservative frame, was used thirteen times to frame father's caregiving. The CDU utilised their conventional argument of familialism, which emphasises family’s responsibility for childcare, to frame father’s caregiving as his responsibility. The CDU mentioned the need of father’s caregiving for the better welfare of children:

“Children have a right to demand their parents. Children need mothers, but children also need fathers.” (The CDU’s official statement on 27 November 2005)

In relation to the economic frame, the CDU problematised the inefficient working culture and lack of consideration for caring responsibility at workplaces. The CDU warned the companies that they would lose young workers who value work-life balance to other countries. In order to convince the economic sectors, the positive impacts of men’s caring experience on their work efficiency and the consequent economic benefit was repeatedly emphasised by the CDU politicians.

Notably, the CDU politicians referred to feminist issues as a precondition for addressing conservative issues, which implicitly showed the party's priority on conservative interests. The connection between the feminist and conservative frames was observed typically between gender equality and demographic issues:

“The demographic comparison shows us that more children are born in countries where equality between men and women has progressed at home..., and in the workplace.” (Ursula von der Leyen on 22 December 2005)

The analysis shows that CDU has combined feminist and conservative diagnostic frames and they presented the two as related sometimes.

Prognostic frame analysis (fatherhood model)

In terms of the proposed fatherhood model, the CDU politicians frequently framed father's caregiving role as equally demanding and important as mother's. The importance of caring fatherhood was emphasised especially when they used the gender equality and child welfare frames. In relation to gender equality, the father's caregiving role was introduced as the main caregiver. In relation to child's welfare, the CDU politicians acknowledged the different nature of mother's and father's caregiving but still regarded father's caregiving as important for children as mother's. Ursula von der Leyen frequently used the expression of “active father” to describe young men who take caring responsibility for their children. She problematised the lack of a good fatherhood model that hindered men from taking a step to be an active father. For this reason, von der Leyen hoped young men to be a “trendsetter” to show a new role model of caring fathers:

“A father who values childcare time as much as working time is no wimp - this dad is a trendsetter!” (Ursula von der Leyen on 27 November, 2005)

Table 3. Prognostic frame (fatherhood model) mentioned by the CDU

Fatherhood Model	Total	Percentage of Total
Main caregiver	6	37%
Supportive caregiver	2	13%
Up to fathers	8	50%
	16	100%

However, the CDU politicians often avoided proposing a certain model of father's caregiving, instead they framed father's caregiving role as something up to father's decision. When the CDU proposed the parental leave policy reforms, especially the bonus months designed for fathers, the party received criticism from the media that the reform forces families to follow a specific family model set by the government. Facing inquiries from the media on the possibility of the reform as a breach of the constitution (Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 2005a; 2005b), von der Leyen had to emphasise that she has no intention to force any specific family model and father's role:

“We do not force anyone to take two bonus months. The state does not force anything, but it makes an offer. As young fathers want to take parental leave, we want to support them with parental allowance. So far, I have found no serious objection to the constitution.” (Ursula von der Leyen on 29 December, 2005)

In order to protect the policy reform, the party used the idea of "freedom of choice" (German: *Wahlfreiheit*) to clarify that the new parental leave policy was not meant to put pressure on men to take parental leave and force the dual-worker/dual-carer model. The emphasis on father's freedom of choice on one hand mitigated the conflict between the ideas of equal sharing of care and gender division of labour. At the same time, it implied an excuse for fathers not to engage in caregiving. By using gender-neutral terms in the action proposal, the CDU allowed fathers and mothers to decide the distribution of caring responsibilities in their own way. Besides, the CDU clearly stated that the new parental leave policy was targeting only those who are willing to do childcare. These framing strategies allowed the CDU to keep a balance between feminist and conservative interests.

Prognostic frame analysis (action proposal)

Finally, the CDU framed their action proposals more often with the enabling frames than the promoting ones. The CDU mentioned more intervening measures when they talk about the younger generation who are willing to be fathers and share the caring responsibility with mothers.

“We support young people so that they get the courage to have children.” (Ursula von der Leyen on 2 December 2005)

“Mothers and fathers should share responsibility for their children. We want to encourage fathers in particular to get more involved in family work and education.” (The CDU’s official statement on 27 November 2005)

Table 4. Prognostic frame (action proposal) mentioned by the CDU

Action Proposal	Total	Percentage of Total
Promoting/Intervening	8	40%
Enabling/Non-intervening	12	60%
	20	100%

However, the CDU politician frequently proposed less restrictive measures, as the promotion of father’s caregiving was criticised as the coercion of certain gender and family models, which I already discussed in the section on the fatherhood model. The CDU politicians claimed that the new parental leave law only offers the conditions in which fathers can enjoy the freedom of choice. Besides, the Family Minister von der Leyen also utilised equivocal expressions that can be understood in various ways:

“It is correct that the state cannot set some role models...I want to support the people who are doing the best thing that can happen to our state.” (Ursula von der Leyen on 17 February 2006)

In summary, policy-framing by the CDU is characterised by the balanced use of feminist and conservative frames in diagnostic frames and the emphasis on father’s choice and non-restrictive measures in prognostic frames.

5.2 The LDP

Diagnostic frame analysis (issue formulation)

The LDP used the conservative frames more often than the feminist ones. Two conservative frames were mainly used as a justification for promoting father's care. The first is the demographic, which problematised women's reluctance to have a second child as a main cause for the country's declining birth rate. The focus on the birth of the second child was based on the survey result on the mother's opinions. The survey showed that a large number of mothers experienced excessive caring responsibilities when raising their first child, which often discouraged them to have a second child:

“The families with fathers who take part in childcare are more often satisfied with the childcare experience of the first child, hence they are more willing to have the second child.” (Norihisa Tamura on 12 March 2014)

Table 5. Diagnostic frame (issue formulations) mentioned by LDP

Issue Formulation	Sub-codes	Total	Percentage of Total
Feminist (32%)	Gender equality	0	0%
	Men's changing attitude	2	5%
	Work-life balance	11	27%
Conservative (68%)	Child welfare	1	2%
	Demographic	13	32%
	Economic	14	34%
		41	100%

The second frame was the economic, which defined women's exit from the labour market when having their first child as a hindrance to economic development. For the LDP, mother's labour participation was inevitable to achieve national economic interests:

“The social environment where the husband and the wife can take care of children together will decrease the women’s risk of pausing their career development, which would possibly contribute to the revitalisation of the national economy.” (Emiko Takagai on 19 March 2014)

On the other hand, there was only one statement on child welfare, which suggests that the LDP framed father’s caregiving mostly in line with the benefits for the fathers and mothers.

As for the feminist frames, the LDP politicians repeatedly argued that Japanese workers have a poor work-life balance that should be changed through parental leave reforms. As male-dominated corporate culture is named as the cause of the poor work-life balance, the LDP expected that men’s parental leave uptake leads to a change in men’s attitude toward care and consequently transform the whole working environment. The work-life balance was one of the main focus of the government-led *ikumēn* (caring fathers) campaign, which targeted fathers and employers to advocate father’s caregiving (Koike, 2022).

“In order to create an environment where the work-life balance is achieved, I would like to continue to firmly promote this *ikumēn* (caring fathers) project.” (Noriyoshi Tamura on 25 March 2014)

In contrast, men’s changing attitude and gender equality were rarely observed in the LDP’s problem formulations. Remarkably, gender equality was not mentioned at all by the LDP politicians in the context of the policy reform. This reflected the tendencies of the LDP to frame the policy reform with the impacts at the individual level (e.g., women’s higher motivation for working and childbearing or men’s work-life balance) and avoid mentioning significant changes in relationships between couples. Finally, similar to the CDU, feminist issues are referred to as a precondition to address conservative issues, which shows the importance of conservative frames for the LDP.

“If we do not improve the work-life balance of Japanese people, we will not be able to solve the declining birth rate and the welfare of our children.” (Takaki Shirasuga on 21 February 2014)

The analysis shows that LDP framed father’s caregiving with mostly conservative frames with the exception of work-life balance.

Prognostic frame analysis (fatherhood model)

The LDP politicians described father’s caregiving role with two levels of importance. About a third of the coded statements admitted the importance of father’s caregiving role as the main caregiver, all of which were made by the Welfare Minister Tamura. The analysis suggests that these policy frames were made in line with the introduction of incentives for an equal uptake of parental leave. The LDP proposed to increase the parental leave allowance up to 67% of the previous salary level during the first six months of parental leave for each person. Facing several criticisms that the allowance period was too short, Tamura explained that the limited period of higher allowance was intended to promote equal distribution of the caring responsibility between mothers and fathers.

“Our intention for the policy reform is that fathers and mothers in turn take the leave for half a year respectively.” (Norihisa Tamura on 12 March, 2014)

His statement implied that fathers can take care of their children as main caregivers when mothers are working, which suggests that Tamura described fathers as competent caregivers. Besides, Tamura also regarded caring for children as the joint responsibility of “men and women” or “couples”, which implies that fathers are supposed to have the same level of caring responsibility as mothers.

“I want fathers to take full parental leave to take a significant amount of caring responsibility as it is very important for both men and women together to do the childcare.” (Norihisa Tamura on 19 April, 2013)

Table 6. Prognostic frame (fatherhood model) mentioned by the LDP

Fatherhood Model	Total	Percentage of Total
Main caregiver	5	26%
Supportive caregiver	11	58%
Up to fathers	3	16%
	19	100%

Despite Tamura's high evaluation of father's caregiving, the LDP politicians mostly framed father's caregiving role as the supportive caregiver. Several LDP politicians explicitly mentioned the limited expectations of father's involvement in caregiving. As conservative narratives connected demographic and economic issues to mother's excessive care burdens, the LDP politicians tended to frame father's caregiving in relation to the mother's. The LDP situated fathers' caregiving as a support to mother's, which was not fully challenging the gender division of labour. The LDP's proposal was designed to modify the existing gender roles to fit the current economic needs for women's labour while maintaining mothers as main caretakers. Father's limited caring responsibility was emphasised by the repetitive use of the word "participation" which implies that fathers are not regarded as primary caregivers:

"It is reported that the time of father's childcare participation is very short, so I want fathers to help care for children." (Norihisa Tamura on 12 March, 2014)

Father's *participation* in childcare was assumed to decrease the caring burden of mothers and prevent mothers from quitting their jobs. The LDP politicians also argued that the symbolic effect of father's participation in childcare relieves mothers' stress of caregiving, no matter how short father's leave uptake is.

“We should accept it if men take parental leave for just 5 or 10 days because that length is enough to make women feel that they are doing childcare together.”
(Masako Mori on 25 April, 2013)

Besides, the LDP politicians including the Welfare Minister Tamura mentioned in the parliament that they themselves had not taken care of their children. Based on their personal struggling experience, they argued the need to provide a better environment for father’s caregiving:

“I regret that I was not a caring father, so instead I would like to work on arranging a (father-friendly) environment.” (Noriyuki Tamura on 12 March, 2014)

Prognostic frame analysis (action proposal)

Finally, the LDP framed father’s caregiving in many cases with more intervening action proposals. The LDP set numerical goals for father’s involvement in childcare and domestic work, which led the LDP politicians to mention more concrete commitments to increasing father’s caregiving. The numerical goals allowed the politicians to discuss more concrete and intervening measures to achieve the goals:

“We are determined to make efforts to achieve the father’s parental leave uptake rate at 13% by 2020 with all the measures that we can take.” (Noriyuki Tamura on 12 March, 2014)

Table 7. Prognostic frame (action proposal) mentioned by the LDP

Action Proposal	Total	Percentage of Total
Promoting/Intervening	26	93%
Enabling/Non-intervening	2	7%
	28	100%

It was the Welfare Minister Tamura who led the discussion on the measures to increase father’s caregiving. He frequently praised *ikumens* (caring fathers) in his statements and

used the concept in the campaigns targeting different stakeholders. As the male-dominated working culture was regarded as the main barrier to father's caregiving, Tamura initiated the national *ikumēn* award for the father-friendly companies to create champions of father's caregiving:

“As a part of the *ikumēn* project, we carried out our first *ikumēn* Award to praise men's involvement in childcare including parental leave uptake and shorter working hours.” (Norihisa Tamura on 25 March, 2014)

Other LDP politicians proposed more direct incentives for companies to help promote father's caregiving:

“To increase the time of father's involvement in domestic work and childcare, we need to promote father's parental leave uptake...for this purpose we need to provide an additional benefit for the companies where more than 10% of their male employees have taken parental leave for a month or longer.” (Mizuho Onuma on 25 March, 2014)

The LDP was also paying attention to the international statistics on men's childcare involvement and criticism of gender inequality in Japan. As previous research pointed out, international reputation has driven the LDP to establish ‘a new social system to show Japan as a model of a developed nation’ in the field of father's childcare (The Liberal Democratic Party of Japan, 2013, p. 2; Och & Hasunuma, 2018). The pronatalist argument on father's caregiving fits well to the overall Abe's policy agenda for the revitalisation of Japan. Abe also stated his determination in taking serious measures to promote father's caregiving:

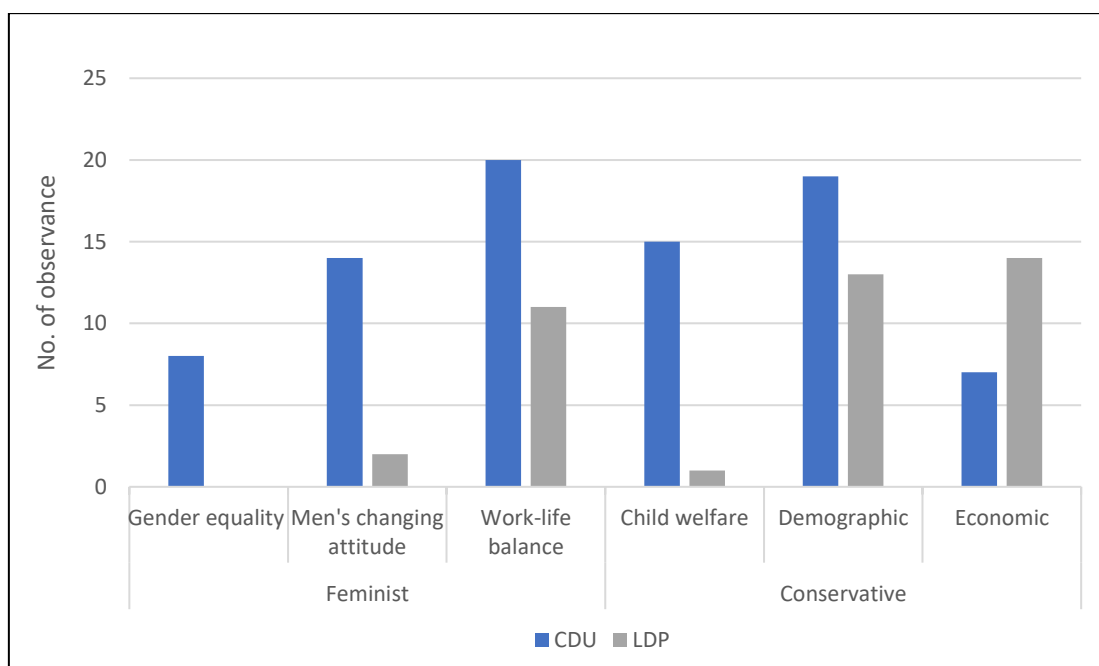
“I believe that we must actively take measures to enhance the understanding of men's parental leave uptake within the society.” (Shinzo Abe on 23 April, 2013)

In summary, the policy-framing of the LDP is characterised by the frequent use of conservative frames in diagnostic frames and the emphasis on governmental intervention to promote the limited father's caregiving roles in prognostic frames.

6. Discussion

The analysis of policy-framing in the previous chapters allowed me to describe the characteristics of the diagnostic and prognostic frames used by the CDU and LDP. In terms of the diagnostic frames, the data of the CDU and LDP indicate more differences than similarities, which are primarily attributed to the differences in the party structures and political climates of both countries. To begin with the similarities, both the CDU and LDP frequently mentioned demographic issues to explain the need for father's caregiving (see Figure 1). This is not a surprising result for the LDP, as Prime Minister Abe himself framed the declining birth rate as a national crisis and emphasised caring fathers as heroes to save the declining nation (Kristensen & Semba, 2021). On the other hand, the frequent reference to demographic issues by the CDU seems to contradict some existing research that denied the importance of demographic issues in the debates on the partner months (Och, 2019). The frequent appearance of demographic issues in my data can be explained by the types of documents that I analysed. Unlike Och's research focusing exclusively on parliamentary debates, my research dealt also with statements of conservative politicians outside the parliament. It was the Family Minister von der Leyen who frequently referred to demographic issues in the press conferences. This can be explained on one hand by the questions asked by the journalists on demographic issues, but also by her deliberate reference to the demographic issues. As demographic issues attracted attention in the media, she could more easily legitimise the policy reforms by mentioning the better outcome on demographic issues (Bujard, 2013). In both countries, the causal relationship between father's caregiving and the high birth-rate was referred to by conservative politicians to frame father's caregiving as beneficial for national interests.

Figure 1. Comparison of diagnostic frame (problem formulation) mentioned by CDU and LDP (N=124)



Besides the demographic issues, work-life balance was often mentioned by both parties. This reflects the salience of the poor working conditions of male workers in both countries, which were also named as a hindrance for the economic development and demographic recovery. Conservative politicians in both countries used work-life balance to appeal to fathers by stressing the merits of caregiving to fathers themselves. Unlike the previous issues, economic issues were the only case that was mentioned more often by the LDP than the CDU. Framing caregiving with economic issues is regarded as a popular strategy of conservative catch-all parties to depoliticise debates on caregiving (Von Wahl, 2008; Lambert, 2007). The stronger emphasis on economic issues by the LDP than the CDU could be explained by Abe's economic development strategy that explicitly mentioned women's labour participation as crucial for Japan's economic revitalisation (Och & Hasunuma, 2018).

The patterns of policy-framing marked a clear difference in the use of the frames such as child welfare, gender equality and men's changing attitude. There are several reasons for the use of these frames predominantly by the CDU. The CDU's legitimization of father's

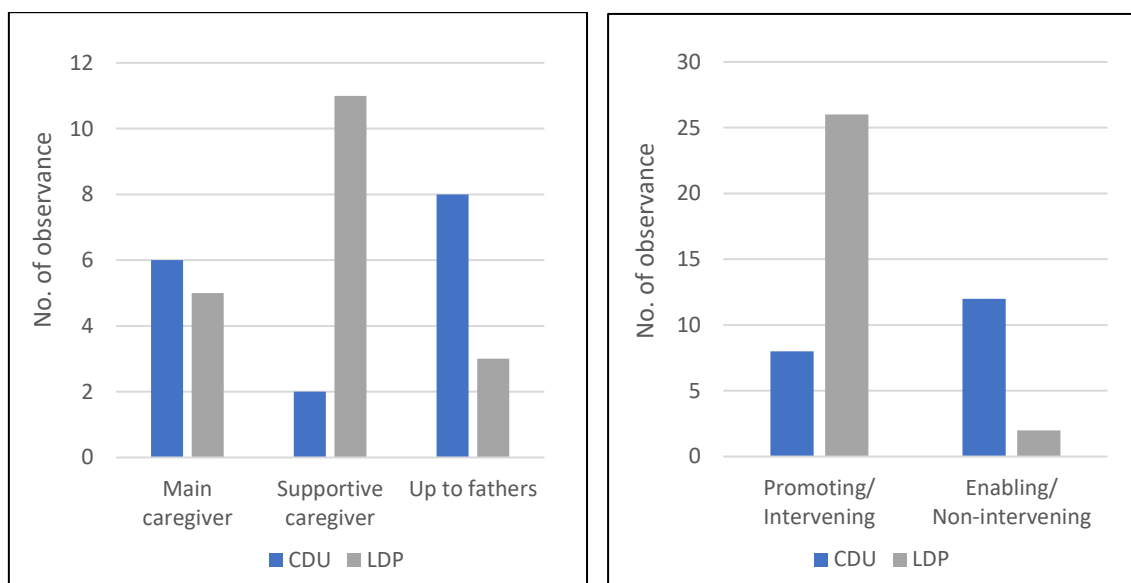
caregiving by mentioning child welfare could be interpreted as follows. The CDU conventionally stresses the merit of mother's caregiving on children's well-being, but this time the merit of father's caregiving was stressed in the similar way. The emphasis on the merit of father's caregiving matched well with the bigger caring responsibility attributed to fathers in the prognostic frames. This was not the case in Japan, where child welfare was not explicitly connected to father's caregiving as father's caregiving role was predominantly framed as a support to mothers instead.

The exclusive use of the gender equality frame by the CDU politicians supports existing comparative research on the CDU and LDP that suggests higher female representation within the party and its electoral competition against the Social Democratic Party led the CDU to use more feminist policy-framing (Wiliarty, 2013). Similarly, the difference in the number of references to men's changing attitude is interesting to examine as both parties had survey data on respective countries that showed men's increasing interest in caregiving. What brought the difference is expected to be the larger movement advocating for father's rights in Germany (Joshi, 2021). The more prominent characteristic of the CDU as a catch-all party due to higher electoral competition in Germany pushed the CDU to address men's voices for the demand for childcare involvement.

Finally, the overall picture of diagnostic frames shows contrasting frame preferences between the CDU and LDP. The CDU tried to use feminist and conservative frames equally to represent the wider variety of interests, while the LDP framed father's caregiving with three main issues with more focus on conservative interests. The wider variety of issues observed in the data of the CDU reflected its catch-all party strategy to gain support from both political right and left to win the electoral competition. The frequent use of feminist issues by the CDU was induced possibly due to the pressure from the EU policy framework for gender equality and the concerns to catch up with other European countries (Bryson & Heppell, 2010; Joshi, 2021). On the other hand, the LDP was more likely to use conservative frames, which can be mostly explained by the weaker threat from centre-left parties (Gauder & Wiliarty, 2020). Despite the above-mentioned differences, I should note an important similarity in the frequent use of demographic issues. By pointing out the positive correlation between the proportion of fathers involved

in childcare and the birth rate, ministers from both the CDU and LDP framed father’s caregiving as a driver for increasing the birth rate and reproduction of the nation. The use of pronatalist arguments can be understood as a common pattern of conservative polity-framing to gain the support of traditionalists for father’s caregiving.

Figure 2 & 3. Comparisons of prognostic frame mentioned by CDU and LDP (Left: fatherhood model, N=35; Right: action proposal, N=48)



The difference between the CDU and LDP is evident again in the prognostic frames. In terms of the fatherhood model, the LDP predominantly tried to limit the caring responsibility of fathers, while the CDU was more likely to acknowledge the same level of caring responsibility between father’s and mother’s. The CDU simultaneously emphasised the freedom of choice of fathers, suggesting that fathers should be able to decide themselves how much caring responsibility they want to take. The combination of these two framing patterns allowed the CDU to make nuanced arguments on the father’s caring role. This agrees with the existing research on catch-all parties that obscure the policy goal to avoid disagreements (Gauder & Wiliarty, 2020). On the other hand, the presentation of father’s caregiving as a support to mothers by the LDP politicians possibly derived from Japan’s cultural background of Confucianism which values the unity and harmony of family members (Freiner, 2012). The cultural aspect helps explain why the LDP politicians preferred to frame father’s caregiving as a means to relieve mother’s

burden so that couples can maintain a harmonious relationship. Besides, the result that I did not expect was the LDP's moderate use of the fatherhood model that defines a father's caring role as the main caregiver. The analysis showed that all the statements of the main caregiver frame were made when the LDP politicians argued for an equal share of parental leave uptake between mothers and fathers. As gender equality in the leave uptake does not assure that the amount of care is shared equally, the use of the main caregiver frame does not conflict with the general framing pattern of the LDP politicians that recognises limited responsibilities of fathers.

Moving the focus to the proposed actions, the difference between the two parties is evident: the CDU predominantly mentioned enabling and non-intervening frames while the LDP heavily relied on promoting and intervening frames. The difference here can be explained in relation to the fatherhood models presented by the parties. The CDU favoured enabling and non-intervening measures that allowed fathers to take care of their children if they wanted to but also allowed them to maintain the conventional breadwinning role. On the other hand, the LDP showed the motivation to take various measures to promote father's caregiving for several reasons. First, as the LDP insisted on the numerical goal of parental leave uptake rate, the LDP politicians proposed more explicit incentives for fathers to achieve the goals (Nakazato, 2023). Second, as father's caregiving was mostly framed as a support to the mother's which was in line with the conservative value of family unity, the LDP politicians could freely claim for more intervening and effective measures without facing criticism from traditionalist groups within the party.

Based on the aforementioned comparison of each frame component, I would like to determine the similar policy-framing strategies of the CDU and LDP and discuss how much the findings on the CDU and LDP can be generalised as conservative policy-framing. Even though the CDU and LDP showed differences in each frame component, with all the frame components combined, both of the parties achieved the same outcome of policy-framing: the parties framed father's caregiving as compatible not only with the feminist interests but also with the conservative interests. The CDU mentioned a wide variety of diagnostic frames to show that father's caregiving is beneficial for everyone.

At the same time, the CDU proposed measures to enable father's choice on the caregiving role to avoid criticism neither from traditionalists nor feminists. The LDP on the other hand legitimised the intervention in the distribution of care at home by limiting the father's caring role and emphasising its benefits for the conservatives. In this way, both the CDU and LDP tried to convince traditionalist politicians and voters that families with conventional gender roles based on the male-breadwinner model will not be disadvantaged by the policy reforms. As a result of policy-framing, both of the parties avoided highlighting the progressive effect of the policy reform such as gender equality in caregiving, which was a main driver for the precedent reforms in Nordic countries. Instead, the CDU and LDP emphasised on one hand its minimal unfavourable effects on conservative families, and on the other hand its significant benefits for national interests as a result of the increased father's caregiving. Even though the parental leave policy policies proposed by the CDU and LDP were very similar to the ones by social democratic parties in Nordic countries, the CDU and LDP utilised different framing strategies to legitimise the policy reforms in the more conservative political settings.

Finally, I would like to address my research question by generalising the discussion on policy-framing by the CDU and LDP. The comparison between the CDU and LDP indicated a good example that conservative parties could use different issues, ideas and actions to legitimise similar policy reforms in different political settings. However, I still expect that a few policy-framing strategies found in the cases of the CDU and LDP can be applied to any conservative party's policy-framing. First, conservative catch-all parties would utilise the conservative frames that could be associated with father's caregiving to demonstrate that father's caregiving matches both feminist values and conservative interests. Second, conservative parties would avoid using the combination of the fatherhood model and action proposal that would explicitly disadvantage traditional gender division of labour. In order to avoid criticism from traditionalists, conservative parties would be reluctant to define the father's caring role as a primary caregiver by large-scale intervening measures such as setting incentives or punishments. With these two policy-framing strategies, conservative parties would be able to frame parental leave reforms that favour father's caregiving as beneficial for conservative voters and stakeholders who keep supporting traditional gender norms.

7. Conclusion

This study addressed how conservative catch-all parties in conservative gender regimes in developed democracies framed father's caregiving for father-friendly policy reforms. To solve this research question, I analysed the policy frames used by two conservative parties in Germany and Japan. My research provides both empirical and theoretical contributions for future research. This is the first comparative analysis of policy-framing on father's caregiving by conservative parties, which contributes to our understanding of how conservative parties frame policies that are not in line with their conservative party ideologies on caregiving. Moreover, combining the literature and bottom-up codes, I have devised an analytical framework to examine policy-framing on parental leave policies. My framework can be used by other researchers who study similar policy reforms in other countries to carry out a more systematic comparative analysis.

The research had several limitations due to the selected methods and cases. As the research dealt only with the statements made by conservative politicians in the official documents, the development process of policy frames through policy debates with other political actors was not concerned. Besides, I need to carefully examine the validity of the generalisation from the data of policy-framing by the CDU and LDP. If I have more cases of policy-framing on father's caregiving by conservative parties in future, I would be able to investigate whether the policy-framing of these parties represents a common pattern of conservative parties. A systematic comparative explanatory analysis with the data of more cases would allow me to fully theorise the similarities and differences in outcomes. Despite these limitations, the study contributes to filling in the lack of knowledge on the framing strategies of conservative parties on father's caregiving.

After several revisions of the parental leave policies, parental leave policies for fathers in Germany and Japan are now categorised as generous as the Swedish parental leave system which was one of the models for their reforms (Chau et al., 2017). However, both countries still stand out for the unequal distribution of parental leave uptake between mothers and fathers compared to not only the forerunner Nordic countries but also the

latecomer countries in parental leave policies such as Luxemburg, Portugal or Estonia (OECD, 2022). In addition to the social and cultural factors that have been investigated by other researchers (Miyajima & Yamaguchi, 2017; Reimer, 2017), I propose the possibility that the policy-framing on father's caregiving by conservative parties might influence father's reluctant attitudes toward parental leave uptake. I can expect that the framing strategy of conservative parties, which consists of the diagnostic frames advocating national interests and the prognostic frames emphasising the freedom of choice or the limited importance of caring fatherhood, would limit the motivations of fathers for caregiving, even though the generous parental leave policies give high incentives for the father's uptake. Therefore, future research should examine the influence of conservative parties' policy-framing on the persisting low level of father's leave uptake. With more data of conservative parties adapting feminist arguments in future, there will be a bigger possibility to understand the policy-framing strategies of conservative catch-all parties and their broader influence on gender equality in caregiving at home.

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9. Appendices

9.1 Appendix A: The list of documents for the analysis

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9.2 Appendix B: The list of codes for the frame analysis

Frame component	Codes	Definition (above) and example (below)
Issue formulation	Feminist	Statement that challenges existing gender roles "Parental allowance is...a step towards more equality. It promotes fathers' responsibility for raising children... and it promotes the anchoring of mothers in their professional life"
	Conservative	Statement that deals with conventional conservative interests "The families with fathers who take part in childcare are more often satisfied with the childcare experience of the first child, hence they are more willing to have the second."
Fatherhood model	Main caregiver	Statement arguing that the father should take as much caring responsibility as the mother "Our intention for the policy reform is that fathers and mothers in turn take the leave for half a year respectively."
	Supportive caregiver	Statement arguing that the father should help the mother with caring for children "We should accept it if men take parental leave for just 5 or 10 days because that length is enough to make women feel that they are doing childcare together."
	Up to fathers	Statement arguing that it is father's choice how much caring responsibility he takes "We do not force anyone to take two bonus months. The state does not force something, but it makes an offer. "
Action proposal	Promoting/ Intervening	Statement arguing that father's caregiving should be promoted by intervening measures "We need to promote father's parental leave uptake...for this purpose, we need to provide an additional benefit for the companies where more than 10% of their male employees have taken parental leave for a month or longer."
	Enabling/ Non-intervening	Statement arguing that father's caregiving should be enabled by non-intervening measures "Politics and business are now facing a challenge to enable working fathers to be involved more in the family."

9.3 Appendix C: The list of sub-codes for the frame analysis

Codes	Sub-codes	Definition (above) and example (below)
Feminist	Gender equality	Statement that explicitly problematised inequality between women and men “...then there will also be a balance between the sexes.”
	Men's changing attitude	Statement that deals with men’s willingness to take care of children “Although 31.8% of men want to take a parental leave, only 2.63% actually take it, which means that the men’s wish and the reality do not quite match.”
	Work-life balance	Statement that points out the lack of compatibility between work and caregiving for either women or men. “...so that both men and women balance work and childcare”
Conservative	Child welfare	Statement that points out the negative effect on children caused by the lack of father’s caregiving “...so that means: great benefit for cooperation in the community and great benefit for the children.”
	Demographic	Statement that problematised low-birth rates or showed an explicit intention to promote giving birth “...fathers and mothers are accepted in the working life and receive more support, then more children will be born.”
	Economic	Statement that points out the economic issues “The social environment where husband and wives can take care of children together will decrease the women’s risk of pausing their career development, which would possibly contribute to the revitalisation of the national economy”