

After the Abe Assassination: Tracking Religion in Japan



Minister of Education Nagaoka Keiko addresses reporters on 17 October 2022 at the Prime Minister's office to announce an investigation aimed at removing religious juridical person status from the former Unification Church.

Japan's religious juridical persons law (*shūkyō hōjinhō*) includes provisions that allow the government to investigate and dissolve religions.

Levi McLaughlin
North Carolina State University



8 July: former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō, campaigning for his Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), is gunned down in Nara by Yamagami Tetsuya (41).

14 July: PM Kishida announces plans to hold a state funeral for Abe, the first in Japan for a former PM since 1967 (for Yoshida Shigeru).



Revelations pour forth about Yamagami's motive: a grudge against the Unification Church.

Yamagami targeted Abe for his long-term support for the church, which convinced Yamagami's mother to make ruinous donations that bankrupted the family.



The Family Federation for World Peace and Unification



Mass blessings (weddings) of thousands matched up by the church.



“Spiritual sales” as onerous financial demands.

Adherent dedication to “true parents” Sun-Myung Moon (1920-2012) and Hak Ja Han Moon (1943-).



Instrumental in formulating and promoting anti-LGBT+, anti-gender equality, and other conservative legislation, especially as ordinances at the prefectural and municipal levels.

Active in Japan since 1959, claims 600,000 adherents (most likely ~60,000 active members in Japan).





27 September: 4183 attendees honor former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō at Nippon Budōkan (Tokyo). They include seven members of the Imperial Family, thousands of current and former Japanese politicians, and ~700 foreign dignitaries (no G7 leaders).



Approximately 25,000 people wait for more than four hours in a line stretching ~2 km to lay flowers at a designated memorial spot separated from the Budōkan.



On 27 September and at earlier events, before the National Diet, at the Atomic Bomb Dome in Hiroshima, and in other locations, thousands demonstrate against the state funeral. Yamagami cosplayers join the fray...

Some of the largest demonstrations in Japan since the 2015 protests against the security laws.



Opposition to the state funeral plan, even in conservative news outlets, dominates polls.

各世論調査での国葬反対の割合

	前回調査 7月末 もしくは8月	9月調査 前回との差 Pはポイント
読売新聞	46%	56% 10P増
NHK	50%	56.7% 6.7P増
朝日新聞	50%	56% 6P増
時事通信	47.3%	51.9% 4.6P増
日経新聞・ テレビ東京	47%	60% 13P増
共同通信	53.3%	60.8% 7.5P増
毎日新聞・社会 調査研究センター	53%	62% 9P増
産経新聞・ FNN	51.1%	62.3% 11.2P増



Many state funeral opponents cite the cost to taxpayers (~US\$8 million+), but animosity is driven by outrage at revelations about LDP links with the Unification Church.

The Kishida Cabinet's approval rate drops to a low of 29%, down from a previous high of 64%

Push to remove religious juridical person status from the FFWPU

26 September: Komeito leader Yamaguchi Natsuo warns of a need to be “extremely cautious” about abusing any order to dissolve a religious juridical person.

Only two religious juridical persons to date (out of ~180,000) have been dissolved: Aum Shinrikyō and Myōkakuji.

Dramatic press appearances by second-generation former UC members (e.g. Ogawa Sayuri at the FCCJ on 7 Oct) are spurring support for dissolving the church.



17 October: PM Kishida announces probe that could strip the church of religious juridical person (*shūkyō hōjin*) status. A telephone advice service for UC victims opened by the government on 5 September received more than 1,700 calls, many of which detailed financial abuse by the church.

18 October: The ruling coalition is joined by opposition parties Japan Innovation Party and the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, which cooperated earlier to push for new legislation aiding those who have endured malevolent financial damage via manipulative contractual demands.

19 October: Kishida lowers bar for a dissolution order, saying civil law violations (not only criminal) could allow for it.



Efforts to dissolve the Church

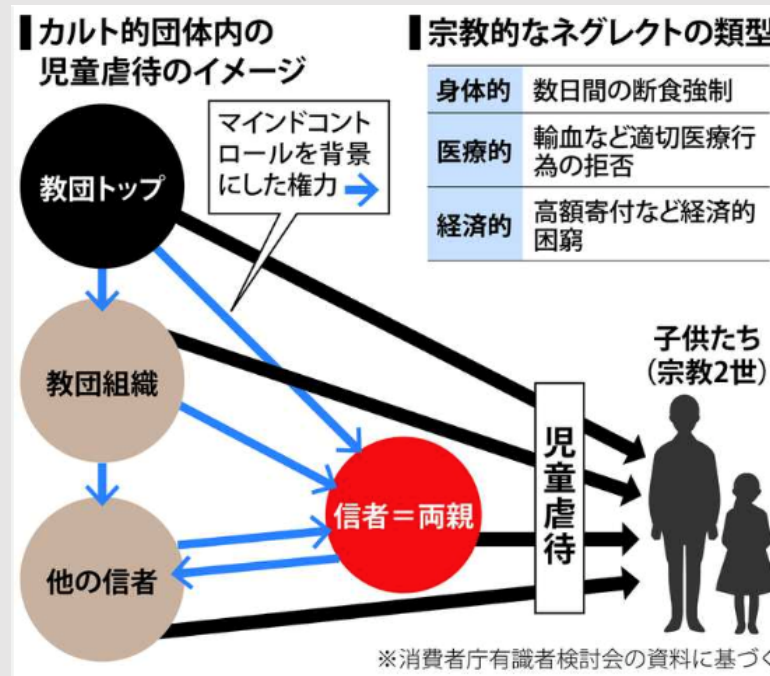
22 November: Japan's Ministry of Education begins its first investigation of the FFWPU. A second round of inquiries follows on 15 December.

The government oversees multiple committees that contribute to the investigation, including a Religious Juridical Persons Law Inquiry Board (Shūkyō Hōjin Shingikai 宗教法人審議会) chaired by Ishii Kenji (Professor of Shinto Studies at Kokugakuin University) at the Agency for Cultural Affairs.

Other academics, including Shimazono Susumu (emeritus at University of Tokyo) and Sakurai Yoshihide (prominent anti-Unification Church expert) petition to join the experts investigating the church and call for a quick dissolution order from the government.

10 December: Japan's parliament enacts a law to restrict malicious solicitations for donations. Critics note that the new law lacks donation limits and protection for “second-generation religious” (*shūkyō nisei* 宗教2世) and backs off from previous drafts that promised aid to victims of “mind control.”

Shūkyō nisei becomes a prominent term in media and political discourse. A wave of new books, magazines, etc. featuring the voices of people who grew up within the Unification Church, Soka Gakkai, Kōfuku no Kagaku, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, and other controversial groups.



The apotheosis of Yamagami

13 January 2023: Yamagami Tetsuya indicted by prosecutors for the murder of Abe Shinzō and violating Japan's firearms and sword law. He underwent psychiatric evaluation at the Osaka Detention Center from late July 2022, was declared fit to stand trial.



僕は、星になれるのか

REVOLUTION

+1



Fandom for Yamagami has risen since the assassination.

- A change.org petition calling to reduce or commute his sentence has ~13,500 signatures (as of 2 Feb. 2023).
- Young women dubbed the “Yamagami Girls” are internet fans, as are others who render his image in heroic styles.
- The Osaka Detention Center ran out of space to keep a steady stream of gifts sent to Yamagami (including cash exceeding one million yen).
- A feature-length film titled “Revolution+1” that portrays Yamagami as a heroic victim. A 50-minute version opened in Japanese theaters on the day of Abe's state funeral (full version released 24 December). It was directed by Adachi Masao (83), former member of the Japanese Red Army and radical leftist artist. The feature film began screening in Germany in late January 2023.

Preliminary twitter data on Abe assassination

Descriptive statistics of the dataset

- tweet date/time; **July 3, 09:00 to September 10 (collection ongoing)**
- dataset size: **181** million tweets (**30** million non-retweets, **151** million retweets);
- some duplication expected, tweets are unique within each query collection, but there are overlaps between different queries)
- tweet author; **82.3** million unique **authors**
- tweet content; **50+** content **categories** (by collection query)
- tweet mentions; **2.5** million **mentions** (in unique tweets)
- number of likes (at collection time); **468** million **likes** (in unique tweets)
- number of retweets (at collection time); **135.9** million **retweets**
- other metadata (links, media, ids etc.); **multiple billion pieces of metadata** (number of tweets * number of metadata fields, generally at least 8-9 active on any tweet)
- **~200 million collected** - all counts above are preliminary and done using a conservative approach

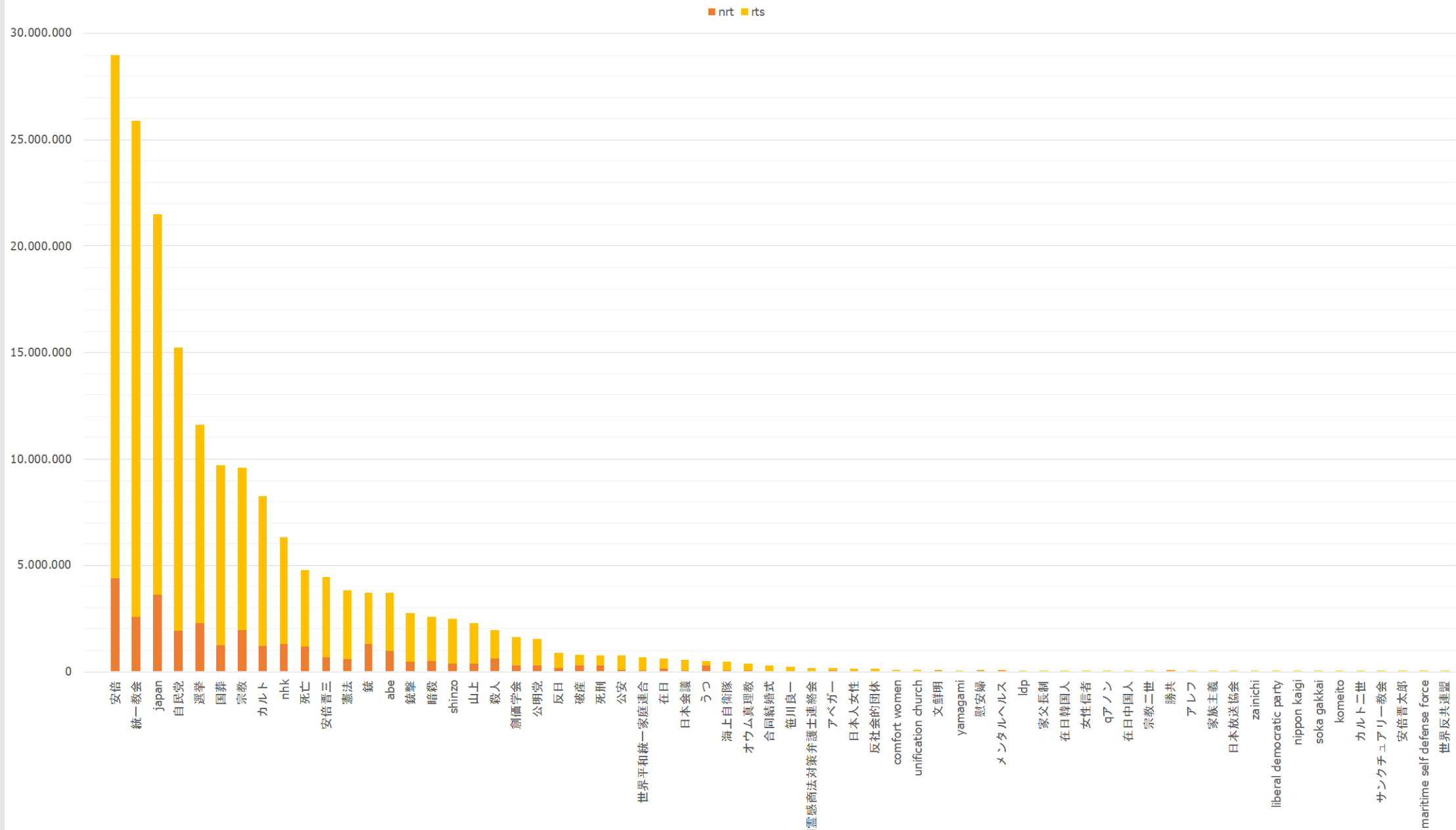
Japan's largest-ever Twitter event

Descriptive statistics of data by collection query

Topic (sample)	Three Days Prior (July 5-7)	Three Days After (July 8-10)	72-Hour % Increase
安倍 (Abe)	119,364	8,260,493	6,820.42
japan	862,507	1,458,581	69.11
統一教会 (Unification Church)	13,828	949,385	6,765.67
自民党 (LDP)	750,863	1,421,465	89.31
宗教 (religion)	66,136	877,533	1,226.86
カルト (cult)	30,480	305,367	901.86
海上自衛隊 (Maritime Self Defense Force)	15,618	244,732	1,466.99
世界平和統一家庭 連合 (Family Federation for World Peace and Unification)	1,370	46,059	3,261.97
在日 (Zainichi)	25,104	53,393	112.69
Comfort Women	233	47,633	20,343.35

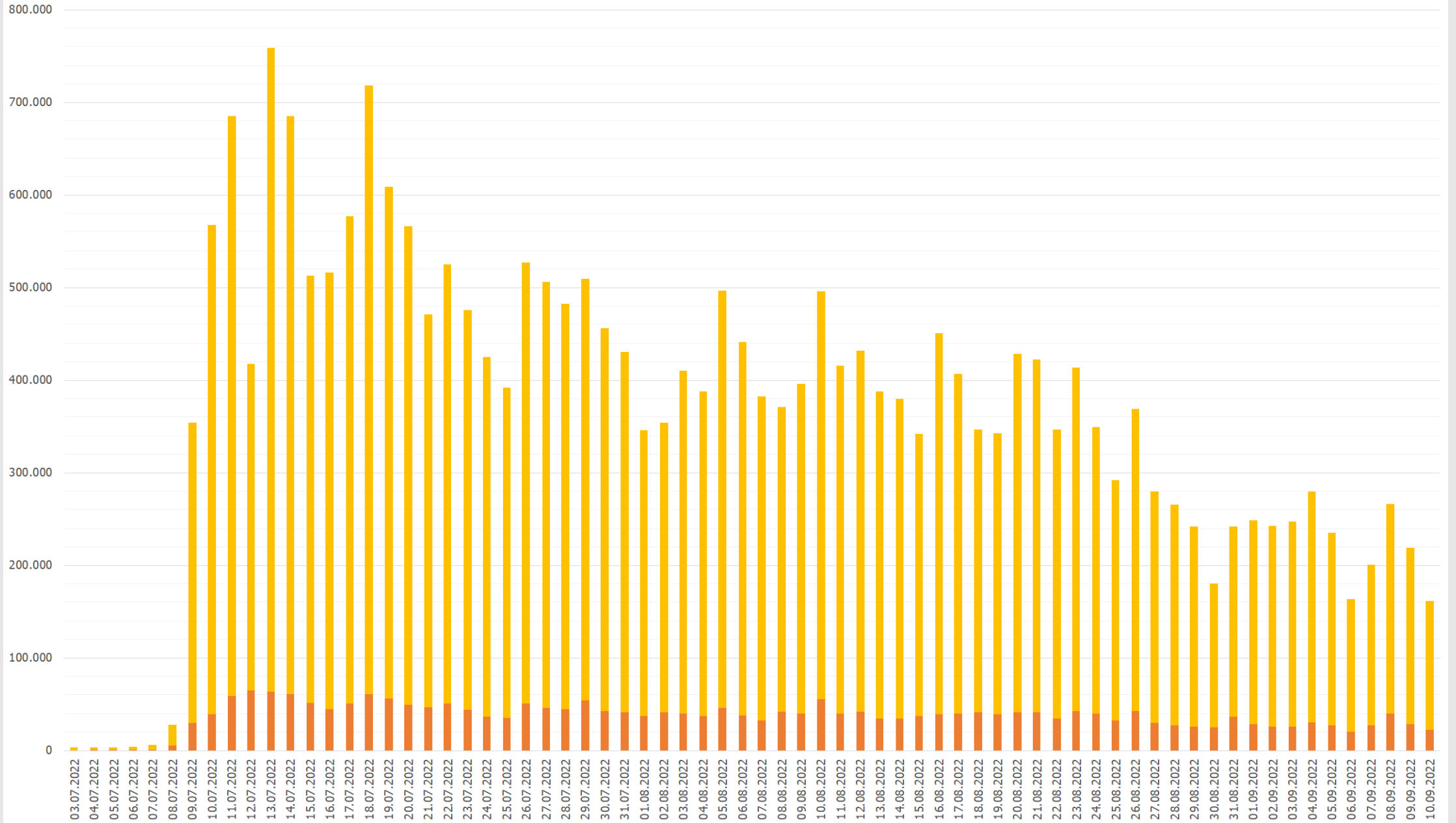
Collected by Matthew Brummer, National Graduate
Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS), Tokyo

Shinzo Abe Assassination Dataset, 4 july - 10 september 2022 / total tweets collected by query by kind



Shinzo Abe Assassination Dataset / total tweets collected for query "統一教会 "

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Religion in Japan: conceptual dilemmas

Public aversion to the category

“Do you have religious faith?” (2008 *Yomiuri shinbun* survey): 26.1% yes, 71.9% no

<10% of survey respondents in Japan trust religious organizations (2010 World Values Survey), lowest in world

2013 Japanese National Character survey: 72% have no religious faith

2015 Japanese General Social Survey: 68.6% do not follow any religion

2015 WIN-Gallup International GLOBAL Index of Religiosity and Atheism: 13% of respondents in Japan affirm they are religious (2nd lowest in world), 31% claim to be *not* religious, 31% atheist

“Faith” and “action” divides

2018 NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute values survey:

- 47% believe in either buddhas or the *kami* (deities)
- Only 32% assert non-belief
- 71% perform ritual visits to graves >1X / year
- Only 12% perform no religious activities

Post-assassination curation of religion in media-driven narratives

Impact on religion by anti-cult academics, lawmakers, lawyers, and journalists

- Hardened divide between cults vs. traditional groups, suspect/malicious/illegitimate vs. real religion. Advancing now via deliberations overseen by the Religious Juridical Persons Law Council at the Agency for Cultural Affairs and related governmental bodies.
- Moral panic about cults amplified by media coverage of anti-cult activists, including those who shaped discourses following the Aum Shinrikyō attacks in 1995.
- Concern for ways moral panic can be weaponized by savvy political actors apparent in the statements (and silences) of the governing coalition.

Impact on religions and religion affiliates in Japanese politics



Komeito leader Yamaguchi Natsuo (l) greets his re-elected Liberal Democratic Party coalition partner Prime Minister Abe Shinzō (r) on 25 December 2012.

Japan's national-level ruling coalition

Liberal Democratic Party

- **Leader:** Prime Minister Kishida Fumio (since October 2021)
- House of Representatives (**Lower House**) members: 260
- House of Councillors (**Upper House**) members: 119



Komeito

- **Leader:** Yamaguchi Natsuo (since 2009)
- **Lower House** members: 32
- **Upper House** members: 27



Japan's religion/politics ecology

Ideologues who inform the LDP
(Association for Shinto Shrines,
Nippon Kaigi, Unification Church,
numerous others)



Komeito (Clean Government
Party) and its affiliated lay
Buddhist association Soka Gakkai



Komeito 公明党 (the Clean Government Party)

A pivotal presence in national and regional Japanese politics

- Founded November 1964
- In coalition with the LDP at the national level since 1999

Members in:

- House of Representatives: 32
- House of Councillors: 27
- Prefectural Assemblies: 197
- Municipal Assemblies: 2,690

Driven by electioneering by members of Soka Gakkai through *f-tori*

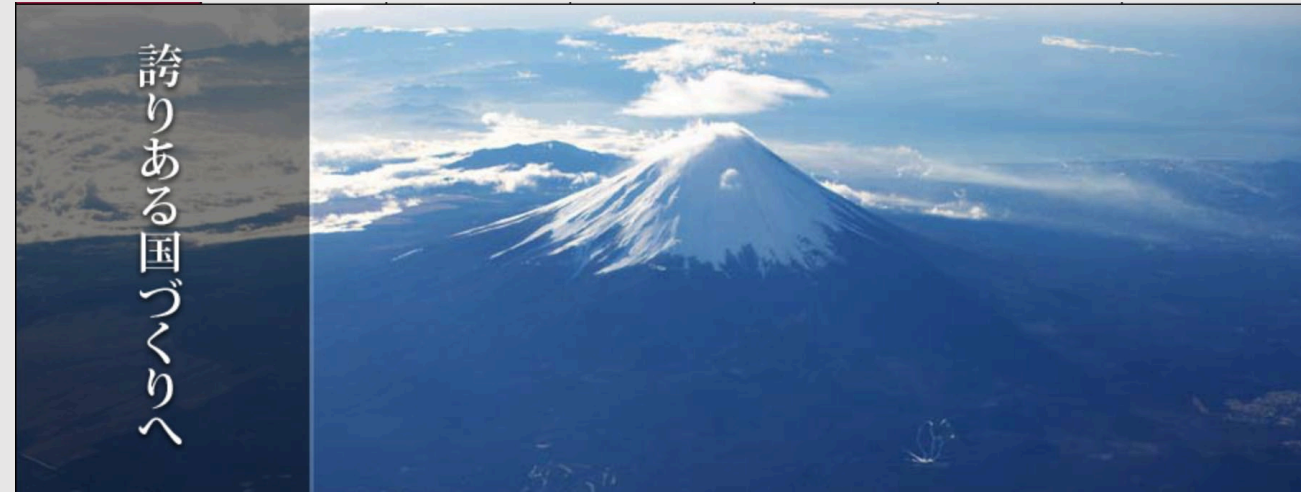


Nippon Kaigi 日本会議 [Japan Conference]

Meeting-point for diverse activists

- Claims ~38,000 members
- Founded in 1997 by the composer Mayuzumi Toshirō (1929-1997)
- Merged Nippon o Mamoru Kokumin Kaigi (founded 1981, political) and Nippon o Mamoru Kai (1974, religious)
- A meeting point for a majority of LDP Diet politicians, numerous business leaders, journalists, educators, members of religious groups, ethics training organizations, and other ideologically motivated enterprises
- Kaigi leaders and employees, many from Seichō no Ie families, reacted against the student movement in the 1960s and 70s and/or are latter-day converts to conservative causes
- A modest operation with deep ties to powerholders

Conflates pragmatic and transcendent aims



Slogan from the Nippon Kaigi homepage: “Toward making a nation (*kunizukuri*) with pride.”

Cultivation as a binding agent within Nippon Kaigi

Nippon Kaigi's participants come from:

- Jinja Honchō (Association of Shinto Shrines)
- Shintō Seiji Renmei (Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership)
- Formal and informal associations of Shinto clergy
- Rinri Kenkyūjo, Moralogy, and other incorporated ethics training organizations
- Numerous NGOs and NPOs (OISCA and others)
- Religious juridical persons (*shūkyō hōjin*) categorized as Buddhist, Christian, Shinto, and other
- Diverse conventions and teachings, participant groups frequently at odds with one another
- Shared commitment to Nippon Kaigi's political and transcendent aims
- Generally agree on shared forms of cultivation as a means to achieve them
- Engage in techniques of “person-making” (*hitozukuri*) to realize “nation-making” (*kunizukuri*)

Who is missing from the story?



12 September: LDP Secretary General Moteji Toshimitsu announced that 179 Diet members (out of 379) had Unification Church links. Follow-up investigations by journalists find others.

Overlooked dimensions: **gender** and **social class**

- It took the murder of Japan's most prominent man by a male assailant to trigger public outcry against decades of women adherents' exploitation.
- We need to account for the grassroots-level, everyday engagements of adherents like Yamagami's mother to understand how Japan's religion/politics nexus is mobilized from the ground up.
- While institutional leadership and representations of claimants are male-dominated, local-level participation in meetings, rituals, electioneering, and related events are driven in large part by women for whom institutional engagement exceeds a calculus of exploitation.
- We are unable to properly understand motivations for participation in Japan's religion/politics ecology without sustained efforts to appreciate non-elite participants on their own terms.

“Religion”: a category born of political intervention

Shūkyō 宗教 as a new legal category from the 1850s “Religion” presuppositions not typically borne in Japan



Shūkyō translated from “religion” as Japan transformed into a modern imperialist nation-state

Treaty of Amity and Commerce between Japan and the United States, signed at Yedo, 29 July 1858

Article Eighth.

Americans in Japan, shall be allowed the free exercise of their Religion, and for this purpose shall have the right to erect suitable places of worship. No injury shall be done to such buildings, nor any insult be offered to the religious worship of the Americans.

American Citizens shall not injure, any Japanese temple or mia, or offer any insult or injury, to Japanese religious ceremonies, or to the objects of their worship.

The Americans and Japanese shall not do anything, that may be calculated to excite religious animosity. The Government of Japan has already abolished, the practice of trampling on religious emblems.

- | | |
|--------|------|
| • 信教 | 神道 |
| • 宗門 | 奉教礼拝 |
| • 宗旨法教 | 聖人の道 |
| • 宗旨の教 | 聖道 |
| • 法教 | 教門 |
| • 宗旨 | |
| • 教門 | |
| • 法教 | |
| • 教 | |

- Regular worship attendance
- Knowledge of teachings / scripture
- Centrality of personal, interiorized faith
- Exclusive adherence

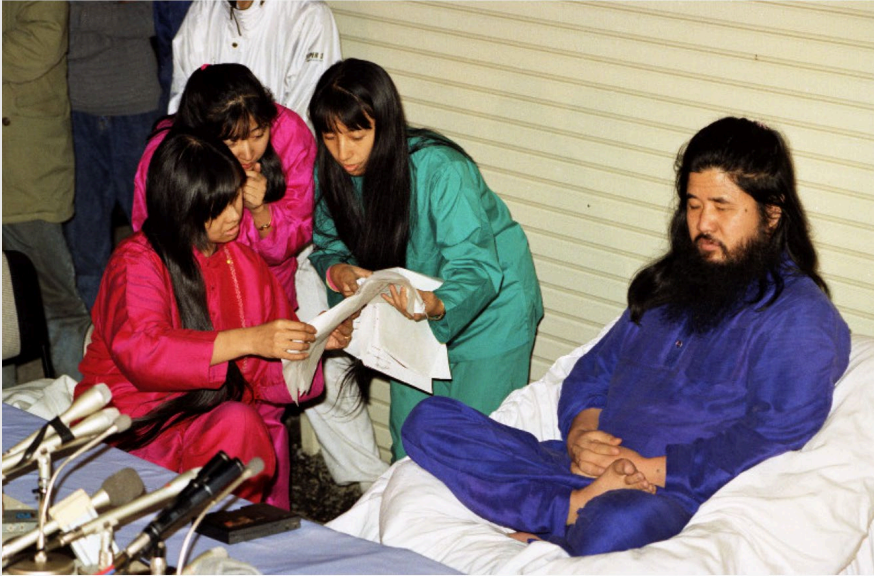


A visitor to the tsunami-ravaged shore at Sendai offers a prayer in 2011.

“Religion” particularly stigmatized since 1995

The Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas attacks of the mid-1990s

A new “religion” narrative following the 3.11 disasters



Religion in Japan: conceptual dilemmas

“Born Shinto, [marry Christian], die Buddhist”

- Japan population (2021): 126,050,804
- Shinto: 87,924,087 parishioners (~69.8%)
- Buddhist: 83,971,139 parishioners (~66.7%)
- Christian: 1,915,294 (~1.5%)
- “Other” religions: 7,335,572 (5.9%)

Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunkachō),
Shūkyō nenkan [religion almanac], 2021



Multiple divisions of religion and state in the 1947 Constitution

Article 20

- Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all. No religious organization shall receive any privileges from the State, nor exercise any political authority.
- No person shall be compelled to take part in any religious act, celebration, rite or practice.
- The State and its organs shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activity.

Article 89

- No public money or other property shall be expended or appropriated for the use, benefit or maintenance of any religious institution or association, or for any charitable, educational or benevolent enterprises not under the control of public authority.

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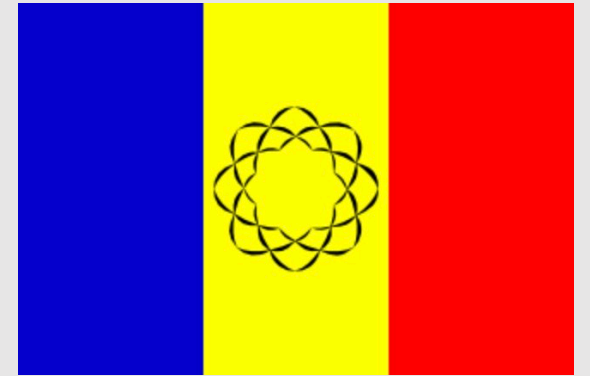
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Sōka Gakkai 創価学会 (Value Creation Study Association)



Makiguchi Tsunesaburō 牧口常三郎 (1871-1944)



Toda Jōsei 戸田城聖 (1900-1958)



Ikeda Daisaku 池田大作
(1928-)



Nichiren 日蓮
(1222-1282)



Soka Gakkai developed as a peace movement as Komeito rationalized its founding pacifism



Under Ikeda's leadership, Gakkai members carried out "world peace culture festivals" (*sekai heiwa bunkasai* 世界平和文化祭) and other peace promotion campaigns.



Former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō 安倍晋三 (l) confirms the LDP alliance with Komeito leader Yamaguchi Natsuo 山口那津男 (r).

Pragmatic and transcendent aims

Objectives:

- **Immediate:** Adding a third clause to Article 9 (the “peace clause”) to recognize the constitutionality of the Japan Self-Defense Forces
- Promoting new laws preventing different spousal family names (*fūfu bessei*), forestalling the enthronement of a female Imperial sovereign (*josei tennō / jokei tennō*)
- **Ultimate:** Doing away with the 1947 Constitution, ushering in a polity centered on Emperor reverence that harkens back to the 1890 Meiji Constitution and upholds principles of the 17-Article Constitution of 604
- Eliminating constitutional divides between religion and government, cultivating a return to *matsurigoto* 政
- Remilitarizing Japan, potentially with nuclear weapons
- Comprehensive overhaul of educational and social policies to cultivate Japanese citizens as imperial subjects (*kokumin* 国民)

People:

- A fluid network of activists from a broad range of religious, institutional, educational, social class, and ethnic backgrounds
- Maintain intimate ties with Liberal Democratic Party politicians and other conservative lawmakers
- Coalesce around nostalgia for the imagined glories of Japan’s idealized past
- Otherwise differ greatly in their ideals and teachings
- Regard political engagement as a necessary but limited component of far more comprehensive *cultivation campaigns*
- Many organizations potentially fungible: most important are 1) personal ties 2) shared ideals and 3) a common methodology