

Legal, Financial, Religious and Political Issues at Stake in the Struggle over the Unification Church's Corporate Status in Japan

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ABSTRACT: Shinzo Abe, Japan's longest serving Prime Minister (2006–7, 2012–20), was assassinated on July 8, 2022. The assassin claimed that his action was prompted by Abe's support of the Unification Church (UC), known officially as the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU, of which the author is a member), against which he held a grudge due to his mother's excessive donations twenty years previously. The Japanese government opened a probe of the church on October 17, 2022, and on October 12, 2023, announced that it would seek a court order revoking the UC's legal status. Controversy in Japan over the UC, a Korea-based new religious movement (NRM) founded by Moon Sun Myung has been ongoing for more than half a century. This article examines legal, financial, religious, and political issues at stake in the government's action.

KEYWORDS: Unification Church, Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, Unification Church in Japan, Assassination of Shinzo Abe, Dissolution Proceedings Against the Unification Church in Japan.

Introduction

While campaigning for a provincial candidate in Nara City, former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (1954–2022) was shot from behind at close range by an assassin with a homemade gun. Abe was transported by medical helicopter to a local hospital where he expired six hours later. Police apprehended the assassin, 41-year-old Tetsuya Yamagami, at the scene. He told investigators that he shot Abe in retaliation for the former Prime Minister's support of the Unification Church (UC), known officially as the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), a Korea-based new religious movement (NRM) founded by Moon Sun Myung (1920–2012). Yamagami stated that he held a grudge

against the UC over his mother's excessive donations which had driven his family into bankruptcy.

Abe was a staunch conservative and regarded by many as a right-wing nationalist. There was controversy over his state funeral, which was not a tradition in post-World-War-II Japan. There also was controversy over the National Police Agency's security lapses. However, the main controversy was over the UC. The assassination "powered Japan's largest-ever Twitter event" with the UC next to Abe as "the most frequently appearing keyword in the approximately 350 million tweet firestorm" (McLaughlin 2023, 209). An analysis of 4,238 UC-related stories in Japanese media found "not one gave a positive angle on the Unification Church" (Hawksley 2022).

Outrage initially focused on alleged pressure tactics used by UC members in selling religious artifacts and obtaining donations. A National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (NNLASS) claimed that "between 1987 and 2021," they had "pursued more than 35,000 claims against the church and won back 123.7 billion yen, or just under \$900 million" (*The Asahi Shimbun* 2022a). Media accounts featured anguished stories of UC members' adult children who testified to have been negatively affected, even broken by their parents' donations. This, ironically, led to sympathy for the assassin. An online petition to reduce or commute Yamagami's sentence "garnered more than 13,500 signatures," gifts including "over 1 million yen in cash" flooded into his detention center, and a hastily-made feature-length film depicting him as a "sympathetic underdog" screened on September 27, the day of Abe's state funeral (McLaughlin 2023, 214).

Japanese media also scrutinized links between the UC and Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). *The Asahi Shimbun*, in an online survey of 3,333 Japanese lawmakers, found that 447, including 150 Diet members, 290 prefectural assembly members, and seven governors, affirmed that they had ties to the UC. Eighty percent were affiliated with the LDP (*The Asahi Shimbun* 2022c). In a separate investigation, the LDP announced that 179 of its 379 Diet members disclosed links with the church (Uechi 2022). It was further revealed that at least 30 deputies in LDP Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's cabinet had various levels of contact with the UC (Yoshikawa 2022).

These disclosures resulted in a series of measures directed against the UC:

- On August 31, 2022, the LDP announced that it would no longer have any relationship with the UC and its associated organizations.
- On October 16, 2022, PM Kishida announced that the government would exercise the “right of inquiry” provision under the Religious Corporations Act (Religious Corporations Act 1951) to open an investigation into the UC.
- On October 19, 2022, Kishida stated an order to dissolve the UC could include civil as well as criminal violations.
- On December 10, 2022, the Japanese Diet passed two bills, one restricting the solicitation of donations by religious organizations such as the UC, the other providing relief to victims.
- On September 7, 2023, Japan’s Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) announced that the Family Federation of Japan might be fined for not answering properly to questions from the ministry.
- On October 12, 2023, the MEXT stated it will apply to the Tokyo District Court for a “dissolution order.”
- On October 13, 2023, the MEXT asked the Tokyo District Court to issue an order to dissolve the UC under Japan’s Religious Corporations Act.

The UC, its attorneys and various human rights activists vigorously opposed these measures in public statements, press conferences, petitions, lawsuits, and multiple articles, but to little effect. An attorney for the UC provided data that “only four lawsuits have been filed for refund of donations since 2009, and not a single case has been filed in the last seven years” (Nakayama 2023, 72). He also compared the UC to Japanese religious groups that had committed malicious crimes, including group assaults and murder, but against which courts did not grant orders to dissolve (Nakayama 2023, 72–3).

The UC alleged bias and one-sidedness in the government’s handling of its case. Suzan Johnson Cook, former U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, and Katrina Lantos Swett, former chair of the U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom, expressed concern that

Dissolving a religious organization that has not been found guilty of any crime would taint the image of Japan as a country committed to democratic principles (Johnson Cook and Lantos Swett 2023).

Controversy in Japan over the UC has been ongoing for more than fifty years. The Abe assassination brought the controversy to a head. This article examines legal,

financial, religious, and political issues at stake in the government's effort to revoke the UC's corporate status.

Legal Issues

Article 20 of the Japanese Constitution (1947) guarantees freedom of religion and does not allow religious organizations to exercise political authority or receive privileges from the state. However,

the constitution allows an individual belonging to a political party backed by a religious organization to hold public office... Religious organizations are also allowed to lobby and campaign for politicians and express political opinions publicly (U.S. Department of State 2023).

Japan's Religious Corporations Act (1951) provides the legal framework for establishing and running religious organizations, and the government's MEXT has jurisdiction over the approximately 180,000 registered religious organizations. Religious corporations are designated "non-profit foundations" and are tax exempt.

Section 81 of the Religious Corporations Act covers the dissolution of religious corporations. Courts may order the dissolution of a religious corporation when "in violation of laws and regulations... [it] commits an act which is clearly found to harm public welfare substantially." Only two religious corporations have been ordered to dissolve since its enactment. One was Aum Shinrikyo, a Buddhist sect which released sarin gas into the Tokyo subway system in 1995, killing 14 and injuring more than 1,000. The other was Myokakuji Temple, which was dissolved in 2002 for corporate fraud. The leaders of both groups were criminally convicted and jailed (and in Aum's case, executed). In both cases, the groups' assets were liquidated. A new provision was added to the law in 1995, "giving authorities the power to question members of a religious corporation" should the government "have sufficient reason to believe that cause exists... to dissolve the corporation" (Madden 1997, 357).

The UC-Japan was legally incorporated in 1964 and has had a checkered legal career. Its first missionary entered the country illegally in 1958 (Japan and Korea not having established diplomatic relations until 1965) and was deported the same year that the UC obtained legal status (Nishikawa 1966). Three years later, *The Asahi Shimbun* termed the UC "The Religion that Makes Parents Weep"

because contrary to other “newly arisen religions,” the UC detached young adults from jobs, colleges, and families (Beckford 1983; Mickler 1994; Clarke 2006). This sparked the formation of anti-UC parents’ associations and the beginning of religious deprogramming. In 1977, the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) declared war on the UC for its anti-communist activities and in 1987 the>NNLASS, alleged to be comprised of leftist lawyers and involved with religious deprogramming, began filing civil lawsuits against companies employing UC members for their solicitation practices. The>NNLASS filed unsuccessful requests to investigate and dissolve the UC in 1994, 1998, and 2012 (Nakayama 2023, 73). Its October 2022 request to disband the UC/FFWPU gained traction in the wake of the Abe assassination. In October 2023, following a year-long investigation, the MEXT asked the Tokyo District Court to issue an order dissolving the FFWPU.

The government’s action raises a host of issues, beginning with disputed facts. As noted, Nakayama, an attorney for the UC, claims that only four lawsuits have been filed for refund of donations since 2009 and not a single case has been filed since 2015. On the other hand, the>NNLASS reported that the situation did not improve and in 2021 alone, it “received legal inquiries involving over 300 million yen [\$2 million USD] from victims of the UC” (*Nippon TV News* 2022).

Nakayama countered that Japan’s Consumer Affairs Agency reported that in 2021,

only 1.9% of the damage consultations it invited for “spiritual sales” problems were related to the Family Federation. The remaining 98.1% involved “spiritual sales” for other organizations (Nakayama 2023, 90).

The government’s stated rationale for its investigation of the UC was based on judgments in 22 civil cases. However, the UC claims that it won half the cases and

90 percent of the plaintiffs in the 22 cases had been abducted, confined, and forced to leave the church... those who left... were then brought to court to claim damages (Holdhus 2023c; see Nakayama 2023, 87).

The UC and supporters claimed that the government’s right of inquiry and dissolution requests were driven by religious hate speech, public opinion, and politics. They criticized the appointment of one of the most uncompromising activists from the>NNLASS as an “expert” for the government investigating committee, and personal meetings of PM Kishida and MEXT officers with apostate former members (in-person meetings were denied to the UC). They also

argued that the MEXT provided distorted representations of the UC's submitted responses to questions. The UC filed a lawsuit against the MEXT and described its investigative probe as illegal. It also called for transparency in what will be a closed trial (Holdhus 2023a, 2023b).

The government's revised interpretation of Article 81 (1) (i) of the Religious Corporations Act will be a serious point of contention. The dissolution standard applied in the Aum Shinrikyo and Myokakuji Temple cases was a breach of criminal law. PM Kishida acknowledged this on October 18, 2022, when he stated, "violation of laws and regulations does not include torts under the Civil Code." However, the following day he changed his interpretation, declaring that if violations are "organized, malicious and continuous," civil law tort actions could be included (Holdhus 2023b).

UC attorney Nobuya Fukumoto (cited in Holdhus 2023b) argued that laws and regulations in Article 81 mean "actual laws, orders and substantive regulations." At an October 16, 2023, press conference, he noted that in exercising its right of inquiry, the government did not specify any law that had been violated, only saying, "the Family Federation has acted in breach of civil law and order" (Holdhus 2023b). He questioned whether this would be admissible in court and objected to the vagueness and broad application of the government's new interpretation.

Another issue raised by Fukumoto was "the interpretation of requirements for an act to be considered an act of a religious corporation." He cited the Tokyo High Court which ruled in the appeal of the Aum Shinrikyo case that

The acts referred to in the first sentence of Article 81 (1) (i) and (ii) of the Act are acts committed by the representative officers of a religious corporation, using property acquired and accumulated in the name of the organization (Holdhus 2023b).

In 2009, police raided several UC centers but failed to discover documents or evidence linking the church to illegal activities. The UC was subject to civil judgments over donations, but no UC official was charged, much less convicted on criminal charges.

Financial Issues

Financial issues have been a major source of controversy over the UC in Japan since 1987 when the Japanese Bar Association issued a 41-page report against so-called “spiritual sales,” a practice which influenced buyers through high-pressure sales tactics and “fortune-telling” to purchase items such as marble vases, ivory seals, and miniature pagodas at highly inflated rates (Mickler 1994). Separately incorporated businesses operated by UC members allegedly employed the practice in generating huge profits donated to the UC or related entities. After 1987, these companies became subject to civil lawsuits and out-of-court settlements. In 2000, Japan tightened consumer protections, and in 2009, two UC members who were senior officials of Shinsei, a seal retailer, were criminally convicted, fined, and sentenced to suspended jail terms. The UC denied involvement but “acknowledged responsibility for not having instructed members about the law and their duty to respect it” (Introvigne 2022, 81) The church president resigned, the UC issued a Statement of Compliance, and implemented reforms.

This dramatically reduced lawsuits (and profits) from the public and increased the UC’s dependence on donations from members. In reality, the line between customers and adherents was not clear. Housewives whose husbands worked long hours but who controlled household budgets (still common in Japan) were a target demographic for both sales and proselytization. However, large donations of women who became members resulted in family friction. Yamagami’s mother, whose husband died in 1984, joined the UC during the 1990s. She donated approximately 100 million yen to the church (\$720,000 USD) and filed for bankruptcy in 2002. Relatives pressed the UC for a refund and in 2009, an agreement, signed by both mother and son, was reached whereby members of the UC refunded 50 million yen by 2014. This did not lessen Yamagami’s grudge or desire for revenge. His July 2022 assassination of Abe exploded the issue of donations and its impact on families.

In December 2022, the Japanese Diet passed a Prevention of Unfair Solicitation of Donations by Corporations Act. The Consumer Affairs Agency (CAA) followed with guidelines in the form of questions and answers to courts and agencies for enforcing the Act. Although not mentioned by name, the text of the guidelines had the UC “squarely in its sights” (Lewis 2023):

- The Guidelines define “malicious and socially unacceptable forms of solicitation” as those “generally regarded by our society as inappropriate” (Q 1).
- In the case of donors who have joined a religious organization, they refer to “doctrines that take advantage” of people’s anxiety and “induces in them a state of confusion whereby they are mentally incapable of making judgments under free will” (Q 9).
- The Guidelines grant revocation rights for those claiming to be victims of “mind control” (Q 11).
- They prohibit “suggesting that the donor should borrow money to donate” (Q 14) and allow broad recovery rights to relatives and others who object to donations (Q 16).
- In the case of minors, the Guidelines provide for “special procedures... such as the suspension of parental authority, [or] the appointment of a guardian” (Q 17).
- Legal support “is considered to be particularly important ... to the relief of damage suffered by the relatives of donors” (Q 17: Introvigne 2023, 81–92).

Introvigne wrote that “the pseudo-scientific theory of brainwashing (or ‘mind control’)” was “being resurrected in Japan” (Introvigne 2023, 73). He also criticized Japanese authorities invoking “a standard of what society in general regard as appropriate” which he described as “a recipe for discrimination” (Introvigne 2023, 75). Lewis suggested that

in its rush to enact something, Japan has skipped over some extraordinarily nuanced theological questions and created potential trouble for a much larger circle of organizations and activities (Lewis 2023).

The Prevention of Unfair Solicitation Act and Guidelines imposes a “duty of consideration” whereby organizations (or individuals) soliciting donations “should ensure that the donation not make it [life] difficult for the individual, the individual’s spouse, or the individual’s relatives” (Article 3).

At a press conference on November 7, 2023, UC President Tomihiro Tanaka announced plans to allocate up to 10 billion yen (\$67 million) to the Japanese government to cover possible compensation for former believers and their families for damage they claim to have suffered. He apologized for circumstances that led to the situation but clarified that the apology did not equate to an acknowledgment of wrongdoing by the church toward former believers (*Kyodo News* 2023). The announcement was made in response to fears that the UC

would transfer assets overseas and calls to freeze its assets. Tanaka noted that the UC “had addressed 664 refund requests totaling around 4.4 billion yen” since July 2022 and “would continue to assess claims” but that “it would not be possible to comply with every request.” What impact, if any, the action will have on the government’s dissolution request, which Tanaka termed “impossible to accept,” is an open question.

Religious Issues

Japan is something of a religious anomaly. It consistently ranks among the least religious nations in the world with nearly three-fourths of its population indicating that they have no religious faith (Iwai 2017). On the other hand, membership in religious groups totaled 181 million as of December 31, 2020, out of a population of 124 million (reflecting affiliation with multiple religions) and there are approximately 180,000 registered religious organizations. Yoshihide Sakurai, professor of Sociology at Hokkaido University, explains,

From the Japanese standpoint, being on the rolls of a temple or shrine doesn’t count as having religion. That’s why most Japanese don’t consider themselves religious, even though they engage in religious activities like praying at shrines of temples on the New Year, visiting ancestral graves, and holding Buddhist memorial services for the dead (Itakura 2022).

McLaughlin points out a distinction in Japanese culture between “good religion” embedded in Japanese “culture, custom, spirituality, tradition, or another safe tradition” and “aberrant sects, misleading superstitions, nefarious cults, and other heterodoxies.” These minority groups account for what he describes as Japan’s “unease with religion” and trigger periodic “moral panics” (McLaughlin 2023, 210–11).

The UC clearly falls into the latter category. It was broadly stigmatized within Japanese society long before the Abe assassination. The first parent associations opposing the UC arose in the early 1970s. Vigilante-style kidnappings and “deprogramming” of UC members followed. Bromley reported 396 coercive deprogrammings of UC adherents in the U.S. from 1973–86 (Bromley 1988). In contrast, the UC Japan (UCJ) claimed as many as 300 a year and 4,300 total over a 40-year period, the most egregious case being that of Toru Goto, who was confined for twelve and a half years (Kamono 2009). Apart from “brainwashing”

claims, the nascent Japanese anti-cult movement (ACM) raised the specter of the UC's Korean origins and labeled it an organ of the Korean intelligence service KCIA.

The Japanese Communist Party (JCP) declared war on the UC in 1978 and called upon its members to “isolate and annihilate” it (Study Group on Communism and Religion 1984). In 1986, the United Church of Christ in Japan (UCCJ), Japan's largest grouping of Protestant bodies, disassociated itself in “faith” and “organization” from the UC and criticized its converts “rapid personality changes” (Clarke 2006, 48). In 1987, the NNLASS began filing lawsuits against the UC and agitating for its dissolution.

The Abe assassination focused attention on “second generation religious” (*shukyo nisei*) as a class of UC victims. Lyons notes that their stories “could be readily interpreted through the familiar lens of Yamagami's biography,” opening “the door for self-identified *nisei* to express their grievances to a broader audience and to begin to mobilize for political recognition” (Lyons forthcoming). Apart from the UC, unpopular groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and Soka Gakkai were identified. However, attention focused primarily on the UC.

In November 2022, the Japanese Diet conducted hearings, and in December, the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare published new guidelines on the “religious abuse of children.” Similar to the guidelines on religious donations, they included a series of questions and answers. These were titled, “Handling Child Abuse and Similar Cases Related to Religious and Similar Beliefs.” Among the listed prohibited actions were:

- Forcing children to participate in religious activities such as worship services and requiring them not to move for a long period of time (Q 2-3).
- Preventing children from socializing with friends in a way that our society generally accepts, and impairing the children's socialization, i.e., calling children's friends, teachers, or other persons with whom the children socialize “enemies,” “Satans,” or other similar names (Q 3-2).
- Prohibiting children from accessing forms of entertainment that are considered age-appropriate based on their general acceptance in society, i.e., fairy tales, cartoons, comics, and games; and allowing children to access only the forms of entertainment approved by their religious organizations (Q 3-3).

- Requiring children to wear ornaments and similar that objectively reveal their belief in a specific religion (Q 3-4).
- Forcing children to participate in missionary activities (Q 3-5).
- Spending money on belief-related, religious, or similar activities, and not providing children with appropriate housing environment, clothing, foods, and so on, which are needed for creating a healthy child-rearing environment (Q 4-2).
- Threatening children with expressions such as, “If you don’t do this, or do this, you will go to hell,” or with images or materials that may arouse fear (Q 4-3: see Introvigne 2023, 92–113).

Introvigne highlighted problems in defining “what child abuse in a religious or spiritual context is” and cited examples from multiple religious traditions that would be violations of Japan’s guidelines (Introvigne 2023, 76–9). He also criticized the rationale of the directive, i.e., “that religionists do not have the right to pass to their children a way of living that is different from what is ‘generally accepted’” because “many religions teach that what is ‘generally accepted’ by the majority is in fact morally decadent or unacceptable” (Introvigne 2023, 77–8). Parents’ “right to pass on their religious faith to their children,” he argued, “is not a right for parents in mainline and majority religions only” but “extends to parents who belong to minority religions, whose values are not those regarded as ‘normal’ by social majorities” (Introvigne 2023, 80). Lyons similarly notes,

If the government were to establish a new regulatory framework for religions, then the repercussions of the Abe assassination could be felt by the entire sector of religious organizations in Japan (Lyons forthcoming).

Political Issues

The exposure of UC inroads into Japan’s ruling LDP party was a driver of public outrage and calls for its dissolution. However, the involvement of religious organizations in Japanese politics, including electoral politics, is a pattern in Japanese political life. The most conspicuous example is Komeito, a political party founded by the lay Buddhist organization Soka Gakkai in 1964 and since 2012, the LDP’s junior coalition partner. According to McLaughlin,

For decades, Soka Gakkai has distinguished itself as Japan’s most potent vote-gathering engine. Komeito and allied LDP candidates alike rely on Gakkai adherents’ electioneering to win and keep their seats (McLaughlin 2023, 211).

Even when under pressure in the aftermath of the Abe assassination, LDP PM Kishida said that the separation of politics and religion contained in the country's constitution "is not meant to foreclose political activities by religious institutions." Likewise, Komeito president Natsuo Yamaguchi asserted that "political activities by religious groups are guaranteed by the constitution" (U.S. Department of State 2023). McLaughlin references other organizations with close LDP relationships including the Association of Shinto Shrines and Nippon Kaigi, a nationalist organization with links to state Shintoism (McLaughlin 2023, 211). He contends,

Abe's connection with the... Unification Church was therefore neither unusual nor exclusive. It was one of many interest groups, religious and otherwise, with which he maintained ties to further his and his party's policy aims and gain LDP parliamentary majorities (McLaughlin 2023, 211).

The issue, then, was not the UC's involvement in politics, but its identity as a social pariah. As Susumu Shimazono, professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo expressed it, "The priority should be to maintain a distance between politics and cult organizations with strong anti-social tendencies" (*Nikkei Asia* 2022).

The UC gained access to LDP leadership initially through its anti-communist work. During the 1960s and 1970s, UC members confronted Marxists on Japanese college campuses, gaining the attention of right-wing figures. Ryōichi Sasakawa (1899–1995), chair of the Japan Shipbuilding Industry Foundation, served as honorary chair of the UC's International Federation for Victory Over Communism (IFVOC, est. 1968). Sasakawa was close to Nobusuke Kishi (1896–1987), a founder of the LDP, Prime Minister of Japan (1957–60) and Abe's grandfather. Both served time as "Class A" war criminals but were released as part of a U.S. cold war effort to steer Japan in an anti-communist, pro-American direction.

UC members served LDP interests in a hotly-contested 1978 Kyoto governor's race (won by the LDP) and in LDP's unsuccessful 1985 campaign to enact an Espionage Prevention Bill (revived successfully by Abe in 2013). Shintaro Abe (1924–1991), Kishi's son-in-law and Abe's father, served as Japan's Minister of Foreign Affairs (1982–85) but fell short of becoming Prime Minister. He encouraged leaders in the LDP's nationalist-conservative faction (Seiwa Kai) to accept UC support (*The Asahi Shimbun* 2022b). In recent years,

UC activists have opposed legalization of same-sex marriage, congruent with the LDP's position, Japan being the only G7 country not legally recognizing same-sex unions (Imahashi and French 2022).

Despite commonalities on anti-communism and pro-traditionalist family values, the UC-LDP pairing included a discordant note with respect to Japan-Korea relations. A major criticism of the UC was that its Japanese branch "coerced" donations as "necessary atonement for Japan's colonial rule on the Korean peninsula from 1910 to 1945" (Kosuke 2022). On the other hand, the LDP, and particularly the conservative faction associated with the Kishi-Abe dynasty, held nationalist views on Japanese history. The only public comments Shinzo Abe issued on the UC were statements of support to the Universal Peace Federation (UPF), a UC-affiliate. In May 2006, while chief Cabinet secretary, he sent a congratulatory telegram to UPF; his office later said it was a mistake. In September 2021, he recorded a video message for a UPF event after he was assured that former U.S. President Donald Trump and other international luminaries had recorded messages. This recording allegedly prompted his assassination.

McLaughlin noted, "Critics charge that the UC has enjoyed decades of protection from police investigations thanks to its political influence" (McLaughlin 2023, 213). More likely, the UC benefited from the government's policy of non-interference with religion. There was unease, particularly when the UC came "under fire" for "spiritual sales" (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 2022). Still, public clamor did not rise to the level that the government took action. That changed with Abe's assassination. Public attention was riveted on "atrocious" narratives of UC donors and scandalized by the number of politicians acknowledging connections to the UC or its affiliates. In the face of plummeting poll numbers, Kishida was forced to re-shuffle his Cabinet, sever LDP ties with the UC, announce an investigation and push for dissolution. Introvigne described what occurred as a "textbook example of... mob psychology" (Introvigne 2022, 88). He identified "hate speech of anti-Unification-Church activists" as causal in Abe's assassination and cited more than 400 "hate incidents" perpetrated against UC adherents following the assassination (Introvigne 2022, 76–7, 88–90).

Concluding Remarks

Going forward, Japan faces a decision on the UC. There will be significant pressure on Japan's judiciary to align with the government's dissolution request, particularly given the LDP's reign over judicial appointments and a "long-standing tendency of Japanese courts to show judicial restraint toward the actions of the executive and legislative branches" (Keiichi 2020). In addition, the public weighs heavily in support of dissolution with one national opinion survey showing 83% approval of the government's request for an order to dissolve the UC (*The Mainichi* 2023). The Tokyo District Court's judicial independence will be put to the test in separating legal arguments from political pressure and public opinion.

Provisions in Japanese constitution for freedom of religion and the separation of church and state were pushed by the U.S. occupation to disband state-sponsored Shinto and encourage Japan to become a secular nation. This succeeded but the Japanese populace retains a residue of diffuse religious sentiment at odds with strong religious organizations and sharply defined beliefs. Thus, vague and subjective allegations such as acting in a way different that is "generally accepted" rather than criminal violations have buttressed the government's case against the UC. In the longer term, Japan may need to revisit its tradition of "non-separation between religion and politics" (Introvigne 2022, 84), notably the allowances it makes for religious organizations to lobby and campaign for politicians. As it stands, the UC has been singled out for practices common to other religious bodies.

Regardless of the outcome, the UC case raises legal, financial, religious, and political issues of significance. How they are adjudicated will bear on competing legal and communal traditions in Japanese society.

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