

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Anatomy of Japan's Hostile Media Campaign against Family Fed

Knut Holdhus
July 23, 2026



Infographic-style image of activist-generated media narrative becoming judgment. Illustration ChatGPT



[Bitter Winter](#), the world's leading online magazine on religious liberty and human rights



Dr. Massimo Introvigne, Italian sociologist of religion, founder of [CESNUR](#), specializing in new religious movements and religious liberty. A prolific author, he has advised governments and international bodies, and served as OSCE Representative on combating racism, xenophobia, and intolerance against Christians worldwide and comments on contemporary religious controversies. Here speaking at the UN Office at Geneva on June 16, 2025

Japanese journalist and fact-checker reveals the anatomy of activist-generated news coverage fueling political action that led to the dissolution of the Family federation in Japan

On 23rd June, [Bitter Winter](#), the human rights and religious liberty magazine, published an [article by Dr. Massimo Introvigne](#), Italian sociologist of religion. He analyzes research carried out by Japanese journalist and fact-checker Fumihiro Kato (加藤文宏) on what he calls the "carefully reinforced" dominant media narrative against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), formerly called the [Unification Church](#), in the aftermath of the assassination of former prime minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) in July 2022.

The basis for [Introvigne's comments](#) is an interview with Kato conducted by literary critic Eitaro Ogawa (小川榮太郎).

Continued from part 1: [How Media Narrative Was Changed to Attack Faith](#)

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Fumihiro Kato also used network analysis to examine how different topics were connected in news coverage. Network analysis is a statistical technique that uses computer algorithms and visualizes how information is organized and words and ideas are linked across thousands of texts, revealing the central themes and structure of a media narrative.

The resulting diagrams showed political terms clustered at the center of the discussion. References to donations or so-called "spiritual sales" appeared much farther away from the core.

From this pattern, Kato concludes that criticism of the [Family](#)

[Federation](#) increasingly became part of a broader political struggle. He argues that claims promoted by anti-[Federation](#) activists and the National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales were echoed by opposition politicians during parliamentary debates, placing pressure on the government of Fumio Kishida (岸田文雄).



Japanese journalist and fact-checker Fumihiko Kato



Militantly campaigning against the [Family Federation](#): Activist journalist Eito Suzuki, born as Kiyofumi Tanaka



Masaki Kito, one of the hostile lawyers of National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales and Nationwide Unification Church Damage Countermeasures Legal Team

resulting public pressure.

In his [article](#), Introvigne points out that as a result, media reports focused less on investigating specific allegations against the [religious organization](#) than on portraying the government's response - or perceived lack of response - as politically unacceptable.

Kato also examined the emotional language used in television coverage. He notes that reports about the church's international [marriage Blessing ceremonies](#) frequently used emotionally charged expressions rather than neutral descriptions. One word in particular, urawakai (うら若い), meaning "young and innocent", appeared with unusual frequency.

According to his research, this expression had almost never been used by Japanese media outside this context during the previous two decades. Kato believes its repeated use encouraged audiences to imagine vulnerable young women being manipulated, strengthening negative emotional reactions.

He is also critical of television programs such as Miyane-ya (a news and talk show on Nippon TV), which devoted extensive airtime to the controversy while relying heavily on outspoken critics of the [Family Federation](#), including journalist Eito Suzuki (鈴木エイト) and attorney Masaki Kito (紀藤正樹). Kato argues that these commentators often interpreted events through the lens of scandal rather than balanced reporting.

Despite the enormous volume of media coverage, Kato questions how much genuine public interest actually existed.

Although Miyane-ya recorded audience ratings of around seven percent during its reporting, Kato estimates that only about two to three-and-a-half percent of households were actively paying attention once passive viewing was excluded.

Internet search data showed a similar pattern. Searches for "[Unification Church](#)" surged briefly after the assassination but declined sharply within days. By October 2022, public interest had largely faded. Search activity was also concentrated mainly around Tokyo and Nara rather than spread evenly across Japan.

Nevertheless, Kato argues that the media presented this limited attention as evidence of overwhelming nationwide concern.

He believes this perceived public pressure influenced the Kishida administration and the ruling LDP, which responded by cutting ties with the [Family Federation](#) and eventually supporting legal action seeking its dissolution.

When the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) justified these actions by referring to widespread "anxiety and confusion" among the public, Kato argues that this reflected a media-created atmosphere more than objectively demonstrated social conditions.

Looking beyond the [Family Federation](#) itself, Kato offers a broader warning.

He describes the entire process as a form of information warfare in which activist groups introduced a narrative, news organizations amplified it, and political leaders reacted to the

He is particularly concerned that Japanese courts later relied partly on civil lawsuits dating back several decades when ordering the dissolution of the [religious organization](#). If courts allow public opinion shaped by media campaigns to substitute for current criminal wrongdoing, Kato believes this sets a troubling precedent.

In his view, the issue ultimately extends far beyond one religious movement. It raises fundamental questions about judicial independence, freedom of religion, and whether individuals or organizations can lose their legal protections because of a powerful public narrative rather than proven facts.

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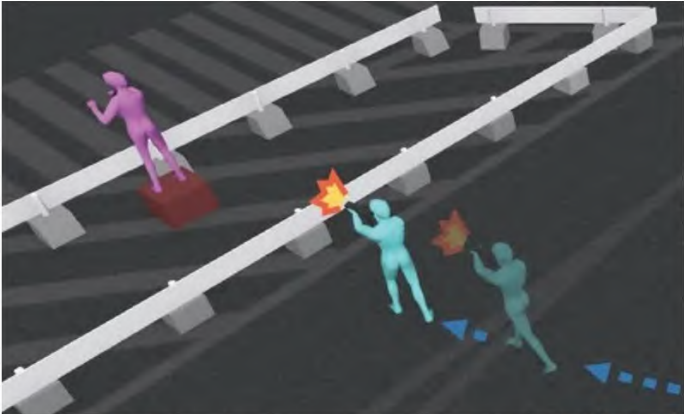
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scapegoat during the national tragedy of the 2022 Abe assassination



Positional relationship between **former prime minister Shinzo Abe** and the shooter Tetsuya Yamagami on his assassination. Sourced from Nikkei.com. Photo: Asanagi / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC CC0 1.0 UPDD](#)

In the aftermath of the assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) in July 2022, public attention quickly shifted from mourning the national tragedy to intense scrutiny of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (formerly known as the [Unification Church](#)). According to an analysis presented by Japanese author, journalist and fact-checker Fumihiko Kato (加藤文宏), this dramatic change did not occur naturally. Rather, he argues that it resulted from a carefully reinforced media narrative that transformed the [religious organization](#) into the focus of a nationwide political controversy.

See also part 2: [The Anatomy of Japan's Hostile Media Campaign](#)



Dr. Massimo Introvigne, Italian sociologist of religion, founder of [CESNUR](#), specializing in new religious movements and religious liberty. A prolific author, he has advised governments and international bodies, and served as OSCE Representative on combating racism, xenophobia, and intolerance against Christians worldwide and comments on contemporary religious controversies. Here speaking at the UN Office at Geneva on 16th June 2025. Screenshot from video by UPF.

Kato's findings were discussed in a lengthy interview with literary critic Eitaro Ogawa (小川 榮太郎) and later analyzed by Italian sociologist of religion Dr. Massimo Introvigne in [Bitter Winter](#), the international online magazine focusing on religious freedom and human rights. Using statistical analysis of thousands of news reports and social media posts, Kato sought to understand how public opinion developed so rapidly in favor of dissolving the [Family Federation](#).

Rather than focusing primarily on allegations against the [religious organization](#) itself, Kato argues that Japanese media concentrated on political connections – especially alleged links between the [organization](#) and members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Through repeated reporting, he believes these political associations came to be viewed as inherently suspicious, creating an atmosphere in

which calls for dissolving the [religious organization](#) gained widespread support.

Kato's research also raises broader questions about the relationship between activism, journalism, politics, and the courts. If public opinion can be shaped through repeated media framing rather than concrete evidence of ongoing wrongdoing, he warns, the implications extend beyond one



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wrongdoing, he warns, the implications extend beyond one **religious movement** and touch fundamental principles such as judicial independence, due process, and freedom of religion.

According to journalist Fumihiro Kato, the public narrative surrounding the **Family Federation** changed with remarkable speed after Shinzo Abe was assassinated on 8th July 2022.

During the first hours after the shooting, television coverage focused almost entirely on the national shock and grief over Abe’s death. However, that emphasis shifted within a very short time.

Later that same evening, a newspaper interview suggested that the assassin had acted for a reason. At a police press conference in Nara, information emerged that the suspect’s mother had belonged to an unnamed religious organization. Although the organization was not immediately identified, media attention began moving away from the assassination itself toward the possible religious background of the killer.

Two days later, on the morning of Japan’s Upper House election, the weekly photo magazine “FLASH” published a story portraying the assassin as a victim who had suffered as a “second-generation believer” [See editor’s note below]. From that point onward, coverage increasingly focused on religious issues, financial donations, consumer complaints, and the experiences of children raised in religious families.

Kato argues that by 11th July the news media had effectively begun treating the **Family Federation** as a national crisis.



Japanese Word Cloud shown in one of the slides Fumihiro Kato used during a **presentation** in Tokyo 20th Jan. 2024. Here with added English words translated from the most frequently occurring Japanese words. Illustration: **FFWPU**

To examine whether this impression could be measured objectively, Kato analyzed more than 4,200 posts published by Japanese news organizations on X (formerly Twitter) between July 2022 and May 2023.

The results surprised him.

During July alone, approximately 300 news articles about the **religious organization** appeared. In August, that number rose to nearly 1,000. Yet when Kato examined the language used in these reports, he found that the most common words were not “donations”, “victims”, or “fraud”.

Instead, the dominant terms referred to politics. Frequently appearing words included “lawmakers”, “Prime Minister”, “organization”, “ties”, and “Liberal Democratic Party” (LDP). Former Prime Minister Abe and then-Prime Minister Fumio Kishida were mentioned repeatedly.

According to Kato, this suggests that the central theme of the reporting was political responsibility rather than alleged misconduct by the **religious organization** itself.

What the media reported and its impact

Deeply intertwined relationship between religious organization and lawmakers.



English reconstruction of one of the slides Fumihiro Kato used during a [presentation](#) in Tokyo 20th Jan. 2024.
Illustration: [FFWPU](#)

The word “ties” appeared [eunificationnews.eu/the-anatomy-of-japans-hostile-media-campaigns](#) specially often. Although reports repeatedly referred to connections between politicians and the [Family Federation](#), they rarely explained precisely what those ties consisted of. Kato believes that, through constant repetition, the mere existence of any connection gradually came to be viewed as evidence of wrongdoing.

See more by Kato: [Main Target of Hounding Not Church, but LDP](#)

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Continued in part 2: [The Anatomy of Japan's Hostile Media Campaign](#)

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: Japanese journalist and fact-checker Fumihiro Kato (加藤文宏) and literary critic Eitaro Ogawa (小川榮太郎). Photo: [Bitter Winter](#)

[Editor's note: The term “second-generation religious believer” – in Japanese 宗教二世 (*shūkyō nisei* – generally refers to people who were raised in a religion by parents who belonged to a religious organization, rather than joining it themselves as adults.]

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How a Narrative Was Built: Fact-Checker Kato Reads the Unification Church Case in Japan

by Massimo Introvigne | Jun 23, 2026 | Testimonies Global

A leading journalist documented, with statistical data, how activists and media fabricated a climate leading to the dissolution of the religious organization.

by Massimo Introvigne



The conversation between Eitaro Ogawa and Fumihiro Kato.

A [long conversation](#) between literary critic Eitaro Ogawa and journalist Fumihiro Kato has produced one of the most detailed reconstructions yet of how the Unification Church (now called the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification) became the center of a political storm after the assassination of Shinzo Abe. Kato has spent years cultivating a reputation as a meticulous fact-checker in Japan's online conservative sphere, a man who reads documents line by line and treats footnotes as evidence rather than decoration. His followers on X describe him as a digital ombudsman who examines what the mainstream press leaves in the margins. In this case, he examined everything, and the picture that emerges is a study in how a narrative can be assembled with speed, emotional force, and political purpose.

Kato begins with the hours immediately following July 8, 2022, the day when Abe was assassinated. Television networks adopted a solemn tone, and the country appeared united in grief. That atmosphere dissolved with astonishing rapidity. At around eight in the evening, the online edition of the "Mainichi Shimbun" published an interview containing the chilling remark that there had been a reason Abe was killed. At the Nara Prefectural Police press conference that same night, a leak introduced the idea that the perpetrator's mother had ties to a religious organization. Reporters were already discussing security failures, and the new information redirected speculation toward a group that had not yet been named. The decisive moment arrived in the early hours of July 10, when the photo weekly "FLASH" published an article timed with the opening of polling stations for the House of Councillors election, presenting the perpetrator as a tragic second-generation religion member. Within hours, the frame of the story shifted from mourning to religious issues, then to consumer complaints, and finally to the plight of second-generation believers. By July 11, the media had entered a campaign-like mode that treated the Unification Church as a national emergency.

Kato's quantitative analysis reveals the scale of this transformation. Between July 10, 2022 and May 31, 2023, news organizations posted 4,246 tweets directing readers to coverage of the group. In July alone, roughly 300 media articles appeared, followed by nearly 1,000 in August. Natural language processing showed that the most frequent nouns were

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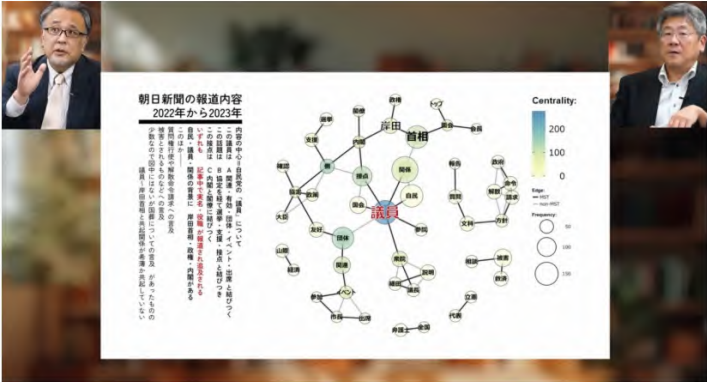
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lawmakers, prime minister, organization, and points of contact. Names such as Prime Minister Kishida and Abe dominated the landscape. The verb-linked noun that appeared with overwhelming frequency was relationship. Words that would normally anchor a discussion of wrongdoing, such as donations or harm, appeared only sporadically. The reporting revolved around political responsibility and alleged deep collusion between the Liberal Democratic Party and the Unification Church. The fact that politicians and the group had ties was repeated endlessly, although the nature of those ties remained undefined. In that vacuum, the idea took hold that the existence of a relationship was itself incriminating, and public opinion moved toward supporting a dissolution order without a clear understanding of the facts.

Kato's correlation analysis visualized the architecture of this narrative. At the center of the network diagram were terms such as Prime Minister Kishida, political situation, relationship, and LDP. Words associated with the Unification Church's alleged wrongdoings, including donations and spiritual sales, appeared on the periphery. The structure suggested a sequence in which interpretations promoted by the anti-Unification-Church and left-leaning National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales were taken up by the Constitutional Democratic Party for questioning in the Diet, and the direction of attack targeted the Kishida administration. Concrete issues involving the Unification Church served as material for political confrontation, while the reporting consistently revolved around the political situation. Even coverage of the government's response was framed as evidence of administrative illegitimacy rather than an attempt to address alleged problems.

The emotional tone of the reporting further shaped public perception. Coverage of mass weddings relied on adjectives that would normally be used sparingly in objective journalism. The term “urawakai,” meaning young and innocent, appeared with unusual frequency. Between 2004 and 2024, it appeared in the media outside Unification Church contexts only twice, in promotional material for television programs. Its use in this context encouraged viewers to imagine inexperienced young women being deceived. The wide-show program “Miyaneya,” which devoted extensive attention to the issue, relied on notorious anti-Unification-Church activists, including journalist Eight Suzuki and attorney Masaki Kito, whose search volume rose more through gossip than through substantive commentary. Their role resembled that of scandal interpreters rather than information providers. Through this lens, the group was depicted as a stain on the community's moral fabric, and that image was projected onto Prime Minister Kishida and the LDP, even though the connection was tenuous.



Discussing Kato's linguistic cluster analysis.

Despite the intensity of the media campaign, Kato's data suggest that public engagement was limited. “Miyaneya” recorded a 7 percent audience rating during its coverage of the issue, but once background viewing was excluded, the number of households actively engaged amounted to only 2 to 3.5 percent. Google searches for “Unification Church” surged on July 17, 2022, then fell sharply within days, and by October interest had nearly vanished. Searches were concentrated in parts of Tokyo and in Nara City, rather than nationwide. Yet the media presented this limited interest as a national atmosphere, creating pressure on the Kishida administration. Fearing the loss of public support, the government and the LDP adopted hard-line measures, including severing ties with the Church and requesting a dissolution order. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology justified its stance by citing anxiety and confusion among many people, an expression that reflected the influence of a manufactured atmosphere rather than concrete evidence.

The interview concludes with a warning. Kato describes the sequence of

events as a form of information warfare in which activists disseminated a narrative, the media amplified it, and the public followed under pressure to conform. The fact that the Tokyo District Court and High Court cited civil lawsuits from forty years ago as grounds for dissolution is an alarming precedent. If the judiciary yields to an abstract social problem created by reporting, without concrete ongoing criminal facts, the result is a form of judicial suicide. Should the Supreme Court endorse this trajectory, Japan risks becoming a society in which a damaging reputation created by activists or the media can erase individuals or organizations without legal protection. The implications extend far beyond the fate of a single religious group. They concern the foundations of judicial independence and human rights in a society where political pressure can be disguised as reporting.

Japan, Religious Liberty, Unification Church



Massimo Introvigne

Massimo Introvigne (born June 14, 1955 in Rome) is an Italian sociologist of religions. He is the founder and managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions ([CESNUR](#)), an international network of scholars who study new religious movements. Introvigne is the author of some 70 books and more than 100 articles in the field of sociology of religion. He was the main author of the [Enciclopedia delle religioni in Italia](#) (Encyclopedia of Religions in Italy). He is a member of the editorial board for the [Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion](#) and of the executive board of University of California Press' [Nova Religio](#). From January 5 to December 31, 2011, he has served as the "Representative on combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination, with a special focus on discrimination against Christians and members of other religions" of the [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe](#) (OSCE). From 2012 to 2015 he served as chairperson of the Observatory of Religious Liberty, instituted by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to monitor problems of religious liberty on a worldwide scale.

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