

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Japan's Government and Media Allowed Terror to Succeed

Knut Holdhus
September 3, 2024



A floral tribute stand set up at Osaka Gokoku Shrine on 6th July 2024, on the occasion of the second anniversary of the death of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe



Media and Government Allowed Terror to Succeed

Terrorist's anti-religious sentiments embraced by media and government just like the intention was

Tokyo, 3rd September 2024 - Published as the 24th article in a series in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese.
[Original article](#)

Series: Freedom of Religion Under Threat - Part 4: Media Crossing the Line

Inciting sympathy for terrorists

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)

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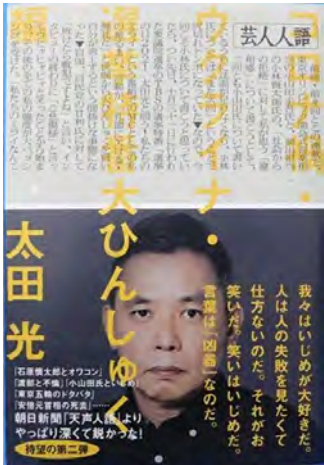
On the morning of 15th April 2023, an incident occurred where something resembling a pipe bomb was thrown at Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, who had come in a hurry to the Saikazaki Fishing Cooperative to support the House of Representatives by-election in Wakayama District 1. The arrested suspect was Ryūji Kimura (木村隆二), who was 24 years old at the time.

Three days after the incident, international political scientist Yuichi Hosoya (細谷雄一) pointed out on Twitter (now X) the following:

"In terrorism studies, it is generally understood that the very act of trying to understand the background of a terrorist's crime helps to achieve the terrorist's objectives."



Prime Minister Fumio Kishida April 16 2023, the day after a bomb was thrown at him



front page of "Geinin Ningo: Corona Pandemic, Ukraine, and Election Special - The Great Displeasure Edition" by Hikari Ota, published on Asahi Shimbun Publishing



Noritoshi Furuichi. 2023

In other words, the key to preventing similar incidents from recurring is for the media to ignore the motives behind the crime.

However, even though the full picture of the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) remains unclear, the media jumped on the leaked information from the investigative authorities that there was a grudge against a [religious organization](#). The media heated up the reporting based on the premise that this was the motive for the crime.

In the afterword of his book "Geinin Ningo: Corona Pandemic, Ukraine, and Election Special - The Great Displeasure Edition", published before the attack on Prime Minister Kishida, Hikari Ota (太田光) of the comedy duo Bakusho Mondai wrote the following:

"If the statements of the accused Yamagami are true, the current actions of television are proceeding exactly as the perpetrator intended. Is it acceptable for murder to be a means of advocating something? [...] Television must continue to send the message that 'resorting to violence achieves nothing' with the same intensity as it pursues the 'relationship between politics and religion.'"

Ota expressed his concern that the heated TV coverage of the investigation into the [religious organization](#) could lead to the emergence of a second or third Yamagami. He made similar remarks on the show "Sunday Japan" (TBS), where he serves as the MC, but these comments also drew criticism, being perceived as defending the [religious organization](#).

Ota is not the only commentator who has faced backlash for warning that the current situation has effectively allowed Yamagami's act of terrorism to succeed. Two days after the attack on the Prime Minister, sociologist Noritoshi Furuichi (古市憲寿) shared a similar perspective on the morning show "Mezamashi 8" (Fuji TV).

The two incidents - the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe and the more recent attack that occurred less than a year later - both took place at election campaign events. While many details remain unclear, it is too early to definitively label the accused, Kimura, as a "copycat" of Yamagami. However, it is safe to say that he was likely influenced by Yamagami's actions.

On this program, lawyer Toru Hashimoto (橋下徹) made a statement delving into political implications:

"Due to Yamagami's actions in attacking former Prime Minister Abe, not only did the media react, but the government also took action. They created laws. Of course, it is natural to properly correct and address issues with the former [Unification Church](#) if there are problems, but the fact that Yamagami's actions incited the state to take action is a significant issue."

The media coverage, overheated with criticism of the [religious organization](#), made the state to act in response to terrorism.

The final piece included in "Geinin Jingo" is an article published in the August 2022 issue of "A Book" (Issatsu no Hon). It appears to have been written a few days after the incident where Shinzo Abe, who held the longest tenure as Prime Minister in the history of Japan's constitutional government, was assassinated in public. The agitation of Hikari Ota and other television station personnel is conveyed. One passage stands out:

"We don't even know if the perpetrator's stated motive is genuine. It's possible that even the perpetrator himself doesn't know. Whether it's the Tokyo subway sarin attack or the assassination of President Kennedy, despite the time that has passed, no one can clearly explain what really happened. In fact, the more time passes, the more 'words' and 'information' accumulate, which might take us further away from the 'truth'."



Toru Hashimoto, Japanese TV personality, politician, and lawyer (2013)

At the end of June this year, nearly two years after the assassination of Shinzo Abe, the defense team that met with the accused Yamagami revealed that he said, regarding the government's request for a dissolution order against the [religious organization](#), "I never expected this situation to arise" (Nikkei Shimbun). He also stated, "Before the incident, I was cornered and did not foresee what was to come."

If these words are true, how will the reaction be from television professionals and commentators who have continued to report and comment with such "one-sided intensity" from the early stages of this case?

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Key Questions Ignored By Media Chasing Ratings

September 2, 2024 • Knut Holdhus

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Japanese author and TV personality: Key questions ignored by media “increasingly desperate to chase ratings”

Tokyo, 2nd September 2024 – Published as the **23rd article** in a series in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*. Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#)

Series: Freedom of Religion Under Threat – Part 4: **Media Crossing the Line – Concerns Over One-Sided Reporting**

Hikari Ota comes under fire for “defending a cult”

by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of *Sekai Nippo*

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"TV has become obsessed with pursuing the connections between Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) members and the former [Unification Church](#). I think TV has a bad habit of getting 'overheated' in one direction."



The front page cover of "Geinin Ningo: Corona Pandemic, Ukraine, and Election Special - The Great Displeasure Edition" by Hikari Ota, published on Asahi Shimbun Publishing.

At the end of September 2022, Hikari Ota (太田光) from the comedy duo *Bakusho Mondai* published a book titled "Geinin Ningo: Corona Pandemic, Ukraine, and Election Special - The Great Displeasure Edition". This 333-page book, which is quite thick to be a recent publication, was published by Asahi Shimbun and includes revised and expanded versions of his serialized essays from the literary monthly magazine "One Book" from December 2020 to August 2022. The opening words were written at the beginning of August in the afterword.

Hikari Ota serves as the MC for the Sunday morning current affairs variety show "Sunday Japon" (TBS), which discusses political and social issues. TV "wide shows" [Editor's note: Japanese term for news and talk shows] have predominantly focused on criticizing the [Family Federation for World](#)

[Peace and Unification](#) (formerly the [Unification Church](#)) over issues such as "spiritual sales" and high donations. Ota, on the other hand, often made statements that set him apart from other commentators, such as "No one can say that the teachings themselves are wrong." However, other participants immediately refuted his comments. Additionally, on social media, he was criticized with comments like "He's defending them!" and "Don't put him on TV!"

For Ota, what matters most is not politics or religion, but "television". This reflects his deep attachment to the medium. This is likely why, even though only a little over a month had passed since the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), he was concerned about how television reporting was 'overheating' in one direction.

Immediately after the incident [Editor's note: the assassination of Shinzo Abe], it was reported that the suspect, Tetsuya Yamagami (山上徹也), had told the police that his motive was "a grudge against the [religious organization](#)". The media repeatedly criticized it, assuming that this grudge led to the assassination of Abe, who had sent a video message to an event related to the [religious organization](#).

Regarding this media situation, Ota lamented in the afterword,

"Is it really okay to base our understanding of the entire incident on fragments of statements we've heard and turn it into a discussion about 'politics and religion'?"



Shinzo Abe in March 2022, just months before his assassination. Photo: English: United States Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel / Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain image](#). Cropped

It is unnatural for a grudge against the [religious organization](#) to be directed at Shinzo Abe, who was not a member. Moreover, it is said that the suspect's mother made large donations to the [organization](#) and went bankrupt in 2002, which was 20 years ago when the suspect was 21 years old. If the motive for the crime was hatred towards the [religious organization](#), too much time has passed. **There is not only a distance between the assassination and the motive, but also a significant time gap between when the grudge was formed and the incident occurred. What happened to the suspect during this time?**

There were some TV commentators who expressed how they **felt uneasy about the gap between the fragmentary reports of the motive and the horrific crime that actually took place**. However, this **crucial question - a key to understanding the full scope of the incident - was pushed aside** as the **media, particularly on "wide shows", became overly focused on criticizing the [organization](#)**.

It's not that the concept of "freedom of religion" didn't cross the minds of the program producers. However, in the post-war social climate where being "non-religious" is considered the norm, there are likely **few media professionals who have deeply considered the importance of faith**. Moreover, **the idea that infringing on 'freedom of religion' is a serious**

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issue that shakes the very foundation of democracy may not have been fully considered.



Eito Suzuki, born as Kiyofumi Tanaka. Photo: Mikkabie / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 4.0 Int. Cropped

With television struggling to maintain viewership in the face of competition from YouTube and other platforms, broadcasters have become increasingly desperate to chase ratings. This may have led to the overheated criticism of the [religious organization](#).

In the afterword, Ota reveals an important fact when considering why "wide shows" have been biased against the [Family Federation](#). He notes about his own show, which has been running for over 20 years,

"I don't recall ever covering the [Unification Church](#) before Abe's assassination. Most of the younger staff don't even know the name 'Unification Church'."

This situation is not limited to television staff but also extends to newspaper reporters and other journalists. As a result, **program producers and reporters have relied on sources like lawyers who have long represented former members claiming damages from the [religious organization](#), as well as activists like Eito Suzuki (鈴木エイト) and others who have opposed the [organization](#)**. These individuals became regular guests on news and talk shows. Meanwhile, according to the [Family Federation's Public Relations Department](#), Sunday Japan has not even once requested an appearance from them.

Regarding the media coverage of the [Family Federation](#), nonfiction writer Masaki Kubota (窪田順生), author of "[Infiltrating the Former Unification Church](#)" (潜入 旧統一教会), points out that while it's referred to as

"reporting on the former [Unification Church](#)", it has essentially become "reporting on 'victims'".



Masaki Kubota. Photo (2023): Sekai Nippo

The media, which should protect freedom of religion, has instead become overly critical, crossing the line and spiraling out of control. This is how the situation has developed.

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Featured image above: Tetsuya Yamagami, the man who killed Shinzo Abe, the former prime minister of Japan. Photo: Andrew2592009 / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC ASA 4.0 Int. Cropped

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