

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Massimo Introvigne on Verdict of Fake Mind Control

Knut Holdhus
June 28, 2026



Dr. Massimo Introvigne speaking at an international conference in Bordeaux, France June 14, 2024



[Sekai Nippo](#)

The shadow of discarded concepts of "brainwashing" and "mind control" can be seen in the government's choice of advisors in the Family Federation dissolution case and appointment of Supreme Court judge

Tokyo, 26th June 2026 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

Part 2 of opinion contribution by Dr. Massimo Introvigne, Founder and Managing Director of the Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR)

Japan's Supreme Court Finalizes Dissolution of the Family Federation

Serious Questions About Neutrality and Due Process

by Massimo Introvigne, Sociologist of Religion

Ignoring the Warnings of UN Special Rapporteurs; the Shadow of "Mind Control" Theory



The Japanese Supreme Court in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo

The extraordinary speed with which the [judgment](#) was delivered has also attracted attention. Although the case involved constitutional rights and the dissolution of a [religious organization](#) with a long history, the Supreme Court reached its [decision](#) in an exceptionally short period.

See also part 1: [Ruling Leaves Serious Questions on Due Process](#)

See also [Dissolution Case: Pseudoscience Shaping Verdict](#)

Given the gravity of the consequences, the Court's reasoning is strikingly brief.

Many observers expected the Supreme Court to dismiss the appeal, since it had already signaled a degree of predisposition on the underlying legal issue. At the same time, many had hoped for a more substantive examination of the constitutional and international law questions raised by the case.

Instead, the Court issued what amounts to a formal affirmation of the existing judgments rather than a genuinely substantive review.

The outcome also cannot be separated from the Supreme Court's own earlier role. In 2025, the Court reinterpreted the Religious Corporations Act by expanding the meaning of "acts violating laws and regulations" to [include civil torts](#). This new interpretation became the legal foundation for dissolving the [Unification Church](#). [See editor's note 1 below]

Having opened the legal path toward dissolution, the Supreme Court has now completed the process by affirming the very outcome made possible by [its own reinterpretation](#).

Concerns regarding judicial impartiality also remain unresolved.



AI-illustration of Justice Masami Okino



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

As [Bitter Winter](#) reported, the [Unification Church](#) [See editor's note 1 below] [sought the recusal](#) of Justice Masami Okino (沖野眞巳) after it became known that she had participated in a seminar critical of the [Church](#) [See editor's note 1 below].

At that seminar, speakers denounced the [Unification Church](#) [See editor's note 1 below], endorsed the so-called "mind control" theory [See editor's note 2 below], and portrayed the [Church's](#) activities as inherently malicious. According to the [Church's](#) recusal motion, Justice Okino herself made comments indicating that she had already formed opinions about the [Church's](#) nature and activities.

The Supreme Court [rejected the recusal motion](#) without explanation in a decision consisting of only two lines.

Justice Okino's signature does not appear on the [Supreme Court's decision](#), and it remains unclear whether she participated in drafting it. Nevertheless, the mere fact that the [recusal request was denied](#) casts a shadow over the legitimacy of the Court's final decision.

If the Court [rejected the recusal request](#), however, why did she not sign the judgment?

The [Supreme Court's ruling](#) brings the judicial proceedings concerning the [dissolution order](#) to a close. At the same time, however, many important issues remain unresolved.

The [decision](#) does not respond to [concerns raised by four United Nations Special Rapporteurs](#) [See editor's note 3 below]. They warned that the Japanese government's actions against the [Unification Church](#) [See editor's note 1 below] relied upon an excessively vague concept of "public welfare" that is incompatible with Article 18 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR).



Nor does the [decision](#) address its continued reliance on theories of "mental harm" based on the now-discredited concept of "brainwashing" [See editor's note 4 below], or on standards such as "social acceptability", which are inconsistent with international law.

It also fails to examine the dangers of using civil tort liability as grounds for dissolving religious organizations.

Nor does it consider what [precedent](#) this may establish for other minority religions.

Finally, it does not address the implications of allowing political pressure and media campaigns to influence the interpretation of legal principles designed to protect freedom of religion.

Believers will undoubtedly continue practicing their faith. They will do so, however, without their places of worship, without their assets, and without the legal protections and organizational stability upon which Japan's religious corporations have long relied.

The Supreme Court insists that these are merely indirect consequences. Yet it is difficult to conclude that this characterization adequately reflects the profound changes brought about by the [decision](#).

Japan has long presented itself to the international community as a democratic nation committed to pluralism and the rule of law. This case, however, raises questions about how firmly those commitments

will be upheld when a religious minority becomes the target of political controversy.

		The Supreme Court had an opportunity to reaffirm constitutional protections and restore balance to a process that had been criticized on numerous grounds. Instead, it chose simply to endorse the course adopted by the government and the lower courts, without confronting the fundamental concerns that had emerged throughout the proceedings. The judgment has now been rendered. Its impact on religious freedom in Japan will become apparent only gradually over the years to come. See also part 1: Ruling Leaves Serious Questions on Due Process See also Dissolution Case: Pseudoscience Shaping Verdict [Editor's note 1: Although Massimo Introvigne uses the name "Unification Church" and also the word "church", please be aware that the Unification Church in Japan in 2015 changed its name to Family Federation for World peace and Unification.]
		

[Editor's note 2: In Japan, the "mind-control" myth has been a powerful tool used to stigmatize and suppress new religious movements (NRMs), particularly since the 1980s. The concept suggests that NRMs manipulate or "brainwash" their followers, depriving them of free will and rational thought. This narrative gained traction after the 1995 Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas attack, when public fear of dangerous cults intensified. Although Aum was an extreme and violent exception, the incident cast suspicion on all NRMs, allowing critics, media, and the government to label diverse groups as manipulative or psychologically coercive.

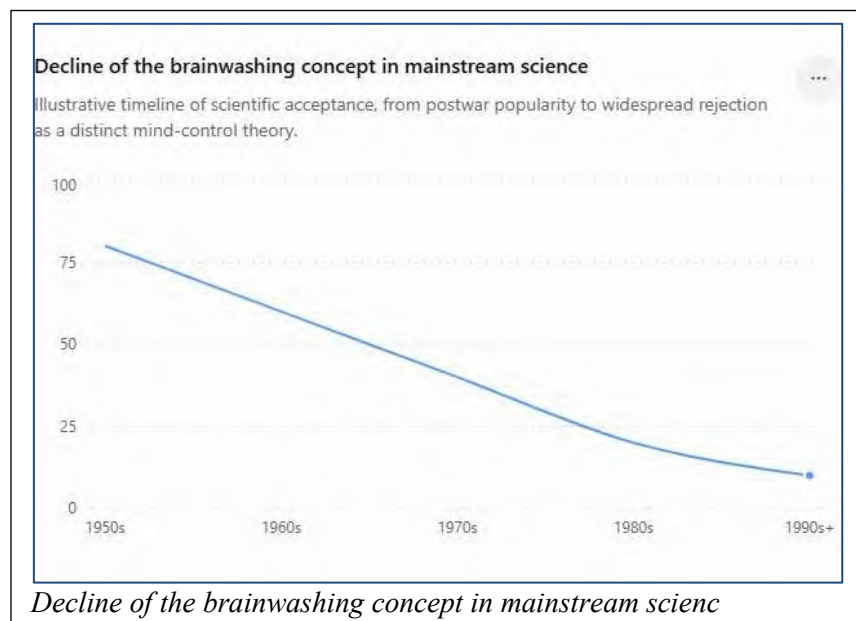
The "mind-control" myth serves multiple social and political functions. It simplifies complex questions of belief, making it easier to portray converts as victims rather than as individuals exercising spiritual agency. This framing justifies legal and social intervention, including the coercive "[deprogramming](#)" of believers - sometimes involving confinement or psychological pressure to force renunciation of faith. Lawyers, ex-member groups, and certain media outlets have used the idea of mind control to construct NRMs as threats to family stability and national order, reinforcing social conformity and Japan's preference for established, non-controversial religions such as Buddhism and Shinto.

In recent years, the myth resurfaced following the 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose attacker cited resentment toward the [Family Federation](#). A public outrage largely created by media reignited scrutiny of NRMs, and politicians and journalists revived "mind-control" rhetoric to explain fundraising and recruitment practices. Critics argue that this framing discourages genuine religious tolerance and critical examination of Japan's restrictive religious climate. Overall, the "mind-control" myth functions less as a scientific or psychological concept and more as a moral panic - a cultural weapon used to delegitimize minority faiths and to reaffirm mainstream social norms about religion, obedience, and the boundaries of acceptable belief.]

[Editor's note 3: A Special Rapporteur (or Independent Expert) is an independent human rights expert appointed by the United Nations (UN) to provide reports or advice on human rights issues from either a thematic or country-specific perspective. These experts are selected by the UN Human Rights Council and operate independently of any government, playing a crucial role in monitoring the actions of sovereign nations and democratically elected governments.

Special Rapporteurs do not receive financial compensation from the United Nations for their work. However, they receive support from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and are often funded by charities and corporations. Annually, they convene in Geneva to discuss common issues, coordinate their efforts, and engage with various stakeholders, including states and civil society organizations.

These experts frequently conduct fact-finding missions to investigate human rights violation allegations in different countries. In addition to these missions, they regularly review complaints from alleged victims of human rights abuses. If a complaint is verified, they send an urgent letter or appeal to the concerned government. Even without a specific complaint, Special Rapporteurs can intervene on behalf of individuals or groups at their discretion.]



[Editor's note 4:

"Brainwashing" was a popular term that emerged during the early Cold War to explain why some prisoners of war and political detainees appeared to adopt beliefs favored by their captors. The idea suggested that powerful psychological techniques could erase a person's existing beliefs and replace them with new ones against their will, almost like reprogramming a machine.

Over time, however, the concept was largely discarded by mainstream psychology and cognitive science as a

scientific explanation of persuasion or belief change. Researchers found little evidence for such a process, that any special, unique process existed that could fundamentally override human autonomy and completely remake a person's personality or convictions.

Studies in psychology, sociology, and psychiatry showed that belief change is usually gradual, variable, and dependent on many factors: social pressure, isolation, coercion, rewards, threats, conformity, identity, and existing motivations. People can certainly be influenced, manipulated, indoctrinated, or coerced, but there is no scientifically demonstrated mechanism that allows a person's mind to be completely overwritten in the dramatic way implied by "brainwashing".

The concept came under especially heavy criticism in the 1970s - 1990s during debates about new religious movements - by anti-religious activists and others often called "cults". Some experts testified that members had been brainwashed, while other scholars argued that the theory lacked clear definitions, reliable measurements, falsifiable predictions, and strong empirical support. Courts increasingly viewed brainwashing testimony skeptically because it often could not meet scientific standards of evidence.

A major problem was that "brainwashing" lacked a clear, measurable definition. Different writers used it to describe very different phenomena, from prisoner interrogation to religious conversion to participation in controversial groups. Because it could not be reliably operationalized or tested, it failed to meet basic scientific standards. Studies of prisoners of war and members of new religious movements showed that apparent ideological conversions were often temporary, strategic, situational, or reversible rather than evidence of a mysterious mind-control process.

By the 1970s and 1980s, many psychologists, sociologists, and legal scholars concluded that brainwashing functioned more as a cultural and political metaphor than as a validated scientific theory. Courts also became increasingly skeptical of expert testimony claiming that members of new religious movements had been "brainwashed". Today, scholars generally prefer more specific concepts - such as persuasion, coercive control, social influence, indoctrination, obedience, and group dynamics - rather than assuming the existence of a mysterious power that can completely rewrite a person's beliefs.]

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The Family Federation dissolution case illustrates how concepts from pseudoscience can gain broad acceptance, influencing Japan's media,

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[Editorial]

A Decision That Violates the Human Rights of Believers

Dissolution of the Family Federation

by the editorial board of *Sekai Nippo*

The Supreme Court has dismissed the special appeal filed by the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* (formerly the *Unification Church*) regarding the court order to dissolve it as a religious corporation, thereby making the loss of its legal religious status final.

See also: *Verdict Under the Shadow of “Mind Control” Myth*

See also *Ruling Leaves Serious Questions on Due Process*

See also *Japan’s Treatment of Faith Minority Families*

The dissolution proceedings began under the administration of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (岸田文雄) in response to criticism following the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三), over the religious organization’s solicitation of large donations on the grounds that “victims” should be compensated. Nearly four years have passed since those proceedings began. Yet the possibility that the human rights of tens of thousands of believers could be disregarded represents a blind spot in Japanese society and will leave a lasting negative legacy.



Former prime minister Fumio Kishida delivering a speech at the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (COP26) 2nd Nov. 2021. Photo: 首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 4.0 Int. Cropped



A Japanese woman offering a donation at a meeting. A



Logo of the
Sekai Nippo

June 22, 2026



Japan: Only
Freedom To
Believe, Not
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June 21, 2026

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hostile group of lawyers used consumer laws and coined the term “spiritual sales” on donations given to religious organizations and try every trick to label donors as “victims”. Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator, 10th February 2025.

A Judgment Based on Speculation

As in the decisions of the lower courts, the [Supreme Court’s ruling](#) is based on conjecture despite the absence of evidence showing the continued commission of civil-law torts by the [religious organization](#).

To issue such a momentous decision on uncertain grounds suggests that, beyond distrust and prejudice toward the [religious organization](#), the influence of criticism based on concepts such as “mind control” [\[See editor’s note 1 below\]](#) can be discerned.

The ruling states:

“The appellant (the [religious organization](#)) has failed to take effective measures to prevent believers from engaging in inappropriate solicitation of donations. There is a risk that, in the future, it will continue to require believers to solicit donations by setting numerical targets that cannot be achieved through methods and manners of solicitation that remain within socially acceptable bounds. In that event, there is a high likelihood that believers will engage in the aforementioned solicitation activities.

Therefore, in order to address such conduct by the appellant, it is necessary and appropriate to dissolve the [appellant](#) and deprive it of its corporate status, and it cannot be said that there exist any other effective means, including measures under the *Act on the Prevention of Improper Solicitation of Donations by Corporations and Other Entities*.”

This is what the decision says.

First, considering the fact that lawsuits concerning large donations virtually disappeared after the [religious organization’s](#) 2009 “Compliance Declaration” [\[See editor’s note 2 below\]](#), it is reasonable to conclude that effective preventive measures had in fact been implemented.

Nevertheless, the [Court](#) refused to acknowledge this and instead ordered dissolution based on hypothetical assumptions expressed in phrases such as “there is a risk”, “in that event”, and “there is a high likelihood”. This can only be described as careless. It is tantamount to saying that believers are “brainwashed” and beyond help, so the [religious organization](#) should simply be dissolved. What underlies this fixed idea are rumors and labels such as “destructive cult” (破壊的カルト).

Justice Masami Okino (沖野真己), who reportedly did not participate in this decision, stated at a consumer law seminar hosted by the *Japan Federation of Bar Associations* two years ago that:

“The acts described as evangelism or religious instruction [by the [Family Federation](#)] are themselves fundamentally problematic conduct,” and “ they can be understood as conduct that can lead to violations of religious freedom or even violations affecting the person’s entire



AI-illustration of Justice Masami Okino (沖野真己). Image: Grok xAI, 22nd May 2026

even violations affecting the persons entire autonomy and personhood.” [See editor’s note 3 below]

Every religion seeks to increase its membership through missionary work and evangelism. However, the view that the [Family Federation](#)’s evangelism amounts to an infringement upon the “entire autonomy” [See editor’s note 3 below] of its believers aligns with arguments such as “mind control” employed by [faith-breaking](#) (deprogramming) specialists who forcibly induce [Family Federation](#) members to renounce their faith and who use such reasoning to justify the abduction and confinement of believers.

Do Not Repeat the Mistakes of Eugenics

In the United States, the concept of “mind control” has been rejected in court as unscientific.

However, the precedent established in Japan through the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#) could lend momentum to claims based on this kind of pseudoscience.

Japan must not repeat the mistake made in Germany, where eugenics [See editor’s note 4 below] once became intertwined with discriminatory antisemitism [See editor’s note 5 below].

See also: [Verdict Under the Shadow of “Mind Control” Myth](#)

See also [Ruling Leaves Serious Questions on Due Process](#)

See also [Japan’s Treatment of Faith Minority Families](#)

Featured image above: Concepts of pseudoscience like “eugenics” and “mind control theory” easily gaining broad acceptance. The top image depicts the Warsaw Ghetto uprising during World War II. The bottom image depicts Toru Goto, a member of the [Family Federation](#) abducted, forcibly detained for 12 years and 5 months, while exposed to coercive faith-breaking at the hands of his own family and professional faith-breakers. Illustration: ChatGPT, 27th June 2026.

[Editor’s note 1: In Japan, the “**mind-control**” myth has been a powerful tool used to stigmatize and suppress new religious movements (NRMs), particularly since the 1980s. The concept suggests that NRMs manipulate or “brainwash” their followers, depriving them of free will and rational thought. This narrative gained traction after the 1995 Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas attack, when public fear of dangerous cults intensified. Although Aum was an extreme and violent exception, the incident cast suspicion on all NRMs, allowing critics, media, and the government to label diverse groups as manipulative or psychologically coercive.

The “mind-control” myth serves multiple social and political functions. It simplifies complex questions of belief, making it easier to portray converts as victims rather than as individuals exercising spiritual agency. This framing justifies legal and social intervention, including the coercive “[deprogramming](#)” of believers – sometimes involving confinement or psychological pressure to force renunciation of faith. Lawyers, ex-member groups, and certain media outlets have used the idea of mind control to construct NRMs as threats to family stability and national order, reinforcing social conformity and Japan’s preference for established, non-controversial religions such as Buddhism and Shinto.

In recent years, the myth resurfaced following the 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose attacker cited resentment toward the [Family Federation](#). A public outrage largely created by media reignited scrutiny of NRMs, and politicians and journalists revived “mind-control” rhetoric to explain fundraising and recruitment practices. Critics argue that this framing discourages genuine religious tolerance and critical examination of

Japan's restrictive religious climate. Overall, the “mind-control” myth functions less as a scientific or psychological concept and more as a moral panic – a cultural weapon used to delegitimize minority faiths and to reaffirm mainstream social norms about religion, obedience, and the boundaries of acceptable belief.]

[Editor's note 2: The **2009 compliance declaration** of the **Unification Church** of Japan (now the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification*) was a formal commitment by the **organization** to reform its practices in response to longstanding public criticism and legal challenges.

The **Unification Church** in Japan had faced numerous allegations related to recruitment tactics and donation solicitation, termed “spiritual sales” (靈感商法) by a hostile network of activist lawyers who had declared the **religious organization** an enemy. These issues led to multiple lawsuits orchestrated by the activist lawyers and significant media backlash. This prompted the **organization** to take measures to restore its reputation and demonstrate compliance with legal and ethical standards.

The **religious organization** pledged to stop possibly unethical donation practices, including what the hostile network of lawyers claimed amounted to “pressuring members into making large financial contributions under spiritual pretexts.”

This was in response to accusations from the same activist lawyers that followers “were being manipulated into giving away substantial amounts of money or property.”

The **Unification Church** stated it would enhance internal oversight to ensure compliance with ethical and legal standards. Measures included better training for leaders and stricter guidelines for evangelization and solicitation of donations.

After this compliance declaration, there was a significant decrease in the number of lawsuits against the **Unification Church** – since 2015 called the **Family Federation**. The **religious organization** has used this as evidence that it has improved its practices and should not be subject to **dissolution**.]

[Editor's note 3: “Violations affecting the person's entire autonomy and personhood” (全人格的な侵害 – zenjinkakuteki na shingai) is a very strong expression and a key concept in the vocabulary of so-called **faith-breakers** (deprogrammers) and activist lawyers.

It does not refer to physical injury. Rather, it describes interference with someone's capacity to think, choose, and develop as an autonomous individual. The idea is that something affects not just one aspect of a person, but their entire psychological and moral agency.

In Japan, in the context of religious movements, this phrase often appears in discussions about alleged psychological coercion, “mind control”, undue influence, coercive persuasion.

So-called “anti-cult activists” and activist lawyers argue that the methods of evangelism are so psychologically manipulative that they undermine an individual's independent judgment and identity. Such a characterization assumes the truth of the controversial “mind control” theory.

Its reasoning is essentially based on the hostile assumption that evangelism is said to produce “violations affecting the person's entire autonomy and personhood”. Then converts are viewed as incapable of making free choices, which in turn can be used to justify extraordinary measures against the organization – such as dissolution – or even against believers themselves.

Such unreasonable reasoning can be linked to the claims of

such unreasonable reasoning can be linked to the claims of professional **faith-breakers** (deprogrammers who argue that members of religious organizations have been “brainwashed” and therefore could legitimately be subjected to **coercive faith-breaking** or forcible deconversion.

The Japanese expression “全人格的な侵害 – zenjinkaku-teki na shingai” may also be rendered as “an infringement upon a person’s whole personhood” or “a profound violation of personal autonomy and identity”, alternatively “an assault on a person’s psychological autonomy”. It may also be said to mean “an impairment of a person’s capacity for independent judgment and self-determination”.]

[Editor’s note 4: In late 19th- and early 20th-century Europe and North America, **eugenics** began as a movement claiming that society could be improved by encouraging the reproduction of those deemed “fit” and discouraging or preventing the reproduction of those deemed “unfit”. It presented itself as scientific, drawing on then-current ideas about heredity.



Francis Galton (1822–1911). Photo: Wikimedia Commons. **Public domain** image

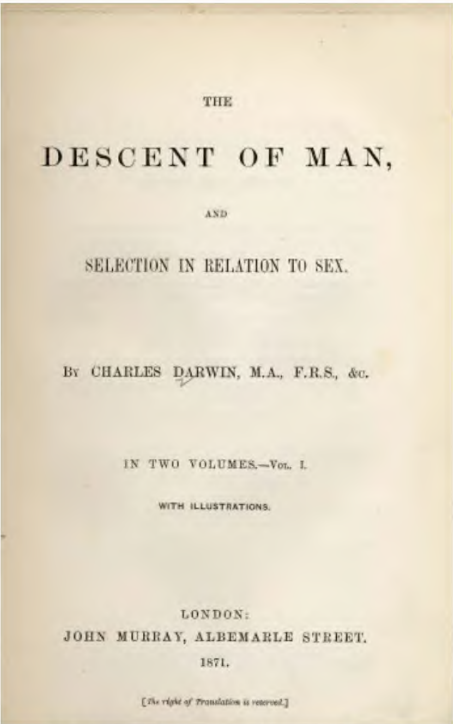
Charles Darwin’s cousin **Francis Galton** (1822–1911) who coined the term **eugenics** in 1883, drew ideas from the materialistic worldview of Darwinism and applied them to human society.

In *The Descent of Man* (1871), Charles Darwin argued that humans evolved through the same natural processes as other species, including natural and sexual selection. He suggested that modern civilization weakened

natural selection by allowing people with serious hereditary illnesses to survive and reproduce, though he also insisted that sympathy and care for the vulnerable were among humanity’s highest moral instincts. Darwin himself did not advocate state-directed breeding programs. However, his discussion of heredity, fitness, and human variation was

later reinterpreted and extended by others. Francis Galton, Darwin’s cousin, developed eugenics from these ideas, promoting selective reproduction. Later, proponents of Social Darwinism and racial hygiene misapplied evolutionary concepts to justify inequality, racism, forced sterilization, and discriminatory policies.

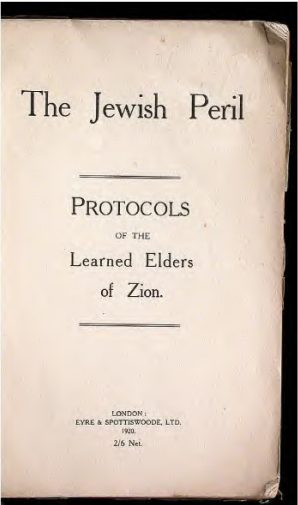
In Germany, these ideas became increasingly entangled with racial ideology, particularly antisemitism. Race was treated as a biological reality. Many eugenicists believed humanity consisted of biologically distinct races with inherited moral and intellectual characteristics. These claims are now understood to have been scientifically unfounded



Cover page of Charles Darwin’s *Descent of Man* (1871). Photo: Wikimedia Commons. **Public domain** image

are now understood to have been scientifically unfounded.

Long-standing religious and cultural antisemitism was reframed in pseudo-scientific terms. Rather than depicting Jews simply as followers of another religion, antisemitic writers increasingly described them as an inherently inferior or dangerous “race” and a biological threat. The Nazi regime fused eugenics with racial antisemitism.



The Japanese network of lawyers painting a black picture of the [Family Federation](#), uses similar rhetoric to what the Nazis used against the Jews. Here the title page of the 1920 British publication of the anonymous edition of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, an antisemitic fraudulent publication describing an alleged Jewish conspiracy to take over the world. Photo: Eyre & Spottiswoode / Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain](#) image

After 1933, the Nazi government used eugenic language to justify policies aimed at protecting the supposed “racial health” of the German people. This included compulsory sterilization of people with certain disabilities or illnesses, restrictions on marriage, and the legal classification of Jews and other groups as racially alien.

The same framework escalated to persecution and genocide. Once the state accepted the premise that some groups were biologically harmful, increasingly severe measures were justified in the name of protecting society. This culminated in the systematic murder of approximately six million Jews during The Holocaust, along with the persecution and murder of many other groups.

[Editor’s note 5: The editorial argues that the concept of “mind control” is a form of pseudoscience and warns that accepting it in legal decisions could stigmatize an entire religious group. To reinforce

that warning, it points to the historical example of eugenics, arguing that ideas presented as scientific can become intertwined with prejudice and lead to discrimination.

The comparison is rhetorical, not historical. It is not claiming that the dissolution of the [Family Federation](#) is equivalent to Nazi policies. Rather, it is drawing the broader lesson that legal or governmental decisions should be cautious about relying on theories that critics regard as lacking scientific validity, because history shows that pseudoscientific concepts can be used to legitimize state persecution.]

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