

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Openly Family Fed Hating Japanese Justice to Judge Family Fed

Knut Holdhus
May 22, 2026



Masaki Nakamasa - Born in 1963 in Kure City, Hiroshima Prefecture. Received his PhD from the University of Tokyo in 1996. Currently a professor of law at Kanazawa University specializing in the history of political thought and social philosophy. Major works include Postmodern Nihilism (Sakuhinsha) and Beyond Hegel (Kodansha) March 26, 2026



*AI-illustration of Biased Justice
Masami Okino*

Supreme Court judge in Family Federation special appeal case has ties to anti-cult camp and has been one of their keynote speakers expressing extreme anti-religious viewpoints

In a pointed and alarming [article](#) published in the Japanese digital magazine BEST TIMES on 22nd May 2026, Professor Masaki Nakamasa (仲正 昌樹) argues that Japan's handling of the dissolution case against the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) - formerly the [Unification Church](#) - represents a profound crisis for constitutional government, judicial neutrality, and religious liberty. The [article](#) centers on allegations concerning Supreme Court Justice Masami Okino (沖野眞巳), a member of the Third Petty Bench of the Japanese Supreme Court, which is currently reviewing the [Family Federation's special appeal](#) against the [dissolution order](#) issued by the Tokyo High Court.

See also [Japan's Treatment of Faith Headed to The Hague?](#)

Nakamasa presents the issue not merely as a dispute over a persecuted [religious organization](#), but as a test case for the integrity of the Japanese legal system itself. In his view, the state's treatment of the [Family Federation](#) has moved beyond ordinary legal adjudication into something resembling ideological persecution. He argues that the central danger lies not only in the [dissolution order](#) itself, but in the emergence of legal arguments that characterize the very act of propagating religious doctrine as inherently unlawful.

The background to the controversy is the Japanese government's effort to dissolve the [Family Federation](#), following an extensive wave of persecution after the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) in 2022. Activist leftwing lawyers from National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (Zenkoku Benren) have campaigned to have the [religious organization](#) dissolved since 1987. Fundamentally, it is because of its clear anti-communist stand.

The network of lawyers and media supporting them have accused the [Family Federation](#) by using classical anti-cult concepts like "manipulative fundraising practices", "mind-control" [See editor's note 1 below], and "harmful forms of religious influence". Supporters and defenders of the [religious organization](#), however, argue that the government response has evolved into a politically driven campaign that threatens basic constitutional protections for freedom of religion.



Freedom of religion includes the right to preach publicly: Here, a Japanese member of the [Family Federation](#) spreading the word on 15th March 2026, even though the [religious organization](#) had been dissolved by the authorities 11 days earlier

According to Nakamasa, the current phase of the legal battle became especially alarming after revelations concerning Justice Okino. The professor writes,

"According to the motion, she attended the seminar titled '34th Japan Federation of Bar Associations Summer Consumer Seminar: Understanding the Reality of Spiritual Sales and Considering Relief and Prevention,' held in July 2025, as one of the keynote speakers, where she made remarks completely condemning the [Unification Church](#)."

In his [article](#), Nakamasa stresses that the concern is not simply that Justice Okino attended the event. Rather, he argues that her remarks there demonstrated a substantive alignment with activist legal positions hostile to the [religious organization](#). He focuses in particular on statements in which she reportedly argued that evangelism and religious instruction connected to the [Family Federation](#) were "fundamentally problematic acts", extending beyond ordinary solicitation into conduct that could violate an individual's freedom of religion or even affect the person's entire psychological autonomy.

For Nakamasa, this formulation is extraordinarily dangerous because it reverses the conventional understanding of religious liberty. In liberal constitutional systems, religious freedom normally includes not only the right to hold beliefs privately but also the right to persuade others, preach publicly, and seek converts. By contrast, the position attributed to Okino implies that successful

religious persuasion may itself constitute a form of coercion. Nakamasa interprets this as a theory under which missionary activity becomes inherently suspect whenever critics believe a religion exerts strong psychological influence.

He argues that this line of reasoning effectively collapses the distinction between persuasion and coercion. If communicating doctrine is treated as "mind control" [See editor's note 1 below], then any intense or transformative religious experience could potentially be reclassified as a legal harm. Nakamasa warns that such a framework could justify state suppression not only of the [Family Federation](#) but of many forms of committed religious activity more broadly.

The [article](#) also highlights the role of attorney Masaki Gōro (郷路征記), described as a leading anti-[Family Federation](#) activist associated with Zenkoku Benren. Nakamasa portrays Gōro as advocating an extreme theory according to which adherence to the [religious organization](#) itself amounts to a violation of religious freedom. Nakamasa further criticizes arguments allegedly used to justify coercive faith-breaking [See editor's note 2 below] practices, pointing out that activist attorney Gōro "argues that kidnapping and confinement intended to force believers to renounce their faith are not illegal."

Professor Nakamasa adds more about the seminar,

"The coordinator was attorney Akihito Katsumata (勝俣彰仁), a core member of Zenkoku Benren. In substance, it was an anti-[Unification Church](#) seminar organized by Zenkoku Benren."



Activist attorney Masaki Gōro -
Illustration: Grok xAI

Nakamasa contends that the overlap between these activist positions and Justice Okino's seminar remarks creates an appearance of bias incompatible with judicial neutrality. He therefore supports the [Family Federation](#)'s motion seeking her recusal from the Supreme Court proceedings.

A major theme running throughout the [article](#) is the distinction between legal procedure and political passion. Nakamasa repeatedly argues that courts in a constitutional democracy must preserve impartiality, especially in cases involving unpopular groups. The legitimacy of the judiciary, he suggests, depends precisely on its willingness to uphold procedural fairness even when public opinion strongly favors punishment.

The professor spells it out clearly,

"Is entrusting deliberation in such an important case to a justice aligned with forces hostile to the appellant something a proper nation governed by the rule of law would do? Is the Supreme

Court not ashamed of what it is doing? Legal professionals and legal scholars who view trials not merely as power games but as forums for pursuing fairness should be outraged by this situation."

In this respect, he compares the current atmosphere surrounding the [Family Federation](#) to a form of modern-day "inquisition". Referring to an earlier article he wrote criticizing the Tokyo High Court decision, Nakamasa claims that judges have gone beyond evaluating concrete unlawful acts and have instead begun evaluating the truth, value, and psychological effects of religious doctrine itself. He considers this a dramatic and dangerous expansion of judicial authority into areas protected by constitutional guarantees.

Nakamasa confronts what he sees as flagrant injustice and questions whether the Supreme Court administration knowingly assigned the appeal to a bench including one of the justices most openly hostile to the [religious organization](#). He expresses disbelief that neither the justice herself nor the court bureaucracy recognized the appearance of partiality this situation would create. Professor Nakamasa asks,

"Did they think something like this? 'The [Unification Church](#) side, including its lawyers, are fools and won't notice anyway. The media are anti - [Unification Church](#), so they won't object no matter what methods are used to crush it. The public doesn't think deeply about these matters, so if we say there's no problem, they'll easily believe us.'"

He also accuses the Japanese media of functioning as a largely one-sided anti-[Family Federation](#) force unwilling to scrutinize procedural abuses if the target is sufficiently unpopular. Public opinion, he suggests, has become emotionally conditioned to accept extraordinary legal measures against the [minority faith](#) without reflecting on the wider implications for civil liberties.



Demonstration at Shibuya Mark City in Tokyo against the religious persecution members of the [Family Federation](#) suffer in Japan

Underlying Nakamasa's argument is a broader philosophical concern about the nature of the rule of law. In his view, a genuine legal order cannot be defined merely by the existence of courts or formal procedures. Rather, it depends on the principled application of universal standards, including equal treatment before the law and meaningful protections for unpopular minorities.

He warns that once a society accepts the idea that certain religious teachings are so dangerous that their dissemination can itself be prohibited, constitutional protections become contingent on political fashion rather than legal principle. At that point, he argues, the state no longer acts as a neutral guarantor of liberty but as an ideological actor deciding which beliefs may legitimately exist in public life.

Whether one agrees with Nakamasa's conclusions or not, the article represents a forceful intervention in one of the most controversial legal and religious disputes in contemporary Japan. It combines constitutional argument, criticism of judicial ethics, and broader reflections on freedom of belief into a sweeping indictment of what Nakamasa sees as the politicization of the Japanese legal system.

The [article](#) therefore functions not only as a defense of the [Family Federation](#)'s procedural rights, but also as a warning about the fragility of civil liberties during periods of moral panic and political consensus. For Nakamasa, the central issue is ultimately larger than the fate of a single [religious organization](#): it is whether Japan's legal institutions remain committed to the liberal constitutional principles they are supposed to uphold.

See also [Japan's Treatment of Faith Headed to The Hague?](#)

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

[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.]



Also subject to faith-breaking attempts: Members of Soka Gakkai. Here students belonging to the faith in

[Editor's note 2: Coercive faith-breaking ("deprogramming") in Japan refers to the practice of coercively attempting to separate individuals from their religious affiliations or beliefs, typically through intervention by family members, professional faith-breakers (deprogrammers) or organizations hostile to new religious movements (NRMs). This phenomenon often targets members of such movements, e.g. relatively large faiths like the [Family Federation](#) or Jehovah's Witnesses, but also smaller groups like Happy Science (Kōfuku no Kagaku) and other newer religious movements.

However, also Soka Gakkai, a Buddhist-based lay organization with more than 8 million Japanese members, and affiliated with Nichiren Buddhism, has occasionally been subject to faith-breaking attempts.

The practice gained attention in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Parents or concerned family members often hired faith-breakers who taught them how to abduct and forcibly detain believers. Almost all such cases involved confining the individual believer and cutting him or her off from the religious community. During the confinement, the believer was subjected to intense questioning or indoctrination designed to break his or her faith. The aim was to "rescue" the person from what the family often had been tricked by faith-breakers or lawyers to regard as harmful influence from the religious organization.

Critics of forced de-conversion argue that it violates fundamental human rights, including freedom of thought, religion, and association. Reports of psychological trauma and accusations of unlawful detention have sparked debates over its ethical and legal implications. In response, some religious groups, particularly NRMs, have lobbied for greater protections against such practices.

Japanese courts have been inconsistent in addressing cases of coercive faith-breaking. While some verdicts have condemned the practice as illegal detention, others have been more lenient, citing family concerns about "mental health" or alleged "exploitation" as mitigating factors.]

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cross into religious judgment

On 19th May 2026, *Bitter Winter*, the world's leading online magazine on religious liberty and human rights, published an op-ed titled "Terrorism, Constitution, or Judicial Overreach?".

See also *Supreme Court Justice with Hostile Views*



Logo of *Bitter Winter*, the world's leading online magazine on religious liberty and human rights.

In this [article](#), Japanese attorney Tatsuki Nakayama (中山達樹) argues that the Japanese government and courts by issuing a [dissolution order](#) against the the religious organization known as the *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification*, effectively fulfilled the terrorist's wish to destroy a religion he according to media reports despised. Nakayama believes the case raises serious [constitutional](#) and human rights concerns.

The [Bitter Winter article](#) connects two major events. First was the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) in 2022 by Tetsuya Yamagami (山上徹也). Second was the later [court decision](#) ordering the dissolution of the *Family Federation*.

Attorney Nakayama's central argument is this: although Yamagami was [punished for murder](#), the later dissolution of the *Family Federation* effectively achieved the political and personal goal that motivated the assassination. Nakayama warns that courts should not weaken constitutional guarantees of the right to a fair trial because of public anger or political pressure.

The assassination and Yamagami's sentence



Tetsuya Yamagami given [life sentence](#). Illustration: Chat GPT 25th January 2026.

Nakayama begins by discussing the [January 2026 sentencing](#) of Yamagami. The court gave him [life imprisonment](#) for killing Abe during a public speech.

According to Nakayama, this outcome was expected. In Japan, the death penalty is usually reserved for cases involving multiple murders. Since Yamagami killed one person, even though the victim was a former prime minister, execution would probably have been considered excessive. At the same time, a shorter prison sentence would have appeared too lenient because the murder was politically motivated and carefully planned.

Nakayama also notes that the court [refused to excuse or justify the crime](#) by blaming the *Family Federation*. Some media reports had suggested that the group's fundraising practices or political connections partly explained Yamagami's actions. However, the court [did not](#)

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accept this argument. It ruled that Abe's limited contact with the religious organization was not improper and that Yamagami remained fully responsible for the assassination.

In Nakayama's view, this was legally correct. Courts should not treat hatred toward a religion as a justification for murder.

The dissolution of the Family Federation

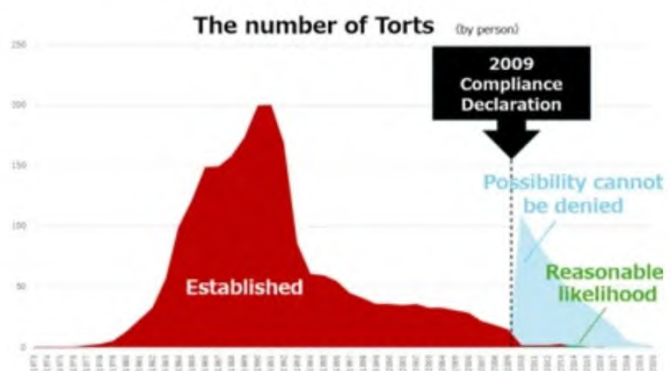
The more controversial issue, according to Nakayama, was the March 2026 decision by the Tokyo High Court ordering the dissolution of the Family Federation.

This ruling removed the religious organization's legal status and severely limited its ability to function. Nakayama argues that this decision raises multiple constitutional problems.

He believes the court relied on weak evidence, speculative reasoning, and an overly broad interpretation of the law. He also argues that the ruling violates religious freedom and due process protections guaranteed by the Japanese Constitution.

Concerns about evidence and fairness

One of Nakayama's main criticisms is that the court treated accusations as if they were proven facts.



Number of Family Federation's "torts" (civil wrongdoings) throughout the years. Illustration: Bitter Winter

He explains that in 2009, the Family Federation introduced what it called a "Compliance Declaration" [See editor's note below] to reduce controversial fundraising activities. According to the article, complaints and financial damages connected to the organization dropped dramatically afterward.

Yet the court still relied heavily on cases from after 2009. Nakayama says that in many of those cases, it was never clearly proven that unlawful conduct had actually occurred. In fact, the ruling itself reportedly admitted that wrongdoing "could not be ruled out," rather than conclusively established.

Despite this uncertainty, the court still described the organization as continuously engaging in unlawful conduct.

Nakayama argues that this is a dangerous legal leap. In his view, courts should not impose severe punishments unless wrongdoing has been clearly proven with evidence. Otherwise, the constitutional right to a fair trial is weakened.

Claims based on speculation

Nakayama also criticizes the court for relying on assumptions about what the organization might do in the future.

The court reportedly suggested that senior leaders of the Family Federation might continue "improper" fundraising because they defended statements made by founders

because they defended statements made by founders [Sun Myung Moon](#) (1920-2012) and [Hak Ja Han](#), who has led the [global movement](#) since her husband's death.

Nakayama says this reasoning is flawed. Religious leaders often defend the teachings or statements of their founders. That alone does not prove that faith leaders are incapable of following the law or controlling donations responsibly.

He argues that the court made an unjustified jump from “leaders defend the founder’s ideas” to “leaders will inevitably commit harmful acts.”

Religious freedom concerns

A major theme of the [article](#) is religious freedom.

The court claimed that dissolving the [religious organization](#) did not directly prohibit believers from practicing their religion. Nakayama strongly disagrees.



Closed along with 259 other church building and cannot be used for worship services, funerals, or religious gatherings: The Japanese headquarters of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) in Shibuya, Tokyo, where a court-appointed liquidator has entered. Photo taken on 4th March 2026. Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#)

He points out that believers can no longer freely use [church buildings](#) for worship services, funerals, or religious gatherings. In practical terms, he says, this clearly restricts religious activity.

He uses a comparison: claiming religious freedom is unaffected after dissolving a church organization is like claiming academic freedom still exists after destroying a university campus. Even if beliefs remain legal in theory, removing the [physical institutions](#) makes practicing those beliefs much harder.

Nakayama also argues that governments should use the least restrictive solution possible when limiting freedoms. He notes that Japan already passed laws aimed at preventing improper fundraising and donation solicitation. According to him, these measures could address concerns without completely dismantling the [religious organization](#).

Problems with balancing rights

Another criticism involves how the court balanced competing interests.

The court reportedly argued that dissolving the [Family Federation](#) was justified to prevent possible future financial harm to members and donors.

Nakayama says this analysis is backwards because it sacrifices an existing and concrete freedom – religious practice – in order to prevent uncertain future economic harm.

In constitutional law, spiritual and religious freedoms are

usually considered among the highest protected rights. Economic concerns, while important, normally carry less constitutional weight.

Nakayama believes the court reversed this priority and accepted hypothetical risks as sufficient reason to limit fundamental freedoms.

Judicial interference in religion

The [article](#) also argues that the court improperly entered into theological questions.

According to Nakayama, the [ruling](#) criticized internal doctrines and concepts within the [Family Federation](#), including ideas related to fundraising and religious mission.

He says courts should avoid deciding whether religious teachings are proper, reasonable, or morally acceptable. Under long-established legal principles, judges are supposed to remain neutral toward religious doctrine.

Otherwise, courts risk deciding which beliefs are acceptable and which are not – something Nakayama sees as incompatible with religious liberty.



Constitutionally highly problematic proceedings against [Family Federation](#) were held behind closed doors in the joint building of the Tokyo High Court, Tokyo District Court, and Tokyo Summary Court in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo, Japan. Photo (2012): [Rs1421 / Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC ASA 3.0 Unp](#)

Closed-door proceedings

Nakayama further objects to the fact that the dissolution process occurred without public access.

The court argued that these proceedings were not ordinary disputes between opposing parties and therefore did not require open hearings. Nakayama rejects this reasoning.

He points out that the government and the [Family Federation](#) spent years arguing against each other in court. Because the state was attempting to strip a [religious organization](#) of legal status and freedoms, he believes transparency was essential.

Proceedings held behind [closed doors](#) in [secrecy](#), he argues, undermine public trust and constitutional guarantees of due process.

Broader legal and international concerns

Toward the end of the [article](#), Nakayama warns that the court expanded legal definitions in troubling ways.

Specifically, he argues that the court treated [civil lawsuits](#) and allegations of harmful conduct as equivalent to violations of criminal law, even though the [religious organization](#) itself had not been convicted of criminal

organization, which has not been convicted of criminal offenses during its long history.

He says this weakens the principle that laws must clearly define prohibited conduct before severe penalties can be imposed.

Nakayama also notes that United Nations experts criticized Japan's handling of the case and warned that vague references to "public welfare"



International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

could threaten religious freedom under international human rights standards. Nakayama writes,

"The United Nations has repeatedly warned Japan that such vagueness violates international law. On October 1, 2025, UN experts issued a [press release](#) stating that the [District Court's decision](#) violated international law. The Miki [Tokyo High Court presiding judge Motoko Miki (三木素子)] [decision](#) disregarded these concerns and issued a ruling inconsistent with Article 18(3) of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), which requires that restrictions on religious freedom be clearly defined, and with Article 98(2) of the Constitution, which mandates compliance with international law."

Conclusion

Nakayama concludes that the case is not only about one [religious organization](#). In his view, it is about whether constitutional protections remain strong when public emotions are intense.

He argues that democracies must be especially careful not to weaken legal principles after shocking acts of violence or terrorism. Otherwise, courts may unintentionally reward political violence by allowing assassins or extremists to achieve their broader goals indirectly.

Attorney Nakayama sums it up,

"These five constitutional concerns form a troubling pattern. The [Family Federation](#) has filed a [special appeal](#) with the Supreme Court. To avoid being remembered as a court that bent constitutional principles to fulfill the wishes of a terrorist, the [Supreme Court](#) must render a judgment that withstands scrutiny from future generations."

The [Family Federation](#) has [appealed](#) to the Supreme Court of Japan, and the outcome there will, according to Nakayama, shape how posterity evaluates Japan's commitment to constitutional rights, religious liberty, and judicial fairness.

See also [Supreme Court Justice with Hostile Views](#)

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: **Tatsuki Nakayama** graduated from the Faculty of Law at the University of Tokyo in 1998. He was admitted as a lawyer in 2005 and graduated from the National University of Singapore Law School in 2010. After working as an international lawyer at a

Singapore law firm, he opened Nakayama & Partners in 2015. After studying as a certified fraud examiner in 2016, at Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, and Singularity University, he became a business ethics expert in 2022.

He has held executive positions and other important positions in the Inter-Pacific Bar Association, which includes 1,500 lawyers worldwide. His major works are “Global Governance and Compliance” and “Integrity” (both published by Chuokeizaisha), and his recent books include “English Negotiation Techniques” (Heisei Publishing). Photo: Tsuyoshi Toyoda / [Sekai Nippo](#)

[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.]

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