

# The Religious Cult Secretly Running Japan

Nippon Kaigi, a small cult with some of the country's most powerful people, aims to return Japan to pre-WWII imperial 'glory.' Sunday's elections may further its goal.

TOKYO — In the Land of the Rising Sun, a conservative Shinto cult dating back to the 1970s, which includes Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and many of his cabinet among its adherents, finally has been dragged out of the shadows.

The group is called *Nippon Kaigi* (Japan Conference) and is ostensibly run by Tadae Takubo, a former journalist turned political scientist. It only has 38,000 members, but like many an exclusive club, or sect, it wields tremendous political influence.

Broadly speaking, Shinto is a polytheistic and animist religion native to Japan. The state-sponsored Shintoism promulgated here before and during World War II also elevated the Emperor to the status of a God and insisted that [the Japanese were a divine race—the Yamato](#); with all other races considered inferior.

Nippon Kaigi originally began in the early 1970s from a liberal Shinto group known as *Seicho No Ie*. In 1974, a splinter section of the group joined forces with *Nippon o Mamoru Kai*, a State-Shinto revival organization that espoused patriotism and a return to imperial worship. The group in its current state was officially formed in May of 1997, when *Nippon o Mamoru Kai* and a group of right-leaning intellectuals joined forces.

The current cult's goals: gut Japan's post-war pacifist constitution, end sexual equality, get rid of foreigners, void pesky "human rights" laws, and return Japan to its Imperial Glory.

With Japan's parliamentary elections to be held on July 10, the cult may now have its chance to dominate policy completely. If the ruling coalition wins enough seats, the door will open to amending Japan's modern democratic constitution, something that has remained sacred and inviolate since 1947.

Indeed, for Japan, these elections may be a constitutional Brexit—deciding whether this country moves forward as a democracy or literally takes a step back to the Meiji era that ended more than a century ago. Then, the Emperor was supreme and freedom of expression was subservient to the interests of the state.

The influence of Nippon Kaigi may be hard for an American to understand on a gut level. But try this: Imagine if [“future World President” Donald Trump](#) belonged to a right-wing evangelical group, let’s call it “USA Conference,” that advocated a return to monarchy, the expulsion of immigrants, the revoking of equal rights for women, restrictions on freedom of speech—and most of his pre-selected political appointees were from the same group.

Sounds incredible... In any case, this would worry people.

That is the American equivalent of what has already taken place in Japan with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his cabinet.

Abe, a third-generation politician, is the grandson of Nobusuke Kishi, who was Japan's minister of munitions during WWII and arrested as a war criminal in 1945 before becoming prime minister in the 1950s.

Abe is a staunch nationalist and historical revisionist, who also served as prime minister, from 2006 until 2007, before resigning abruptly mid-term. His ties to the Nippon Kaigi organization go back to the '90s.

In line with fellow members of his imperial and imperialist cult, Abe has said the revision of the constitution is his lifetime goal. In an interview in *Nikkei Asian Review*, published in February 2014, Abe stated, “My party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), has been advocating amending our constitution since its founding almost 60 years ago.”

So, now, Abe and his party, at least the extremist factions, are at last coming very close to that goal.

**Japan’s Parliament, also known as the Diet, is composed** of an upper and lower house. Article 96 of the constitution stipulates that amendments can be

made to the constitution if approved by super majority of two-thirds of both houses of the Diet, and by simple majority in a referendum.

At present, the LDP and its coalition partners only have a two-thirds majority in the Lower House and a simple majority in the Upper House. They hope to have the needed two-thirds majority in the Upper House after Sunday's elections.

The Asahi Shimbun and the independent press in Japan have called this year's campaign "The Hidden Agenda Elections." Local media have reported that the LDP and partner political parties have made sure their candidates avoid mentioning constitutional revision in their stump speeches.

The ruling coalition is toeing the party line that: "It's all about Abenomics."

And those are?

Abenomics is the economic policy Prime Minister Abe promised to put into action in 2012. It is based upon "three arrows" of fiscal stimulus, monetary easing and structural reforms. It was supposed to revitalize Japan's long stagnant economy. The third "arrow" has yet to be fired and on June 20, this year, the International Money Fund essentially [declared it a failure](#) and suggested Japan raise wages.

The ruling party wants to focus all talk on the economy and the hope that Abenomics eventually will work, while the opposition parties, united by The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), are cooperating to field single candidates in areas of Japan where they have a good chance of winning—all under the banner of blocking constitutional revision.

DPJ leader Katsuya Okada has warned, "Under the Abe administration basic human rights such as freedom of speech and the public's right to free access to information (about their government) have been threatened... the pacifism of the constitution will be [destroyed](#)."

The LDP's [internal crackdown on mention of constitutional revision is savvy](#), notes Koichi Nakano, a professor and expert on Japanese politics at Sophia University. "Abenomics was simply a way of repackaging Abe's nationalism as something sexy so he could return to power," says Nakano. He notes public opinion is opposed by a large margin to the revision of the constitution.

“Abe is using the same tactics he did in two previous elections since 2012 to emphasize that the vote is about the economy and then proceed to do what he intended to do once the election is over. He did this with the passing of [the State Secrets Laws](#) and then with the strongly opposed [Security Laws](#) last year after the December 2014 snap elections. Perhaps he is getting advice from his deputy prime minister, who once remarked that the LDP should learn from the Nazis about how to quietly change the constitution.”

The LDP’s proposed constitution, which has been strongly influenced by Nippon Kaigi alumni, according to reports by the *Asahi Shimbun* and other media, would scrap Article 9, which forbids Japan from engaging in warfare as a means of settling international disputes. It would also severely curtail freedom of speech, taking away the right to speak out on issues “if it is against the public interest.”

Presumably, the government would decide what is “the public interest.”

It eliminates the words “[basic human rights](#)” from key sections, as constitutional experts have noted.

The LDP argues that revision is necessary for a modern Japan to deal with the threat of China and break free “of the post-war regime.”

**The ideology behind Prime Minister Abe and his cabinet** had received only modest scrutiny from Japan’s mainstream media until this May. All that changed with the publication of the surprise best seller, *Nippon Kaigi No Kenkyu (Research into Japan Conference)* by former white-collar worker turned journalist, Tamotsu Sugano, on April 30.

Japan’s leading constitutional expert, Setsu Kobayashi, who is also a former member of Nippon Kaigi, says of the group, “They have trouble accepting the reality that [Japan lost the war](#)” and that they wish to restore the Meiji era constitution.

Some members are descendants of the people who started the war, he notes.

Kobayashi is so vexed with his former brethren, that in May he created a new political party to promote and protect constitutional rights called, somewhat amusingly, [Kokumin Ikari-no Koe](#) aka The Angry Voice of the People. For Nippon

Kaigi, he is a traitor and a nightmare. For Prime Minister Abe, he is an angry loud-mouthed headache.

And Abe is having other headaches before the election. *Seicho No Ie*, the spiritual forebear of Nippon Kaigi, has turned its back on the LDP and the ruling coalition as well—its first overt political action in decades.

The organization told the *Weekly Post* last month, “The Abe government thinks lightly of the constitution and we are opposed to their attempts to change Article 9 (the peace clause). In addition, we feel distrust in their failure to uphold policy determined by law.”

Despite Nippon Kaigi’s small numbers overall, half of the Abe Cabinet belongs to the Nippon Kaigi National Lawmakers Friendship Association, the group’s political offshoot. Prime Minister Abe himself is the special advisor.

Former Defense Minister Yuriko Koike, who is running for Governor of Tokyo, is another prominent member.

*Sankei Shimbun* and others have reported that Nippon Kaigi even tried to pressure the publisher, *Fusosha*, into dropping the book on April 28. The protest letter sent to the publisher was surprisingly under the name of the group’s secretary general, Yuzo Kabushima, not the name of the Chairman Tadae Takubo.

Kabushima is a staunch Emperor worshipper and was a key member of *Seicho No Ie*’s student movement. Sugano argues in his book that Kabushima is the person really running the organization.

Despite the threatening tone of the letter, the publisher didn’t budge. Originally, only 8,000 copies of the book were printed. It’s now on its fourth printing with over 126,000 copies sold. Five other books have now been printed on the group; magazines are running front-page stories about them.

Suddenly, Nippon Kaigi is very visible.

**Sugano is surprised and relieved to see Nippon Kaigi** and its influence on national policy finally getting attention. He himself is a political conservative who

graduated from the University of Texas with a degree in political science before returning to Japan over a decade ago.

While he was living in Texas, where he picked up a bit of an accent, he noticed how the Christian evangelical movement exerted political influence and sees some parallels in their methods and those of Nippon Kaigi.

Sugano was still a white collar worker aka “salary-man” when he first became aware of the existence of Nippon Kaigi. Back in 2008, Sugano recalls the shift he felt in the atmosphere on the streets. “Crazy people were starting to speak out,” he says. Protests lead by groups, such as the anti-foreigner hate speech group [Zaitokukai](#) were more noticeable. He saw an ugly escalation of their activities with each passing day.

He found these hate speech movements troubling and started to infiltrate their protests, documenting the events in photos and recordings. In order to understand the motives of members and supporters, he started to dig into the conservative publications often referenced in their online comments.

The contributors that wrote for these publications puzzled him. Many were established in their field, journalists and academics, all contributing on topics unrelated to their expertise. This peculiar pattern helped him connect the dots: they all seemed to be members of one group. That realization led him down the rabbit hole, where he found the revisionist wonderland that is Nippon Kaigi.

Nippon Kaigi, he found, used *neto-uyo* (cyber right wingers who troll anyone on the internet they feel writes negatively of Japan), intellectuals, politicians, and closet sympathizers in mainstream media to exert considerable influence on policy and public opinion.

That included getting the Japanese government to reinstitute the Imperial Calendar, which was banished by the U.S. occupation government. It’s 2016 in the West, but under the Imperial Calendar, based on the reign of the Emperor, it is year 28 of the Heisei era. The system is so confusing that many reporters in Japan carry a handy chart to translate the Imperial Calendar dates into Western time.



Sugano also credits Nippon Kaigi with politically resurrecting Prime Minister Abe, whose political career was considered dead after his abrupt resignation as prime minister in 2007.

He also believes their goal may be to alter radically the parts of the constitution which define marriage and the rights of wives, thus, “rolling back sexual equality and making Japan a country pleasant for cranky old men, like themselves.”

*The Daily Beast* contacted Nippon Kaigi via email, fax, and by telephone and asked for clarification of what has been written about the group and their objections to Sugano’s book but did not receive a reply

While several recently published books and articles paint a picture of a masterful Machiavellian organization that has skirted the law to avoid having to register as a political group, Sugano believes they are primarily reactionary with no clear idea what they want to do once their goals are achieved.

“They have worked steadily and stealthily with local politicians and political lobbies to oppose things like gender equality, recognition of war crimes and the comfort women [sex slaves during WWII], women using their maiden names after marriage etc. It’s anti-this and anti-that but has no vision of the future.”

Other researchers have taken notice of the group’s anti-gender equality stance, but point out that Prime Minister Abe appears to be sincere about promoting women in the workplace and that the group also has female lawmakers in its ranks.

Sugano isn’t surprised. “Prime Minister Abe talks a lot about *womenomics* (the empowerment of women in the business world) but it’s all talk. It’s like a Texas racist saying, ‘I have a black friend so I’m not racist.’ The fact that there are female politicians supported by the group is the same logic. There are always some minorities in a minority that consider discrimination to be acceptable. Or these women find the support of the group advantageous to themselves—if not for women in general.”

Professor **Jeff Kingston**, a historian of modern Japan, has pointed out that while Abe says all the right things, he has quietly reduced his original professed goal of promoting women in management from 30 percent to 15 percent, and in reality

his meager actions are [“a nod to patriarchal realities that exposes Abe’s version of womenomics as a sham”](#).

Sugano insists the “patriarchal realities” of Japan are one reason behind Japan’s media self-censorship under the Abe administration and why they long avoided touching upon Nippon Kaigi.

He argues the mainstream Japanese media are run by misogynistic old men whose world views align with Nippon Kaigi’s sexist ideals, and since they agree with their principles, they have seen no need to report on the organization. “It is not self censorship. It’s more like silent collusion,” he said.

Nippon Kaigi’s dismissive attitude towards women and children also explains its evident opposition to The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Hideaki Kase, a prominent member of Nippon Kaigi and prolific revisionist writer, is also listed as Chairman of Japan’s Corporal Punishment Association—which advocates judicious beating of children as a means of educating them and making them strong.

If you ask Sugano why these elections are important, he will tell you why in his Kansai-accented Texas drawl:

“The LDP, Abe, and Nippon Kaigi have essentially the same agenda. The frightening thing about this election is that they have never been closer to achieving their dreams—amending the constitution to return Japan to a militaristic feudal society where women, children, youngsters and foreigners, including the Japanese-Koreans, have no basic human rights. They will only have one right: the right to shut up.”