

The Role of Citizen Journalism and Alternative Media in Legal and Political Equality – A Case from Japan

by Jason Morgan & Kenji Yoshida

Equality before the law and equality of political participation are fundamentals of a free and fair society. Given the power of those in positions of governmental and informational authority, however, these two fundamental equalities are among the most easily abused. The fact is that equality before the law and equal access to political processes, including access to information on which political decisions are made, are not naturally-occurring phenomena. Human beings make decisions in political and informational milieux that affect, for well or for ill, how equal we all are before the law and how equally we may participate in politics. Equality before the law and equality of political participation are fundamental, but they are far from guaranteed.

To our minds, the best way to ensure equality before the law and equality of political participation is to

place no restrictions on public speech. We agree with John Stuart Mill when he [writes](#) in Chapter Two of *On Liberty* (1859):

Strange it is, that men should admit the validity of the arguments for free discussion, but object to their being "pushed to an extreme"; not seeing that unless the reasons are good for an extreme case, they are not good for any case. Strange that they should imagine that they are not assuming infallibility, when they acknowledge that there should be free discussion on all subjects which can possibly be *doubtful*, but think that some particular principle or doctrine should be forbidden to be questioned because it is *so certain*, that is, because *they are certain* that it is certain. To call any proposition certain, while there is any one who would deny its certainty if permitted, but who is not permitted, is to assume that we ourselves, and those who agree with us, are the judges of certainty, and judges without hearing the other side.

There are many sides to any story, and many objections to the exercise of political power, especially from those who do not enjoy access to the power. The same is true about equality before

the law, where positions of authority and temptations to act prejudicially go hand in hand.

If there is to be greater equality before the law and greater equality of political participation, then, it would seem that there should be freedom to speak. Freedom to speak is freedom to object, and those in weaker positions vis-à-vis political and legal powerholders will have, probably, more reasons to object to how that power is used. But what are the limits on this freedom, if any? How far may one go in pursuit of liberty by means of verbal communication? Mill can help us think through this problem, too. He argued that the sole constraint on freedom of speech should be whether any harm came to another person. In Chapter One of *On Liberty* Mill [writes](#):

the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant.

This seems a sound premise. Insofar as I do not cause harm to others, I am free to exercise my liberty, regardless of whether others may not like how I do so. This includes the right to speak freely, of course. And yet, there is hidden in this pronouncement a prophesy of risk, if one reads Mill's words at a certain slant. One may interfere with liberty, Mill argues, for the sake of "self-protection," or to "prevent harm to others." There is a "warrant" for such action, Mill says. We take this at face value, but ask in reply: in the case of self-protection, may one forego that warrant for the greater good? In terms of liberty and equality, may, *should*, one risk violence against one's person in order to benefit society by means of greater free speech aimed at furthering equality before the law and equality of political participation? To push the question further, may anyone in society expect there to be liberty or equality without the sacrifice of some for the benefit of all?

In early April, 2025, we had the chance to observe these powerful principles in action, at least secondhand. We interviewed [Hamada Satoshi](#), a member of the political party NHK Kara Kokumin o Mamoru To, at his office in the House of Councilors' building in downtown Tokyo. NHK

Kara Kokumin o Mamoru To, the Party to Protect the People from NHK, is an outlier political party in Japan which advocates for free speech, and against what they see as the malign influence of Japan's major public broadcaster, NHK. NHK Kara Kokumin o Mamoru To are wildcards in Japanese politics, and often work to bring greater access to information and to political processes in the face of Japan's entrenched media (NHK) and political classes.

Hamada first came to our attention because of his recent defense of free speech and human rights in the context of Japanese government action against the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, a religious group founded in South Korea by the late Sun Myung Moon and formerly known as the Unification Church. The Japanese media have been waging what can only be called a denunciation campaign against the church since July of 2022. Yamagami Tetsuya, the man who is alleged to have assassinated former prime minister Abe Shinzo that month, carried out his attack, it is claimed by a leak from the Nara police department (Abe was murdered on the streets of Nara), due to his hatred of Abe for having associated with the World Federation church. The media reported that

Yamagami's family fell into financial difficulty when his mother made large-sum donations to World Federation. Abe, along with many members of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), used the church as a get-out-the-vote platform, but when Abe was killed the media all but pinned the murder on World Federation. The LDP rushed to distance itself from World Federation, and Yamagami was held up by the media as almost a co-victim, with Abe, of a rogue religious group.

In March of 2025, the LDP, still seeking to contain the political fallout over the Abe assassination and the LDP's past ties to World Federation, issued an order that the World Federation church be disbanded, a move which would appear to be in violation of constitutional and legal protections of freedom of religion. The LDP is also engaging, many argue, in selective political maneuvering, as the only other two religious groups ever forcibly disbanded in Japan were Myokakuji, which was running a fraud scheme, and Aum Shinrikyo, which carried out murderous sarin gas attacks causing mass casualties. The 2025 disbandment of the World Federation church was the first time in Japan that a religious organization was dissolved due to violations of civil, not criminal, codes. In 2009,

Hamada reminds us, the World Federation church undertook an extensive organizational overhaul, which included forbidding seeking large-sum donations from believers. After that, complaints against the church dropped off precipitously. There are also many believers who have come forward in defense of the church—something which the media has almost entirely refused to report.

Hamada also discovered that, prior to the Abe assassination, thousands of World Federation members had been kidnapped and held against their will, sometimes for a period of years, by professional “deprogrammers” (*dakkaiya* in Japanese) who used threats, force, and psychological torture to “rescue” World Federation members from what the deprogrammers insisted was a “cult.” The media has largely ignored this dark history as well.

Then there is the political complication to the story. The former Unification Church has long been active in conservative politics in Japan (as well as in South Korea and the United States), with anti-communism being a major plank of their political activism platform. The Japanese media, overwhelmingly left-leaning, seems to have hidden the human rights

abuses against Unification Church/World Federation members out of political animus.

Hamada is, to our knowledge, one of the very few members of the Diet who has been outspoken on the human rights abuses suffered by church members as well as in favor of free speech and the importance of hearing all views in a democratic society. We could not help but wonder whether the World Federation church, or, more accurately, its members, hasn't been made to act as sacrificial victim, with the façade of free speech in Japan concealing the arbitrary exercise of political power when it suits the political and media class. Hamada was quick to point out that one could hardly describe the situation surrounding the World Federation reporting as one of untrammelled free speech. This only strengthened the misgivings we were beginning to harbor.

During our interview, Hamada brought up another topic, one which has also highlighted the throttling of information and political participation in Japan and the concomitant need for free speech to counter false reporting. The founder of NHK Kara Kokumin o Mamoru To, Tachibana Takashi, was attacked on March 14 while giving a speech in front of the

Ministry of Finance in downtown Tokyo. Tachibana was wounded around the neck and ear by a man in his thirties wielding a pruning knife-type blade. Just like Abe in 2022, another Japanese politician had been assaulted due, it would seem, to a dangerous mixture of media and political misrepresentation. The media in Japan have been attacking Tachibana for his positions and reporting on a political scandal in Hyogo Prefecture, located in central Honshu near the major city of Osaka. We asked Hamada about that incident, and about the use of violence as a means to counter free speech and free political participation.

Morgan & Yoshida: Do you feel that violence is becoming more common in politics in Japan?

Hamada: There's always the possibility for such a thing to happen. However, former prime minister Abe was shot dead in the summer of 2022, and even before that the Supreme Court in Japan gave favorable treatment in its rulings to people who heckled Abe during his speeches. Behind political violence may be the crisis atmosphere created by the Supreme Court in which those who

aggressively interrupted Abe's speeches were unduly protected.

One must also mention the press coverage Abe received long before his assassination. Freedom of the press is indispensable. The press and the people should be free to criticize politicians. But whether this was always done in an appropriate manner is a separate question in the case of Abe. I believe the press coverage, which was very negative against Abe, was over the top, and that this was not unrelated to his being assassinated.

In the case of Tachibana, too, an attorney named Oizumi Madoka has said that Tachibana disseminated written materials containing defamatory remarks against a former Hyogo Prefecture politician named Takeuchi Hideaki. A TBS television program also reported that Tachibana committed defamation against Takeuchi. These kinds of media reports are, I think, part of what caused the physical attack against Tachibana in March.

Morgan & Yoshida: Takeuchi Hideaki is a politician who is said to have committed

suicide surrounding a scandal involving the governor of Hyogo Prefecture, Saito Motohiko. Tachibana claimed after Takeuchi's suicide that Takeuchi was about to be arrested by Hyogo prefectural police, a [claim](#) which the Hyogo police deny and for which Tachibana has apologized. Separately from that, however, Governor Saito was denounced in the media for having engaged in power harassment, which allegedly led to Takeuchi's suicide. The Japanese media did not reveal the power plays behind the scenes in Hyogo as anti-Saito forces angled to remove Saito from office via internal political processes. Tachibana Takashi, who understood that the whole story was not being told in the mainstream media, jumped into the governor's race in October of 2024, a race in which Saito was running for re-election after the ongoing scandal led to his having been recalled from office. Tachibana wanted to support Saito, who was eventually re-elected.

Hamada: Yes, I think that Tachibana's having entered the race led to the race's flipping in Governor Saito's favor. The results of that

election are, I think, due to the efforts of the NHK Kara Kokumin o Mamoru To.

The media were reporting that Takeuchi took his own life because of Governor Saito's abuse of power. Because of this, a special commission was convened and a vote of no confidence was passed against Saito, who was subsequently thrown out of office. The media wanted the story they had created to end with the election of another governor, but the truth was different.

What really happened is that the head of the prefectural government office attempted a coup d'état to take Governor Saito down. When it came to light that he had planned this scheme during his regular work hours, that he had concocted a highly questionable document in advance of his scheme, and that other personal improprieties were going to surface, he committed suicide. Allegations of abuse of power against Governor Saito were not substantiated.

The media are responsible for much of this, but they seem not to have any compunction for what they have done. Tachibana has the

ability to reach a big audience, so many people in Japan were, thanks to him, able to learn the truth.

Hamada's interview responses, and the case of Tachibana, raise some very important points about freedom of speech, freedom of political participation, and equality before the law. It would seem that power brokers in Hyogo Prefecture may have been using political processes, to which they as government officials had access and about which they had special knowledge largely unknown to the Japanese public, to take down a populist governor using undemocratic means. It would also seem that the Japanese media, who were also, like the Hyogo power brokers, against the populist governor, were using half-truths and misinformation to assist the Hyogo officials in their efforts. Tachibana Takashi, a political outsider, used opposing information — some of it inaccurate - to counter what he saw as an unjust use of law, politics, and media platforms, including the taxpayer-funded NHK. Allegations of lying, defamation, abuse of power, and political chicanery flew as Tachibana took on the political and media class in Japan. There was violence, both self-inflicted and other-directed. This violence grew out of a media and political environment in which

control of a certain narrative is contested, with freedom of speech constricted toward political ends.

In the light of NHK Kara Kokumin o Mamoru To's fights for free speech and against controlled political and media narratives, we revisit our earlier, unsettling questions, in particular this one: "May anyone in society expect there to be liberty or equality without the sacrifice of some for the benefit of all?" We do not have a definite answer, but from our conversation with Hamada Satoshi, we feel that we may have come closer to what we intuit will be an equally unsettling conclusion.

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