

THE STRATEGIC USE OF RELIGION IN A SECULAR STATE: THE IMPACT OF
RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS ON JAPANESE POLITICS

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How do religions and nationalism interact in secular democracies? With its history of nationalism based on religious ideologies, and the subsequent forced separation of state and religion, Japan provides a valuable case to examine how religion and nationalism interact and affect the politics of a secular state. The purpose of this dissertation is to understand and synthesize the divide within the literature regarding the idea that Shinto is fundamentally nationalist in nature. Due to Shinto's historical ties to Japanese nationalism, it is clear that religion and nationalism played a role in Japanese politics in the past. However, with Japan's transition to democracy and the constitutional provision of the separation between religion and state, religion's effect on nationalism in Japan has become blurred contemporarily. In order to explore these relationships between Shinto, nationalism, and Japanese politics, I investigate how political groups and religious organizations influence nationalist sentiment in political institutions and public opinion in Japan using the Japanese Value Orientations survey and an original dataset. I find that even though the evidence is mounting against the accuracy around the idea of State Shinto and the fundamentally nationalist nature of Shinto, the narrative persists. The existence of nationalist circles perpetuates these narratives, regardless of the truthfulness of the association between Shinto and nationalism because this narrative serves as a benefit to some groups. Shinto may not be automatically nationalist, but there are still nationalistic Shinto practitioners. The description of Shinto as inherently nationalist is not likely to go away while that description still serves a purpose.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Considering Shinto and Nationalism

How do religions and nationalism interact in secular democracies? It is easy to imagine that characteristics that a nation sees as unique to its state, such as religion, ethnicity, or cultural elements, could be used as justifications to enact nativist policies. However, in secular democracies, while groups with nationalist ideologies are obviously going to exist, there is an assumption that democratic institutions can help address the divisions in a society and mediate any potential conflicts, whether those divisions are caused by ethnic tensions (Lijphart 2004), religious differences (Fox 2007), or other divisive elements. Yet, with the rise in nationalist sentiment around the globe, and its growing influence (i.e., Brexit, Build the Wall), it is apparent that secular democracies can also be affected by nationalism in diverse ways.

In order to protect against the potential tyranny of the (religious) majority, it is assumed that liberal democracies will enact a separation of state and religion (Fox 2007). Nevertheless, what this separation looks like can be widely variant, as the rules and enforcement of those rules are not uniform across secular democracies. As a result, the interaction between religion and nationalism in secular democracies can also have varying effects. Due to its history of nationalism based on religious ideologies, and the subsequent forced separation of state and religion, Japan provides a valuable case to examine how religion and nationalism interact and affect the politics of a secular state. In order to demonstrate this relationship, I investigate how political groups and religious organizations influence nationalist sentiment in political institutions and public opinion in Japan.

Shinto is often considered the indigenous religion of Japan, but the discussion surrounding

Shinto is complicated and often debated. Whether it is truly indigenous or an adapted form of Daoism from China, Shinto became intertwined with Japanese Buddhism to the point that the distinctions were unclear and shrines and temples became indistinguishable (Hardacre 2017). The Meiji government (1868-1912) officially separated Shinto and Buddhism and created what came to be known as “State Shinto”, arguing that Buddhism was a foreign import, and that Japan needed an inherently Japanese national ideology.

Japan’s history with State Shinto during the pre-war era has left a lasting impact on how Japan considers the role of religion in politics. Perhaps as an effort to appear in compliance with western norms of modernity, the Japanese government declared that State Shinto was a moral code and not a religion. The emperor of Japan also utilized State Shinto as a means of mobilizing a nationalist movement. Even after World War II ended, Shinto retained its status as a moral code. Due to the fact that many scholars and Shinto priests alike consider Shinto to not be a religion, but a way of life, the impact of Shinto on Japanese politics contemporarily is not well understood.

After World War II, however, State Shinto was disestablished under the supervision of the United States with the writing of Japan’s constitution. Further, while Shinto, separate from State Shinto, was allowed to still be practiced, all state funding was taken away from Shinto shrines (Pye 2003). In other words, under State Shinto, the Japanese government and Shintoist beliefs and values were paired in order to reinforce the government’s legitimate right to rule. By appealing to the beliefs of Shinto, the emperor reinstated his divine right to rule and placed State Shinto under the jurisdiction of the state. By dismantling State Shinto but still allowing Shinto to be practiced by Japanese citizens, the United States separated Shinto from the authority of the government, but still allowed it to be practiced in the capacity of a decentralized religion.

However, while State Shinto was removed, the belief in the non-religious nature of Shinto

in general remained. Shinto priests and scholars alike have made the argument that Shinto does not fit the concept of being a religion (Josephson 2012). The logic of Shinto being a moral code rather than a religion that was presented during the Meiji Restoration persisted after World War II, with supporters of the argument that Shinto is not a religion stating that Shinto is more political or organizational than religious. Separating Shinto from its religious status was also an attempt to separate the practice of Shinto from State Shinto in an effort to signal that adherence to Shintoist beliefs and values were not meant to be an attempt at revitalizing a nationalist movement that desired to violently take over other countries, but simply a way to act in accordance with the nature of what it means for a person to be Japanese.

Contemporarily, it is certainly the case that Japan is a secular nation, as over half of Japanese citizens (57%) stated they were not affiliated with any religions as of 2015 (Pew Research Center 2016). Further, with Japanese laws upholding freedoms for its citizens regarding the right to religion, and rules that limit the ties between religion and politics in Japan, there are clear separations between religion and the state. However, although the relationship between religion and politics is well demonstrated throughout Japan's history when analyzing contemporary Japanese politics, religious influences are rarely examined. Because of the history surrounding the separation of state and religion implemented by United States occupiers after World War II, the extant literature often treats Japan and Japanese politics as being areligious (Josephson 2012; Azegami 2012).

However, the assumption that Shinto is not a religion, or at the very least that Shinto does not follow religious characteristics, needs to be challenged. As of 2015, 70.4% of people in Japan engaged in Shintoist practices even if they did not declare themselves to be affiliated with Shinto (CIA World Factbook). By not considering the role that Shinto might play on Japanese politics,

this could be a significant oversight considering the number of people who identify as being a member of this group. In his book chapter, “What is Religion?”, Smith (2017) argues that the reality of religion is more important than the concepts of religion. Smith states:

Religion is a complex of culturally prescribed practices, based on premises about the existence and nature of superhuman powers, whether personal or impersonal, which seek to help practitioners gain access to and communicate or align themselves with these powers, in hopes of realizing human goods and avoiding things bad. (Smith 2017, 22)

Instead of a set of beliefs, Smith defines religion as a network of practices, such as interventionist, behavior-regulating, and discursive practices. Further, it is necessary to distinguish between the different methods of studying religion. While a person’s beliefs or sense of belonging to a religious group are important indicators of how religion can affect one’s political attitudes and participation, so too is a person’s religious behaviors.¹ By examining Shinto through this lens, Shinto can be justified as being studied as religion, even with its political history.

A consequence of previous scholarship considering Shinto as nonreligious is that the influence of religion on Japanese politics has been underexamined. Scholars have shown great interest in how Shinto helped shape Japan’s past, but the discussion of how religion and politics interact in present-day Japan is limited, although growing. Japan’s constitution and laws that were instituted after World War II were not free from the influence of religion and religious groups, even though the American occupiers abolished the state’s version of Shinto. Jinja Honcho (the Association of Shinto Shrines) has also been especially active in trying to maintain the prominence of Shinto’s image in Japan, hoping to influence Japanese laws, such as restoring state support of Yasukuni shrine and encouraging political visits to the shrine (Hardacre 2017). As a result of not studying these ties, the influence of religion on Japanese citizens’ political preferences and voting

¹ See Hackett and Lindsay 2008 for an example of how different measures of religion can produce varying results.

behaviors is not clear. However, because institutional structures that were established after the war were influenced by religious groups, it is still valuable to explore the contemporary relationship between religion and Japanese politics, even if Japan is considered to be a highly secular state.

Historically, Shinto has been associated with nationalist ideologies in Japan, not only because of the events surrounding World War II, but also because of the Shintoist beliefs in the divinity of the emperor and the desire of Jinja Honcho for Shinto to be interpreted as part of Japanese national character (Azegami 2012; Josephson 2012). More recently, however, this assumption that Shinto is inherently nationalistic is increasingly challenged (Hardacre 2017; Thomas 2019). By exploring the connections between Shinto religious practices, political preferences, and nationalism in Japan, Chapter 2 of this dissertation aims to contribute to a more general understanding of how religious and political preferences are connected in Japan by testing these two competing arguments empirically. The Japanese Value Orientations Survey, which has been conducted every five years in Japan since 1973, consistently asks a variety of questions regarding the opinions of people in Japan about political, religious, and sociological topics. Using this survey, I discuss how the average Shinto practitioner does not automatically have nationalist political ideologies and is therefore not a useful predictor for nationalist sentiment or support for the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Instead, the chapter finds that LDP support and nationalist sentiment are more directly related.

1.2 Different Types of Shinto Practitioners

Based on the findings of Chapter 2 that Shinto practitioners are not innately nationalist, Chapter 3 explores why the association between Shinto and nationalism persists in the behaviors of political and religious groups in present-day Japan. Do Shintoists and non-Shintoists participate in politics differently from one another? For that matter, do Shinto nationalists have different

political behaviors than Shinto non-nationalists? Using the Japanese Value Orientations survey, Chapter 3 finds that a distinction can be made between Shinto nationalists and non-nationalists and how they participate in politics. This distinction allows for a richer discussion of how Shintoists participate in politics, not only compared to non-Shintoists, but also to one another.

According to the results of Chapter 3, Shintoists were more likely to participate in various forms of politics than non-Shintoists, and Shinto nationalists were more variant than Shinto non-nationalists in types of political participation. It seems that both Shinto nationalists and Shinto non-nationalists have a desire to be heard in various forms of political participation. This finding could influence modern Japanese politics by helping to explain why nationalist interest groups and political officials continue to associate Shinto with nationalism, as Shinto nationalists could serve as an outspoken and effective base. Thus, the use of Shinto iconography and the association with nationalist history continues to be a useful narrative, despite its foundations in misinformation.

1.3 Using Religious Affiliation as a Political Advantage

It is certainly not uncommon for democracies to have political parties that are based on ethnic or religious ties. Due to religion's influence on a person's set of values and beliefs, it is logical that a political party based on religious ideologies would form in order to represent the interests of that religion's followers. However, the interpretation of separation of religion and state varies between secular nations. While the religious affiliation of political parties is not seen as problematic in some states, such as the Christian Democratic Union in Germany, this is not the case in all secular states. In Japan, the Komeito political party is largely supported by the Buddhist sect, Soka Gakkai (McLaughlin 2014). The Komeito party was criticized, however, for being unconstitutional based on the language regarding the separation of religion and the state. Komeito eventually officially separated with Soka Gakka to assure their critics that they were a secular party

and were not giving Soka Gakkai advantages (Abe and Endo 2014). Yet, the formal breaking of ties can seem unconvincing, given that Soka Gakkai is still the largest voting bloc for Komeito.

Similarly, considering Japan's political history, it seems unlikely that Shinto would have no political influence contemporarily. While there is no Shintoist political party, Jinja Honcho does oversee a political organization called Shinto Seiji Renmei. Due to the LDP's history of friendliness toward nationalist ideologies, it is reasonable that members of the LDP would be attracted to the policies promoted by Shinto Seiji Renmei. Currently, the majority of Liberal Democratic Party members in Japan's lower house are also members of the Shinto Seiji Renmei. However, this was not the case in 2012 when the LDP regained their position as Japan's ruling party, which means that LDP membership in Shinto Seiji Renmei must be motivated by something other than ideology alone.

What are the motivations for joining such a group, considering Japan has institutional regulations regarding the separation of politics and religion, in addition to there being no sign of rising religiosity among the Japanese population? Chapter 4 of this dissertation explores these motivations. By focusing on politicians' electoral incentives in a changing environment of Japan's party politics, we can see how the existence of the distinction between Shinto nationalists and non-nationalists found in chapter three can affect Japanese politics. This chapter makes apparent that there are benefits to be gained by religious and political organizations when they reinforce the narrative that Shinto is fundamentally nationalist. As the opposition became fragmented after 2012, the ruling party's candidates found it electorally advantageous to signal to the core supporters rather than the centrist floating voters by joining Shinto Seiji Renmei. An empirical analysis of an original dataset supports this argument. The findings suggest the changes in Japan's political landscape might affect the future strategies of LDP politicians, particularly regarding the

coalition with Komeito. Overall, this chapter proposes that there is a need to pay closer attention to politicians' strategic use of religion in politics.

CHAPTER 2

IS SHINTO A NATIONALIST RELIGION? EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SHINTO, NATIONALIST SENTIMENT, AND SUPPORT FOR THE LDP

2.1 Introduction

It is reasonable to assume that religion would be influential in forming the ideologies and values reflected in a society's general public opinion (Norris and Inglehart 2011). Thus, religious beliefs are an important consideration when studying public opinion and political affiliation, even in a secular democracy. Based on Japan's history of militant nationalism during World War II and its connection with State Shinto, the association of religious symbols with Japanese politics can create mixed reactions from the Japanese public. One of the most commonly discussed instances of religious symbolism in Japanese politics is when political officials make visits to Yasukuni shrine.² On the other hand, when considering how religion and religious affiliation might affect public opinion and political affiliation in Japan, the relationship is unclear. As for Japanese citizens, 70.4% of people stated they participated in Shintoist practices and 69.8% observed Buddhist practices in 2015 (CIA World Factbook). However, when asked which religion they belong to, 57% of people said they were unaffiliated with any religion (Pew Research Center).

Does Shinto predict support for nationalist policies and practices, or is there a desire for those who believe in Shintoist values to separate themselves from the association between Shinto and a Japanese national identity? Is the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) trying to appeal to a religious base, or are they only utilizing Shintoist symbolism and iconography in order to relate their party with a sense of national identity by drawing on associations of the (constructed) past

² Yasukuni is a Shinto shrine that houses those who have died serving in a war for Japan, so long as their war death can be verified. The controversy surrounding this shrine is discussed below.

relationship between Shinto and the Japanese nationalist state?

This chapter questions the assumptions behind the idea that Shinto is a nationalist religion. The literature regarding this assumption is divided. With the creation of loaded terms, such as “State Shinto”, some argue Shinto, nationalism, and the state of Japan are naturally tied together (Josephson 2012; Azegami 2012). Because of Shinto’s historical ties with nationalism, it would seem plausible to assume people who engage in Shintoist practices would be more likely to adopt nationalist ideologies and politically support the LDP. Further Shintoist beliefs in the divinity of the emperor and the idea that Shinto is part of Japanese national character lend support to this argument. However, particularly more recently, other scholars are pointing to evidence that Shinto’s inherent nationalist tendency is a false narrative based on misunderstandings and oversimplifications of this history (Hardacre 2017; Thomas 2019). Thus, it is also possible the average Shintoist practitioners have a wide array of political views that are not associated with Shinto’s past.

Using the Japanese Value Orientations Survey, I aim to contribute to this discussion by empirically testing the ties between practicing Shinto, nationalist sentiment, and support for the Liberal Democratic Party. I find practicing Shinto is a poor indicator for predicting if a person has strong feelings of nationalist sentiment or is a supporter of the LDP. Instead, the more straightforward relationship is between strong nationalist ideology and LDP support, suggesting political groups use Shintoist iconography to motivate or signal nationalist sentiment, rather than Shinto practitioners being naturally inclined toward or against nationalist ideologies.

2.2 Shinto, Nationalism, and the LDP

There is a historical association between Shinto and nationalism born out of the Meiji Era (1868-1912) and what came to be known as State Shinto. Ideals attached to Shinto

fundamentalism, such as belief in the divinity of the emperor, desires of ethnic purity, and the aspiration for Shinto to represent a distinct sense of Japanese character, provided the government with effective tools to motivate a nationalist movement (Skya 2009). The Meiji government decided to make a distinction between private (religious) Shrine Shinto and public (civil) State Shinto (Zhong 2016). Because of this history, the extant literature often treats Japanese politics and Shinto as being areligious (Josephson 2012; Azegami 2012).

Consequently, Shinto is frequently described as a civil ideology with nationalist underpinnings. After World War II, State Shinto was disestablished under the supervision of the United States with the writing of Japan's constitution. Emperor Hirohito also made a declaration that he did not come from a divine lineage, and the imperial government became a constitutional monarchy. Further, while Shrine Shinto, separate from State Shinto, was allowed to still be practiced, all state funding was taken away from Shinto shrines (Pye 2003).

More recently, this historical association between Shinto and nationalism has become increasingly challenged. Although these events did occur, such as the attempt to separate Shinto into a private and public sphere and attempting to use Shinto as a moral code, several scholars argue our understanding and interpretation of these events are flawed. For instance, the distinction of what Shinto meant was a fairly new concept, as it was only divorced from Buddhism during the Meiji era (Hardacre 2017). Further, Buddhist priests also participated in Japan's effort to modernize and militarize its government during the expansion in World War II, so placing the attention on Shinto undermines the role played by other religious groups (Rambelli 2011; Victoria 2011). Another perspective is that pairing Shinto and nationalism implies blame for repression and militarism should be placed on Shinto as a state religion, rather than on the secularist government (Thomas 2019). Rather, the association of Shinto and nationalism exists because of the desires and

efforts of Shintoist and nationalist groups, such as Jinja Honcho³ and Nippon Kaigi.⁴

However, as groups such as Jinja Honcho and Nippon Kaigi demonstrate, even though the origins of the association between Shinto and nationalism may not be as straightforward as saying Shinto is inherently nationalist, the consequences of this narrative are very much real (Guthmann 2017). Often framed as the Liberal Democratic Party's lingering appeal to Japanese nationalism, it is hard to argue the political controversies surrounding Yasukuni shrine visits do not have religious undertones since Yasukuni is a Shinto shrine, even though it does not fall under the umbrella of Jinja Honcho (Breen 2011). As Yasukuni shrine is dedicated to all verifiable Japanese war dead, this includes honoring Japanese war criminals who have died. Thus, political visits to Yasukuni have an inherent risk of both international and domestic criticism.

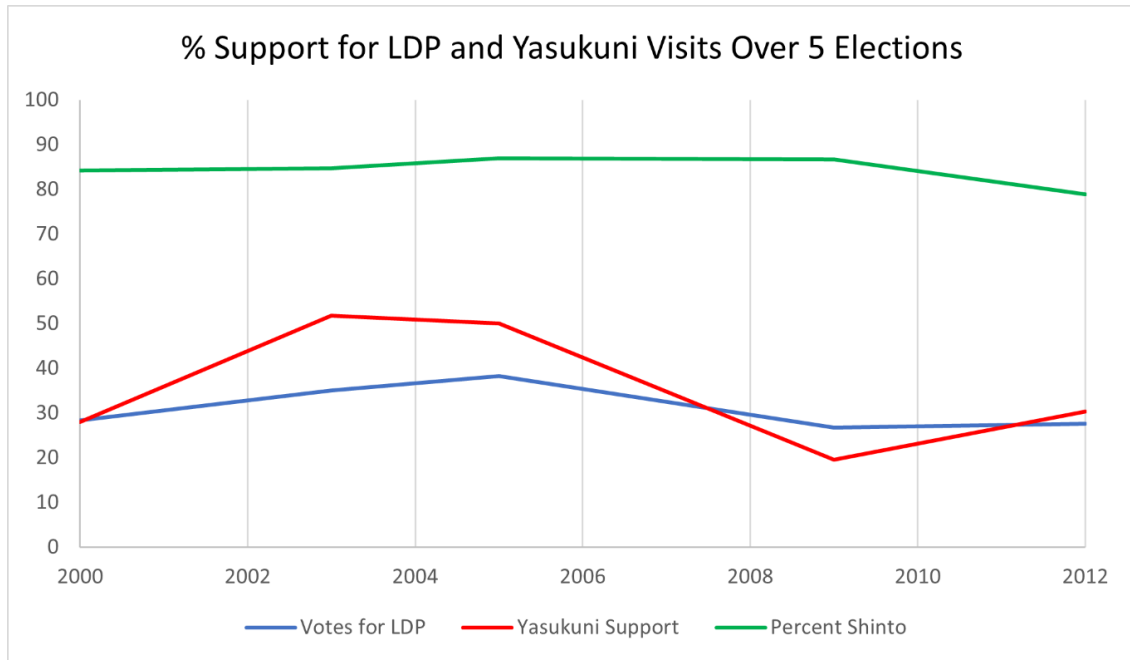
Figure 2.1 graphs the descriptive statistics for the national level election results (in percentages) for the Liberal Democratic Party for the 2000-2012 general elections, as well as the public approval ratings of visits to Yasukuni shrine for each of these years (Asahi Shimbun 2017; Pollmann 2016). The percentage of Japanese citizens who believe in Shintoist values according to the Agency for Cultural Affairs are also included for these five elections. It is worth noting the percentage of Shinto adherents, according to the Agency for Cultural Affairs, is very high, staying above 75% for this period of twelve years. Looking at Figure 2.1, the percentage of Shinto adherents stays relatively constant, despite the varying support for the LDP and Yasukuni visits. This figure suggests those who identify with Shinto are not necessarily connected to the same people who support the politically motivated visits to Yasukuni. Further, members of the Liberal

³ The Association of Shinto Shrines, which oversees around 80,000 Shinto shrines and advocates for nationalist policies (Shibuichi 2017; Tawara 2017).

⁴ The Japan Conference, a nationalist lobbying group that can trace its origins back to Shinto organizations (Mizohata 2016).

Democratic Party might be utilizing Shintoist symbolism and iconography in order to relate their party with a sense of national identity by drawing on associations of the past relationship between Shinto and the Japanese state.

Figure 2.1: Comparison of % Shinto, Support for LDP, and Yasukuni Visits



In the subsequent analysis, I empirically evaluate the following hypothesis on which competing expectations exist:

H1: Shinto practitioners will be more likely to express nationalist sentiment.

Since some teachings of Shinto share ideologies with Japanese nationalist groups, like the belief in the divinity of the emperor, it is possible that practicing Shinto would be good predictor for increased nationalist sentiment. However, if Shinto’s association with nationalism is false, as Thomas (2019) and Hardacre (2017) argue, there could be an inconclusive or even negative relationship between Shinto and nationalism.

At the same time, the effects of the narrative that Shinto is associated with nationalism could have an influence on party support preference:

H2: Shinto practitioners will be more likely to support the LDP.

Due to the Liberal Democratic Party's history of supporting nationalist policies, Shinto practitioner would likely support the LDP if Shinto is inherently nationalistic. Yet, as with the first hypothesis, if Shinto practitioners do not support nationalist policies or wish to separate themselves from this association, they may be less likely to support the LDP.

Perhaps the more accurate association is more direct: a relationship between support for the LDP and nationalist sentiment:

H3: Those who express nationalist sentiment are more likely to support the LDP than those who do not.

Consequently, nationalist appeals by the LDP using Shinto iconography are better understood as a signal to a specific subset of Shinto followers and nationalists in general. As Gellner (1983) and Anderson (1983) argue, nationalism is created by the state in order to produce a sense of cohesion within society. Thus, while nationalist groups may draw upon ideas of Shinto to conjure nationalist sentiment, those with nationalist political leanings are not necessarily the same people who practice Shinto. Instead, it is these nationalist groups that reinforce these associations between political and religious elements, such as the shared memberships between Nippon Kaigi, Jinja Honcho, and the Liberal Democratic Party.

2.3 Data and Methods

This chapter draws from the Japanese Value Orientations Survey, which is conducted every five years in Japan since 1973.⁵ The survey consistently asks a variety of questions regarding the opinions of people in Japan about political, religious, and sociological topics. The unit of analysis

⁵ The data for this secondary analysis, "The Survey on Japanese Value Orientations, 1973-2013, Public Opinion Research Division, NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute," was provided by the Social Science Japan Data Archive, Center for Social Research and Data Archives, Institute of Social Science, The University of Tokyo.

is at the individual level.

2.3.1 Dependent Variables

For the first hypothesis, I test whether people who practice Shinto are associated with nationalist sentiment. The nationalist sentiment dependent variable is an indexed variable based on the response to three survey options: 1) Japanese people are superior to others.⁶ 2) Japan is a first-tier country.⁷ 3) There are many things to learn from other countries.⁸ The first two responses are coded as 1 if the respondent agreed with the statement and a 0 if they disagreed. Conversely, the third response is assigned a value of 1 if the respondent believed that Japan had nothing to learn from other countries and a 0 if they indicated that there are many things to learn from other countries.⁹ These answers were then combined to create a nationalist sentiment index, with a minimum score of 0 (least nationalist) and a maximum score of 3 (highly nationalist).¹⁰ This hypothesis will help determine if religious participation has an impact on the likelihood of a person expressing nationalist sentiment.

The second hypothesis tests if those who have nationalist ideology are more likely to support the LDP; thus, the dependent variable for this hypothesis is support for the LDP. If the respondent indicated their support for the LDP, they are coded as a 1.¹¹ Otherwise, a 0 indicates the choice for all other parties. The dependent variable for the third hypothesis is also based on

⁶ ナショナリズム：日本人は、他の国民に比べて、きわめてすぐれた素質をもっている

⁷ ナショナリズム：日本は一流国だ

⁸ ナショナリズム：外国から見習うべきことが多い

⁹ The correlation between the three variables is fairly minimal, with a score of 0.29 for the first-tier and superior country questions, 0.08 for the first-tier and nothing to learn questions, and 0.06 for the nothing to learn and Japan as superior country questions.

¹⁰ The resulting index has a mean of 1.34 with a standard deviation of 0.91.

¹¹ See Appendix A for a list of all parties.

this question regarding a person's support for a particular party. Specifically, this hypothesis is interested in the effects of religious participation on support for the Liberal Democratic Party.

2.3.2 Independent Variables

The Value Orientations Survey does not include questions that specifically ask if the respondent is a practitioner of Shinto. Thus, this chapter uses two related questions to create an indexed variable to try to relay the concept as closely as possible. The variables chosen primarily signify religious behaviors rather than beliefs. First is the question that indicates if the respondent practices religious things, with a 1 indicating practice and a 0 for not practicing.¹² I have coded those who also responded that they believe in Buddha as a 0 to increase the probability that the religious practices refer to Shinto. Further, because the population of Christians in Japan is less than 2%, the probability that these religious practices are associated with Christianity should be very low (CIA World Factbook). Thus, any inclusion of Christians in this variable should not have a notable impact on the variable.

The second religious variable in the index has a clearer association with Shinto. The respondents are asked if they own/believe in charms such as ofuda (fortunes) and omamori (talismans) that ward against evil, with a 1 signifying yes and 0 no.¹³ Although omamori and ofuda are greatly associated with Shinto, Buddhist temples can also distribute them. Thus, the respondents who stated their belief in Buddha were coded as a 0 for this question, as well.¹⁴ These two religious variables are combined to create an index from 0 to 2, with a 0 signifying no religious

¹² 宗教的行動：ふだんから宗教的な行いをしている

¹³ 宗教的行動：魔よけや縁起物を身の回りにおいている

¹⁴ The correlation between these two variables is very minimal, at 0.04.

participation and a 2 being the maximum level of participation in Shinto.¹⁵ This index is used for hypothesis 1 that tests the relationship between religious practice and nationalist sentiment, as well as for hypothesis 2 that examines if Shintoist religious practices can serve as a predictor of support for the Liberal Democratic Party.

For the third hypothesis, the nationalist sentiment index – which tallies the respondent’s answers to the Japanese superiority, Japan as a first-tier country, and Japan has nothing to learn questions – is used as the independent variable. This hypothesis postulates that the more likely predictor for respondents who support the LDP is their level of nationalist sentiment, meaning as the level of nationalist sentiment increases, the likelihood that the respondent supports the LDP also increases.

2.3.3 Control Variables

Control variables commonly associated with having an influence on nationalist sentiment or a person’s support of the Liberal Democratic Party include sex, age, education level, and city size. The variable for sex is binary, with a 0 indicating the respondent answered male and a 1 meaning female. Age is an ordinal variable with five-year age ranges from 16-74, and then 75 and over. The variable for level of education reflects the respondent has more than a high school education if the value is 1 and a 0 for high school or less. Finally, city size is divided into urban and rural, with urban meaning the city has a population of 300,000 people or more and rural being less than 300,000. An ordered logistic regression is used for the first hypothesis because of the nationalist sentiment index. A logistic regression model is used for hypotheses two and three due to the binary nature of the dependent variables.

¹⁵ The mean for this variable is 0.19 and has a standard deviation of 0.42.

2.4 Results

2.4.1 The Impact of Practicing Shinto on Nationalist Sentiment

Overall, Table 2.1 indicates participating in religious activities has an inconclusive to a negative relationship with feelings of nationalist sentiment. Thus, the analysis does not provide support for the argument that those who practice Shinto are more likely to hold inherently nationalist ideologies. The relationship was only significant in the years 1993, 1998, and 2008, but in these years Shinto practitioners were less likely to identify with the nationalist statements. Instead, the strongest personal indicator of holding increased nationalist sentiment is age, meaning the older a person was, the more likely they were to have increased nationalist ideologies. Although not always significant, the control variables for education, and city size do fall into the expected direction when they are significant. However, women were more likely to have stronger nationalist sentiment than men when the variable was significant. In short, those who are female, less educated, and live in rural areas are more likely to have an increased nationalist sentiment throughout the years than their counterparts.

2.4.2 The Impact of Practicing Shinto on Support for the LDP

Similar to Shinto's common association with nationalism, a connection is also often made between Shinto and the Liberal Democratic Party. Most notably, visits to Yasukuni shrine by LDP politicians, including former Prime Ministers Koizumi and Abe, have garnered domestic and international attention. However, when considering the relationship between Shinto religious practice and support for the LDP, those who are Shinto practitioners have an inconclusive relationship with those who support the LDP except for in the year 2003 (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.1: Impact of Practicing Shinto on Feelings of Nationalist Sentiment

	1973	1978	1983	1988	1993	1998	2003	2008	2013
Practicing Shinto	-.024 (.080)	-.022 (.079)	.093 (.074)	-.060 (.078)	-.217** (.082)	-.265** (.085)	-.033 (.081)	-.187* (.090)	-.118 (.089)
Sex	.126 (.064)	.032 (.065)	.182** (.065)	.010 (.066)	.190** (.066)	.028 (.068)	.028 (.071)	.081 (.074)	.245** (.074)
Age	.152*** (.011)	.159*** (.019)	.145*** (.011)	.130*** (.011)	.118*** (.010)	.174*** (.011)	.153*** (.011)	.127*** (.011)	.109*** (.011)
Education	-.266** (.089)	-.180 (.122)	-.302*** (.078)	-.277*** (.077)	-.301*** (.074)	-.210** (.074)	-.118 (.076)	-.111 (.077)	-.178* (.076)
Urban/ Rural	.046 (.068)	.055 (.102)	-.210** (.068)	-.194** (.070)	-.051 (.069)	.114 (.071)	-.115 (.074)	-.013 (.075)	-.023 (.075)
/cut1	-.702 (.087)	-.931 (.093)	-1.239 (.097)	-.812 (.096)	-.574 (.095)	.265 (.103)	.095 (.108)	-.252 (.117)	-.934 (.123)
/cut2	1.027 (.087)	.844 (.091)	.484 (.093)	.775 (.095)	.954 (.095)	1.875 (.109)	1.798 (.114)	1.394 (.120)	.777 (.121)
/cut3	3.192 (.105)	3.030 (.107)	2.770 (.106)	2.990 (.112)	3.260 (.115)	4.169 (.135)	3.931 (.138)	3.681 (.143)	3.095 (.136)
N	3,297	3,232	3,306	3,122	3,116	2,956	2,707	2,519	2,543
χ^2	228.54***	227.11***	247.53***	201.90***	200.90***	348.62***	232.70***	167.36***	139.67***

Standard Errors in Parentheses *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001

Table 2.2: Impact of Practicing Shinto and Feelings of Nationalist Sentiment on Support for LDP

	1973	1978	1983	1988	1993	1998	2003	2008	2013
Practicing Shinto	-.056 (.097)	-.114 (.095)	-.069 (.087)	-.037 (.095)	-.050 (.109)	-.089 (.122)	-.389** (.119)	-.001 (.121)	-.128 (.107)
Nationalist Sentiment	.226*** (.043)	.331*** (.045)	.249*** (.045)	.210*** (.044)	.376*** (.048)	.351*** (.053)	.265*** (.055)	.282*** (.055)	.461*** (.053)
Sex	-.194** (.076)	-.054 (.077)	-.222** (.076)	-.197** (.078)	-.292** (.084)	-.228* (.093)	-.123 (.095)	.010 (.095)	-.289** (.087)

(table continues)

	1973	1978	1983	1988	1993	1998	2003	2008	2013
Age	.136*** (.013)	.169*** (.014)	.189*** (.013)	.183*** (.013)	.135*** (.013)	.209*** (.016)	.202*** (.016)	.134*** (.015)	.107*** (.013)
Education	-.041 (.108)	-.108 (.105)	-.025 (.093)	.177 (.092)	-.193* (.098)	-.001 (.106)	-.144 (.106)	-.106 (.102)	-.019 (.091)
Urban/ Rural	-.430*** (.082)	-.329*** (.081)	-.461*** (.080)	-.560*** (.084)	-.427*** (.090)	-.414*** (.099)	-.154 (.099)	-.020 (.097)	-.098 (.089)
Constant	-1.421*** (.111)	-1.732*** (.119)	-1.638*** (.125)	-1.665*** (.126)	-2.036*** (.136)	-2.094*** (.164)	-2.790*** (.171)	-2.473*** (.173)	-2.036*** (.139)
N	3,297	3,232	3,306	3,112	3,116	2,956	2,707	2,519	2,543
χ^2	229.93***	327.60***	385.56***	338.89***	277.25***	370.10***	312.33***	156.89***	204.27***

Standard Errors in Parentheses *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001

In fact, the impact for that year is negative, meaning those who practice Shinto were less likely to support the LDP in 2003. As with hypothesis 1, these results suggest that, at most, being a Shinto practitioner is negatively correlated with being a supporter of the LDP, if there is a relationship at all. Taken together the idea that Shinto is inherently nationalistic and that those who practice Shinto are more likely to support nationalist policies is unsupported.

2.4.3 The Impact of Nationalist Sentiment on Support for the LDP

If practitioners of Shinto are not the driving predictors for nationalist sentiment or support for the LDP, where does the connection actually lie? Table 2.2 also illustrates that a respondent with increased nationalist sentiment is positively correlated with that respondent supporting the Liberal Democratic Party. This correlation is statistically significant at the 0.001 level for all years available within the survey data.

As with hypothesis and Table 2.1, age is again a strong predictor. The model finds those who are older are more likely to support the LDP. This is the case in all years in the survey. Although they are not significant indicators for all years, sex and city size have a fairly consistent relationship with supporting the LDP, with men and people in rural areas being more likely to indicate their support for the LDP. Education is not a strong indicator for these hypotheses, as there is only a significant relationship between education level and support for the LDP in the year 1993. However, it is still in the expected direction that the respondent is more likely to support the LDP if they have a lower level of education. It may be worth noting that 1993 was one of two years where the Liberal Democratic Party lost power.

2.5 Conclusion

Considering the findings of the three hypotheses together, these results suggest those who are practitioners of Shinto should not be automatically assumed as supporters of the LDP or

nationalist ideals. Instead, the relationship between nationalist sentiment and support for the Liberal Democratic Party exists on its own. Although nationalist groups such as Nippon Kaigi arguably have Shintoist ties and although the Liberal Democratic Party's use of Yasukuni shrine is arguably a nationalist gesture, we cannot argue Shinto and its followers are the foundation of nationalism.

As discussed above, this is not to say that Shinto practitioners are never supporters for the LDP or that Shinto practitioners never adhere to strong nationalist ideologies. It is worth noting that the only conclusive findings (years 1993, 1998, and 2008) suggest a negative relationship between Shinto and nationalism. At the same time, however, the majority of the time, there are no conclusions we can draw one way or another about this relationship. Rather, the reality is more nuanced than some coverage of historical events indicated. What is perhaps happening, then, is that there are possibly different groupings of Shinto practitioners. This is a logical conclusion, as there are different sects of Shinto, like what can be found in Japanese Buddhism.

This distinction that there are different types of Shinto practitioners would be important when thinking of why the LDP and nationalist groups use Shinto and its iconography, as they are likely trying to communicate with a subset of Shinto practitioners. Despite the misinformation surrounding the start of the association between Shinto and nationalism, that is a narrative that has persisted to this day, and it is bound to have some sort of effect or consequence.

CHAPTER 3

THE SQUEAKY WHEEL GETS THE GREASE: COMPARING THE POLITICAL BEHAVIORS OF SHINTO NATIONALISTS, SHINTO NON-NATIONALISTS, AND NON-SHINTOISTS

3.1 Introduction

There is a debate within the scholarly literature regarding the inherently nationalist nature of Shinto. While older literature tends to assume that Shinto and nationalism are intrinsically connected, more recent scholarship has demonstrated that these historical connections are likely more complicated. What does this mean when considering the political participation of Shinto practitioners compared to those who are not adherents to Shinto? I argue that Shinto practitioners will be more likely to participate in a multitude of political avenues than non-Shintoists. Further, the divide within the literature also points to the possibility that there are different categories of Shinto practitioners regarding nationalist sentiment. This chapter divides Shinto practitioners into Shinto nationalists and Shinto practitioners who do not have strong nationalist sentiment (hereafter categorized as Shinto non-nationalists). By adding this distinction, I find that there is not only a difference in political participation between Shintoists and non-Shintoists, but also between Shinto nationalists and Shinto non-nationalists. While Shintoists as a whole are more likely to participate in politics than non-Shintoists, Shinto nationalists also participate in politics in more ways than Shinto non-nationalists. This finding helps contribute to our understanding of how the historical context of the relationship between Shinto and nationalism affects current political behaviors.

The influence that religion can have on political participation gives valuable insights to the discussions of political behavior and democratic consolidation. For instance, in an American context, churches and religious organizations can help train its religious adherents in various forms

of civic engagement and political participation, thus having the capacity to strengthen democratic processes and values (Djupe and Gilbert 2006; Jamal 2005; Jones-Correa and Leal 2001). However, there is also the concern that religion's ties to traditionalist values could be detrimental to democracy, particularly when religion is paired with nationalist sentiment (Davis 2018; Davis and Perry 2020; Whitehead et al. 2018). This chapter first examines this literature regarding the relationship between religion and political participation in a general sense, and then explores this topic in the context of Japan. I argue that Shintoists are more likely to participate in multiple political forms than non-Shintoists. Further, I also expect to find that Shinto nationalists will be more likely to participate in various political mediums than Shinto non-nationalists. Using the Japanese Value Orientations survey, I find support for these hypotheses. Finally, I discuss the potential consequences of these findings, namely that it could be in the interest of nationalist groups and political officials to play into the association between Shinto and nationalism, as Shinto nationalists could serve as a vocal and politically active base.

3.2 Religion and Political Participation

When talking about religion and political participation, we often hear about how religious affiliation affects partisan voting and vote choice in general in an American context (Calfano and Djupe 2009; Campbell et al. 2011; Green 2007; Green 2009; Holman and Shockley 2017; Layman 1997). Some articles help clarify definitions or show how other factors, such as ethnicity, create different or interactive effects (Connaughton 2004; Kelly and Kelly 2005). Others challenge norms and expectations, notably the religious Republican and atheist Democrat assumption (Claassen 2015), or switching the focus from Christian denominations (Ayers and Hofstetter 2008; Brockway 2018; Schoettmer 2013).

The literature has also expanded to include different types of political participation other

than voting, such as protesting or writing their Congressperson (Arikan and Bloom 2019; Djupe and Neilheisel 2012). Religious affiliation also gets a deeper look, as the authors start considering factors such as church attendance and membership in church groups. For instance, religious affiliation on its own might be more likely to reduce political participation, but when paired with church attendance, groups, and activities, political participation tends to increase (Driskell et al. 2008). This could be due to church groups helping citizens develop necessary civic skills that allow for more informed political participation (Djupe and Gilbert 2006; Jamal 2005; Jones-Correa and Leal 2001). This literature has greatly contributed to our understanding of how religion can have an impact on political participation, and in turn affect politics.

Often, the discussion of the relationship between religion and politics examines the impact this relationship might have on democracy and democratic consolidation. Churches can play a role as socializers for the political structure (Huckle and Silva 2020). However, this role can go either way. Some research finds that churches can increase democratic ties by informing and training their congregation with democratic values (Audette and Weaver 2016; Djupe and Calfano 2012). Conversely, other scholars argue that churches can weaken these democratic ties due to preference of traditional values (Robinson 2010; Wilcox 2011).

Christian nationalism in particular has become a point of focus. Christian nationalists in the United States assert that the US has a “distinctively Christian heritage and future”, and these values influence political choices, behaviors, and ideologies (Whitehead et al. 2018, 147). For instance, the concern that democratic values will take a backseat to traditional values also appears in the discussion of Christian nationalism. As nationalism in general is concerned with who belongs to the in-groups and out-groups, Christian nationalism helps define those terms. Further, authoritarian attitudes and control measures can be encouraged due to intolerance toward the

outgroup (Davis 2018). Prejudicial attitudes toward not just ethnic and racial minorities, but marginalized groups in general, are commonly found among Christian nationalists (Davis and Perry 2020). One recent example of the relationship between Christian nationalism and politics comes from the Christian nationalist beliefs in distrust of science and scientific experts (Baker et al. 2020). This ideology impacted the downplaying or disregarding the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic, which contributed to the politicization of the pandemic (Perry et al. 2020).

In the context of Japan, the literature on religion and political participation is not yet as vast as it is for the United States. Typically, discussions regarding the relationship between religion and political participation, are in reference to Soka Gakkai and Komeito. A Buddhist sect based on the teachings of Nichiren, Soka Gakkai is a religious group that founded the Komeito party in 1964 (Ehrhardt et al. 2014). Although the Komeito Party eventually officially cut ties with Soka Gakkai in order to prevent legal issues due to the constitutional separation of religion and state in Japan, there is still an assumption that Komeito draws most of its base from Soka Gakkai (Abe and Endo 2014). However, closer evaluation finds that social identity is not enough to persuade Soka Gakkai members to vote for the Komeito party, and thus the party must react to the demands of individuals in the religious group by making appeals regarding policy claims in order to win their vote (Ehrhardt 2009). Further, as is commonly found in the literature in an American context, being part of Soka Gakkai as a religious organization can provide opportunities for developing political skills (Ehrhardt 2014). While this literature on the connections between Soka Gakka, Komeito, and political participation is incredibly valuable and insightful, it does not even cover Buddhists in general, but a specific sub-set.

When analyzing Shinto and its relationship with political participation, there are additional complications. Due to the process and designations that Shinto experienced during the Meiji Era,

Shinto is often not even treated as a religion, despite having components like the belief in spirits and the deification of the emperor (Josephson 2012). This is perhaps due to the fact that it was more valuable for Shinto to be seen at this time as a Japanese moral code and a tool of the state (Breen and Teeuwen 2010).

Other complications are created from this time period, as well. The extent to which Shinto is inherently nationalist is debated in the academic literature. With the implementation of the “Shinto Directive” by the United States during its occupation of Japan after World War II, it was clear that the American government considered “State Shinto” to be directly associated with the Japanese government’s militaristic and ultranationalist approach (Okazaki 2010). This directive forced a separation of Shinto and the Japanese government, prohibiting the use of public funding for Shinto shrines, as well as other forms of state support for Shinto practices (Breen and Teeuwen 2010). “Shrine Shinto”, private adherence to Shinto ideals and rituals, was permitted to exist, however.

Like the United States government after the war, there are also scholars who argue that there are nationalist underpinnings to Shinto (see for example Fukase-Indergaard and Indergaard 2008; Holtom 1947; Kumada 2018; Guthmann 2017). With tenets such as the deification of the Japanese Emperor, it is clear to see how the Japanese government during the Meiji government would want to be paired with Shinto. Further, current nationalist groups in Japan, such as Jinja Honcho (the Association of Shinto Shrines) and Nippon Kaigi (the Japan Conference), use foundations in Shinto to justify some nationalist ideologies (Burchardt et al. 2015; Mizohata 2016; Shibuichi 2017; Tawara 2017). Conversely, there are also those who contend that the history between Shinto and nationalism is more complicated, and that Shinto is not necessarily nationalistically inclined (Fridell 1976; Hardacre 2017; Thomas 2019). Instead, Shinto was used

as a tool of the government to amplify nationalist ideologies, but this does not mean that Shinto was inherently nationalistic. For instance, it was not only Shinto but also Buddhist priests who promoted the superiority of the Japanese government and supported the war effort (Rambelli 2011; Victoria 2011). Yet, Buddhism in Japan is not discussed as being inherently nationalistic.

3.3 Shinto and Political Participation

This chapter argues that both of these perspectives are true to an extent. The idea that Shinto's history is more complex than simply being defined as nationalistic or not nationalistic is a growing discussion with rich, new insights. The evidence that Shinto was used as a tool of the state, and thus should not automatically assume nationalistic ideologies is convincing. However, the narrative that Shinto is a nationalist religion has not only endured, but it has also been strengthened by scholars, Japanese nationalist groups, and political officials. This distinction of a not entirely true, but still reinforced, history of a nationalist Shinto means there will be consequences on the relationship Shinto, and political behavior.

I expect that the reason it is possible for Shinto to not be inherently nationalist and yet also possible for political nationalist groups to depend on Shinto iconography to send nationalistic messages is because there are two groups of Shintoists. Further, they might participate in politics differently, not only from one another, but from non-Shintoists. Thus, anticipate that Shintoists will consequently be more motivated to participate in politics than non-Shintoists because there are competing voices within Shinto that are trying to be heard.

H1: In a comparison of individuals, those who are Shintoists are more likely to participate in multiple forms of politics than non-Shintoists.

Additionally, the persistence of the modern connection between Shinto and nationalism may be due to the political behaviors of Shinto nationalists. It could be the case that Shinto nationalists will be more consistently involved in visible forms of political participation, other than

voting, and thus are a reliable and consistent core to which politicians and nationalist groups can signal. Consequently, this may be why we still see evidence in modern politics of a connection between Shinto and nationalism, such visits to Yasukuni shrine and the growing relevance of Jinja Honcho and Nippon Kaigi. This relationship could also work in the inverse direction. If Shinto nationalists are more politically engaged than their Shinto non-nationalist counterparts, they would be able to advocate for themselves, and thus politicians and interest groups could be more likely to rely on Shinto nationalism since Shinto nationalists are already sharing their interests and demands in a variety of political forms.

H2: In a comparison of individuals, those who are Shinto nationalists are more likely to participate in various forms of politics than Shinto non-nationalists.

3.4 Research Design

This chapter tests the above hypotheses using the Japanese Value Orientations (JVO) survey.¹⁶ The JVO survey has been conducted every five years since 1973, and the current version includes respondent answers up through 2013. Based on the survey data, the unit of analysis for this chapter is individual respondents. The dependent variables are types of political participation, including participating in demonstrations,¹⁷ signing petitions,¹⁸ writing the media,¹⁹ making political donations,²⁰ attending political meetings,²¹ and being an acting member of a political

¹⁶ The data for this secondary analysis, "The Survey on Japanese Value Orientations, 1973-2013, Public Opinion Research Division, NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute," was provided by the Social Science Japan Data Archive, Center for Social Research and Data Archives, Institute of Social Science, The University of Tokyo.

¹⁷ 政治活動：デモに参加した

¹⁸ 政治活動：署名運動に協力した

¹⁹ 政治活動：マスコミに投書した

²⁰ 政治活動：献金・カンパした

²¹ 政治活動：集会や会合に出席した

organization or party.²² Each type of political participation is a dummy variable, with a 0 indicating that the respondent has not participated and a 1 signifying that the respondent has engaged in that type of political participation.

There are two independent variables used to test the hypotheses: Shinto nationalists and Shinto non-nationalists. For both independent variables, a score of 0 denotes the reference category of non-Shinto practitioners. Since the Japanese Value Orientations survey does not specifically ask the respondent to which religion they belong, being a Shinto practitioner is based on two questions regarding the respondent's religious behaviors. First is the question that asks if the respondent practices religious things.²³ In order to make sure that this question captures Shinto practitioners and to eliminate the possibility that the respondent practices Buddhism, those who indicated that they believe in Buddha were not included. Additionally, Christian responses would also not have a significant impact on this variable, as the number of Christians in Japan is less than 2% (CIA World Factbook). The second question that indicates if the respondent is a Shinto practitioner asks if the person owns/believes in charms and talismans that are commonly associated with Shinto.²⁴ Since Buddhist temples can also sell and distribute these items, those who indicated that they believe in Buddha were likewise not included for this question. Given these parameters, if the respondent answered affirmatively to either of these questions, they are coded as a Shinto practitioner.

Whether a respondent is nationalist is based on a nationalism index that was created using the following three survey options: 1) There are many things to learn from other countries;²⁵ 2)

²² 政治活動：政党・団体の一員として活動した

²³ 宗教的行動：ふだんから宗教的な行いをしている

²⁴ 宗教的行動：魔よけや縁起物を身の回りにおいている

²⁵ ナショナリズム：外国から見習うべきことが多い

Japan is a first-tier country:²⁶ 3) Japanese people are superior to others.²⁷ In order to be considered a nationalist, the respondent needed to indicate their agreement with at least two of these nationalism survey options. This coding decision was made to better capture a stronger sense of nationalist sentiment, rather than simply general pride in one's country.

The first independent variable, Shinto nationalist, is coded as a 1 if the respondent is both a Shinto practitioner and a nationalist based on the above criteria. The Japanese Value Orientations survey contains responses from 33,328 individuals. Among them, 2,055 individuals qualify as Shinto nationalists, meaning they comprise about 6% of the observations. The second independent variable, Shinto non-nationalist, is indicated by a 1 if the respondent is a Shinto practitioner but does not meet the criteria for being considered a nationalist. There are 3,185 respondents, about 10% of the observations, who fall into this category. Consistent with other surveys and polls, non-Shintoists make up the vast majority of the respondents, at about 85%, or 28,088 individuals, and they are the reference category in the analysis below.

The control variables available in the JVO survey that could also have an impact on a person's political behavior are sex, age, education, and city size. The sex, education, and city size variables are all binary variables. For sex, a 0 signifies male and 1 female. Education takes a value of 0 if the respondent has a high school education or less and a 1 if they have gone beyond high school. The area the respondent lives is considered urban if it has 300,000 people or more and is coded as a 1. A population of less than 300,000 is considered rural and coded as a 0. Age is separated into categories with five-year ranges from 16-74, and then 75 and over. Finally, a binary variable is included for each year that the survey was conducted. Based on the binary nature of the

²⁶ ナショナリズム：日本は一流国だ

²⁷ ナショナリズム：日本人は、他の国民に比べて、きわめてすぐれた素質をもっている

dependent variables, a logistic regression is used to test the hypotheses.

3.5 Results

Across the board, Shinto practitioners as a whole tend to participate in various forms of politics than non-Shintoists. As Table 3.1 illustrates, Shinto non-nationalists are more likely to sign petitions, donate, and write to the media than non-Shintoists.²⁸ There is no statistical evidence that Shinto non-nationalists are different from non-Shintoists for attending demonstrations, attending political meetings, and being members of political groups. As for Shinto nationalists, there are likewise no categories of political participation where non-Shintoists outperformed them.

Table 3.1: Likelihood of Political Participation

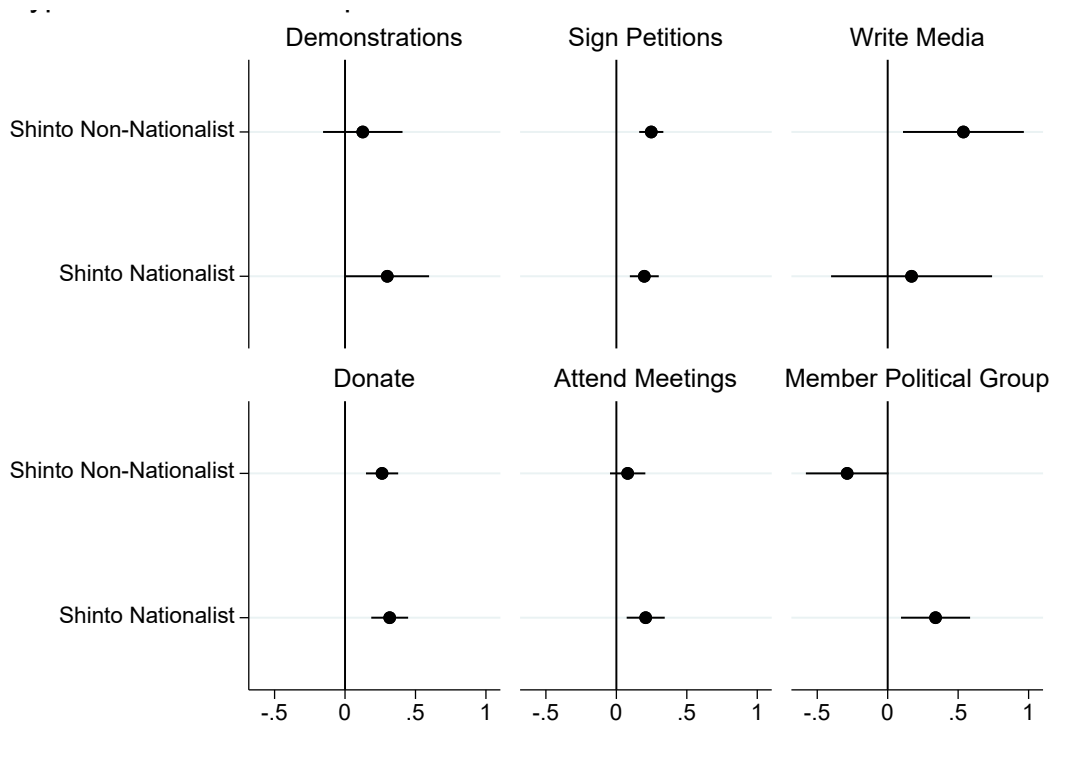
	Demonstrate	Sign Petitions	Write Media	Donate	Political Meetings	Political Member
Shinto Nationalists	.324* (.150)	.198*** (.052)	.169 (.291)	.317*** (.067)	.208** (.069)	.340** (.125)
Shinto Non-Nationalists	.126 (.144)	.248*** (.043)	.537* (.218)	.263*** (.058)	.080 (.064)	-.287 (.150)
Sex	-1.142*** (.093)	-.212*** (.026)	-.466** (.148)	-.220*** (.035)	-.823*** (.036)	-.856*** (.072)
Age	-.005 (.013)	.041*** (.004)	.073** (.023)	.032*** (.006)	.113*** (.006)	.096*** (.011)
Education	.366*** (.096)	.392*** (.030)	.568*** (.163)	.357*** (.041)	.109** (.042)	-.099 (.087)
Urban/Rural	.117 (.087)	-.056* (.027)	-.071 (.154)	.103** (.037)	-.229*** (.038)	-.173* (.075)
Constant	-4.918*** (.281)	-2.043*** (.067)	-6.017*** (.372)	-2.788*** (.090)	-3.132*** (.094)	-4.311*** (.081)
N	32,907	32,907	32,907	32,907	32,907	32,907
X ²	507.10***	711.12***	44.99***	433.10***	1282.26***	333.29***

Standard Errors in Parentheses *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001

²⁸ For readability, the dummy variables for each year were not included in Table 3.1. They can be found in Appendix B.

Shinto nationalists are more likely to attend demonstrations, sign petitions, give donations, attend political meetings and be members of political groups than non-Shintoists. Only writing to the media had inconclusive results. These findings lend strong support to the first hypothesis that Shinto nationalists and non-nationalists are more likely to participate in a variety of political mediums than non-Shintoists.

Figure 3.1: Comparing Types of Political Participation Between Shinto Nationalists and Non-Nationalists



Between Shinto nationalists and non-nationalists, the two groups are no more or less likely to participate in these various forms of politics than the other, with one important exception. Shinto nationalists are more likely to be members of political groups than Shinto non-nationalists. As Figure 3.1 demonstrates, this likelihood is much more apparent and significant. Although Shinto practitioners are overall more likely to participate in politics in a variety of ways, there is only a distinction between Shinto nationalists and non-nationalists regarding being a member of a

political organization or group. Thus, findings only lend partial support to the second hypothesis that Shinto nationalists are more likely to participate in various forms of politics than Shinto non-nationalists, although both categories of Shinto practitioners actively participate in a variety of political forms.

While the findings regarding the control variables are important, they are not necessarily surprising. For each form of political participation, men were significantly more likely than women to be involved. Age was also a consistently influential factor, with demonstrations being the only inconclusive result.

Older age categories were more likely to sign petitions, write the media, donate, attend political meetings, and be members of political groups than younger age groups. Those who were more educated had statistically significant results with participating in demonstrations, signing petitions, writing the media, donating, and attending political meetings. Respondents from rural areas were more likely to sign petitions, attend political meetings, and be members of political groups, while those from urban areas were more likely to make political donations.

3.6 Conclusions

This chapter finds support for the idea that Shinto nationalists and Shinto non-nationalists are more likely to participate in multiple forms of politics than non-Shintoists. This finding contributes to the debate regarding the inherently nationalist nature of Shinto and supports the first hypothesis that Shintoists will be more likely to participate in politics in a variety of ways. While there is strong evidence that the idea of Shinto being fundamentally nationalistic is based on historical inaccuracies and oversimplification of the history around the Meiji Era, the impression that Shinto and nationalism are connected has still endured to modern Japanese politics. This seeming conundrum has created an interesting reality: Shinto practitioners are not a homogenous

group regarding nationalist ideology. Both Shinto nationalists and Shinto non-nationalists make an effort to participate in a variety of political mediums, perhaps in an effort to be heard over the other group. Thus, Shintoists in both groups are more likely to participate in various forms of politics than non-Shintoists.

While Shinto non-nationalists are more likely to be involved in some forms of political participation than non-Shintoists, they are either matched in participation with the Shinto nationalists, or they are even outdone by the Shinto nationalists. Thus, there is also a distinct difference between Shinto nationalists and Shinto non-nationalists. Although not all Shintoists are nationalists, those who are nationalist are more likely to participate in one more visible form of politics than Shinto non-nationalists: being members of political parties and organizations. By being active in additional forms of politics than Shinto-non-nationalists, those who belong to the Shinto nationalist group are able to express their desires and wishes in more forms than the Shinto non-nationalists. Additionally, this might also mean that politicians are more likely to use Shinto as a nationalist signal even though Shinto is not inherently nationalist. Overall, Shinto nationalists as a group are debatably more politically active in a form that is likely to have greater influence in party politics, and therefore they can serve as a reliable core for nationalist interest groups and political officials.

CHAPTER 4

THE POLITICAL STRATEGY OF APPEALING TO RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM:

EXAMINING MOTIVATIONS TO JOIN RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

BY JAPANESE LDP POLITICIANS²⁹

4.1 Introduction

Media outlets and scholarly works are inundated with discussions of the influence and repercussions of nationalism and nationalistic policies around the world. With events such as former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's pledge to revise Japan's Constitution to formalize the role of the Self-Defense Force, Japan's trade wars with South Korea, and the increase of books and articles in recent years focusing on the influence of the nationalist lobbying group Nippon Kaigi, also known as the Japan Conference, concerns regarding an increasingly nationalist Japan are on the rise. Influenced by the memory of a government created, nationalist version of State Shinto,³⁰ the religion of Shinto is perceived to at least have nationalistic inclinations, if not being fully nationalistic (Azegami 2012). This perception is often supported by occurrences such as political visits to Yasukuni Shrine, which causes both national and international controversy due to the fact that Yasukuni enshrines Japan's war dead, including Class-A war criminals (Breen 2008; Pye 2003; Ryu 2007). Thus, official political visits are associated with an endorsement for State Shinto and Japan's aggressive, militaristic past. Additionally, politicians holding memberships in both

²⁹ This chapter is reproduced from Gentry, Hope Dewell, 2020, "The Political Strategy of Appealing to Religious Nationalism: Examining Motivations to Join Religious Organizations by Japanese LDP Politicians," *Politics and Religion* 1-21, with permission from Cambridge University Press.

³⁰ I would like to acknowledge here that there is a disagreement within the literature regarding the pervasiveness of State Shinto, and even its religious nature and true affiliation with Shinto. However, it is outside the scope of this chapter to answer these questions. What is most pertinent to this chapter is the collective memory regarding State Shinto and the association between Shinto and nationalism that has grown as a result of this collective memory. If the reader is interested in further exploring the divergence within the literature, I recommend the following books and articles: Hardacre 2011; Hardacre 2017; Rots and Teeuwen 2017 and the full "Formations of the Secular in Japan" special issue from *Japan Review*; Thomas 2019.

Nippon Kaigi and Jinja Honcho, the Association of Shinto Shrines, further cement the association between far-right, nationalist ideologies and Shinto. For example, as of 2018, 18 out of the 19 Ministers in Abe's Fifth Cabinet were members of Nippon Kaigi or Jinja Honcho's political organization, Shinto Seiji Renmei.³¹

With the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) tendencies toward nationalist policies, including the Abe Cabinet's extremely high rate of membership in nationalist groups with Shintoist affiliations, it is logical to assume that members of the LDP would commonly be associated with Shintoist groups, such as Jinja Honcho and their affiliated political group, Shinto Seiji Renmei (Shinseiren). Further, Shinseiren commonly endorses the LDP but not other parties, as Shinseiren's positions on nationalist policies such as restricting non-Japanese from being able to vote are most closely aligned with the LDP (Klein and Reed 2014). However, the number of Shinseiren members among the LDP Lower House experienced an increase from 51% in 2013 to about 75% in 2014. Since the number of people in Japan who are affiliated with any religion has only been shrinking over time, this increase in Shinseiren membership cannot be explained by a turn toward religion. Further, as members of the LDP were largely not associated with Shinseiren in 2012, the escalation of memberships would also not be prompted by general ideological similarities, either.³² So, if not for religious or ideological reasons, why was there a sudden surge in Shinseiren membership by politicians within the LDP after the 2012 general election?

While nationalism in Japan is commonly associated with Shinto due to their shared history, this chapter finds that identifying with or belonging to a religious organization can be done for

³¹ Known in English as the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership. Asia Policy Point. 2018. The Point. November 4. Accessed November 6, 2019. <http://newasiapolicypoint.blogspot.com/2018/11/the-ministers-of-abes-fifth-cabinet.html>.

³² The data source used to determine this trend is explained later.

politically strategic reasons, in this case, to guarantee more votes in order to ensure reelection. Religion and religious organizations certainly have an influence on politics in Japan, but the motivations for religious memberships are not necessarily driven by ideological reasons. Instead, I argue that membership into the religious organization, Shinseiren, is motivated by strategic reasons, as the LDP legislators now had electoral incentives to join Shinseiren after the 2012 general election. In Table 4.1, the number of Shinseiren members in the Japanese National Diet are outlined by year, with a few LDP-leaning independents, but almost all being LDP politicians. Between 2013 and 2014, the number of Shinseiren members in the Diet increased by 87 members. While individual changes in ideology cannot be ruled out, it does not seem likely that the noteworthy increase in Shinseiren memberships between these two years would only be due to ideological reasons. Considering the Japanese general election had just occurred in 2012, the timing of the increase in memberships could be due to political motivations.

Table 4.1: Number of Shinto Seiji Renmei Members in the Japanese National Diet by Year

	National Diet	Lower House	Upper House
September 2013	204	149	55
August 2014	291	213	78
July 2015	302	222	80
July 2016	297	223	74
July 2017	310	228	82
July 2018	294	211	83

Before the 2012 general election, Japan’s party politics largely functioned as a two-party competition, with the LDP and its main opponent, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) competing for the centrist voters. However, with the DPJ’s drastic decline in popularity after its stint as the ruling party following the 2009 election, the LDP no longer has a viable competitor, changing the LDP candidates’ incentive strategies. The LDP experienced a strong return to power in the 2012

general election, with many legislators being rookie Diet members. With virtually no external competition, the electoral incentive changes for the individual freshman LDP legislators to focusing on core LDP voters instead of centrist voters. Thus, if individual members of the LDP won by a smaller vote margin during the 2012 general election, joining Shinseiren could serve as a signal to core supporters, appealing to a specific bloc of voters and increasing their chances of reelection.

To explain how members of the LDP use Shinto and its connection to nationalism strategically, this chapter first discusses how connections between Shinto and Japanese nationalism have been made in the past, and how this legacy, despite its questionable historical accuracy, lives on. Next, the chapter discusses how rookie LDP legislators were incentivized to join a religious organization in order to ensure their political survival when their vote margins were narrow in the 2012 Japanese general election. The research design describes the original dataset created to test the hypothesis that membership in a religious organization is affected by vote margins. The analysis finds support for the argument that vote margin affects the likelihood of joining Shinseiren. Finally, the chapter concludes by explaining how the results found more generally suggest that memberships in religious organizations are not necessarily motivated by ideological reasons, and instead can be used in a way that helps achieve political goals. And specifically in the case of Japan, these findings might indicate changes in future LDP political strategy, such as putting the longstanding coalition with Komeito into question.

4.2 Nationalism and Religion in Contemporary Japan

While religion is not a necessary component of nationalistic ideologies, religion is a natural pair with nationalism, as it most likely already has a set of guidelines that creates boundaries between the in-group and the other. Thus, further rooting oneself into religious traditions can create

a sense of comfort and belonging when feeling socially, politically, or economically ostracized (Kinnvall 2004). Further, these boundaries can be justified through the nation's (imagined) religious past (Anderson [1983] 2006; Gellner 1983; Juergensmeyer 2019). Although these religious "traditions" are actually more modern creations, this does not mean that their influence on nationalist ideologies is any less impactful.

The connection between religion and nationalism in Japan is not as straightforward as it is in some other cases around the world. Indeed, the idea of whether Shinto should even be considered a religion is still debated.³³ Further, there is a disagreement in the literature regarding Shinto's historical connection to nationalism. In his book, *Faking Liberties: Religious Freedom in American-Occupied Japan*, Thomas details how the common narrative that the United States brought religious freedom to Japan contains great inaccuracies, and as a result, our understanding of a nationalistic Shinto is flawed (2019). Thomas states, "Japanese governance in the first half of the twentieth century was repressive because it was secularist, not because it was dominated by Shintō as a state religion" (2019, 3). Authors such as Guthmann, on the other hand, argue that the Japanese government tried to characterize Shinto as non-religious in order to appear secular (2017). This chapter, however, does not contribute to or make a claim for either side of this discussion. Instead, it is the collective memory surrounding this debate that matters to my argument (Assmann and Czaplicla 1995). Regardless of the veracity of the claim, scholars and historians have long perpetuated the idea that State Shinto is shrouded in a history of religious fundamentalism and restrictions to religious freedoms. Whether or not this is true does not lessen the impact of the long-term effects this narrative has created between Shinto and nationalism.

³³ This chapter takes the position that Shinto should be considered a religion, or at least should be studied as having religious characteristics. To see more regarding this debate, the reader can refer to the following literature: Azegami 2012; Guthmann 2017; Hardacre 2017; Josephson 2012; Rots and Teeuwen 2017; Starrs 2011.

In order to understand religious nationalism in Japan today, it is necessary to examine the ties between various groups and political organizations associated with nationalist ideologies. Guthmann refers to these groups of organizations as “nationalist circles” (2017). These nationalist circles do not limit their issues to religious ones, and they are not even necessarily religious groups. For instance, Nippon Kaigi is a lobby group with nationalist goals. Even Shinseiren is more accurately a political organization that is a wing of Jinja Honcho. And while Jinja Honcho is the Association of Shinto Shrines, it is largely a bureaucratic organization. Indeed, as with special interest groups that appeal on their own behalf to political officials, religious organizations are no different. Nippon Kaigi, Shinseiren, and Jinja Honcho at large take an active role in lobbying on behalf of their political interests.

To elucidate on how these nationalist groups fall under the category of religious nationalism, Guthmann explains,

Thus, the majority of the political battles waged by nationalist circles in Japan do not have religious dimensions. Yet the fact remains that within these circles, popular devotion for the emperor and the existence of a national cult of the war dead at Yasukuni Shrine are considered as two fundamental, indispensable elements of a Japan that has regained all its state power. The cult of the emperor and the cult of the war dead are two remnants of State Shinto, which, I argue...have a religious character (2017, 208-209).

In order to more fully elaborate on how these nationalist circles are tied together, the remainder of this section takes a closer look at the issue of Yasukuni shrine, the nationalist ideologies of Nippon Kaigi and Jinja Honcho, and how the LDP is connected.

Perhaps most commonly discussed when considering contemporary religious nationalism in Japan is the issue of political visits to Yasukuni shrine, which is dedicated to all verifiable Japanese war dead. This includes honoring Japanese war criminals who have died. As a result, Japanese politicians who visit the shrine face the possibility of heavy criticism, both from the international community and from Japan’s domestic audiences (Deans 2007; Pollmann 2016). This

is not to say that Yasukuni is a representation of all Shinto shrines, or even the tenets of Shinto in general. However, on the world stage, Yasukuni is perhaps the most recognized Shinto shrine.³⁴ This contributes to the perception of Shinto as a nationalistic religion, regardless of whether or not Shinto shrines more generally participate in nationalist practices.

Visits to Yasukuni shrine are not the only examples of religious nationalism commonly discussed in the case of in Japan. Nippon Kaigi, a right-wing organization/lobby group, is a prime example of Guthmann's nationalist circles, as the group advocates for its nationalist ideologies. However, its religious connections are not immediately apparent. Coverage regarding Nippon Kaigi has spiked only in the last several years despite the fact that the group was established in 1997 and has played a role in Japanese politics since its inception (Tawara 2017). While it is not a Shinto organization, its ideologies are based in religious organizations, one of which being Jinja Honcho (Mizohata 2016).³⁵ Like Jinja Honcho, Nippon Kaigi proposes nationalistic policies such as revising historical textbooks to downplay or remove discussions of war crimes committed by Japan during World War II, and rewriting the Japanese Constitution to allow Japan's Self-Defense Force to officially become a national army that can act offensively as well as defensively (Tawara 2017). Further, the group also lobbies politicians to support and visit Yasukuni (Shibuichi 2017).

Jinja Honcho, which oversees approximately 80,000 Shinto shrines, also actively campaigns to promote their political interests, such as urging for state support of Yasukuni.³⁶ One of the early and notable victories of the organization was in the late 1960s with establishing State Foundation Day, a national holiday based on the day that the first emperor, Jinmu, allegedly took

³⁴ Possibly with the exception of Ise shrine.

³⁵ The other religious organization is Seicho no ie, or House of Birth and Growth (see Mizohata 2016 for more information).

³⁶ However, Yasukuni shrine does not fall under the purview of Jinja Honcho. For more information on Jinja Honcho, their website can be found at the following web address: <https://www.jinjahoncho.or.jp/>

the throne (Hardacre 2017). Much of Jinja Honcho's lobbying work is performed by Shinseiren (Breen and Teeuwen 2010). As with Nippon Kaigi and Jinja Honcho, some of Shinseiren's prominent issues include supporting Yasukuni shrine, reforming the education system, and revising the Constitution (Burchardt et al. 2015).³⁷

One notable member of Nippon Kaigi and Shinseiren is former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo. Often characterized as a proponent of nationalistic values, Abe is well known for his support of constitutional revision that would allow Japan to take a more offensive stance militarily (Pyle 2018). As the head of the LDP at the time of the 2012 general election, Abe's values might be assumed to represent the ideologies of the LDP. However, the LDP's platform is not necessarily consistent, and there can be wide variation among individual members. This may be partially due to the fact that the LDP has been the ruling party in Japan all but two times since it was formed in 1955, and thus having some more moderate policy proposals helps to keep a larger number of voters satisfied (Rosenbluth and Thies 2010). Nevertheless, the LDP is a consistently conservative party with nationalist policy tendencies, takes a pro-business approach (Crespo 1995), and has a large support base in rural areas (Maeda 2010).

Under the leadership of Abe Shinzo, the LDP's ties to far-right policies and its support from conservative nationalist voters was apparent. Like the LDP's former Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro, Abe's nationalism also demonstrates ties to religious elements, as with his official visits to Yasukuni shrine (Fukuoka 2013; Larsson 2017; Mochizuki and Porter 2013). As state support of Yasukuni is one of the goals of Nippon Kaigi (Shibuichi 2017), Jinja Honcho (Hardacre 2017), and Shinseiren (Burchardt et al. 2015) the similarities of the nationalistic goals and ideologies

³⁷ For more information on Shinseiren, their website can be found at the following web address: <http://sinseiren.org/index.htm>

between these groups become evident (Hardacre 2005; Tawara 2017). Further, Jinja Honcho and their political organization, Shinseiren, have shown strong support for the LDP's attempts at constitutional revision, even though revision is not inherently a religious issue (Hardacre 2005).

With these parallel goals and ideologies, it is logical to assume that there would be widely shared memberships between these organizations, such as Abe's membership in Nippon Kaigi and Shinseiren. However, only about half (51%) of LDP legislators were members of Shinseiren as of September 2013.³⁸ This could perhaps be explained by the fact that shared ideologies do not automatically result in shared memberships with organizations that have similar values. With 57% of Japanese citizens saying they are unaffiliated with any religion as of 2015, it is possible that while members of the LDP support nationalist policies, they do not necessarily affiliate with Shinto (Pew Research Center 2016).

Further, Japan has institutional regulations of the separation between religion and the state. Articles 20 and 89 in the Japanese Constitution addresses these regulations, stating:

Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all. No religious organization shall receive any privileges from the State, nor exercise any political authority. No person shall be compelled to take part in any religious act, celebration, rite or practice. The State and its organs shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activity (Article 20)...No public money or other property shall be expended or appropriated for the use, benefit or maintenance of any religious institution or association, or for any charitable, educational or benevolent enterprises not under the control of public authority (Article 89).

Thus, it is reasonable that Japanese politicians would not want to politically affiliate with a religious organization for fear of violating the constitutional separation of state and religion, even though they are free to associate with any religious group as individuals (Klein and Reed 2014). For example, Japan's Komeito political party was originally founded under the ideologies of the Soka Gakkai religious group, which is a sect of Buddhism based on the teachings of Nichiren

³⁸ These data is further explained in the research design.

(McLaughlin 2014). Because of this religious affiliation, the Komeito party came under heavy criticism by its opposition on both the right and the left as being unconstitutional. Komeito was also attacked by the Japanese public as using their influence in politics to give an advantage to Soka Gakkai's goals. As a result, the Komeito party officially cut ties with Soka Gakkai in order to assert its secular nature (Abe and Endo 2014).

Yet, only one year later, in 2014, the number of LDP Lower House members who were also part of Shinseiren increased to about 75%. Consequently, fear of being accused of breaking constitutional laws does not appear to be a motivator for whether or not politicians join the Shinseiren political organization. Further, as the population of Japan is only getting less religious over time (Pew Research Center 2016; Reader 2012), the increase in Shinseiren membership would also not be due to a growth of religiosity. Thus, the sudden surge of cross-membership between the LDP's Lower House politicians and Shinseiren does not appear to be driven by ideological similarities, fear of constitutional violations, or an increase in religiosity.

In other words, Japan is commonly considered a secular country in the sense that its government takes a stance in officially recognizing a separation between religion and the public domain of the state.³⁹ While individuals, including politicians, are allowed to privately observe the religion of their choosing, the promotion of a particular religion in an official capacity by a public figure runs the risk of being unconstitutional, and at the very least could draw criticism from the national and international community, such as we have seen with a politician visiting Yasukuni Shrine or the suspected pull of Soka Gakkai on the Komeito Party. Further, the Japanese population itself is increasingly unaffiliated with any religion, with over half the population stating they do

³⁹ While I am using a more simple definition of the term "secular" for the purposes of this chapter, I would also like to acknowledge the complications surrounding this term in the literature. For more information about the nuances of this discussion, the reader can refer to articles such as Fox 2007, Hurd 2004, and Hurd 2017.

not belong to any religions as of 2015.⁴⁰ Accordingly, if affiliating with the political organization Shinseiren has the potential to damage the Liberal Democratic Party's ability to win median voters from the general voting population, what motivations might the LDP candidates have had in joining after the 2012 general election?

4.3 The LDP and Memberships in Shinseiren

This chapter argues that politicians make strategic decisions based on individual motivations that will benefit their self-interests. Thus, politicians are rational actors that make choices in order to stay in power. In this case, individual members of the LDP in the House of Representatives made a calculated decision to become members of Shinseiren in order to guarantee more votes in future elections.

The influence of religion on Japanese politics has come increasingly into question as public awareness of organizations such as Nippon Kaigi and their connection to powerful political groups continues to grow. As mentioned above, almost all of Abe's Cabinet Ministers are members of either Nippon Kaigi or Shinto Seiji Renmei, with a majority being members of both. Because of the sudden increase of membership in Shinseiren by the LDP Lower House politicians right after the 2012 election, this specific period of time is important to study in order to understand the puzzle of the affiliation of LDP politicians with Shinseiren. Decidedly, this timeframe is significant due to the unique circumstances of both the LDP's return to power over its main competitor and the high number of junior LDP politicians that joined the Lower House for the first time. This particular set of conditions allows us to gain valuable insights on the relationship between religion

⁴⁰ This chapter references the percentage of the Japanese population that personally affiliates with a particular religion. However, the number of Japanese citizens who participate in religious practices, such as holding a Buddhist funeral or visiting a Shinto shrine on New Year can differ. The Government of Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs has more information on these numbers. Further, for a discussion on measuring religion through practice versus belief, please see works such as Hackett and Lindsay 2008; Setzer and Burge 2015; and Steensland et al. 2000.

and politics in Japan by observing the aftermath of the 2012 general election in the Lower House.

Before it disbanded, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) has long been the LDP's largest opposition party. As such, the LDP and DPJ essentially functioned as two-party system competition for much of its history. The DPJ even won the 2009 general election. In the second column of Table 4.2, the mean effective number⁴¹ of non-LDP candidates by district is calculated for each election year, showing that the 2003, 2005, and 2009 elections functioned largely as a two-party competition. Due to a variety of factors, the Democratic Party of Japan plummeted in popularity after the 2009 election.⁴² The DPJ only won a total of 57 seats in the 2012 election, which was down from 308 seats in 2009. With the Japan Restoration Party winning 54 seats, the DPJ's status as the LDP's only viable rival completely disappeared. This heavy loss resulted in the reinstatement of the LDP as the ruling party in 2012. Table 4.2 showcases the fragmentation of the LDP's opposition after the 2009, which resulted in a major spike in the mean effective number of non-LDP candidates and has still not come back down to pre-2012 levels. With the LDP's most notable adversary out of the way, the party itself has no real threat to its power.

Table 4.2: Unity/Fragmentation of the LDP's Opposition, 2003-2017

Election Year	Mean Effective Number of Non-LDP Candidates	Mean Vote Share of the Top Non-LDP candidates
2003	1.57	40.13%
2005	1.56	39.16%
2009	1.33	51.16%
2012	2.45	30.07%
2014	1.75	34.89%
2017	1.71	36.24%

⁴¹ See Laasko and Taagepera 1979 for discussion of the calculation for the effective number of parties.

⁴² See Kushida and Lipsy 2013 for an analysis of the DPJ's time in power after the 2009 election.

Under the essential two-party system, most districts experienced a two-candidate competition between the LDP and the DPJ candidates. Thus, when the LDP was competing with the DPJ for votes, it was in the interest of the LDP politicians to appeal to the centrist voters in order to win as many votes away from the Democratic Party of Japan as possible, since winning the median voter was the best way to guarantee election (Downs 1957).

However, since the LDP's opposition experienced heavy fragmentation in the 2012 general election, the LDP candidates no longer have the need to win 50% of the votes. In Table 4.2, the third column signifies the average vote share of non-LDP candidates who won the most votes in single member districts (SMDs) by election year. Before the 2012 election, the LDP's biggest competitors won more shares of votes, and posed a larger threat to the LDP candidates. However, with the drop in the competition's vote shares in 2012, the LDP candidates, including the rookie candidates, did not have the need to seek to win 50% of the votes.

Instead, in order to ensure their electoral survival, it was in the interest of the individuals within the LDP to appeal to their core set of voters in order to guarantee an election. This is particularly true for the individual members of the LDP who won by a smaller vote margin, as their electoral insecurity makes it more advantageous to appeal to a reliable support base. In this case, joining Shinseiren sent a strong signal to a more cohesive set of voters, as voters who are concerned with nationalist issues as proposed by these nationalist circles supply a significant base for the LDP.

On the other hand, those LDP politicians who won by a larger margin have no incentive to change their behaviors as they are already electorally secure. In fact, an LDP legislator who is already secure and becomes a Shinseiren member could even be a dangerous strategy, as it could look like they are changing from their previous political stances. Similarly, another possible

cost of an LDP politician joining Shinseiren is creating a potentially negative impact on the LDP's coalition with Komeito. Although Komeito and the LDP may have ideological differences, the coalition formed between the two in 1999 has greatly benefitted both parties strategically in national elections (Liff and Maeda 2019). By coordinating an agreement where Komeito and the LDP decide which of their two parties will run in each SMD, they ensure that their parties are never in direct competition with one another. Further, the LDP endorses the candidates from Komeito in SMDs where the LDP is not running, and vice versa (Maeda 2010). Because of the tensions between the nationalist circle groups and Soka Gakkai and Komeito, it is possible that joining Shinseiren could potentially be detrimental for the LDP politician.

Accordingly, I suggest that an LDP legislator's SMD vote margins affect the legislator's decision to join Shinseiren. If the vote margin is small, meaning the legislator barely won or lost the SMD seat, then the legislator would be more likely to become a member of Shinseiren in order to signal to the LDP's core supporters and guarantee more votes in the next election. In this instance, the cost of not joining Shinseiren is greater than the risk incurred by sending a potentially negative signal to a voter who supports Komeito.

I by no means intend to argue that the candidates' electoral incentives are the only factors that determine their affiliation with Shinseiren. For example, it is possible that, like any interest group, Shinseiren made direct appeals to the running LDP candidates to become members. Religious groups have an advantage politically in that they are able to both organize and mobilize others, which as Klein and Reed mention, is "the key to electoral success" (2014, 25). Thus, joining a group such as Shinseiren could have great political appeal to LDP politicians, as membership could serve as a sort of shorthand to indicate to members of that particular group that the politician might represent their interests.

To further complicate the matter, however, the scale of influence that Nippon Kaigi and Shinseiren have over politics is uncertain, with some sources stating that these groups have exceptionally large mobilizing power and financial resources (Aoki 2016), while others argue that their political power and financial strength have been exaggerated (Terada 2017). The number of LDP candidates who experienced a direct appeal from Shinseiren is unknown. However, whether the motivation was due to a direct appeal by Shinseiren or otherwise, I expect a similar result. If an LDP political candidate was only interested in appealing to the particular group of core voters, then there should be no variation in new memberships. The legislator would be equally advantaged whether they had experienced a high or a low vote margin. However, as mentioned above, I argue that if they have a larger vote margin, the legislator risks votes they have already won. Yet, if they have a smaller vote margin in the 2012 election, the legislator would then have good reason to want to signal to a specific group of voters in order to gain a better advantage in the next election. Thus, I expect that it is a low vote margin that encourages an increased chance in Shinseiren membership, regardless of active appeals from Shinseiren.

Further, it could also be argued that the LDP legislator's motivation for joining Shinseiren could be a signal to Abe, rather than voters, in order to appeal to his nationalist tendencies in exchange for political security. The idea of joining Shinseiren as an appeal to core voters and to Abe are not mutually exclusive. Yet, while the intent of signaling to Abe is a possibility, I would not expect variation in Shinseiren memberships, as trying to be in Abe's good graces should be appealing to all LDP legislators. Thus, if there is variation in Shinseiren memberships dependent on vote margins, this would be a good indication that the LDP legislator's decision was motivated by their desire to appeal to a specific group of voters.

In summary, I expect that the LDP politicians' decision to join Shinseiren after the 2012

election can be explained by the level of electoral (in)security. Thus, if my argument is accurate, the following hypothesis should be empirically supported:

H: LDP politicians who were elected with a smaller margin were more likely to join Shinseiren.

4.4 Research Design

Because of the surge of Shinseiren memberships by the LDP, this chapter utilizes an original dataset that details certain characteristics of individual LDP members in the Lower House between the 2012 and 2014 general elections in Japan. My cutoff of the 2014 general election does not imply that the effects of vote margins on the likelihood of increased Shinseiren memberships would not be relevant beyond 2014. However, major redistricting occurred between 2014 and 2017, resulting in district boundary changes. As a result, I am unable to equally evaluate vote share changes beyond the 2014 general election, as there are not enough observations.

The unit of analysis is individual Lower House members of the LDP. The LDP won 294 seats in the 2012 election. Among them, 18 ran only in the PR tier and were elected. These legislators were not included in the analysis since they did not compete in any SMDs. Further, 82 members were excluded as they were already Shinseiren members before the 2012 election, leaving 194 observations in the sample.⁴³ The dependent variable takes a value of one if the legislator was a Shinseiren member right before the 2014 election, and zero otherwise. The Shinseiren's website (sinseiren.org) shows a list of its members, and using the Internet Archive (archive.org), I was able to obtain membership lists at various points in time since 2012.⁴⁴

⁴³ The data includes both if the candidate was only running in the SMD election and if they ran in both the SMD and PR races at the same time. This is due to essentially a lack of variation, as only about 4% of those running did not have dual candidacy, and they were mostly senior politicians, including Abe himself.

⁴⁴ Only legislator memberships in Shinto Seiji Renmei are used, as memberships in Nippon Kaigi are not publicly available.

The vote margin serves as the main independent variable, and it reflects the vote share by which the politician won or lost the SMD election. As noted earlier, a candidate may lose in an SMD but still secure a seat from the PR tier. This variable takes a negative value for those politicians, meaning the vote margin can be even smaller than zero. It is expected that this variable would take a negative coefficient, as the hypothesis predicts that the legislators who are electorally weak will have a higher chance to join Shinseiren. The electoral results data were obtained from newspaper websites.

There are a number of other factors that could influence an LDP legislators' membership in Shinseiren and should be controlled for in the analysis. For instance, common factors that might indicate a person's membership in Shinseiren include being a representative of an older district and being a representative of a more rural area (Mudde 2010; Mudde 1996; Golder 2003). Thus, age and urbanization are included as control variables. The age variable measures the median age of the representative's district, and the level of urbanization is measured by the percentage of residents who live in densely inhabited districts (DIDs) as defined by the 2010 Japanese census.⁴⁵ The number of terms served is also used as a control, as the number of times a politician has served could also influence their choices in memberships. Particularly junior legislators might be interested in appealing to core voters through Shinseiren since they do not currently have a stable support base. Finally, a variable that indicates whether the candidate was officially recommended by the Komeito Party is included as a control, based on the above discussion regarding the coalition between the LDP and Komeito. A logistic regression is used due to the binary nature of the dependent variable.

⁴⁵ These data were provided by Steven Reed (Chuo University).

4.5 Results

As indicated in the results from Table 4.3, this chapter finds support at the 0.05 level for the argument that joining Shinseiren is motivated by strategic reasons.⁴⁶

Table 4.3: Effect of Vote Margin on Shinto Seiji Renmei Membership

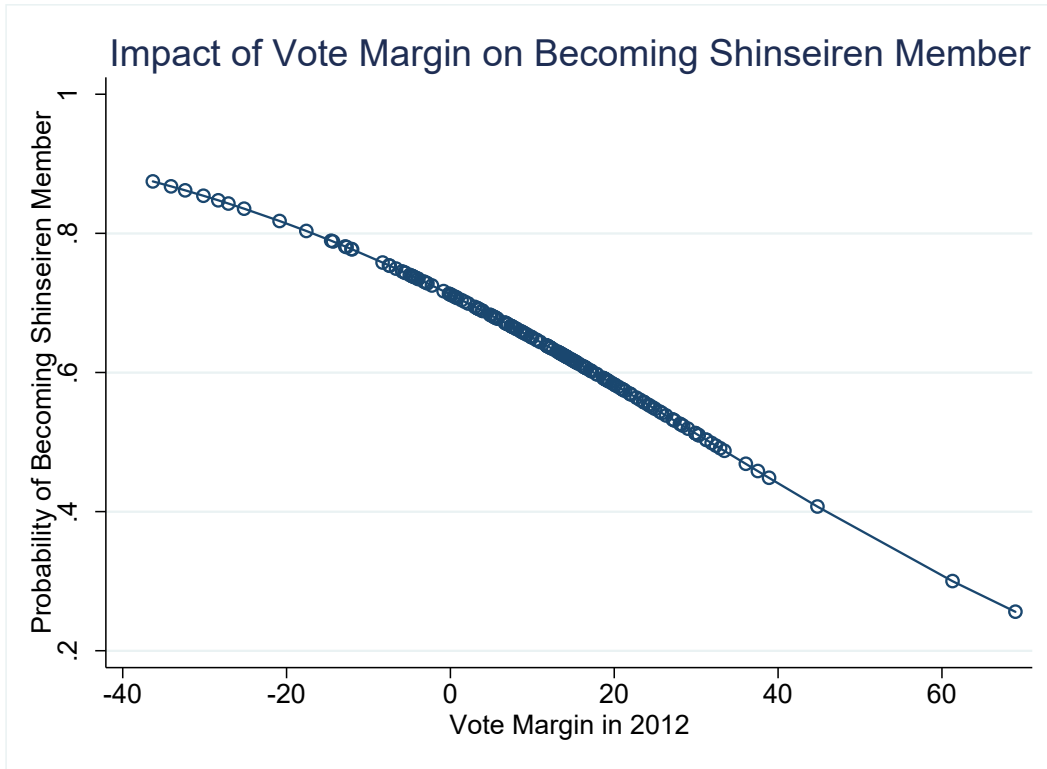
Change of Membership to Shinto Seiji Renmei	
Vote Margin	-.029* (.013)
Age	.423*** (.096)
Urbanization	.743 (.775)
Number of Terms	-.240** (.079)
Komeito Recommended	.064 (.443)
Constant	-18.089*** (4.556)
N	194
X²	42.81***

Standard Errors in Parentheses *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001

To understand how vote margins affect an LDP Lower House politician's likelihood of becoming a member of Shinseiren in a more substantive way, it is useful to discuss this relationship in terms of the predicted probabilities. Figure 4.1 plots the predicted probabilities against the vote margin while holding age, urbanization, and number of terms at their means and Komeito recommendations at a value of 1. It is clear that there is a strong pattern between vote margins and Shinseiren membership.

⁴⁶ Replication data is available at my website: <https://hopedewellgentry.wixsite.com/welcome/research>

Figure 4.1: Predicted Probabilities of Joining Shinseiren



With a vote margin of about 69%, there is only a 26% chance that the LDP politician will become a member of Shinseiren. This finding supports the idea that if the LDP legislator is already electorally secure, they do not have a strong incentive to join Shinseiren. However, as the vote margin decreases to 36%, the likelihood of joining Shinseiren already increases to almost 47%. As the margin gets closer to zero, indicating the politician barely won their election, the probability that the politician joins Shinseiren climbs to around 71%.

Additionally, as for the control variables, the number of terms a politician has been in office also has a significant effect on whether or not an LDP member in the Lower House joins Shinseiren. Based on the negative coefficient, an LDP politician is more likely to join in an earlier stage of their careers. Rookie legislators concerned about the prospects of reelection would especially have incentives to join Shinseiren since they do not have a stable base of voters to rely upon. Further, the variable for age also has a significant impact on the probability that an LDP

politician joins Shinseiren. As expected, those who represent older districts have a higher likelihood of becoming members of Shinseiren. Since older voters are traditionally main supporters of the LDP, it is logical that those elected in these areas, where the most traditionalist voters are, would possibly be incentivized to appeal to these voters through Shinseiren memberships. On the other hand, the results for urbanization and being recommended by Komeito were inconclusive.

4.6 Conclusions

This chapter finds support for the idea that when an LDP politician identifies with Jinja Honcho's political organization Shinto Seiji Renmei, it is done with electoral incentives in mind, particularly with the purpose of securing more votes for future elections. Because the number of Shinseiren memberships experienced the increase after the 2012 general election, it is less likely that these memberships were due to ideological reasons or from a sudden growth of religiosity. Instead, because the LDP candidates had no need to make sure it secured over 50% of the vote due to the lack of a unified opposition after the 2012 election, the individual members of the LDP were then incentivized to appeal to the LDP's core supporters, as opposed to the swing voters. This is particularly the case for those politicians who only won by a small margin, are junior LDP members, and represent rural areas.

While this chapter is not arguing that joining Shinseiren is only motivated by an LDP legislator's desire to appeal to voters, the analysis does demonstrate variation in Shinseiren memberships, indicating at least in this case, that it is the voters the SMD candidates have in mind when they join Shinseiren. For example, when the LDP legislator had already won by a large vote margin and was thus electorally secure, they were less likely to join Shinseiren. If membership in Shinseiren was motivated by a desire to appeal to Abe, for example, we would not expect to

witness this variation. While outside the scope of this paper, in future research, it could be possible to explore the behavior of PR only legislators and their position on the list in order to determine if joining religious nationalist organizations are also done as a signal to Abe.

Further, with the LDP's lack of external competition with the dissolution of the Democratic Party of Japan, there may be changes to the future of Japan's political landscape. With less incentive to take a more centrist position and greater risk for not appealing to core voters, it is possible that the longstanding coalition between Komeito and the LDP may be in jeopardy. As discussed above, these nationalist circle organizations have a history of proactively lobbying on behalf of their political interests, and they actively appeal to representatives in the LDP. What is more, the findings of this chapter indicate that this is a two-way street. It is not only that religious groups (and groups with religious character) try to gain favor with political officials in order to promote their interests, but also politicians who appeal to these religious and religiously affiliated groups to promote their electoral interests.

With the surge of nationalism and nationalistic policies around the world, many scholars have been trying to understand the circumstances under which this seemingly sudden growth has occurred. With the Ministers of Abe's Cabinet having such a high rate of membership in Nippon Kaigi and Jinja Honcho's Shinto Seiji Renmei, it is clear that the degree to which these nationalist circles and religious nationalism affect Japanese politics needs to be explored. As Japan is a democracy with institutionalized separations of religion and the state, it is easy to assume that even though groups with nationalist ideologies exist, the secular democratic institutions would not allow for religious nationalism to take hold in politics, as these institutions can help address the divisions in a society and mediate any potential conflicts (Fox 2007; Lijphart 2004). Yet, with this rise in nationalist sentiment around the globe, and its growing influence, it is apparent that secular

democracies can also be affected by nationalism in diverse ways. By examining the motivations behind individual LDP legislators' joining Shinseiren, we are able to see an example of how political officials strategically appeal to religious nationalism in order to promote their own electoral interests. Rather than only focusing on nationalist sentiment and ideology in general, this chapter demonstrates the importance of looking at political and electoral factors in considering how religion affects politics, even in a democratic state with institutional structures that mandate the separation of politics and religion.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this dissertation is to understand and synthesize the divide within the literature regarding the idea that Shinto is fundamentally nationalist in nature. Due to Shinto's historical ties to Japanese nationalism, it is clear that religion and nationalism played a role in Japanese politics in the past. However, with Japan's transition to democracy and the constitutional provision of the separation between religion and state, religion's effect on nationalism in Japan has become blurred contemporarily. Further, as each of the previous chapters point out, the role that Shinto specifically played in Japan's militarism and nationalism is increasingly called into question. To assert that Shinto is simply a nationalist religion understates the role of the Japanese government in constructing an image of Japanese character, using Shinto ideals as a tool, but ultimately based on strategies to further its own goals, such as modernization and secularization (Thomas 2019). Additionally, Shinto is not the only religion in Japan whose followers were interested in Japanese imperialism and expansion. Buddhists were also known to encourage this image (Hardacre 2017).

Conversely, contemporary examples of Shinto nationalism are ever present. Nationalist circles, or the connection of groups and organizations with nationalist ideologies, often find common ground in Shinto ideals. The existence of these groups, like Nippon Kaigi, Jinja Honcho, and Shinto Seiji Renmei, maintains these connections between Shinto and nationalism. Even Nippon Kaigi, which is not inherently tied to Shinto, draws on ideals of Shinto nationalism, such as devotion to the emperor.

This dissertation explores how both sides of the literature can be simultaneously true. Chapter 2 empirically tests the claim that Shinto is inherently nationalist. Based on public opinion

from the Japanese Value Orientations survey, which has been conducted since 1973, I find that being a Shinto practitioner is not, in fact, a valuable predictor for holding nationalist sentiment or for supporting the Liberal Democratic Party. Instead, the relationship between nationalism and support for the LDP is more direct. However, it is also important to note that Shinto practitioners are not necessarily anti-nationalist, either. If most Shinto practitioners were interested in separating themselves from the assertion that Shinto is nationalist, we might expect to find that they would be significantly less likely to hold nationalist ideals or support the LDP. Yet, there were only three years (1993, 1998, 2008) where Shinto practitioners were found to be less likely to have nationalist sentiment and one year (2003) where they were less likely to support the LDP.

The third chapter builds on these findings. Rather than assuming Shinto practitioners are nationalist or non-nationalist, I divide Shinto practitioners into the two categories. By doing so, we can gain insight into how and why Shinto practitioners participate in politics, not only compared to one another, but also to non-Shintoists. Again using the Japanese Value Orientations survey, the third chapter finds Shinto practitioners participate in more forms of politics than non-Shintoists. Considering the two groups of Shinto practitioners might be competing with one another for political space, this finding is reasonable. Additionally, Shinto nationalists were more likely than Shinto non-nationalists to be members of political groups or organizations. While both groupings of Shinto practitioners have motivation to participate in a variety of political forms, it may be the case that Shinto nationalists put themselves in positions that make their goals and ideals more accessible to political groups. Further, nationalist political and religious groups may be more willing to appeal to this group of Shinto nationalists, knowing they are politically active and could therefore serve as a reliable core.

In the fourth chapter, I expand upon this idea of a core of Shinto nationalist voters. Due to the circumstances surrounding the 2012 Japanese general election, the LDP gained a large number of freshman legislators, many of whom were not members of Jinja Honcho's political organization, Shinto Seiji Renmei. However, the number of Shinseiren members among the LDP Lower House grew from 51% in 2013 to around 75% in 2014. The rapid increase in Shinseiren memberships, particularly among the freshmen legislators, suggests that more than religious ideology might be motivating the membership increase. I find that there is a politically strategic reason: when a legislator's vote margin is small and is therefore electorally insecure, they were more likely to join Shinto Seiji Renmei. By doing so, these legislators could be signaling to that core of reliable Shinto nationalists found in chapter three that they are part of the nationalist circle.

Even though the evidence is mounting against the accuracy around the idea of State Shinto and the fundamentally nationalist nature of Shinto, the narrative persists. The existence of nationalist circles perpetuates these narratives, regardless of the truthfulness of the association between Shinto and nationalism because this narrative serves as a benefit to some groups. Shinto may not be automatically nationalist, but there are still nationalistic Shinto practitioners. The description of Shinto as inherently nationalist is not likely to go away while that description still serves a purpose.

APPENDIX A

QUESTION 42 FROM JAPANESE VALUE ORIENTATIONS SURVEY

Indicate party support (支持政党)

Liberal Democratic Party	自民党
Democratic Party of Japan	民主党
Komeito	公明党
Communist Party	共産党
Social Democratic Party	社民（社会）党
People's New Party	国民新党
New Party Nippon	新党日本
Other	その他の政治団体
No support for a particular party	特に支持している政党はない
No answer	無回答

APPENDIX B

LIKELIHOOD OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION WITH ALL YEARS

	Demonstrate	Sign Petitions	Write Media	Donate	Political Meetings	Political Member
Shinto Nationalists	.324* (.150)	.198*** (.052)	.169 (.291)	.317*** (.067)	.208** (.069)	.340** (.125)
Shinto Non-Nationalists	.126 (.144)	.248*** (.043)	.537* (.218)	.263*** (.058)	.080 (.064)	-.287 (.150)
Sex	-1.142*** (.093)	-.212*** (.026)	-.466** (.148)	-.220*** (.035)	-.823*** (.036)	-.856*** (.072)
Age	-.005 (.013)	.041*** (.004)	.073** (.023)	.032*** (.006)	.113*** (.006)	.096*** (.011)
Education	.366*** (.096)	.392*** (.030)	.568*** (.163)	.357*** (.041)	.109** (.042)	-.099 (.087)
Urban/Rural	.117 (.087)	-.056* (.027)	-.071 (.154)	.103** (.037)	-.229*** (.038)	-.173* (.075)
1973	2.093*** (.261)	.722*** (.063)	.850** (.324)	.792*** (.082)	.927*** (.088)	.711*** (.166)
1978	1.946*** (.262)	.751*** (.063)	.649 (.333)	.709*** (.082)	.898*** (.088)	.561** (.169)
1983	1.539*** (.267)	.932*** (.062)	.580 (.331)	.754*** (.081)	1.250*** (.084)	1.035*** (.157)
1988	1.266*** (.274)	1.021*** (.061)	.481 (.336)	.601*** (.083)	.930*** (.087)	.590*** (.167)
1993	.212 (.317)	.446*** (.064)	-.014 (.370)	.196* (.087)	.772*** (.088)	.427* (.171)
1998	.425 (.306)	.578*** (.063)	.239 (.345)	.179* (.088)	.409*** (.092)	.081 (.183)
2003	.191 (.325)	.392*** (.065)	.059 (.362)	-.097 (.094)	.601*** (.090)	.241 (.179)
2008	.057 (.339)	.169* (.068)	-.276 (.398)	-.023 (.093)	.203* (.097)	-.008 (.191)
2013	(omitted)	(omitted)	(omitted)	(omitted)	(omitted)	(omitted)
Constant	-4.918*** (.281)	-2.043*** (.067)	-6.017*** (.372)	-2.788*** (.090)	-3.132*** (.094)	-4.311*** (.081)
N	32,907	32,907	32,907	32,907	32,907	32,907
X ²	507.10***	711.12***	44.99***	433.10***	1282.26***	333.29***

Standard Errors in Parentheses *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001

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