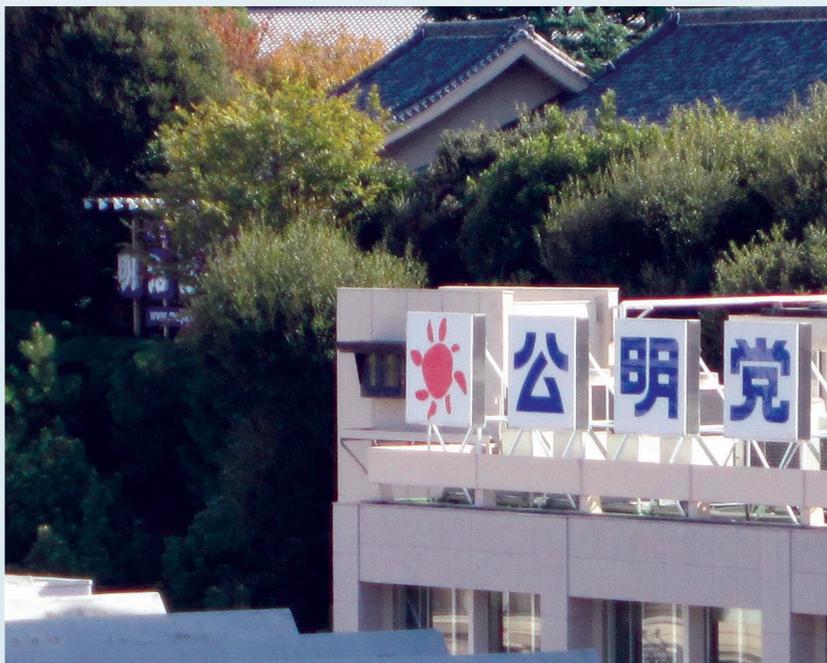


# Kōmeitō



## Politics and Religion in Japan

Edited by  
George Ehrhardt, Axel Klein,  
Levi McLaughlin, and Steven R. Reed

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**Institute of**  
**East Asian Studies**  
University of California, Berkeley

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# Abbreviations

DPJ	Democratic Party of Japan
DSP	Democratic Socialist Party
HRP	Happiness Realization Party
JCP	Japan Communist Party
JSP	Japan Socialist Party
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
LP	Liberal Party
MMD	Multi-member district
MMM	Mixed member majoritarian system
NCP	New Conservative Party
NFP	New Frontier Party
PFCL	Political Funds Control Law
PKO	Peace Keeping Operation
PR	Proportional representation
RKK	Risshō Kōseikai
SDF	Self-Defense Forces
SGI	Sōka Gakkai International
SMD	Single-member district
SNTV	Single non-transferable vote

# Preface and Acknowledgments

Anyone who studies politics in contemporary Japan will eventually come across the tense relationship that persists in the country between politics and religion. Students of modern Japanese politics usually encounter the topic of religion in occasional references to prewar State Shinto, or when they learn that the 1947 Constitution guarantees a legal separation of state and religious organizations—a guarantee born initially of fear that state support of religious enterprises could enable a return to reverence for a divine emperor. Considerations of this aspect of Japan’s constitution generally conclude with discussions of the most commonly documented instance of perceived transgressions of the politics/religion divide, namely, the periodic visits by Japanese prime ministers to the controversial war memorial Yasukuni Shrine, which routinely results in condemnation by Chinese, Taiwanese, and Korean governments. Further discussions tend to move toward intra–East Asian conflict and away from Japan’s domestic political and religious spheres. Resulting investigations of the religious dimensions of this conflict almost always take students backward in time to learn about the wartime legacy of State Shinto, thereby veering them away from contemporary interactions of politics and religion.

Because the issue of religion and politics has been framed as a constitutional and regional issue, political scientists have largely ignored the most prominent example of their intersection within contemporary Japan: Kōmeitō, the “Clean Government Party,” and its origins in the lay Buddhist organization Sōka Gakkai. Kōmeitō should be an obvious topic for any student of Japanese politics: the party has served as the third-largest party in the Diet for most years since the late 1960s, it has operated in coalition with the Liberal Democratic Party since 1999, and its representatives occupy thousands of seats in regional legislatures across the country. On a topical level, Kōmeitō should interest students concerned with debates surrounding politics and religion because it stands as the only example of a party founded by a religious organization that has found a

lasting and influential place at all political levels in Japan. Kōmeitō has risen to prominence in the face of considerable public ambivalence and, not infrequently, outright hostility. Due to its size, its influence on the course of postwar Japanese politics, and its distinctive identity as the Japanese Diet's only originally religious party, we assert that one can neither understand Japanese politics nor contemporary Japanese religion without coming to some level of understanding of Kōmeitō.

However, despite Kōmeitō's obvious importance, there has not yet been a single reliable book-length treatment, in any language, that presents scholarly, nonpartisan investigations of how Kōmeitō took shape and how it operates as a political party. This is just such a book. The pages that follow detail reasons for the glaring lacuna to date in research on Kōmeitō and other politically active religious groups. Put simply, conducting research on this topic has meant confronting multiple taboos: (1) digging into the history and contemporary grassroots-level activities of Sōka Gakkai and several other controversial new religious movements; (2) documenting the inner workings of institutional apparatuses and electoral practices that straddle the fraught politics/religion divide; (3) searching through documents on seldom studied religious groups; (4) unearthing details surrounding some of the most scandal-ridden episodes in postwar Japanese political history; and (5) collating information from a wide variety of sources, often of uncertain reliability, to reveal gaps between the rhetoric employed by political organizations—of all types—and the reality of how politics operates on a day-to-day level.

Perhaps surprisingly, rather than encountering resistance from individuals or organizations that may have been nervous about long-standing taboos surrounding our research, we have enjoyed a heartening degree of support from fellow scholars in the fields of politics and religion. Additionally, people situated at all levels of Kōmeitō, Sōka Gakkai, and several other religious groups were willing to consult with us extensively. Over the several years during which this project took shape, the authors of this book—eight political scientists and one religious studies scholar—have been able to attend Kōmeitō events and Sōka Gakkai meetings, interview politicians at the national and regional levels, acquire difficult-to-find published documents related to Kōmeitō's past, and otherwise gain access to heretofore inaccessible sources of information on Kōmeitō. The enthusiasm with which our endeavor was received by fellow scholars in Japan and overseas, by Kōmeitō politicians and their supporters, and even by Kōmeitō's political and religious rivals, indicates to us that many people share our conviction that scholarly attention to Kōmeitō is long overdue.

This collection was born at a fortuitous meeting of the editors at the German Institute of Japanese Studies (Deutsches Institut für Japanstudien,

DIJ) in Tokyo in 2008, where we discovered that we were all independently pursuing research on the connection between religion and politics. Later in 2008, Axel Klein, then senior research fellow at the DIJ, organized a symposium on Kōmeitō at which the editors of this volume and several of our authors presented papers on our work to date. The DIJ effectively became our base of operations from that point onward, and several other meetings sponsored by the institute followed. These included a symposium in 2010 that brought together numerous Japanese scholars of religion and politics, and a meeting in the same year at which the volume's authors were able to speak extensively with the veteran Kōmeitō politician Ueda Isamu. Generous additional financial support from the Faculty of Policy Studies of Chūō University, the home institution of our editor Steven R. Reed, provided us with valuable research assistance at this juncture. Further interviews with Kōmeitō politicians followed. We were also fortunate to have Ian Reader from Lancaster University and Erica Bafelli, now at the University of Manchester, conduct a workshop at the DIJ on their 2012 special issue of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, to which Axel Klein and Levi McLaughlin contributed Kōmeitō-related research findings. This workshop is one more example of the interdisciplinary cooperation that has helped to improve the chapters of this book.

We wish to thank Hirasawa Katsuei, Hirohashi Takashi, Kajimoto Akira, Katō Kōichi, Nagaoka Tōru, Ōe Yasuhiro, Ōta Akihiro, Sakaguchi Chikara, Satomura Eiichi, Shirahama Kazuyoshi, Shirakawa Katsuhiko, Takagi Yōsuke, Tanaka Junkō, Takemura Masayoshi, Tōyama Kiyohiko, and, above all, Ueda Isamu for meeting sometimes more than once with our authors to provide invaluable insight into Kōmeitō and related topics. Our thanks also go to Nishiyama Shigeru, from Tōyō University, Tsukada Hōtaka, now at Kokugakuin University, Mark Mullins, now at the University of Auckland, and Saitō Jun, formerly at Yale University, for presenting information to our authors at crucial early stages of the project. Additionally, George Ehrhardt and Levi McLaughlin wish to thank members of Sōka Gakkai, who must remain anonymous for the sake of academic integrity, for generously allowing them to attend meetings at their homes and for letting them accompany members undertaking electioneering activities. Steve Reed wishes to thank Annette Yoshiko Reed for running him through basic training in religious studies, without which he would have never considered participating in this project. Axel Klein is grateful to Florian Coulmas, then director of the DIJ, for supporting the project from the very beginning.

Researching and writing this book has truly been a group effort, with all authors assisting each other in several ways, and the editors are grateful for the additional support our authors have contributed beyond

composing their individual chapters. This cooperation may be one reason why it has taken us six years to publish this volume. As it turns out, however, there was a very welcome side effect to this prolonged process. Additional support—incisive comments from two anonymous reviewers; tremendous encouragement from Keila Diehl and Katherine Lawn Chouta, managing editors at Berkeley’s Institute of East Asian Studies; and hard work from our copyeditors Alexandra Davydova, Stan Eberlein, Chris Pitts, and Ann Rives enabled us to publish this volume just in time for the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Kōmeitō in November 2014. A Junior Faculty Development Award from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at North Carolina State University provided funds that allowed Ann Rives to complete our index, and a publication subvention grant from the Triangle Center for Japanese Studies made possible by funds from the Japan Foundation went to another round of copyediting that sped the final push toward publication. All remaining errors are the responsibility of the editors.

We are aware that this volume does not represent a definitive account of either Kōmeitō or religion and politics in Japan, but we are confident that the chapters, which survey a wide variety of fields associated with this fraught relationship, will stimulate further research into this understudied complex of topics.

ONE

# Kōmeitō

## *The Most Understudied Party of Japanese Politics*

GEORGE EHRHARDT, AXEL KLEIN, LEVI MCLAUGHLIN,  
AND STEVEN R. REED

### **Why This Book?**

When the Japanese lay Buddhist movement Sōka Gakkai (literally, the “Value Creation Study Association”) founded the political party Kōmeitō in 1964, it did so with the declared intention of bringing “Buddhist democracy” (*buppō minshushugi*) to the country. According to Ikeda Daisaku, then third president of Sōka Gakkai, Kōmeitō was to promote social welfare, humanistic socialism, and pacifism through a political program rooted in a combination of the Buddha’s Dharma and the best of the Euro-American philosophical tradition (McLaughlin 2009, 94–95; Kōmeitō 1964; see also chapter 3 of this volume). To many observers at that time, however, Kōmeitō did not represent a socially progressive new political force fighting for the good of the Japanese people; rather, it was seen as a dangerous, constitution-violating fusion of religion and politics. For most of its critics, Kōmeitō was a poorly disguised attempt by a suspicious new religious group to take control of the country by manipulating democratic processes to usher in theocratic rule.

Despite controversy surrounding its institutional continuity with an expansionist religious sect, Kōmeitō enjoyed increasing electoral success until the end of the 1960s. In 1970, Sōka Gakkai and Kōmeitō cut all official organizational ties following a series of scandals involving attempts by Sōka Gakkai and Kōmeitō leaders to forestall published critiques of the Gakkai and then president Ikeda. Thereafter, the party removed all religious content and language from its political programs. Reformed and nominally independent, the party lost much of its founding vigor. Its era of spectacular growth had ended, but Kōmeitō maintained its powerful

organizational base, which allowed it to retain an influential presence in electoral politics. Indeed, from the 1990s on the party operated as a power broker in the middle of every political turning point at the national level, shifting back and forth between ally and opponent of Japan's major political players. Kōmeitō played a key role in defeating the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP; Jimintō) in the 1993 general election. It was key to the short-lived success of the New Frontier Party (NFP; Shinshintō), and it was also key to the NFP's ultimate failure (see chapter 5). It was subsequently instrumental in sustaining the LDP-led coalition government between 1999 and 2009, and it continued its partnership with the LDP in opposition from 2009 until December 2012, when the LDP and Kōmeitō were once again elected to government. Thus, because of Kōmeitō's role in these pivotal events, and in others, one cannot understand Japanese postwar politics without understanding Kōmeitō.

However, in spite of its influence, Kōmeitō has remained opaque. Scholarship to date on Japan's political system does not reflect the party's significance, and the relatively small quantity of extant literature on Kōmeitō, in Japanese and in English, tends to rely on newspaper articles and outdated sources in concise attempts to explain the party. Some well-regarded academic studies of Japanese politics all but ignore the party entirely. It is this neglect of Kōmeitō and the resulting gap in our knowledge that spurred us to write this book.

This volume, however, is not only meant to shed light on a long-ignored part of Japan's political system. We also hope to make Kōmeitō more accessible to comparative political science. After a long period during which religion was rarely found on the political science research agenda, it was pushed back into the limelight by the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and subsequent cases of religiously motivated extremism. Since then, a large portion of political science research on religion has dealt with Islam and terrorism.<sup>1</sup> Many other studies have used a Western- and Christian-based approach that does not necessarily fit well with political realities outside Europe and North America.

That Japan has featured rarely in international comparative studies is, for a number of reasons, no surprise. Controversy surrounding visits by politicians to Yasukuni, a Shintō shrine and war memorial at which the spirits of convicted war criminals are revered, frequently inspires discord between the Japanese government and its Asian neighbors. This site of religious and political antagonism is of primary interest to those investigating the way in which former wartime enemies deal with their past and

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<sup>1</sup> According to Kettell (2012), 40 percent of all articles on religion and politics deal with this topic. See also Wald et al. (2005) and Philpott (2009).

TWO

# Religious Groups in Japanese Electoral Politics

AXEL KLEIN AND STEVEN R. REED

## Introduction

The key to electoral success is the ability to organize and mobilize people. Religious groups are well designed to perform these tasks. One should thus not be surprised to learn that some of the most successful parties in Western Europe have been Christian Democratic parties (Kalyvas 1996; Kselman and Buttigieg 2003). In the case of Japan, however, Toyoda and Tanaka observe that “religion in contemporary postwar Japanese society is viewed by most observers to be politically irrelevant or, at most, on the political periphery” (2002, 269). The standard wisdom among political scientists is that Japan has no religious cleavage. Watanuki states the case best: “Of the four types of social cleavages usually associated with voting behavior—regional or ethnic divisions, religious divisions, agrarian-industrial divisions, and class divisions—Japan was basically exempt from the first two and has been so throughout the modern period” (1991, 49). Furthermore, “in addition to the limited number of believers, there is no sharp cleavage between those that believe in some religion and those who do not” (75). We find no reason to doubt the standard wisdom with respect to voting behavior. There is no religious cleavage in Japanese voting behavior, let alone anything analogous to the Catholic-Protestant cleavage that has played such a large role in Western European electoral politics.

With respect to political parties, however, Kōmeitō challenges the standard wisdom. Since its first general election in 1967, it has been one of several small opposition parties in a party system dominated by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and, in that sense, Kōmeitō might have been considered peripheral during that period. However, even during the era of LDP dominance, the party won around 10 percent of the vote and was no more peripheral than the Japan Communist Party (JCP; Nihon Kyōsantō)

THREE

## Electioneering as Religious Practice

*A History of Sōka Gakkai's Political Activities to 1970*

LEVI MCLAUGHLIN

### Introduction

Sōka Gakkai, though it is Japan's largest active religion, is only one of thousands of new religious groups that flourished in Japan after the Second World War, and, as Klein and Reed outlined in the previous chapter, one of several that has engaged in postwar electoral politics. However, only Sōka Gakkai has succeeded in establishing a prominent and lasting place for itself in the Japanese political system, and only Kōmeitō has endured as an influential party founded to satisfy religious motives.

Kōmeitō emerged as a component of Sōka Gakkai's eschatological mission to realize the vision of the medieval Buddhist reformer Nichiren (1222–1282). Nichiren's vision was to deliver salvation for Japan by convincing all people to embrace the *Lotus Sūtra* and reject all other teachings, including other forms of Buddhism, as false and misleading. At the outset of Sōka Gakkai's foray into politics, gathering votes and gaining seats in regional and national legislatures in themselves were not the principal aims within the group's mission. Instead, political victories were merely steps toward the more profound *religious* victory of salvation for Japan through realizing doctrinally mandated objectives. It is not an exaggeration to state that even today, more than forty years after Sōka Gakkai officially abandoned political objectives, many ordinary members still consider Kōmeitō campaigning to be as integral to their practice as chanting the *Lotus Sūtra* and seeking to convert nonbelievers to their faith.

Why did Sōka Gakkai's leaders steer the religion into electoral politics, and how did Sōka Gakkai leaders convince millions of people in Japan to fuse religious propagation with political activism? In order to understand how Kōmeitō operates, and in order to make sense of its constituents and

FOUR

# Kōmeitō's Uncertain Decades between Religion and Politics

YUKI ABE AND MASAHISA ENDO

## Introduction

After 1970, Kōmeitō found itself lost with no clear purpose or direction.<sup>1</sup> As McLaughlin described in the previous chapter, Kōmeitō began as little more than an organizing structure for Sōka Gakkai political action. Public outcry over Sōka Gakkai's use of political influence to suppress publication of anti-Gakkai books led Kōmeitō to cut ties with its religious parent and declare itself ostensibly secular and independent. The abandonment of Sōka Gakkai theocratic goals left Kōmeitō with political power, yet without a clear set of goals to pursue.

Fast-forward twenty-three years and Kōmeitō found itself a member of the anti-Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) ruling coalition; another six years and Kōmeitō joined its old enemy, the LDP, in government. How did these changes come about? From 1970 until 1993, the party struggled to establish a clear and compelling identity. Those twenty-three years were the party's crucial formative period, an era that might be termed Kōmeitō's adolescence, when the party learned its place in the secular political world. Understanding Kōmeitō's actions today requires a firm grasp of what happened in the 1970s and 1980s.

Studies to date offer little insight into these formative years. Although there was a great deal of research undertaken in the late 1960s in response to Kōmeitō's explosive growth, relatively few studies explore the party after 1970. In addition, when research on Kōmeitō resumed to an extent in the 1990s, it focused on Kōmeitō's role in government, not its transformations throughout the preceding decades. In this chapter, we examine Kōmeitō's historical record to shed light on the party's time in the "wilderness," its formative years in the 1970s and 1980s, to uncover the story

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<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank Aiji Tanaka for his invaluable comments on earlier drafts.

## How Kōmeitō Politicians Get Elected

GEORGE EHRHARDT

### Introduction

Though many Japanese religious groups have entered politics, none have succeeded like Sōka Gakkai. As recounted in chapter 2, groups such as Tenrikyō and Shinshūren have sponsored the election of individual politicians under the umbrella of a major political party, but none have created a viable political party. Kōmeitō's success in parlaying Sōka Gakkai support into its position as the third-largest party in the Diet, and a swing bloc on key issues, deserves an explanation. How do they do it?

Predictably, this success has engendered a backlash, not only from other religious groups (see chapter 9), but from writers as well, and this question of how Kōmeitō mobilizes votes is a key point in the debate. While legally separate, rank-and-file Sōka Gakkai members connect Kōmeitō partisanship to their religious beliefs, and Kōmeitō electioneering to their religious practice (see chapter 3). Critics argue that this invocation of religious beliefs for political mobilization violates believers' freedom of choice: members of Sōka Gakkai vote Kōmeitō because they are unable to do anything else (Etō 2003; Yamada 2004, 134).

Journalists writing about Sōka Gakkai are prone to hyperbolic accusations of mind control, but even cooler-headed academic writers have little to offer on this point. Initial analyses claimed that Sōka Gakkai members reliably voted Kōmeitō because they had subsumed their identity into an isolated mass movement, but White (1970) had disproved this by the end of the 1960s. Contemporary English-language textbooks like Curtis's (1999) and Hrebenar's (2000) assert that Sōka Gakkai members support Kōmeitō but don't explore why. In the Japanese-language literature, Hori (1985) asserts that religious leaders determine followers' votes by asking them to sign party registration cards—as if that is all that one needs to know in order to explain their actual vote. What's missing in the literature

# Party Ideals and Practical Constraints in Kōmeitō Candidate Nominations

DANIEL M. SMITH

## Introduction

Candidate selection is a fundamental part of the delegation and accountability relationship between voters and political parties in modern representative democracies (Strøm 2000). In most parliamentary democracies, parties play the greatest role in recruiting (screening) and selecting candidates for office, so the processes and outcomes of candidate selection can confer a great deal of information about a party's organization and its priorities in terms of key personnel (Schattschneider 1942; Crotty 1968; Ranney 1981; Rahat 2007; Hazan and Rahat 2010).

However, the candidate selection process within parties is often opaque. In many parties, the internal process of selecting candidates is guarded with secrecy, and details about specific nomination decisions are rarely discussed publicly. Thus, only a few comparative studies have examined the internal recruitment processes and priorities of parties (e.g., Gallagher and Marsh 1988; Katz and Mair 1992; Norris 1997; Narud et al. 2002; Lundell 2004; Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008). This is no doubt a reflection of the difficulty in obtaining such "insider" information from parties—in contrast to more readily available data, such as electoral results.

In Japan, there are few legal constraints imposed on eligibility for office. According to Article 10 of the Public Offices Election Law, a candidate for

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SEVEN

# Kōmeitō, Sōka Gakkai, and Money in Japanese Politics

MATTHEW CARLSON

## Introduction

The pervasive use of money in Japanese politics was a predominant feature of the “1955 system” where the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was the dominant ruling party and continues to be important in one of the world’s most expensive political systems (Nassmacher 2009). Money flowed freely from big business to LDP coffers, which helped sustain one-party dominance. It also greased the corners of the “iron triangle”—the three-legged relationship of politicians, bureaucrats, and big business—and was linked to a vicious cycle of political corruption scandals. Money also played a significant yet understudied role in the emergence of some of Japan’s New Religions and their involvement in politics.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this chapter is to examine some of the money-collecting methods of Kōmeitō and Sōka Gakkai and to consider some of the efforts of Kōmeitō to advocate for more transparent politics when it joined the ruling coalition government from 1999 to 2009.

In this chapter, several questions are considered. How much money do Kōmeitō members raise and spend compared to those of other parties in Japan’s Lower House, the more powerful chamber of the bicameral parliament? And, what are the money-collecting methods of Kōmeitō and Sōka Gakkai? While the fund-raising efforts of Kōmeitō in recent years have relied heavily on the government subsidy for political parties, Sōka Gakkai’s finances have been officially separate from those of the party since its creation in 1964.<sup>2</sup> However, the division and the financial ties

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<sup>1</sup> The term New Religion (*shinshūkyō*) primarily refers to lay-centered groups founded in the last two hundred years (see chapter 3).

<sup>2</sup> See also chapters 3 and 4, and Kōmeitō’s official explanation titled “New Kōmeitō’s Views on Politics and Religion in Japan,” available at [www.komei.or.jp/en/about/view.html](http://www.komei.or.jp/en/about/view.html) (accessed Jan. 2014).

## Housewife Voters and Kōmeitō Policies

GEORGE EHRHARDT

### Introduction

Deciphering what Kōmeitō wants to accomplish is an enduring project for outside observers. This is often driven by the way it commonly uses left-of-center rhetoric on social issues while allying solely with the right-of-center Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) instead of the more left-leaning Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). Broadly speaking, there are two conventional understandings of Kōmeitō political goals that explain this discrepancy: religious motives and elite power seeking. While these theories have different implications, they both rely on a top-down model of political behavior, which assumes that voters echo politicians' preferences, rather than the other way around.

In this chapter, I take the perspective that in spite of its religious origins, Kōmeitō is above all a *political* party, whose goal is to win elections. Like other political parties, it pursues policies to win votes, and the key to understanding Kōmeitō's policy goals is identifying whose votes the party seeks to win (Aldrich 1995). To restate this differently, while important decisions are typically made by elites in opaque processes, the contents of those decisions are dominated by the long shadow of grassroots preferences. Correspondingly, understanding the party's supporters allows us to explain what the party is doing and is likely to do in the future. Saying that Kōmeitō's base is Sōka Gakkai—as most analyses do—isn't wrong, but it misses a fundamental point: unpacking the black box of Sōka Gakkai membership reveals a diversity of political preferences. Looking at those gives us a more nuanced understanding, one that enables us to see how the party relies on a particular portion of Sōka Gakkai for its votes, and how that shapes its policy goals.

Here I propose and test an alternative hypothesis about Kōmeitō's agenda: like secular political parties, Kōmeitō's policy agenda matches that of its core supporters, which in this case is Sōka Gakkai's Married

## Anti-Kōmeitō Countermobilizations

AXEL KLEIN AND STEVEN R. REED

### Introduction

Sōka Gakkai's entrance into the political arena changed the relationship between religion and politics in Japan. It did so by creating a new cleavage that divided religious groups and politicians into two camps: those who opposed the creation of a religious political party and those who accepted the idea of, what we called in chapter 2, the "mixing of religion and politics." In politics, mobilization tends to trigger countermobilization, though seldom of equal and opposite force, and Kōmeitō has triggered political countermobilizations on four different occasions. First, the founding of Kōmeitō in 1964 produced a countermobilization led primarily by rival religious groups. An umbrella organization for the New Religions, Shinshūren (Shin Shūkyō Renmei), led by Sōka Gakkai's largest rival among the New Religions, the Risshō Kōseikai (RKK), united by a single candidate in the 1965 Upper House election to counter the perceived threat (*Asahi*, 5 July 1967). These groups had already been supporting candidates in various elections, most running on the LDP ticket, but in the 1965 Upper House elections they took the unprecedented step of nominating the leader of the Shinshūren to represent them collectively.

The second countermobilization began in late 1993 and was led by the April Society (Shigatsukai). This movement included many leaders of the first countermobilization but was more of a political and less of a religious movement. At the time, Kōmeitō was part of a coalition government that excluded the LDP, the first time a religious party had ever participated in government in Japan. One strategy the LDP used to regain power was to gather support from those religious groups critical of Kōmeitō. The LDP directed intense public criticism focusing on the danger of a government controlled by Ikeda Daisaku, Sōka Gakkai's honorary president and leader, arguing that it was a breach of Article 20 of the constitution. When

TEN

## Kōmeitō in Coalition

LINDA HASUNUMA AND AXEL KLEIN

### Introduction

As explained in the previous chapter, Kōmeitō and the Liberal Democratic Party went from fierce political competitors to coalition partners over a transitional period of just a few years. Their alliance proved stable enough to rule Japan from 1999 to 2009. It then weathered a brief period in opposition, allowing the two parties to fight the 2012 election campaign together and to form a new coalition government thereafter. Most of the scholarship that deals with these years of Japanese politics, however, pays little attention to Kōmeitō's involvement (see Govella and Vogel 2007; Muramatsu et al. 2001).<sup>1</sup> The studies that do tend to focus on the controversial Peace-Keeping Operations (PKO) Law (November 2001), which was drafted in response to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and was meant to make Japan's Self-Defense Forces (SDF) part of the "war against terror" (Shinoda 2006; Benedict 2011; Fisker-Nielsen 2012).<sup>2</sup> While the LDP pushed strongly for passage of the bill, Sōka Gakkai's ideal of pacifist noninterventionism placed Kōmeitō politicians between a rock and a hard place. As part of the Japanese government and in order to maintain the alliance with the Liberal Democrats, Kōmeitō had no real alternative to agreeing to the SDF's dispatch. At the same time, Kōmeitō politicians were beholden to vote-gathering Sōka Gakkai constituents who considered the dispatch to be a violation of Japan's constitution and who upheld pacifist ideals promoted for decades by their religious leaders, most notably Honorary President Ikeda Daisaku. The party delayed parliamentary delibera-

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<sup>1</sup> The Liberal Party, which had been part of the coalition from 1999 to 2000, received considerably more attention from political scientists and journalists, while the smaller New Conservative Party (2000 until it merged completely with the LDP in 2003) was ignored like Kōmeitō, though it was clearly less relevant.

<sup>2</sup> Exceptions are Suzuki's case study of Kōmeitō's fertility policies (2008) and Métraux's (1999) description of the beginning of the coalition.

## Kōmeitō

### *Politics and Religion in Japan*

GEORGE EHRHARDT, AXEL KLEIN, LEVI MCLAUGHLIN,  
AND STEVEN R. REED

#### **What Have We Learned?**

The clearest conclusion to be drawn from this volume is that Kōmeitō is a “normal” political party. By this we mean nothing more than the theories that political scientists use to study political parties work as well for Kōmeitō as they do for any other party. The most extraordinary aspect of Kōmeitō’s operation as a political party is its capacity to mobilize voters, a capacity that far exceeds that of any other Japanese political party and probably finds few equals around the world. The party not only gets its voters to the polls but it directs those votes toward whatever candidate or party Kōmeitō is supporting in any particular electoral district. However, this extraordinary mobilization is accomplished using standard techniques that are employed by other parties and campaign organizations as well. Our field research provided us with evidence that Sōka Gakkai meetings are used to introduce Kōmeitō candidates and to advertise the party, particularly during the period leading up the election; we saw nothing that resembled what critics have termed “brainwashing.” Rather, the obvious partisanship of Sōka Gakkai resembles the outspoken advocacy for specific parties displayed by Catholic priests in many parts of Europe or evangelical activists in the United States, and does not differ greatly from techniques used to mobilize doctors, dentists, farmers, or any of the other special interest groups that endorse candidates in Japan.

More generally, Kōmeitō can be understood as a “mass party” by employing the same theories used to analyze labor and Catholic parties in Western Europe. A mass party is a party founded and supported by an organization in civil society. Japan has two mass parties, Kōmeitō and the Japan Communist Party. Both of these parties display strong party

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