

The Political Orientation of Japanese Online Right-wingers

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ABSTRACT

Since the early 2000s, Japan has witnessed the growing salience of so-called *netto uyoku* (online right-wingers). This group is characterized by strong anti-China and anti-Korea sentiments, nationalistic political views, and online political engagement. While online radical right movements in Europe are often regarded as support bases for radical right candidates or parties, few studies have investigated whether this assumption applies to Japanese online right-wingers. The present study sought to shed light on this issue by conducting a large-scale web survey with 77,084 respondents living in the greater Tokyo metropolitan area. Respondents were registered monitors for a research company. The large sample size enabled multivariate analyses to clarify the characteristics of online right-wingers in comparison to other respondents. The results indicated that 1.5 percent of the respondents (1,167) could be classified as online right-wingers and, in contrast with the political discontent hypothesis, most online right-wingers had a high degree of external political efficacy and lower levels of populist attitudes relative to other respondents. This suggests that online right-wingers trusted and remained satisfied with the current political conditions. Furthermore, they were more likely to vote, especially for established conservative parties, suggesting an affinity among online right-wingers for traditional conservative parties and candidates. These findings indicate that, unlike in Europe, Japanese online right-wingers are not a support base for radical right candidates and parties. In Japan, which is under a right-leaning government, online right-wingers have not become a driving force for emergent radical right parties.

Keywords: online right-wingers, *netto uyoku*, Internet, cyber racism, voting behaviour, Japan, radical right parties

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Introduction

Rooted in the expanding nationalistic and historical revisionism of the 1990s, cyber racism has surged in Japan in the 2000s.¹ Hate speech against Koreans and Chinese has become prominent in cyberspace, especially on the online news board known as 2channel, various video sites, and Twitter. The phenomenon was triggered by emotional encounters during the 2002 FIFA World Cup, jointly hosted by Japan and South Korea, as well as political conflicts over postwar compensation and territorial disputes. People who produce and spread xenophobic discourses are known as *netto uyoku* (hereafter, online right-wingers).

In a broad sense, online right-wingers can be defined as those who engage in online activism and spread right-wing ideological views. Online activism takes the form of circulating information and opinions carrying certain political views through social networking services (SNS), posting political views on blogs, and uploading, commenting on, and sharing videos with political messages.² Right-wing ideology varies across contexts, and the ideological standpoints of online right-wingers can be diverse. However, they are often characterized by their xenophobic views about East Asian countries and historical revisionism.³ Accordingly, the current study defines online right-wingers as online activists who hold nationalistic viewpoints and xenophobic attitudes toward China and Korea.

There are two strands of studies on online right-wingers. Studies that fall into the first category position online right-wingers in relation to the radical right groups that are collectively referred to as the Action Conservative Movement (ACM).⁴ These studies have attempted to clarify characteristics

¹ Akihiro Kitada, *Warau Nihon no 'Nashonarizumu'* [Japan's Sneering 'Nationalism'] (Tokyo: NHK Books, 2005); Nathaniel M. Smith, "Vigilante Video: Digital Populism and Anxious Anonymity Among Japan's New Netizens," *Critical Asian Studies* 52, no. 1 (2020): 69–70.

² Smith, "Vigilante Video," 67–69.

³ Masaki Itō, *Netto Uha no Rekishi Shakaigaku: Andōguraundo Heiseishi 1990–2000 Nendai* [Historical Sociology of Online Right: Underground Heisei-history from the 1990s to the 2000s] (Tokyo: Seikyūsha, 2019), 20; Kōhei Kurahashi, *Rekishi Shūsei Shūgi to Sabu Karuchā: 90 Nendai Hoshugensetsu no Medhia Bunka* [Historical Revisionism and Sub-Cultures: Media Cultures for Conservative Discourses in the 1990s] (Tokyo: Seikyūsha, 2018); Rumi Sakamoto, "'Koreans, Go Home!' Internet Nationalism in Contemporary Japan as a Digitally Mediated Subculture," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 9, no. 10 (2011): 4; Daisuke Tsuji, "Keiryō Chōsa kara Miru 'Netto Uyoku' no Purofuairu: 2007/2014 nen Uebuchōsa no Bunsekikekka o Motoni" [A Profile of Netto-Uyoku: Quantitative Data Analysis of Online Questionnaire Surveys in 2007 and 2014], *Neipō Ningen Kagaku* 38 (2017): 213.

⁴ Tom Gill, "The Nativist Backlash: Exploring the Roots of the Action Conservative Movement," *Social Science Japan Journal* 21, no. 2 (2018): 175–176; Nathaniel M. Smith, "Fights on the Right: Social Citizenship, Ethnicity, and Postwar Cohorts of the Japanese Activist Right," *Social Science Japan Journal* 21, no. 2 (2018): 250; Kōichi Yasuda, *Netto to Aikoku: Zaitokukai no "Yami" o Oikakete* [The Internet and Patriotism: Exploring the 'Darkness' of Zaitokukai] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2012); Apichai W. Shipper, "Activism for Harmony? Immigrant Rights Activism and Xenophobic Activism," in *Social Movements and Political Activism in Contemporary Japan: Re-emerging from Invisibility*, eds. David Chiavacci and Julia Obinger (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018); Tomomi Yamaguchi, "Xenophobia in Action: Ultranationalism, Hate Speech, and the Internet in Japan," *Radical History Review* 117 (2013): 98–118. See also Masahisa Endo and Willy Jou, *Ideologi to Nihonseiji: Sedai de Kotomaru "Hoshu" to "Kakushin"*

of the ACM by comparing it to earlier radical right movements. The ACM holds clear xenophobic and racist stances (especially toward neighbouring East Asian countries), which is different from earlier radical right movements. Right-wing activism in Japan has traditionally held standpoints characterized by “anti-Communism, mixed with nostalgia for Imperial Japan,” or ethno-nationalistic, anti-American (referring to the US-Japan security relationship) sentiments; they have been inclusive toward minorities.⁵ According to these studies the ACM presents itself as a “disaffected majority” and uses the Internet as a mobilization tool. These studies present the online right-wingers as members of, or a mobilization base of, the ACM, and explain how the geopolitical relationship with neighbouring countries, domestic political and discursive opportunity structures, and the development of Internet technology influenced the growth of the ACM.

The second strand of literature is based on media research, and offers analysis of online right-wingers by focusing on the impact of the Internet on opinion formation.⁶ These studies look at the size of the community of online right-wingers, their comments on the Internet, and the psychological and social factors that encourage online right-wingers. They analyze public opinion survey data and comments on news sites and SNS. According to the studies’ findings, online right-wingers assume that the Korean government and citizens, as well as the Chinese government and citizens, are privileged and protected by liberal elites and the mass media, who hide the “truth” of historical issues such as Japanese colonialism. They also find that online right-wingers are heavy Internet users. These characteristics are largely consistent with the findings from the first strand of research.

The research presented in this article examines the potential political effects of online right-wingers on Japanese politics. As discussed above, previous studies have focussed on the political impact of the ACM as a lobbying group,⁷ and on whether exposure to xenophobic comments on the Internet intensifies xenophobia.⁸ In other words, these studies have investigated if online right-wingers influence public opinion. What remains

[Generational Gap in Japanese Politics: A Longitudinal Study of Political Attitudes and Behavior] (Tokyo: Shinsensha, 2019), 188.

⁵ Smith, “Fights on the Right.”

⁶ Tadamasu Kimura, *Haiburiddo Esunogurafi: NC Kenkyū no Shitsuteki Hōhō to Jissen* [Hybrid Ethnography: Qualitative Method and Practice of Network Communication Research] (Tokyo: Shinyōsha, 2018), 282; Fumiaki Taka, *Reishizumu o Kaibōsuru: Zainichi Korean heno Henken to Intānetto* [Anatomy of Racism: Prejudice toward Koreans and the Internet] (Tokyo: Kiesō Shobō, 2015), 82–83; Tsuji, “Keiryō Chōsa kara Miru ‘Netto Uyoku’ no Purofuairu,” 213; Daisuke Tsuji and Satoshi Kitamura, “Intānetto deno Nyūsu Sesshoku to Haigaishugitekitaido no Kyokuseika: Nihon to Amerika no Hikakubunseki o Majieta Chōsa Dēta karano Kenshō,” [Exposure to online news and polarization of xenophobic attitudes: A quantitative analysis of survey data in Japan and the US], *Jōhōtūshin Gakkaishi* 36, no. 2 (2018): 99–109.

⁷ Gill, “The Nativist Backlash,” 188–189; Shipper, “Activism for Harmony?,” 102–106.

⁸ Taka, *Reishizumu o Kaibōsuru*; Tsuji, “Keiryō Chōsa kara Miru ‘Netto Uyoku’ no Purofuairu,” 220; Tsuji and Kitamura, “Intānetto deno Nyūsu Sesshoku to Haigaishugitekitaido no Kyokuseika.”

unclear is the potential electoral effects of online right-wingers which have become increasingly important in Japan, where radical right parties and candidates have emerged in the elections since the 1990s. The online right-wingers could become their driving force. The present study sheds light on this point by analyzing their political orientations and voting behaviours, using a public opinion survey. Our research study used a dataset of 77,084 respondents in total, which included 1,167 online right-wingers. The large sample size enabled multivariate analyses to clarify the characteristics of online right-wingers in comparison to other respondents.

In the next section, we review previous research on political orientation and engagement with offline politics among members of online radical right-wing communities and movements. We also provide an overview of the conditions of radical right parties and candidates in Japan. Then, we introduce our variables and data. Next, we describe the results of the statistical analyses. We analyzed the political orientations and voting behaviours of Japanese online right-wingers from the perspectives of (1) political discontent and (2) voting behaviours in the Tokyo governor's election of 2016 and the national election of 2017. We focus on the Tokyo governor's election, in addition to the national election, because one of the candidates in the former is the leader of an ACM group, enabling us to investigate whether online right-wingers choose to support radical alternatives instead of established conservative candidates when given the choice. In the final section, we summarize the results and discuss their implications. This study seeks to contribute to existing knowledge on the impact of current online right-wing activism on offline politics by identifying which candidates or parties online right-wing movements support when entering offline politics in Japan.

Links Between the Online and Offline Radical Right

Internet and Radical Right Movements

The growth of online radical right movements can be understood as a function of the Internet, which enables people to select information that supports their own opinions and to communicate mainly with like-minded people. This results in a polarization of public opinion.⁹ Furthermore, the Internet can be an effective mobilization tool for radical right-wing social

⁹ Cass R. Sustein, *#republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Fumiaki Taka, Yūri Amemiya, and Shinkichi Sugimori, "Daigakusei ni okeru Intānetto Ri'yō to Ukeika: Ideorogī to Zainichi Korian heno Henken," [Internet Usage and Leaning to the Right among College Students: Ideologies and Racism against Zainichi Koreans], *Tokyo Gakugeidaigaku Kiyō* 66, no. 1 (2015): 199–201; Tsuji and Kitamura, "Intānetto deno Nyūsu Sesshoku to Haigaishugitekitaido no Kyokuseika."

movements.¹⁰ There are virtually no gatekeepers in cyberspace, allowing individuals to express their views and values more openly than they would in the real world. They can legitimize “hate-based information” by combining information from different online platforms, including news, political blogs, and social network sites.¹¹ In addition, these communities create collective identities, leading participants to engage in offline politics.¹²

It should be noted that the relationship between online radical right communities and offline politics is not universal. In some cases, online radical right communities are not clearly associated with offline politics. *Ilbe* in South Korea, for example, denounces leftists and social minorities, but limits its activities to ridiculing targets in cyberspace.¹³ On the other hand, studies on the political orientations of online radical right communities in offline politics, focusing on Europe and the US, suggest that members of online radical right movements actually do tend to support radical right candidates or parties. For example, the alt-right movement supported Donald Trump’s election as US president, and online supporters of Pegida in Germany tend to support the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party.¹⁴ Other studies have pointed out that the newly emerging radical right does not have exclusive use of the Internet. It is also used as a mobilization tool by established parties and candidates, exemplified by the former Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak’s use of political blogs, Facebook, and Twitter; he actively interacted with the electorate and extended online interactions offline by inviting some of the audience to offline events.¹⁵

Political Discontent and Online Radical Right Supporters

Political discontent could be one reason that people are attracted to radical right-wing movements.¹⁶ In other words, people might participate in these

¹⁰ Josh Adams and Vincent J. Roscigno, “White Supremacist, Oppositional Culture and the World Wide Web,” *Social Forces* 84, no. 2 (2005): 759–778; Naoto Higuchi, *Nihongata Haigaisiugi: Zaitokukai, Gaikokujin Sanseiken, Higashijia Chiseigaku* [Japan’s Ultra-Right: Zaitokukai, Foreigner’s Suffrage, and East Asian Geopolitics] (Nagoya: Nagoya University Press, 2014), 117–140; Adam Klein, “Slipping Racism into the Mainstream: A Theory of Information Laundering,” *Communication Theory* 22 (2012): 427–448; Smith, “Vigilante Video.”

¹¹ Klein, “Slipping Racism into the Mainstream,” 431.

¹² Magdalena Wojcieszak, “‘Carrying Online Participation Offline’: Mobilization by Radical Online Groups and Politically Dissimilar Offline Ties,” *Journal of Communication* 59 (2009): 564–586.

¹³ EuyRyung Jun, “‘Voices of ordinary citizens’: *ban damunhwa* and its neoliberal affect of anti-immigration in South Korea,” *Critical Asian Studies* 51, no. 3 (2019): 392.

¹⁴ Jamie Bartlett, Jonathan Birdwell, and Mark Littler, *The New Face of Digital Populism* (London: Demos, 2011), 22; George Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 115–125; Sebastian Stier et al., “When Populists Become Popular: Comparing Facebook Use by the Right-Wing Movement Pegida and German Political Parties,” *Information, Communication and Society* 20, no. 9 (2017): 1373–1374.

¹⁵ Julian Hopkins, “Cybertroopers & Tea Parties: Government Use of the Internet in Malaysia,” *Asian Journal of Communication* 24, no. 1 (2014): 14–17.

¹⁶ Hans-George Betz, “The New Politics of Resentment: Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe,” *Comparative Politics* 25, no. 4 (1993): 413–427; Niko Heikkilä, “Online Antagonism of the Alt-Right in the 2016 Election,” *European Journal of American Studies* 12, no. 2 (2017): 5; Jens Rydgren, “The Sociology of Radical Right,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 33 (2007): 251–252.

movements to protest and voice their disapproval of current politics. According to this hypothesis, radical right-wing movements mobilize citizens through populist discourses that separate the established elite—such as the government, established parties, and the mass media—from ordinary citizens. These movements claim to represent the latter and actively criticize the former for their corruption, indifference toward citizens, caring only about their own interests, and their failure to deal with social issues, especially immigration. The established elite, as opponents, sometimes includes established conservatives whose ideological standpoints are similar to those of radical right-wing movements.

Empirical studies, however, have produced mixed findings regarding whether supporters of these movements have a strong sense of political discontent. Some studies have indicated political discontent to be a significant factor in people's support of these movements.¹⁷ However, reduced political trust and dissatisfaction do not mean that right-wing supporters reject all aspects of the existing political system; rather, their support merely indicates dissatisfaction with the government and the way democracy currently functions in their country. They also have less trust in the government, and believe that it is vital to vote. This might reflect their populist disposition, especially their emphasis on the sovereignty of the people. Those who have strong populist attitudes tend to support radical right-wing movements, especially if their ideology is modestly congruent with that of radical right-wing parties.¹⁸

Some studies have reported that supporters of radical right-wing movements do not have a high degree of political discontent in the first place. For example, supporters of alt-right movements in the US are no less trusting of political institutions such as the Congress than non-supporters, and are even less concerned about corruption,¹⁹ which may partially explain the short ideological distance between these movements and the Trump government. Oesch suggests that political discontent had little impact on support for Austria's Freedom Party or the Swiss People's Party in 2002–2003,

¹⁷ Bartlett, Birdwell, and Littler, *The New Face of Digital Populism*, 59–74; Eric Bélanger and Kees Aarts, "Explaining the Rise of the LPF: Issues, Discontent, and the 2002 Dutch Election," *Acta Politica* 41 (2006): 4–20; Marcel Lubbers, Mérove Gijsberts, and Peer Scheepers, "Extreme Right-Wing Voting in Western Europe," *European Journal of Political Research* 41 (2002): 365–367; Oliver Schmidtke, "Politicizing Social Inequality: Competing Narratives from the Alternative for Germany and Left-Wing Movement *Stand Up!*," *Frontiers in Sociology* 5 (2020): 13; Matthijs Rooduijn, Wouter van der Brug, and Sarah L. de Lange, "Expressing or Fuelling Discontent? The Relationship Between Populist Voting and Political Discontent," *Electoral Studies* 43 (2016): 32–40.

¹⁸ Steven M. Van Hauwaert and Stijn van Kessel, "Beyond Protest and Discontent: A Cross-National Analysis of the Effect of Populist Attitudes and Issue Positions on Populist Party Support," *European Journal of Political Research* 57, no. 1 (2018): 68–92; Bram Geurkink et al., "Populist Attitudes, Political Trust, and External Political Efficacy: Old Wine in New Bottles?" *Political Studies* 68, no. 1 (2020): 247–267.

¹⁹ Patrick S. Forscher and Nour S. Kteily, "A Psychological Profile of the Alt-Right," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 15, no. 1 (2020): 93.

because these parties were already in government at the time of the survey.²⁰ This suggests that in most cases, supporters of radical right movements can be satisfied with current political conditions, as long as they perceive their ideas to be reflected in the current government.

According to Kimura, online right-wingers in Japan feel deprived of their fair share by so-called minorities, including Chinese and Koreans, along with the elites supporting those minorities.²¹ This might reflect their populist attitudes. On the other hand, existing studies show that people who voted for the radical right-wing candidates, Ishihara and Tamogami, in the Tokyo governor's election had a high degree of political trust and satisfaction, and a positive perception of the prime minister, similar to those who voted for mainstream conservative candidates.²² Furthermore, Hieda and his colleagues investigated voting behaviours in the 2017 Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly election and found that those who hold populist attitudes tend to vote for the leftist party, the Japanese Communist Party,²³ these studies on voting behaviours of citizens in Tokyo suggest that online right-wingers do not necessarily hold strong populist attitudes.

The Radical Right in Japanese Politics

National Politics

Although there are many radical right parties in Japan, none of them have governed postwar Japan. Whereas some radical right candidates have contested national and local elections, their presence remains limited. For example, the Party for Japanese Kokoro (kokoro means heart; hereafter referred to as the PJK) contested the 2017 national election. Although its ideological position is not very distant from that of the right-wing side of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), this party can be regarded as a rightist party, in that it emphasizes the amendment of Article 9 of the Constitution, the revision of history, and the importance of traditional Japanese values. However, the party gained less than 1 percent of the votes, leading it to be absorbed into the LDP.

The current lack of popularity of radical right parties in Japan can be

²⁰ Daniel Oesch, "Explaining Workers' Support for Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe: Evidence from Austria, Belgium, France, Norway, and Switzerland," *International Political Science Review* 29, no. 3 (2008): 368–369.

²¹ Kimura, *Haiburiddo Esunogurafi*, 288–289.

²² Endo and Jou, *Ideorogi to Nihonseiji*, 192–193; Naoto Mitsuru Higuchi and Matsutani, "Support for the Radical Right in Japan," *Social Theory and Dynamics* 1 (2016): 65; Mitsuru Matsutani, "Netto Uyoku Katsudōka no 'Riaru' na Shijikiban," [What is the "Real" support base for an online radical right activist] in *Netto Uyoku towa Nanika* [What is an Online Right-winger], eds. Naoto Higuchi et al. (Tokyo: Seikyūsha, 2019), 60.

²³ Takeshi Hieda, Masahiro Zenkyo, and Masaru Nishikawa, "Do Populists Support Populism? An Examination through an Online Survey Following the 2017 Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly Election" *Party Politics* (2019), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1354068819848112>.

attributed to the conservative position of the ruling party, the LDP.²⁴ The LDP has historically been known as a “big tent,” including both hawkish and dovish factions, or mutual aid groups, supporting each other in elections, fund-raising, and governmental positions.²⁵ With a medium constituency system, candidates must rely on their factions in order to compete with other candidates in the same party. The patronage politics led by the faction system has enabled the LDP to be in government for the entire postwar period, except for a few years in the mid-1990s, late 2000s, and early 2010s. On its right-wing side, the LDP has had close connections with radical right movements. For example, some members of the LDP affiliate with the radical right lobbying group *Nippon Kaigi*.²⁶ As the LDP has been in power for most of the postwar period, radical right movements could have been able to influence policy by supporting the LDP or sending candidates to the party.²⁷

Since the 1990s, the LDP has leaned to the right.²⁸ First, a single-member constituency (as opposed to a medium constituency) system was introduced in 1996, weakening the influence of party factions. Second, during the 1990s, the Japanese government took a more liberal position and admitted Japanese wartime responsibilities, leading to a backlash from LDP right-wing politicians. Third, after the centre-left Democratic Party took power in 2009, the LDP became aware of the necessity to differentiate themselves from the Democratic Party by assuming a more right-leaning position. Fourth, public opinion toward neighbouring countries has been worsening in this period due to political conflicts, such as postwar compensation and territorial disputes, especially in the 2010s.²⁹ While we cannot determine whether the LDP shifted its position to the right in response to the rightward shift of voters, or whether the LDP’s shift attracted right-leaning citizens, hawkish voters were more likely to support the LDP in 2014.³⁰

Some researchers have suggested that established parties refrain from making clear connections with the ACM because of its violent and unlawful image.³¹ At the same time, Higuchi pointed out that radical right movements

²⁴ Endo and Jou, *Ideogō to Nihonseiji*, 205; Naoto Higuchi, “The Radical Right in Japan,” in *The Oxford Handbook of The Radical Right*, ed. Jens Rydgren (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 685.

²⁵ Kōji Nakakita, “*Jimintō no Ukeika*” [Conservative Swing in the Liberal Democratic Party], in *Tettei Kenshō Nihon no Ukeika* [Thorough Investigation: Is Japan Leaning to the Right?], ed. Hotaka Tsukada (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2017), 103.

²⁶ Legislators of other parties also affiliate with *Nippon Kaigi*. Daiki Shibuichi, “The Japan Conference (*Nippon Kaigi*): an Elusive Conglomerate,” *East Asia* 34 (2017): 183–184.

²⁷ Higuchi, “The Radical Right in Japan,” 684–685.

²⁸ Higuchi, “The Radical Right in Japan”; Nakakita, “*Jimintō no Ukeika*.”

²⁹ Naoto Higuchi, “Haigaishugi to Heitosupūchi” [Xenophobia and Hate Speech] in *Tettei Kenshō Nihon no Ukeika* [Thorough Investigation: Is Japan Leaning to the Right?], ed. Hotaka Tsukada (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2017), 81–82.

³⁰ Yoshihiko Takenaka, “Yükensha no Ukeika o Kenshō suru” [Are Voters Leaning to the Right?], in *Tettei Kenshō Nihon no Ukeika* [Thorough Investigation: Is Japan Leaning to the Right?], ed. Hotaka Tsukada (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2017), 117–124.

³¹ Higuchi, “The Radical Right in Japan,” 684. However, Gill believes that rightist politicians in the LDP have a relationship with the ACM. Gill, “The Nativist Backlash,” 188–189.

took advantage of discursive opportunities opened by right-leaning established parties.³² In other words, there is a possibility that the online radical right community perceives the established conservative parties to represent their standpoints, even though there is no direct association between them.

Local Politics

The presence of radical right candidates has been relatively prominent in the Tokyo governor's election, although the policies that matter to radical right movements, such as diplomatic policies, feature national-level rather than local-level policies. Shintaro Ishihara, known for his nationalistic and xenophobic political orientation, won the election in 1999 and was subsequently reelected for four terms. Two years after Ishihara's resignation, Toshio Tamogami, former chief-of-staff in the Self-Defense Force and a known hawk with a revisionist standpoint, ran in the Tokyo governor's election of 2014. He received over 600,000 votes and was ranked fourth. Nationalistic and xenophobic attitudes were motivators of the votes for Ishihara and Tamogami.³³

The 2016 election is critical for investigating the relationship between online radical right activism and offline politics, as Makoto Sakurai, leader of one group in the ACM named *Zainichi Tokken o Yurusanai Shimin no Kai* (Citizens' Group Against Special Rights for Korean Residents in Japan), was a candidate in this election. His standpoint is at the extreme right; for example, his ACM group is known for aggressive activism, which has led its members to be arrested. In his campaign, he claimed exclusion of foreign citizens from the public assistance program. He competed not only against liberal candidates, but also two other conservative candidates. One of the conservative candidates, Yuriko Koike, had been a member of several conservative parties and supported the amendment of Article 9 of the Constitution, as well as restricting immigration.³⁴ She based her populist strategy on a promise to fight the LDP, which had dominated the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly and decided on important issues behind closed doors. Hiroya Masuda was another conservative candidate, who was supported by the LDP. He had no clear standpoint on nationalistic and xenophobic issues. While Sakurai was a radical right-wing candidate, and Masuda an established conservative candidate, Koike was a middle-of-the-road candidate. Koike collected more than 40 percent of the total votes and Masuda 27 percent, while votes for Sakurai were limited to 1.7 percent.

The study under discussion in this paper is exploratory and, therefore, we did not develop a specific hypothesis. However, if Japanese online right-

³² Higuchi, "Haigaishugi to Heitosupichi," 75–78.

³³ Endo and Jou, *Ideogō to Nihonseiji*, 200; Higuchi and Matsutani, "Support for the Radical Right in Japan," 65.

³⁴ Hieda, Zenkyo, and Nishikawa, "Do Populists Support Populism?"

wingers are similar to radical online right-wing activists in European countries, we would expect that they feel discontented with current politics and vote for radical right-wing parties and candidates, while holding populist attitudes. However, another possibility is that they do not hold substantial political grievances if they regard the contemporary right-leaning government as representing them adequately.

Data and Variables

Data

The data for this study was obtained from an online survey conducted from December 1 to 15, 2017.³⁵ Survey respondents were registered monitors³⁶ for a research company, Rakuten Research, aged 20 to 79 years, and living in the greater Tokyo metropolitan area. The survey was conducted in Japanese. Rakuten Research is a subsidiary company of Rakuten, one of the biggest Internet service companies in Japan; in 2019, they had 2.2 million monitors. Its large monitor group allowed us to gather data from 77,084 respondents. We selected participants such that the sample reflected the age and gender distribution of the broader population of the greater Tokyo area. The company invited monitors to participate in the survey until the required sample sizes for each age-gender group were reached.³⁷ This approach was followed as web survey monitors tend to be younger and more educated than the rest of the population, and are considered to not adequately represent Japanese citizens.³⁸ For example, more than half of the respondents in our sample had attended university, compared to just around 30 percent of the

³⁵ The survey was planned by a research group led by Naoto Huguchi and commissioned by the Survey Research Center. For more detailed explanations for the survey, see Keiichi Satoh et al., “3.11 go no Undōsanka: Han/Datsu Genpatsu Undō to Han Anpo Undō heno Sanka o Chūshin ni” [Social Movements in Post-3.11: Findings from the data of 8,000 people] *Shakaikagaku Kenkyū* 32, no. 1 (2018): 8–9.

³⁶ Registered monitors of Rakuten Research (it changed its name to Rakuten Insight) are Rakuten customers who voluntarily register as monitors in response to an invitation. In return, they can earn Rakuten points, which they can use in exchange for services. Rakuten Research does not disclose demographic or socioeconomic information about their monitors. According to Honda and Motokawa’s comparative survey using five different survey companies, around 70 percent of monitors are currently employed—an unemployment rate below the national average. Furthermore, more than 70 percent of monitors participate in a survey more than once a week, most for pocket money; Norie Honda and Akira Motokawa, *Intānetto Chōsa wa Shakai Chōsa ni Riyō Dekiruka: Jikkenchōsa ni yoru Kenshō Kekka* [Can We Use Web Survey for Social Survey? Results from an Experimental Survey] (Tokyo: The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training, 2005), 107–109, 121.

³⁷ More or less samples than expected were eventually collected in some strata in order to obtain sufficient sample size in total.

³⁸ Hiroshi Ishida et al., “Shinrai Dekiru Intānetto Chōsahou no Kakuritsu ni Mukete” [Towards Reliable Web Surveys], *SSJ Data Archive Research Paper Series* 42 (2009), <https://csrda.iss.u-tokyo.ac.jp/tps/RPS042.pdf>.

population in the greater Tokyo metropolitan area.³⁹ The mean age of our sample was 47.19, and male respondents comprised 53 percent of the total sample. Furthermore, monitors in web surveys use the Internet more frequently than Japanese citizens,⁴⁰ which needs to be considered in the interpretation of our results. Previous studies have shown that there is little bias in the correlations between variables, with a few exceptions such as correlations between age and class identification.⁴¹

The original sample size was 83,732. We excluded respondents who did not pay sufficient attention while responding,⁴² as indicated by, for example, claiming membership in all 12 associations that we inquired about. The final sample size was 77,084 respondents.

Operational Definition of Online Right-wingers

Our independent variable was whether one is an online right-winger. The method for identifying online right-wingers has been controversial, and two methods have been used in previous studies on alt-right supporters: (1) based on support for a specific social movement,⁴³ and (2) based on sharing the core ideas of the movement.⁴⁴ Both these studies came to an identical estimate of the number of alt-right supporters (6 percent of the respondents), regardless of their use of different identification criteria.

In Japan, Tsuji used the second method and identified online right-wingers based on three criteria: a xenophobic attitude toward China and South Korea, a nationalistic political attitude, and posting or exchanging opinions

³⁹ Statistics Bureau, *Heisei 22 Nen Kokusei Chōsa* [National Census in 2010], accessed 26 March 2018, <http://www.stat.go.jp/data/kokusei/2010/index.html>.

⁴⁰ Honda and Motokawa, *Intānetto Chōsa wa Shakai Chōsa ni Riyō Dekiruka*, 118.

⁴¹ Makoto Todoroki and Aki Kaeriyama, “Yobichōsa to shiten Intānetto Chōsa no Kanousei: Hensūkan no Kanren ni Chūmoku Shite” [The Possibility of Web Surveys for the Purpose of Preliminary Research], *Shakai to Chōsa* 12 (2014): 46–61, see also Kikuko Nagayoshi, Mitsuru Matsutani, and Naoto Higuchi, “Onrain Chōsa niyoru Daihyōhon Dēta Shūshū: 3.11 go no Demo Sanka o Meguru Chōsa o Jirei to shite” [An Online Survey with a Large Sample Size: A case of the survey for demonstrators after the Great East Japan Earthquake], *Riron to Hōhō* 35, no. 1 (2020): 146–159. As an exception, Honda and Motokawa, *Intānetto Chōsa wa Shakai Chōsa ni Riyō Dekiruka*, 177–184. Our sampling bias could affect our results if socioeconomic status influences voting behaviours and probabilities of being online right-wingers. Previous studies have found that there is no difference in socioeconomic status between online right-wingers and other populations. There is also no clear correlation between socioeconomic status and support for radical right candidates. These points suggest that there is only minimal bias in our results, although we cannot demonstrate this. Endo and Jou, *Ideogī to Nihonseiji*, 200; Higuchi and Matsutani, “Support for the Radical Right in Japan,” 65; Matsutani, “Netto Uyoku Katsudōka no ‘Riaru’ na Shijikiban,” 65; Kikuko Nagayoshi, “Netto Uyoku towa Dareka,” [Who are online right-wingers] in *Netto Uyoku towa Nanika* [What is an Online Right-Winger], eds. Naoto Higuchi et al. (Tokyo: Seikyusha, 2019), 34.

⁴² For more detailed explanations for the sample selection, see Nagayoshi, Matsutani, and Higuchi, “Onrain Chōsa niyoru Daihyōhon Dēta Shūshū.”

⁴³ Forscher and Kteily, “A Psychological Profile of the Alt-Right,” 93.

⁴⁴ In this sense, his purpose is not to identify activists, but (potential) supporters of the alt-right; George Hawley, “The Demography of the Alt-Right,” *Institute for Family Studies* website (blog), 9 August 2018, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-demography-of-the-alt-right>.

about political issues on the Internet.⁴⁵ In the current study, we used Tsuji's operationalization.⁴⁶ These criteria are, of course, not perfect, as online radical right communities can vary in their support for nationalistic and xenophobic agendas. However, we use this operationalization in line with previous studies.

In the current survey, we used a favourability rating to assess the level of xenophobia toward China and South Korea. The participants responded to the question, "Do you have favourable or unfavourable feelings toward the following political parties, politicians, and countries? Please respond by selecting a number closest to your opinion on a scale ranging from 0 (least favourable) to 10 (most favourable)." The results showed that the highest proportion (more than 25 percent) of respondents chose "0" for attitudes toward China and South Korea; the mean of favourable feelings about China was 2.71, and South Korea 2.82, suggesting that the respondents held very negative attitudes toward these countries. We operationalized "xenophobia toward China and Korea" as choosing "0" in the favourability ratings for both countries. Based on this definition, 21.5 percent of respondents were "xenophobic towards China and Korea."

We assessed nationalistic political attitudes by asking respondents whether they supported the following policies: the prime minister's and government ministers' official visits to the Yasukuni Shrine; the amendment to Article 9 of the Constitution; teaching about the Japanese national flag and anthem in schools; and revising school curricula to foster patriotism and civic duty. Between 30 to 45 percent of respondents chose "neither agree nor disagree" with these policies, perhaps because most Japanese citizens have difficulties in deciding about these policies. However, a higher proportion of respondents supported these policies, except for the amendment of Article 9 of the Constitution, rather than opposing them. We defined people who selected "agree" or "somewhat agree" with all these policies as having nationalistic political attitudes, and approximately 11.8 percent of respondents could be included in this group.

We assessed political activities conducted over the Internet based on responses to the question: "Have you ever participated in any of the following activities in relation to politics and social issues during the last year?" The activities included posting ideas on SNS, circulating posts of others with similar ideas on SNS, posting ideas on Internet news and video-sharing sites, and speaking or discussing ideas with friends using the Internet or SNS. The responses were scored on a three-point scale (3 = frequently; 2 = at least

⁴⁵ Tsuji, "Keiryō Chōsa kara Miru 'Netto Uyoku' no Purofuaifu," 213–214.

⁴⁶ Although our survey measured explicit attitudes of prejudice and nationalistic attitudes, there is a possibility that implicit attitudes matter more for voting behaviours. A next step would be to use implicit measurement and to examine the impact of implicit attitudes; John Jost, "The IAT Is Dead, Long Live the IAT: Context-Sensitive Measures of Implicit Attitudes Are Indispensable to Social and Political Psychology," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 28, no. 1 (2019): 10–19.

once; 1 = never). We assumed that a person was involved in political activities if he or she had conducted at least one of these activities at least once during the last year and, based on this definition, we found 20 percent of respondents to have been involved in political activities during the last year.⁴⁷

We define online right-wingers as those who fit in all the above criteria. Their proportion among our respondents was 1.5 percent, which is close to the proportion in Tsuji's study.⁴⁸

Dependent Variables

Political discontent

We used political discontent and voting behaviours as dependent variables. Political discontent was assessed by external political efficacy and populist attitudes. Based on previous studies,⁴⁹ external political efficacy was defined as "beliefs about the responsiveness of government authorities and institutions to citizen demands." We considered that low external political efficacy would result in high political discontent.⁵⁰ The indicator for external political efficacy was extracted by factor analysis of responses to the following statements: "people like me do not have any say in what the government does"; "citizens' opinions and expectations are rarely reflected in national politics"; and "most politicians engage in politics only to serve their own interests." The responses to each statement were done on a five-point scale (1 = agree; 2 = somewhat agree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = somewhat disagree; and 5 = disagree). We conducted a factor analysis of these responses and extracted a factor with more than one eigenvalue (Cronbach's alpha⁵¹ = 0.75).

We assessed populist attitudes based on responses to three statements: "ordinary people should have the final say on the most important political issues by voting on them directly in referendums"; "the most important political issues should only be decided after ordinary people openly voice their opinions and discuss them at length"; and "the opinion of ordinary

⁴⁷ The small proportion suggests that most of the online right-wingers in our sample are only moderately active online. We need to test the validity of this measurement, but it is possible that sending political messages is uncommon in Japanese cyberspace.

⁴⁸ Tsuji, "Keiryō Chōsa kara Miru 'Netto Uyoku' no Purofuiru," 214–215.

⁴⁹ Stephen C. Craig, Richard G. Niemi, and Glenn E. Silver, "Political Efficacy and Trust: A Report on the NES Pilot Study Items," *Political Behavior* 12, no. 3 (1990): 290; Geurkink et al., "Populist Attitudes, Political Trust, and External Political Efficacy."

⁵⁰ Rooduijn, van der Brug, and de Lange, "Expressing or Fuelling Discontent?" 36.

⁵¹ While Cronbach's alpha is often used as a measurement of "internal consistency" reliability, a high alpha value does not prove unidimensionality of items. Cortina suggests that a high alpha value means high commonalities and thus low uniqueness among items. Combined with results from the factor analyses, we can at least say that the items have some commonality, which we interpret as political discontent and populist attitudes; Jose M. Cortina, "What Is Coefficient Alpha? An Examination of Theory and Applications," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 78, no. 1 (1993), 98–104; Douglas G. Bonett and Thomas A. Wright, "Cronbach's Alpha Reliability: Interval Estimation, Hypothesis Testing, and Sample Size Planning," *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 36 (2015): 3.

people is worth more than that of elites and politicians.” Populist attitudes are defined as attitudes that emphasize the sovereignty of the people, and the Manichean distinction between the people⁵² and the elite. These items measure the preference for sovereignty of the people, which is one of the components of populist attitudes, along with anti-elitism and the homogeneity of the people.⁵³ The other two components can be important, but this is the only component that could be measured from the survey. The responses to each statement were made on a 5-point scale (5 = agree; 4 = somewhat agree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 2 = somewhat disagree; and 1 = disagree). We conducted a factor analysis for these responses and extracted a factor with more than one eigenvalue (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.76).

Voting behaviours

Voting behaviours were assessed by surveying respondents who had voted in the national election⁵⁴ of October 2017, and the Tokyo governor’s election in July 2016.⁵⁵ We focused on these two elections because they took place close to the year of the survey, and a radical right-wing party or candidate ran in these elections.

Figures 1 and 2 compare the actual voting rates and the distributions of voting behaviour in the elections, with those calculated from the sample in this study.⁵⁶ The voting rates in our sample, for both elections, were much higher, which might reflect social desirability bias, according to which respondents would hesitate to respond that they did not vote. Social desirability bias might also have influenced responses regarding the party and the candidate the respondents voted for if they wanted to hide voting for a radical right-wing party or candidate. Nevertheless, in terms of votes in the national and the Tokyo governor election, the PJK’s and Sakurai’s performances did not differ much between the actual outcome and the voters’ proportions in our sample.

⁵² Who is included in the “people” and who is regarded as an “opponent” depends on historical and social contexts. For example, the people are regarded as ethnically plural in South Asian countries, and therefore anti-minority populism has rarely been observed there; Thomas Pipensky, “Migrants, Minorities, and Populism in Asia,” *Pacific Affairs* 93, no. 3 (2020), 593–610.

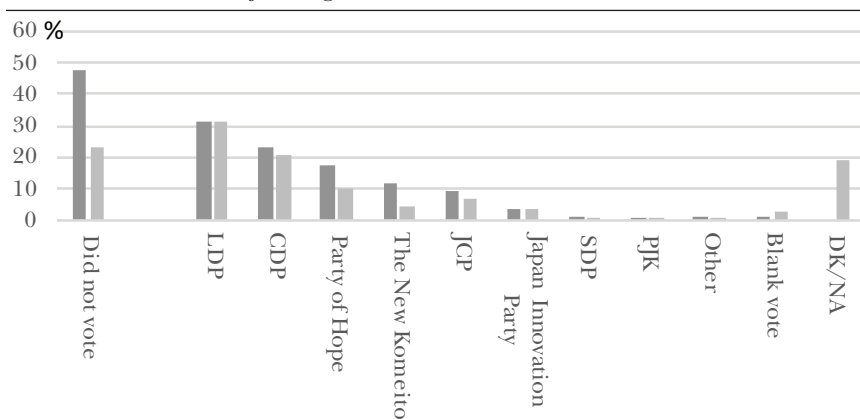
⁵³ Agnes Akkerman, Cas Mudde, and Andrej Zaslove, “How Populist Are the People? Measuring Populist Attitudes in Voters,” *Comparative Political Studies* 47, no. 9 (2014): 1331; Rooduijn, van der Brug, and de Lange, “Expressing or Fuelling Discontent?” 33; Masahiro Zenkyo, *Ishin Shiji no Bunseki: Popurizumu ka Yūkensha no Gourisei ka* [Support for the Ishin: Is It a Consequence of Populism, or Rational Choice?] (Tokyo: Yūhikaku, 2018), 236–239.

⁵⁴ We limited the analysis of voting in the proportional representation system in order to exclude the effects of different choices of candidates based on electoral districts.

⁵⁵ For the analysis of voting behaviours in the Tokyo governor’s election, we limited the sample to those who were aged over 20 and lived in Tokyo at the time of the election.

⁵⁶ The share of votes in the national election calculated for our sample is closer to the actual share than the share of votes in the Tokyo governor’s election calculated for our sample is to its counterpart. One possible reason for this difference could be the timing of the elections and the survey. The survey was conducted in 2017, the year of the national election, whereas the Tokyo governor’s election was held in 2016. Therefore, respondents were more likely to have forgotten whom they voted for in the governor’s election.

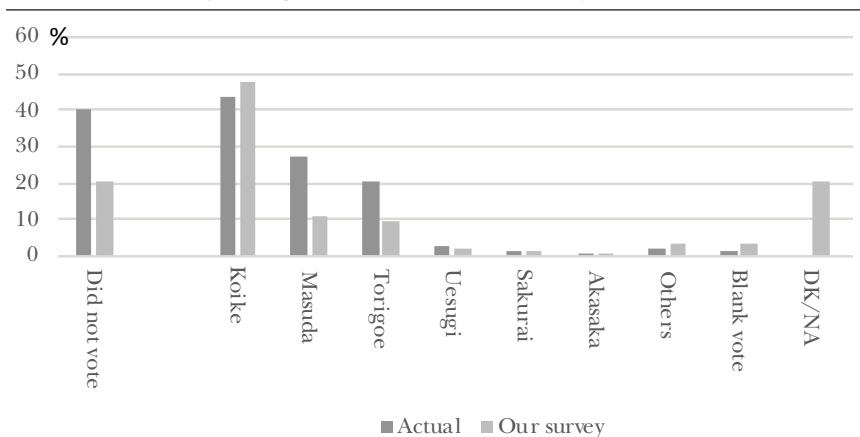
Figure 1
Distribution of Voting Behaviour in the 2017 National Election



Note: Proportions for each party represent the share of the vote. Actual voting rate and share of the vote are for the Greater Tokyo area. “Blank vote” in the actual voting rate includes all invalid votes.

Source: This survey data and Ministry of International Affairs and Communications, “Heisei 29 Nen 10 Gatsu 22 Nichi Shikkou Shūgin Sōsenkyo Saikōsaibansho Saibankan Kokuminshinsa Sokuhoukekka” [Breaking Report on Results of the Election for the House of Representatives and the National Referendum for Supreme Court Judges on 22 October 2017], accessed 9 April 2020, https://www.soumu.go.jp/senkyo/senkyo_s/data/shugin48/index.html.

Figure 2
Distribution of Voting Behaviour in the 2016 Tokyo Governor’s Election



Note: Proportions for each candidate represent the share of the vote.

Source: This survey data and Secretariat to Election Administration Commission, “Tokyo Tochijisenkyo (Heisei 28 Nen 7 Gatsu 31 Nichi Shikkō) Tōkaihyō Kekka” [The Polling Results of the Tokyo Governor Election on 31 July 2016], accessed 9 April 2020, <https://www.senkyo.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/election/tochiji-all/tochiji-sokuhou2016/>.

Control Variables

As control variables, we used age, gender, education level, occupation, household income, marital status, and having children. Age was categorized into six categories: twenties, thirties, forties, fifties, sixties, and seventies. Gender was a dichotomous variable, with 0 = male and 1 = female, as was education level, with 1 = above upper secondary school, and 0 = up to or below upper secondary school.

Occupation was a categorical variable consisting of the following:⁵⁷ “service class workers” (professionals, proprietors, and managers); “routine non-manual workers” (clerical workers, sales personnel, and other rank-and-file service workers); “self-employed” (including farmers); “manual workers” (skilled and unskilled workers, and their supervisors); “non-regular workers” (contract workers, dispatch workers, and part-time workers in all occupations); and “unemployed and those out of the labour market.” We combined employment status and occupational categories based on the categorization by Erikson and Goldthorpe⁵⁸ because in Japan, employment status is closely related to the stability of employment and salaries.

Household income was a categorical variable consisting of “the upper-income group” (an income above 25 percent of the respondents); “the middle-income group” (people with an income between the upper 25 and lower 25 percent of respondents); and “the lower income group” (an income below or equal to the lower 25 percent of respondents). The “do not know” category represented people who did not respond to the question on household income, and was included because over 10 percent of the respondents did not respond to the item.

Marital status was a categorical variable with “married” as the reference category, along with “divorced or widowed,” and “never married.” Having children was a dichotomous variable: 1 = having a child; and 0 = not having a child.

Descriptive statistics of the study variables are summarized in table 1.

Results

Political Orientations of Online Right-wingers

First, we examined whether online right-wingers experienced more political discontent and maintained more populist attitudes than the other respondents, using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. As can be seen

⁵⁷ It is better to differentiate the unemployed from those who are out of the labour market. However, there was no question related to job-seeking, and we therefore categorized them as one group.

⁵⁸ Robert Erikson and John H. Goldthorpe, *The Constant Flux: A Study of Class Mobility in Industrial Societies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

Japanese Online Right-Wingers

Table 1
Descriptive Studies

	n	%
Online right-wingers	1,167	1.51
Other respondents	75,917	98.49
20-29	6,205	8.05
30-39	16,451	21.34
40-49	23,068	29.93
50-59	16,405	21.28
60-69	12,520	16.24
70-79	2,435	3.16
Male	40,887	53.04
Female	36,197	46.96
Up to or below upper secondary school	21,578	27.99
Above upper secondary school	55,506	72.01
Service-class workers	23,250	30.37
Routine non-manual workers	9,570	12.50
The self-employed	3,557	4.65
Manual workers	4,555	5.95
Non-regular workers	15,146	19.79
Unemployed and out of labour market	20,472	26.74
Lower income	9,731	12.62
Middle income	39,815	51.65
Upper income	17,197	22.31
DKNA	10,341	13.42
Married	51,184	66.40
Divorced/widowed	6,218	8.07
Never married	19,682	25.53
No child	34,273	44.46
Having a child	42,811	55.54
The LDP	18,586	28.95
The PJK	163	0.25
Other parties	27,647	43.07

Table 1 continued next page

Did not vote	17,802	27.73			
Koike	10,808	46.98			
Sakurai	347	1.51			
Masuda	2,432	10.57			
Others	3,513	15.27			
Did not vote	5,905	25.67			
	n	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max
External political efficacy	77,084	0.00	0.85	-1.22	2.65
Populist attitudes	77,084	0.00	0.84	-2.55	1.50

in table 2, online right-wingers had more external political efficacy and less populist attitudes than other respondents, which suggested that they believed that politicians do indeed listen to them and, as a result, there was no need to emphasize the sovereignty of the people.

Voting Behaviours of Online Right-wingers

Next, we examined the associations between online right-winger status and voting behaviours. Table 3 shows the differences in the distributions of voting behaviour between online right-wingers and other respondents. The results indicated apparent differences in the national election, such that online right-wingers voted for the LDP and the PJK more often than other respondents. Moreover, a more substantial proportion of online right-wingers voted for the LDP than for the PJK, who received only 3 percent of their vote. Furthermore, online right-wingers were less likely to abstain from voting, supporting a previous finding that they were politically active both on- and offline.⁵⁹

Online right-wingers' tendency to prefer established conservative candidates to radical candidates, as well as their high participation rate, could be observed in the Tokyo governor's election: 13 percent of online right-wingers voted for Makoto Sakurai, while only 1.3 percent of other respondents voted for him. Interestingly, the proportion of voters for Sakurai among online right-wingers was as high as the proportion of voters for Masuda. Additionally, approximately half of the online right-wingers voted for Koike. This proportion did not differ much between participant groups. Sakurai was not the primary choice for online right-wing voters.

These findings did not indicate effects of being an online right-winger due to differences in the demographic composition of online right-wingers

⁵⁹ Daisuke Tsuji, *Intanetto ni okeru 'Ukeika' Genshō ni Kansuru Jisshō Kenkyū Chōsa Gaiyō Hōkokusho* [Report on Empirical Research about "Rightward Trend" on the Internet], accessed 27 September 2017, <http://d-tsuji.com/paper/r04/>. In our dataset, the online right-wingers were more likely to sign a petition (21.0 compared to 16.8 percent) and participate in demonstrations (13.6 compared to 3.6 percent) than other respondents.

Japanese Online Right-Wingers

Table 2
OLS Regression Model of Political Orientation

	External political efficacy		Populist attitudes	
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
Online right-wingers	0.26**	0.03	-0.19**	0.03
20-29 (ref.)				
30-39	-0.05**	0.01	0.03*	0.01
40-49	-0.07**	0.01	0.07**	0.01
50-59	-0.05**	0.01	0.10**	0.01
60-69	0.05**	0.01	0.11**	0.01
70-79	0.13**	0.02	0.09**	0.02
Male (ref.)				
Female	-0.18**	0.01	0.21**	0.01
Up to or below upper secondary school (ref.)				
Above upper secondary school	0.12**	0.01	-0.10**	0.01
Service-class workers (ref.)				
Routine non-manual workers	-0.05**	0.01	0.03*	0.01
The self-employed	-0.09**	0.02	0.10**	0.02
Manual workers	-0.10**	0.01	0.10**	0.01
Non-regular workers	-0.07**	0.01	0.05**	0.01
The unemployed and out of labour market	-0.03**	0.01	0.03**	0.01
Lower income (ref.)				
Middle income	0.05**	0.01	-0.05**	0.01
Upper income	0.15**	0.01	-0.12**	0.01
No answer to income	0.08**	0.01	-0.06**	0.01
Married (ref.)				
Divorced/widowed	-0.03*	0.01	0.02	0.01
Never married	0.03**	0.01	-0.03**	0.01
No child (ref.)				
Having a child	-0.01	0.01	0.03**	0.01
Intercepts	-0.01	0.02	-0.08**	0.02
R-squared	0.031		0.028	

Note: n = 76,550, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05. Robust standard errors were used.

Table 3
Voting Behaviours of Online Right-wingers and Other Respondents

National election					
	The LDP	The PJK	The other parties	Did not vote	n
Online right-wingers	66.8	3.1	20.7	9.4	1,114
Other respondents	28.3	0.2	43.5	28.1	63,084
Total	29.0	0.3	43.1	27.7	64,198

Note: Chi-squared = 1200.00, $p < 0.01$, Cramer's V = 0.136

Tokyo governor election						
	Koike	Sakurai	Masuda	The others	Did not vote	n
Online right-wingers	48.1	13.3	13.5	10.2	14.9	430
Other respondents	47.0	1.3	10.5	15.4	25.9	22,575
Total	47.0	1.5	10.6	15.3	25.7	23,005

Note: Chi-squared = 431.70, $p < 0.01$, Cramer's V = 0.137

and other respondents. Therefore, we conducted a multinomial logistic regression analysis of voting behaviours. The independent and controlling variables of the models were identical to those used in analyses of political discontent. We considered “did not vote” as a reference category. Table 4 shows the results of voting behaviours in the national election. Being an online right-winger had a significant positive effect on voting for the LDP, the PJK, and other parties. These findings suggest that online right-wingers are more likely to vote than other respondents.

It is difficult to compare effect size in a logistic regression model. Therefore, we used the marginal effects of being an online right-winger (figure 3). The marginal effect showed how much probabilities of voting for a specific party increase for each one-unit change of the independent variable—being an online right-winger—with other variables—age, gender, education level, and so on—fixed at the mean values.

As shown in figure 3, being an online right-winger increased the probability of voting for the LDP and the PJK. A comparison of effect sizes indicated that the effects of being an online right-winger on voting for the LDP were

Japanese Online Right-Wingers

Table 4

Multinomial Logistic Regressions for Voting Behaviours in the National Election

	The LDP		The PJK		The other parties	
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
Online right-wingers	1.89**	0.11	3.69**	0.23	0.33**	0.12
20-29 (ref.)						
30-39	0.05	0.04	0.41	0.36	0.34**	0.04
40-49	0.06	0.04	0.69*	0.35	0.70**	0.04
50-59	0.20**	0.05	0.92*	0.37	1.10**	0.04
60-69	0.78**	0.05	1.44**	0.43	1.91**	0.05
70-79	1.52**	0.10	1.93**	0.64	2.60**	0.09
Male (ref.)						
Female	-0.64**	0.03	-0.62**	0.19	-0.38**	0.02
Up to or below upper secondary school (ref.)						
Above upper secondary school	0.48**	0.03	0.71**	0.20	0.50**	0.02
Service-class workers (ref.)						
Routine non-manual workers	-0.07	0.04	0.07	0.28	-0.05	0.04
The self-employed	-0.10	0.06	0.31	0.35	-0.05	0.05
Manual workers	-0.29**	0.05	-0.49	0.44	-0.19**	0.05
Non-regular workers	-0.24**	0.04	0.14	0.26	-0.08*	0.03
The unemployed and out of labour market	-0.12**	0.04	0.48	0.24	-0.10**	0.03
Lower income (ref.)						
Middle income	0.36**	0.04	0.23	0.28	0.13**	0.03
Upper income	0.73**	0.04	0.84**	0.31	0.25**	0.04
No answer to income	0.11*	0.05	0.55	0.31	-0.13**	0.04
Married (ref.)						
Divorced/widowed	-0.37**	0.04	-0.58	0.36	-0.39**	0.04
Never married	-0.20**	0.03	-0.07	0.22	-0.21**	0.03
No child (ref.)						
Having a child	0.02	0.03	-0.90**	0.22	-0.05	0.03
Intercepts	-0.41	0.06	-5.94**	0.56	-0.54**	0.06
McFadden R-squared	0.06					

Note: n = 63,769, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05. Robust standard errors were used. A reference category was "did not vote."

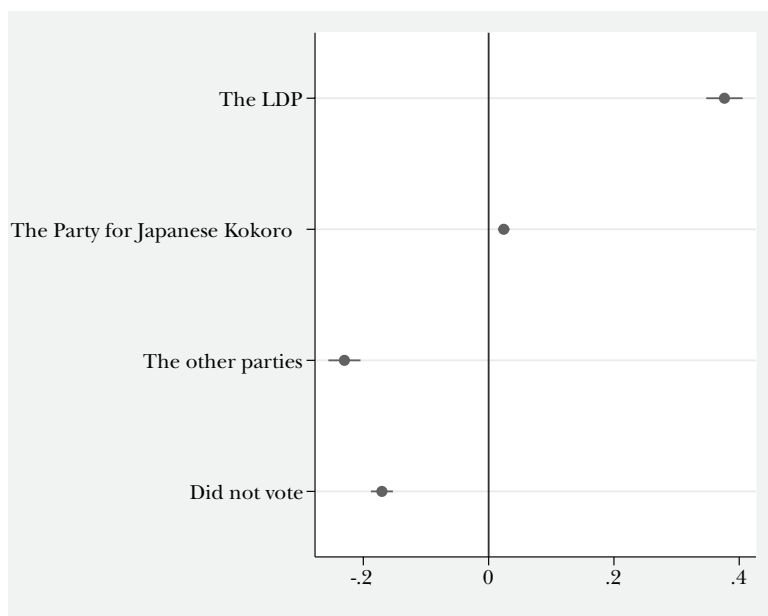
much more extensive than on voting for the PJK. These findings suggest that being an online right-winger increased the probability of voting not only for the radical right-wing party, but also for the established conservative party.⁶⁰

As can be seen in table 5, being an online right-winger increased the probability of voting for conservative candidates in the Tokyo governor's election. Figure 4 shows the marginal effects of being an online right-winger on voting in the 2016 Tokyo governor's election. In terms of voting for Sakurai, the effects of being an online right-winger were small (less than 0.1).

Discussion

This study examined the political orientations and voting behaviours of online right-wingers in Japan. Although several studies have investigated

Figure 3
Marginal Effects of an Online Right-winger Status



Note: Age, gender, education, occupation, household income, marital status, having a child or not were fixed at their mean values. $n = 63,769$.

⁶⁰ According to Miyagi, members of the xenophobic social movement supported the Party for Future Generations (Jisedaino Tō), the predecessor of the PJK, more than they did the LDP in 2014. Our results show that online right-wingers do not necessarily share a political standpoint with members of offline xenophobic social movements; Yusuke Miyagi, "Nihon ni okeru Haigaishugi Undō to Sono Chūgoku, Kankoku, Kitachōsenkan: Shinkyū Hoshu Medeia no Hikaku kara" [Xenophobic Social Movements in Japan and Their Views of China, South Korea, and North Korea: Comparison Between Old and New Conservative Media], *Asia Kenkyū* 62, no. 2 (2016): 25.

Table 5
Multinomial Logistic Regression for Voting Behaviours in the Tokyo Governor's Election

	Koike		Sakurai		Masuda		The others	
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
Online right-wingers	0.66**	0.15	2.71**	0.20	0.82**	0.19	0.16	0.21
20-29 (ref.)								
30-39	0.40**	0.07	0.85**	0.25	0.28**	0.10	0.60**	0.11
40-49	0.55**	0.06	0.70**	0.25	0.25*	0.10	0.97**	0.10
50-59	0.77**	0.07	0.54*	0.27	0.52**	0.11	1.27**	0.11
60-69	1.25**	0.08	0.20	0.33	1.23**	0.12	1.98**	0.12
70-79	1.81**	0.15	-0.07	0.76	1.95**	0.19	2.67**	0.18
Male (ref.)								
Female	-0.04	0.04	-0.89**	0.14	-0.50**	0.06	-0.43**	0.05
Up to or below upper secondary school (ref.)								
Above upper secondary school	0.46**	0.04	0.18	0.14	0.64**	0.06	0.45**	0.05
Service-class workers (ref.)								
Routine non-manual workers	0.02	0.06	-0.10	0.19	-0.06	0.08	0.06	0.08
The self-employed	-0.01	0.08	-0.06	0.25	-0.25*	0.12	-0.07	0.10

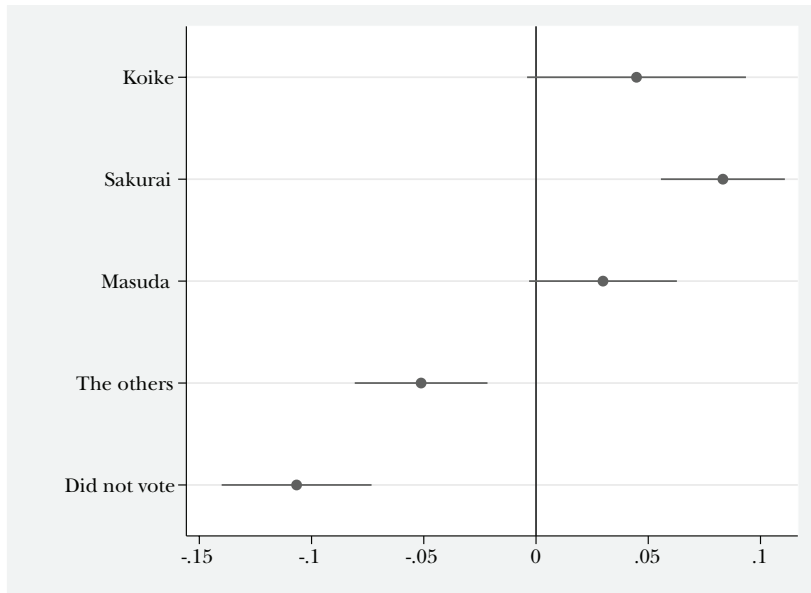
Table 5 continued next page

Table 5 continued
Multinomial Logistic Regression for Voting Behaviours in the Tokyo Governor's Election

Manual workers	-0.14	0.08	-0.25	0.25	-0.23	0.12	-0.06	0.10
Non-regular workers	0.03	0.05	0.06	0.19	-0.04	0.08	0.06	0.07
The unemployed and out of labour market	-0.01	0.05	0.25	0.18	-0.05	0.08	-0.02	0.07
Lower income (ref.)								
Middle income	0.19**	0.05	0.16	0.18	0.31**	0.09	0.02	0.07
Upper income	0.30**	0.07	0.06	0.22	0.58**	0.10	-0.08	0.08
No answer to income	0.04	0.07	-0.20	0.26	0.18	0.11	-0.28**	0.09
Married (ref.)								
Divorced/widowed	-0.38**	0.06	0.02	0.21	-0.43**	0.10	-0.29**	0.08
Never married	-0.34**	0.05	0.00	0.16	-0.20*	0.08	-0.16*	0.07
No child (ref.)								
Having a child	0.18**	0.04	-0.24	0.15	0.18**	0.07	-0.03	0.06
Intercepts	-0.48**	0.10	-3.35**	0.35	-1.90**	0.15	-1.61**	0.14
McFadden R-squared	0.04							

Note: n = 22,849, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05. Robust standard errors were used. A reference category was "did not vote."

Figure 4
Marginal Effects of an Online Right-winger Status



Note: Age, gender, education, occupation, household income, marital status, having a child or not were fixed at their mean values. $n = 21,326$.

online right-wingers in the past, little is known about their political orientations and how they position themselves in offline politics. The current study has sought to fill this knowledge gap.

Our results firstly showed that online right-wingers had more external political efficacy and lower levels of populist attitudes than other respondents, which precludes the assumption that online right-wingers are disgruntled populists; instead, they can be deemed politically satisfied conservatives. Low support for the sovereignty of the people might align with the pro-emperor orientation among traditional right-wing movements. The validity of this interpretation needs to be tested in a future study.

Second, online right-wingers were more likely to participate in elections and vote for right-wing parties and candidates. Surprisingly, online right-wingers voted more often for the LDP, the established conservative party, than for the newly emerging radical right-wing party, the PJK, or for Makoto Sakurai, who is a radical right-wing candidate. A large proportion of the votes cast for the PJK and Sakurai came from online right-wingers. This means that some online right-wingers form an actual support base of radical right parties and candidates; nevertheless, a larger proportion of online right-wingers did not limit their votes to radical right-wing parties or candidates, and their voting range was broad.

Our results suggest that Japanese online right-wingers behave differently than supporters of many radical right-wing movements in European countries, with the European supporters staying away from traditional, established, conservative parties.⁶¹ Japanese online right-wingers, on the other hand, do not reveal a strong difference in their voting behaviours from that observed amongst traditional conservatives. Members of a new type of radical right, who distance themselves from the established conservatives, form only a limited part of the online right-winger population in Japan. Even when there is a candidate representing one type of ACM, the majority of its members have chosen moderately conservative, rather than radically conservative, candidates. This finding supports the argument that radical right parties are not successful in Japan because the policies of the LDP government already encompass the voices of potential radical right voters. Or maybe the voters choose a better party or candidate from among those with a chance to win in the election, or to have power to influence policies. Even so, we can at least say that most online right-wingers regarded established conservatives as the most desirable parties or candidates to represent them and embody their political opinions. This finding could also be applicable to other countries where the government takes a right-leaning position; under such conditions, online right-wing movements are less likely to contribute to the emergence of radical right parties. Instead, they may contribute to strengthening the conservative government.

Specific limitations constrain the findings of this study. First, our operationalization of online right-wingers could be improved. Nationalistic political attitudes and unfavourable attitudes toward China and Korea had opposing effects in some of our analyses (results not shown). The political orientations and behaviours of online right-wingers may differ if they could be defined using only one of these criteria, or if different issues could be used to indicate nationalistic political attitudes. Therefore, different forms of operationalization need to be tested to verify the robustness of the current results. Using comments in cyberspace to operationally define online right-wingers is one option. In addition, this survey covered only respondents in the greater Tokyo area in 2017. In 2020, Sakurai ran for the Tokyo governor's election for the second time. He ranked fifth again, but his votes increased by more than 60,000, despite a decline in the voting rate. This may be because there were no candidates approved by the LDP, which led to more radical right votes being cast to the radical right candidate. However, further investigation is needed to ascertain the reason for this increase. Finally, this study treats online right-wingers as one category. However, as we mentioned in the introduction, online right-wingers may comprise a mixture of

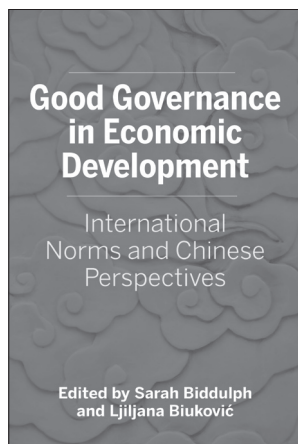
⁶¹ Bartlett, Birdwell, and Littler, *The New Face of Digital Populism*, 59–74; Stier et al., “When Populists Become Popular”; Schmidtke, “Politicizing Social Inequality.”

conservative groups with different ideological standpoints. Detailed analysis of differences within online right-wing populations remains a future task.

Many discourses regarding Japanese online right-wingers exist, although few studies investigate how they behave in electoral politics and the potential voting consequences. Therefore, more quantitative and qualitative studies need to be conducted to derive an accurate understanding of the political impact of online right-wingers. This study lays the groundwork for achieving this goal.

University of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan, January 2021

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