

MP-IDSA *Issue Brief*

The Rise of the Far-Right in Japan

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December 01, 2025

Summary

Sohei Kamiya's far-right populist Sanseito captured 14 seats (in addition to a previously existing seat) in the July 2025 elections to the House of Councillors, the Upper House of the Japanese Diet. The Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement, along with its defining policy approaches and worldview, has found resonance among certain sections of the electorate in Japan.

Introduction

The Japanese far-right has emerged as a radical challenger to the conservative socio-political landscape, long dominated by the incumbent Liberal Democratic Party. (LDP). The electoral and populist support for Sohei Kamiya’s Sanseito represents the tangible outcome of multiple factors, including growing economic pressures, the transnationalisation of far-right (MAGA) ideas across the Pacific, and socio-political mobilisation through digital platforms. The far-right’s rise in Japan is neither unprecedented nor emerging in a vacuum. Instead, it has been enabled by a broader ecosystem and past precedents that created a fertile ground for its emergence through different avenues. This brief contextualises the rise of Sanseito.

Digital Mobilisation and Initial Breakthrough

Sanseito’s rise through YouTube in 2020 was initially facilitated by the lockdown measures imposed due to the pandemic and a worldwide gravitational shift towards social media platforms like X, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, amid increasing uncertainty, chaos, and an influx of information—credible and debunked by securing 2 per cent of vote share in the 2022 House of Councillors election, Sohei Kamiya broke through the minimum threshold requirements to emerge as a political stakeholder in Japan.

Sanseito increased its vote share to 14 seats in the 2025 elections to the Upper House by campaigning on the *Japanese First* (similar to the *America First* narrative promulgated by MAGA nationalists) narrative. At the core of its nationalistic fervour lay advocating the notion of protecting Japan’s unique cultural heritage by rolling back legislation such as the LGBT Understanding Promotion Act, 2023 and retaining welfare funds solely for ethnic Japanese. This is presented in benign packaging as one of its 10 Pillars for New-Nation Building,¹ whose ultimate objective is stated as ‘building a national identity that protects and nurtures Japan’s freedom, culture, and uniqueness’.

Economic Crises and Japanese Populism

Such ideas resonated in a country confronting multiple crises, including inflation and economic strain that grew more pronounced. Over the past nine months, i.e., since February 2025, for instance, the Japanese Yen has devalued against the USD by over 2.5 per cent.² Meanwhile, expenses related to rice, a staple food (accounting

¹ “[10 Pillars for New-nation building vision](#)”, Sanseito.

² “[US Dollar to Japanese Yen History: 2025](#)”, *Exchange Rates.org.uk*.

for 50 per cent of the country’s inflation), have surged over the past few years. For example, rice available in supermarkets has skyrocketed to 4,235 Yen³ per 5 kilograms on average, marking at least a 50 per cent rise since 2023. Additionally, rice wholesalers were compelled to pay a 56 per cent increase, amounting to 163 Yen, due to a 56 per cent increase in Zen-Noh (National Federation of Agricultural Cooperative Associations) resulting from worsening inflation in Japan.

A survey of nearly 6,000 supermarkets conducted⁴ by the Agriculture Ministry indicated that the price surge has hit a record high since February 2025. Climate change has further exacerbated this crisis, as vagaries of weather have led to failed rice harvests in 2024 and 2025. Furthermore, observers have noted that regions such as Tohoku and Hokuriku recorded a record-breaking decrease in rainfall in July 2025. In the past, these areas have been significant contributors to Japan’s overall rice production. At the same time, rising temperatures can have adverse ramifications for rice production. Observers have warned⁵ that rising temperatures could lead to reduced rice production and, in turn, drive up prices due to a limited overall rice supply, leading to skyrocketing prices.

Immigrants, including short-term migrants such as students and tourists, are not the primary cause of the growing burden on the Japanese economy. However, misinformation and disinformation via alternative media consumption platforms, as has been the case in the US, fuelled this distorted narrative. Far-right actors have incorrectly linked immigration (only 3.4 million foreign residents out of a total population of 127 million, as per 2025 statistics) and tourism to the economic crisis, despite tourism being a major contributor to Japan’s economy. This has been one of the key drivers in creating a hyper-nationalist and insular worldview that has resonated with an electorate that (at least at the moment) overwhelmingly relies⁶ on proliferating video-sharing websites and social media platforms.

Enablers of Sanseito’s Rise

Far-right parties—past or present—have never emerged in a vacuum. Cycles of instability affecting working-class livelihoods amplify far-right messaging. Notably, Japan’s economy contracted by 2.5 per cent⁷ in 2025. Japan’s pre-existing

³ Kaori Kaneko, [“Japan’s Rice Prices on Rise Again in Test for New Prime Minister”](#), *Reuters*, 11 November 2025.

⁴ [“Rice Prices in Japan’s Supermarkets Hit Record High”](#), *NHK*, 14 November 2025.

⁵ Aaron Clark, [“Japan’s Rice Crop at Risk as Farms Face Record-breaking Heat”](#), *Japan Times*, 8 August 2025.

⁶ [“Line and YouTube Most Popular Social Media in Japan”](#), *Nippon.com*, 30 April 2025.

⁷ Makiko Yamazaki, [“New Reflationist Members at Japan’s Top Economic Panel Push for Big Stimulus”](#), *Reuters*, 12 November 2025.

challenges—COVID-19’s economic fallout, a decline in purchasing power, and uncertainty due to American tariffs—have also been exploited by far-right narratives. This concerning trend amplified even as mainstream political parties and media outlets struggled to counter the manipulation of facts with compelling counter-narratives.

Analysts also note that Sohei Kamiya’s use of immersive simulations through his DIY School Program ⁸ to indoctrinate new leaders and his fast-tracked training programme have contributed to Sanseito’s organisational success. Figures affiliated with Sanseito have promoted the notion of preserving Japanese culture and purity, building paranoia by referencing official Health Ministry statistics. The idea of being overrun by immigrants and becoming a minority draws inspiration from Replacement Theory⁹ promoted by MAGA hyper-nationalists and the European far-right. Statistics such as babies born to one or both foreign parents, offsetting ethnic Japanese babies by 50 per cent in 2024, have fuelled far-right propaganda.

Additionally, Kurdish minorities in Saitama have become fodder for tough immigration narratives, highlighted by Itsunori Onodera’s (a former LDP Policy Chief) Zero Illegal Foreigners Proposal¹⁰ in 2025. While the Kurdish issue (and anti-Kurdish sentiments) has been a long-standing concern in Japanese society, it has gained a lot of relevance due to the rise of Sanseito. As per information available in the open-source domain, the origins of the Japanese Kurdish community can be traced to Kurdish asylum seekers (fleeing political persecution and forced displacement in Turkiye) who migrated to Japan in the mid-1990s. By 2024, 10 per cent of 12,373 asylum seekers¹¹ had Turkish origins.

It can be argued¹² that the anti-Kurdish xenophobia is part of the broader question and anxiety about national identity and immigration. Nonetheless, key issues such as garbage collection, recycling, noise control, public brawls and law-and-order problems, and their perceived correlation to the Kurdish community, as shown in the media, have been at the centre of the rising anti-Kurdish wave in Saitama Prefecture.¹³

⁸ [“What is Sanseito DIY School \(SDS\)?”](#), Sanseito.

⁹ Lara Bullens, [“How France’s ‘Great Replacement’ Theory Conquered the Global Far- Right”](#), *France24*, 8 November 2021.

¹⁰ Maximilien Xavier Rehm, [“Ishiba Walks a Political Tightrope on Migration”](#), *East Asia Forum*, 19 July 2025.

¹¹ Chiaki Tsuchida, [“Kurds Increasingly Deported After Japan Closes ‘Loophole’ Law”](#), *openDemocracy*, 16 October 2025.

¹² Roy Matsumoto, [“Japan’s Immigration Policy and the Kurdish Population”](#), The Foreign Policy Research Institute, 5 June 2025.

¹³ Yasuda Kōichi, [“Japanese Hate Groups Targeting Kurdish Community”](#), *Nippon.com*, 24 October 2024.

Meanwhile, mainstream political leaders such as Sanae Takaichi and Shigeru Ishiba have latched onto anti-immigrant sentiments to remain politically relevant. Upon his accession to the premiership, Ishiba established the Office for the Promotion of a Society for Harmonious Coexistence with Foreign Nationals, which has faced criticism for fuelling xenophobic sentiments, even under the current leader.¹⁴ PM Takaichi ran on the platform that foreign immigrants are harmful to national cohesion, even citing alleged tourist abuse of deer in Nara.¹⁵ Following her victory, she has accorded this office high priority and called on her Cabinet to review Japan’s policies regarding foreign nationals residing in the country.

Historical and Ideational Rationales

Sanseito’s rise to popularity has been aided by the far right. The National Socialist Japanese Workers’ Party (promoting hypernationalism and xenophobia), a popular wave of historical revisionism in the 1990s, and the rise of right-wing netizens (*netto uyoku*) moulded Japan’s far-right ecosystem. Far-right digital mobilisation has even translated into physical assaults and other hate crimes,¹⁶ primarily against the Korean community.

Moreover, it has been observed that the Japanese Emperor’s centrality (as a shared symbol of national identity linked to the Japanese empire’s militaristic past versus the symbolic and pacifist role attached to the Imperial Household in the post-war era), territorial disputes with neighbouring countries like South Korea, and nationalistic fervour in previous decades shaped the far-right momentum. Previously, Shinzo Abe’s domestic posture,¹⁷ including emphasis on collective self-defence, downplaying wartime actions, and visiting Yasukuni Shrine, marked an initial shift away from the pacifist character imposed by the Allied forces after Japan’s surrender in World War II.¹⁸

Meanwhile, one must also broadly account for the presence of *Uyoku Dantai* (right-wing groups), an umbrella term which encompasses internet trolls and ultra-nationalist activists who are united by shared belief systems, including Japanese denial of complicity in war crimes, hyper nationalism and militarism. One broad comparison that can be drawn here with the MAGA movement is that, like the latter,

¹⁴ Jeff W. Richards, [“Japan Today Spotlight #39 | Japan’s ‘Foreigner Problem’: Kimi Onoda and the Politics of Coexistence”](#), *Japan Today*, 30 October 2025.

¹⁵ [“Takaichi Says She Once Warned English Speaker for Kicking Deer”](#), *Japan Today*, 11 November 2025.

¹⁶ Sonia Sarkar, [“Transnational White Supremacy: Digital Violent Extremism from West to East”](#), Insights, Global Network on Extremism & Technology, 1 August 2025.

¹⁷ Christopher W. Hughes, [“An ‘Abe Doctrine’ As Japan’s Grand Strategy: New Dynamism or Dead-End?”](#), *Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 30, 27 July 2015.

¹⁸ [“Occupation and Reconstruction of Japan, 1945-52”](#), Office of the Historian.

which has rejected institutionalised racism in the US and Critical Race Theory¹⁹ and banned related books’ circulation in public libraries, the far-right section of Japanese society has sought to whitewash war crimes committed by Imperial Japan. The American and Japanese far-right perceive discussion about systemic racism (American society culture) and Japanese complicity²⁰ in war crimes, respectively, as far-left or communist propaganda.

Finally, some organisations, like The Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact, situated in Tokyo, have attempted to justify the attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941 and the use of so-called ‘comfort women’ by Japanese forces during the wartime era. History taught in junior schools in Japan often overlooks or underplays events such as the Nanjing Massacre²¹ (1937). The organisation’s Chairman, Hiromichi Moteki, has previously argued that

Every country has the right to consider its own history in its own way. There was a war, but Japan was defeated, so the victors say that all the causes were Japan’s fault. It is our policy to dispute this...²²

Arguably, organisations such as this play a key role in legitimising the historical and ideological narrative of far-right populists in Japan. They do so by denying or refuting Japan’s wartime actions and promoting re-militarisation within Japanese society. Furthermore, they seek to rewrite history and influence public discourse, further bolstering historical revisionist ideas promoted by the far-right.

Youth Backlash, Disinformation and Transnational Populist Bridges

Interestingly, on the one hand, the anti-immigrant and replacement theory narrative, along with rallying around the deep state and foreign elements in Japan, has also emerged as an echo chamber for the American MAGA. It has unified the far-right populists from North America to the Pacific. For example, the late far-right commentator and podcast host, Charlie Kirk, during his visit to East Asia in the lead-up to his death, met the Sanseito leaders and hailed their big fight against globalism. He had even argued that further immigration would ensure that “Japan’s not Japan

¹⁹ Stephen Sawchuk, [“What Is Critical Race Theory, and Why Is It Under Attack?”](#), Education Week, 18 May 2021.

²⁰ Fujiwara Kiichi, [“Memory Wars: Politics of War Remembrance in Japan”](#), Sasakawa Peace Foundation, 20 May 2002.

²¹ Fan Wang, [“We Were Never Friends: A Massacre on the Eve of WW2 Still Haunts China-Japan Relations”](#), *BBC News*, 15 August 2025.

²² Julian Ryall, [“Japan’s Struggle with History”](#), *DW*, 15 August 2017.

anymore... that’s not xenophobia, it’s common sense.”²³ This trend appears to be the manifestation of global far-right groups bound by shared concerns/hostilities/antagonisms rather than an ideational consensus.

As President Donald Trump has used Truth Social and X as his key communication and outreach platforms, Sohei Kamiya has used YouTube as his brand platform for similar purposes. Since the anti-globalist worldview has accompanied the hyper-nationalism prevailing from North America to the Pacific, it remains unsurprising that, like Trump, Sohei Kamiya has lambasted the apparently adverse impact of globalisation on Japanese society. He has argued that “under globalism, multinational companies have changed Japan’s policies for their own purposes. If we fail to resist this foreign pressure, Japan will become a colony.”²⁴ The following table briefly summarises the broad similarities between the MAGA movement and the Japanese First movement.

Dimensions	US	Japan	Convergences/Parallels
Core Focus/Slogan/Agenda	America First/MAGA	Japanese First	Hyper nationalism & insular outlook/protectionism.
Ideational Focus/Core Identity Determinant	Anti-liberalism/immigration/woke culture/anti-establishment, & promotion of Gender Binaries/Family Centrality, anti-white nationalism, replacement theory.	Anti-globalisation, anti-LGBT, anti-establishment, ethno-Japanese nationalism, foreign invasion/tourists & immigrants as threats to Japanese homogeneity	Anti-establishment, ethno-nationalist, xenophobic, conspiracy theory & ultra-conservative narratives.
Leader and Media/Mobilisation Strategies	Donald Trump + Truth Social & X	Sohei Kamiya + YouTube + crash course/training programme for party members	Personality-driven leadership with extensive reliance on digital platforms for outreach and mobilisation.

As the LDP faced scandals and leadership volatility (post-Shinzo Abe) over the past few years, it has failed to address the worsening economic insecurities of the working

²³ Mithil Aggarwal, “[Charlie Kirk as Spreading His Conservative Message in Asia Days Before He Was Killed](#)”, *NBC News*, 12 September 2025.

²⁴ Shaimaa Khalil, “[The Rise of the Far-right ‘Japanese First’ Party](#)”, *BBC News*, 21 July 2025.

class and first-time voters. As a result, they began turning towards more radical parties like Sanseito. The Japanese First narrative promulgated by Sanseito resonated with the youth who had become disillusioned with the perceived mishandling of the rising inflation and other economic issues by parties like the LDP. In fact, at least 20 per cent of 18–19-year-old voters supported it in the July elections.²⁵ Moreover, according to a survey conducted by the Asahi Shimbun, 71 per cent of young voters polled supported Sanseito.²⁶ In contrast, nationwide, a study conducted by the Asahi Shimbun found that 71 per cent of young voters supported Sanseito. In comparison, a survey conducted by the Asahi Shimbun found that 71 per cent of young voters polled supported Sanseito, while nationwide, 48 per cent of Japanese endorsed the Japanese First platform.

Simultaneously, the weaponisation of information has proven particularly effective for Sanseito in rallying support. The lack of checks and verifications, besides news disseminated across multiple digital platforms (beyond YouTube), including Ni-Channel (2ch, as Ni means ‘two’ in Japanese) and NicoNico Douga,²⁷ has boosted its anti-immigration platform. In August 2025, there was public outcry²⁸ when unverified information about a potential influx of African immigrants to ease labour shortages (amid reports of a requirement of 6.88 million²⁹ workers by 2040 to meet growth targets) was released.

Shinichi Yamaguchi, an Associate Professor at the International University of Japan, found that only 14.5 per cent³⁰ of viewers could effectively assess online information literacy. That is a concerning yet mainstream phenomenon on a global scale over the past few years. Additionally, Japan’s Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications’ White Paper reported that approximately 73 per cent of the Japanese society consumes news through non-traditional online platforms.³¹ This document also reported that 50 per cent of Japanese society now relies on the internet for information, deeming it a necessary source.³² Additionally, *NHK*, Japan’s

²⁵ Peter Bennett, [“Japan First! The Recent Rise of the Far-Right in Japan and the Future of Japanese Politics”](#), Pacific Forum, 15 August 2025.

²⁶ [“Poll: 48% of Voters Say ‘Japanese First’ Works for Them”](#), *The Asahi Shimbun*, 28 July 2025.

²⁷ J. Berkshire Miller, [“Loud for Their Size: Japan’s Right Wing and Social Media”](#), Global Asia, June 2014.

²⁸ [“Japan Scrambles to Refute Claims It is Bringing in a ‘Flood’ of Africans”](#), *The Asahi Shimbun*, 26 August 2025.

²⁹ Erika Yokoyama and Keiko Ujikane, [“Japan’s Foreign Workforce Hits Fresh Record as Labor Crisis Deepens”](#), *The Japan Times*, 31 January 2025.

³⁰ [“Could Social Media Sway the Upper House election?”](#), *NHK*, 18 July 2025.

³¹ [“Almost Three Quarters of Japan Looks Online First for News, White Paper Reports”](#), *The Japan Times*, 8 July 2025.

³² Ibid.

public broadcaster, has highlighted how the inability to gauge credibility significantly influences election results.³³

More importantly, it is interesting to note the posts here. Today, its YouTube channel has approximately half a million subscribers, *vis-à-vis* the LDP’s struggle to cross 200,000. Stephen Nagy, a Visiting Fellow at the Japan Institute for International Affairs, has argued that, following the election results

The fact that Sanseito won suggests that ordinary Japanese people are very economically insecure, and they are prioritising their immediate economic needs over the sustainability of the state.³⁴

Conclusion

Sanseito has effectively tapped into the growing frustration fuelled by misinformation. It has been suggested that the aid provided to Chinese doctoral students does not require repayment. This is even as Japanese students struggle to repay education loans.³⁵ Such misinformation has been compounded by the depreciating value of wages, the perceived ‘silent invasion’ of foreigners, and the astronomical cost-of-living crisis, especially among middle-class workers. The transnational impact of far-right extremist movements like MAGA has also shaped socio-political ruptures in Japan. Sanseito has effectively exploited digital platforms, economic anxieties, and disinformation to gain electoral benefits. Sanseito now faces the challenge of achieving a parliamentary majority to implement its ethno-nationalist agenda, though this seems unlikely in the immediate future.

³³ [“Could Social Media Sway the Upper House Election?”](#), no. 30.

³⁴ Chad de Guzman, [“Inspired by Trump, an Insurgent Far-Right Party Wants to Make Japan Great Again”](#), *TIME*, 1 August 2025.

³⁵ Suvendrini Kakuchi, [“Concerns Over Conservative Policy Impact on Foreign Students”](#), *University World News*, 28 October 2025.

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