

# YouTube and Japan’s New Political Underground: The Rise and Decline of The Party to Protect the People From NHK

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**Abstract:** *Rising from obscurity to attain a seat in the upper house of the Diet in summer 2019, the Party to Protect the People from NHK and its leader, Tachibana Takashi, have utilized a purely internet-based strategy to establish a community-cum-forum for voices locked out of the mainstream media. This article attempts to establish a foundation for understanding the new Japanese internet politics heralded by the emergence of this party through a chronicling of the party’s rise and decline, and an ethnographic analysis of the viewer experience of the October 2019 livestream of its Ikebukuro speeches.*

**Keywords:** *The Party to Protect the People From NHK, internet politics, NHK, Tachibana Takashi, YouTube, Media distrust in Japan*

Something peculiar appeared on Japanese YouTube’s front page in the summer of 2019. What usually touted entertainment and news stories now included videos posted by two small political parties, Reiwa Shinsengumi and The Party to Protect the People from NHK (*NHK kara kokumin wo mamoru tō*; hereafter abbreviated to N-Koku). In advance of the July 2019 election of the House of Councillors (upper house of the Japanese Diet), these new political parties issued livestreamed appeals to Japanese internet users. Subscribing to N-Koku party leader Tachibana Takashi’s channel revealed a swathe of videos, where, before a

whiteboard, he explained why his party promoted the “destruction” of Japan’s national public broadcaster, NHK (*Nippon hōsō kyōkai*), and how he intended to protect the Japanese people from what he called the “viciousness” of NHK license fee collectors.



**The NHK *gekitai shiru*.**

When Tachibana managed to actually win a seat in the Diet on 21 July 2019, despite being ignored by the traditional mass media, it became apparent that he was not just another fringe candidate. How had N-Koku, which relied solely on YouTube for publicity, transcended the inertia of the Japanese politico-media complex? Tachibana, I argue, utilized YouTube’s transformative power to constitute a community rooted in the feeling of what Feuer (1983) referred to as “liveness”, or the appearance of showing things as they are.

This community, which uses its own grammar to map Japanese politics and society, took advantage of the system of proportional representation to acquire a modicum of political power, bypassing the mass media's gatekeeping.

Japanese politics have been shielded from the effects of the digital revolution until recently, to the extent that the mere act of electoral campaigning via the internet was prohibited by law until 2013 (Yuasa 2013). Furthermore, while western countries, such as America, Britain, and Germany, have been roiled by media distrust and polarization of political opinion rooted in the proliferation of partisan media, Hayashi (2017) asserts that Japan has been mostly spared by these phenomena, and that Japanese media distrust is defined instead by indifference. The emergence of N-Koku, however, suggests that the internet's influence has finally begun to percolate into the Japanese political mainstream, and brought with it the same sort of media distrust that has defined populist movements right across the world. As younger audiences abandon traditional media—particularly NHK—the power of such institutions to act as a political gatekeeper has been called into question.

N-Koku functions as a cathartic outlet for frustration with the mass media, and those who are silenced by it have found a forum in N-Koku livestreams and comment sections. This function, however, is not limited to N-Koku: a decline in its influence in late 2019–early 2020 created space for various new communities, mirroring N-Koku's modality, and the impact of such entities on Japanese politics can be expected to increase. Through a chronicling of N-Koku's rise and decline, this article hopes to shed light on the transformative power of internet communities, but also on the limitations inherent in a medium defined by its ephemerality.

## **Tachibana, NHK in Crisis, and the Origin of N-Koku**

Tachibana Takashi was born in Izumiōtsu, Osaka Prefecture, in 1967 and grew up in an Osaka tower block (Tachibana 2018c). At fifteen, he left the difficult confines of his family home and began making money through part-time work and pachinko. He wanted to go to university, but was prevented from doing so by the poor quality of his high school, which failed to prepare students for the required exams (Tachibana 2018c). One of his teachers suggested he sit the exam to enter NHK. He passed and attended an interview at the Osaka Broadcasting Station (Tachibana 2018c). During the interview, he claimed that he discussed the NHK television license fee (*jushinryō*), presuming that, as a mere high school graduate, license fee collection (work as a 'money collector', or *shūkinnin*) would be the only job open to him. His own household had a history of not paying the license fee, and he claims he stated in the interview that as someone who had lived in such a household, he knew how he could convince people to pay: to explain that NHK, as a public broadcaster funded equally by all Japanese, served as a bulwark to prevent future wars in the interest of a small elite (Tachibana 2018c). He passed and went to work at the Wakayama Broadcasting Station in 1986 and later worked in the accounting department at NHK's Tokyo headquarters from 1998 (Tachibana 2018c).

Tachibana is a product of Japan's post-war economic boom. While on the fringes of respectable society in his youth, he experienced both the pinnacle of Japan's growth, and the education-work system that had underpinned it, as well as its collapse. Likewise, he observed a similar pattern in NHK. NHK was founded in the aftermath of the Second World War in consultation with the American occupation government (Murakami 2008). Its aim was to provide a public space for discourse to promote democracy (Suzuki 2016,

50), and, as Tachibana said in his interview, to militate against a recurrence of the sort of warmongering that had been prevalent in Japanese media in the run up to and during the Second World War (Matsuda 2014, 66-70). NHK dominated Japan's media landscape throughout the post-war period. By the 1980s, NHK aired more hours than any other network worldwide and ranked as Japan's most trusted societal institution (Krauss 1996, 91). While NHK has long been criticized as a servant of the Japanese state, as Krauss (1996) documents, most people remained satisfied with its "minimalization of conflict" model of news coverage until recently.

This began to change in the 1980s-1990s. As NHK came under pressure from private competition, it lobbied for revisions to the 1950 Broadcasting Law (*Hōsōhō*) to allow it to venture into commercial pursuits (Krauss 2000, 198-199). These took place in 1982 and 1988 (Krauss 2000, 198-199), and sparked a shift in the way NHK produced content. Like Britain's BBC, NHK began outsourcing most content creation to private companies, eschewing in-house production (Matsuda 2014, 191). One of these was Sōgō Vision, a joint venture of new NHK subsidiary NHK Enterprises and powerful advertising firm Dentsu that was founded in 1986 (Krauss 2000, 199-200). Tachibana (2019d; 2019f) posits the partnership between Dentsu and NHK, specifically as it related to sporting event broadcast rights, as allowing for commercial interests to subvert NHK's public mission. Gradually, Tachibana (2019d) says, NHK began to be "taken over" by Dentsu.

While such a sweeping claim cannot be verified, Yamakoshi (2013) documents how the shift toward a private television-like model resulted in the dilution of NHK's role as a public broadcaster. Essentially, the outsourcing process led to the creation of content which, as far as the average viewer can discern, is no different from that aired by private television channels (Yamakoshi 2013, 171). According to

Yamakoshi (2013, 169), this decline in the publicness of NHK content, the proliferation of alternative television channels in the 1990s and the subsequent rise of the internet, compounded by a series of widely documented scandals in the 2000s, created a perfect storm that drove many viewers away from NHK. Those scandals culminated in the January 2005 resignation of then chairman Ebisawa Katsuji (*The Japan Times* 2005a), with who Tachibana claims to have had a working relationship (Tachibana 2019d). One of the effects of this fall into opprobrium was a sudden increase in the public's refusal to pay the license fee (*The Japan Times* 2005a).

The license fee system was established by the Broadcasting Law as NHK's sole source of revenue (Krauss 1996, 90). As Tachibana himself has explained, the purpose of the system was to make NHK, as a public broadcaster, accountable to the Japanese people, rather than to the government or private companies. This was in contrast to the pre-war state-funded (*kokuei hōsō*) version of NHK, and also to advertising-beholden private broadcasters (*minpō*). In the year following Ebisawa's resignation, more than a million households refused to pay the license fee (*Asahi Shimbun* 2005). Revenue dropped by more than 47 billion yen (410 million US dollars), compelling the company to issue wide-reaching plans for restructuring (*The Hollywood Reporter* 2006). *The Japan Times* (2005b) even published a satirical article about how to repel NHK money collectors.

The fallout from these scandals was only the thin end of the wedge: competition from alternative media was steadily chipping away at NHK viewership, especially among young people. Nakamura and Yonekura (2008, 112-115) found that older people were much more likely to report frequently watching and being satisfied with NHK. Crucially, they also found that frequent internet use corresponded with distrust in and dissatisfaction with NHK,

and that only 21% of frequent internet users surveyed believed public television was accountable to its viewers (Nakamura and Yonekura 2008, 121-122). By all accounts, NHK was in crisis.

Tachibana entered NHK having embraced the idealistic post-war conception of public broadcasting, but this quickly came into conflict with the reality that he observed. Among other unsavory dealings, Tachibana says he was ordered to create a 30 million-yen (about 281 thousand US dollars) slush fund (*uragane*) while working for NHK during the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics (*Shūkan Bunshun* 2005) (Tachibana 2019e). Over time, he became so disillusioned with the company's working practices that he says he fell into mental illness.<sup>1</sup> In 2005 he became a whistleblower and leaked an account of inappropriate activities he said he had been forced to carry out to the weekly magazine *Shūkan Bunshun* (Tachibana 2018c). Following the publication of this exposé, Tachibana was sanctioned for "fraudulent accounting" by NHK, presumably as a reprisal for leaking the information, and quit the company (Tachibana 2018c). Subsequent years were marked by divorce and mental illness. He moonlighted as a "freelance journalist" and played pachinko professionally, which became his primary source of income (Tachibana 2018c). His spare time was spent posting about NHK, politics, pachinko, and other matters on the popular Japanese forum 2channel.<sup>2</sup>

In 2011, however, Tachibana decided to take the fight back to NHK, and founded his first YouTube channel (Tachibana 2019k). With NHK facing increasing distrust from actors on both the political left and right, competition from internet media, so-called *terebi-banare* (declining television viewership) among the youth, and increasing license fee non-payment, Tachibana used his knowledge of the company's inner workings to launch an assault on its privileged position within the Japanese

societal framework. This began in earnest with the establishment of the *Tachibana hitori hōsōkyoku* ('Tachibana one-man broadcasting station') internet television channel in 2012: from his tiny room in Sakai (Tachibana Takashi Back-up 2019), Tachibana began to broadcast NHK's misdeeds to audiences across Japan and the world. The one-man broadcasting station was established as a stock company; within two months, Tachibana had sold stock to 137 people, amounting to a total of more than six million yen (over 65 thousand US dollars) in investment<sup>3</sup> (Tachibana 2012). In 2013, the company evolved into the political party N-Koku.

**Tachibana's "manual" to the Broadcast Law, and the "safe" way to avoid paying the NHK license fee.**

The stated objective of Tachibana and N-Koku has always been to “protect” the *kokumin* (the people) from NHK’s misdeeds. This might seem absurd, given that NHK is a public broadcaster whose official mission is to serve the *kokumin*. Although Tachibana does not align himself with broader attacks from the Japanese political right on the specific content of NHK programs (FCCJ 2019, 15:20), he argues that the company’s production of reprehensible content is rooted in its increasing commercialization and its resulting relationship with Dentsu (Tachibana 2019d). Instead, his activities focus on faults within the license fee system, and the conduct of NHK money collectors. With people refusing to pay a company that they no longer trusted, Tachibana documented an ominous change in the behavior of the NHK money collectors (FCCJ 2019, 46:42). According to the Broadcasting Law, all who own devices capable of receiving an NHK signal are required to establish a contract with the company (Suzuki 2016, 50-51) and pay the license fee. But in a legal oddity, it does not establish a punishment for failing to pay (Tachibana 2019c). With no means of criminally prosecuting non-payers, NHK has resorted to using money collectors to pressure people into paying. N-Koku portrays the NHK money collector as a yakuza-like character banging on doors for hours on end, demanding that individuals pay or face “the consequences” (FCC 2019, 46:10).

Tachibana has seized on alleged instances of fraud, and forcing people without televisions to sign NHK contracts, even releasing a professionally dramatized re-enactment of one such case on 1 July 2020.<sup>4</sup> Collection, Tachibana argues, has been outsourced to numerous companies connected to *hanshakaiteki-seiryoku* (Tachibana 2018a), a Japanese term which can be loosely translated as “anti-social forces”, and includes the yakuza. *The Japan Times* reported in 2006 that NHK spent 76.9 billion yen (nearly 722 million US

dollars) yearly on collection, amounting to 12.4% of its annual income, with roughly 59.7 billion going to external contractors (Clarke 2006).

The figure of the NHK money collector is central to the N-Koku narrative. Viral videos show Tachibana and his associates trapping them in so-called *obikiyose sakusen* (‘drawing-out operations’), repelling them from people’s houses. He also created the so-called “Repel NHK Sticker” (*NHK gekitai shīru*). These are distributed freely by the party, and their display on households’ doors is intended to signify that the residents are more trouble than they are worth (Tachibana 2020, 12:11), repelling money collectors much as Shinto talismans are believed to repel misfortune. Tachibana has also opened a call center to field queries from *kokumin* who are harassed by money collectors or seeking advice on “safe” ways to avoid paying the license fee. Perhaps even more troubling for NHK, he has promoted the IRANEHK (‘I don’t need NHK’) device, which filters out NHK’s television signal, rendering the television that it is attached to incapable of receiving NHK content (Tachibana 2018b). The Tokyo District Court upheld a woman’s claim that the use of this device negated her obligation to pay the license fee in June 2020 (Jiji Press 2020b), legitimizing Tachibana’s promotion of it as a way to deny NHK revenue.

Until 2019, N-Koku’s activities were largely limited to this sort of grassroots “protection” of what Tachibana refers to as the “victims” of the NHK license fee system. Tachibana, however, had something grander in mind as a permanent solution to the “NHK problem” (*NHK mondai*): implement “scramble broadcasting” (*sukuramburu hōsō*), whereby only people wishing to watch NHK would have to pay for it. As mentioned above, Tachibana’s promotion of scramble broadcasting as a method to “destroy” NHK is unrelated to content (FCCJ 2019, 15:20). Rather, it aims to eliminate

problems with the license fee system (FCCJ 2019, 15:20), such as money collectors, the lack of punishment for non-payment, and the inequality created by license-fee payers subsidizing those who do not pay (FCCJ 2019, 36:00). Tachibana has often said that most Japanese are probably in favor of scramble broadcasting, even if it is unlikely to be implemented by Japanese politicians. A joint opinion poll by the Fujisankei group conducted in early August 2019 seemed to confirm Tachibana's belief, with 51.1% favoring his scramble broadcasting policy (*Sankei Shimbun* 2019a). As a "destroyer", Tachibana says that his role is limited to clearing a path for the creation of something new (FCCJ 2019, 5:40). As such, he has declared that he will quit politics when scramble broadcasting is implemented, and N-Koku has thus been labeled a "single-issue" party (TV Tokyo News 2019). Tachibana's goal, then, was clear. All he had to do now was make the Japanese people aware of his plans, and the only thing standing in his way was the Japanese mass media.

### Tachibana's "Name-Selling" Strategy

In Japan, political parties only receive media coverage from major outlets if they have received a certain threshold of support. This practice is loosely based on the 1994 Political Party Subsidies Law (*Seitōjoseihō*). To be recognized as a political party, it is necessary to either have more than five members in the Diet, or attain more than 2% of the vote in the most recent upper or lower house election (*Asahi Shimbun* 2019b). Though there is no law requiring it, a party that does not meet the aforementioned (or a similar) threshold will typically be represented in election coverage and results as *shoha*, or "minor parties".<sup>5</sup> Such parties are not even granted the right to use their *name* in the public media space, effectively banishing them from the airwaves. The Japanese media thus serves as a

gatekeeper of participation in Japanese politics. If a political party or group receives no coverage, most people simply will not know about its existence or its policies.

Tachibana has always been keenly aware of this reality, claiming often that this represents the media's suppression of the Japanese people's right to know what is truly going on in the country. To enter the political world and attain media coverage, Tachibana would need to bypass the aforementioned byzantine system of official and unofficial media rules. To do this, N-Koku needed to become a *kōtō*, or "official party," by meeting the necessary threshold. NHK's reform would remain impossible unless people *knew* about his party — and, as Tachibana has said, "television is more powerful than a nuclear weapon" (Tachibana 2018c, 34:44).

This factored heavily into Tachibana's planning for the 2019 upper house election, which began in 2013, soon after N-Koku's establishment (Bunshun Online 2019). Since the electoral reform of 1982, a block of Diet seats has been chosen through proportional representation. Following another reform in 2000 (House of Councillors, no date), votes cast for any party candidate fielded in electoral districts are additionally counted in the party's race for proportional seats. Tachibana saw that if he took advantage of this system, there was a chance that he could gain a seat and meet the 2% threshold for becoming an official party, forcing the mass media to provide him coverage (Tachibana 2019).

Japan has a vibrant tradition of political broadcasts (*seiken hōsō*). As part of the electoral process, candidates must pay a fee, called *kyōtakukin* ('deposit'). The amount required depends on the type of election (30 million yen for an upper house election), and the full amount is returned to candidates who receive a certain level of support (*Asahi Shimbun* 2019c). The fee grants campaigning

candidates certain privileges, such as the ability to hang posters on official boards (Tachibana 2018d) and—crucially—the opportunity to record a video declaring one’s candidacy and manifesto for broadcast on NHK (Tachibana 2018d). Fringe candidates with little chance of election have long used these videos to air their views, and some broadcasts now go viral on YouTube.<sup>6</sup> Tachibana realized early on that Japanese elections were not just about winning: they could also provide a vehicle for “name-selling” (*baimei*), or self-promotion (Hatakeyama 2019). For the 2019 upper house election, Tachibana devised a battery of broadcasts, aired on NHK itself, that vowed to destroy the broadcaster.

N-Koku ran a slate of 37 candidates across the country (*Asahi Shimbun* 2019c), each airing their own broadcast. Many went viral online, notably Kadota Setsuyo’s impersonation of three sisters debating whether to pay the license fee.<sup>7</sup> Tachibana’s broadcast was designed to shock, including the repetition of the phrase *furin rojō kā sekkusu*, or “adulterous on-the-road car sex,” in reference to an adultery scandal at NHK.<sup>8</sup> Tachibana later acknowledged that perhaps he had joked excessively during the broadcast, but it received 5.6 million views on YouTube (Tachibana 2019a). Tachibana’s trademark phrase “Destroy NHK!” (*NHK wo bukkowasu!*) was even reported by *Tokyo Sports* (2019) as being popular among Japanese primary schoolers. Many Japanese who had become dissatisfied with the heavily choreographed, conflict-nullifying nature of the media empathized with this approach, regardless of whether they supported Tachibana. Ultimately, the political broadcast served to draw viewers to the heart of N-Koku’s activities: Tachibana’s YouTube channel.

His first channel of substance was created in 2012; he was subsequently forced to create multiple new channels, owing to recurring bans. Japan’s YouTube space includes myriad

small-time channels and several *ōmono* (‘big players’) represented by the UUM management company. In 2017, the *Nikkei Shimbun* reported that Japanese YouTubers were worth more than 21.9 billion yen (Sakakibara 2018), and as of August 2020, the most popular Japanese YouTuber, Hajime Syacho, had 8.76 million subscribers (Social Blade 2020a). Like their peers across the globe, Japanese youth watch YouTube for entertainment and, increasingly, for news.

Digital media like YouTube allow lone individuals to exploit the power of broadcasting in a way that was impossible during the twentieth century (Ricke 2010, 115–118); for Tachibana, they allowed him to bypass the mass media’s gatekeeping, and beam his message directly to the Japanese people. As a new kind of politician not associated with a traditional political party and outside the highly choreographed realm of Japanese politics that one sees on television, Tachibana offered viewers what Feuer (1983) identified as “liveness” and the appearance of reality. Tanaka (2012, 36) found that the Japanese internet media identifies itself with a modality of truth ignored by the mass media, and Tachibana arguably served as a momentary champion of the internet’s fight to bring that truth into the open.

Tachibana’s videos typically adopt several distinct formats, which serve to give his image an unpolished and authentic feel. The most common of these is that of him standing before a whiteboard, explaining the Broadcasting Law, teaching the *kokumin* how to “safely” avoid paying the license fee, and how NHK and the Japanese media have been taken over by Dentsu. Compounding this emphasis on directness is Tachibana’s “money collector repulsion” video format. In these videos, Tachibana or his associates go to someone’s house as they are being visited by an NHK money collector and attempt to drive them away with legal arguments, or through sheer

force of will. In many cases, the mere fact that they are being filmed seems to repel the money collectors. Tachibana never seems to “turn off the camera”: whether his videos show meetings of party grandees, the live release of election results, or just him sitting in his flat with his three cats, the viewer is mesmerized by how they are seemingly beamed straight into Tachibana’s world.

Tachibana also appealed to livestreamers of all stripes, including both N-Koku-supporters *and* critics, to broadcast his speeches and other party activities on YouTube. While these events would always include an “official” stream, often consisting of Tachibana holding his laptop before him as he spoke, numerous other people came to host N-Koku-related content. These streamers would compete for views, each with their own unique style and commentary. At the peak of this competition in summer and autumn 2019, tens of seemingly unrelated people came together to host content simultaneously, and any N-Koku-related video or stream on YouTube would net significant viewers for even the most obscure streamers. In the wake of Tachibana’s victory, many “spin offs” of this network emerged, notably Hiratsuka Masayuki’s YouTube channel, which is addressed below. This network was critical to N-Koku’s growth as a community.

The combination of Tachibana’s YouTube strategy and latent support for his policy of scramble broadcasting brought him what many thought would be impossible; N-Koku won a seat in the 21 July 2019 election, attaining 3.02% of the national vote in electoral districts and meeting the conditions necessary to become an official political party (*Asahi Shimbun* 2019b). Tachibana had worked around the mass media blackout, and gained real political power.

The days after the election were marked by several media appearances on such programs as the Asahi-owned internet television channel

Abema’s *News Prime* (23 July) and Fuji Television’s morning news *Tokudane!* (29 July). Tachibana seized the opportunity to promote scramble broadcasting and explain how Japanese could legally avoid paying the NHK license fee. He received what might be delicately termed a cool reception and the flurry of coverage soon ended; he returned to churning out YouTube videos. Indeed, most television networks ignored both him and N-Koku-related news. One exception was a series of interviews with TV Tokyo, which began promoting its YouTube channel in spring-summer 2019 and has won praise among YouTube commenters for its coverage of news that otherwise goes unreported.<sup>9</sup>

Tachibana knew that things had not gone exactly to plan. Although he reached his goal of making N-Koku an official political party, his message continued to be forced off the air. In response, he turned to a strategy that he referred to as *akumei wa mumei ni masaru* — “it is better to be infamous than nameless.” He embraced the use of controversy to sell his “product” (TV Tokyo News 2019): by doing outrageous things, he believed he would finally get the coverage he thought he deserved.

### Into the Diet, and Out

On 1 August 2019, Tachibana entered the Diet, proudly displaying his member’s badge on his lapel. His first task upon arrival was to establish a *kaiha* (‘in-house group’). By forming a *kaiha*, Tachibana would ensure that N-Koku received a place on a committee, where he could hold ministers to account. He joined Watanabe Yoshimi, former leader of Your Party (*Minna no Tō*) to form a new *kaiha* called Your Party (*Asahi Shimbun* 2019d). While he had hoped to get a seat on the Internal Affairs Committee, which regulates NHK, N-Koku was placed on the Budget Committee (*Asahi Shimbun* 2019e). Next, he recruited new members to the party. Ultimately, he was able



to recruit only former Japan Innovation Party member Maruyama Hodaka (*Asahi Shimbun* 2019d). Finally, Tachibana installed journalist and former Tokyo gubernatorial candidate Uesugi Takashi as Secretary-General of N-Koku. Tachibana's organization of the party following his victory was the apex of his political career. Though the broadcast media largely ignored him in the weeks after his victory, he conducted numerous collaborations with Japanese YouTubers and livestreamed and recorded all his activities direct from his new Diet office. In one example, he attempted to meet with Diet member Konishi Hiroyuki, who he said had slandered him on Twitter. When Konishi refused to speak on the telephone, he approached his office, camera in hand, and tried to force entry (Tachibana, 2019h).<sup>10</sup> Moments of this nature not only defined Tachibana's YouTube channel but his politics too.

Tachibana attempted to use his Diet member status to arrange a meeting with NHK's chairman but was refused (*Mainichi Shimbun* 2019). It became clear to Tachibana that, on his own, he could never implement N-Koku's manifesto. In response to questions about what he planned to do with his Diet seat following his election, he quipped "Frankly, nothing," (Tachibana 2019b, :33) acknowledging that, as a lone Diet member, his ability to effect real legislative change was close to zero. He also realized that he was not suited to the Diet's way of doing business, and thus proclaimed the idea of *seiji to senkyo no bunri*—the separation of politics from elections (Yahoo News 2019). In this vision, controversial and "interesting" people like Tachibana would do the campaigning, while level-headed experts would fill the Diet seats. The road to scramble broadcasting would require expanding his party's influence, and to do this, he needed to gain more publicity and build on the party's new-found momentum. The media blackout that he had hoped would end upon N-Koku's elevation to an official party, however, quickly

returned. To break through that blackout, then, Tachibana did something extraordinary: less than three months after winning his seat, he decided to resign from the upper house to run in an upper house by-election in Saitama Prefecture in October 2019 (*Asahi Shimbun* 2019f).

Resignation would not mean the loss of N-Koku's coveted seat in the Diet — because Tachibana had been elected on the proportional list, which is based on party affiliation, the seat automatically went to the second person listed. This was Hamada Satoshi, a doctor from Kurashiki, and the polar opposite of Tachibana's bombastic figure. Quiet and unassuming, Hamada went to the Diet to serve as one of Tachibana's experts (*Abema Times* 2019) and was even praised by Liberal Democratic Party grandee and former prime minister Asō Tarō following his debut question in the Diet's Financial Affairs Committee (Tachibana Takashi's Editorial Department 2020).

The nature of the Saitama by-election and Tachibana's campaigning style elucidated N-Koku's function as a cathartic outlet for frustration against Japanese society's established structures. Tachibana's abandonment of the Diet seat that he had recently contested and won to participate in an election that he had little chance of winning shocked the Japanese media and his YouTube audience. Why would someone give up Diet membership and its attendant perks (such as free railway travel) after investing considerable effort to attain it? Some felt that they had been "betrayed" by his refusal to do the actual work required of Diet members, though others were keen to go along with Tachibana's scheming. The publicity provided by a new election, by the shock of his resignation, and the ability to record a new political broadcast were, in Tachibana's mind, well worth the risk of offending some of his supporters.

For the Saitama election, he broadened his message from “Destroy NHK!” to “Destroy vested interests!” (*kitokukeneki wo bukkowasu*). To destroy NHK, Tachibana argued, it was necessary to challenge all the vested interests in the politico-media complex that helped to prop it up (FCCJ 2019, 41:00). The Saitama election itself was a victim of the *dangō*, or “fixing”, of Japanese politics — it was only held so that Saitama governor Ueda Kiyoshi and upper house member Ōno Motohiro, who had worked together for years, could “switch jobs” (Tachibana 2019i). If Tachibana had not contested the election, there would have been only one candidate—Ueda—basically supported by both the opposition (excluding the Communists -- though they did not run a candidate) and the governing Liberal Democratic Party (*Sankei Shimbun* 2019b). Striving to realign politics with the reality of his viewers’ daily experiences, Tachibana attempted to break through the scripted nature of Japanese politics and the entrenched structures of Japanese society.

In many ways, this election marked the peak of Tachibana’s influence on YouTube. Since his whirlwind ascent to the Diet, a network of YouTubers sprung up around N-Koku, covering all matters related to the party and its operations. These included livestreamers, commentators, and random “watchers” of Tachibana. N-Koku local councillors, too, are encouraged to launch YouTube channels to directly address their constituents. Popular channels included that of Kawaguchi city councillor Shiota Kazuhisa<sup>11</sup>, and Kasukabe city councillor Sakatani Kazuhide<sup>12</sup>, who was particularly known for streaming, and the Seikei Yukkuri channel. Other broadcasters of N-Koku-related events include well-known *monomōsu-kei*<sup>13</sup> YouTuber Mizunyan and YouTuber and entrepreneur Erai Tenchō.

One particularly notable example is Hiratsuka Masayuki, who ran in the 2019 upper house

election as part of Tachibana’s *anchi-waku* (Seikei Yukkuri Channel 2019). This was a slate of people who were opposed to N-Koku, Tachibana, and scramble broadcasting, but who agreed to become official candidates of the party in return for the political platform that would offer. Tachibana enacted this strategy for the purpose of name-selling, and indeed, Hiratsuka began his political broadcast with “Do not vote for N-Koku under any circumstances!”, which was certainly memorable (Tachibana 2019). Another example is former truck driver and Kashiwa city councillor Ōhashi Masanobu, a long-time party member who serves as vice-chairman, is close to Tachibana, and is known for his Yakuza-like appearance and “defense” of *kokumin* from NHK money collectors live on camera.

Tachibana also received coverage from well-known YouTuber mentalist Daigo<sup>14</sup>, disgraced entrepreneur Horie Takafumi<sup>15</sup>, leader of the Democratic Party of the People Tamaki Yūichirō<sup>16</sup>, public speaking YouTuber Kamogashira Yoshihito<sup>17</sup>, and many others. This series of collaborations, pushed by YouTube’s recommendations for those who regularly consumed N-Koku content, made it feel as if all of Japanese YouTube were discussing Tachibana in late summer and early autumn 2019. The list presented here is by no means exhaustive; many more YouTubers covered the party, both positively and negatively. Tachibana’s campaign for increasing recognition had succeeded, at least in the internet domain.

One fascinating aspect of his strategy was that YouTube itself was paying him for his political activities. At its peak in August 2019, Tachibana claimed to receive nearly twelve and a half million yen (about 118 thousand US dollars) in advertising revenue in that month alone (Tachibana 2019g). In the months after that, however, advertisements began to be withheld from his videos. Across YouTube, N-Koku-related YouTubers noticed that if they

covered the party, or matters related to Tachibana, the relevant videos would not have any adverts. Indeed, by early 2020, this trend had permeated Japanese YouTube space, with many political videos (Kyōmoto 2019) and, later, videos related to coronavirus (Kyōmoto 2020) being stripped of their adverts, rendering them incapable of monetization.

This wave of increased regulation can be viewed as an expansion of what English-speaking YouTubers refer to as the “adpocalypse” into the Japanese YouTube space. The “adpocalypse” refers to a series of events that began in 2017, whereby YouTube began to revise its terms of service to make them more favorable to advertisers, allowing them to exclude certain categories of content (e.g. that related to “sensitive social issues”) from hosting their adverts (Kumar 2019). It is not surprising that Japanese advertisers did not want their adverts attached to Tachibana’s videos. Tachibana, who issued numerous proclamations establishing Dentsu as the root of all evil, mused that adverts were removed in revenge, but YouTube does not reveal the reasons for demonetization. It probably did not help when on 2 October 2019, the Tokyo Metropolitan Police announced that they were referring Tachibana to public prosecutors for threatening a former N-Koku local councilor via YouTube in July (Jiji Press, 2019).

The party’s activities were funded via YouTube, and moreover, expansion of the party’s influence through name-selling depended on other YouTubers’ coverage. However, this network always included both critics and supporters of Tachibana’s politics. If they knew covering him would result in a loss of advertising revenue, would they bother to do so? Given the ephemeral nature of the alliance that was established during N-Koku’s period of rising popularity, it came as no surprise that many would not. Like Tachibana, they had sought publicity, and indeed, advertising revenue on YouTube and covering N-Koku was

simply good business for a time. Tachibana has since tried to establish a series of new YouTube channels to see if they could be monetized, but all such attempts have failed. The model that propelled him to popularity has thus reached an end.

These events happened as the Saitama by-election got underway. In many ways, the election marked the end of what Tachibana had attained in the summer of 2019. Indeed, it was the final time that the N-Koku network of YouTubers united to cover N-Koku-related events. To promote himself during this election, Tachibana decided to deliver a speech at Ikebukuro Station in Tokyo on 14 October 2019. Streamers’ coverage of this speech and the viewers’ response present an intriguing insight into Tachibana’s YouTube strategy and how YouTube and livestreaming as media can constitute networks, communities, and discursive spaces.

### The Ikebukuro Speeches

Tachibana announced on 13 October that he would give a speech in front of Ikebukuro Station in Tokyo, an unconventional choice for a Saitama election (Tachibana 2019j). A slate of speeches by N-Koku supporters, beginning at 14:00, would run into the night. Those giving speeches would include former Your Party leader Watanabe Yoshimi, N-Koku Secretary-General Uesugi Takashi, and wrestler The Great Sasuke. Tachibana also announced, however, that anyone who would like to make a speech would be allowed to mount his “election car” (*senkyo kā*) and say their piece.

As the keynote event of the party’s first national-level election since the past summer’s victory, Ikebukuro’s importance was clear to all N-Koku watchers. Elections have always brought together N-Koku’s disparate threads as a community, and N-Koku YouTubers are keen to publish videos of themselves hanging posters

and to livestream vote counting. Most N-Koku supporters and watchers, however, would experience the Ikebukuro speeches not in person but through the lens of the screen. As a result of Tachibana’s strategy of encouraging livestreamers, the viewer of the Ikebukuro speeches had an endless choice of streams to choose from. Most people chose to watch Tachibana’s own stream when available, but his use of his laptop webcam, held in his own hands, often meant that reception was poor. Given the length of the Ikebukuro events, different people were active streaming/viewing at different times. I myself began watching later in the day, and, for convenience, chose the Seikei Yukkuri channel stream<sup>18</sup>, as Tachibana himself did not appear to be streaming, and it had the most viewers.

Because N-Koku streams are typically amateur, they commonly cut out, often at critical moments, and Ikebukuro was no exception. The chat section that appears on the side of each YouTube livestream was filled with cries of “*kuru kuru*” (‘spinning’), a reference to the symbol that YouTube uses to indicate that a video or stream is buffering. The patchy reception that plagued the stream eventually gave way to a complete termination of its signal, and viewers came to be collectively stuck on a stopped frame that indicated buffering. Using YouTube’s search function to find an alternative stream, I traveled to a channel I had never seen before, that of Hiratsuka Masayuki<sup>19</sup>, which was listed at the top of the search results.



**The view of the election car from the Seikei Yukkuri stream.**

Almost immediately, viewers were confronted with a completely different *mise-en-scène*. The stream, ostensibly focusing on the speech at that time being made by Uesugi Takashi, was not from the front. In fact, Hiratsuka seemed to be standing in some sort of queue, amid a crowd of people, filming from the side of the election car. Unlike the Seikei Yukkuri stream, Hiratsuka frequently spoke, mentioning that he was part of the queue to speak from atop the election car. Suddenly, a stern voice issued the command “Queue up!” at around 29:20 (Hiratsuka 2019a). Anticipating a conflict, Hiratsuka flipped the camera around, revealing himself and another person, N-Koku 2019 upper house candidate Hayashi Daisuke. For chance viewers of Hiratsuka’s stream, the Ikebukuro speeches were no longer our focus. Instead, we would witness a petty dispute about the appropriate way to queue. Hayashi accused Hiratsuka of simply wanting to stream, and of standing in the street, where only those queuing to speak, or those volunteers holding a “rope”<sup>20</sup>, should ostensibly have been. As the dispute intensified and other people began to intervene, chat participants started to write things like “Controversy!” (Hiratsuka 2019a, 32:00) and “A split in N-Koku?” (Hiratsuka 2019a, 32:49), anticipating what would play out before them.

A man in the crowd, supporting Hayashi, said that Hiratsuka should “work” to help the party,

rather than merely stream for his own benefit. Viewers rebutted that livestreaming was work valuable to N-Koku and that someone who did not recognize this was “crazy” (Hiratsuka 2019a, 32:52). For viewers, Hayashi’s disruption of their experience was unforgivable. As N-Koku was a party built on YouTube and livestreaming, viewers did not understand why a party member would disrupt such a vital moment: one viewer said, “as someone who can’t vote in the Saitama election, this was a really important stream for me...” (Hiratsuka 2019a, 37:29). At 33:47 (Hiratsuka 2019a), one viewer even accused those harassing Hiratsuka of being NHK *kōsakuin* (“agents”), and this idea would later spread throughout the chat. This reference to “agents”, along with comments suggesting *denpa bōgai* (“signal jamming”) by NHK as the origin of technical difficulties, is typical for N-Koku streams, and perhaps serves as an expression of collective catharsis. When viewers wrote “internal strife?” (Hiratsuka 2019a, 35:21), “what’s with this guy?” (Hiratsuka 2019a, 35:24) or “are you sure that’s not an NHK agent?” (Hiratsuka 2019a, 35:27), they were expressing feelings that they would normally internalize. The inherent transformative anonymity of a YouTube livestream facilitates the manifestation of these feelings. What is more, by using shared jargon, what Pharr (1996, 38) refers to as a common “toolset” (or grammar), to evoke them, and engaging in what could be considered a collective sigh at the apparent state of disorder, viewers are able to express shared experience as part of the network of N-Koku viewers. It is clear that most viewers did not believe that NHK was really interfering with N-Koku’s broadcast of Ikebukuro; the collective spamming of these shibboleths as a means of venting frustration, then, functioned primarily to facilitate identification with the N-Koku group.

When scandal-seeking YouTuber Mizunyan appeared at the back of the frame, camera in

hand, it became apparent to the seasoned viewer that the Ikebukuro stream had become completely derailed. I looked for other streams that actually focused on the speeches, but those available were of poor quality and did not seem worth watching. Moreover, the dispute taking place on the Hiratsuka channel was compelling, with the same liveness that Tachibana so frequently invoked in his videos. The suspense was particularly captivating, and one felt obliged to keep watching, both for “fear of missing out” and because one felt bound into a collective experience of emotional engagement with the unfolding tension.

Viewers looking forward to seeing the Ikebukuro speeches’ unique format were disappointed, and even began calling for Hayashi’s striking from the N-Koku roster. Others, however, realized that the situation was not only of Hayashi’s making. One mentioned that profiting from Hayashi’s “blow-up” would be “delicious” (Hiratsuka 2019a, 43:40), and another hoped that Hiratsuka and Hayashi’s quarrel would not negate Tachibana’s hard work (Hiratsuka 2019a, 46:26). Mizunyan himself eventually appeared on camera with Hiratsuka, using the word *uchigeba* (‘internal violence’) to describe the events (Hiratsuka 2019a, 39:32). Some users, in a show of support for Hiratsuka, donated money to him via YouTube’s SuperChat feature, the first amounting to 10,000 yen. Nearly 5,000 people were watching the stream at this time, far more than Hiratsuka could otherwise have hoped for. As things quieted, Hiratsuka resumed streaming the speeches. This was not the end of what he would soon term the “Ikebukuro Uproar” (*Ikebukuro sōdō*), however; it was the foundation of a new community, with a grammar different from that of N-Koku’s.

In the coming days, Hiratsuka issued a video recapping the dispute and publicly disclosed a private LINE group chat for party members, which he said revealed that Tachibana’s

secretary, Yoshida, had ordered the suppression of livestreamers to concentrate views and YouTube revenue in the hands of the party, and to remove Hiratsuka from party-related events (Hiratsuka 2019b). Other streamers, including some local N-Koku local councillors, were upset by Yoshida's message, and Hiratsuka used this to attack the party, stating that N-Koku now had its own "vested interests" that needed destroying. The Ikebukuro Uproar's impact is apparent in Hiratsuka's subscriber numbers, which increased from 15,823 in September 2019 to 29,500 in November 2019 (Social Blade 2020b). Hiratsuka continued to spar with N-Koku for months, even after leaving the party on 4 December 2019 (Hiratsuka 2019c), and formed his own organization, the People's Sovereignty Party (*Kokuminshukentō*).

The idea that looking at events from a different angle can change one's perspective is not revolutionary. What is revolutionary, however, is how the liveness produced by a sudden change in camera angle in the hands of individuals like Tachibana and Hiratsuka via YouTube can constitute a new grammar for understanding and thus space for discourse. The Seikei Yukkuri stream cut out by sheer happenstance, and a substantial number of N-Koku viewers discovered a channel they had never viewed before. Viewers were forced to move their attention from N-Koku and the Ikebukuro speeches to what seemed like a trivial dispute between Hiratsuka and Hayashi.

The ephemeral sensation of this movement from webpage to webpage (or stream to stream), seemingly mapping the desires of the user, is described by McPherson (2006, 202) as the primary mode by which the internet's liveness is experienced. This process of what she termed "volitional mobility" is at least partly illusion. Hidden algorithms guide the user through the internet, pointing them in a predetermined direction, much as they pointed Ikebukuro viewers toward Hiratsuka's stream.

Even so, the very act of movement implies the potential for transformation, which McPherson (2006, 204-205) identifies as the most promising aspect of the internet. When one enters a livestream like those airing the Ikebukuro speeches, the inherent uncertainty about what will occur, what *can* occur, can temporarily negate the existing self of the user, creating a new, transformative space, where one can revel in the sensation of possibility and change. McPherson (2006, 207) argues that these sensations, while illusory, may be able to trigger a real desire for movement and change, which could be activated outside the internet space. I would argue that N-Koku's rise was one such activation.

Another important feature of this transformative livestream space is that it is shared with other viewers. By virtue of sharing the same source of information provision, the same perspective, viewers are affected by the bonding effect that Pharr (1996, 38) identified as one of the powers of consuming a shared source of information. This process is observed in the way those who became tied to the Hiratsuka community expressed themselves in livestream chat sections: in time, memes like NHK agents and signal jamming, defining features of the N-Koku grammar, were replaced by references to Yoshida, Hayashi, and the rope. It took Tachibana years to cultivate the N-Koku community, but the liveness of the Ikebukuro Uproar allowed Hiratsuka to establish a presence in mere minutes.

### The Floundering of N-Koku

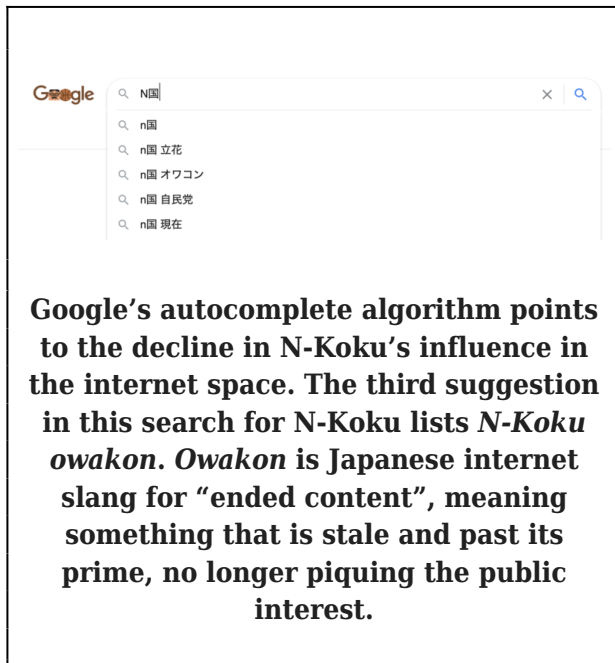
While many N-Koku viewers would not embrace Hiratsuka's new community, the split that originated with the Ikebukuro Uproar heralded a decline in N-Koku's overall influence on YouTube. Tachibana's subscriber numbers peaked at 535,000 on 3 November, not long after he inevitably lost the Saitama election

(Social Blade 2020c). Since then, they have continually declined, falling to 446,000 by December 2020 (Social Blade, 2020c). A similarly fatal blow was dealt when Erai Tenchō, who had founded the *Shoboi seitō* (lit. ‘Lackluster Party’) to rival N-Koku in December 2019 (Yauchi 2019), suddenly accosted Tachibana live on stream, turning Tachibana’s own tactics against him.<sup>21</sup>

In April 2020, Tachibana was indicted on charges of threatening a former local N-Koku councillor via YouTube and for having illegally obtained personal information from an NHK money collector’s tablet and attempting to use that information to blackmail the NHK chairman into a meeting (Jiji Press 2020a). Tachibana became persona non grata, and the idea of him working in the Diet to implement scramble broadcasting was almost laughable. Much as what McPherson (2006, 204-205) called the transformative power of the internet, rooted in the sensation of movement it provokes, and the weaponization of liveness had propelled Tachibana to success, so too did these sink his ship.

While Tachibana received .7% of the vote in the 5 July 2020 Tokyo gubernatorial election (*Yomiuri Shimbun* 2020)—the first in which the media treated him as a “main candidate” by virtue of N-Koku’s official party status (Yahoo News 2020a)—his campaign was overshadowed by that of far-right Japan First Party leader Sakurai Makoto. Amid the coronavirus pandemic and suffering from the same media blackout that N-Koku had once experienced, Sakurai adopted the tactics that Tachibana had pioneered, conducting a virtual campaign on YouTube and Japanese livestreaming site Fuwachi<sup>22</sup>, taking 2.9% of the vote (*Yomiuri Shimbun* 2020). Hiratsuka too would stand for election, now with a platform denouncing coronavirus-related restrictions. While he took a mere .1% of the vote (*Yomiuri Shimbun* 2020), his subsequent livestreamed “cluster fest” protests and maskless “hijacking” of the Yamanote railway line in central Tokyo successfully attracted media attention (Yahoo News 2020b).<sup>23</sup>

Unlike Tachibana, neither Sakurai nor Hiratsuka could rely on YouTube for revenue. As stated above, YouTube has markedly increased its policing of Japanese political content, and demonetization is the norm rather than the exception. Both have successfully raised money from viewers, however, and such groups will continue their activities as long as YouTube permits them to do so. In Hiratsuka’s case, that permission was revoked on 31 August 2020, when his accounts, along with all those related to his People’s Sovereignty Party, were banned (Hiratsuka 2020a), probably because of infringements of new regulations on coronavirus-related content. Since his initial ban, he has created several new accounts that are typically banned soon after creation. On 10 November 2020, Hiratsuka stated on Twitter that forty-one of these had been banned (Hiratsuka 2020b).



## Conclusion

While N-Koku and Tachibana may have receded from public consciousness, the proliferation of internet-based communities participating in the 2020 Tokyo gubernatorial election suggests that N-Koku's story will have enduring relevance as a starting point for a new YouTube-based Japanese internet politics. That relevance was demonstrated by *ōmono* YouTuber Hikakin's 10 April 2020 interview with Tokyo governor Koike Yuriko about the coronavirus pandemic, which received almost 11 million views.<sup>24</sup> Speaking directly to the denizens of the YouTube space, bypassing the mass media, Koike explained the importance of preventing the spread of coronavirus, perhaps realizing that the importance of bringing a younger audience on board with the anti-coronavirus measures *necessitated* the use of the platform.

Grassroots resistance against the mass media's gatekeeping role in Japanese society is nothing new; the Grass Seeds (*Kusa no mi*) of the 1950s,<sup>25</sup> documented by Sasaki-Uemura (2001), foreshadow the rise of N-Koku and similar communities. The internet and YouTube, however, allow individuals to fight back on a heretofore unimaginable scale, which can only be expected to grow amid the demographic shift away from traditional media. By providing an alternative source of information, and utilizing the transformative power of the sensation of movement inherent to the internet space, and a more authentic liveness than that television once used to dominate the airwaves, individuals like Tachibana can create communities that serve as discursive spaces for those outside the mass media space. The memes that populate these spaces comprise an alternative "toolset" (Pharr 1996, 38), or grammar, for understanding the world, rooted in the lived experience of its participants, and their evoking functions as a form of collective catharsis.

It is worth investigating, however, whether the inherently ephemeral nature of these communities limits their ability to effect lasting change. As analysis of the Ikebukuro livestreams shows, these communities are constantly evolving, often at the whim of technological factors outside both the transmitter's and viewer's control. The sensation of movement that McPherson (2006) observes is the basis of the internet's transformative power may also impact internet communities' ability to rival the entrenched material power of existing societal institutions. Networks of YouTubers, like that which raised N-Koku out of obscurity, are inherently transactional exercises, and the increased policing of YouTube may signal the end for such networks on that platform. Sakurai's use of the indigenous Japanese streaming platform Fuwachi has shown that alternatives to YouTube do exist, and that these are worthy of future investigation as sites of political activism.

The broadcast media, including NHK, will undoubtedly continue to face declining viewership and user engagement. Saitō (2020, 3) found that, as of 2019, 27% of Japanese in their 20s reported no interaction with real-time television (compared to 11% in 2009), that those still interacting with it were doing so less, and that catch-up and internet-based services offered by the major television networks have failed to make up for these losses. Overall, Saitō (2020, 8) says that the number of people having any interaction with content produced by television stations has declined to 82% (from 89% in 2016), and concludes that Japanese young people are not merely shifting away from the traditional *mode* of viewing television, but from televisual content as a whole. NHK's political position is thus far from secure, irrespective of N-Koku's decline and the as-yet limited reach of internet communities.

When an influential politician like Tokyo



Governor Koike Yuriko decides to issue what amounts to an announcement in the public interest through a YouTuber (albeit in addition to appeals in the usual channels), the crisis of legitimacy that confronts NHK is evident. It remains to be seen, however, whether the undercurrent of media distrust and anti-license fee sentiment that runs through the Japanese internet will be enough to drive real reform of NHK. It is certain, however, that NHK and the mass media can no longer claim to be the sole legitimate space for public discourse.

N-Koku's accomplishment is significant. Tachibana's six-year effort to establish a community where no mass media dared to tread was so successful that its influence permeated the inert Japanese politico-media complex. While Hayashi (2017) claimed that Japanese media distrust is "quiet" in comparison to that found in western countries, and that the operation of that distrust is limited to the avoidance of engagement with the media and politics altogether, the story of N-Koku suggests otherwise. The vibrancy of the Japanese internet space presents a direct challenge to the Japanese mass media, and with new communities constantly emerging, it is rich in potential objects of research.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Tachibana admitted to having bipolar disorder and schizophrenia in a [YouTube video](#) from 4 October 2018.

<sup>2</sup> An overview of Tachibana’s activities on 2channel can be found in Erai Tenchō’s *NHK kara kokumin wo mamoru tō no kenkyū* (2020).

<sup>3</sup> Following his election, an article in the 28 August 2019 issue of *Shūkan Bunshun* suggested that this method of raising money may have been fraudulent.

<sup>4</sup> [NHK ni yoru sagi jiken o dorama de saigen shimashita](#) .

<sup>5</sup> This practice is not officially documented anywhere but is frequently alluded to in internet news and Tachibana-related videos. [A 2013 statement](#) by the Japanese Green Party says that when asked why their candidates were listed as *shoha* in election coverage, people connected with various media companies replied that it was because they did not meet these requirements.

<sup>6</sup> The [1989 broadcast of anti-media lower house candidate Akao Bin](#) (then 90 years old) has over 600,000 views. One commenter writes: “Even now, in July 2020, this really hits the nail on the head!”

<sup>7</sup> [NHK o bukkowasu! \[Seiken hōsō\] NHK kara kokumin o mamoru tō \[Kadota Setsuyo\]](#)

<sup>8</sup> [NHK o bukkowasu! \[Seiken hōsō\] NHK kara kokumin o mamoru tō \[Tachibana Takashi ta 3-me\] zenkoku hirei-ku](#)

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, [this 19 December 2019 interview](#). The comment section is filled with praise for its no-cut style, with some commenters suggesting that they would be happy to pay a license fee for TV Tokyo.

<sup>10</sup> This genre is known in Japanese internet slang as *ria-totsu* (from the English ‘real’ and the Japanese *totsugeki*, meaning ‘attack’).

<sup>11</sup> [Shiota Kazuhisa shigikai giin](#)

<sup>12</sup> [NHK kara ji kokumin o mamoru tō](#)

<sup>13</sup> Literally meaning “complaining-type,” but denoting a type of YouTuber that observes and criticizes others’ behavior.

<sup>14</sup> [NHK kara kokumin o mamoru tō \[Tachibana daihyō no tōsen riyū o shinri-gaku-teki ni kaisetsu\]](#)

<sup>15</sup> See [Horie’s 16 September 2019 interview of Tachibana](#)

<sup>16</sup> See for instance [Tamaki’s 13 September 2019 interview of Tachibana](#).

<sup>17</sup> [N-koku tō \[kotoba no maryoku\] Tachibana Takashi-san no supīchi o hanashi-kata no gakkō gakuchō ōtō Yoshito ga bunseki.](#)

<sup>18</sup> [NHK kara kokumin o mamoru tō Tachibana Takashi tōshu Sangiin Saitama hosen Ikebukuro gaisen Watanabe Yoshimi Gurētosasuke Maruyama Hodaka Uesugi Takashi Kaya Marifu NER \(Kuniba Yūdai\) Yokoyama Midori \(Kubota Gaku\) Yokoku Hideyuki](#)

<sup>19</sup> [Link \[Editor's note: Please note that as of 18th January 2021 this account has been](#)

suspended by Youtube]

<sup>20</sup> The “rope” was apparently a sort of badge used to identify volunteers helping to organize the speeches, though, at the time, Hiratsuka and livestream viewers alike had no idea what Hayashi was talking about.

<sup>21</sup> [Tachibana Takashi tatsu](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Link](#)

<sup>23</sup> The video records of most streams have since been removed by YouTube.

<sup>24</sup> [Koike tohiji ni korona no koto shitsumon shi makutte mita \[hikakin TV\] \[shingata koronairusu\]](#)

<sup>25</sup> A diverse group of women from across Japan dissatisfied with the estrangement of the mass media’s portrayal of events from the experience of their daily lives, who went on to establish a *minikomi* (“mini communication”) magazine to serve as an autonomous and more authentic space for public discourse.