

Policing and Japan's Aum Shinrikyo

At 7:45 a.m. on March 20, 1995, five members of the terrorist group Aum Shinrikyo boarded trains at different ends of Tokyo's sprawling subway system. They coordinated their attack so that the trains would converge a half-hour later at a single central stop: the Kasumigaseki station in the heart of Tokyo's government district. The station was strategically situated several blocks from the Japanese parliament building, government agencies, and the Imperial Palace. The Aum Shinrikyo terrorists who carried out the attacks included a young graduate student in physics at Tokyo University, a former cardiovascular surgeon who had graduated from Keio University, a former physics student from Waseda University, and an electronics engineer. Each member carried an umbrella with a sharpened tip and held a loosely wrapped newspaper in his arms. Inside the newspaper was a plastic sack containing sarin. As the trains converged on the Kasumigaseki station, the Aum Shinrikyo members put their newspapers on the floor of the train and pierced the plastic sack with the sharpened end of the umbrella. They quickly exited the trains and left behind leaking plastic bags with sarin gas, which permeated the subway trains. The attack killed 12 people and injured more than 5,000 others.¹ Over the subsequent several years, Japanese police and intelligence officials conducted one of the largest manhunts in the country's history. By 1997, Aum Shinrikyo had been eradicated as a terrorist organization. Most of its leadership structure

¹ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2000, pp. 103–104.