

# Yakuza or the "japanese mafia"

[Law](#), [Crime](#)



## **The Yakuza Explained**

The focus of my research is the Yakuza or as they are sometimes referred to as the “ Japanese Mafia”. They are an organized crime group that developed early in the Edo period and are still active to this day. The Yakuza function like other crime organizations, however, their relationship with society is much different and its beginning to shift, forcing the Yakuza to take to a more behind the scenes operation than they previously utilized. By examining the history and practices of the Yakuza, we can see how the changes in law and public opinion have affected their stance in society. The Yakuza originated sometime during the Edo Period in Japan 1603-1898. It is said that they originated as a group of gamblers. The traditions and organization of Yakuza groups points back to the gambling groups during the Edo period. During Tokugawa shogunate’s rule the organized gambling dens began to surface across Japan. While the country was previously struggling with war and political difficulties, the Tokugawa shogunate ran the government with strict laws and clear control. This created a problem for the gamblers and forced them to be more organized to avoid being thrown in jail.

In the early 1900’s the prominent members of the Yakuza had a meeting with the Home Minister Tokonami Takejirō. This meeting led to the organization of the influential nationalist group of the interwar era: The Greater Japan National Essence Association. “ This collaborative moment in October 1919 was but part of a larger story about the close relationship between yakuza and the state—the Home Ministry and to a lesser extent the

military and the police" (Siniawer, 2011, p. 623). This relationship was forged a relationship based on like ideas, financial interests, and the use of violence for maintaining power. At the time Japan was a world where there weren't boundaries between illegitimate and legitimate actions. Post-World War Two Japan's economy was in shambles alongside the horrible living conditions its people were forced live in. Most of Japan, especially urban areas, were damaged due to bombing and fires during the war. Japan had also lost a great deal of resources from previous wars and conquests. " The backdrop was the prevailing conditions after the war. Japanese society was in chaos, the economy in ruins and the industrial and social infrastructure in shambles. Millions of Japanese returned from abroad, adding mouths to be fed. Unemployment was severe" (Edström, 2015, p. 522).

The Yakuza were able to take advantage of the current state of the country and found themselves with a surplus of methamphetamine that they sold on the black market. With the Japanese government weak and the influence and control the United States had it likely contributed to the Yakuza organizations freedom during this time. They mostly expanded their racketeering operations. The Yakuza became more involved with using threats and violence to coerce local businesses and Japanese citizens to make payments. After the Korean War, there was a great demand in the construction sector and several Yakuza entered early. By forcing construction companies to pay a percentage of their profits to avoid violent action the Yakuza managed to profit from their control of the construction sector. The Yakuza utilized laborers to control the source of the cheap unskilled labor primarily used by the construction companies. " Not

contesting legitimate violence allows for a kind of violent legitimacy, whereby the assumed legitimacy of the state serves as a cloak for violence of an unjust and undemocratic kind" (Siniawer, 2011, p. 623).

The Yakuza not only expanded their racketeering operations but also their methods. They will buy shares of stock from a company and use those stocks to gain admission to the shareholders meetings where they can extort money from the company. By threatening to release financial information and blackmailing the executives their new methods have allowed them to become a more legitimate business. Japanese law enforcement has begun applying an increased amount of pressure on various groups due to the growing influence of the Yakuza. With their expansion into construction companies and racketeering, also legitimate businesses their presence is well known. Due to a change in public opinion and laws the Yakuza have taken their operations underground to stay out of the limelight. In the earlier years a tradition called Yubitsume which is the act of self-amputation of one's own finger at the joint has even been abandoned due to the attention it brings and that it helps the police and public identify members more easily.