

and murder, among the world's worst. But the vast majority of these victims are poor black South Africans, often women and girls. Does the oracle imagine that for the month of July 2010 South Africa will suspend its psychosexual crisis and unleash its full fury only on travelling German or English fans? This is scaremongering of the worst and most ignorant kind.

Yes, there are thieves, pickpockets and dodgy taxi drivers out there. To that extent the English fans will be at home. And yes, visitors will have to think carefully about their behaviour, and their state of inebriation. This seems to be a rather good thing.

If the World Cup is anything at all, it is humanity's singular global festival of play: a celebration of universalism and cosmopolitanism. The decision to give it to South Africa was not irresponsible, but inspirational. The world's commitment to Africa means more than handouts and lectures; it requires engagement by individuals and institutions on Africa's terms, as well as ours. Glanville has been generous in his praise for African football and footballers. It is time that he, and others, extended that generosity to the people of Africa.

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JAPAN

Sayonara, change

Japan's landslide election threw out the ruling party, but was really a conservative revolt

Kenneth Neil Cukier

Japan has long been called a "democracy within a democracy." Though it held elections, the country had kept the Liberal Democratic party (and its forbearers, the Liberals and the Democrats) in power virtually uninterrupted since the end of the second world war. So the election of 30th August was historic, not just because it is the first time an opposition party has taken control of Japan's government, but because it represents the beginning of the end of Japan's postwar political system.

On election night the ruling LDP lost 177 of its 300 seats in the 480-seat lower house of Japan's parliament, the Diet. The Democratic party of Japan (DPJ), an eclectic collection of ex-LDPers, socialists, right-wingers and former bureaucrats,

took nearly all of them. The landslide was aided by a massive 70 per cent turnout. Yet on election night no cars honked, and no youths leapt into fountains. Such public stoicism is a sign of uncertainty and unease. The Japanese people voted against the incumbents: the DPJ won because they weren't the LDP. Despite their many campaign pledges—mainly to create a new state-run social safety net—they only had one well-thought out policy: to win power. Their leadership even refused to allow an internal debate over their party platform, for fear of looking divided.

The DPJ win is only a half-step towards political reform. The party is as internally inconsistent as the LDP and, without experience governing, potentially as ineffective. (In opinion polls prior to the election, eight out of ten people said they didn't expect anything to change under a DPJ government.) But Japan's challenges range from overcoming 20 years of stagnation to tackling the problems that come with the world's oldest population. And faced with crisis, Japan's first reaction is customarily to retreat into itself.

The DPJ, then, offers more of the same. Its leader Yukio Hatoyama, now prime minister, employed the Obama-esque term "chang-i," but resists anything radical. Instead he promised to undo the "market fundamentalism" of the LDP and Junichiro Koizumi, its popular ex-prime minister—though Koizumi's reforms were more discussed than enacted. In truth, the election amounted to a conservative revolt. Japan's society, economy and international relations are in flux, and its cherished myths of national identity are being undermined. So the Japanese voted for the past, not the future.

Those myths of national identity loom large, even as they look antiquated. Japan's "developmental state," where the bureaucracy directed the economy and led to the country's stunning postwar success, is today meddlesome and inefficient. Workers used to count on lifetime employment. But since the 1990s, ties between companies and employees have frayed, and "non-regular workers" (those hired on a short-term or part-time basis) have increased to one-third of the workforce, while being paid as little as 40 per cent of a "regular" worker's pay. For decades some 90 per cent of Japanese characterised themselves as middle class. But a few years ago inequality of wealth actually slipped above the OECD average. And the country's famously low crime rate has been creeping up too, especially among the elderly, who find it harder to get by.

In response, the DPJ promises to return Japan to gentler times. Hatoyama's campaign slogan was "yuai," which translates as "friendship and love." He promises to increase the minimum wage, offer more welfare and pension benefits, eliminate many fees, taxes and tolls, and even provide families with about £170 a month for every child aged 15 and under. Japan never did have a true welfare state—companies performed the role through a bloated workforce and lifetime employment. But those days are over. Meanwhile, the DPJ aims to neuter the bureaucracy, which for too long has dictated priorities to elected politicians. Yet, alarmingly, no one seems willing to discuss the demographic crisis, or the need for greater immigration, the latter almost as shocking a concept to the Japanese as eugenics is in the west.

What happens next? Unusually, it seems the new government intends to uphold its campaign promises. But even if it does so without bankrupting the country, the DPJ will do little to return Japan to its former glory. Thirty years ago it was on track to be the world's largest economy. Now it is poised to lose the number 2 spot to China this year or next. And the DPJ's approach towards its region remains an enigma, just as its neighbourhood is getting rougher with North Korean nukes and China's nascent deep-water fleet.

Nevertheless, the election starts Japan's political modernisation. Regardless of its policies the DPJ's very existence will begin the process of holding leaders to account. The era of one-party predominance is almost certainly over. The LDP kept power with a rationale that in good times there was no reason to change, and in bad experienced hands were prized. But now, following an electoral reform that lets smaller parties win more Diet seats, there is little chance of a return to monopoly.

A true multi-party state will in time change the relationship between the state and citizens, perhaps even spreading into the business and social sphere. To this extent this election will bring change, even if it is not immediately apparent because the DPJ and the public don't know what sort of change they want. The Liberal Democratic party was neither liberal, nor democratic, nor a party. It was a conservative force representing big business. It brokered policy behind closed doors with scant public accountability. And it was not so much a single unit as an amalgam of disparate factions. The DPJ is not much better, only different. But it is a start.

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