

**JAPAN'S NEW PRIME MINISTER
NODA YOSHIHIKO: GENERATIONAL
CHANGE IN ITS POLITICAL LEADERSHIP?**

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Executive Summary

1. Noda Yoshihiko's rise as Japan's Prime Minister heralds a generational shift in Japanese political leadership. Hitherto, the ruling Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) had been dominated by the triumvirate of Kan Naoto, Hatoyama Yukio and Ozawa Ichiro.
2. Prime Minister Noda is only 52 years of age — considered young in a society where seniority rules. Five ministers in their 40s have been appointed including Finance Minister Azumi Jun, 49 years old; Foreign Minister Genba Koichiro, 47; and Environment Minister and State Minister for Nuclear Crisis Hosono Goshi, 40. The average age of Noda's Cabinet is 58.
3. Conceivably, there are three implications for the “changing of the guard” in Japan. First, the young DPJ ministers who cut their teeth as opposition MPs are not money-driven and corrupt like many older MPs from the then ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).
4. Second, growing up in a democratic and prosperous postwar Japan means that the young ministers are generally confident and presumably have no “hang ups” about Japan's burden of history — the invasion of China and the colonization of Korea.
5. Third, greater dynamism, vitality and idealism from the younger ministers could be expected despite the manifold challenges facing DPJ and Japan.
6. Noda is the first Prime Minister to graduate from the famous Matsushita Institute of Government and Management (known as the Matsushita Seikei Juku [MSJ] in Japanese: 松下政経塾). The MSJ seeks to groom talented political leaders to change Japan. A hallmark of MSJ students is that they are overwhelmingly not the offsprings of politicians.

7. Five Cabinet ministers and top executives of the Noda-led DPJ come from the MSJ: Prime Minister Noda, Foreign Minister Genba, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Nagahama Hiroyuki, DPJ acting Secretary General Tarutoko Shinji and DPJ Policy Research Committee Chairman Maehara Seiji.
8. By July 2011, there were 78 young politicians — mostly in their 30s and 40s — from the MSJ in both the ruling and opposition parties. These MSJ politicians constitute 38 Diet members from the Lower and Upper Houses, 30 local assembly members, one governor and nine mayors. Indeed, the number of MSJ students who win elections is growing steadily each year.
9. Most MSJ graduates like Noda are reputed to be intelligent, confident, tenacious, focused, purpose-driven and knowledgeable. Many are also policy “wonks”. Due to their socialization at the MSJ, they tend to be pro-market, pro-US-Japan Alliance and nationalistic (not in a xenophobic way).
10. The next DPJ Presidential Election will take place in September 2012. If Noda loses his re-election as Party President next year, he will not remain as Prime Minister. Former Foreign Minister Maehara Seiji (another MSJ graduate) is waiting at the wings; this could well be the last roll of the dice for the ruling DPJ to have a popular Prime Minister before the next Lower House Election.