

wording, it will be easy for Beijing to use the agreement in its international propaganda regarding the “one China” principle and “unification.” Not only will the ECFA transform Taiwan into an economic appendix to China, it will also promote the international view that Taiwan is part of China. Even if the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) wins the 2012 presidential election, it will be no easy task to correct this view. The party could even be characterized as “troublemakers” for not implementing an agreement signed by the KMT and the CCP.

This is Beijing’s intention in signing an ECFA, and it is something Taiwan’s government and opposition parties must pay more attention to as they continue to clash over it.

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The Problem of Implementing Absentee Voting

Background

On February 3 Taiwan Interior Minister Jiang Yi-huah said that the government will amend the law to allow absentee voting in order to safeguard citizens' right to political participation. The ministry's amendment would allow people who are not able to return to their place of household registration on voting day because of work or studies to apply for permission to vote in their current place of residence. On March 10 he further elaborated saying that the government plans to implement the absentee voting system from the presidential election in 2012. He added that while the government rules out postal voting for the time being, it is its ultimate goal and that it is hoped that one day voting by mail can be

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implemented in Taiwan like in the United States, Japan and South Korea.

Analysis

More comprehensive safeguards for citizens' voting rights are definitely a goal worth to be pursued, but any guarantees of basic rights should not remain a mere formality. This means that in order to guarantee voting rights the following four most important factors must also be considered: Full disclosure of information on candidates and their political platforms, freedom of choice, non-partisan election administration as well as a fair (non-discriminatory voting rights and one vote one value) and secret voting. Therefore the author definitely agrees that the fair, secret, and direct voting rights of all Taiwanese citizens be guaranteed. After further consideration of Taiwan's particular national situation and political environment, Taiwan Brain Trust provides the following conclusions and suggestions for further reference:

1. Yes to Domestic Transfer of Voter Registration

Due to Taiwan's distinct household registration system it is quite common that a voter's place of household registration is not identical with his place of residence. In order to safeguard basic voting rights, allowing the transfer of voter registration within Taiwan could therefore be considered, so that citizens who do not live at the place of household registration could exercise their voting rights in their place of residence. As a number of opinion polls on absentee voting shows domestic consensus is the highest regarding this point. Therefore this proposal deserves to be endorsed.

As for the technical side, the complexity of electoral affairs is comparatively low in presidential elections,

because there is only one nationwide electoral district and

there is only one category of votes. But in Legislative Yuan elections the electoral authorities would have to set up separate ballot boxes for voters who vote outside their place of household registration or beforehand print ballot papers from other electoral districts for distribution. It is doubtful whether electoral authorities would be able to shoulder such a gigantic task.

2. Conditional Yes to the Establishment of Special Polling Stations

Special polling stations are usually established for the convenience of nursing home inmates and mobility impaired people or to enable soldiers and police on duty as well as prison inmates to exercise their voting rights. Based on Taiwan's current situation we agree in principle to the establishment of special polling stations, but on the technical side there is still room for further discussions. Since freedom awareness is rapidly increasing among the Taiwanese collective election fraud is less of a concern, and even if there was any, it would likely be exposed and investigated within a very short time. Crucial is that no undue pressure is exerted on the free individual will of voters and that voting secrecy is ensured.

3. No to Postal Voting at Home and Abroad

In advanced nations like the United States, Japan and Britain voting by mail enjoys quite high public trust. But due to Taiwan's international isolation and its difficult relations with China many technical problems regarding the voting rights of Taiwanese investors in China can presently still not be overcome. Candidates for public office can, for instance, not visit China to canvass votes or present their political platforms to Taiwanese businesspeople and students. As official Taiwanese government documents ballot papers that are sent to China are bound to cause problems. China would need to cooperate on measures for voting by postal delivery such as meeting requirements for the confidentiality

of the delivery process. But China's entire postal system is closely monitored by the Chinese government so that there is no impartiality or confidentiality at all to speak of. Taiwanese business people, managers or students would probably voluntarily (or upon request) keep a copy (of their ballot paper) to demonstrate their political leaning to the Chinese government. Regarding the voting rights of overseas Taiwanese living in other places than China we will take as example the United States which maintains the best foreign relations with Taiwan. Assuming voter registration and voting for a presidential election would take place at Taiwan's representative offices in the United States (which are organs of public authority), then this would involve highly sensitive and public political activities. The likeliness that the United States would hold such events despite Chinese pressure is close to zero, not to speak of Japan, Europe or other countries.

Regarding postal voting in Taiwan we need to remember that Taiwan differs greatly from other advanced nations in that the island is rife with vote buying. If voting by mail were adopted, it would probably become a tool for certain political groups for fostering vote buying, even if the postal system would be able to remain completely nonpartisan and confidential. The vote buyer could take advantage of postal mailing to demand that the bribed seller photocopy his ballot sheet to prove that he fulfilled his obligation under the vote-buying pact. Opinion polls presently conducted by academic and political party organizations show that Taiwanese society has comparatively little trust in a postal voting system, which is why the rash promotion of such a system is not advisable.

Recent Developments in US-China Relations and Its Impact on Taiwan

The US-China relations seemed to have been steady in the first year of the Barack Obama administration.