

October Analysis of the 2010 Municipal Elections in Taiwan

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Taiwan is undertaking a major administrative rezoning project, which results in constituency rezoning. Taipei County is upgraded to Xinbei City (New Taipei City) while Taichung City and County, Tainan City and County, and Kaohsiung City and County are integrated into special municipalities. On November 27, the 2010 Taiwan Municipal Elections will be held and the mayors for Taipei City, Xinbei City, the integrated Taichung, Tainan, Kaohsiung Cities will be chosen. The five new metropolitans, in sum, accommodate over 60% of the entire population in Taiwan. The election results will paint a new political division map. The 2010 Metropolitan Elections therefore are, in general impressions, crucial to the 2012 Presidential Election. The ruling Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), or blue camp, and the opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), or green camp, need to win at least 3 out of the 5 metropolitans to secure victory in the 2012 Presidential Election.

KMT was more advantaged in Taipei and Taichung Cities while the opposition DPP was leading in Tainan and Kaohsiung Cities. Xinbei City will be formed from the elevation of Taipei County into a central municipality,

and in the past the KMT and DPP had victories and losses in this constituency, so the political inclination of Xinbei City is more ambiguous.

The DPP nominees for Taipei, Taichung and Xinbei mayors are well recognized by local voters. The gang shooting in Taichung and the elevated highway scandals and Flora Expo fleece in Taipei have ignited an election crisis for KMT. Hao Long-bin, the current Taipei City Mayor and KMT nominee, lost to the DPP nominee for the first time in public surveys. In Taichung, the DPP candidate is narrowing the gap with his KMT rival. In Tainan and Kaohsiung, the green camp has supporters twice more than the blue camp. In Xinbei City, the DPP and KMT candidates are in a tug-of-war with a sampling error of positive and negative 3%. Though the typhoon hitting Taiwan on September 19 caused serious flood, and lowered the DPP Kaohsiung mayor's approval rate, she is still leading in the election campaign. All in all, the 2010 Municipal Elections will be challenging for KMT.

Ma Ying-jeou has been Taiwan's president for two years. Although he has been fully committed to economic development, and has

firmly facilitated the signing of ECFA, people in Taiwan do not perceive much economic improvement. The unemployment rate is over 5%, and price fluctuation is beyond acceptance. ECFA may actually harm KMT's election campaigns instead of benefiting the elections as Ma expected. At the same time, the problematic leadership of Ma Ying-jeou and the poor performance of his team have taken the general public from expectation to suspicion to disappointment. In mid-August, Ma's approval rate dropped one percent although ECFA was signed and endorsed. The approval rate of Wu administration declined to lower than 30%. This is a testament to the dissatisfaction for Ma and his government. On the contrary, DPP city mayors and county governors have been acknowledged in poll surveys. Scored the lowest are KMT mayors and governors. It is natural that KMT shifted from advantages to disadvantages in the course of election.

KMT is now in disadvantages partly because it failed to satisfy electorate, and it's falling behind DPP at poll surveys. More importantly, the change of the party is an important factor for KMT's declination.

First, the core of KMT consists of a group of deep-blue members. They formed an oligarch structure in the party. This oligarch might not be close enough to electorate in

the past but through power sharing, the oligarch maintained good relations with local government, and won several local organization elections. However, Ma Ying-jeou, the Chairman of KMT, has opposed to such management style. Ma and his team think that local opinion leaders are at different levels involved in gangs, so they are indifferent or even hostile to local organizations. They focused their party work on propaganda, believing that sending out flyers can help them win elections and settle political issues. This is why Ma's team has a large number of media experts. As a consequence, KMT is losing its local supports and the 2009 Local Elections.

Secondly, Ma's controversial leading and staffing skills have generated three paradoxes in KMT. First paradox is relevant to birth place. Ma's fully-trusted deep-blue forces, most of them born in China, have formed an oligarch in the party, marginalizing KMT members born in Taiwan. Second paradox is the confrontation between central and local governments. Ma and his team are indifferent to local organizations, so the KMT often nominates wrong people for local elections, resulting in resentment in the party. The third paradox is between the KMT's blue and orange (People First Party) camps. KMT won the 2008 presidential election because it

joined forces with the orange camp. But after the election KMT did not give the orange party the share it deserves while delegating powers. This will certainly affect solidarity. The three paradoxes will decrease KMT's forces to drive election campaigns.

On the other hand, KMT has suppressed Taiwan's former president Chen Shui-bian and charged him of corruption. The core leadership in Chen's government has retired one after one, giving DPP a chance to reborn from ashes. After Chen steps down from his presidency, DPP has developed new operation models and recruited new blood. More and more DPP candidates hold master or doctoral degrees and satisfying performances. They have successfully managed local organizations. The Irrigation Association election is a good example and the success functions to reassure DPP. Old experiences cannot be applied to the observation and prediction of the 2010 Municipal Elections because this is the first decisive battle between the new DPP and new KMT.

It is generally believed that the 2010 Metropolitan Elections at the end of 2010 are crucial to whether Ma can win his second presidential term. KMT members share such viewpoint too. Although it may be too early to tell the election results, the changed public opinions are obvious to all. Since

pan-blue media are pessimistic about the performance of KMT at the elections, it would be very challenging for KMT to win in three metropolitans. DPP on the other hand may have an opportunity to take over four, if not all five, metropolitans. **B**