

## *Analysis of the Democratic Progressive Party's 2011 Primary System*

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The Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) primary system has been reformed once again this year. Since the establishment of the DPP 24 years ago, the party's primaries have gone through formats such as the evaluation of candidates by party officials and a 100-percent party member vote, which was later reduced to a 50-percent party member vote and then further lowered to a 30-percent party member vote. While 50 percent of the vote was from public opinion polls in earlier years, that ratio has been raised to 70 percent later and even to 100 percent this year. Observation of the DPP's reforms of its primary system revealed that its primary system has been gradually conformed to the mode of general elections. It is worth mentioning that, in recent years, the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) primary system has copied and followed hard on the heels of the DPP's formats. In early days, KMT leaders directly appointed candidates, and afterwards they adopted a negotiation process. Then the party changed its primary system: 30 percent of the vote was by party members and 70 percent from public opinion polls. Although the KMT has in principle maintained its existing system this year, it has not excluded the possibility of allowing public opinion polls to form the basis for its primaries.

At first glance, the so-called "100-percent public opinion polls" in party primaries seems to be a consistent format that looks into the opinions of the entire electorate. However, because the actual practices or details of this format—such as the 2007 opinion polls that excluded pro-blue individuals, the opinion polls that compare

support for both DPP and KMT candidates, the opinion polls that compare only support for DPP candidates, or grading methods according to whether the candidates belong to single-member districts or multiple-member districts—often differ, the results obtained usually vary widely as well. The DPP's presidential and legislative primary systems are further and respectively explained as follows:

### 1. The presidential primary:

The DPP has participated in presidential elections for five times. It mapped out two phases for the 1996 presidential primary. In the first phase, four candidates joined and a vote by party members was conducted. The candidates who won the highest vote and the second highest vote entered the second phase of a vote by citizens. In 2000 and 2004, only one candidate registered to run for president, so the DPP did not hold presidential primaries. In the 2008 presidential primary, 30 percent of the vote was conducted by party members and 70 percent from public opinion polls (which only compared support for DPP candidates). After the vote by party members had been completed, the DPP concluded its primary without entering the phase in which public opinion polls were scheduled to be conducted. As the DPP holds its presidential primary for the third time in 2011, its public opinion polls will be carried out in this way: the party will commission five polling companies to conduct the polls, with 3,000 valid samples in each poll. This means that there will

be 15,000 valid samples in total. Questions in the polls are designed to compare support for DPP and KMT candidates, and the polls will compare support rates for candidates from both camps. Below are the criteria used to determine the outcome:

- (1) If only one DPP candidate acquires support rate higher than or equal to that of the KMT rival, then this candidate wins the polls.
- (2) If most of the DPP candidates score higher support rates than the KMT rival, or if most of the DPP candidates score lower support rates than the KMT rival, then in either case the DPP candidate who gains the highest support rate wins the polls.
- (3) If a number of DPP candidates score equal support rates, then the candidate who defeats the KMT rival by the largest margin wins the polls.

## 2. Legislative primaries:

As penalty regulations that encompass party primaries have been added to Chapter 5 of the Civil Servants Election and Recall Act entitled “Penalty for Encumbering Election or Recall,” the DPP has in response changed its legislative primaries so as to choose candidates through public opinion polls alone. Three polling units will carry out the polls all at the same time, and the total number of samples for each unit collects must be no less than 1,200. Questionnaires in the polls will cover questions that compare support

for DPP and KMT candidates as well as questions that compare support for DPP candidates only. The KMT rivals in the polls are first KMT individuals whom DPP candidates unanimously regard as their potential rivals. Secondly, KMT candidates whom the KMT has officially nominated will also be the DPP candidates’ rivals in the polls.

- (1) Legislative primaries have to be held in 33 electoral districts:
  - a. If one DPP candidate (or more than one DPP candidate) scores support rate higher than or equal to that of the KMT rival, then the DPP candidate who obtains the highest support rate wins the polls.
  - b. If most DPP candidates acquires support rates higher than or equal to that of the KMT rival and the support rates for many DPP candidates are the same, then the DPP candidate who defeats the KMT rival by the largest margin wins the polls.
  - c. If all DPP candidates score lower support rates than the KMT rival, then the polls based on questions that compare support for DPP candidates only shall determine which DPP candidate wins the polls.

In reality, most of the electoral districts that need legislative primaries are for the incumbent DPP legislators, and the KMT has not decided who shall be its candidates in these districts. What’s more, it is not easy for DPP candidates to reach a consensus on whom their KMT rival in the polls

shall be. Therefore, in actual practice, the DPP is likely to adopt polls that compare support for DPP candidates only to determine which candidate is the winner.

(2) Forty difficult electoral districts:

A difficult electoral district in legislative elections means a district that does not have an incumbent DPP legislator and where the DPP has not gained over 42.5 percent of the vote in the most recent civil servants election of the same kind. This category is a response to the electoral reform that introduced single-member districts. The DPP chairperson will nominate the difficult electoral districts' candidates and the selection will be finalized after the approval of the party's Central Executive Committee.

### 3. Legislator-at-large (proportional party representative) primaries:

- (1) The DPP chairperson will nominate seven to nine individuals to form the nomination committee. The nomination committee will be established after the party's Central Executive Committee approved the selection of its members. The DPP chairperson will preside over the nomination committee (its membership is not restricted to DPP party members only).
- (2) At least 50 percent of the legislator-at-large nominees should be women.
- (3) The nominees should include one (or more) overseas representative.

- (4) The nominees should include one (or more) aboriginal representative.
- (5) Legislators-at-large can be nominated for two terms at most. The 7th legislative session shall be counted as the first term.
- (6) The list of legislator-at-large nominees shall be approved by two-thirds of the party's Central Executive Committee, which cannot meddle with the nominees or interfere with their rankings.

In the presidential primary, the adoption of polls that compare support for DPP and KMT candidates can effectively reduce the disturbance created by KMT interviewees who falsely expressed support for DPP candidates as well as strategic answers given by KMT supporters. But these polls will also shorten the gap between DPP candidates while reducing manifestation of factional positions and confrontations caused by mobilization of party members. The candidates' personality characteristics and charisma will become determining factors in winning the victory.

In legislative primaries, the addition of the category "difficult electoral districts" was meant to increase the flexibility and adaptability of the nomination process. If the DPP can nominate well-known candidates or candidates with a good image in difficult electoral districts, there will be room for the party to increase its seats and votes in these districts. As to legislator-at-large (proportional party representative) primaries, the list of the candidates needs to be refreshingly eye-opening to all sectors of society in order to boost the DPP's chances of winning the elections. If the

list becomes spoils for party factions to carve up, then it will only serve to foster the organization and cohesion of the factions.

In conclusion, the main purpose of the DPP's adoption of a "non-exclusive" public opinion polls in presidential and legislative primaries is to reduce the various negative influences brought about by the chronic ills related to dummy party members. This method also aims to achieve systematic fairness within the party as well as flexibility and adaptability while the party competes in elections. However, as expected, this approach has caused certain party members' backfires. From the perspective of the ideal that party candidates should mainly be decided by party members, it can be said that some grassroots party members' criticisms of this method are not entirely without reason. How to solve and reconcile this conflict between ideal and reality is a task that the DPP needs to work hard to improve upon in the future. **B**