

Analysis of 2012 Election Results (2) - Changes in DPP Support in the Presidential Election

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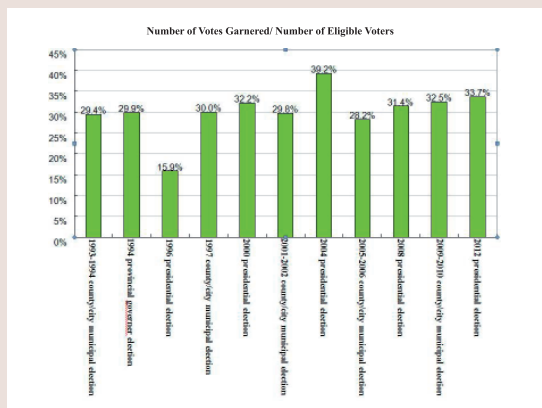
Once said that one could be misled if only changes in the share of the vote of different political parties were considered when discussing changing election results. The reason is that the share of the vote of one party very likely could have increased because its opponents garnered fewer votes, and not because it garnered more votes itself. Should voters swing back to the rival parties in the next election; the party in question will be back to where it was in the first place. Taoyuan County is a classic example of such voter swings. In the 2009 county magistrate elections (the Democratic Progressive Party's) Cheng Wen-Tsan garnered a high 45.7 percent of the vote, while voter turnout reached only a very low 53.7 percent. In the first constituency Cheng even managed to win 49.3 percent of the vote. This led him to believe that he would stand a good chance of winning a seat in the legislature if he ran in the first constituency. But actually Cheng won such a high share of the vote in 2009 because many supporters of the blue camp simply did not turn out to vote. When the pan-blue supporters returned to the fold this time voter turnout in Taoyuan County stood at 74.7 percent, the DPP's share of the vote slipped to 39.9 percent, although more people voted for the DPP than before. Cheng also won more votes in the first constituency, but his share of votes cast declined to 44.7 percent.

I have been reiterating over and over again that voter support is a more reliable indicator for changes in the electoral landscape than the percentage of votes garnered. This article aims to compare the changes in voter support for the DPP in the just concluded and previous presidential elections. Let's review once more how voter support is defined before we start the analysis:

$$\text{voter turnout}_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ratio} \hat{p} \text{ non-residents}_{i,t} + \beta_2 \text{advanced elections}_{i,t} + \beta_3 \text{ratio} \hat{p} \text{ non-residents} * \text{advanced elections}_{i,t} + \varepsilon_{i,t}$$

Two Decades of Changes

Graph 1 shows DPP support in county magistrate and presidential elections since 1993. It is quite obvious that aside from two exceptions – the presidential elections in 1996 and 2004 – around one third of the electorate voted for the DPP. The first exception in 1996 was due to the fact that half of the DPP supporters defected to vote for Kuomintang candidate Lee Teng-hui. The second exception will be discussed later on in this article.



Note: Chen Li-chen, candidate for Chiayi City mayor in 2001, and Liu Chao-hao, candidate for Taitung County magistrate in 2005, ran as independents, while Chen Chien-ming, candidate for Keelung City mayor in 2005 ran on the ticket of the Taiwan Solidarity Union. However, the candidacies of all three were endorsed by the DPP. Therefore the votes cast for these three candidates are counted toward DPP support.

Graph 1: DPP Support in Past Elections

In countries with a two-party-system, a political party needs to gain support from 40 percent of all eligible voters to be able to build a stable government. In 2000 the DPP won the presidency with a support rate of just 30 percent, because the

pan-blue camp was split. This was fortunate and unfortunate at the same time. Since the DPP lacked a sufficient base in society, it was easily obstructed no matter what policy it advocated. In 2004 then incumbent President Chen Shui-bian used the advantage of being in power to mobilize vast resources to alienate grassroots supporters from the KMT, which temporarily boosted his support to almost 40 percent. However, since these changes came too abruptly, he failed to win over society at large. Shortly afterwards, DPP support slipped back to 30 percent. Much more unfortunate was that many structural problems that were a legacy of the authoritarian KMT era were now blamed on the DPP. As a result, eight years of weak and feeble government brought to an end the upward trend that DPP support had shown since the 1990s.

Changes in support for a certain political party are actually quite moderate and do not happen in one swoop. The DPP's big advance in 2004 occurred so suddenly that it triggered distrust among the public. Although the DPP was not able to return to the Presidential Office this time, it is good to see that its support keeps steadily inching upward. As long as the DPP maintains this upward momentum, not only its chances of winning are increasing, but much more important is that it would be able to create a stable government following an election victory.

Comparison of 2010 and 2012

In comparison to the mayoral elections in the five major cities in 2010, DPP support in the 2012 presidential election slightly increased in Tainan City and Kaohsiung City, while it somewhat declined in Taipei City and New Taipei City. In Taichung City DPP support declined more markedly Table 1 . This shows that some

voters are ready to give the DPP a chance in local elections, but that they shriek back when it comes to presidential elections. A possible reason is that many Taiwanese companies have adopted a model of “taking orders in Taiwan, while manufacturing in China” in recent years, which keeps operations management, design and R&D departments in northern Taiwan, but relocates production to China. As a result, northern Taiwan has a big number of white collar workers who work in operations management, design and R&D, and are therefore particularly worried that sudden changes in cross-strait ties could affect their companies’ production chain and thus their own jobs. For the DPP it is a matter of utmost urgency to figure out how to win the trust of these white collar workers.

On the other hand, some voters in Taichung County, who voted for the DPP in 2010, probably only did so to prevent incumbent Taichung City Mayor Jason Hu from winning his reelection bid. In contrast to Hu, who neglected local grassroots supporters, the KMT devoted huge resources in the presidential election this time to incorporate local grassroots. Consequently such voters returned to the fold.

Table 1
Comparison of DPP Support in the 2010 Five Cities Elections and the 2012 Presidential Election

	2010 Support	2012 Support	Change
Taipei City	30.70%	30.18%	-0.52%
New Taipei City	33.42%	32.77%	-0.65%
Taichung City	35.32%	33.63%	-1.69%
Tainan City	42.25%	42.51%	+0.26%
Kaohsiung City	39.85%*	40.29%	+0.44%

Note: In 2010 (Kaohsiung City mayoral candidate) Yang Chiu-hsing received 10 percent of his votes from the green camp, and 90 percent from the blue camp (See: <http://richter.pixnet.net/blog/post/27835357>), therefore his green votes are counted toward the DPP support rate.

Comparison of 2018 and 2012

In comparison with the 2008 presidential election, DPP support increased virtually everywhere across the island in 2012. The regions with the most pronounced increases include: the northern coast, former Taichung County and the mountainous areas in the south. DPP support in these regions increased by more than 3 percentage points Graph 2 . While the DPP generally lagged behind the KMT in Taoyuan, Hsinchu and Miaoli counties and Taichung City, it still actually gained in support there.

although the DPP won the presidential election in 2000 and lost it in 2012, its voter base in 2012 was bigger than in 2000. **B**

Comparison of 2000 and 2012

Eight years of weak DPP government caused the party's support to plummet in northern Taiwan. Despite party rebuilding during the subsequent four years, DPP support in Taipei City has not recovered to the 1990s level Graph 3 . Moreover, the votes that Chen Shui-bian won in the former Tainan County thanks to his home county advantage were not all switched to other DPP candidates. Therefore, current DPP support cannot reach the level of the Chen Shui-bian era in many locations in Tainan. The DPP's luster is also beginning to fade in Chiayi City and Ilan County, both bastions of the democracy movement during the Dangwai era, when no other parties than the KMT were legal. In Chiayi City this shift is owed to the fact that the politically long dominating Hsu family cozied up to the KMT, while in the case of Ilan County further analysis is needed before a conclusion can be drawn. On top of that the DPP has languished in defeat in Changhua County for the past decade. Aside from the areas mentioned above DPP support generally increased between 2000 and 2012. To sum things up,