

Can the Mayoral Race in Taipei City Break the Mold of Blue-Green Confrontation?

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Due to the voter structure in Taipei City, the pan-blue camp should be able to easily maintain a vote share of 55 percent to 58 percent, whereas the pan-green camp will garner only 42 percent to 45 percent. Therefore, it is quite paradoxical that Ko Wen-je, the mayoral candidate backed by a broad coalition of opposition forces, leads Kuomintang (KMT) candidate Sean Lien by a stable margin of more than 10 percentage points in public opinion polls. When examining election trends based on opinion polls, it is therefore easy to lose one's way amid the figures.

If we look into the reasons for this paradox, we need to look first at the structure of the KMT voter base. The KMT votes mainly come from "waisheng" voters - people who immigrated to Taiwan after World War II and their offspring – plus three other KMT clienteles: members of the military, civil servants and teachers, local factions and economic policy-oriented voters. In Taipei City only a few clan-based traditional factions remain, while the large local factions have disappeared. In the past, economic policy-oriented voters firmly held the belief that the KMT is more capable of handling economic development. However, over the past six years the government of President Ma Ying-jeou has not been able to improve the economy despite the China factor. Instead, the unequal distribution of economic benefits has led to a more pronounced stratification of society. KMT support among such voters is eroding.

The Age Divide

Among voters aged 40 and younger Ko leads with a wide margin in all public opinion polls on the Taipei mayoral race published by various media so far. Lien is the favored candidate among voters aged 50 and older, especially among female voters. The approval rate for the two major political parties, the KMT and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), combined stand at 40 plus percent. Middle-of-the-road voters with no preference for a particular party account for a higher percentage of public support than the two parties combined. Among this voter segment, support for Ko is higher than for the KMT candidate Lien. Experience shows that turnout is low among young voters. Crucial for a victory by Ko is a high young voter turnout.

Overt and Covert Political Party Preferences

Before 2012, public opinion polls showed that pan-blue voters openly showed their party preference, whereas supporters of the green camp tended to keep their political leaning secret. Therefore, the prospects of green camp candidates were usually underestimated in such surveys. However, in the 2012 presidential election, support for DPP presidential hopeful Tsai Ing-wen at one time exceeded that of KMT candidate and incumbent President Ma; in other polls the two candidates were running neck-and-neck alternating in taking the lead. In the run-up to the election, the green camp assumed that voters with no declared party preference would

tend to vote for Tsai. Nevertheless, the blue camp believed that because of Ma's dismal political record its supporters were unwilling to reveal their party preference and therefore assumed that the noncommittal voters would tend to vote for Ma. Follow-up opinion polls after the presidential election showed that the noncommittal voters were split fifty-fifty between Tsai and Ma.

In the wake of the March 18 student protests, voters who support the KMT are even more likely to keep their political leaning secret. As a result, support rates for KMT candidates tend to be low, which means that opinion polls underrate support for Lien. Nevertheless, there are exceptions to the rule such as incumbent New Taipei City Mayor Eric Chu, who is seeking reelection.

Blue-Green Divide Being Deconstructed

Around 1992, Taiwan's opposition forces were weak since the KMT dominated politics. After assuming office, the power of then President Lee Teng-hui was challenged by a power struggle between mainstream and non-mainstream factions, which led to the formation of the New Party by KMT renegades. The Taipei City mayoral race of 1994 was the most fiercely contested to date with the three equally strong candidates Chen Shui-bian, Chao Shao-kang and Huang Ta-chou. Yet at the time, the concept of blue-green and the resulting political divide did not exist.

In the 1996 presidential election Lee sought reelection as a native Taiwanese versus his alien regime challengers (the Lin Yang-kang and Hau Pei-tsun ticket) so there was no blue-green issue. The blue-green divide emerged after the 2000 presidential election because James Soong left

the KMT to run for president. Since the combined vote share of Soong and KMT candidate Lien Chan exceeded that of DPP candidate Chen Shui-bian and the New Party and Soong's People First Party were KMT splinter groups, the term pan-blue became the moniker for all three and blue-green came to describe the confrontation between the two camps.

Now we have the demands made by the Sunflower student movement, a KMT candidate (Lien) who belongs to the political elite and an independent challenger (Ko). Together these three indispensable factors are about to "deconstruct" the basis for the blue-green divide. Regardless of the election outcome, the 2014 Taipei City mayoral race has set off the process of gradually "deconstructing" blue-green.

The Exchange of Future Events (xFuture) predicts a 53.9 percent probability for Ko to win the presidential election versus 47.6 percent for Lien. The ultimate vote share is predicted to stand at 47.9 percent for Ko and 47 percent for Lien, respectively, which shows that the race is tight and the victor will likely win with a razor thin margin. Whether Ko will be able to win is uncertain, but he has definitely broken the mold of blue-green confrontation in Taiwan politics. **BT**

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