

Prediction of the Nov. 29 Local Elections and their Political Implications

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I. Local elections set the political agenda

Taiwan's last constitutional amendment not only slashed the seats of the Legislative Yuan in half and changed the voting system into single district plurality, but also extended the term of legislators to four years, specifically to combine and streamline elections on different levels. Since then, municipal mayors, county magistrates, legislators, and the president all serve four years; every four years concurrent national elections are held for the presidency and the legislature, in between are the local elections for mayors, magistrates, and other local offices. The biennial election cycle is designed to resemble US midterm elections. However, judging from Taiwan's political progression, local elections not only test the support of the ruling party but also the overall political and economic environment, and at times could even trigger changeover of power, in effect serving as the thermometer for the next presidential race.

II. Nov. 29 Election Prediction

Based on various indicators and surveys, I propose three scenarios for the ruling Kuomintang (KMT): worst case, middling, and best case. The worst case for the KMT is also the most likely: in addition to the double losses of both Taipei and Taichung Cities, it also loses Changhua County with its over one million population, only holding on to New Taipei City and Taoyuan among the six special municipalities. The middling outcomes would be that the KMT manages to retain either Taipei or Taichung City and even recovers the

southern county Yunlin; then it can claim to have held its grounds and the opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) cannot declare victory. KMT's best case scenario is to keep Taipei, Taichung, Chiayi City, and even recovers Yunlin.

If the large-scale transition of local powers does take place, it would not necessarily be a realignment of the Blue v. Green political landscape but possibly only a short-term prevalence of split ticket: the electorate votes Blue for councilmen and votes either Green or nonpartisan for mayor. The lasting effect of the de-alignment after such a political shift remains to be seen.

A changeover in Taichung would greatly differ from one in Taipei City. If the DPP candidate Lin Chia-lung prevails over the KMT incumbent Jason Hu in Taichung, it would signal the ebbing of the Blue and the waxing of the Green. If the independent Ko Wen-je beats out KMT Sean Lien in Taipei, it will mark the rise of a new political force, which poses a challenge to both major parties.

III. A Pattern for changeover of political power

Looking back at both political transitions in Taiwan's recent history, the first time, Chen Shui-bian's victory in 2000, had its foundation in DPP's triumph in the 1997 local elections and the subsequent strategy of "laying siege to the central government with local success." The second power transition, KMT's retaking the government, should be attributed to its 2005

victory in local elections more than other factors such as the Red Shirt movement, which was a backlash against then President Chen. Local elections boast a good track record of predicting changeover of the central power.

Therefore, if the worst happens to the KMT at the end of November and the DPP under Chair Tsai Ing-wen declares victory, Tsai will all but certain secure DPP's nomination to run in the 2016 presidential race. In the meantime, the KMT will descend into leadership infighting; Ma Ying-jeou's chairmanship will be challenged and Vice President Wu Den-yih and New Taipei City Magistrate Eric Chu will openly spar over the next presidential ticket. Ma might name a new premier and reshuffle the Cabinet in an attempt to placate his camp and to curry favor with intra-party factions. After a period of regrouping, Chu would yield to Wu and bite his time for future prospect. The 2016 presidential election will be a contest between Tsai and Wu. **BT**

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