

Satisfaction with Government Continues to Slide Across Political Spectrum

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Public approval of the president, the premier and the cabinet continued to decline and reached a record low in December 2014, according to the latest Taiwan Brain Trust (TBT) opinion poll. The public's disenchantment with the government and the ruling National Party or Kuomintang (KMT) has only increased after the KMT's landslide defeat in the Nov. 29 nine-in-one local elections. The results of this poll are significant in that the share of those who regard China as hostile toward Taiwan has increased and pro-independence leanings have grown stronger.

First, dissatisfaction with President Ma Ying-jeou has reached an all-time high of 76.2 percent, while satisfaction has hit rock bottom with 14.2 percent. What deserves particular attention is that even among pan-blue voters dissatisfaction with the president has reached nearly 60 percent (57.7%). Premier Jiang Yi-huah resigned after the elections and his successor Mao Chi-kuo carried out a minor cabinet reshuffle. However, nearly 60 percent of the respondents are dissatisfied with the new cabinet. Among pan-blue supporters, almost every second respondent (47%) voiced dissatisfaction. Mao's team kicked off with a public approval rate of just 13.5 percent. Rarely has a new cabinet started from such low point. The cabinet's dismal popularity could probably be attributed to the fact that Mao replaced just three cabinet ministers, retaining the majority of an already unpopular team.

Second, dissatisfaction with the KMT continued to rise, hitting a record high of 80.0

percent in the December survey. Correspondingly, satisfaction with the KMT reached a record low of 11.0 percent. Even among pan-blue supporters, satisfaction with the KMT has slipped sharply by 16.1 percentage points from 40.5 percent in October 2014 to 24.4 percent in December 2014. This shows that the public is still dissatisfied with the KMT although Ma stepped down as party chairman to take responsibility for the election debacle. On the other hand, satisfaction with the major opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has risen 16.0 percentage points (30.2% → 46.2%) between October and December 2014, hitting the highest point since TBT began to track political party approval ratings. At the same time, dissatisfaction with the DPP has markedly declined by 14.1 percentage points (49.5% → 35.4%). Clearly, the election outcome has led to marked changes in the two major parties' approval ratings.

As for party leader approval ratings, DPP Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen enjoys rising popularity (48.7% → 65.5%), while fewer people are dissatisfied with her performance (30.5% → 18.3%). These results seem to indicate a massive swing of public opinion in favor of Tsai. On the other hand, the survey provides a mixed picture with regard to the ability of New Taipei City Mayor Eric Chu, who has meanwhile succeeded Ma as KMT chairman, to reform the ruling party. Almost as many respondents believe (39.0%) he will be able to bring about reform as do not believe (39.9%). Interestingly, only 6 percent are convinced that Chu will "definitely"

succeed at reforming the KMT, which shows that the public does not have strong confidence in the new party leader.

In terms of self-identification of the Taiwanese public, 61.6 percent describe themselves as “Taiwanese” compared to 31.2 percent who say they are “both Taiwanese and Chinese” and 4.4 percent who see themselves as “Chinese.” When asked to choose between “Taiwanese” or “Chinese,” 88.7 percent say they are Taiwanese, while just 7.7 percent say they are Chinese. These results are in line with previous surveys and do not indicate major shifts in national identity.

With regard to possible unification with China, the ratio of those who support maintaining Taiwan’s status quo continued to decline between August and December 2014 (58.8% → 55.4% → 50.9%), while support for independence went up (25.4% → 28.4% → 29.6%). If the status quo were no longer viable, 67.5 percent would support Taiwan to become an independent country. Moreover, 65.6 percent believe that Taiwan already is a sovereign, independent country compared to 21.9 percent who believe the opposite. These results are also in line with the past trend.

As for perceptions about China, as many as 50.9 percent regard China as hostile, including 19.6 percent who perceive the neighboring country as “very hostile.” In contrast, 31.0 percent believe China is friendly and barely 3.2 percent consider it “very friendly.” These results show that China truly needs to reexamine its policy toward Taiwan.

Finally, support for TBT founder Koo Kuan-min’s “brotherly states” initiative outstrips opposition to it. As many as 50.6 percent agree that Taiwan and China could establish relations as brotherly states compared to 39.2 percent who disagree with the proposal. With 70.1 percent, support for “brotherly states” is particularly high among pan-blue voters, whereas opposition to the concept is particularly high among the pan-green camp with 50.8 percent. Obviously, there is a market for the brotherly states concept among pan-blue supporters, whereas acceptance remains low among pan-green voters who ardently insist on Taiwan’s national subjectivity. These findings could serve as important reference for the future development of the “brotherly states” discourse. **TBT**

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