

Factors for DPP Cross-Strait Policy in the 2014 Elections Aftermath

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DPP victory in the 2014 nine-in-one local elections did not come through a political showdown between blue (Kuomintang, KMT) and green (Democratic Progressive Party, DPP) camps, but rather was determined by the public's loss of confidence in KMT governance at the central, county, and municipal levels. With a popular desire for change and the KMT's inability to win back the public's trust, the prospect of a turnover in leadership in 2016 has grown significantly. However, the question of how the DPP should approach cross-strait policy remains a focal point for every sector of Taiwanese society.

In anticipation of the 2016 presidential and legislative elections, the direction of DPP cross-strait policy is likely to be influenced by the following four factors:

1. The will of the Taiwanese people: In the recent election, popular disappointment in the KMT stemming from issues such as corruption cases involving KMT politicians, controversial urban renewal projects in Taipei City, the Dapu compulsory acquisition case in Miaoli, the death of conscript Hung Chung-chiu, the strife between Ma Ying-jeou and parliamentary speaker Wang Jin-pyng, the Sunflower Student Movement, and the case of alleged leaking of state secrets by Taiwan's top negotiator to China Chang Hsien-yao, culminated in the public's wariness of the KMT. This sentiment drove voters to censure the ruling

party by their votes. But the question remains, could it translate into an affirmation of DPP ideals and policies?

The attitude of the Taiwanese people toward cross-strait policy is by no means one of unmitigated rejection of exchanges but an expression of dissatisfaction with KMT monopolization of the process, which has resulted in an unequal distribution of benefits to a privileged few instead of the Taiwanese people as a whole and the injustice that has festered as a consequence.

Since Ma Ying-jeou took office as president in 2008, the handling of cross-strait relations has been less than transparent. The process has come under criticism for everything from the Cross-Strait Service Agreement to closed-door meetings between Zhang Zhijun, head of China's Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, and Wang Yu-chi, Taiwan's Minister of the Mainland Affairs Council. Nevertheless, the Taiwanese people continue to consider cross-strait exchanges and peaceful development beneficial. It is issues of fairness and justice in the process that concerns most Taiwanese—particularly the youth.

2. The balance of power between factions within the party and heads of local governments: In the wake of the elections, DPP chairperson Tsai Ing-wen and the party's core leadership have cemented their positions, while DPP "warlords" have established local power centers throughout Taiwan. This development means that on the

issue of cross-strait policy development, Tsai must now take into account the views of mayors and county magistrates. A regard for rationality and pragmatism is expected to be the common denominator. Whether cross-strait city-to-city exchanges will be put on hold, especially between municipals held by the green camp and their Chinese counterparts or, conversely, whether such exchanges might be more actively pursued, might be an early indicator of China's intentions. Another potential issue pertains to Taipei mayor Ko Wen-je. Ko's personal interest in cross-strait policy and his high profile guarantee that Ko's future remarks on the subject will be closely scrutinized, especially if he diverges from the DPP's position or even force its hand in policy matters.

3. The U.S. factor: The American government does not particularly like or dislike the KMT or the DPP. Whether it supports a particular party on a particular issue is determined by U.S. national interests and the expectations of the Taiwanese people. When the KMT draws too close to China, the United States would pull it back; when the DPP appears too anti-China, the U.S. would also rein it in. The primary objective of the United State is to keep the situation under its control. The U.S. will always be a factor for the DPP leadership on cross-strait issues; although it will not dictate DPP policy, it will inevitably react to DPP policy proposals.

4. China's Response: The DPP cannot implement cross-strait policy unilaterally but must engage China in the process. Realization or acceptance of DPP cross-strait policy depends on China's positive response. As the DPP ponders its next steps, China's potential reaction, be it unyielding opposition, stony silence or positive feedback, is a crucial variable.

As DPP chairperson Tsai Ing-wen remarked at the November 29 press conference after the election victory, "In the future, Taiwan's path will depend on the collective wisdom of its political parties and civil society. As politicians, we have only one principle, and that is in the face of the rising power of the people, we cannot but become more humble." In other words, the DPP's future cross-strait policy will not merely hinge on the party's position but will be determined by a Taiwanese consensus. At the same time, American and Chinese attitudes will receive due consideration.

The 2014 elections mostly expressed the public distrust of the KMT and cannot be taken as direct endorsement of DPP policy. Although the DPP's position on cross-strait relations will not run counter to its tenets nor the direction of civil society, there is still room to maneuver when it comes to policy and practice. This narrow course must be negotiated between the expectations of the Taiwanese people, the necessity of effective governance, and the framework of U.S.-China relations. **BT**

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