

Sunflower Anniversary: A New Dawn

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The Taiwan Brain Trust's mid-March 2015 public opinion survey reveals meager support for the Ma administration and challenges to both the ruling and opposition parties. Tsai Ing-wen enjoys a solid lead in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election. One year on since the Sunflower Student Movement, the rise of civil power has profoundly altered Taiwan's political landscape.

Chronically Low Support for the Ma administration and Tough Issues for Both Parties

President Ma Ying-jeou's approval rating has risen to 19.1% from the nadir of 14.2% in December 2014, while his disapproval rating persists at the height of 73.1%. Premier Mao Chi-kuo matches the President's low approval with 19.3%, while his disapproval rating is comparatively lower than the president's at 47.3%. The public's disapproval of the performance of the cabinet as a whole is as high as 65.0%, closer to the president's rating. These numbers demonstrate the public's continuing disapproval of the administration overall.

For both parties disapproval ratings exceed approval ratings. The Kuomintang's (KMT) disapproval rating has reached 74.9% while its approval rating is only 18.3%. For the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), the disapproval is at 51.4% as opposed to its 37.8% approval. The DPP's scores have reverted to those before the November 2014 local elections, when disapproval eclipsed approval. This reflects the adverse effects of squabbles over

the parliamentary primary elections. In terms of party preference, the DPP's number has fallen to 25.7%, only slightly higher than the KMT's 19.9%. The People First Party (PFP) holds a lead over the other small parties with a 7.0% preference rating. However, dislike for the KMT has reached 41.7%, and among those who self-identify as pan-Blue, 11.9% expresses the greatest dislike for the KMT, signaling the decline of the party. An upside for the KMT is the rising public approval of party chairman Eric Chu, which has risen from 46.7% in late January to the current 52.4%. Chu is closing the gap with DPP chairwoman Tsai Ing-wen, who enjoys an approval rating of 59.6%.

2016 Presidential Election Outlook: Frontrunner Tsai Ing-Wen, Dark Horse Wang Jin-pyng

As much as 73.2% of the Taiwan public expects another power transition in 2016, a number consistent with the trend in recent surveys. As to who should run for president on the KMT ticket, 39.9% supports Eric Chu while 33.4% supports Legislative Speaker Wang Jin-pyng. Respondents were also polled about various matchups. In a one to one race, Chu trails Tsai Ing-wen by a 20.9% margin (33.1% vs. 54.0%), the gap having widened as Chu's support has dropped four percentage points since January. If Wu Den-yih ran against Tsai, he would face a whopping 54.1% chasm, with 41.1% of pan-Blue voters switching support to Tsai. Surprisingly, Wang Jin-pyng leads the KMT pack by losing to Tsai Ing-wen by only 16.4%, with each receiving support from approximately 20% of the opposing

camp's voters. However, Tsai Ing-wen enjoys a majority of support in every scenario. If James Soong entered the fray, he could boast support from 19.5% of the public; as such, Soong's influence should not be overlooked. With Soong in the running, support for both Chu and Tsai drops as Soong draws votes from both the Blue and Green camps, taking as much as 32.0% of Blue votes.

The Anniversary of the Sunflower Student Movement and the Rise of Civil Power

Fifty-eight point four percent of the public believes the KMT was defeated in the November 2014 local elections by youth and civil power; this view is especially prevalent among the young respondents. In addition, more than half of those interviewed (54.9%) opposes legal action against students and other participants in the Sunflower Student Movement. Forty-five point two percent agrees that the Movement precipitated the rise of the "third forces." Approximately 60% of youth, the highly educated, and pan-Green supporters equate the "third forces" with the Sunflower Student Movement. This is also reflected in shifting support in the 2016 parliamentary elections as 46% of the public would consider voting for a "third forces" candidate or choosing a "third forces" party in the party list. The pan-Green camp is facing the pressure of a divided vote.

Noteworthy, the "Ko Wen-je model" of pan-Green cooperation has been held up as worthy of emulation. Fifty-five point nine percent of the public would like to see the DPP follow this example and coordinate with the "third forces" in nominating candidates for the 2016 parliamentary elections. Over 70% of youth and pan-Green voters voice their support for such a strategy,

increasing the demand for cooperation across party lines.

The impetus for constitutional reform continues to build up steam, with support rising from 66.5% in June 2014 to 73.9% in January 2015 to 79.7% now. The public, however, remains divided over the voting rights of eighteen year olds. Forty-eight point four percent of the public supports revising the constitution to lower the voting age to eighteen while 47.7% opposes the proposal. Interestingly, more than half of youth ages twenty to thirty-nine oppose lowering the voting age. Support for increasing the number of seats in parliament is even lower at 33.7%, while 75.3% of Blue voters and six out of ten in the age bracket of forty to fifty-nine oppose this idea. With Eric Chu talking up the prospect of meeting with Xi Jinping, more people favor KMT indigenization, rising from 49.3% in January 2015 to 58.2%. However, there remains division over whether the KMT, officially the "Chinese Nationalist Party," should change its name to the "Taiwanese Nationalist Party," with 35.5% for and 49.7% against.

The 2014 Sunflower Student Movement continues to shape Taiwan's current political landscape, the salient feature of which is the widespread discontent with the government and the main political parties. Looking toward the 2016 general elections, anticipation for another government turnover remains high, but internal power shifts within the KMT warrant continued scrutiny. **B**

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