

Press Release

Jan. 13, 2020

**“Post-Election Outlook for Taiwan and Beyond: Stability or Uncertainty?”
Workshop Press Release**

The Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD) on Jan. 12 co-hosted the “Post-Election Outlook for Taiwan and Beyond: Stability or Uncertainty?” workshop with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Foreign Policy Research Institute, and the Foundation for Scholarly Exchange (Fulbright Taiwan). The event invited eight academics and experts from Taiwan and the U.S. to share their analysis on the Taiwan’s 2020 presidential and legislative election results, and the implications of the results for cross-Strait relations and regional security. TFD Vice President Ketty W. Chen and Hudson Institute Senior Fellow Robert Spalding moderated the workshop.

TFD President Ford Fu-Te Liao in his opening remarks emphasized that Taiwan’s 2020 presidential and legislative elections were the first to be held after “a series of momentous events in the past few years.” These events included the legalization of same-sex marriage in Taiwan, the passage of Taiwan’s Anti-infiltration Act, and the anti-extradition bill protests in Hong Kong, among others. President Liao pointed out that these events have “shined an even brighter international spotlight” on the 2020 elections in Taiwan, as the world watches how Taiwanese voters react to these significant developments.

Foundation for Scholarly Exchange (Fulbright Taiwan) Executive Director Randall Nadeau said in his remarks that while many possible challenges and uncertainties lie ahead for Taiwan’s future, Taiwan once again demonstrated its single and unified dedication to the principle of a free and open democracy.

Dr. Ching-hsing Wang, assistant professor of the Department of Political Science at National Cheng Kung University, started the panel by sharing the voter turnout rate had reached a low in the 2016 presidential and legislative elections (66.3%), but rose again in the 2020 elections to 74.9%. With statistics analysis, he pointed out that the high turnout rate was an advantage for President Tsai Ing-wen, and not Kuomintang (KMT) Presidential Candidate Han Guo-yu, and that the vote shares between 2016

and 2020 are similar for both the Democratic Progress Party (DPP) and KMT presidential candidates.

Dr. Wang said that public discussion on the factors contributing to President Tsai's re-election and the DPP winning the majority of the Legislative Yuan includes People's Republic of China President Xi Jinping's New Year's speech in January 2019, the 2019 Hong Kong protests, a growing sense of national despair, KMT's selection for presidential candidate and internal divide, and a possible generational divide.

Dr. Kharis Templeman, adviser to the Project on Taiwan in the Indo-Pacific, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, also spoke about similar reasons that "drove this dramatic turn-around." He said that support for Han was "very deep but narrow," while support for Tsai was "very shallow but broad." Dr. Templeman added that the DPP managed to unify themselves after their major defeat in the 2018 local elections, a feat that was reflected in the 2020 election results.

Brown Professor of East Asian Politics at Davidson College and Fulbright Scholar Dr. Shelley Rigger said that the election results show it is obvious that whatever was appealing to the people of Kaohsiung last year has "lost its magic." However, she also pointed out there are certain warning signs and challenges for the DPP to look out for. Dr. Rigger stated that the party list voting is volatile, which shows weak party identification (While 72% of Tsai's votes also went to the DPP, 87% of Han's votes also went to the KMT). The DPP will need to prove itself able to persuade the public on their domestic agenda as well, said Dr. Rigger.

In addition, Dr. Wang said that people should keep an eye out for the possible wide range of reforms the Tsai administration will carry out, the future of KMT, and the role the small parties elected into the Legislative Yuan will play going forwards. Dr. Templeman added that the results show an urban-rural divide (small parties did well in major cities, but not rural areas), which is also something to look out for. This was echoed by Dr. Eric Yu, associate research fellow of the Election Study Center at National Chengchi University, who warned that polarization will harm Taiwan's democracy.

Dr. Jacques deLisle, director of Asia Program of the Foreign Policy Research Institute, said the election results show that China's carrots and sticks strategy does not work.

Dr. I-Chung Lai, president of The Prospect Foundation, added the results demonstrate a rebuttal against China's position on Taiwan.

Dr. Jude Blanchette, Freeman Chair in China Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), said that an increase of pressure from China is expected. However, Foreign Policy Research Institute's Dr. deLisle pointed out that tactics such as military muscle-flex and diplomatic poaching have their limits.

Associate Professor of the Graduate Institute of East Asian Studies at National Chengchi University Dr. Ray Wang said that it is worth discussing Beijing's options if it chooses not to continue to push for "peaceful reunification." Warfare is what the international society wants to avoid, said Dr. Wang.

The Prospect Foundation's Dr. Lai elaborated Beijing supporters might take advantage of the party votes and the increase of Han's votes compared to that of former KMT Presidential Candidate Eric Chu in 2016, and use this to convince China that their Taiwan strategy works. It might also work the other way around, with China deciding their Taiwan strategy unviable and opting to change it, he said.

Dr. Lai pointed out that with Hong Kong's legislative elections and the U.S. presidential election coming up this year, China will be keeping a close eye on international developments. It is also worth keeping an eye out for how reformations will be carried out in the newly-elected Legislative Yuan in Taiwan, especially ones that concern national security.

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