

Tsai must abandon her overcautious mindset

Written by Lau Yi-te 廖亦壯
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A range of opinion polls were published in the run-up to the second anniversary of President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) inauguration. Despite differences in the actual numbers, when seen as a whole, the picture that emerges is one of a continued slide in the public's satisfaction with Tsai's performance, coupled with a gradual increase in her disapproval ratings.

There is considerable agreement among the polls that respondents with little confidence in her leadership outnumber those who have confidence in her. The trend suggests that Taiwan's leaders are facing something of a crisis of confidence.

This is good for neither the nation nor Taiwanese, and cannot be fully explained by simply saying that the government, in pursuing a reform agenda, was always going to have to break a few eggs.

BRAVE AIMS

Over the past few years, Tsai has bravely attempted to address some of the nation's ills, and aggressively pursued a reform agenda. This is laudable.

In general, her seeking to claim back illicitly acquired party assets and tackle workers' rights, transitional justice and pension, judicial and financial reforms, as well as to deal with low salaries and the low birthrate, are all examples of her fulfilling campaign promises, and are well-intentioned policies that comply with fairness, justice and public opinion.

It is only natural for the policies to offend those with vested interests or the minority affected by the reforms, but they have at the same time been supported by the majority, who expect such reforms to be carried through.

That said, the continued slide in her approval ratings highlights that there is something that Tsai is not quite catching on to. This is either due to the reforms not having been adequately carried through or to Tsai appointing individuals who have prevaricated about pushing the

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reforms through — or both.

Consequently, Tsai's administration has been overly cautious the minute the reforms have met any opposition or boycott, and failed to make them happen. At every step, it has found itself in a defensive posture.

A REAL MESS

Pension reform and workers' rights legislation have led to social unrest. Thus far, judicial reform has been treading water. Frankly, the government has made a real mess of things — so the trends shown by the polling numbers come as little surprise. This has contributed to the crisis of confidence, and it is a shame.

There is no sense in quibbling or making comparisons with previous administrations. Tsai herself must not be overly happy with her mid-term grades. The hope is that she will get things back on track and make good use of the remaining two years of this term. She will need to demonstrate self-confidence and courage.

In terms of her governance, she must, once she has addressed the current predicament and identified the procedural failings that have led to it, establish policies that set her back on course.

In terms of her personnel picks, she must alter her overcautious mindset and appoint ministers up to the demands of the task at hand. If she does this, she will save herself from the burgeoning crisis of confidence in her administration, something no leader wants.

The public will respond to her if she takes the correct approach and appoints the right people. Sometimes being preoccupied with securing a second term is counterproductive.

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