

DPP needs to change its tune

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was left bruised and battered by Saturday's local elections, losing more than half of the positions it held, including two special municipalities.

The DPP is left with only six of the nation's 22 cities, counties and municipalities — a drastic decline in local power by any measure.

Granted, factors such as China's meddling and rampant disinformation played roles in affecting the outcome, but the one key reason for its losses was the DPP itself.

It was the central government's poor performance over the past two years that hurt the party's showing on Saturday, as voters with a negative impression of President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) vented their dissatisfaction.

Kaohsiung mayor-elect Han Kuo-yu (韓國瑜), who the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) parachuted into the city just a few months ago, beat his DPP rival Chen Chi-mai (陳其邁) despite Chen's extensive administrative experience and policy platforms because of the central government's dismal performance record.

It was the same with Taiching, where Mayor Lin Chia-lung (林啟豐) of the DPP fared poorly, not because of his own track record, but largely due to voters' negative perceptions of his party.

While the KMT won in 15 cities and counties, including the DPP's long-time stronghold of Kaohsiung, it did not win victory on its own merits, but because voters are unhappy with Tsai's administration.

Tsai took office on May 20, 2016, with a pledge to reform. More than two years later, many voters' high expectations have been met with disappointment.

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Tsai boosted her reform campaign with flowery words and ornate language, but her government has failed to live up to the beautiful-sounding promises she made. All she has managed to achieve is to erode the public's trust and make people question her competence.

No one ever said governing and implementing reforms would be easy, but in the case of Tsai's administration, its many shortcomings have been exposed as it failed to prioritize its reforms, be responsive to the public's needs and concerns, and quell factional nepotism, among other things.

Its labor reform policy that focused on "one fixed day off with one flexible rest day" is one example that demonstrated the government's aforementioned failures, alongside its reforms of pensions for public-school teachers, military personnel and civil servants.

Meanwhile, the judicial reform that many have called for has been shelved, with Tsai saying her government's plans on that front do not include assessing judges — which shows how much she has underestimated the public's dissatisfaction with so-called "dinosaur judges."

The Transitional Justice Commission, whose former deputy chairman resigned in September over an alleged effort to manipulate public opinion against a KMT politician, is a prime example of Tsai's lack of judgement when it comes to political appointments.

In short, the lessons from Saturday's elections are that: One, they demonstrated that in a democracy, the people are the masters; and two, that people do not necessarily follow the lead of those who brand themselves the people's leaders, regardless of the rosy picture they have painted to voters.

Following the substantial changes to the nation's political map, it is to be hoped that all political parties, particularly the DPP, have been humbly reminded that the "people are the masters."

Politicians, especially leaders, must shelve their egoistic attitude that demands that the public "catch up" with them, rather than their needing to "walk with" the people.

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