

TAIPEI (Taiwan News) – The ruling Kuomintang lost Ilan to the opposition Democratic Progressive Party and Hualien to an independent in Saturday's local elections, with a review being demanded for Penghu.

The KMT ended up with a total of 12 counties and cities, the DPP with four, in elections widely seen as a popularity test for President Ma Ying-jeou, less than two months after taking office as KMT chairman. The ruling party's total share of the vote slipped to 47.86 percent, compared to the DPP's 45.39 percent.

The KMT was defending 14 seats and the DPP three in the election for county magistrates and city mayors, while county and city councils and mayoral positions for lower-level townships were also at stake.

The DPP held on to the counties of Pingtung, Yunlin and Chiayi but also added Ilan in the Northeast, a DPP stronghold for more than two decades until the KMT's Lu Kuo-hua won the county four years ago. Intensive campaigning by President Ma, including two appearances on Friday, failed to keep the county in KMT hands.

DPP candidate Lin Tsung-hsien was the frontrunner during most of the counting after ballot stations closed at 5 p.m., and Lu admitted defeat first. The DPP had said recovering the county would mean the party had won the county elections. Lin won an estimated 54 percent against Lu's 45 percent.

Lin invoked the memory of late Justice Minister Chen Ding-nan, the first opposition county magistrate in Ilan, while Lu reportedly paid the price for abolishing a popular children's festival soon after he took office.

The KMT also lost Hualien County to Fu Kun-chi, the only independent to win a seat Saturday. The lawmaker had been expelled from the KMT for running against its official candidate, Tu Li-hua. He defeated Tu by 56 percent to 25 percent.

Taiwan Local Elections: DPP recovers 11, KMT loses 2 seats

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The KMT said it could not nominate Fu because he had been convicted of illegal stock market practices. He is still appealing the verdict.

DPP incumbents Tsao Chi-hung in Pingtung County and Su Chih-fen in Yunlin County were re-elected, while Chang Hwa-kuan won Chiayi County by a decisive margin three days after resigning from the Legislative Yuan as a show of determination. Incumbent DPP county magistrate Chen Ming-wen could not run for re-election after serving the maximum two four-year terms.

Taitung County, a KMT stronghold, was the unexpected scene for a closely fought battle between KMT lawmaker Justin Huang and DPP candidate Liu Chao-hao. Outgoing county magistrate Kuang Li-chen, also from the KMT, made national headlines with her frequent foreign trips, even while a typhoon hit her home region. Huang's decision to resign from the Legislative Yuan and Kuang's registration as a candidate for his seat provoked accusations of a secret political deal but both politicians denied the allegations.

The DPP also came close to winning in Penghu, the island archipelago in the middle of the Taiwan Straits. KMT incumbent Wang Chien-fa declared victory after what looked like defeating DPP challenger Tsai Chien-hsing by only 600 votes.

Even though Wang said he had won, Tsai filed a request for a recount, according to reports.

Residents rejected the KMT-proposed legalization of casino gambling in a referendum last September, an element which might have influenced Saturday's vote, observers said.

In Hsinchu County, KMT lawmaker Chiu Ching-chun declared himself the winner despite a moderate lead of about 8 percent over DPP candidate Peng Shao-chin and independent Chang Pi-chin, who received about 30 percent of the vote each, reports said.

The situation in the county was complicated, with the incumbent magistrate being expelled from the KMT for supporting Chang. In the final days of the campaign, prosecutors detained campaign workers for Chang in an investigation into vote buying.

Chiayi City Mayor Huang Ming-hui won re-election as the only KMT local leader in the area south of the Choshui River.

The son of former KMT Chairman Wu Poh-hsiung, lawmaker John Wu, won Taoyuan County by defeating former DPP spokesman Cheng Wen-tsan.

Nantou County KMT incumbent Lee Chao-ching was re-elected despite allegations from his DPP opponent that he joined Premier Wu Den-yih, then a lawmaker, and a man with a past in organized crime on a trip to Bali. The DPP alleged they discussed gravel contracts and political appointments on the voyage.

The first candidate to declare victory, about one hour after the polls closed, was KMT candidate Yang Suei-sheng in Lienchiang County, the sparsely populated island of Matsu. On Kinmen, the other island near the coast of the Chinese province of Fujian, KMT candidate Lee Wo-shih defeated a field of six rivals.

Voting in Hsinchu County was marred by an incident where police moved media photographers 30 meters away from the ballot box at the polling station where Chang was about to vote, preventing camera teams from filming her voting.

Late Friday, there were reports that a blank ballot had been found on the street in Chutung, Hsinchu County. A count of the ballots at local polling stations later revealed none was missing, reports said.

In Hualien, outgoing county magistrate Hsieh Shen-shan appeared at the final election-eve rally Friday for independent candidate Chang Chih-ming, leading to speculation about the nature of eventual KMT sanctions against him.

Hsieh told reporters he had not mounted the podium to appear with Chang, so he had nothing wrong.

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The past election campaign was marred by internal splits, especially within the KMT, and by widespread allegations of vote buying. The Ministry of Justice said 174 suspects had been detained and 79 indicted. The suspects in custody included 38 KMT members and 14 DPP, those indicted 24 KMT and two DPP, the ministry said. Prosecutors were investigating more than 2,000 cases of vote buying and related irregularities.

All three candidates for the position of Kuangfu Township in Hualien County were detained for alleged vote buying, reports said.

Voting in the cities of Taipei, Kaohsiung, Tainan and Taichung, and in Taipei County, Taichung County, Tainan County and Kaohsiung County is likely to take place late next year as the result of administrative reforms leading to the merger and or elevation of those areas to a higher level.

Voters in one constituency in Nantou County also cast their ballots Saturday to elect a successor to Wu Den-yih, who vacated the seat to become premier. KMT candidate Ma Wen-chun looked like defeating the DPP's Lin Yun-sheng.

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