

Taiwan Voters Prove They are not Sheep

Written by Jerome F. Keating Ph.D.
Tuesday, 29 September 2009 10:15

On Saturday, September 26, Taiwan voters made a statement; it was simple, but it was direct and to the point. They said, we are not sheep; don't expect us to follow all the old patterns; don't think you can always buy our votes; don't think big advertising campaigns will always sway us. Taiwan voters once again proved that Taiwan is a democracy and people can vote their minds' unlike that other country that lies somewhere to the west of Taiwan where their paternalistic and patronizing government tells them what is best for them. What country is that; well let's forget about their name, what was the vote on in Taiwan.

The first vote was in Penghu; it was local and a referendum on whether to allow gambling casinos to be built. The developers supported by members of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) put out a strong campaign with ads and promotion. It had to have cost big bucks, but of course if passed big bucks were to be made. Debates were held; religious groups opposed as well as environmentalists, but the developers had the money for advertising. The KMT also stacked the deck in having the referendum not follow the normal strict rules that set the bar high for passage. In this one they needed only one vote more than the opposition. With these odds, most expected the casinos to win, but . . . well like in gambling, you can't always count on the odds and in a democracy, and sometimes the people surprise you. Penghu voted no casinos.

The second vote was in Yunlin County to replace the KMT legislator who had been convicted of vote-buying. There were three candidates. One was the ex-KMT legislator's father (Chang Hui-yuan) who had organized the vote-buying for his son. Isn't that a slap in the face, but that tells you something of local politics in Taiwan. The father ran as an independent, obviously because the family had too much invested to just let the seat go. The second was the KMT replacement candidate, Chang Ken-hui, a respectable candidate. The third was the DPP candidate, Liu Chien-kuo. Liu won, but it was not his win that was surprising since the KMT vote would have been split. What was surprising was that his total vote was larger than the combined vote of the other two. Liu had 74,272 votes; Chang Ken-hui 29,278 votes, and Chang Hui-yuan had 22,747 votes.

The size of Liu's vote while not tremendously large was, as was said, larger than the combined vote of the other two. Given that the KMT had won the election there, barely a year ago, did have a message. The voters are not sheep; they can change sides and quickly when they sense there is something wrong. That is a good sign for Taiwan.

There is a back story. Ma Ying-jeou, Taiwan's president, did not campaign either in support of the KMT candidate or in support of the father of the ex-KMT legislator. He stayed out of it. Why?

Taiwan Voters Prove They are not Sheep

Written by Jerome F. Keating Ph.D.
Tuesday, 29 September 2009 10:15

A reason for this may be that the given Ma's current unpopularity over Typhoon Morakot and his questionable competence as an administrator, the KMT candidate and the independent did not want him to campaign for them. Ma has been the kiss of death lately.

Another reason could be that Ma thought the KMT candidate might not win and therefore did not want to be visibly associated with another loss. His previous candidate choices in Hualien and Miaoli had lost. But a third reason yet could be that Ma was unable to choose where to throw his support, i.e. to the father of the corrupt ex-legislator, or to the KMT selected candidate. Ma does not like to be held accountable in many matters, so he will avoid any direct commitments. For us, at least we know Taiwan's voters are not sheep.

Source: [Jerome F. Keating's writings](#)