

President playing with fire

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Thursday, 06 November 2014 10:04

With 23 days to go until the Nov. 29 elections, the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) appears to be banking on a strategy of polarizing pan-blue and pan-green voters. Despite general dissatisfaction with President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) governance and poor polling numbers by some candidates, KMT nominees could nonetheless achieve electoral success if voters are swayed to follow traditional blue-green lines in areas where pan-blue voters predominate.

This strategy was evident in comments by Legislative Speaker Wang Jin-pyng (王金平), who expressed optimism over KMT Taipei mayoral candidate Sean Lien's (連戰) chances of being elected, despite less-than-satisfactory survey results.

"A child with a scabby head is nonetheless one's own," Wang reportedly said.

In Taipei's five previous mayoral elections, no pan-green candidate has ever won more than 50 percent of the vote. The best showing the pan-green camp ever scored was in the 1998 election, when then-Taipei mayor Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) lost his re-election bid to Ma with 45.9 percent of the vote, to Ma's 51.1 percent.

The strategy to provoke pan-blue and pan-green voters for electoral gain was also evident in comments Lien made on Tuesday. In response to an incident earlier in the day when a man crashed a car into the gate of Ma's residence, Lien was quick to link the act to the election by calling on the public to remain rational about voting, even though the man said he was protesting the nation's bureaucratic medical system.

People have a right to express their opinion, but such violent methods should not be encouraged. The incident was the third case this year in which people have attempted dangerous acts that could have harmed the president. That people feel they need to resort to such drastic measures to express their frustration suggests public grievance is running high.

If Ma were a responsible and wise leader who genuinely wanted to solve grievances, he would ask himself what measures he could take to better alleviate people's worries and improve their livelihoods.

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Instead, the public was treated to scenes of the president hopping around the streets, accompanying Lien to canvas votes in bustling Ximending (西門町). Ma was, as many had anticipated, heckled several times throughout the event, with sporadic clashes between protesters and security officials.

Ma's presence prompted speculation that he wanted to be heckled or even incite someone to throw another book at him, which would generate more tension and further polarize voters.

This situation means it is the DPP that is most concerned with Ma's safety, fearing that any harm to the president might hurt the DPP's chances at the polls. It is little wonder that prior to Ma's outing on Wednesday last week, the DPP headquarters issued a directive to its party members not to stage protests where Ma and Lien would be, to avoid heckling that might lead to a flare-up between pan-blue and pan-green voters.

Furthermore, with Ma exposing himself to potential harm by engaging in activities in such close proximity to the public, the need to beef up security puts great stress on security agents and the police, as well as inconveniencing the public and holding up traffic.

The competition for the mayoral seat in the capital is fierce. However, Ma should be reminded that he is not only the KMT chairman, he is also the head of state. It would be utterly despicable if he has only his party's interests in mind and is intentionally creating opportunities for confrontations between pan-blue and pan-green supporters.

Such a ploy would be playing with fire. No one can know for sure what might happen, and the damage to Taiwan's democratic development could be severe.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2014/11/06](#)