

## Breaking through the 'party-state' democracy

Written by Chung Ming-Lun 鍾明倫

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The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) had a landslide victory in the nine-in-one elections on Saturday last week, winning 13 of the 22 mayoral seats up for grabs. This has great implications for the nation's political development.

After the elections, it is time to reflect on the question: Is Taiwan on the road to serfdom or on the road to human emancipation within the democratic framework of "party-state" capitalism?

First, the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), led by President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), tried to forcibly pass the cross-strait service trade agreement through the Legislative Yuan, sparking massive protests and giving rise to the Sunflower movement early this year.

This means that a connection between the public and party-state democracy is rightly loose and that Taiwanese are questioning Ma's cross-strait economic policy.

Some acrimonious critics say that democracy within party-state capitalism benefits only a few corporations and specific interest groups, rather than being a "win-win" situation between national development and local governance.

### BALANCING ACT

Facing the heavy pressure of free-trade invasion within the context of global capitalism, how to strike a balance between local governance and national development is a critical issue and leaves much room for civic dialogue and ideological debates after the elections.

Second, some critics say that the DPP has regained the ethos of local governance and that Ma has become a lame-duck president besieged by local governments.

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However, I partly disagree with this argument, because while the election's outcome means the collapse and crisis of KMT governance, the DPP's political governance — especially its cross-strait economic policy and diplomatic policy — is still swaying back and forth.

Strictly speaking, the DPP did win the elections, but not necessarily the people's hearts.

Specifically, the DPP won the elections on a vote of "no confidence" in Ma's governance, rather than a vote of confidence in the DPP's governance, within the two-party framework.

In this new political environment, how to transcend the vicious struggle between the KMT and the DPP and create a just society is another democratic challenge.

Third, the turnout rate of about 70 percent demonstrates the rise of new civic politics which stresses the subjectivity of people's political participation.

It is notable that this election raised young people's concerns and made them believe in the possibility of structural transformation based on direct political participation.

## PEOPLE'S POWER

The stirring *Do You Hear the People Sing?* number in the musical adaptation of Victor Hugo's novel *Les Misérables* reflects the voice of younger generations implicitly telling the ruling party that people have the absolute right and ability to uphold and depose any political parties or individuals.

People in different counties are breaking through the party-state democracy led by the KMT and rebuilding a new social order of civic society in Taiwan.

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Whether the DPP can take on this responsibility after the collapse of the party-state democracy depends on the DPP's ideological stances and how it can achieve an optimal balance between citizens' needs, city development and the core value of social justice.

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