

## Elections bring hope for a better Taiwan

Written by Mark Kao

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The results of the recently concluded nine-in-one elections have given the overseas Taiwanese community new hope for the nation's future. These elections demonstrated that Taiwanese are willing to work hard for their freedom and preserve their vibrant democracy.

For the first time since the transition to democracy in the early 1990s, Taiwan has a more level political playing field. Until now, elections were too often determined by who had the most money, power and influence.

However, this virtual monopoly has now been ended by the influence of the Internet and the involvement of a new generation of young people, inspired by the Sunflower movement students and activists who occupied the legislature earlier this year to protest the handling of the cross-strait service trade agreement.

The “politics as usual” spell has been broken: The electorate has grown tired of the massive TV advertising campaigns, the mudslinging, the huge billboards along the roads and the ubiquitous campaign trucks with loudspeakers. As the campaign waged by Taipei mayor-elect Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) showed, people are more impressed by down-to-earth solutions to practical problems, transparency and good governance.

All of this promises a better Taiwan, but the hard work is still ahead. The country still needs to go through a number of reforms to make the nation truly better — a better place to live, a better homeland for all.

Two places to start are judicial reform and legislative reform: The judicial system is still too beholden to one political party and too prone to political influence. Taiwan needs a judicial system that is truly independent, with rule of law instead of rule by law.

Legislative reform is also badly needed, since the political stalemate seen recently has occurred in part been due to legislators' lack of freedom to make up their own mind on the issues before them. In particular, Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) lawmakers are often too beholden to the central party leadership to get funding for their campaigns, making them unwilling to deviate from the party line.

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In addition, the Legislative Yuan needs to assume a true checks and balance role vis-a-vis the executive branch.

Economic reforms are also badly needed. While Taiwan's economy still has a lot of vitality and ingenuity, it is being dragged down by old state-run enterprises like Taiwan Power Co, China Steel Corp, China Shipbuilding Corp, China Airlines, etc. These corporations are run by KMT party stalwarts who hold their plush jobs because of their party connections. A large-scale shakeup would hopefully bring new vitality and more competitiveness.

The impact of the Nov. 29 elections goes way beyond domestic issues: The results were a rejection of the way President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) administration has handled international relations and cross-strait affairs. Under Ma's rule, Taiwan has hardly gained any international space.

Cross-strait affairs are, of course, the most crucial issue. No one is against having good relations with China, but this engagement needs to be balanced, transparent and respectful of the freedom and democracy Taiwan has achieved.

Ma's rapprochement policy toward China is only leading Taiwan further into international isolation, making the nation increasingly economically dependent on China, so that eventually Taiwanese will have no choice regarding their future.

Taiwanese-Americans fully support the nation's vibrant democracy and will do everything to help Taiwan be accepted as a full, equal member in the international family of nations.

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