

What issue lies at the heart of the coming presidential election? This is something that the ruling party, the presidential candidates and the electorate all care about; it is also what divides them. The contrasts between the two major parties explain why the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), which has ruled Taiwan for the best part of 60 years, is hemorrhaging support, while the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) is widening its support base.

KMT presidential candidate Hung Hsiu-chu (洪秀柱) keeps trying to shift the focus of her campaign to cross-strait policy. Even though both she and DPP presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) have talked of maintaining the "status quo," Hung has said that she cannot talk of the existence of the Republic of China (ROC), as this would be accepting state-to-state relations, and talked about cross-strait unification. She offered this opinion to show that she would be able to maintain cross-strait harmony, apparently for Beijing's benefit. At the same time, Hung has been continuously calling into question what Tsai means by maintaining the "status quo," asking her to clarify her cross-strait policy. When DPP-affiliated Tainan Mayor William Lai (賴清德) announced in the council chamber that he supported independence, Hung equated Tsai and the DPP with Taiwanese independence.

However, Tsai is not playing along. No matter how many times Hung has tried to bait her, Tsai has refused to bite. In response to Hung's accusation that both Tsai and Lai advocate Taiwanese independence, Tsai avoided locking horns with Hung and said that Lai's opinion was his own; not hers or the party's.

To avoid getting caught up in arguments over national identity, Tsai signaled her willingness to attend the Double Ten National Day celebrations on Saturday, evidently to show that she identifies with the ROC, and thereby letting out a lot of wind from the sails of the KMT and its attempts to ignite an independence-versus-unification debate.

Given Hung's reluctance to speak of the ROC's existence due to her pro-China stance, Tsai's decision to attend the National Day celebrations has shown the electorate who would be most suitable for the role of presidency. After all, this election is for the president of the ROC and if a certain candidate cannot bring herself to admit to the existence of the nation, then how is she to safeguard its survival or dignity?

Hung has chosen to focus the election campaign on the wrong issues. Indeed, these will help

Hung's cross-strait focus hurts her

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Tuesday, 06 October 2015 07:34

her consolidate the core pro-unification faction within her party, but they have also disturbed the pact within the party between members who were born in China and those born in Taiwan. This might not only cause a collapse of the party's base, but it could also see many KMT legislators defecting, taking with them their grassroots supporters.

The ambiguity over Tsai's understanding of maintaining the "status quo" has left many guessing, but it does provide her with some room to maneuver. For Tsai, the election is not centered on cross-strait relations; rather, she is interested in domestic issues: the economy, social welfare and housing. She is gradually laying out her policies, which is a far more practical approach than that being taken by her opponent.

Elections are not about what the candidates want, it is about what the electorate wants. The Sunflower movement and the defeat the KMT received in the nine-in-one elections show that mainstream public opinion has rejected the cross-strait policy pushed by President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) administration.

If Hung follows in the same vein, she is unlikely to improve upon Ma's performance. The voters are more concerned about issues affecting their everyday lives, such as economic stagnation, falling wages, the pension fund's looming bankruptcy and the burgeoning wealth disparity.

Hung is losing the battle for the electorate's hearts. and minds.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2015/10/06](#)