

Young people must not waste vote

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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Ahead of Saturday's elections, presidential and legislative candidates alike have picked up steam in their campaigns to woo voters, with opposition parties in particular urging young people to vote.

The opposition's anxiety over young people not voting is understandable, with local media reporting on the younger generation's reluctance to vote, citing the inconvenience of having to return to their hometowns, the cost of transportation and schedule conflicts — with final exams for college students taking priority.

According to the Central Election Commission, there are to be 1.29 million first-time voters in Saturday's elections, accounting for 6.8 percent of total voters.

The percentage is large enough to play a crucial role in the outcome of the elections.

Voter turnout among first-time voters is notoriously low. In previous national elections, the voter turnout rate among young people has been about 60 percent, with the exception of the nine-in-one local elections in November 2014 — in the wake of the Sunflower movement earlier that year — which saw the turnout among people aged 20 to 40 increase by 10 percent from previous elections.

While the call to encourage young people to cast their ballots has primarily come from the opposition, all young voters, regardless of political preference and inclination, should vote and not waste the opportunity to make their voices heard.

After all, *men* (悶) has been the Chinese word used by the nation's young people across the board, describing their “feeling of stagnation or having no way forward.”

Many are bristling with indignation over their future seeming increasingly uncertain; high unemployment rates; rising retail and home prices; and wage stagnation, not to mention the notorious “22K curse” — the NT\$22,000 starting salary for university graduates.

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For a long time, young people have been said to be apathetic toward politics and their surroundings, and have been criticized as being spoiled and enjoying the fruits of democracy without thinking about how they might contribute or consolidate democratic achievements.

While certain negative public perceptions of young people have changed since the Sunflower movement, during which many displayed their social and political awareness, many others still shy away from civic engagements or being vocal on critically important national issues for fear of being labeled as “politically frenetic.”

All young people should be reminded that voting is a basic right that is enshrined in the nation’s Constitution and a fruit of democracy hard fought for by the nation’s democracy pioneers that propelled Taiwan to hold direct presidential elections since 1996.

Considering the blood, sweat and tears shed by rights activists from the Wild Lily student movement in 1990 to the Sunflower movement in 2014 — not forgetting the violent nature of the police crackdown and forced eviction of student protesters from the Executive Yuan — it would be a waste for young people not to make the effort to vote.

By casting votes, young people can help push policy changes, make a change in the political landscape and, most importantly, continue the Sunflower movement’s luminescence and become a force for consolidating the nation’s democracy.

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