

KMT members got it all wrong

Written by Huang Yu-zhe 黃宇哲
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The Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) suffered a colossal defeat in the Jan. 11 presidential and legislative elections. However, instead of reflecting on its “innumerable failings,” such as sexism, dissemination of fake news and a pro-China stance, it has focused on policies that it believes led to its loss — including cross-strait discourse.

As a young Taiwanese undergraduate student of political science, I would like to tell KMT members: You have got it all wrong.

Many have argued that young people came out in droves to vote for President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) in part not because they were satisfied with her or the Democratic Progressive Party’s (DPP) governance, but because they were worried about the nation’s future if the KMT candidate, Kaohsiung Mayor Han Kuo-yu (韓國瑜) — a country bumpkin in young people’s minds — were to win.

The proof is in the split-ticket voting for legislators-at-large.

While young people overwhelmingly voted for the DPP’s Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文)-William Lai (賴清德) ticket for the presidency, they split their party vote, allowing the Taiwan People’s Party (TPP) to secure five seats, while the New Power Party (NPP) got three. In contrast, the DPP only got 13 legislator-at-large seats.

If one were to convert the Tsai-Lai ticket’s 8.17 million votes into seats, the DPP should have garnered more than 25 seats. The reason is simple: While young people wanted to see Tsai re-elected, they also favored smaller parties to serve as a third force in the legislature to check and balance the central government.

Given these circumstances, the KMT’s reflection is headed in the wrong direction.

First, the KMT’s cross-strait discourse is not the problem per se — but rather its pro-China stance and ideology. The party needs to stop claiming that Beijing would use force if Taiwan

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were to declare independence. Such a wrong precondition — repeatedly intimidating Taiwanese on behalf of China — fails to recognize that Beijing has never intended to give up hostilities or remove missiles directed at Taiwan whether or not Taiwan declares independence.

As it is, Taiwan is already an independent country called the Republic of China, Taiwan — as Tsai said in a BBC interview.

The solution is to abandon its pro-China position and recognize that the so-called “1992 consensus” is moot. The term, coined by former Mainland Affairs Council chairman Su Chi (蘇起), refers to a meeting in 1992 between the representatives of the People’s Republic of China and the KMT in which they reached a tacit understanding, yet remain divided over its definition.

For the KMT, the Chinese Communist Party (CPP) and the DPP the interpretations all differ.

It is pointless to debate the definition of the “1992 consensus,” as it is no longer important. During the three televised platform presentations and the presidential debate before the election, the three presidential candidates barely mentioned the term in regard to cross-strait policy.

It is time to conceptualize what Tsai proposed in her re-election victory speech — “peace, parity, democracy and dialogue” serving as the basis for cross-strait interaction and long-term stable development. It could be called the “Taiwan consensus,” a term that Tsai adopted to replace the “1992 consensus” in 2012, when she ran against then-president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九).

With a new and strong mandate from Taiwanese, the “Taiwan consensus” is more legitimate. This concept could bring Taiwan to a critical juncture where it can interact not only with China, but with the rest of the world, including countries forced to adhere to the “one China” policy.

Under this principle, all should respect the will of Taiwanese people.

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Second, as former US president Abraham Lincoln said: “No party can command respect which sustains this year what it opposed the last.”

Some KMT insiders have said that the party failed because it was not in line with mainstream public opinion on issues such as same-sex marriage. This so-called reflection is ironic and at the same time difficult to understand.

In the 2018 referendum, the KMT was busy mobilizing voters to support two proposals against same-sex marriage and one proposal against same-sex education initiated by anti-LGBT advocates. The KMT, along with some groups, started rumors that same-sex marriage would create an AIDS epidemic and further drive down the nation’s birthrate.

What is worse is the party played the same old trick in this year’s election, but the public — especially young people — punished them with a firm vote this time.

The KMT’s problem is it is not on the same page with public opinion. The crux of the problem is whether it truly believes in our shared values — democracy, freedom and respect for human rights. The survival of the party hangs in the balance.

If the KMT still refuses to face the music and lives in an echo chamber surrounded by more outdated ideology and little respect for the way of life in Taiwan, it should keep in mind that more young people would be entitled to vote in the next election.

The structure of voters will change in the next decade, and young voters are setting even higher criteria that politicians need to meet in line with the values they hold so dear.

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