

Taiwan's Double Ten National Day approaches, and with the attendant celebrations, it is natural for Taiwanese to examine how their democracy compares with other present-day democracies.

How is it doing? Well, Taiwan is doing quite well.

Democracy in Taiwan might be young, but it has already shown clear signs that its citizens have a good grasp of what it is all about and how to implement it.

Some might even say that Taiwan has proven to be far better at achieving democracy's ends than many older and perhaps "decadent democracies," including the UK and the US.

Certainly Taiwanese have demonstrated that they appreciate the power of the vote and can use it to build a solid nation.

For example, in past elections they have not relied on or trusted representatives of any one party and its slogans. From 1996 on, when the president and legislature were elected by the people, they have carefully made their choices.

On a national level, they have gone from a Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) president to a Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) one, and then back to a KMT president and once again to a DPP leader.

This is not a flip-flop, but a clear choice of evaluating what each party's candidate had to offer at the moment of each election.

Further, in barely two decades, Taiwanese have even shown openness to gender equality in the presidential office and have chosen a female leader. The US has still not achieved that goal

in more than 240 years; it remains mired in what could be called “good old boys’ male chauvinism.”

During the past two decades, the Legislative Yuan has also gradually moved from being dominated by its former one-party state KMT to the present DPP majority. This shift has been driven in part by many KMT representatives’ insistence on clinging to outmoded ideas, including a wished-for binding relationship with China and the bogus “1992 consensus.”

Likewise, the people have changed the referendum laws to free themselves from former “bird cage” referendum conditions. Referendum achievements are now possible; the referendum laws are not yet perfect, but they are in developing progressively.

Regarding voter turnout, the average showing in major elections in Taiwan ranges in the 70 to 80 percentile of eligible voters. The UK’s turnout closely resembles those figures on average, but the US has consistently had poor participation. Its turnout is about 45 to 50 percent of eligible voters, which might explain its recent issues.

At the local level, Taiwan provides other examples of a balanced democracy in action.

In Penghu County, residents twice voted against and defeated efforts to build casinos in their backyard, in 2009 and again in 2016.

Often in such cases, one would expect that big money would win out by enticing voters with promises of jobs and income. That did not work there either time, because the people wanted to preserve their environment.

However, the one example that most significantly represents voter awareness in Taiwan is when Kaohsiung residents voted to recall their mayor, Han Kuo-yu (韓國瑜).

What those citizens demonstrated was that they have the ability to feel voters’ remorse when

they make a mistake in judgement and also the ability to do something about it within the system.

For 20 years, from 1998 to 2018, the DPP had held the mayor's office in Kaohsiung. This party dominance was challenged in 2018 by the KMT's Han, who strode in with promises of the traditional "chicken in every pot" and grandiose plans for the city's prosperity.

In the initial vote, Han defeated the DPP's Chen Chi-mai (陳其邁) 892,545 to 742,239. It was a solid win and voters looked for the promised progress.

However, Han was not even a year in office when he turned and decided to use his seeming popularity to run for president.

It was at that point that voters realized they had been sold a bill of populist goods and immediately used the system to correct it.

The recall process must go through several phases. In the final stage, at least 25 percent of the electorate (here 574,996 voters) must approve the recall. In a startling statement, the recall vote totaled 939,090, far more than the 892,545 votes that originally elected Han.

Han had hoped to disrupt the 25 percent rule by urging supporters not to vote. That failed. Only 25,051 voted disapproval, but many others ignored his plea.

Voters who worked in Taipei even made a special trip back just to ensure the recall. The recall vote was even more solid than Han's original win.

A look at other older democracies shows that they definitely have their problems. Two glaring examples stand out.

Written by Jerome Keating
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The first is the Brexit vote in the UK, where supporters of Brexit convinced voters that the UK would be far better off by breaking its ties with the EU.

However, what seemed to be a simple vote in 2016, turned out to be a horrendous quagmire, illustrating the complexity of ties in a realistic modern world.

In four years, the UK has still not figured out how to gracefully leave the EU while sustaining as little collateral damage as possible.

Brexit had been portrayed as a quick easy break, something as simple as a Las Vegas divorce. Instead it has turned into an ongoing standing joke, one that promises to end badly.

Here, the UK voters discovered that the vast promised benefits have failed to materialize, and yet even though they might have voters' remorse, they are powerless to rectify it.

The US has its own set of problems. It took the nation more than a century to overcome its slavery issues and even more for women to obtain the right to vote.

Now, US citizens find themselves hamstrung by an outdated Electoral College system, whereby a candidate who lost by nearly 3 million votes was still able to win the presidency. That makes the issue even harder to correct, even with voters' remorse.

This problem with the Electoral College has happened before, but never at such a scale. By having a populist president without majority support, many other flaws in the system are revealed. A perfect storm has occurred.

The US has a president who continuously makes false and misleading claims. Because of a lack of needed transparency in the reporting of candidates' previous income, the US has also discovered that this same "lying" president is millions of dollars in debt, a factor that easily lends any such person to abuse presidential power to escape such liability, more so for a lying

one.

That same president has gaslighted Americans on the danger of COVID-19, while bragging that his office has done a fantastic job on the virus, despite a whopping more than 200,000 dead.

Now that the president has the virus himself, any statements on his condition or wishes are naturally under suspicion of credibility.

Based on these examples, Taiwan stands tall among democracies. Its voters have overcome the Stockholm syndrome from 40 years of a one-party state and avoided party propaganda polarization.

Taiwan does not deny it still has a learning curve, but many nations already admire its superb job in handling COVID-19, despite its proximity to China.

This brings up the final irony, and it is time for all democracies in the world to take stock of this: Taiwan knows how a democracy can learn from its mistakes and progress, but it is still not a member of the UN.

That body contains many democracies, as well as one-party states. Democratic Taiwan is kept out because that UN allows a one-party state to “democratically” reject it.

This needs to change. It is time for democratic Taiwan to be recognized and take its deserved seat at the table.

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