

Police crack down on vote betting

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Police in Taoyuan yesterday escort four people suspected of being part of an illegal ring taking bets on the presidential election.

Photo: Lee Jung-ping, Taipei Times

Police in Taoyuan said they have raided an illegal gambling ring that took bets on the result of next month's presidential election, and detained four people for questioning.

Seized material suggests that the ring had total money flow of NT\$250 million (US\$8.3 million), they said.

A 53-year-old man surnamed Chen (陳), who is suspected of masterminding the ring, remained in police custody, they added.

Chen had three employees and offered odds for people to bet on the number of votes President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and Kaohsiung Mayor Han Kuo-yu (韓國瑜) would get in the Jan. 11 elections, police said.

Tsai is seeking re-election, while Han is the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) candidate.

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“The raid was carried out at a location in Taoyuan’s Guanyin District (關廟) on Friday, in which computers, mobile phones, fax machines, ledgers, receipts and NT\$20,000 in cash were seized,” Taoyuan Police Department Jhongli Police Station Chief Liu Yin-kong (劉銀宗) said.

The suspects face charges of conducting illegal gambling activities under the Criminal Code, and breaches of the Civil Servants Election and Recall Act (公職人員選舉罷免法), Liu said.

Underground betting on election results is known to have affected election results in one-on-one races, Liu said.

Operators can entice people to bet on a certain candidate by offering favorable odds, which can skew the odds toward a higher payout, and is therefore considered a form of illegal vote-buying, Liu added.

In Chen’s case, people placed bets by telephone, fax or the Line messaging app, and each bet was set at NT\$50,000, Liu said, adding that bidders used code words to bet on Tsai or Han.

Law enforcement agencies nationwide have been instructed to crack down on illegal betting on the election results and cut off such operations’ money flow, Liu added.

The authorities have promised to clean up such activities and prevent underground criminal syndicates from interfering in the election’s outcome, Liu said.

Separately, the Criminal Investigation Bureau last week said that from Dec. 10 to 13, it raided 24 illegal operations allowing people to bet on the election’s outcome, and arrested 30 people.

The arrests were part of an investigation into 694 cases of all forms of gambling nationwide.

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Bureau officials said they seized NT\$36.88 million during the raids.

Cases of illegal gambling on election outcomes are prosecuted under Article 104 of the act, which stipulates a punishment of up to five years in prison for “anyone who disseminates rumors or spreads falsehoods by text, picture, audio tape, video tape, speech or any other method” that results in a candidate losing or winning an election.

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