

**TAIWAN'S 2018 MUNICIPAL
ELECTIONS (I): THE
ELECTION RESULTS**

Katherine TSENG Hui-Yi

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Executive Summary

1. Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) suffered a major defeat in the municipal elections held on 24 November 2018. The opposition party, Kuomintang (KMT) took 15 cities, while DPP kept only six. Incumbent Taipei city Mayor Ko Wen-je won a pyrrhic victory over his KMT rival by a thin margin of slightly more than 3,000 votes.
2. DPP lost the election mainly for its failure to deliver effective governance, the quick but highly controversial reform and the unexpected popularity of Han Kuo-yu (the newly elected Kaohsiung city mayor on behalf of KMT) that boosts overall KMT morale.
3. This election sends a clear message that it is unlikely for DPP to establish a long-term one-party dominance. The electorates now demand more of the candidate's capability, and prefer the middle and diligent candidate.
4. The use of new campaign tools, namely, the use of online platform and social media, have gained further ground. The more cost-efficient information dissemination and deconstruction of political power allow smaller parties and individual candidates, even without major party back-up, to participate in the election.
5. The 10 referendums held concurrently with the elections have unwittingly empowered the electorate to directly decide on a policy issue. The referendum is a bodacious step to give the DPP the political leverage on certain issues.
6. It remains to be seen how the Tsai government is to handle these referendum decisions. The referendum will become another critical battlefield in future elections.

7. The referendum led to the aggregation of the conservative force that opposes the pursuit of liberal values in recent years, for example, the legalisation of same-sex marriage.
8. The conservative force is largely suburban residents who are not heavy users of social media and feel discriminated because of their conservative positions. The rise of the conservative force should be taken as a rejection of the Tsai government's failed governance and less as an echoing event to the worldwide phenomenon of conservatism resuscitation.
9. There are concerns of external actors and foreign intervention in the election. China has been singled as the main suspect as officials in the national investigative bureau identified certain suspicious cyber activities. However, local governance being the main focus, there is not much room for China's influence.