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## Plain wrong on Kaohsiung voters

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As someone who moved to Kaohsiung five years ago, the post-election commentary about the city's mayoral and city council elections on television and in the newspapers disappoints and angers me.

What disappoints me is that these commentators -- who have the privilege of voicing their opinions to the public via the media -- offer an outdated discourse that does not help politically concerned voters to understand why their favorite candidate lost or won by a razor-thin margin.

What angers me is that this outdated analysis and discourse puts the brakes on the already slow interaction between voters and those who implement policy, thus hijacking and distorting the true intent of the voters. The end result is that voters lose their ability to be heard.

This hackneyed and outdated political commentary can be summarized into six categories.

First, Kaohsiung residents' pro-localization leanings cause them to tolerate President Chen Shui-bian's (陳水扁) corruption, which led to the win by Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Kaohsiung mayor-elect Chen Chu (陳菊), who beat Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) mayoral candidate Huang Jun-ying (黃俊英) by a razor-thin margin.

Second, the commentators said that the accusation of vote-buying by the KMT was a final and effective part of the DPP's vicious campaign strategy of chipping away at Huang's support.

Third, during the week prior to the elections, many major DPP figures stumped for Chen

Chu, whereas only KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) did so for Huang.

Fourth, the commentators said that Chen Chu's victory shows that Kaohsiung residents still have confidence in President Chen, while Huang's defeat indicates that Ma's charisma does not reach south of the Chuoshui River (濁水溪), the nominal line separating northern from southern Taiwan.

Fifth, the candidates' different personalities played a major role in determining voter preferences. Chen Chu is perceived as having determination and boldness, whereas the perception of Huang as being mild and cultured does not match the "coarse" tastes of most Kaohsiung residents.

Sixth, the commentators said that undeclared green supporters in Kaohsiung played a significant role in Chen Chu's win.

But these categorizations contain many misunderstandings and blind spots. Their first mistake is to believe that Kaohsiung residents are unable to show initiative and are easily manipulated by the media.

For example, media commentators said that rumors of vote buying by the KMT caused Kaohsiung voters to cast their ballots for Chen Chu. This concept is built on the assumption that many voters were "swayed" by the rumors of the KMT's alleged vote buying, but not affected by the much larger issue of the president's alleged misuse of the "state affairs fund."

Further, the commentators place a disproportionate amount of emphasis on the effectiveness of campaign endorsements by political heavyweights, believing that their participation always helps to boost a candidate's campaign momentum. In fact, the president's stumping for Chen Chu in Kaohsiung caused resentment among many pan-green supporters because of the recent controversy surrounding the "state affairs fund."

In Taipei, DPP Taipei mayoral candidate Frank Hsieh (謝長廷) distanced himself from the president and was therefore able to make a respectable showing. In other words, media commentators feel that Taipei voters are rational, but that Kaohsiung voters are incapable of the same kind of rational choice.

The commentators also paid excessive attention to the candidates' personalities. They stressed the "crudeness" of Kaohsiung residents while saying that Huang is mild and cultured, which did not appeal to the tastes of Kaohsiung residents.

If the commentators were correct, then why would "traditional" and "chauvinist" Kaohsiung elect the city's first female mayor? In fact, a mere 1,000-odd votes separated mildness from crudeness in the election. This argument in fact reveals their own chauvinist, simplistic view of Kaohsiung voters.

It is also apparent that commentators went too far in dividing voters into two groups: those who had a pro-localization outlook and those who didn't. The commentators said that voters who did not declare their preference prior to the election were pan-green supporters. But in the Kaohsiung election, 8,957 fewer people voted for the mayor than for city councilors, a fairly large difference. In other words, 8,957 voters were not willing to vote for Chen Chu, which might have been an expression of their disapproval of the DPP's perceived corruption problems.

In the Kaohsiung city councilor elections, the total vote counts for the KMT, the People First Party and the New Party constituted 42.76 percent of total votes, a figure that shows that the pan-blue camp enjoys massive support in the city.

By contrast, the percentage of city councilor votes for DPP and the Taiwan Solidarity Union candidates only came up to 36.23 percent, a figure well below that of the pan-blue camp. It is worth noting that 21.01 percent of voters voted for independent city councilor candidates, which indicates that the Kaohsiung electorate is composed of a substantial proportion of undecided swing voters.

But I very much doubt that all of the undecided voters were in fact secret pan-green supporters.

Finally, media commentators excessively politicized and simplified the voting behavior of Kaohsiung residents when they said that those who voted for Chen Chu were really showing their support for the president.

The Kaohsiung election reflected the voters' true needs and the demands they place on the city's administration.

This satisfaction with the city's administration that made voters want to continue the DPP's successful policies in the person of Chen Chu. This is why she received the support of moderate voters and expanded the DPP's fundamental support from 36.23 percent to 49.41 percent.

Kaohsiung residents are not staunch pan-green supporters. Taipei media commentators statements that Kaohsiung is pro-localization and green are simply nonsense resulting from

their sense of disappointment.

Commentators should leave their air-conditioned studios and offices in Taipei and actually visit Kaohsiung to conduct field research.

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