



**T**he Democratic Progressive Party suffered a major setback in the nine-in-one local election on November 24. The setback resulted in the resignation of Tsai Ing-wen as party chairman and large-scale restructuring of the cabinet. Thorough revision in policies also is inevitable. An interesting contrast is that, before the election, many DPP advocates and public opinion leaders regarded misinformation and the Chinese Internet Water Army as the greatest challenge in this election. Nevertheless, the internal review in the DPP and feedback from a variety of sources after the election suggested that flaws in the election process, chaos and controversy caused by referendums, too-aggressive reforms, and the lack of communication with people when bringing up new policies are the root causes of the setback. As for misinformation, it is not the top target after the election.

Nonetheless, this does not suggest that misinformation is not an important issue or does not need to be taken seriously. It rather suggests that, when dealing with misinformation, we should not be so stressed with the election that we take inappropriate actions, such as imposing excessive regulation on public speech and the Internet. After all, freedom of speech is not only a critical foundation of Taiwan's democratic development, but also an edge for Taiwan over China in institutional competition.

### **What Makes Misinformation So Influential**

The core reason misinformation is so rampant in Taiwan lies not in the intervention of foreign forces or rumors created by people with bad intentions, but in the lack of media literacy and trust in the government of Taiwanese people. When misinformation presents itself, the lack of media literacy and trust in the government causes people to believe the incorrect information easily and continue to spread the word without hesitation or trying to seek confirmation from a third party beforehand, even if the government makes statements or provides proof to contradict and refute the incorrect information within a short period of time.

As AIT Director Brent Christensen stated at the opening ceremony of the Global Cooperation and Training Framework Workshop on "Defending Democracy through Media Literacy" in early October this year, "Media Literacy is built on a foundation of critical thinking. In the free marketplace of ideas, we want our citizens to be discerning consumers. The same critical



thinking that makes people adept news consumers have helped them fulfill their civic duties.” Here, it must be emphasized that enhancing people’s media literacy does not mean people have to believe all the information given by the government, but means that people should make a habit of being discerning of the information presented and have the willingness and capability to verify information.

### **The Tools and Means That Taiwan Has**

Therefore, a fact-check mechanism led by the third sector has become more important. Fortunately, Taiwan has made progress in this regard. The Taiwan FactCheck Center website was officially launched on July 31 this year and was certified by the International Fact-Checking Network on November 1st, becoming the 53rd member of the organization worldwide. This is also the first fact-checking organization in Taiwan that has been internationally recognized. Going forward, the Taiwan FactCheck Center can engage in more international cooperation and exchange through IFCN. Every piece of information considered misleading by Taiwan FactCheck Center will be given less exposure on social media, such as Facebook, curbing the spread of misinformation.

In addition, for closed-end and encrypted instant messaging software, such as LINE, Taiwan civil community has also established the Cofacts project. To put it simply, Cofacts set up a LINE Chatbot to collect the content of suspected misinformation reported by LINE users and submits the content to an editorial group that everyone can join in freely. After the content is verified by the editorial group, it will be brought by the chatbot to the respective LINE chat group. The reason this must be done is that, as a closed-end and encrypted instant messaging software, even LINE Corporation itself has repeatedly emphasized that it, not to mention the government, does not have knowledge or access to the content of the chats in any chat group. Therefore, spontaneous action by the users is the only way to curb the spread of misinformation on this kind of instant messaging software.

On the other hand, rebuilding people's trust in the government cannot rely on the third sector, nor can it be expected to be completed in a short period of time. The government must fully execute the concept of Open Government, so people can participate in public affairs more easily. In the meantime, it is necessary for the government to keep increasing the transparency of the decision-making process.



Taiwan's administrative departments have been known for stability and efficiency and have met Taiwanese people's needs for public services and infrastructure for quite a long time. With the evolution of democracy and the rise of civil society, however, Taiwanese people expect to have more involvement and want their opinions to be heard in the policy making process, rather than just accepting the results passively. Moreover, whether such an expectation is met has become a vital factor for Taiwanese people in evaluating public policies and their satisfaction with the government.

In conclusion, the DPP as the ruling party suffered a great setback in the results of the election and the post-election situation. Nevertheless, the impact of misinformation on Taiwan's democracy and society, though tremendous, was not as severe and irremediable as claimed by pessimists before the election. Moreover, it is fortunate that international cooperation with friendly countries, a fact-check mechanism led by the third sector, and Open Government awareness and tools are all available resources for the government and Taiwanese people. Taiwan is definitely not running into a dead end.

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