

Press Release

July 19, 2019

### **2019 TFD Survey on Taiwanese View of Democratic Values and Governance**

The Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD) on July 19 held a press conference at the TFD about the 2019 TFD survey on Taiwanese View of Democratic Values and Governance. The event was moderated by TFD President Ford Fu-te Liao, who gave an overview presentation on the survey results. The TFD also invited scholars Tsai Chia-hung, Director of the Election Study Center at National Chengchi University and Lin Thung-hong, Research Fellow of the Institute of Sociology at Academia Sinica to introduce the research method and comment on the survey results.

The TFD has been conducting surveys on Taiwanese people's attitude on democracy since 2011. This year, the TFD again commissioned the Election Study Center of National Chengchi University for conducting the survey, and has continued to ask Taiwanese people their willingness to defend Taiwan, as we did last year. New in this year's poll were questions about people's views on how people view false information and its possible effects.

TFD President Liao said that Taiwanese people's confidence and satisfaction in democracy has steadily increased since the nadir in 2014. This year there are still over 70 percent of the questioned (72%) agreeing to the statement that although the democratic system is not perfect, it is still the best political system we have. "What's more important is that the percentage of people said they are satisfied with the implementation of democracy grew almost six percentage points to 39.4% this year, with a six-percentage-point decrease in those unsatisfied," President Liao said.

There is also a drastic decrease of 10 percentage points this year (44%) in the percentage of people being pessimistic about the future of Taiwanese democracy compared to that of last year (54.4%), and those who said they are optimistic about the future of Taiwanese democracy also increased, with 43.1% saying they are optimistic this year and 36.4% said so last year, according to the survey.

"It shows that Taiwanese people, despite believing there is definitely room for improvement, are generally optimistic about Taiwan's democracy," President Liao said.

The poll this year included questions about disinformation for the first time. The survey results showed that 91.7% of the polled said they believe disinformation tends to influence other people's judgment, while 68.7% said disinformation could affect their own judgment. Significantly, 65.7% of the polled

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believe disinformation would incur “great harm” to Taiwan’s democracy, and 28.5% said “some harm.” 80.5 percent of the polled said they do not agree with the statement, “Disinformation is part of freedom of expression, so the government should not have any regulations concerning disinformation,” while only 14.3% said the opposite.

“This shows that Taiwanese people believe that disinformation should be regulated, with moderation, as it could be detrimental to the development of democracy,” President Liao said.

On Taiwanese people’s willingness to defend Taiwan and its democracy, the TFD’s survey last year found 55% of the polled said they would defend Taiwan if war breaks out due to Taiwan’s declaring its formal independence, and this year there are still over half of the polled (57.4%) said they would, while the percentage of those said the opposite decreased from 35.9% last year to this year’s 31%.

To the question, “Would you fight for Taiwan if China uses force against Taiwan for unification,” nearly 70 percent (68.2%) said they would, a slight increase from last year’s 67.7%.

President Liao said a point worthy of note is that Taiwanese people aged between 20 and 29 are as or more positive than other age groups in terms of attitude toward democracy, believing disinformation being a great harm to democracy, and willingness to defend Taiwan. 86% of the 20-29 age group agree that democracy is the best political system we have so far, 63.6% believe disinformation would cause great harm to democracy, 72.7% are willing to fight for Taiwan announces its formal independence and China attacks, and 81.9% are willing to defend Taiwan if China uses force against Taiwan for unification.

Lin Thung-hong, Research Fellow of the Institute of Sociology at Academia Sinica, in his presentation put his focus on disinformation, a plague that Taiwan has been paying attention to closely recently. Citing the research study that he has been working on, he showed that there is a “censorship spillover effect,” meaning that the stronger your neighboring countries are exercising Internet censorship, the more likely you are going to be troubled by disinformation disseminated by those countries.

On how China, the country that is run by an authoritarian regime with internet censorship and therefore is most likely to affect Taiwan with its disinformation, Lin said we should stay cautious to certain tactics that various research studies have found to be employed by the regime. “[The Chinese Communist Party] actually does not ban criticisms against the government, according to a study, as they would rather encourage heated squabbles to harm the mutual trust and polarize the community; they blocked you only when you started to think about initiating collective action,” Lin said. Other

tactics on the Internet included making distracting comments (to lead the discussion away from the topic in question) or ad hominem attacks in an online discussion, or spreading “chicken soup for the soul” stories whenever a major event happens.

Tsai Chia-hung, Director of the Election Study Center at National Chengchi University that conducted the survey this time, told the press conference that this survey, conducted from April 11 to April 16, interviewed people who live in Taiwan and are aged over 20 via landline and mobile phone. The poll collected a total of 1,262 valid samples, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of  $\pm 2.93\%$ .

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