

Press Release

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Press Release: 2018 TFD Survey on Taiwanese Young People's Political Attitudes

The Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD) on April 19 held a press conference at the TFD about the 2018 TFD survey on Taiwanese young people's political attitudes. The event was hosted by TFD President Hsu Szu-chien and invited scholars included Wu Nai-teh, Adjoint Research Fellow of the Institute of Sociology at Academia Sinica, Lin Thung-hong, Associate Research Fellow of the Institute of Sociology at Academia Sinica, and Tsai Chia-hung, Director of the Election Study Center at National Chengchi University.

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 which took a step forward, asking for Taiwanese people's leanings on cross-strait relations and their willingness to defend Taiwan — both of which have consequential implications for Taiwan's democratic institutions. The survey also “oversampled” the Taiwanese young (those under 40) for a better statistic analysis of their political attitudes.

TFD President Hsu at the press conference said that the survey is one of the biannual polls the TFD conducts. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) or the current administration played no role in the TFD carrying out the survey, he said, and the research demonstrates the percentage of Taiwanese' willingness to defend Taiwan's democratic system. The survey does not advocate the pursuit of Taiwan independence or war mongering for Taiwan's independence, said Hsu. He also said the samples of the survey included more Kuomintang (KMT) supporters than DPP supporters, and the samples were not manipulated. Hsu also pointed out that the China Impact Survey research team of the Institute of Sociology at Academia Sinica has also obtained similar results for three consecutive years.

Regarding his presentation at the Global Taiwan Institute on April 3, Hsu said he discussed three major concerns about young people's political attitudes — democratic support, preference on future Cross-Strait relations, and commitment to defense. Data from the survey shows an overwhelming support for democracy among the young people, especially after the 2014 Sunflower Movement, and their support for authoritarianism is declining, he said. However, Taiwanese people are less optimistic about the future of democracy. In terms of being “naturally pro-independence,” the survey shows a strong sense of Taiwanese identity among young Taiwanese, but most of them support maintaining the

status quo on Cross-Strait relations. Therefore, Hsu said “naturally anti-unification” better describes the phenomenon than “naturally pro-independence.”

Hsu said different preconditions were laid out as a part of the survey — including war instigated by Taiwan’s declaration of independence and war provoked by China’s using force against Taiwan for unification — before the respondents were asked if they were willing to defend Taiwan. Results show that 68% are willing to defend Taiwan under the latter precondition, which is higher than the 55% under the first precondition. The data also shows those who are more supportive of democracy are less willing to engage in war if China uses force for unification. Hsu said that his presentation at GTI also referenced the survey conducted by Professor Emerson S. Niou from the Department of Political Science at Duke University as a contrast to emphasize that both surveys received different results due to the different way to answer each survey adopted. Professor Niou used open-ended answers while the TFD survey asked yes or no questions.

Since 2012, the China Impact Survey research team has conducted annual surveys to study how the Taiwanese people perceive the impact of China’s influence on Taiwan’s politics, society, and economy, said Wu Nai-teh, Adjunct Research Fellow of the Institute of Sociology at Academia Sinica. He said the results the China Impact Survey obtained regarding defending Taiwan were very similar to those of the TFD survey. It showed from 2016 to 2018, respectively 75.9%, 69.1%, and 67.1% of respondents answered “willing” to the question “Peaceful cross-Strait relations are what we all desire. But if China invades Taiwan, are you willing to engage in war to protect this country?” in the China Impact Survey.

Institute of Sociology at Academia Sinica Associate Research Fellow Lin Thung-hong said household surveys show continuously increasing support for democratic values and Taiwanese identity in the past 20 years (1995-2015). There has also been little change in identification among the Taiwanese young people in the last six years, and they are mostly supportive of being “naturally pro-Taiwan.” However, this does not necessarily mean they stand for Taiwan’s independence. Lin also said the China Impact Survey found that identities see a more significant variation among those over 50 years old, which is similar to the findings of the TFD survey.

To conclude the press conference, Tsai Chia-hung, Director of the Election Study Center at National Chengchi University, said although slight errors may occur due to the TFD survey oversampling young people, they will not overturn the research conclusions.



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