

Voting age (Taiwan): Groups call referendum result 'regrettable,' signal further action

Tuesday 29 November 2022, by [CHIH-CHUNG Chen](#), [PEI-JU Teng](#) (Date first published: 27 November 2022).

Taipei, Nov. 26 (CNA) Student groups and NGOs expressed their disappointment Saturday evening at the failure of a referendum initiative that would have lowered the voting age in Taiwan from 20 to 18, and they hinted at other steps to address the issue.

The referendum, which asked voters to approve a proposed constitutional amendment granting voting rights to citizens aged 18 and over and the right to run for office, pending changes to existing laws, to those 18 and over, was held in conjunction with local government elections on Saturday.

The referendum fell short of the threshold — nearly 9.62 million “yes” votes — needed to pass, as only 5.65 million voters backed the proposed revision against 5.02 million voters opposing it, according to figures from the Central Election Commission (CEC).

Turnout for the referendum was around 59 percent, slightly less than the 60 percent for the city and county chief elections, but 6 percent of the votes cast were invalid.

With passage requiring 50 percent of all eligible voters to support the initiative, about 90 percent of the 10.66 million valid votes cast would have had to be “yes” votes for the constitutional amendment to go through.

At a press conference in Taipei, the Taiwan Alliance for Advancement of Youth Rights and Welfare (TAAAYRW), the Taiwan Youth Association for Democracy (TYAD), and other groups said the referendum result was “regrettable.”

“This is not the result we looked forward to seeing,” TAAAYRW Secretary General Lin Yueh-chin (林月珍) said of the referendum, while urging young people to not be frustrated and to instead continue to campaign for the lowering of the voting age in Taiwan.

Lin said the TAAAYRW and other groups might consider seeking a constitutional interpretation by judicial authorities over the issue, or lobbying the Legislature for another referendum.

To amend the Constitution, legislators must first pass a proposed amendment with at least three-quarters of all lawmakers present and a minimum of three-quarters of those present supporting the measure.

The proposed amendment must then be endorsed in a national referendum with the support of half of the nation’s eligible voters to come into effect.

These rules were enshrined in the Additional Articles of the Constitution of the Republic of China in 2005, when Taiwan last made a constitutional revision.

TYAD Managing Director Alvin Chang (張景森), meanwhile, said he was proud of the fact that the first

referendum on proposed constitutional amendments garnered more than 5 million “yes” votes.

Chang expressed gratitude to many mayoral and city councilor candidates who openly championed the passage of the referendum during their election campaigns.

It remained problematic, however, that people turning 18 next year would face citizen-related obligations, such as paying taxes, as stipulated in the Civil Code, without being given the right to vote, Chang said.

Starting in 2023, the age of majority in the Civil Code will be 18, in accordance with the Criminal Code based on an amendment passed in December 2020.

Also in a press statement, the TYAD blamed the CEC for not making enough of an effort to promote the referendum, arguing that nearly half of all voters were unaware that it would be held on Nov. 26, citing a survey conducted in October.

In addition, there were reported cases in which polling station staffers did not provide referendum ballots to voters, as they did automatically with election ballots, until they were asked to do so.

Those staffers might have been guilty of negligence, the TYAD said, and it called on the agency to look into the reported cases.

Meanwhile, both the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and opposition Kuomintang (KMT) said they found the referendum result regrettable.

DPP spokesperson Melody Huang (黃珊珊) said the party’s candidates as well as rank and file had seized every opportunity to urge supporters to back the proposed amendment in public events over the past few months.

The KMT said it respected the decision of voters and that its support for the proposed measure to lower the voting age remained unchanged.

Chen Chih-chung
Teng Pei-ju

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