

Taiwan: Respect the people's right to vote through free and fair elections

(Bangkok, 8 January 2020) – The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) calls on the Government of Taiwan, and all relevant stakeholders, to respect the people's right to vote and ensure free and fair elections in Taiwan. FORUM-ASIA condemns any form of interference, through any means, that seeks to compromise the ability of Taiwan's citizens to freely choose their future leaders.

The run-up to the elections, scheduled for 11 January 2020, has seen the widespread use of disinformation seeking to influence and manipulate the results. These efforts continue in the form of false information and smear campaigns, circulated in online spaces that aim to discredit known dissenters and sow division among the Taiwanese people.¹

Examples from the region and beyond have shown how manipulating elections through the use of targeted political propaganda have subverted democracy, and led to violations of human rights.² As a nation which has made democratic strides over recent years despite enormous challenges, the Taiwanese people have much to lose should its democratic institutions fail to counter these efforts.

FORUM-ASIA recommends the following for the Government of Taiwan:

- For all institutions in the country to take all means necessary to protect every citizen's right to vote, and hold to account those who seek to manipulate the process;
- To ensure that these means do not in any way, impinge on the fundamental rights of all individuals to freely express and form opinions, or associate with chosen parties or organisations;
- To guarantee that all citizens have access to necessary information; and
- To ensure safe spaces, both off and online, for debate and discussions regarding the elections and other political developments

FORUM-ASIA recommends the following for other stakeholders:

- For social media companies to be vigilant and ensure they promote strong rights-based policies against the spread of disinformation, smear campaigns and dangerous speech on their platforms; and
- For other Governments to continue to monitor the election process, including its aftermath, and support transparency and accountability.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/06/technology/taiwan-election-china-disinformation.html>

² <https://qz.com/1239762/cambridge-analytica-scandal-all-the-countries-where-scl-elections-claims-to-have-worked/>

As the only country in the region rated as having open civic space, Taiwan exerts positive influence on its neighbours.³ Manipulation of its democratic process could have detrimental repercussions on civic space across the region.

About FORUM-ASIA:

FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 81 member organisations in 21 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.

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³ <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/taiwan/>