

The Green Party Taiwan's Achievements and Challenges in Promoting Gender Equality

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There is a common misconception that Green Parties are solely concerned with environmental issues. However, the [Charter of the Global Greens](#), which sets out the core guiding values for Green Parties, shows that these parties have a very diverse and comprehensive set of transformative goals. One distinguishing feature of Green Parties is their promotion of gender equality. A recent [study](#) on European political parties found that Green Parties tend to be more feminist than their party system competitors. But do such findings hold when we examine Green Parties in newer democracies and beyond Europe? Are Asian Greens more feminist in their policy advocacy, leadership and candidate selection and in the way they deal with cases of sexual harassment?

Founded in January 1996, Green Party Taiwan (GPT) was the first Green Party to be established in Asia. It is one of the oldest movement parties in Taiwan, created through the efforts of student activists and several civil society groups, including activists from the eco-feminist Homemakers United Foundation. One of the main reasons Taiwan has made such impressive progress in the realm of gender equality has been due to civil society activism. Since Green Parties operate on the boundaries between civil and political society, an examination of the GPT's case can bring a different perspective on Taiwan's achievements and challenges in the realm of gender equality.

Our research shows that in many ways the GPT has been a pioneer, not unlike its European counterparts, in promoting gender equality. The GPT was the first party in Taiwan to have a female party leader in 1999. Starting in 2006, the GPT followed the common practice among many Green Parties of having a female-male co-convenor. In this way, it was the first and until now the only Taiwanese party, with a male-female co-convenor leadership. It was also the first to introduce gender quotas for its core decision-making body, the Central Executive Committee.

There has tended to be a similar pattern in the realm of the GPT's election candidate nomination. On average, the party has had a [much higher proportion](#) of female candidates than other major parties in Taiwan. For instance, in the 1998 local elections, six out of its seven candidates were female. It was also the first party to nominate openly LGBTQ candidates in the 2010 local elections for Taipei City and New Taipei City Councils. Most recently, the party proposed a new precedent by which all its parliamentary party list candidates will be female for its [2024 election campaign](#).

The GPT has attempted to go beyond mere descriptive political representation by promoting gender equality in its policy advocacy. In the party's early years, for instance, its candidates fought for gender equality in public toilet provisions and also exposed the hypocrisy of mainstream parties' views on prostitution. The GPT, like its international counterparts, has often taken gender-related positions that other parties are afraid to touch upon. For instance, in 2008, the GPT called for protecting the rights of sex workers, and the party was the first to openly advocate for LGBTQ rights, including same-sex marriage. Only much later, mainstream parties such as the DPP endorsed same-sex marriage in the 2016 campaign. The GPT has also been able to highlight gender issues through its nomination of leading activists from both feminist and LGBTQ rights organisations. For instance, in 2016, two leading figures in Taiwan's LGBTQ rights movement stood for the party in the parliamentary elections. The GPT maintained such advocacy in its [most recent national election](#) in 2020 when the party called for adoption rights equality for same-sex couples, a system for surrogacy mothers and exposed the way some conservative religious groups have tried to undermine gender equality education in schools.

Nevertheless, internationally Green Parties have sometimes also been questioned on their gender equality credentials. For instance, there have been cases where the Green Parties have not handled

sexual harassment cases well in both England and Australia. The question of transgender rights has proved divisive within the Green Party of England and Wales. In fact, in 2022, the Scottish Greens even [cut ties](#) with the Green Party of England and Wales over concerns about transphobia in the party.

Similarly, what is arguably Taiwan's most gender progressive party, the GPT, has faced challenges due to patriarchal or misogynistic attitudes within broader society, the party system and even within the party itself. In the 2018 local elections, a leaflet attacking a female GPT's Hsinchu County candidate was distributed. The [text](#) included the lines: 'She loves to masturbate, sleep naked and promote sexual activities. She has been a sex partner and mistress of a married man. So disgusting, don't vote for her.' The fact that a rival camp distributed the leaflet reveals that some politicians believe they can still win votes based on such misogynistic attacks. However, this did not undermine the candidate's campaign, as she won election to Hsinchu County Council for the first time. Moreover, the police did find and convict the perpetrator who had been distributing the leaflets.

At times within the party, GPT female activists have had to face misogynistic attitudes. This was also shown in the 2018 local elections when a male GPT candidate said to our co-author, who was a female candidate, 'I suggest that you dye your hair back to black, and wear less revealing clothes, otherwise, you look like a street prostitute. Haha.' At the time, he thought this was a humorous remark. Our co-author thought otherwise and recalled, 'That was the moment I decided to keep my hair auburn at least until the election day.'

Following the portrayal of sexual harassment within a fictional political party in the Netflix Taiwanese series [Wave Makers](#), Taiwan is witnessing its most significant #MeToo movement to date. While the government has responded with proposals to reform legislation, the GPT has [lobbied](#) for a more comprehensive set of revisions to gender equality laws. In the past, there had been accusations of sexual harassment within the GPT as well and in response, the party tried to establish formal systems for dealing with such cases much earlier than other parties. One case revealed that even within the GPT, some activists retain patriarchal attitudes. For instance, during the 2018 local elections, an accusation of sexual harassment was made against a GPT candidate. However, some Central Executive Committee members believed this should be dismissed, arguing it should be treated as a politically motivated attack by rival parties. The accused candidate agreed, claiming that no action was necessary. In contrast, our co-author, who was also a candidate at the time, was shocked by this response. She asked whether it was reasonable for the Central Executive Committee of a party known for emphasising gender issues to simply dismiss an incident of alleged sexual harassment with this kind of attitude?

In the aftermath, party figures looked for ways to improve the internal handling of gender equality issues by establishing a grievance-handling procedure and a designated contact point to receive complaints. The GPT's Gender Equality Grievance Committee comprises party members who are knowledgeable about gender issues such as sexual harassment and gender discrimination. Their role is to determine whether to accept a case. If it is determined that a case should be accepted and further investigation is required, external experts will be sought to serve as investigating commissioners to ensure the fairness of the investigation. However, even during the process of establishing and implementing the grievance committee, our co-author, even though not directly involved in the alleged harassment, faced suspicion regarding her intentions in setting up the mechanism. She even heard rumours of verbal attacks or mockery behind her back. Despite these challenges, most of the party's Central Executive Committee supported creating the grievance handling system.

The Taiwan case shows that the GPT shares many similarities with its European counterparts in the way it has promoted gender equality through leadership and candidate selection, party election platforms and issue priorities, as well as handling of sexual harassment cases. Compared to other parties in Taiwan, the GPT has been a pioneer in its gender activism. Nevertheless, it has faced similar challenges of patriarchal or misogynistic attitudes in society and within the party itself. Feminist party activists need to operate in a political world that is filled with toxic masculinity, and female candidates are often unfairly sexualised.

The GPT case shows how having a more balanced gender ratio in leadership and candidates can bring more diverse perspectives into party and electoral politics. We argue the GPT, and its members should emphasise promoting gender equality, as this allows the party to offer something distinctive to the party system. The party need not worry about losing potential conservative votes through its gender activism or see it as something troublesome. While it is easy to incorporate gender equity in manifestos, it is important not to forget that a genuine Green Party should put gender equality into practice in its daily operation.

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