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Special Issue: Taiwanese Voices On The 2024 Elections

by Arran Hope



President-elect Lai Ching-te (L2) and Vice President-elect Hsiao Bi-khim (L3) of the Democratic Progressive Party wave to supporters after winning the election in Taipei. (Source: Alex Chan Tsz Yuk/Sipa USA)

This year sees the Jamestown Foundation celebrate its 40th anniversary. The intention of Jamestown’s analysis since its inception has always been to foreground indigenous voices and local sources from the regions of focus. The organization’s founder, William Geimer, published memoirs of Arkady Shevchenko, the highest-ranking Soviet official ever to defect when he left his position as undersecretary general of the United Nations, and of Ion Pacepa, Romania’s former top intelligence officer. Ever since, Jamestown has sought to disseminate information on countries of strategic concern to the United States and its allies and partners. For the last 24 years, *China Brief* has pursued this approach to its coverage of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and Taiwan.

It is in this context that Jamestown is publishing a special issue of *China Brief* on the 2024 Taiwan elections. [1] Arriving almost exactly a month following the island’s presidential and legislative elections held on January 13, this issue includes shorter pieces by five sitting lawmakers and two Taiwan-based experts. [2] These cover a variety of topics, ranging from introspective analyses about the Kuomintang (KMT) and its perspective on the years ahead, to overviews of civil society initiatives to enhance the population’s defense

capabilities and awareness, to insight on how Taiwanese politicians view their own relations with the PRC. These articles are published here as full translations or with minor edits. In this way, Jamestown has sought to preserve the voices and the views of the authors to the fullest extent. The articles run as follows:

- [Marco Ho, Co-founder and Chief Advisor of Kuma \(Black Bear\) Academy](#)
- [Lin Fei-fan, one of the leaders of the 2014 Sunflower Movement](#)
- [Amb. Victor Chin, KMT Representative to the United States](#)
- [Dr. Puma Shen, DPP freshman lawmaker](#)
- [Hsu Chiao-Hsin, KMT freshman lawmaker](#)
- [Dr. Fan Yun, DPP lawmaker](#)
- [Alex Wang Ting-yu, DPP lawmaker](#)

External treatments of Taiwan's politics are often reductive. This is something that rising interest in the island in recent years has clarified, leading to coverage that frames Taiwan in functional terms, as the site for geopolitical contestation (see for instance: [BBC](#), January 13; [Economist](#), May 1, 2021). True, the PRC is a perennial concern in Taiwanese politics, and remained a salient issue during the election campaign ([The Diplomat](#), February 1). Nevertheless, domestic concerns were clearly also at the fore: stagnating wages, unaffordable house prices, and brain drain among the younger population were all hot-button issues, not to mention various political scandals and characteristic mudslinging. As such, the election, as the critical point in the country's political calendar in which attention is squarely focused internally, and as the moment during which the whole island most publicly participates in expressing its full range of political views, beliefs, and commitments, provides a golden opportunity to explore the nuances and idiosyncrasies of this polity, which it has as much as any other state.

When each voter arrived in person at the ballot box on January 13, they were presented with three different ballots. The first ballot was for the presidential election, which is decided by a simple majority vote. The second and third ballots were for the legislative elections: one to select a local district/constituency candidate, and the other to vote for a particular party. This mixed or 'parallel' voting system ensures that 73 members of the 113-seat Legislative Yuan are chosen via first-past-the-post voting, while 34 members are chosen via proportional representation, with candidates elected from party lists depending on their party's proportional share of the overall vote. A further six seats are voted for exclusively by Taiwan's indigenous population.

The 2024 presidential election was won by Lai Ching-te (賴清德), with just over 40 percent of the vote.

[2] Lai will be sworn into office on May 20. Commentators have argued that his victory—which returned a DPP candidate as Head of State for an historic third consecutive term—can be seen as “a vote for stability, at least by the large minority of Taiwanese” ([Jacobin](#), February 5). In the Legislative Yuan elections, the DPP also won more votes than any other party. However, this translated to much fewer seats, losing their commanding majority. Including allied minor parties and independents (who tend to vote with one of the main two parties), the DPP now holds 51 seats to the KMT's 54. Both are several seats shy of 57, the requisite number for a majority ([Frozen Garlic](#), January 28).

The rise of the Taiwan People's Party (TPP) as a third candidate made the election process much more uncertain than in previous years. Having outperformed expectations by winning eight seats, Ko Wen-je (柯文哲)'s campaign has left the two traditional parties with questions to answer going forward. Ko received over half of the votes of 20–29 year old voters. Educated voters (including graduate students at National Taiwan University) may not have been fans of Ko *per se*, they felt alienated and disappointed by the incumbent DPP and the KMT ([CWP](#), February 12). The TPP's savvy use of social media and online platforms—TikTok and Youtube in particular—generated youth support in ways that other parties failed to capitalize on. However, as the party institutionalizes and struggles as the third-largest party, it is difficult to see how much better, if at all, Ko's party will fare come 2028.

A division of powers between the DPP executive (with key appointments, such as the premier, made by Lai) and the KMT-led Legislative Yuan (with Han Kuo-yu (韓國瑜) as speaker) dictating the legislative process) will make gridlock more likely. The national budget will still be spearheaded by the executive, though the legislature will be able to cut spending for specific items and new programs will be difficult to get off the ground. Moreover, the legislature can pursue its own agenda, which rarely receives significant pushback from the executive. One crucial area where this might play out is in the approval of military aid (Frozen Garlic, [January 28](#)).

For those who must view the island at the level of analysis of a geopolitical unit, an understanding of Taiwan's internal workings is still vital. Contingencies within the island's political culture and democratic processes inform its status in broader regional and global settings, as well as affecting analyses in Beijing on whether or how to take any of a number of potential actions. For instance, Han Kuo-yu is known for maintaining friendly ties with the PRC, and met with officials during a 2019 trip. Scholar of Taiwanese politics Lev Nachman has argued that Beijing is "probably very happy" that Han now has this platform, while Taiwanese expert Chen Fan-yu has argued that Beijing may therefore try to exert influence via the legislature, and might even invite Han to the PRC ([VOA](#), February 1). Beijing has shown little restraint or subtlety so far, however. Over 80 balloons have been seen over the island in the last two months, and PLA aircraft continue to cross the median line on an almost daily basis ([Newsweek](#), February 12; [MND](#), accessed February 15).

The following compilation of articles that constitute this issue of *China Brief* provide necessary context and detail about Taiwan's contemporary situation. Engaging with their writing can, perhaps better than any other means, help those of us outside Taiwan to better understand what is happening right now, where the priorities of various parts of its political system currently lie, and what its prospects are for the years ahead.

Arran Hope is Editor of China Brief.

Notes

[1] Special thanks are owed to my colleague, Sunny Cheung, for his work commissioning many of these articles and his assistance in putting this issue of *China Brief* together. I am also grateful to Howard Cheng-Hao Shen for coordinating the two submissions by KMT members.

[2] The Taiwan People's Party (TPP) did not respond to enquiries for contributions to this issue.

[3] For more on Lai's platform and background, see [China Brief](#), March 3, 2023.

Civil Society Defense Initiatives

by Marco Ho 何澄輝



Students practicing rescue techniques. (Source: [Thomas Marseca/UPI](#))

Executive Summary:

- Civic groups are enhancing “social resilience” by forming self-training organizations focused on preparing for potential conflict impacts beyond just military engagement.
- These groups address a broad range of issues including civil defense, emergency rescue, disaster preparedness, cyberattack responses, and infrastructure maintenance. Civil society advocates for the use of civilian technologies in defense, such as drones and AI, reflecting a proactive stance on Taiwan's security.
- Kuma Academy exemplifies practical action in civil defense education, offering courses and activities to thousands, alongside other groups focusing on specific preparedness aspects.
- Taiwan's civil society is urging government and political parties to implement defense reforms, over concerns about the country's level of defense in the face of threats from the PRC.

Taiwan's government must actively respond to the increasingly serious and ill-intentioned threats and provocations coming from the People's Republic of China (PRC). Taiwan's civil society should also be deeply concerned.

In recent years, more and more civil society groups have begun to pay attention to the issue of Taiwan's defense. These groups, which include political and social groups, and even academic groups, have been actively urging the government and political parties to carry out defense reforms in areas such as mobilization, the development of new technological applications, and responses to cognitive warfare. Taiwan's civil society has now progressed beyond discussion and debate, and has begun to devote itself to putting active participation into practice.

Citizens' Organizations Starting From the Perspective of Enhancing "Social Resilience"

The most obvious manifestation of civil society taking the initiative is in the variety of civic self-training groups and organizations that have begun to flourish across Taiwan in recent years. Drawing on the experiences of similar groups in current geopolitical hotspots, Taiwan's groups have examined the challenges that they may face in the event that current threats of conflict are realized. They have found that war may not be a remote prospect for Taiwan, and have come to believe that contemporary warfare does not just affect the state's military and defense sectors. Rather, society as a whole faces a broad range of challenges.

In modern warfare, perhaps less than 10 percent of the population serves directly on the front line. However, the impact of war is felt by all in society. People therefore must consider how society as a whole can respond and adapt to the challenges and developments of a contemporary pattern of warfare in which conflicts can extend into the longer term. Clearly, this requires more than arranging for emergency or temporary military mobilization.

Society needs extensive adjustments and construction. Only then will it be able to cope on a socioeconomic—and even psychological—level with a possible destructive assault, with survival following such an extraordinary situation, with reestablishing stability and restoring the functioning of society, and subsequently with continuing to live and develop in order to sustain the country in the face of a war. In other words, enhancing society's ability to deal with and recover from attacks, and strengthening its ability to withstand crises, have become a key focus for civil society. This is what is referred to as the issue of "social resilience (社會韌性)."

Participation Practices of Various Self-Established Organizations

Under the current circumstances, a wide range of citizen groups concerned with defense issues have emerged independently. In addition to traditional issues of military defense, these groups also touch on a variety of subjects and practices of great importance to the construction of social resilience. These include: civil defense, emergency rescue, disaster preparedness, cognitive psychology development, responses to cyberattacks, and infrastructure maintenance. Broadening awareness and discussion of issues through

extensive communication and education is the original and primary goal of Taiwan's current civil society. However, an increasing number of organizations are now focusing on practical action and training.

Kuma Academy (黑熊學院) is one such organization. Established in September 2021, it began with civil defense programs centered on defense knowledge and awareness. Through the introduction of basic knowledge and training, it actively promotes education and drills throughout Taiwan ([Kuma Academy](#), accessed February 14). Basic courses include Modern Warfare Awareness, Understanding Cognitive Warfare, Basic Hygiene and Rescue Training, and Evacuation Planning and Preparedness. In addition, the Academy offers online courses, sells publications and related materials, and organizes parent-child activities to promote civil defense knowledge. To date, tens of thousands of people have engaged with and participated in Kuma Academy programs and activities.

Taiwan has a variety of other civic groups that focus on specific issues (for instance, first aid training or self-defense awareness). A further set of self-training groups organize activities at the local or even neighborhood level. Although these groups' issues of concern vary in emphasis, they are all part of a spontaneous effort by citizens to build social resilience and prepare for the possibility of facing an external threat.

Conclusion

Due to the limitations of Taiwan's legal environment and institutional regulations, training and organization for civilians to directly handle weapons is still only at the discussion stage. However, Taiwan's civil society is actively advocating for and participating in discussions over civilian technologies or new technologies that could be used in a war or during an attack. These include the development and utilization of dual-use drones, AI technology, internet applications, open source intelligence collection, and even technology to counter hacking or cognitive-psychological threats. These constitute the concerns and responses of Taiwan's civil society in the face of emergent threats. At the same time, they signify the on-the-ground implementation of initiatives in the context of Taiwan's unusual defense environment.

Marco Ho (何澄輝) is the Co-founder and Chief Advisor of Kuma (Black Bear) Academy, and the Deputy Secretary General of Taiwan Security Association.

Seeds of the Sunflower Movement

by Fei-fan Lin



Protesters occupied the Legislative Yuan. (Source: Wikipedia)

Executive Summary:

- The 2014 Sunflower Movement significantly impacted Taiwan's political landscape, leading to a shift towards the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and away from policies pursuing deeper official cross-strait engagement.
- The movement catalyzed policies for economic diversification which have measurably reduced dependence on the PRC. These include the New Southbound Policy and increased trade with the United States and Europe.
- Taiwan's continued democratic resilience and international cooperation efforts are directly influenced by the legacy of the Sunflower Movement, including recent trade agreements with the United States and the United Kingdom.

Ten years ago, Taiwan experienced its largest student and civic movement since democratization. The 2014 Sunflower Movement was also the first mass occupation of the parliament chamber in the country's history. Without it, Taiwan's economic independence and democratic achievements would likely have led it to a vastly different place today.

2013–2014: A Global Year of Protest

The years 2013 and 2014 saw several significant grassroots movements emerge, demonstrating against the expansion of authoritarianism, all of which were pivotal in shaping global geopolitics. The Sunflower Movement began on March 18, 2014 and lasted for 21 days. It opposed the policies of the incumbent Kuomintang (KMT) government and the KMT President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) which were excessively supportive of deeper cross-strait engagement. It also opposed the signing of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement and further economic integration between Taiwan and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Ultimately, it aimed to safeguard Taiwan's democratic system from external interference. The second movement to occur that year took place in September, in Hong Kong. What came to be known as the Umbrella Movement demanded that Beijing fulfill its promises to the city by allowing the Hong Kong people to govern Hong Kong, implementing genuine universal suffrage, and opposing the spread of Chinese authoritarianism. The two movements followed the 2013 Euromaidan revolution in Kyiv, Ukraine, sparked by the decision by former president Viktor Yanukovich to opt for closer ties to Russia rather than with the European Union. While the Sunflower and Umbrella movements saw the PRC as the common denominator, the Euromaidan protests shared the premise of demonstrating against an authoritarian power exerting undue influence on and intervention in the politics of a neighboring democratic polity.

The three movements ended in distinct ways. Following the Euromaidan revolution's conclusion, Russia launched a military invasion, annexing Crimea. This further motivated Ukrainians to strengthen their civil defense preparations, laying the foundation for Ukraine's eventual ability to sustain resistance against Russian aggression—a resistance now approaching two years. The outcome of the Sunflower Movement was quite different. Although there were some clashes with the police during the occupation of the parliament building, the movement ultimately ended peacefully. Moreover, it was successful in achieving a key aim of blocking the passage of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement in the legislature. It also significantly disrupted the political agenda of the Ma administration, which sought closer integration with the PRC and eventual unification.

The Sunflower Movement And Progressive Politics in Taiwan

Before the Sunflower Movement, the international community was not optimistic about Taiwan's future. John Mearsheimer, the well-known international relations theorist, published an article in early 2014 titled "Say Goodbye to Taiwan" ([National Interest](#), February 25, 2014). In it, he argued that "there is a reasonable chance that American policy makers will eventually conclude that it makes good strategic sense to abandon Taiwan and allow China to coerce it into accepting unification," and that the international community would find it challenging to defend the island. However, less than two months after Mearsheimer's article was published, the largest student and social movement in Taiwan's history erupted, suggesting the possibility for a different, more hopeful path than his article might have led observers to foresee.

Following the Sunflower Movement, public opinion in Taiwan shifted. There was a much more widely held view that Taiwan should not move closer to or become more dependent on the PRC. This manifested in the local elections at the end of 2014, which were seen as a midterm referendum on the ruling party. The KMT

lost eight municipalities and counties, dropping from holding 14 out of the 22 to just six. Instead, support shifted firmly to the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which advocated for Taiwan to diversify its economic and trade relations rather than rely too heavily on the PRC. Subsequently, in 2016, Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) won the presidential election representing the DPP and led her party to a majority in the legislature, completing Taiwan's third democratic transition.

Taiwan swiftly adjusted its course after the DPP came to power in 2016. President Tsai proposed the New Southbound Policy (新南向政策), encouraging Taiwanese investment in emerging markets such as Southeast Asia and India in order to diversify the country's economic and trade strategies. Additionally, the DPP introduced forward-looking infrastructure projects (前瞻基礎建設計畫), energy transition initiatives, and efforts towards achieving net-zero emissions. These all strengthened the domestic economy and attracted more Taiwanese businesses back to invest at home. As a result, Taiwan's economy has maintained steady growth over the past few years.

Taiwan's economic dependence on the PRC has indeed continued to decline following eight years on this trajectory. During the Ma administration, the PRC accounted for nearly 45 percent of Taiwan's total exports. However, following eight years of government under the DPP, the proportion of exports to the PRC reached 35 percent in 2023—the lowest point in 21 years ([Ministry of Finance](#), January 9). This has been accompanied by significant growth in exports to Europe and the United States, reaching historic levels in 2023. Exports to the former amounted to \$42.29 billion last year, accounting for 9.8 percent of total exports—a 2.9 percent increase on the previous year. Meanwhile, the latter received 17.6 percent (\$76.24 billion) of total exports, at an annual growth rate of 1.6 percent. Additionally, 2022 saw investment by Taiwanese companies in Southeast Asia officially surpass investment in the PRC, demonstrating Taiwan's gradual diversification of its foreign trade.

On January 13, 2024, Taiwan successfully conducted another democratic election. The ruling DPP won a third consecutive term in office, setting a record in Taiwan's post-democratization history. The international community has largely interpreted this as a sign that public opinion in Taiwan still supports the current government's national direction. However, the DPP was unable to secure a majority in the legislature. With the Kuomintang (KMT) and the anti-establishment third-force party, the Taiwan People's Party (TPP), forming a majority in the legislature, the KMT's pro-China lawmaker Han Kuo-yu (韓國瑜) was elected as speaker. This situation will have an impact on the DPP's abilities to pursue its legislative agenda, including important reforms such as Taiwan's defense autonomy. It also brings uncertainties to the future of cross-strait relations.

In the process of campaigning for the presidency, Vice President Lai Ching-te (賴清德), who will be inaugurated as the new president in May, has repeatedly stated that Taiwan will continue to diversify its trade relations and should not continue to lock Taiwan's economy into a "One China" framework. Taiwan must also accelerate the development of its defense autonomy to strengthen its ability to respond to any contingencies. Taiwan will continue to invest resources in efforts to detach from the Chinese market, assist more Taiwanese companies in shifting towards markets in Europe, America, Southeast Asia, and South Asia, and enhance its resilience in the face of the impact of the PRC's economic decline. This trajectory is reinforced by geopolitical trends and the PRC's continued economic downturn.

The Sunflower Movement As Driver Of Political Change

During the Sunflower Movement in 2014, Taiwan faced a choice similar to that of Ukraine. Namely, whether to move towards the world or towards its authoritarian neighbor. Ten years ago, Taiwanese civil society, through unprecedented large-scale social movements, prevented the ruling government from acquiescing to the policies of its authoritarian neighbor. We cannot predict the course of history. However, it is reasonable to infer that, without the 2014 Sunflower Movement, Taiwan would have continued on the path of KMT governance towards cross-strait integration. This would have led to a very different outcome from the present and may have caused Taiwan to suffer amid the US-China trade war and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Instead, the Sunflower Movement guided Taiwan in a new direction. This direction was towards openness to the world and towards deepening connections with like-minded countries, thus providing a strong and powerful mandate for the new government. Ten years on, Taiwan continues to diversify its trade and strengthen its international democratic connections, signing new trade agreements. These include the 21st Century Taiwan-US Trade Initiative, signed with the United States, and the Enhanced Trade Partnership Agreement, signed with the United Kingdom ([USTR](#), August 18, 2023; [UKGOV](#), November 14, 2023). These efforts effectively mitigate risks for Taiwan.

Taiwan will continue to strive to join multilateral trade agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) to further expand connections with more countries in the region, rather than relying solely on the PRC. Today, more than ever before, Taiwan needs support from countries around the world. It requires more substantial assistance and cooperation across military, security, and economic domains. The 2014 Sunflower Movement demonstrated the considerable resilience of the Taiwanese people and their determination for defending themselves and their democracy. With stronger and more substantial international support, Taiwan will undoubtedly continue to serve as a beacon of democracy.

Fei-fan Lin (林飛帆) is a board member of New Frontier Foundation, an official think tank of Taiwan's governing Democratic Progressive Party. He was also the deputy Secretary-General of the DPP (July, 2019–January, 2023) under President Tsai Ing-wen. He was one of the leaders of the 2014 Sunflower Movement.

KMT Bottom Lines Following The 2024 Election

by Amb. Victor Chin



Kuomintang presidential nominee Hou Yu-ih (left) speaks at a press conference in Taipei. (Source: KMT)

Executive Summary:

- The KMT emphasizes a balanced approach to preserving Taiwan’s democracy and Indo-Pacific peace, highlighting the importance of not solely focusing on military buildup but also on fostering good neighborly relations.
- Despite not winning the presidency, the KMT achieved significant gains in the Legislative Yuan, positioning itself as a major force for moderation and rational politics, aiming to provide checks and balances and promote economic development, stabilize cross-strait relations, and investigate corruption.
- The KMT plans to deepen its international engagement, particularly with the United States, under its “defense and dialogue” strategy. The aim of this strategy is to enhance national security and manage cross-strait relations, while also committing to internal and strategic reforms to better represent and serve the people of Taiwan.

The Republic of China (Taiwan)'s 2024 presidential and legislative elections concluded without any transfer of power from one political party to another, yet the impact on Taiwan's political landscape was significant.

The January elections were not, as some claimed, a choice between democracy and autocracy, or between the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC). It was rather a choice by the free will of the people of Taiwan. Major political parties in Taiwan, the Kuomintang (KMT) included, all have the best interests of the nation in mind, though their priorities and approaches may vary. The KMT believes the best way to preserve the free and democratic way of life of Taiwan and to safeguard the peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific region is to tackle future challenges in a balanced and multifaceted manner. Emphasis is not solely placed on military buildup, but also on "good neighbor policy (睦邻友好政策)".

The KMT And A Renewed Legislative Yuan

The KMT's Hou Yu-ih (侯友宜) admitted defeat four hours after the polling stations closed. It was unfortunate that the opposition parties could not consolidate and rally around a single, unified flag in the lead up to the election. However, Lai Ching-te (赖清德) of the Democratic People's Party received a 17 percent lower vote share compared to the 57 percent Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) received in 2020.

The KMT scored crucial victories in the Legislative Yuan. Despite challenges from the DPP's established base and the demagogic appeal of the Taiwan People's Party, the party won 52 out of the 113 seats, an increase of 14 seats from the 2020 elections. With our own version of Angus King and Bernie Sanders, a total of 54 legislators in the KMT caucus will provide the institutional checks and balances Taiwan badly needs, even if this falls just short of an absolute majority. Crucially, the KMT is now the largest party in the Legislative Yuan and represents the electorate's aspirations for a moderate, rational politics, and its distaste for arbitrary, partisan decisions.

The KMT-led Legislative Yuan is no longer a rubber stamp as it was during the DPP's unrestrained leadership. The refreshed Legislative Yuan will cease to waive scrutiny of the executive, something that has not taken place for almost eight years. The renewed Legislative Yuan is becoming a branch of the Republic of China (ROC) government that honestly represents the hopes of a great majority of the people in Taiwan to promote economic development, stabilize cross-strait relations, effect real executive efficiency, and investigate corrupt public sector conduct.

The DPP has now lost the total control over all branches of government it held for the last eight years. It is unsurprising that the electorate was unwilling to tolerate one dominant party in Taiwan's political scene, not least due to a lack of competence and integrity within the ruling party. However, the KMT failed to provide a preferable answer to this public choice question.

The 2D Strategy And The KMT's International Engagement

The KMT adheres, as always, to the general direction of being “pro-United States, friendly with Japan, and peaceful with the mainland.” It is committed—again, as always—to building lasting, amicable, mutually beneficial relations with like-minded partners around the world to safeguard and expand our international space. As such, it will always be the defender of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.

The relationship with the United States is the crux of our foreign relations. The KMT strives to strengthen mutual understanding with American partners and stakeholders in both government and civil society. Through its Representative Office in the United States, it will proactively engage with the US Administration and Congress, Democrats and Republicans, academia, and overseas compatriots' communities for mutual understanding, confidence, and friendship. The KMT is devoted to maximizing ROC-US mutual benefits through ROC Legislative Yuan-US Congress coordination. As the largest party in the Legislative Yuan, the KMT understands the harsh diplomatic realities our country faces. We will use and expand on existing parliamentary mechanisms to achieve foreign policy goals with our formal allies and friendly partners. Our legislative caucus will work to strengthen legislative coordination on common deterrence against the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) across different countries wherever and however possible.

Going forward, KMT Chairman Eric Li-luan Chu (朱立倫) will continue to implement his 2D strategy (“defense and dialogue”) to enhance the ROC's national security. Under this strategy, the KMT will strive to assist the ROC's defense buildup to deter the potential for military adventurism by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) while working to maintain the necessary communication channels to manage risk, reduce miscalculation, and discourage overreaction to accidental incidents ([The Diplomat](#), December 14, 2023). The strategy is the foundation of Hou Yu-ih's 3D strategy unveiled for his 2024 presidential campaign ([World Journal](#), March 19, 2023).

The Path Ahead

The KMT is determined to deepen the party's institutional and strategic reforms to garner support from our people. The KMT will continue to be a party of humility that listens to the people, forms bottom-up consensus from the grassroots level, elevates bread-and-butter issues to the national level, prioritizes youth affairs and policy, and pushes tirelessly for its own rejuvenation ([The Diplomat](#), February 10).

The party failed to achieve an alternation of power in last month's elections. However, its success in becoming the largest party in the Legislative Yuan and ending the political monopoly of the DPP is a remarkable accomplishment. The success of Taiwan's vibrant democracy lies in its lively multi-party politics. Without a strong and functioning opposition, Taiwan would run the risk of becoming a one-party state. Over the next four years, the KMT will respect the separation of powers to the fullest to reflect the majority will of the people and to serve the public faithfully. It will make every effort to play the role of loyal opposition and be constructive, responsible, and—most importantly—resolute in upholding of the Constitution of the Republic of China, which assures the maintenance of a peaceful and stable status quo across the Taiwan Strait.

Ambassador Victor Chin (秦日新) is Kuomintang Representative to the United States and former Representative to Fiji.

TikTok: An Expanding Front in Cognitive Warfare

by Puma Shen



Image of how TikTok influences the Internet and reality. (Source: AI-generated image)

Executive Summary:

- PRC cognitive warfare strategies now include the cultivation of internet influencers who disseminate rumors and on platforms like YouTube designed to undermine Taiwan’s democratic institutions.
- TikTok has become a significant tool in shaping public opinion, exploiting its algorithmic power to spread narratives favourable to Beijing and critical of the United States, especially concerning the 2024 election in Taiwan.
- Taiwan’s commitment to freedom of speech complicates efforts to regulate platforms like TikTok, with nearly 5 million users exposed to PRC-influenced narratives, posing a challenge to democratic resilience and information integrity.
- The response to disinformation requires collective action, including regulatory measures, digital literacy education, international investigations into social media platforms' operations, and global cooperation to uphold transparency and accountability standards.

The Evolution of PRC Cognitive Warfare Strategies

The landscape of the cognitive warfare perpetrated by the People's Republic of China (PRC) against Taiwan is in a state of relentless evolution, adapting and morphing with each passing year. Initially, the conflict was grounded in the physical realm, with Beijing deploying traditional united front tactics to disseminate rumours and sow discord. These efforts were rudimentary but effective, laying the groundwork for more sophisticated operations to come.

The PRC's strategy underwent a significant transformation with the dawning of the digital age. The battleground shifted from the streets to the airwaves, with Beijing infiltrating media outlets to launch a comprehensive public opinion campaign aimed at the heart of Taiwanese society. Beginning in earnest from the turn of the millennium, this marked a pivotal turn in the nature of cognitive warfare.

Since 2015, the focus has shifted yet again. This time the digital frontier of social media is the target. PRC tactics have become more nuanced and multifaceted, ranging from the operation of content farms to the outright purchase of fan pages and the strategic management of online communities. These methods demonstrate a remarkable adaptability and an unyielding determination to influence public opinion.

Among the most insidious developments in this ongoing campaign has been the cultivation of internet influencers. These individuals, operating primarily on platforms like YouTube, have become—knowingly or unknowingly—conduits for propaganda. They broadcast a steady stream of rumours designed to undermine democratic institutions.

Social media platforms have not remained passive. Faced with these challenges, a variety of countermeasures have been implemented, signaling a recognition of the threat posed by unverified information. However, the advent of TikTok has introduced a new dimension to this complex web of information warfare. As other platforms began to tighten their controls, the PRC recognized the strategic advantage of owning and operating a social media platform. TikTok has emerged not merely as a tool for entertainment but as a formidable weapon in the PRC's arsenal for shaping public opinion. Its algorithmic power and global reach have rendered it an invaluable asset in the dissemination of narratives that are pro-Beijing and/or critical of the United States.

Influence And The 2024 Election

The 2024 presidential election in Taiwan serves as a stark illustration of the potential impact of TikTok on democratic processes. The PRC's strategy has evolved beyond the simple fabrication of rumours. By exploiting the natural divisions within Taiwan's political landscape, in particular the animosity between rival parties, Beijing has been able to amplify discord and manipulate public perception to its advantage. The subtlety of this approach lies in its indirectness. By intensifying existing disputes, the PRC can achieve its objectives without overt intervention. This tactic of leveraging internal conflicts presents a considerable challenge to democratic resilience.

Taiwan finds itself in a precarious position in confronting this challenge. The island's deep commitment to the principles of freedom of speech and expression complicates the task of regulating platforms like TikTok. Any attempt at censorship risks backlash from a populace that deeply values its democratic heritage. However, the ruling party's cautious approach to TikTok has inadvertently ceded the informational high ground to Beijing, due to concerns over cybersecurity threats. With the platform dominated by narratives unfavorable to the ruling party and conducive to PRC interests, nearly 5 million Taiwanese users are exposed to a skewed representation of political realities. This situation highlights a critical vulnerability in the information ecosystem that the PRC is all too eager to exploit.

Managing the issue of disinformation on social media platforms is a collective endeavor. It is not merely a matter of regulatory enforcement but a challenge to culture and society more broadly. The ubiquity of platforms like TikTok in the daily lives of millions of people underscores the need for a concerted effort to cultivate digital literacy and critical thinking among the public. Educating users on how to discern credible information from conspiracies is a critical line of defense in the landscape of cognitive warfare. By empowering individuals to critically evaluate the content they consume, democracies can build a citizenry that is more resilient and less susceptible to the manipulative tactics employed by adversarial states. However, if the PRC's tactics become more nuanced, the general public, armed only with basic media literacy, may struggle to resist the overwhelming volume of conspiracies or biased reports that circulate online.

Potential Taiwanese and International Responses

No country is immune to the effects of rumours and conspiracies. The strategies employed by states like the PRC to exploit these platforms have global implications.

Taiwan's current approach is to passively report fake news and accounts to TikTok itself. Even when reports are accepted, TikTok, having no operational base in Taiwan, ignores them. The government is thus powerless to resolve this issue. Fake news reported before elections is dealt with only after the event. Compelling TikTok to establish a local presence would necessitate robust administrative action from the Taiwanese government, whether through advertising regulations, bandwidth restrictions, or demands on fraudulent content. Unfortunately, none of these are easy to implement.

International investigations have a part to play in affecting policy outcomes in Taiwan. Investigations into TikTok's financial backers—for example identifying the company as Chinese-invested—and into the company's control and manipulation of its recommendation algorithm would cause the company to fall under regulations concerning cross-strait relations, thus facing stricter controls. If the international community can work together to make these networks more transparent, it would help in developing regulatory standards worldwide. International forums and coalitions can also serve as platforms for sharing best practices, coordinating regulatory approaches, and facilitating joint investigations into the operations of social media giants. Through such cooperation, nations can exert collective pressure on these companies to uphold higher standards of transparency and accountability.

Conclusion

The threat posed by TikTok and similar platforms in the context of cognitive warfare requires a multifaceted response. This should encompass regulatory measures, public education, private sector innovation, and international cooperation. The goal is not only to protect free speech and foster technological innovation but also to safeguard the public sphere from manipulation and misinformation. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, so too must the strategies employed to defend democratic values and processes. The road ahead is challenging, but with concerted effort and collaboration, democracies can turn the tide in the battle for cognitive sovereignty.

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KMT Appeal To The Younger Generation

by Hsu Chiao-Hsin



Hsu's electoral campaign. (Source: [Hsu Chiao-Hsin's Facebook](#))

Executive Summary:

- The success of younger lawmakers was a bright spot within the KMT's election performance. They have the potential to appeal to middle-class and young Taiwanese voters through innovative approaches and better social media engagement.
- There is significant overlap between the KMT's platform and issues of concern to younger voters. These include parliamentary reform, wage increases, housing justice, and freedom of the press
- The KMT aims to leverage the charisma of its younger politicians and the policy reforms they advocate to address social issues and economic challenges, thereby rebuilding trust and support among Taiwan's younger electorate.

The KMT lost the 2024 Presidential Election. However, president-elect Lai Ching-te (賴清德) of the Democratic People's Party (DPP) only secured 40 percent of the vote. Opposition parties in the Legislative Yuan therefore represent the remaining 60 percent of the public's preferences. One aspect of the election that has received little attention in international coverage is the success of a young generation of Kuomintang (KMT) lawmakers, who did particularly well in the legislative election. As many as 10 new legislators—or a sixth of the KMT caucus—were elected to the legislature after being elected to local council seats in 2018. These are the people that are pushing the party forward in terms of generational change. They are being supported by the ballots of middle-class voters and young Taiwanese who are willing to give these lawmakers a chance in this new Legislative Yuan.

To continue to have success with the youth vote, the KMT must be bold. The party should deploy its younger members in important positions. It should also refrain from being too conservative in its attitudes and approaches. For example, lawmakers should be brave enough to communicate with voters through social media networks, including via short videos and livestream broadcasts, and to break away from traditional media. Moreover, the party should be more responsive to public opinion, proactively seeking to amend the law on issues that receive a lot of attention online, and should be quick to communicate across various channels with society more broadly.

KMT Policies Intersect With Youth Issues

There are several policy issues that are of particular interest to younger voters. These include parliamentary reform, the problem of low wages for young people, and housing justice. Another issue is the question of the blatant restriction of the freedom of the press by Taiwan's National Communications Commission (NCC). The KMT must do more to compete with the DPP and the Taiwan People's Party (TPP) on these policies, who have historically been better at appealing to younger voters.

The KMT has plans for parliamentary reform. The party will strive to strengthen the functions of the Legislative Yuan's faculties, and to prevent it from being treated as little more than a legislative bureau for the executive branch. To this end, the KMT will push for a "Contempt of Parliament" law. This will empower the legislature with a certain legal countermeasures or punitive tools to prevent officials from engaging in bad practices such as lying to parliament, refusing to answer questions, or being passive in response to parliamentary inquiries that harm Taiwan's democratic system. Additionally, the KMT will seek to strengthen the parliamentary privilege of "investigative power." This will incentivize the government to be more transparent and allow the parliament unobstructed access to information that it requests. In this way, the government can be held accountable for important projects and policies. Finally, the KMT aims to improve the "parliamentary hearing system." This will effectively eliminate certain bad habits of officials, such as responding to questions with further questions instead of providing direct answers. These measures are not intended to expand the power of the legislature. Rather, they will level the playing field, putting the legislature's power on par with that of the executive branch. This will ensure that these two arms of government can be held accountable and that the executive branch can effectively reflect public opinion.

The people expect the new Legislative Yuan to work hard on a range of social issues. Among policies that should be prioritized are improving low wages for young people, achieving housing justice, protecting free speech, and protecting the people's right of political participation. According to data released by the Office of the Comptroller General of the Executive Yuan in 2024, the average monthly salary in Taiwan from January to November 2023 was NT\$45,457 (\$1,447), an annual increase of 2.45 percent. Total monthly salary was NT\$58,598 (\$1,864), an annual increase of just 1.47 percent—the lowest rate for seven years. After excluding the price factor, the real recurring monthly wage actually decreased by 0.02 percent annually, indicating a third consecutive year of negative growth. Meanwhile, real total monthly wages decreased by 0.97 percent annually, the first year of negative growth in the past seven years. Coping with inflation and improving the economic situation will be an important area in which the legislature should supervise the government.

Wire fraud is a related issue that has continued to worsen over the past eight years. The previous government's Ministry of Digital Affairs, the Financial Supervisory Commission, the NCC, and other units have failed to perform their duties in this regard. Such failure is not conducive to curbing the harm that these crimes inflict on Taiwanese citizens.

New Candidates, New Prospects

The charisma of individual politicians is a key factor impacting support from the younger generation. Looking ahead to the next elections, it is very likely that the middle-generation of incumbent KMT lawmakers will run again in the 2026 local elections. These candidates, together with the “mother hens” (such as Chiang Wan-an (蔣萬安), Chang San-cheng (張善政), Hsu Shu-hua (許淑華), and Lu Shiow-yen (盧秀燕), whose performances have been recognized by the people in Taipei, Taoyuan, Nantou, and Taichung cities, respectively), will form a formidable team. [1] When the overall image of these candidates becomes younger it is more likely that the youth resonate with them, and vote accordingly.

Conclusion

The number of seats obtained by the KMT in the Legislative Yuan shows that the people have high expectations for the party. It also indicates their dissatisfaction with the ruling party. The KMT must grasp this opportunity and continue to implement the right reforms, become more responsive to current affairs, and promote the participation of the party's younger members. In this way, they will persuade Taiwan's younger voters of the changes occurring within the KMT.

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Notes

[1] In Taiwanese political discourse, the term “mother hen” refers to a prominent political figure who is sufficiently popular to be able to bring their star power to campaigns outside their constituency.

Analyzing Taiwan-PRC Relations in 2024 from the Perspective of PRC Internal Affairs and Xi Jinping's Mode of Governance

by Yun Fan



President-elect William Lai Ching-te holds a campaign rally in Taipei. (Source: MAN HEI LEUNG/ANADOLU/GETTY)

Executive Summary:

- President Xi Jinping is unlikely to abandon his goals for Taiwan, focusing on peaceful reunification and anti-independence, while continuing to exert economic and diplomatic pressures. This is despite potential economic downturns in the PRC. The risks of disruption and to economic stability make a war over Taiwan improbable.
- The CCP faces internal challenges such as rising youth unemployment and a declining population. These may impact Xi Jinping's ambitions for global dominance.
- Taiwan should still continue to focus on strengthening its defenses and public morale against cognitive warfare.

A long-held question is whether a recession in the People's Republic of China (PRC) would cause PRC President Xi Jinping to abandon his aims to control Taiwan.

My view is that it is impossible for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to give up its aims for control over Taiwan. Xi Jinping will continue to exert economic and diplomatic pressure on the island. There are two main reasons for this. First, the CCP's policy towards Taiwan, as established by Deng Xiaoping, is for peaceful reunification and "one country, two systems." Under this framework, the CCP has two major goals: anti-independence and pro-unification. A premise of its policy towards Taiwan is to not abandon the possibility of forceful reunification. Second, after Xi Jinping came to power, he changed the CCP's long-standing attitude towards Taiwan. Instead of focusing on how to prevent and solve the problem of Taiwan's independence—as was the original emphasis during the Jiang and Hu era—Xi has put "promoting reunification" at the center of his policy. In order to accomplish this aim of reunification, Xi must continue to exert pressure on Taiwan in the economic and diplomatic spheres.

I think it is unlikely for the CCP to use force against Taiwan, however, again for two reasons. First, a CCP-initiated war against Taiwan would affect the CCP's own economic situation, and would also impact the global economy. Second, a war would force the world's major economies to intervene in order to maintain peace in the Taiwan Strait. British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly visited Beijing last August, the first such visit in five years. Following his trip, he commented on the possibility of war across the Taiwan Strait, saying, "This is not an entirely domestic matter, huge international trade volumes go through that body of water ... Key components of modern life go through that stretch of water." A war, he continued, would be "a catastrophically bad thing for the global economy, and it would be catastrophically bad for the Chinese economy ... [which] as we are now seeing, is not all-powerful" ([The Spectator](#), October 2, 2023).

According to Bloomberg Economics research, a war in Taiwan would cost about \$10 trillion ([Bloomberg](#), January 8). This is equivalent to roughly 10 percent of global GDP—far greater than the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war, the Covid-19 pandemic, or the global financial crisis. In the event of war, Bloomberg economists estimate that about 40 percent of Taiwan's GDP will be affected; the PRC's GDP will be impacted by 16.7 percent due to the disruption of relations with its major trading partners and its inability to acquire advanced semiconductors; the United States—despite being far away from the battlefield—will see a drop of 6.7 percent in its GDP; and global GDP will decline 10.2 percent, with the largest impacts felt by the East Asian economies of South Korea and Japan. Bloomberg also modeled the impact on the global economy of a one-year blockade of Taiwan by the PRC. In the first year, Taiwan's GDP would drop by 12.2 percent, the PRC's would shrink by 8.9 percent, the United States's would decline by 3.3 percent, and the world's would decrease by 5 percent.

The prospects for the overall development of the CCP's national power is worrying. A declining population and rising youth unemployment will reduce Xi Jinping's self-confidence about becoming a global hegemon. First, there is the rising youth unemployment rate. In the first half of 2023, before the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) stopped publishing the data, the PRC's youth unemployment rate for 16–24 year olds climbed monthly, to 17.3 percent, 18.1 percent, 19.6 percent, 20.4 percent, 20.8 percent, and 21.3 percent,

respectively ([NBS](#), accessed February 14). By comparison, the June 2023 youth unemployment rate in the United States was 7.5 percent ([EPI](#), May 3, 2023) and the figure for the European Union stood at 14.1 percent ([OECD](#), accessed February 14). The White Paper Protests at the end of 2022 have been followed by the ongoing phenomenon of Chinese youth choosing or aspiring to “run (潤; *run*)” from the PRC. Young people leaving the country or being unable to enter the job market will have a critical impact on its economic outlook.

The number of births in the PRC has been declining in recent years. According to NBS data released on January 17, 2024, the number of births in the PRC in 2022 was 9.56 million, and the number of deaths was 10.41 million, a decrease of 850,000 from the end of the previous year. This is the first time the population has declined since the country suffered a famine in the early 1960s following Mao Zedong’s campaign known as the “Great Leap Forward.” The figures for 2023 continued to fall, with 9.02 million new births and 11.1 million deaths. The number of births is indicative of the future labor force. If Xi Jinping continues his wild ambitions for global domination, the PRC’s internal affairs will likely be his biggest problem.

The above is an analysis of the CCP’s situation. However, Taiwan must continue to strengthen its defenses and its asymmetric deterrence capabilities. Especially in terms of public morale, it is necessary to improve awareness about cognitive warfare and develop strategies to counter it. In democratic Taiwan, in which officials often have to face elections, the key to consolidating democracy is in deciphering the means by which CCP agents attack by influencing Taiwan’s democracy through participating in elections. These are the challenges for Lai Ching-te (賴清德), who has just been elected president. They are also his promises.

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Fortifying Taiwan: Security Challenges in the Indo-Pacific Era

by Alex Wang Ting-yu



President Tsai Ing-wen delivered a speech. (Source: [Taiwan Presidential Office](#))

Executive Summary:

- The development of asymmetric military capabilities, including indigenous weapons systems, is crucial for Taiwan's defense and deterrence strategies against potential aggression from the PRC.
- Strengthening alliances and cooperation, especially in advanced military technologies and training, is key to bolstering Taiwan's defense force and contributing to regional stability in the Indo-Pacific.
- Taiwan is adapting to evolving geopolitical challenges by enhancing its defense capabilities, with the United States shifting to a case-by-case arms sales approach to improve responsiveness to Taiwan's security needs.

Taiwan is confronting unprecedented security challenges. Within a tumultuous and evolving geopolitical context, it is imperative for Taiwan to steadfastly enhance its defense capabilities. The United States, during both the Trump and Biden administrations, has shifted its approach to arms sales to Taiwan from the previous bundled format to a case-by-case basis. This allows for real-time responsiveness to the country's defense needs and regional security challenges. This positive and crucial transformation ensures that Taiwan not only has sufficient defense capabilities but also is granted treatment akin to other US allies.

Recent delays in arms sales are due to the war in Ukraine and pandemic supply chain backlogs. Reassuringly, improvements are now underway. The war has prompted nations around the world to reassess their security strategies. Taiwan, as a pivotal player in the Indo-Pacific region, must not only maintain defensive capabilities against potential aggression from the People's Republic of China (PRC), it must also exhibit strategic deterrence to dissuade the PRC from taking any hasty actions. This would align with the deterrent strategy consistently followed by democratic allies such as the United States and Japan, and is worth emulating.

Constructing asymmetric military capabilities is crucial and aligns with Taiwan's strategic objectives. Defending Taiwan is a responsibility that requires not only the procurement of weapons but also the ability to manufacture them domestically. This involves producing indigenous submarines and long-range precision strike weapons to ensure that we have sufficient strength not only for defense but also for deterrence. Such efforts will contribute to promoting peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

A robust deterrent force also relies on strong alliances. Taiwan's relationship with democratic allies, therefore, must be unwavering. However, concrete contingency plans must be drawn up, verified, and adjusted through exercises. Cooperation can be formal or informal but at a minimum it must be tangible. Looking ahead, Taiwan and like-minded partners such as the United States should collaborate more extensively in areas such as Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C4ISR), as strengthening ties sends clear messages to Beijing.

Under President Xi Jinping, the diversity of opinions within the PRC system is gradually diminishing. This presents challenges for those outside the PRC, but it also provides an opportunity. Through collaboration within the democratic alliance, Taiwan can convey clear messages to Beijing, avoiding the misjudgments that can result from strategic ambiguity. Particularly in the C4ISR domain, high-level cooperation will facilitate the rapid and accurate transmission of messages, upholding regional peace and stability.

Taiwan has decided to reinstate one-year mandatory military service. This policy is aimed at enhancing the strength of the country's defense force while also intensifying realistic combat training, drawing inspiration from the approaches of the US military and NATO. Improving the welfare of soldiers and strengthening their sense of honor will contribute to building a more formidable force. There is a pressing need to enhance the internationalization of the Taiwan military's capabilities, transforming it not only into a force for protecting Taiwan but also into a robust pillar for regional stability. In this way, Taiwan will not just be able to better defend itself but also to actively contribute to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

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