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By: Russell Hsiao

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Amid escalating tensions across the Taiwan Strait, President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) has been [repurposing](#) Taiwan's intelligence agencies to meet the multifaceted security threats facing the island democracy from the People's Republic of China (PRC). These efforts appear to cover five key areas: (1) updating the authorities and streamlining the functions of the [various intelligence agencies](#); (2) strengthening the various agencies' [intelligence collection capabilities](#); (3) intelligence integration; (4) deepening intelligence-sharing with allies and like-minded partners; and (5) asserting civilian control over security apparatuses that are naturally wary of exposure and oversight.

While changes at the National Security Bureau (NSB, 國家安全局)—the premier civilian intelligence agency, equivalent to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)—have been relatively [better known](#) due to some of the organization's public functions, less well known are whether changes related to the reclusive Military Intelligence Bureau (MIB, 軍情局), overseen by Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense (MND, 中華民國國防部), are having any meaningful effects. [1] Overall, the military remains an institution that recoils at civilian oversight—and this sentiment applies even more so to its prized intelligence branch.

The MIB, which is roughly equivalent to the US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), is the chief intelligence agency tasked with the collection of human intelligence (HUMINT) on the People's Liberation Army (PLA). However, it rarely provides its intelligence products to other government agencies—much less publicizing its assessments—due to concerns over revealing sources and methods. Instead, it only provides this information to a handful of the most senior leaders to inform critical operational decisions.

The MIB's overzealous caution makes it less prone to leaks by virtue of its limited clients, but it also creates a stovepipe in the intelligence system that likely impedes integration and reflects an institutional

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culture less amenable to accountability and change. In addition to the persistent threat of PRC [intelligence penetration](#) of its clandestine networks, the MIB has [reportedly](#) been suffering from organizational malaise, arguably for over the last decade and perhaps even longer. However, changes at the cloistered intelligence service in the past year suggest that some reforms may be starting to take hold.

Leadership Challenge, Counterintelligence Woes, and Intelligence Coordination Issues

Against this backdrop of escalating threats from across the Taiwan Strait and organizational challenges afflicting Taiwan's intelligence community, the changing of the guard at the MIB in early 2022 is especially noteworthy. [2] In February 2022, Republic of China (ROC) Air Force Lieutenant General Yang Jing-se (楊靜瑟) succeeded his predecessor, ROC Army Lieutenant General Luo De-min (羅德民), as the director-general of MIB.

Luo's term as MIB director-general, which began during Tsai's first term in 2018, came to an unceremonious end in early 2022. Following a string of allegations and subsequent [formal investigations](#) involving the misuse of funds, abuse of authority, improper conduct, and overall nepotism, which had clouded broader reform efforts in the intelligence community, Luo was demoted. The removal of the most recent director-general may be seen as part of current Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-Cheng's (邱國正) ongoing reform of MIB, whose term in that post began in February 2021. Notably, Chiu himself just came from Taiwan's intelligence community, having served as NSB director-general from 2019-2021.

The myriad issues facing the MIB, however, extend beyond Luo's leadership. After the social and political upheaval in the PRC exposed by the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre and the threats manifested by the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis, Taiwan's intelligence services [surged clandestine agents to the mainland](#) (基幹赴陸), which resulted in multiple agents being captured and held hostage in the PRC. To mitigate the growing risks to personnel, since the early 2000s there has been an effective ban on clandestine intelligence gathering through the use of undercover agents. At the time, it was [reported](#) that then-General Tang Yao-ming (湯曜明), who served as chief of the general staff from 1999-2002, had ordered the MIB to cease sending personnel to the PRC for the purpose of intelligence collection. As a result, the MIB largely abandoned its previous focus on HUMINT as a means of gathering intelligence on the PRC, instead [expanding](#) to utilize both HUMINT and signals intelligence (SIGINT). Tang's order is reportedly still in effect today.

Lamenting Taiwan's withering intelligence collection capabilities, [Holmes Liao](#) (廖宏祥), an independent defense analyst, pointed out an additional factor that could be inhibiting reforms. "There could be many reasons for such inaction, one of which is that operatives in the bureau ostensibly refuse to risk their lives for the current ruling party—the Democratic Progressive Party—as it aims to demote Chinese nationalism," Liao wrote.

Finally, the issue of intelligence reform of the MIB has been made more urgent—and complicated—by Taiwan's counter-intelligence woes. As a prime intelligence target, the MIB held a reputation for being impenetrable throughout much of its storied history. However, it has recently suffered from a string of more high-profile cases that could affect morale. In addition to high-profile cases in 2010 and 2016 involving PRC recruitment of MIB agents, in late 2020, Taiwanese authorities [arrested three former MIB officers](#) for allegedly engaging in espionage activities on behalf of China's security services. These scandals underscored Taiwan's growing struggles with countering China's incessant espionage operations and attempts to penetrate the island's security apparatuses. Perhaps understandably, such visible cases involving the reclusive military intelligence agency sent [shockwaves](#) through the Taiwanese security community.

Overall Intelligence Reform under Tsai Ing-wen

The broader issues facing reforms to the MIB are also causes for the overall changes to Taiwan's intelligence community that the Tsai Administration has been gradually undertaking since 2016.

In 2020, the Legislative Yuan—the lawmaking body of the Taiwan government—passed amendments to the *National Intelligence Service Law* (國家情報工作法) that updated the authorities and streamlined the functions of the various intelligence agencies. In a first, at the beginning of President Tsai's second term she appointed civilians to head the NSB—a departure from the previous tradition of selecting bureau chiefs with military backgrounds.

The first civilian leader was China scholar [Chen Ming-tong](#) (陳明通) in 2021, followed by former Deputy Foreign Minister Tsai Ming-yen (蔡明彥) in January 2023. These appointments were ostensibly aimed at strengthening civilian oversight and promoting intelligence exchanges. The placements of the former deputy foreign minister as head of the NSB and [Lieutenant General Yang](#)—who has an extensive background serving as a military attaché and conducting intelligence exchanges as the deputy chief of the general staff for intelligence—as head of the MIB, appear to be mutually reinforcing. Overall, these appointments also reflect the Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP, 民主進步

黨) slow but steady acquisition of influence over the military and national security apparatuses, which had been traditionally dominated by the Kuomintang (KMT, 中國國民黨).

In addition to expanding intelligence exchanges, the Tsai Administration has also been strengthening its analytical and integration capabilities through the establishment of the Joint Intelligence Operations Center (情次室聯合情研中心) under the Office of the Deputy Chief of the General Staff for Intelligence. The [Center](#)—comprised of staff from both the MIB and NSB—was reported to have between 125 to 155 employees in 2022, and is tasked with collecting intelligence on changes and adjustments to PLA operations, weapons research and development, military movements, drills, and preparations, as well as monitoring developments in the region and beyond.

Is Yang the Right Leader at the Right Time?

Lieutenant General Yang is no outsider to Taiwan's intelligence community. Having served as deputy chief of the general staff for intelligence from August 2020 to February 2022, Yang was directly responsible for [exchanging intelligence](#) with foreign military intelligence services and dealing with Taiwan's allies and like-minded countries—in particular the United States.

In June 2022, the "[Monterey Talks](#)," which is the most senior, annual US-Taiwan bilateral military discussion, took place in Maryland. Intelligence cooperation was high on the agenda. For the first time, the United States invited the head of the MIB to attend the meeting. Reflecting the enhanced intelligence cooperation between the two sides, Yang was also reportedly [invited to the CIA headquarters](#) for an exchange. Since assuming office, Yang is reported to have made at least [two visits](#) to the United States.

It is perhaps unsurprising that Yang's ascendance to the head of the MIB came amid deepening intelligence cooperation between the United States and Taiwan to respond to and counter China's growing military threats. Having served as deputy chief for intelligence, Yang is well-positioned to coordinate the intelligence collection firepower of the MIB in terms of targeting and aligning with joint objectives. Yang also has many years of experience serving as a military attaché abroad that he can apply to his current job.

As a further sign of Taiwan's expanding intelligence cooperation under Tsai, in April 2023 the new NSB Director-General Tsai [revealed](#) that Taiwan can now exchange real-time intelligence with the "Five Eyes" alliance of the United States, Canada, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. "We can connect with the 'Five

Eyes' alliance through a confidential system," Tsai [reportedly](#) stated.

Furthermore, a recent case that involved the [Ministry of Justice Investigation Bureau](#) (MJIB, 調查局) is also noteworthy. Following a counterfeiting scheme allegedly involving MIB personnel, the MJIB was permitted to investigate the suspect. Such an investigation, which would previously have been handled in-house by the MIB, seems to reflect a military leadership more willing to accept scrutiny and clean house, as well as an agency more willing to accept oversight and accountability.

According to one assessment, the new MIB director-general is seen as "trying to get [Taiwan's] military intelligence back on its feet." As [Intelligence Online](#)—a commercial intelligence news agency—noted: "Under the leadership of Yang Jing-se, the body is now trying to restore its credibility with a thorough shake-up and by taking on civilian staff to reinforce its independence and operational capabilities."

Conclusion

Under the leadership of Yang as the head of the MIB, there appear to be some signs that long-needed reforms to Taiwan's intelligence community and the MIB in particular may be finally may finally be underway. Recent developments appear to indicate that the new director-general is more capable and better aligned with the Tsai Administration's overall reform agenda for Taiwan's intelligence community.

Yet, the intelligence enterprise is large and slow to change. Whether these reforms happen fast and deep enough for Taiwan's military intelligence to regain some of its lost edge after decades of atrophy remains to be seen. As the [US Intelligence Community](#) has assessed that China's President Xi Jinping (習近平) instructed his country's military to "be ready by 2027" to invade Taiwan, these vital initiatives must occur quickly—and time is of the essence.

The main point: Recent leadership appointments at the National Security Bureau and Military Intelligence Bureau suggest that the Tsai Administration's efforts at intelligence reform may be taking shape. However, institutional inertia and growing aggression from China could pose substantial challenges to these initiatives.

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[1] The MIB is one of the four official "intelligence organizations," alongside the National Security Bureau, the Communica-

tions Development Office (CDO, 電訊發展室), and the Military Security Brigade (MSB, 軍事安全總隊)—as formally designated under the [National Intelligence Service Law](#).

[2] Hon-min Yau, “Taiwan: An Intelligence Community in Constant Transformation,” in *Handbook of Asian Intelligence Cultures*, ed. Ryan Shaffer (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 323-337.

Taiwan’s Gloomy Economy Adds Uncertainty to Prospects for the 2024 Presidential Election

By: Chiang Min-hua

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Several [recent opinion polls](#) have showed that the Democratic Progressive Party’s (DPP, 民主進步黨) candidate Lai Ching-te (賴清德) holds a lead over both Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) of the Taiwan People’s Party (TPP, 台灣民眾黨) and Hou You-yi (侯友宜) of the Kuomintang (KMT, 中國國民黨). However, as it is still six months before the January 2024 election, several factors could significantly impact the election outcome, making current polls irrelevant. Among many uncertainties, Taiwan’s continuing economic downturn is a critical one.

As in past elections, policy towards the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is the main divide between the different political parties in Taiwan. On the economic front, both Hou and Ko contend that better relations with the PRC are key for reviving Taiwan’s economy. Conversely, Lai has argued for the importance of reducing Taiwan’s economic dependence on China, in order to reduce the likelihood of China using economic leverage to undermine Taiwan’s national security.

What Ko and Hou offer is a quick and easy solution to jumpstart Taiwan’s anemic economy. Despite the obvious national security concerns, Lai’s economic diversification approach would necessitate a major adjustment of Taiwan’s external trade and investment relations. Hence, it will be more challenging and time-consuming. It will also require support and collaboration from other countries, most notably the United States. This suggests that Lai’s long-term strategy might not be appealing for Taiwanese voters’ immediate economic concerns.

Explaining Taiwan’s Economic Slowdown

Taiwan’s economic downward trend began in 2021. After the island’s outstanding economic performance during the first year of the COVID-19 global pandemic, its year-over-year (YOY) economic growth rate slowed down sharply: reaching -0.8 percent in the fourth quarter of 2022, down from 5 percent a year before. The economy declined further to -2.9 percent in the first quarter of this year (see *Figure 1*).

Plummeting exports largely explain this feeble economic growth. Taiwan’s export growth has significantly lost its momentum since 2021 (see *Figure 1*). According to Taiwan’s Ministry of Finance (MOF, 財政部), in the first half of 2023 Taiwan’s exports to China have registered the largest decline (-26 percent), followed by its exports to ASEAN states (-17 percent), the United States (-15 percent), Japan (-2.5 percent), and Europe (-1.6 percent).

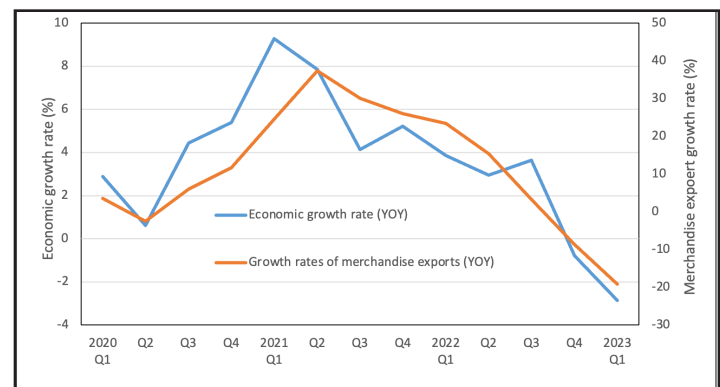


Figure 1: Taiwan’s Economic Growth Rate and Merchandise Export Growth Rate, 2020Q1-2023Q1 (Data source: Directorate General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics [DGBAS, 行政院主計總處])

Softening global demand for final consumption products—due primarily to higher inflation and interest rates—has likely had a substantial impact on Taiwan’s exports of manufactured goods. In addition, Taiwan’s closer economic ties with the PRC have made the small island particularly vulnerable to China’s coercive policies. [China’s own post-COVID economy](#) has been struggling due to sluggish consumer spending, high youth unemployment rates, flagging exports, and a flatlining property market.

More importantly, recent [US export control](#) measures, which have restricted the provision of key components and capital equipment to China, could have impacted Taiwanese firms manufacturing on the mainland. Taiwan’s exports of semi-industrial goods to China for final assembly have likely been constrained as a result.

In 2022, 42.3 percent Taiwan’s overall exports went to China and Hong Kong. This percentage is much higher than China’s

shares in the total exports of South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Vietnam, the European Union, and the United States. Although those economies also suffered from slowing exports and economic growth rates in the first half of this year, their relatively lower dependence on exports to China has lessened the impact on their overall exports and economic growth.

	Economic growth rate in 2023 Q1	Export growth rate in 2023 (Jan-May)	Exports to China and Hong Kong as percentage of total exports in 2022
Taiwan	-2.9	-16.9	42.3
South Korea	0.8	-13.5	32.0
Japan	1.3	-7.1	25.8
Singapore	0.4	-8.9	25.0
European Union	0.1	N/A	11.0
US	1.6	-6.4	8.9
Vietnam	3.3	-12.3	16.0

Figure 2: A Comparison of Taiwan's Economic Growth Rate, Export Growth Rate, and Export Dependence on China with Major Global Economies. (Data source: Ministry of Finance, Taiwan; DGBAS; Vietnam Customs; Eurostat; Trading Economics <https://tradingeconomics.com/>)

Economic Polarization as a Key Concern

Beyond stalled economic growth, the growing income gap is another central concern among voters. [Taiwan's official statistics](#) show that household income inequality in 2021 reached its highest level in the past decade. Confirming this, the [World Inequality Database](#) reckons that the top 10 percent income group accounted for 48 percent of national income share in 2020, growing from 42 percent in 2000. During the same period, the bottom 50 percent income group's share dropped from 13 percent to 11 percent.

Although Taiwan raises its minimum wage almost every year, the small nominal wage growth is mostly negated by inflation. For example, in 2022 nominal wage growth was 3.5 percent, only slightly higher than the inflation rate (3 percent). In the same year, over 50 percent of wage earners saw their salary grow at a rate lower than the average growth rate, according to [DGBAS statistics](#).

This limited wage growth can also be observed through GDP by type of income, which includes employees' remuneration, consumption of fixed capital, and net operating surplus. Over the past several decades, Taiwan's economic growth has been largely driven by investment in capital equipment, at the expense of stagnating worker remuneration. This is evidenced by the growing share of consumption of fixed capital: from 9 percent of total GDP in 1991, to 16 percent in 2021. During the same period, the shares of companies' operating surpluses increased from 28

percent to 37 percent, while the share of employees' remuneration in total GDP dropped from 51 percent to 43 percent, per the [DGBAS](#).

Taiwan's ongoing exclusion from several multilateral and bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) is another key factor in its economic polarization. Taiwan's current bilateral FTA partners only account for [a tiny portion of its total trade](#). However, international trade agreements could have substantial benefits for Taiwan's economic prospects. This phenomenon has been well demonstrated by the island's information technology (IT) sector. Thanks to its membership in the International Technology Agreement (ITA) of the World Trade Organization (WTO), Taiwan has benefited from low—or even zero—tariffs on IT trade. As a consequence, the IT-related industry has become Taiwan's growth engine. Workers in IT-related industries also tend to have above average salaries. In 2022, the average nominal income in electronic manufacturing was 1.6 times the average wage in all sectors. However, the sector only accounted for 8 percent of total employment in Taiwan, according to [government figures](#).

The United States Remains Essential

Taiwan's current close economic ties with China are partly a consequence of the US policy of integrating China into the global economy over the last few decades. Washington's opening up of its market to imports from the PRC was an important driving force behind Taiwan's export-oriented manufacturing investments on the mainland. By sending semi-industrial goods to China for final assembly and then exporting them to the US market through China, Taiwan sustained its economic growth amid the United States' soft economic policies toward China.

In recent years, the growing US-China rivalry—and perhaps more importantly, the US restrictions on the export of certain high-technology goods to China—have made the cross-Strait production network far less economically viable. In response, international supply chains have [increasingly withdrawn from China](#). In evidence of this trend, since 2019 the United States has seen greater import growth from Taiwan, Vietnam, India, and South Korea than from China, according to the data provided by the [US Bureau of Economic Analysis](#).

These changing production relations can also be seen in Taiwan's [export structure](#). The share of China and Hong Kong in Taiwan's total exports declined from 44 percent in 2020 to 36 percent in the first half of 2023. During the same period, Taiwan's exports to the United States, Japan, Europe, and ASEAN countries expanded from 45 percent to 51 percent of total exports. China and Hong Kong's share in Taiwan's total imports also declined

slightly, while the United States' and Europe's shares grew.

Like the policies that encouraged growing cross-strait economic integration in recent decades, US policy will continue to play a key role in Taiwan's future economic relations with China. In turn, this could indirectly influence the island's economic growth path, as well as its election outcomes.

So far, the Biden Administration has sent very confusing signals with regards to its economic policy toward China. Despite Washington's harsh restrictions on exporting key components and capital equipment to China, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen sought out economic cooperation with China during her recent [visit to Beijing](#). Furthermore, the United States did not include Taiwan in its [Indo-Pacific Economic Framework](#) (IPEF), which aims to consolidate the US economic partnerships with its allies in the face of China's growing influence. The US absence from the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) also decreases Taiwan's chances to be part of the cross-regional trade deal.

A strong and consistent US economic policy would be a powerful driver for Taiwan's economic development, and could facilitate the re-designing of its role in the new global economic order. Sustaining Taiwan's economic development and stability would also be critical to allow the island to support the potential necessity of increased military expenditures in the future. By contrast, a muddled and inconsistent economic policy might re-orient Taiwanese voters toward other options, which might not be in the best interests of the United States or the world.

The main point: Taiwan's sluggish economy and growing income inequality have added uncertainty to its upcoming 2024 presidential election. To address these economic challenges, Taiwan will need strong US support to expand its international economic space, thus facilitating its further development and economic diversification.

An Overview of Taiwan's 2023 Han Kuang Military Exercise

By: John Dotson

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In late July, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense (MND, 國防部) held the live-maneuver portion of the [39th iteration of the Han Kuang exercise](#) (漢光39號演習), an annual event held

since 1984 to simulate the response of Taiwan's armed forces to an invasion by the People's Republic of China (PRC). The annual *Han Kuang* exercises have been the subject of criticism from many experts, who have contended that they are overly scripted, and therefore offer limited value as a mechanism for training military servicemembers to respond effectively in real-world crisis scenarios (see [previous comments by this author](#), and by [observers in Taiwan](#)). Despite this, the exercise provides a useful opportunity to observe emerging trends in the Republic of China (ROC) armed forces as they seek to adapt to the growing threat of military coercion, and potential invasion, from the PRC.

As is standard for *Han Kuang*, the exercise was split this year into two parts. The first of these was a [computer simulation and tabletop phase](#), held from May 15-19. Per an MND spokesperson, these were conducted using US-designed modeling software to simulate high-tempo joint operations, and incorporated invasion scenarios that drew upon assessed current trends in People's Liberation Army (PLA) development. The live-maneuver portion was conducted from July 24-28, involving several local scenarios in multiple locations throughout Taiwan. Portions of the exercise were reportedly [cancelled due to Typhoon Doksuri](#), which passed to the south and west of Taiwan (on a northwesterly track, through the Bashi Channel and the southern part of the Taiwan Strait) just as the exercise was scheduled to commence. Despite this complication, the scaled-down exercise still involved a range of scenarios, including counter-terrorism and civil defense drills, a counter-amphibious landing exercise, and the defense of key infrastructure sites.

Prior to commencement of the exercise, [sources cited by Taiwan state media](#) indicated that particular focus in this year's *Han Kuang* would be placed on the survival of critical command-and-control nodes. As indicated in [comments made by National Security Council \(NSC, 國家安全會議\) Secretary-General Wellington Koo \(顧立雄\)](#), the 2023 iteration of *Han Kuang* would also place a greater emphasis on civil defense scenarios and training. Speaking on July 21, Koo noted that "Defending Taiwan would not be a purely military endeavor, but [would] also involve making use of civilian personnel and materiel."

An Overview of the Major Events of Han Kuang 2023

July 24

As was the case with last year's exercise, the first day of *Han Kuang* opened with [dispersal drills](#) of both ships and aircraft. Aircraft from ROC Air Force bases in the west of Taiwan flew to Hualien Air Base on Taiwan's eastern coast (the [reported site of](#)



Image: ROC military police personnel conducting a mock hostage rescue drill at Taipei Main Station on the morning of July 26, as part of the annual Han Kuang exercise. The public relations aspect of the exercise is demonstrated by the numerous media photographers visible in the background. (Image source: [Youth Daily News / Taipei Times](#))

[underground shelters](#) to protect aircraft against bombardment). ROC Navy ships also sortied from their ports to undisclosed operational locations off the coast. The dispersal drills also included [survival and relocation scenarios](#) for the ROC Air Force Joint Air Operations Center (空軍作戰指揮部) on Toad Mountain (蟾蜍山) in Taipei. In these scenarios, the center came under simulated attack, forcing the sequential transfer of personnel and functions to three undisclosed alternate locations around the island. The annual [Wan-An \(萬安\) civil defense air raid drill](#) also began for localities in northern Taiwan. The drill commenced at 1:30 PM local time and lasted until 2:00 PM, with pedestrians and motorists required to clear the streets and move to one of a number of designated shelters (such as subway stations and parking garages) as identified by a National Police Agency (NPA, 內政部警政署) smartphone app. This year's drill was more rigorous than those held in the recent past, with residents reportedly [required to comply under penalty of fines](#).

A major theme of last year's [Han Kuang](#) drills was the MND's effort to [highlight the inclusion of reserve force personnel](#) in the exercises. This was continued this year, with a particular campaign by the MND to publicize a very limited program in which 19 [female reservists engaged for the first time in a military training refresher program](#), reporting on July 24 for duty at the Taoyuan City Reserve Command.

July 25

[Air defense was a key theme](#) of the scenarios conducted on July 25. These operations involved counter-ballistic missile drills, as

well as the public deployment of vehicle-mounted surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems to locations at key facilities around the island. Military and civil defense personnel also took part in a series of drills intended to simulate the [response to missile attacks against infrastructure targets](#) such as airports and harbors.

This aspect of [Han Kuang](#) overlapped with the ninth annual iteration of the parallel [Min-An Exercise \(民安演習\) civil defense drills](#), which were conducted at five locations throughout Taiwan. These scenarios involved rescue operations for a simulated building collapse, complemented by responses by firefighters and medical personnel. The various drills were observed by a number of senior government officials, including Premier Chen Chien-jen (陳建仁), Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng (邱國正), and Wellington Koo.

A [series of drills were also conducted overnight on the 25-26](#), involving both local and military police setting up a closure of the Wanban Bridge (萬板大橋) connecting the Banqiao District (板橋區) and Wanhua District (萬華區), as well as establishing surrounding roadblocks, to simulate efforts to block invading forces from entering Taipei City's downtown.

The [Wan-an air defense drills](#) continued in southern regions of Taiwan, with police and military personnel ushering citizens off the streets and into shelters between 1:30 PM and 2:00 PM in Tainan and other cities.

Some aviation activities planned for the exercise, such as scheduled dispersal and landing drills at the civilian Fengnian Airport in Taitung (southeastern Taiwan) involving F-16 fighter jets and C-130H Hercules transport aircraft, were [cancelled due to weather](#) associated with Typhoon Doksuri.

July 26

In the early morning hours of July 26, a mock [counter-terrorism and hostage rescue drill](#) was conducted at the Taipei Main Railway Station. In the scenario, local police called in assistance from soldiers of the ROC 202nd Military Police Command to engage terrorist suspects in the station. The scenario also involved the discovery of explosives in the station, which were removed and detonated by a bomb squad.

[Additionally, ROC forces conducted a drill at Taoyuan International Airport](#)—Taiwan's largest and primary international airport—to repel a takeover of the facility by hostile forces. (A [similar drill was conducted last year](#) at Taipei's smaller Songshan Airport, but this was the first time the larger and busier Taoyuan Airport was used in the exercise.) The [failed Russian attempt to](#)



Image: ROC Army Blackhawk helicopters (marked in red, signifying the aggressor forces) land troops at Taoyuan International Airport as part of a drill during this year's Han Kuang to simulate defense of the airport against seizure by invading airmobile forces. (Image source: [Taipei Times](#))

[seize Antonov Airport outside of Kyiv](#) at the outset of the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, which would have allowed Russian forces to airlift in considerable numbers of troops and materiel into the battle for Ukraine's capital, demonstrated the critical role played by large airports in a rapid-invasion scenario. In this drill, troops from the Aviation Special Forces Command and Army Airborne Special Forces reportedly took on the role of aggressor "red" forces, while responding "blue" ground force personnel (a mix of army soldiers and airport police) responded to repel the attack. The drill also included a simulated bomb attack on the facility, with airport firefighters called in to extinguish the flames.

The [Wan-an air defense drills](#) continued in eastern regions of Taiwan (such as Hualien and Taitung), as well as on outlying islands (such as the Penghus).

July 27

Drills were held in New Taipei City's northwestern Bali District (八里) to [simulate resistance to an amphibious landing](#) near the port facilities located in the area. This region near the mouth of the Tamsui River (淡水河) has often been regarded as a potential key invasion route, which if seized could allow invading forces an avenue of rapid advance into the capital. The drills included the showcasing of a [150-meter defensive trench](#) constructed near the port and underneath Highway 61, constructed by the ROC Army's 109th Infantry Brigade and civilian contractors. (A similar, 100-meter [trench was constructed in the same area](#) during the 2022 *Han Kuang* exercise; an MND spokesper-

son indicated that the larger trench built this year could accommodate not only more personnel and supplies, but possibly also battle tanks to allow for more firepower to apply against hostile landing forces.)

The [relatively brief \(30 minute\) counter-amphibious drill](#) involved invading "red" troops landing on a Bali beach in 20 AAV7 amphibious assault vehicles, supported by AH-64E and UH-60M attack helicopters. The defending "blue" troops, equipped with tanks and armored vehicles, set off smoke screens and deployed simulated artillery and gunfire to repel the invasion force. The drill also reportedly involved the employment of FGM-148 "Javelin" missiles by the defenders. The scenario was reportedly scaled down from earlier plans to further involve the ROC Navy and Air Force, once again due to weather issues associated with Typhoon Doksuri. The Bali drills were observed by senior government officials, to include President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng.

The [Wan-an air defense drills](#) continued in central regions of Taiwan (such as Taichung and Nantou County).

July 28

No major public events appeared to have occurred on the final day of the exercise.

PRC Responses to the Han Kuang Exercise

The response by official outlets and spokespersons of the government of the PRC—the assumed aggressor of the overall scenario—was relatively restrained in terms of public statements about this year's *Han Kuang* exercise. Rather than denouncing and drawing attention to the exercise, in late July PRC government outlets seemed focused instead on issuing [condemnations of US military assistance to Taiwan](#). There were [indications immediately prior to the exercise](#) that PLA forces were planning to ramp up even further their naval and air operations around Taiwan—both as a political statement, and perhaps also to maximize opportunities to collect intelligence on ROC military activities. However, the track of Typhoon Doksuri likely played a role in diminishing PLA operations around Taiwan during this year's exercise, just as it reportedly downgraded the scope of activities within *Han Kuang* itself.

Conclusions

Overall, the 2023 iteration of *Han Kuang* offered no dramatic surprises, and largely adhered to patterns established in recent years. There were some interesting and incremental changes, including a reportedly [increased role for US military observers](#), as

part of a larger process of growing US-Taiwan defense ties. Some aspects of the exercise—such as the survivability drills for ROC Air Force command and control nodes, and the counter-airmobile assault drill at Taoyuan International Airport—demonstrate increased attention to some of the lessons drawn from the Ukraine war, in terms of both critical infrastructure protection and an heightened focus on preventing the rapid “decapitation” of key command echelons.

However, the *Han Kuang* exercise remains highly scripted and unrealistic—particularly in terms of the severe logistical challenges, high casualty rates, and widespread social dislocation that would be encountered during an actual, large-scale PLA invasion. It may be that the secret, computer simulation phase of the exercise deals with these problems more realistically and in greater depth, but the public, live-fire portion of the exercise remains largely a public relations exercise for the Ministry of National Defense and civil defense officials. Far more rigorous and realistic training exercises will be required to more effectively prepare the ROC military and civilian officials alike for the nightmare scenario of an actual, large-scale invasion by the PLA.

The main point: This year’s iteration of *Han Kuang*, the largest annual training exercise conducted by Taiwan’s military and civil defense agencies, was conducted in the last week of July. This year’s exercise included drills for aircraft and ship dispersion, civil defense responses to simulated attacks on infrastructure, and a counter-amphibious landing exercise. While the exercise provides some limited training value, the highly scripted nature of *Han Kuang* diminishes its value in preparing the island’s citizens for a real-world crisis scenario.

Solidarity and Chip Diplomacy: Taiwan’s Foreign Minister Visits Europe

By: Michael Malinconi

Michael Malinconi is a research assistant intern at Elcano Royal Institute and Carnegie China.

In June, Taiwan’s Foreign Minister Joseph Wu (吳釗燮) conducted a European tour that brought him to Prague, Brussels, and Milan. Although the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA, 中華民國外交部) has not publicized a great deal of information about Wu’s trip, the visit has nevertheless had the effect of raising Taiwan’s international profile, and has further paved the way for potential Taiwanese investments in Europe.

Deepening Cooperation in Prague and Brussels

In Prague, Wu [attended the European Values Center for Security Policy summit](#) held on June 14th, where Czech President Petr Pavel delivered the keynote address. Wu also [met with](#) Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies Markéta Pekarová Adamová and Senate President Miloš Vystrčil, both of whom have been at the forefront of Czech efforts to build closer relations with Taiwan in recent years.

Czech Republic-Taiwan relations [have grown significantly](#) since 2019. Taipei and Prague have exchanged several legislative delegations and signed [several memoranda of understanding \(MOUs\)](#) in various areas. After he won the Czech presidency this January, Pavel took a brief call from Taiwan’s President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), in which she congratulated him on his victory. Pavel has since adopted strong, Western-leaning policies, and his plans to increase economic cooperation with Taiwan do not yet seem deterred by People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) protests.

Proceeding to Brussels after the summit, Wu [met with members of the European Parliament](#) and [legislators](#) from Belgium, Luxembourg, and the United Kingdom. The main topic of discussion during these meetings was Taiwan and the challenges it still faces while engaging with Europe. Additionally, and perhaps foremost, the two sides discussed chip diplomacy. Brussels sees Taiwan as an important, like-minded partner, and in recent years the European Union (EU) [has strengthened](#) economic ties, as well as political engagement. Specifically, the EU would like to upgrade its technological cooperation with Taipei, especially in the semiconductor sector.

While the EU is Taiwan’s largest source of foreign direct investment (FDI), amongst Taiwan’s overall global FDI, the EU currently plays a limited role. Nonetheless, Taiwanese investors continue to demonstrate confidence in the European market, potentially setting the stage for greatly [expanded Taiwanese investment](#) in the bloc. Taiwan’s leading role in the production of high-tech goods—in particular, semiconductors and electronic products vital to both the green and digital transitions—represents a major asset. Indeed, the EU is eager to attract Taiwanese investments in high-tech industries. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC, 台灣積體電路製造股份有限公司) recently [announced](#) that it would be investing roughly USD 3.9 billion to establish a chipmaking plant in Germany. The investment—part of TSMC’s global plan to invest USD \$100 billion over the next three years [to ramp up production](#)—would help meet strong European demand for specialty processes in

high-tech goods and mitigate potential geopolitical barriers.

However, the Taiwanese government currently seems unwilling to enhance cooperation under the current framework. In an [interview given to Politico](#), Wu clarified the point: “[The] philosophical issue is that when a country is in shortage of computer chips, they will ask Taiwan, ‘you should do this, and you should do that’ — but they don’t seem to be thinking about a broader picture of better relations with Taiwan, economic or otherwise.” These comments were evidently in reference to an incident in 2021, when then-German Minister for Economic Affairs and Energy Peter Altmaier [asked his Taiwanese counterpart](#), Wang Mei-hua (王美花), to intervene regarding TSMC’s reduced supply to the German auto industry. The EU cannot expect to enjoy growing technological cooperation with Taipei without a more formal upgrade in economic relations.

Another key topic has been a potential EU-Taiwan bilateral investment agreement (BIA). The European Commission has been reluctant to begin negotiations, apparently out of concern about retaliation from Beijing. Last February, EU officials [crushed Taiwanese hopes](#), stating that there is no economic rationale for such an agreement. In the same interview with *Politico*, Wu stated that he was “very concerned” that a possible EU-Taiwan investment deal was caught as a “hostage,” even as Brussels seems determined to move forward on a trade and investment agreement with the PRC. The EU-China [Comprehensive Agreement on Investment](#) (CAI) has been [frozen](#) since 2021, though [some](#) have pushed for renewed engagement. Wu further argued that “If you look at the linkage—close linkage—between Taiwan and the EU, in economic sense, I think [the] EU needs to find an alternative to strengthen the bilateral economic or trade relations.” The foreign minister also called for stronger European voices to caution the PRC against hostile actions against the island: “We are continuing to make our effort so that there can be more European voices to caution against China.”

The Italian Trip

In Milan, which [will soon host](#) Taiwan’s second Representative Office in Italy, Wu met with four Italian parliamentarians, including Paolo Formentini, vice president of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Italian Chamber. Formentini has been a firm proponent of closer Italy-Taiwan ties and recently presented a [parliamentary question](#) regarding Taiwan’s participation in the work of the World Health Organization (WHO).

The relationship between Rome and Taipei is becoming deeper and more open. Traditionally, chemicals, machinery, and equipment are at the core of bilateral trade, totaling [EUR €4.7 billion](#)



Image: Taiwan Foreign Minister Joseph Wu (seated, left foreground) in attendance at the European Values Summit in Prague (June 14, 2023). Czech President Petr Pavel is speaking (right). (Image source: [Twitter](#))

[in 2021](#), when Italy ranked as Taiwan’s third-largest EU trading partner. Both sides have [expressed their desire](#) to expand cooperation. In recent months, the Italian government has been lobbying to attract Taiwanese investments in high-tech industries. Italy depends particularly heavily on semiconductors for its automotive sector. In April, an Italian delegation from the Ministry of Enterprises and Made in Italy [visited Taiwan](#) to discuss plans to increase cooperation on the production and export of semiconductors. Furthermore, Carmaker Stellantis (controlled by the Agnelli family) and Foxconn (富士康科技集团) [recently created a 50-50 joint venture](#), called SiliconAuto, to design and sell semiconductors for the automotive industry beginning in 2026.

In May, Taiwan’s Representative in Italy, Vincent Y.C. Tsai (蔡允中), visited Biella, a small town in Piedmont. During the trip, Tsai was received by government and local officials to discuss shared economic interests, including discussing Biella as [a possible destination](#) for Taiwanese investments. Piedmont [is trying to boost](#) its microelectronic industry through EU’s “Chips Act” funding and to attract foreign investments that could generate added value, knowledge spillovers and technology transfer. Although the meeting was primarily focused on digitalization, Biella is known for its textile industry. Textiles are one of Taiwan’s major industrial export sectors, with a production value of [over USD \\$11 billion in 2022](#). Amid serious challenges due to labor shortages, increasing overhead costs, and environmental protection concerns, Taiwan’s textile industry is [attaching great importance](#) to developing sustainable technologies and practices.

It is not coincidental that the Italian political figures with whom Wu and Tsai met all belong to right-wing parties. In recent years,

Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy (Fdi) and Minister of Infrastructure and Transport Matteo Salvini's Lega have expressed strong pro-Taiwan stances. A delegation of Lega parliamentarians [visited Taiwan in 2019](#), and another large Italian parliamentary delegation—part of the Taiwan-Italy Parliamentary Friendship Group and composed of Fdi members—was slated to visit Taiwan in April before the visit [was cancelled last-minute](#) due to security concerns linked to the PRC's military exercises in the area. While Wu was in Prague, Vice-President of the Italian Senate Gian Marco Centinaio and Senator Elena Murelli, both from Lega, arrived in Taipei for a personal visit, during which they conducted high-level meetings and were also [received by President Tsai](#).

What is out of the ordinary is the level of transparency and visibility given to these visits [by the Italian press](#). Although European parliamentary delegations to the island are not infrequent, the Italian media has remained reluctant to openly discuss relations with Taiwan. Centinaio, who had already visited Taiwan in his institutional capacity in 2019 while simultaneously cultivating [good relations](#) with the PRC embassy in Rome, not only talked about new opportunities in the cooperation between Rome and Taipei but also defined Taiwan as a “[democratic garrison](#)” to defend.

Meloni's government is attempting to implement an ambitious, [values-based foreign policy](#), with a particular emphasis on the Indo-Pacific. While mercantilist interests are still present and important, they are increasingly complemented by ideological considerations, with democratic values and principles guiding relationships and strategies. This value-based approach was [re-iterated](#) by Under-Secretary of Justice Andrea Delmastro Delle Vedove (Fdi) after the summit with Ambassador Tsai in Biella: “Taiwan's respect for freedom, [the] free market and human rights represents a fundamental feature in the possible cooperation.” The big test for such foreign policy ideals will come before the end of the year, when Italy will need to decide whether or not to [withdraw from its Memorandum of Understanding](#) on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI, formerly known as “One Belt, One Road,” 一帶一路), which was signed in 2019. Given recent [public pronouncements](#), such a withdrawal may be more likely than ever.

The main point: Joseph Wu embarked on a European tour in June that brought him to Prague, Brussels, and Milan. The trip was a valuable opportunity to deepen political ties with Czech government officials and lawmakers, and to hold meetings with European and Italian parliamentarians about possible Taiwanese investments—potentially setting the stage for expanded

future relations.

“Let's Not Just Let This Go”: Taiwan's #Me-Too Movement and its Policy Implications

By: Adrienne Wu

Adrienne Wu is a research associate at Global Taiwan Institute and the host of Taiwan Salon, GTI's cultural policy and soft power podcast.

Wave Makers (人選之人—造浪者, 2023), the same TV show that [Weibo users praised for discussing sexual harassment](#), is [now also credited](#) for being the catalyst for Taiwan's own #Me-Too movement. Inspired by the protagonist's words to “Let's not just let this go” in response to a sexual harassment accusation, a former staffer for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民主進步黨) was [the first to come forward](#) about being touched inappropriately by a filmmaker following a DPP video shoot. Following her post in late May, a [wave of sexual assault allegations](#) have been levied against [well-known figures in politics and the Chinese dissident community](#). These have included [Chinese dissident and pro-democracy activist Wang Dan \(王丹\)](#), [former Deputy Director of Poland's representative office in Taipei Bartosz Ryś](#), and [Kuomintang \(KMT, 中國國民黨\) lawmaker Fu Kun-chi \(傅崐萁\)](#).

This has led observers to speculate about how this recent #Me-Too movement will affect the current political landscape. While jarring for these cases' sharp contrast to Taiwan's oft-praised open and democratic culture, it seems clear that Taiwanese government officials are not “letting it go” in real life. Accordingly, this movement could provide a much-needed opportunity for policymakers to reflect on how to better accommodate victims of sexual harassment and assault through policy reforms, while also showing how Taiwan deals with these allegations as a mature democracy.

#MeToo and the Legal Background

First gaining prevalence in [the United States](#) in 2017, the #Me-Too movement spread to Asia via [Japan](#) and [South Korea](#) during the following year. The fact that Taiwan is only having its own #MeToo movement five years later has led to difficult questions: why now and why has it taken so long? [According to Chen Mei-hua \(陳美華\)](#), a sociology professor at National Sun Yat-Sen University (國立中山大學), many Taiwanese women are taught to tolerate sexual harassment in favor of considering the

“big picture.” Given the prevalence of such mindsets, it is perhaps not surprising that *Wave Makers* resonated so powerfully with Taiwanese women.

Additionally, Chen [noted](#) that Taiwan has been slow in creating a legal framework to deal with these cases. The term for “sexual harassment” entered the lexicon in Japan and Taiwan at around the same time—with the term arising in Taiwan [in the early 1990s](#) and gaining popularity in Japan [around 1992](#). However, Japan [revised](#) the *Equal Employment Opportunity Law* in 1997 to include guidelines for the prevention of workplace sexual harassment (the same year that the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [issued](#) a fact sheet defin-

ing sexual harassment), nearly ten years before Taiwan [passed](#) its own *Sexual Harassment Prevention Act* (性騷擾防治法) in 2006. Taiwan also lagged behind South Korea, which [included](#) articles on sexual harassment in its own *Equal Employment Act* in 1999. Considering Taiwan’s relative listlessness in addressing sexual harassment, it is perhaps understandable that its #MeToo movement has been slower to catch on as well. Still, it should also be noted that this current movement did not emerge from nowhere. As Taiwanese lawyer Audrey Lu emphasized: “This is the effort of a lot of men and women put in fighting sexual harassment and sexual assault for many generations. This is a combination, not a one-shot or one-event impact of the TV show.”

Timeline of the Main Developments

Date	Main Political Accusations and Rulings	Responses to the Accusations
May 31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Former DPP staffer Chen Chien-Jou (陳汶軒) posts on Facebook, calling out the inadequate response of DPP official Hsu Chia-tien (許嘉恬), who was the head of the DPP’s gender equality department 	
June 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Another former DPP staffer, Chen Wen-hsuan (陳汶軒) accuses Tsai Mu-lin (蔡沐霖) of covering up her sexual harassment allegations against a fellow DPP staffer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DPP Deputy-Secretary General Hsu Chia-tien resigns
June 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KMT New Taipei Mayor Hou You-yi (侯友宜) is accused of mishandling and covering up a sexual harassment case in New Taipei that resulted in suicide (Hou has not apologized for this incident) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tsai Mu-lin, aide to DPP Deputy Labor Minister Lee Chun-yi (李俊偖), resigns Vice President and DPP Chairman William Lai (賴清德) publicly apologizes and announces three reforms President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) apologizes on Facebook for the DPP’s mishandling of sexual misconduct complaints
June 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tung Cheng-yu (董成瑜) accuses KMT Lawmaker Fu Kun-chi of sexual harassment A former Taiwan People’s Party (TPP, 台灣民眾黨) staffer accuses the TPP of covering up sexual harassment accusations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The KMT pledges to investigate the claims against Fu Kun-chi TPP Chairman Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) says that sexual harassment allegations were handled immediately
June 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DPP Legislator Mark Ho (何志偉) is accused of sexual harassment 	
June 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A professor who formerly served as Taipei City Gender Equality Commissioner under Ko Wen-je is accused of sexually harassing a subordinate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Albert Tzeng (曾柏文), a researcher employed by a KMT think-tank, apologizes after being accused of sexual harassment by multiple women (KMT denies any current connection to him)
June 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ruling that KMT lawmaker Chen Hsueh-sheng (陳雪生) must pay USD \$2,605 as compensation for sexually harassing a female DPP lawmaker is upheld in court 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tsai Ing-wen apologizes in a second Facebook post and pledges reforms National Policy Advisor to Tsai Ing-wen Yan Chih-fa (顏志發), quits after being accused of sexual harassment (despite denying the allegations)
June 13		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DPP candidate Lin Fei-fan (林飛帆) decides to withdraw his candidacy to take accountability as head of the DPP’s Gender Equality Committee

While early developments in the #MeToo movement centered mainly around the DPP, further cases have included figures in the KMT and TPP, as well as individuals outside of politics—such as those working in the [entertainment industry](#). One aspect that should be noted in the following timeline is that the DPP has thus far accepted all the allegations that have been made against them without contestation. For instance, while Yan Chih-fa initially contested the accusations against him and [even filed a defamation case on June 5](#), he ultimately decided to withdraw the case and resign instead.

In contrast, the KMT and TPP have not been so eager to accept wrongdoing. As of yet, the two parties have either stated that any allegations were already handled (such as in [the case of Ko Wen-je](#)) or have yet to take any visible actions to increase accountability (such as in [the case of Fu Kun-chi](#)). While several DPP officials who were accused of mishandling cases have already resigned, the KMT continues to support lawmaker Chen Hsueh-sheng as its candidate for a legislative seat from Matsu, [even though Chen has already been found guilty of sexual harassment](#).

As some political commentators have noted, there are several possible reasons behind the DPP's disproportionate response. First, the DPP may face greater pressure, both as the ruling government and the focus of initial accusations. With the election coming up, the party may also be concerned about [losing the support of female and younger voters](#) (who tend to care more about gender-related issues). Lastly, the DPP may hope that tendering the resignations of officials higher-up within the party [will pressure the TPP and KMT to do the same](#). Regardless of the reason, of the three parties, the DPP is the only one to take concrete steps toward reforming itself so far.

Long-Term Impacts

Policy Reform

As noted above, responses from the DPP and the government have also been accompanied by proposals for policy reform. As chairman of the DPP, Lai Ching-te was the first to [announce](#) reforms to DPP party procedures. [According to Lai](#), the DPP would set up an office at its Gender Equality Department to deal with sexual harassment reports. During the investigation, the parties involved would remain anonymous, legal assistance and counseling would be provided by the DPP, and if wrongdoing is proved, then perpetrators would be dismissed and not allowed to work in the party. Accompanying these changes, Lai [also promised](#) to redraft the party charter to implement an internal framework to support gender equality, which would include ed-

ucation programs.

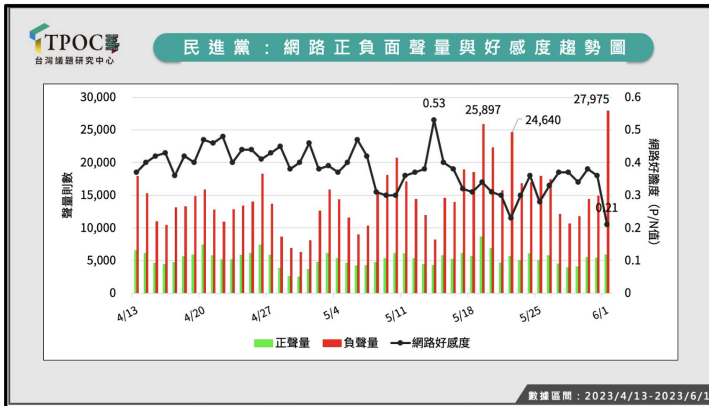
In a [June 6 Facebook post](#), Tsai Ing-wen [announced](#) that she had assigned Premier Chen Chien-ren (陳建仁) to conduct a government review and propose reforms in three main areas: 1) to clearly define what constitutes sexual harassment; 2) to review the current sexual harassment reporting mechanisms and facilitate public powers' ability to intervene in cases that are being mishandled; and 3) to review and propose amendments to the *Gender Equity Education Act*.

On July 13, five weeks after Tsai's post, the Executive Yuan—which functions as the government's executive branch—[approved](#) drafted amendments to the *Gender Equity Education Act*, the *Act of Gender Equality in Employment* and the *Sexual Harassment Prevention Act*, with the aim of combating power-based sexual harassment. [These amendments](#), which among other changes necessitate immediate action from employers and [introduce harsher fines](#), passed within two months of their drafting and are set to take effect on March 8, 2024. (Amendments to the *Gender Equity Education Act* passed on [July 28](#), and additional amendments passed on [July 31](#).) [Women's March Taiwan \(我們台灣\)](#), a grassroots organization that works towards improving awareness around women's rights in Taiwan, has [praised](#) the government's approach for being “victim-centered,” arguing that this will help encourage more victims to come forward. Still, as some have noted, the current amendments [have some remaining blind spots](#), including a limited statute of limitations and a lack of clarity when it comes to after-hours behavior. Targeting power harassment would be in line with [Japan's own workplace reforms in 2019](#). However, compared to Japan's own power harassment law—which was [passed over a year](#) following the start of Japan's #MeToo movement and took effect a year to three years after that—the DPP's timeline for reforms has been incredibly fast.

Implications for the Election

With many of the first allegations centered on the DPP, the ruling party has taken the brunt of the criticism from Taiwanese voters. The [Taiwan Public Opinion Center](#) (TPOC, 台灣議題研究中心) [found](#) that the DPP's favorability rating generally stayed above 30 percent from April to June, peaking at 53 percent in May. However, immediately following the allegations, the DPP's favorability dropped to 21 percent, and there were 27,975 negative social media posts about the DPP posted online. When TPOC [analyzed](#) public opinion trends on social media platforms from June 1 to 9, they found that the DPP, KMT, and TPP all experienced a similar level of favorability when it came to discussions about the #MeToo movement—the DPP was at 13 percent approval, while the KMT and TPP were each at 15 percent. Among the parties, [the](#)

[DPP faced the most scrutiny](#), with 219,137 total social media posts, 96,498 of which were negative. (The KMT had 57,889 total posts, with 29,981 negative; the TPP had 22,114 total, with 10,413 negative.) Additionally, [a Daily View article](#) found that, compared to the period before the allegations, Lai Ching-te’s favorability dropped from 35 percent to 28 percent, while Tsai Ing-wen’s dropped from 40 percent to 31 percent. Clearly, all the parties have suffered in the court of public opinion, the DPP most of all.

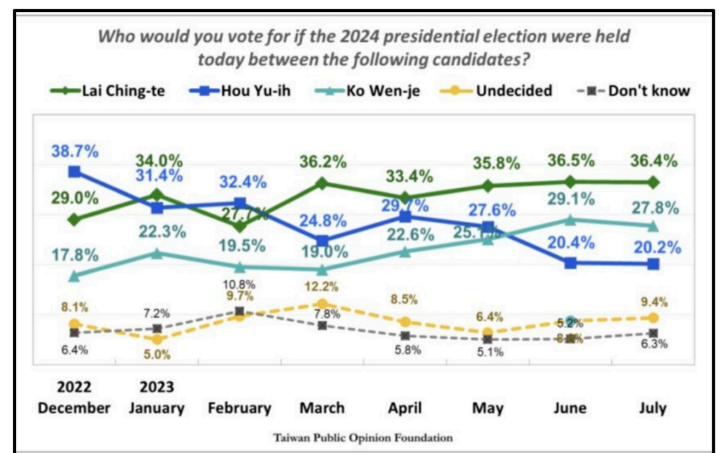


Graphic: The results of data collected by TPOC depicting the DPP’s internet approval ratings from April 13 to June 1, as well as the number of negative and positive social media posts on each day. (Source: [TPOC](#))

Whether these lower approval ratings will translate into changes in voting remain to be seen. In [polling results](#) released by the Taiwanese Public Opinion Foundation (TPOF, 台灣民意基金會) on June 20, 34.5 percent of respondents were satisfied with Lai’s handling of the sexual harassment allegations (a slight relative majority when compared to the 30.7 percent who said they were not satisfied). On [the TPOF’s feeling thermometer](#), Lai had a slight edge over the other candidates (56.48 percent, compared to 53.06 percent for Ko and 48.78 percent for Hou). However, the TPOF added a caveat that Lai’s ratings have continuously declined over the last two years, while the ratings for Ko—his closest competitor—have remained stable. [According to TPOF](#), “If Ko’s presidential support in the poll rises, we know it is not so much that Ko himself won over more hearts and minds but that his opponents have become more unpopular.” Overall, [the DPP continues to struggle winning over younger voters, and any doubts about the DPP’s ethical standards will make gaining that support even harder](#).

Still, [July polling results](#) from the TPOF seem to indicate that the DPP has not taken a sustained hit from the #MeToo allegations. Lai, at 36.4 percent, continues to lead when compared to the other presidential candidates (Ko is at 27.8 percent and Hou at

20.2 percent). Additionally, [responses](#) indicated that Lai would still be in the lead even if Foxconn founder Terry Gou (郭台銘) were to join the presidential race, with Lai at 33.9 percent, Ko at 20.5 percent, Hou at 18.0 percent, and Terry Gou bringing up the rear at 15.2 percent. A poll by *RW News* (菱傳媒) from July 12-16 found similarly high levels of support for the DPP. Further, the poll [indicated](#) that women tend to support Lai over the other candidates, a crucial figure given that the majority of DPP supporters are women. (This stands in contrast to the KMT and TPP, where male supporters outnumber female supporters.) Although the DPP is still struggling to capture the youth vote, it remains the frontrunner when it comes to polling, especially among women.



Graphic: Polling results from the TPOF’s July 25 report asking respondents about who they would vote for in the upcoming 2024 presidential election. (Source: [TPOF](#))

The main point: Although the #MeToo movement was slow to take hold in Taiwanese society compared to some other countries, the government has responded quickly to the allegations and has already passed amendments to existing laws. However, whether the proposed reforms are effective in addressing sexual harassment, and whether the DPP can continue to hold its current lead in the polls, both remain to be seen.

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