

## Three Implications of Taiwan's 2024 Presidential and Legislative Elections

Russell Hsiao

## Taiwan's Security Environment in 2024

Eric Chan

## The Outcomes of Taiwan's 2024 Legislative Elections

John Dotson and Ben Levine

## What Does Nauru's Switch to Beijing Mean for William Lai's Taiwan?

Thomas J. Shattuck

## The Debate over "De-Sinicizing" School Curricula in Taiwan: Partisan Politics or a Reclamation of Heritage?

Adrienne Wu

## Three Domestic Implications of Taiwan's 2024 Presidential and Legislative Elections

By: Russell Hsiao

*Russell Hsiao is the executive director of the Global Taiwan Institute and the editor-in-chief of the Global Taiwan Brief.*

The island democracy of Taiwan, officially referred to as the Republic of China (ROC), held its eighth direct presidential election and 11<sup>th</sup> election for the Legislative Yuan (LY, 立法院) on January 13. Close to 72 percent of registered voters (around 13.7 million out of a total 19.5 million) [went to the polls](#) to elect their president, vice president, and district representatives. With all the votes tallied and no major irregularities detected in the process or the results of the elections, three key takeaways have emerged that are both unprecedented and could potentially have important implications for the future of Taiwan's domestic politics, cross-Strait interactions, and US-Taiwan relations.

The first feature is that the 2024 presidential elections represented the first time that voters in Taiwan have delivered to any political party a third consecutive presidential term. The second feature—another first since 2004—is that no single party commands a majority in the LY. Legislative power will be split among three political parties, with the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) holding a plurality of seats. The third feature is that the Taiwan People's Party (TPP, 民眾黨)—a third party that is not firmly aligned with either the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨) or the KMT—now controls a small but decisive number of votes in the LY. In a sense, an overarching characteristic of the elections is that all three major political parties can walk away claiming a victory from the results.

Relatedly, these features signal potential new challenges ahead for the incoming Taiwan government. Indeed, the 2024 elections saw Chinese Communist Party (CCP, 中國共產黨) [influence and interference activities](#) unprecedented in scale and scope. While the CCP failed to unseat the DPP from executive power, it will be better positioned to exploit the new power dynamics in the post-2024 elections political landscape in Taiwan.

*The Global Taiwan Brief is a bi-weekly publication released every other Wednesday and provides insight into the latest news on Taiwan.*

**Editor-in-Chief**  
Russell Hsiao  
**Associate Editor**  
John Dotson  
**Staff Editor**  
Marshall Reid

*The views and opinions expressed in these articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Global Taiwan Institute.*

*To view web sources cited in the published papers (underlined in printed text), visit <https://global-taiwan.org/issues/vol-9-issue-2/>.*

Global Taiwan Institute  
1836 Jefferson Place NW,  
Washington DC 20036  
[contact@globaltaiwan.org](mailto:contact@globaltaiwan.org)

To subscribe, visit  
<http://globaltaiwan.org/subscribe/>.

© 2024 · Global Taiwan Institute

### ***Third Consecutive Term: Preference for the Status Quo and Continuity of National Policies***

Voters in Taiwan delivered an unprecedented third consecutive term to the ruling DPP, the first time since the island democracy began holding direct presidential elections in 1996. The DPP's presidential and vice presidential candidates, Lai Ching-te (賴清德) and Hsiao Bi-khim (蕭美琴), respectively, won the race with roughly [40 percent of the popular vote](#). Lagging slightly behind was the KMT's ticket of Hou You-yi (侯友宜) and Jaw Shaw-kong (趙少康), who received around 33 percent of votes; followed by the TPP's ticket of Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) and Cynthia Wu (吳欣盈), with 26 percent of the vote.

Overall, the results of the presidential election signal that a plurality of voters within Taiwan prefer continuity over change in national policies. While some voters have likely grown [weary after eight years of DPP rule](#), it is clear that many would like to maintain the status quo in key areas such as national defense, international relations, and cross-Strait dynamics. However, the DPP's margin of victory in the 2024 election was much less than in [2020](#), when President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and Vice President Lai won by a landslide, receiving a record-setting 8.17 million votes. This represented a massive spread of 19 percent over the KMT (57 vs. 38 percent).

While the 2020 elections reflected a clear preference of the electorate for the DPP's candidate over the opposition candidates, it is important to remember that Tsai's victory was far from assured, as she entered 2019 with [gloomy approval ratings](#) that appeared to signal a likely change in government in January 2020. However, following Beijing's imposition of the Hong Kong National Security Law (香港國家安全法) in June 2020, as well as the subsequent crushing of political dissent, Tsai's prospects began to improve. This shift was further bolstered by Xi Jinping's (習近平) increasingly hardline policy stance on Taiwan, as enunciated in his speech commemorating the "[40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Message to Compatriots in Taiwan](#)." In this address, Xi explicitly tied Taiwan to the model of "One Country, Two Systems" (一國兩制) imposed on Hong Kong. In turn, this created a [rallying effect](#) around the incumbent in Taiwan's 2020 elections, and rendered her opponents' more China-friendly positions untenable. Unlike the 2020 election, the 2024 election results likely have less to do with proximate external variables such as Hong Kong and more to do with internal variables.

Indeed, the results of the 2024 election perhaps should be interpreted less as a ringing endorsement of the DPP's policy achievements and more as a failure of the KMT and TPP to offer

voters a compelling alternative to the "status quo" as presented by the DPP.

### ***Split in the Legislative Yuan: Incumbent Fatigue and Checks and Balances***

While winning the presidency reflects a significant electoral victory for the DPP, there is a critical difference in the relative power balance between the political parties from 2016 to the present, and what will now follow after the 2024 elections. In the prior 2016 and 2020 elections, the DPP managed to control a majority of seats in the LY. For the first time since 2004, no single party has an absolute majority in the national legislature.

In a sense, the incumbency fatigue that was reflected in poll after poll leading up to the elections played out most visibly in the Legislative Yuan. Although the KMT failed to clinch an outright majority, it nevertheless had a strong showing, gaining 14 seats and controlling a plurality of 52 seats. The fact that the KMT gained 14 and the DPP lost 10 seats demonstrates a clear desire of voters for some checks and balances on the ruling party. Yet, perhaps most notably, neither the DPP or the KMT received a majority of seats (with a net of 57 seats needed). Despite only holding eight seats, the TPP will likely become a decisive third party that will be essential for either DPP or KMT efforts to pass or block legislation, conduct oversight, and oversee appropriations.

### ***Rise of a Genuine Third Party?***

The third feature of the 2024 elections is the stronger-than-expected showing from Ko and the TPP, despite their clear disadvantages in both the presidential and legislative races.

Some observers may dismiss Ko due to his failure to win the presidency, and the TPP's inability to gain more than a mere eight seats. However, clinching 26 percent of the popular vote is no small feat for a [candidate](#) that lacked a national organization or resources, and with a party that currently controls only a marginal cross section of local offices. Compared to James Soong's (宋楚瑜) People's First Party (PFP, 親民黨)—which received 4 percent of the vote in 2020, while Soong himself garnered 12 percent in his 2016 presidential run—Ko's showing should raise interest among political observers about whether Taiwan may be shifting to a true three-party system. Also, unlike the more recent phenomenon of the New Power Party (NPP, 時代力量)—which failed to gain any seats in the 2024 elections as a result of internal fragmentation, and which also did not run a presidential candidate—Ko had the strongest showing for a third-party presidential candidate since 2000, when Soong re-

ceived 36 percent of the popular vote.

However, the long-term viability of the TPP remains somewhat uncertain. Much like the PFP and also the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU, 台灣團結聯盟), the TPP is a personality-driven party, which is dependent entirely on Ko's public appeal. It remains unclear whether the TPP can nurture a new generation of politicians that the electorate appears to demand. At the same time, since the other two third parties were both generally seen as part of either the "Pan-Green" or "Pan-Blue" coalitions, their eventual failings could potentially be linked to their inability to differentiate themselves from their more dominant coalition partner. Along these lines, the future viability of the TPP may depend on whether or not it can maintain its independent character. The TPP's brief flirtation with the KMT in forming a unity ticket may have tarnished this reputation, but it is still too early to say to what extent.

### ***Implications for Taiwan's Domestic Politics Going Forward***

With 40 percent of the popular vote, President-elect Lai and Vice President-elect Hsiao will enter office with a weaker mandate compared to the outgoing Tsai Administration. Nevertheless, the plurality of votes reflects a preference for the "status quo," and that is precisely what the incoming Lai Administration promised to deliver on the campaign trail. A weaker central government does not necessarily mean an ineffectual one, but with the DPP still in control of the executive branch, the public is unlikely to be as forgiving, and the Lai-Hsiao Administration will likely be under considerably more scrutiny right out of the gate.

Moreover, with the opposition parties controlling a majority in the Legislative Yuan—if the KMT and TPP can successfully form a coalition—observers can at best expect more rigorous oversight of the DPP government. This dynamic could also result in gridlock in the Legislative Yuan, which could impede important authorizations, derail meaningful legislation, and hold up appropriations that would be essential for a functioning government at a critical period. On the other hand, while a Legislative Yuan split between the DPP, the KMT, and TPP will make it harder for the DPP to govern, it could also force the kind of compromises and alliance-building that can catalyze new ideas and necessitate the type of consensus-building on national security issues that will be essential for enhancing the resiliency of the Taiwanese population. Although the DPP will likely try to focus on domestic governance issues, whether it can be successful will depend on building new alliances with independents, the TPP, and "light-blue" factions within the KMT.

Another important question arising from the election is wheth-

er the loss of another presidential election will finally spur the KMT to implement the reforms necessary to bring it more in line with the mainstream of Taiwanese voters. Perhaps the success of the KMT in the Legislative Yuan race—wherein KMT Chairman Eric Chu (朱立倫) appeared to have made a point of fielding relatively moderate candidates (except for the at-large seats) as it had during the [local elections in 2022](#)—could reflect positively in this direction. Nevertheless, there are already calls from within the KMT for Eric Chu to [step down](#), so all eyes will be on the next party's chairman election to see the direction that the party base takes.

Finally, Beijing is expected to escalate its [pressure campaign](#) against Taiwan under the Lai-Hsiao Administration, an effort that will likely target the United States, as well. While not inconsistent with longstanding policy, President Biden's [immediate reaction](#) to a media inquiry on Taiwan's election stated only "We do not support independence." The terseness of the president's remark, even as he sent a [high-level unofficial delegation](#) to Taiwan, reflects, to a degree, how China is also stepping up pressure on the United States to reduce its support for Taiwan.

Beijing's efforts to diplomatically isolate Taiwan have also gained increased urgency. Whereas in 2016, the PRC waited two months before it fired the first salvo of this geopolitical pressure campaign by [establishing diplomatic ties with Gambia](#), it waited less than two days after Lai's victory to [poach Nauru](#) from Taiwan's diplomatic orbit. *[For a more detailed discussion of this story, see "What Does Nauru's Switch to Beijing Mean for William Lai's Taiwan?" by Thomas Shattuck, elsewhere in this issue.]* Last of all, Taiwan's divided government will prominently feature two main opposition parties interested in increasing engagement with Beijing. This will give the CCP a wider opening for it to potentially influence and interfere with the legislative process. In addition to domestic consensus-building, international engagement will be vital for ensuring that Taiwan does not become alienated and pushed toward Beijing's embrace.

While voters in Taiwan handed the DPP an unprecedented third consecutive term in the presidential office, they also gave the KMT and TPP significant power over the Legislative Yuan. This result reflects a degree of incumbency fatigue and a desire for checks and balances. With the control of a decisive minority number of seats in the Legislative Yuan, the steady rise of the TPP also demonstrates that it is a political force to be reckoned with, though its long-term viability remains in question. Political observers are already focusing on the next general elections in 2028, but the first real test for whether the current trends hold will come sooner in 2026.

**The main point:** The 2024 Taiwanese elections will likely have a number of significant implications. While all three major parties can claim minor victories, a divided government will pose substantial challenges for the incoming Lai Administration, both domestically and internationally.

\*\*\*

## Taiwan's Security Environment in 2024

By: Eric Chan

*Eric Chan is a senior non-resident fellow at the Global Taiwan Institute and a senior airpower strategist for the US Air Force. The views in this article are the author's own, and are not intended to represent those of his affiliate organizations.*

In 2024, Taiwan will likely face a critical year for development of its military and deterrence capabilities. The most immediate threat will continue to be the campaign of [gray zone warfare](#) conducted by the People's Republic of China (PRC), with a moderate level of temporary escalation likely in the wake of Lai Ching-te's (賴清德) victory in Taiwan's presidential election. However, these aggressive actions mask a moment of distinct weakness for the PRC. In this brief, I will look at some of the strategic factors driving Taiwan's security environment in 2024.

### PRC Stumbles Buys Taiwan Time

Taiwan faces something of a paradox in its security environment. PRC military-technical capabilities continue to grow at a fast clip, particularly with respect to [naval, air defense, and unmanned aerial system](#) capability. The PLA continues its process of [operationalizing gray zone warfare](#), while normalizing a higher level of incursions - now including [numerous balloons](#). Despite these operational challenges, however, a number of factors have improved Taiwan's strategic position *vis-à-vis* the PRC over the short term. These factors largely stem from Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Xi Jinping (習近平)'s mismanagement of the PRC's economy and domestic social challenges. This buys critically needed time for Taiwan to revamp its defenses.

First, the PRC economy has suffered enormous costs from both a botched "Zero COVID" response, as well as the "Comprehensive National Security" (整體國家安全) hostile regulatory regime. This has translated to [slow economic growth](#) over the last two years, with the [unbalanced economy threatening to drag out the period of slow growth](#) into the medium-term. These issues, in turn, make it still harder for Xi to respond to [long-term systemic issues such as poor demographics and real](#)

[estate overinvestment](#). By comparison, the United States, as the PRC's main competitor—and Taiwan's main security partner—has experienced surprisingly [robust growth](#). (Taiwan, unfortunately, has not done quite so well over the last year or so, [especially the portion of the economy tied to exports to the PRC](#).) The unexpectedly strong US economic situation, combined with CCP discomfiture over the US ability to rally an unprecedented international sanctions regime against Russian aggression, has forced Xi to tactically adjust his competition strategy against the United States.

This new strategy was on display at the November 2023 meeting between Xi and US President Joseph Biden on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in San Francisco. Xi agreed to the relatively minor asks from Biden: [re-suspension of some military-to-military dialogue, an agreement to governmental discussions on artificial intelligence use, and PRC curbing fentanyl-related ingredients](#). Xi resurrected the outward-facing propaganda of "mutual respect, peaceful co-existence, and win-win cooperation" (相互尊重、和平共處、合作共贏). This was a phrase [Xi has selectively used since 2012](#) on American audiences, and he used it repeatedly in [his address to US business leaders](#) following the meeting with Biden. In rhetorical terms, this was [rather different from the phrases](#) that Xi used in the March 2023 Two Sessions, where he warned about US-led "containment, encirclement, and suppression of China" (以美國為首的西方國家對我實施了全方位的遏制，



*Image: Xi Jinping giving the keynote speech at a dinner with American business executives (November 15, 2023). During [this speech](#), he used almost all the standard propaganda topics for "US-China friendship"—the Flying Tigers, pandas, ping-pong diplomacy, and his stay with the Dvorchaks in Iowa in 1985. It is clear that despite Xi's attempts over the last decade to wall off the PRC high-tech economy from any potential sanctions, the PRC economy is still reliant on foreign investment. (Image source: [PRC Embassy in Georgia](#))*

圍堵，打壓)。

In exchange for giving way on items of lower concern for him, Xi used the occasion to press harder on items of higher importance: Taiwan. The two messages that Xi passed on to Biden were: first, [stop arming Taiwan and support peaceful reunification](#); second, [the PRC will reunify Taiwan but the timing has not yet been decided](#). These set of messages put together are interesting in that it seeks to shift the “[Overton Window](#).” Xi knows full well that Biden will not stop arms sales or transfers to Taiwan. However, this sets the rhetorical groundwork for the PRC to state that without active *US support* for reunification, “peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question” per the Three Communiqués is not possible—and that US actions will determine if there is a so-called invasion deadline. This is a messaging strategy that seeks to limit perceived US “interference” on Taiwan at a time of relative PRC weakness. In short, Xi is not immediately interested in raising tensions with the United States, but instead seeks a modicum of stability to regain foreign investment in the PRC. This means some limitations regarding the extent to which Xi will employ coercive gray zone threats against Taiwan.

The second factor assisting Taiwan’s strategic position is Xi’s on-going anti-corruption campaign within the PLA. This started with the August 2023 toppling of Defense Minister Li Shangfu (李尚福) but has since expanded in scope to cover significant elements of the PLA. This purge seems to be even greater in both breadth and depth compared to the [previous purges in 2015-2016](#).

While the [PLA Rocket Force](#) (解放軍火箭軍) has been the service under the most public scrutiny, other sections such as the [Equipment Development Department](#) (裝備發展部), as well as the [state-owned military-industrial complex](#), are under investigation. The investigation implies significant levels of corruption in equipment acquisitions going back at least a decade, especially as the [last round of investigations in 2014 also targeted corruption in acquisitions and logistics](#).

Past the bureaucratic chaos caused by sudden removals of commanders and investigations by anti-corruption units, the more significant effect is the effect on Xi’s trust in the PLA to carry out a mission with enormous blowback risks to the party. The PLA trusts in technical solutions to paralyze networks, combined with the “tyranny of distance,” to offset the perceived defense advantages of Taiwan as well as potential American intervention forces. If “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun,” then Xi must be certain that the gun will not misfire before ordering a war of choice. Relatively low-risk gray zone warfare will

remain the primary coercive instrument of choice.

This is not to say that Taiwan should consider the PLA to be a reduced threat, either on account of the weakening PRC economy or the anti-corruption investigations. The Central Military Commission (中央軍事委員會) will almost certainly seek to fence off funding for identified priority acquisitions and reforms. The anti-corruption campaign will cause some disruption to long-range plans but will likely not affect day-to-day operations. However, it does provide Taiwan some reassurance during this [decade of maximum danger](#) from the PRC.



*Image: Li Shangfu giving a speech on “China’s New Security Initiatives” at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (June 2, 2023). Two months after his appearance at this high-profile event, he disappeared and was later formally removed from his role as defense minister, due to [corruption issues in his last position as head of the Equipment Development Department](#). That Xi was willing to tolerate such a public loss of face by removing the PRC’s chief military diplomat (especially one with [Li’s Party credentials](#)) likely indicates serious equipment issues which have not yet come to light. (Image source: [IISS](#))*

### Conclusion

With DPP candidate Lai winning the Taiwan presidential race, the PLA will now almost certainly respond with a heightened pressure campaign—although likely not as aggressive as the one that followed then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit in August 2022 (see [here](#) and [here](#)). However, these gray zone activities cannot fully hide this period of PRC weakness. Taiwan should take advantage of this by continuing defense reforms that principally cost time and willpower. These reforms should largely be agnostic of platforms, budgetary priorities, and defense acquisitions, all of which will now need to factor in a Legislative Yuan (立法院) in which no party has a clear majority.

These reforms would include things like increased training under realistic conditions, such as assumption of a degraded communications environment under simulated electronic attack.

Taiwan's air force can practice operational concepts such as short-notice large force employment, particularly with respect to the east coast (where the density of PRC surface to air missile threats is not quite as high as in the west). Continued civil-military integration should proceed, expanding the scope of civilian ministry participation in contingency planning. While these training reforms are difficult due to organizational factors, they can be done with the people and platforms that Taiwan has on hand today.

**The main point:** Taiwan will likely face a relatively favorable security environment in 2024, despite the prospect of continued or even temporarily increased PRC gray zone activity. Xi Jinping has prioritized the revival of the PRC economy, while the PLA restructures following a significant anti-corruption purge. This, in turn, buys Taiwan valuable time to re-build its warfighting and deterrence capabilities.

\*\*\*

## The Outcomes of Taiwan's 2024 Legislative Elections

By: John Dotson and Ben Levine

*John Dotson is the deputy director of the Global Taiwan Institute and associate editor of the Global Taiwan Brief.*

*Ben Levine is a current graduate student at the George Washington University, and is a fall 2023 intern at the Global Taiwan Institute*

In Taiwan's elections held on January 13, Lai Ching-te (賴清德), Taiwan's current vice-president and the candidate of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨), [prevailed in the three-way presidential election](#) with 5.59 million votes (a 40.05 percent plurality of the total vote). However, while the presidential contest received the overwhelming share of international media attention, another series of elections were held the same day that were arguably just as significant: all 113 seats of Taiwan's unicameral legislature, the Legislative Yuan (LY, 立法院), were up for election for four-year terms.

Similar to the functions of the US Congress and legislative branches in other democratic states, the [LY drafts laws, determines the government's budget, and performs oversight of the executive branch](#). Accordingly, it is worth taking a closer look at the election results for seats in the LY, as well as what the composition of that body—and the relative balance of power amongst Taiwan's competing political parties—will look like

over the next four years. [Note: For a more detailed analysis of Taiwan's presidential election, and a broader consideration of Taiwan's elections overall, see: "Three Implications of Taiwan's 2024 Presidential and Legislative Elections" by Russell Hsiao, elsewhere in this issue.]

### The Composition of the Legislative Yuan

The Republic of China Legislative Yuan is currently in its tenth class, and in its current form is organized per the provisions of a constitutional amendment passed in 2005. [1] There are a total of 113 seats in the chamber, meaning that a party must have possession of at least 57 seats in order to command an absolute majority.

The membership of the LY is comprised of [legislators elected \(or selected\) in three categories](#):

- 73 regionally based district seats, in which candidates are elected using a "first-past-the-post" system (i.e., the candidate with the most votes wins the seat).
- 34 at-large seats are allocated by party-list proportional representation, in which a party's total vote share determines the number of at-large seats they are allocated. The parties establish these lists of their selected nominees prior to the election, and must obtain at least 5 percent of the overall vote to be eligible for any appointments. At least half of the party list seats must be designated for women. [2]
- 6 seats are allocated to indigenous candidates (that is, representatives of Taiwan's non-Han, native peoples) using a single, non-transferable vote, in which multiple winners are elected. This grouping is divided into two groups: the "lowland and highland aborigines," with each group receiving 3 seats. [3]

[In the current \(and outgoing\) Legislative Yuan \(2020-2024\)](#), the DPP has held an absolute majority of 61 seats, thereby giving it effective control over all major levers of government. This has been a major boon for the Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) Administration, which has been able to secure its budgetary priorities and pass most of its preferred legislation as a result. (A very different set of circumstances prevailed under the prior DPP administration of Chen Shui-bian [陳水扁] [2000-2008], during which "Pan-Blue" majorities in the LY [blocked many of the administration's policies](#).) Meanwhile, the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) has held 38 seats, making it the largest opposition party; the Taiwan People's Party (TPP, 民眾黨) has held five seats; and independent legislators and those from smaller parties (*see below*) held a combined total of nine seats.

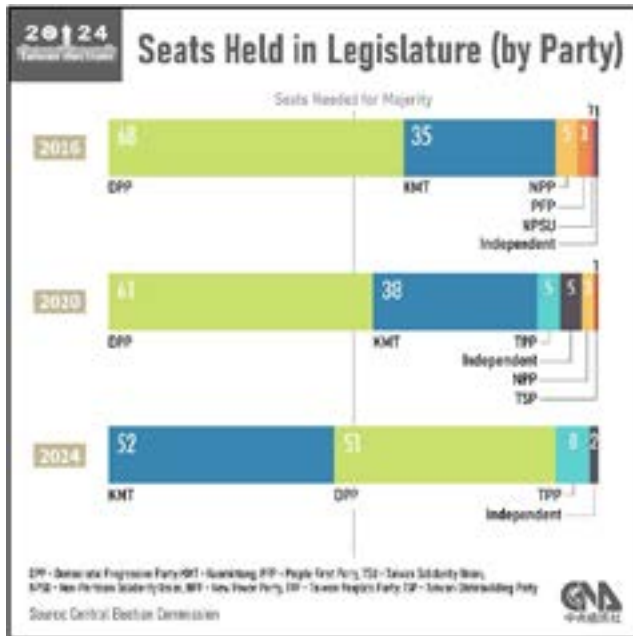


Image: A breakdown of the LY seats held by Taiwan's competing political parties following the 2016, 2020, and 2024 elections. The DPP, while still holding the presidency for the next four years, has lost the absolute majorities it held in the ninth (2016) and tenth (2020) classes of the Legislative Yuan, while the TPP is positioned to play a potentially powerful kingmaker role between the DPP and KMT. (Image source: [Central News Agency](#))

### The 2024 Legislative Yuan Election Results

The 11<sup>th</sup> Legislative Yuan, whose legislators will assume their seats in February, will have [no majority party](#). Notably, [this is the first time since the 2004 elections](#) that no party, or clear party coalition, has commanded a majority. The final tally of the 2024 LY elections made the KMT the largest party in the legislature, controlling 52 seats, narrowly edging out the 51 held by the DPP. The TPP increased its seats to eight, with the remaining two seats held by independents likely to caucus with the KMT. Compared to the numbers in the outgoing LY, the DPP lost 10 seats, the KMT gained 14 seats, and the TPP gained three seats. A few significant trends stand out in the voting, as noted below.

#### Trend #1: KMT Gains in Northern and Central Taiwan

[The KMT's gains \(and the DPP's attendant losses\)](#) came primarily from flipping a total of 15 DPP seats in northern and central Taiwan:

- Taipei City: The KMT flipped Taipei City Constituency 4.
- New Taipei City: The KMT flipped New Taipei City Constituencies 7, 8, and 9.
- Keelung: The KMT flipped the Keelung County constituency seat.

- Taoyuan: The KMT flipped Taoyuan City Constituencies 1, 2, and 6.
- Taichung: The KMT flipped Taichung City Constituencies 2, 4, 5, and 6. The KMT also flipped the Taichung County constituency seat.
- Nantou: The KMT flipped Nantou County Constituency 2.
- Yunlin County: The KMT flipped Yunlin County Constituency 1.

By contrast, the DPP gained only one seat: Pingtung County Constituency 2. (This seat was held by an independent who previously caucused with the DPP, making it an effective one-for-one swap.)

Although the Taipei City and New Taipei City constituency seats have [swapped between the DPP and KMT](#) periodically in recent electoral cycles, the DPP losses in Taichung are worthy of more discussion. Taichung has traditionally been a DPP stronghold: for example, in the 2020 LY elections, DPP candidates won [six out of the eight constituency seats](#). (The 2016 LY results were more divided, with [the DPP winning four seats and the KMT winning three seats](#).) By contrast, in the coming LY, the KMT will [control six out of the eight constituency seats](#). If the DPP had retained those seats, they would have been the largest party in the LY with 55 seats to the KMT's 48 seats. This would have put the DPP just short of a majority in the LY; but even without a majority, the DPP would have been in a stronger position to negotiate with the TPP to form a coalition.



Image: Former KMT Chairman Johnny Chiang (江啟臣) shares a kiss with his wife while celebrating his re-election to Taichung's Constituency 8 seat (January 13). (Image source: [Central News Agency](#))

#### Trend #2: A Likely Kingmaker Role for the TPP

Because both leading parties (DPP and KMT) will lack a majority in the LY and are so close in terms of numbers of seats held, the TPP is positioned to play a potentially powerful kingmaker role.

If the TPP were to enter into a coalition with either the DPP or the KMT, its eight seats would allow for a decisive majority (of either 60 [or 62] in a KMT-led coalition, or else 59 in a DPP-led coalition). Thus far, it is uncertain as to which path the TPP will choose—or whether it might choose a third path of determining its votes on an independent, case-by-case basis.

Ko Wen-je (柯文哲), the former Taipei City mayor and the chairman of the TPP, will likely have much sway over these decisions. Ko has a history of shifting support between both the “Pan-Green” and “Pan-Blue” sides of Taiwan’s political spectrum, often in a mercurial and unpredictable manner. Ko initially rose to fame because of his support for the 2014 [Sunflower Movement](#) (太陽花學運), which arose in opposition to the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA, 海峽兩岸服務貿易協議) with China. When Ko ran as an independent for the Taipei mayor’s office in 2014, the DPP chose not to run its own candidate and to endorse Ko instead (Ko subsequently won the election with [57.16 percent of the vote](#)). Ko continued his loose alliance with DPP in the next electoral cycle, [endorsing Tsai Ing-wen](#) in the 2016 election.

However, Ko appeared to shift in a direction friendlier to the KMT in 2023. During the presidential election campaign, the KMT and TPP reached a tentative deal to [put forward a joint presidential ticket](#). However, after disagreement as to who would become the presidential nominee on the ticket, [the agreement fell apart](#) in November 2023—spectacularly, on live television—and the KMT and TPP each proceeded with their own tickets (ultimately finishing second and third in the voting, respectively). The acrimonious implosion of the nascent KMT-TPP alliance likely left some bruised feelings—and Ko subsequently shifted back to more of a DPP-aligned stance, saying weeks before the election that he is [“deep green at heart.”](#)

However, it remains to be seen how the TPP will decide to use the outsized clout that its eight seats will give it in the coming LY—and whether it will choose to lean “green” or “blue,” or else make *ad hoc* decisions based on individual issues (and the often-unpredictable whims of its leader).

### *Trend #3: The Wipeout of Smaller Parties*

A third significant trend in the 2024 LY elections was the continued consolidation of seats for the DPP (as the core of the “Pan-Green” coalition) and the KMT (as the core of the “Pan-Blue” coalition). The People’s First Party (PFP, 親民黨) and New Party (NP, 新黨), both offshoots of the KMT that formerly operated as significant components of the Pan-Blue coalition, have failed to win seats for several years (since the 2012 and 2004 elections,

respectively), and are effectively defunct. [4] More recently, smaller parties have contributed to the Pan-Green coalition: in the outgoing LY, the New Power Party (NPP, 時代力量) held three seats, while the Taiwan Statebuilding Party (TSP, 台灣基進) held a single seat, with both parties usually adding their votes to those of the DPP. However, [these small parties will have no presence in the next LY](#): having failed to meet the necessary 5 percent national vote threshold, the NPP lost its three party-list seats, while and the TSP lost its one district seat prior to the elections. Similarly, the tiny Green Party (綠黨) won no seats, with its voting tally under 1 percent. [5] If such trends hold, language about “pan-” coalitions may cease to be meaningful, with politics now concentrated among the two large (DPP and KMT) and one smaller (TPP) parties.

### **Conclusions**

The DPP suffered significant losses in the LY races—due likely in no small part to voter fatigue with the continued governance of the DPP, as well as discontent over economic and quality of life issues. This will likely impose constraints on the incoming Lai Administration far heavier than those faced by the Tsai Administration. The outcome of the 2024 LY elections means that Taiwan is likely to see divided government over the next four years: with the DPP controlling the executive branch, and a coalition of opposition parties possibly controlling the legislature. The DPP could still establish an effective majority in the LY if it is able to forge a close alliance with the TPP; while conversely, a tight KMT-TPP alliance would be able to block many of the new administration’s priorities in the legislature.

Once the new LY is seated in early February, a key indicator to watch will be the outcome of the race for President of the LY, or legislative speaker. With no party having an absolute majority, the speaker is likely to come from either the KMT or DPP. Any successful candidate will likely need to rely on TPP votes to secure a speakership bid in the first round of voting. [Should no candidate secure a majority, a subsequent round of voting will occur, and the candidate obtaining the highest number of votes will assume the speakership](#). The DPP is likely to put forward You Si-kun (游錫堃), who served as the previous speaker in the LY and was [re-elected in 2024 via the party list](#). Meanwhile, the KMT has already nominated as its candidate Han Kuo-yu (韓國瑜), the former mayor of Kaohsiung and the party’s presidential nominee in 2020. Han had previously announced that he would [support a TPP candidate as the deputy speaker](#) in the speakership elections, but as of the time of publication, KMT legislator Johnny Chiang had been put forth as the [candidate for the deputy role](#). Whomever emerges as the winner, the TPP’s votes in



the contest for speaker will provide a key indicator of the likely trajectory of the party alliances in the months to come.

**The main point:** The 2024 legislative elections saw significant losses for the DPP, and attendant gains for the KMT. No single party now commands a majority, and the smaller TPP party could be poised to play a crucial kingmaker role.

---

[1] [Article 4 of Additional Articles added to the ROC Constitution](#): “Beginning with the Seventh Legislative Yuan, the Legislative Yuan shall have 113 members, who shall serve a term of four years, which is renewable after re-election. The election of members of the Legislative Yuan shall be completed within three months prior to the expiration of each term, in accordance with the following provisions, the restrictions in Article 64 and Article 65 of the Constitution notwithstanding: 1. Seventy-three members shall be elected from the Special Municipalities, counties, and cities in the free area. At least one member shall be elected from each county and city. 2. Three members each shall be elected from among the lowland and highland aborigines in the free area. 3. A total of thirty-four members shall be elected from the nationwide constituency and among citizens residing abroad.”

[2] [A total of 34 of the 113 seats in the Legislative Yuan are voted in by party-list proportional representation](#). A party’s vote share must be higher than 5 percent nationally to win any seats. For every roughly 3 percent of the overall legislative vote a party gets, one seat is allocated to them in the Legislative Yuan. Therefore, based upon the vote share of the 2024 Legislative Yuan party vote, both the KMT and DPP were each allocated 13 seats and the TPP was allocated 8 seats.

[3] Taiwan’s indigenous population is divided into [two classifications](#) by the government: the “highland” and the “lowland” indigenous groups. The distinction between the two groups comes from the Japanese colonial era, when the seven original tribes living in Taiwan were put into two groups.

[4] The New Party continues a marginal existence as a fringe party, operating primarily as a PRC united front proxy. See: John Dotson, *Chinese Information Operations against Taiwan: The “Abandoned Chess Piece” and “America Skepticism Theory”*, Global Taiwan Institute (August 2023), pp. 6, 14-15. [https://globaltaiwan.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/OR\\_ASTAW-0807FINAL.pdf](https://globaltaiwan.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/OR_ASTAW-0807FINAL.pdf).

[5] The TSP’s Chen Po-wei (陳柏惟) was actually gone prior to the January 2024 election. He had won [Taichung City’s Number](#)

[2 Constituency in the 2020 Legislative Yuan election](#). He was [successfully recalled in 2021](#) (with 77,899 votes for and 73,433 votes against, with a turnout of 51.72 percent). Lin Ching-yi (林靜儀) of the DPP then [won the seat with 51.8 percent of votes](#) in a 2022 by-election. In the 2024 Legislative Election, Yen Kuan-heng (顏寬恆) of the KMT [won the seat with 53.19 percent of the vote](#).

\*\*\*

## What Does Nauru’s Switch to Beijing Mean for William Lai’s Taiwan?

By: Thomas Shattuck

*Thomas Shattuck is the Global Order program manager at the University of Pennsylvania’s Perry World House, a member of Foreign Policy for America’s NextGen Foreign Policy Initiative and the Pacific Forum’s Young Leaders Program, as well as a non-resident fellow at GTI.*

On January 13, the people of Taiwan [elected](#) William Lai Ching-te (賴清德) of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨) to serve as their next president. Two days later—the first workday after Taiwan’s election—the Pacific Island nation of Nauru, home to just over 10,000 people, announced that it would sever formal diplomatic ties with Taipei in favor of Beijing. This move reduces the number of [Taiwan’s formal diplomatic allies](#) down to a dozen countries (including the Holy See).

Amid a flurry of thank you messages to official and unofficial partners regarding the success of the election, Foreign Minister Joseph Wu (吳釗燮) [announced on X/Twitter](#) around midday on January 15: “With deep regret we announce the termination of diplomatic relations with Nauru. This timing is not only China’s retaliation against our democratic elections but also a direct challenge to the international order. Taiwan stands unbowed and will continue as a force for good.”

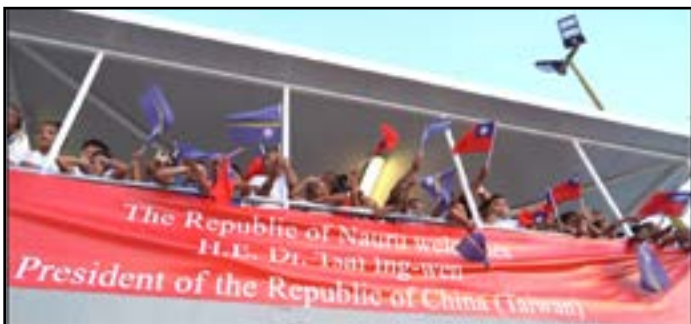
### ***Between Taipei and Beijing***

This is not the first time that Nauru has [switched diplomatic relations](#) between Taiwan (as the Republic of China, ROC) and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). In fact, Nauru’s government recognized Taipei from 1980 to 2002, switched to the PRC from 2002 to 2005, and then returned to Taipei from 2005 to 2024. Given this history, Nauru could potentially shift back to Taiwan’s camp in the future if politics in the country change—or if whatever that Nauru’s government is expecting from China does not pan out.

And what exactly did Nauru ask Taipei for as the price for continued diplomatic relations? According to media reports, the answer is fairly straightforward: [USD \\$83 million](#) to help keep an [asylum detention center](#) afloat after Australia declined to provide its usual funding. There is an odd irony about this being the impetus for the switch, but President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) has been true to her word that she would not participate in “[checkbook diplomacy](#),” the practice of meeting the financial demands of Taiwan’s remaining allies in an effort to maintain their recognition.

Given the ominous timing, it is almost certain that this move was pre-planned by Beijing well in advance. Had Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) presidential candidate Hou You-yi (侯友宜) won the election, it is unlikely that Nauru would have made this change. After all, there was a so-called “[diplomatic truce](#)” in place between Taiwan and China under the administration of President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), during which Beijing refrained from actively poaching Taiwan’s remaining allies.

Beijing likely kept this announcement in its back pocket until the right time as a demonstration of further punishment against the DPP, which has now won three consecutive presidential elections—something that had never occurred in Taiwan since its process of democratization began in the early 1990s. The message from Beijing is clear: expect more of this during the tenure of President Lai.



*Image: Relations in happier times: local citizens attend a welcome ceremony for President Tsai Ing-wen during an official visit to Nauru in March 2019. (Image source: [ROC Presidential Office](#))*

### **Taipei’s Remaining Official Friends**

What can we expect in the coming months before Lai’s inauguration, as well as in the next four years that he holds office? In all likelihood, the PRC will treat the Lai Administration much as it did the Tsai Administration. After Tsai was elected in January 2016, the diplomatic truce was broken. Under her government (including the post-election transition period), ten countries [switched their recognition](#) from Taipei to Beijing: Nauru, Hondu-

ras, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Panama, São Tomé and Príncipe, Nicaragua, and Burkina Faso.

At one point, following the defection of Panama, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic in 2017-18, the United States opted to get involved: [recalling all three of its ambassadors](#) and passing the [Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative Act](#) (TAIPEI Act) to dissuade additional countries from following suit, as well as to encourage other countries to enhance their official and unofficial ties with Taipei. As Nauru’s switch makes clear, the law apparently has not achieved its desired goals.

Unless the Biden Administration decides to make an example of Nauru—as the Trump Administration attempted with Panama, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, and [even the Solomon Islands](#)—we can expect Beijing to press the remaining 12 countries to switch from Taipei before Lai’s inauguration. Notably, many of the remaining countries—Belize, Eswatini, Guatemala, Haiti, the Holy See, Marshall Islands, Palau, Paraguay, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Tuvalu—have similar needs to the countries that have switched throughout Tsai’s presidency.

Just as it has many times before, it is likely that Beijing will seek to entice Taiwan’s allies with promises of economic or political support in an effort to get them to switch allegiances before Lai’s May inauguration. The Vatican could prove to be a primary target of these efforts. Beijing views the Holy See’s recognition as being of particular importance, as having the Vatican’s stamp of approval would provide a level of increased international legitimacy. The Vatican has [come under fire](#) for attempting to get closer to the PRC, particularly in the wake of reports about Beijing’s ongoing repression of both Uyghurs in Xinjiang and Catholics and other Christians across the country. Could Beijing attempt to broker some sort of deal to get the Holy See to make the change? It is very likely that the PRC will be motivated to do so, but the Vatican may be reluctant to accept a deal. The question remains whether Pope Francis is willing to take such a reputational hit, especially considering the church’s freedom to operate in Taiwan: for example, Lai’s vice presidential predecessor and the current premier, Chen Chien-jen (陳建仁), is a Roman Catholic who has been [knighted into the Order of the Holy Sepulchre](#).

This author estimates that Beijing will successfully poach at least four countries between now and the end of Lai’s first term, with the Holy See, Guatemala, Haiti, and Belize being likely candidates based on Beijing’s strategic and symbolic preferences.

This is true regarding the Holy See for the reasons outlined above, while Guatemala and Belize would complete a sweep of Central America; and Haiti is also vulnerable for a switch, since its delicate financial and political situation provides Beijing with potential leverage.

The Marshall Islands and Palau would represent a sweep of the Pacific Islands, but Washington's renewed interest in these countries may be enough to keep a change at bay. Given the stir that such a switch has caused in the Solomon Islands, these countries may decide not to take that path. Since the Solomon Islands made the switch, [Malaita province](#) has pushed for independence as a direct result of the decision to dump Taipei, which resulted in [mass anti-China protests](#) in 2021.

### **What about Taiwan's Unofficial Friends?**

Between now and Lai's inauguration in May, the other battle that Beijing will fight is pressuring countries and governments against sending unofficial delegations to the inauguration. Despite their lack of official ties with Taipei, many governments have sent symbolic delegations to attend past inaugurations to show some level of support for the incoming president. This has generally included sitting lawmakers, retired heads of state, and former high-level bureaucrats. Many of the heads of state and government from Taipei's official allies are also likely to be in attendance. As noted in [Politico's ChinaWatcher newsletter](#), "When Tsai won her first term in 2016, then-former prime ministers from the Netherlands and Slovakia, Dries van Agt and Ivetta Radičová, attended." We should expect more of the same for Lai's inauguration, as Tsai's 2020 inauguration was a small ceremony given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. After all, once out of office, these officials are private citizens who can make their own decisions about whether they want to attend or not.

We can also expect a number of US lawmakers to attend, as is generally customary. The Biden Administration will likely [send a similar delegation](#) to the one that visited Taipei in the aftermath of the elections to meet with Lai, as well as representatives of the KMT and the Taiwan People's Party (TPP, 民眾黨). Such an unofficial delegation would be disappointing given the importance that the administration has placed on Taiwan's security. Sending someone like US Trade Representative Katherine Tai would send a better signal about the future of the US-Taiwan economic relationship, particularly as officials in both Taipei and Washington have been pushing for a [free trade agreement](#) (FTA) between the two for years now. However, Tai's attendance is very unlikely, as the Biden Administration would likely prefer to avoid aggravating China during a supposedly less frothy period

of relations.

Eyes will be on who attends from countries in Europe, as well as the broader Indo-Pacific region. Will Japan, South Korea, Australia, and the Philippines send a cabinet official? What about Taiwan's new friends in Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Czechia? The representatives they send—if they send anyone—will send a message about how these countries view their bilateral relationships over the next four years. Chinese diplomats will be working overtime to ensure that no high-level, sitting officials (and even former officials) attend the inauguration. Many stern warnings and statements will be made the closer we get to May.

With the way that cross-Strait relations are trending, and in light of Beijing's responses to other high-level visits by US officials like former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, it would not be unrealistic to expect that Beijing might sanction individuals who attend Lai's inauguration.

With Taiwan welcoming a new president from a party that Beijing deeply distrusts, Chinese government officials across the world will likely work to further limit Taiwan's international space over the next four years. In the short term, these efforts will center around enticing Taipei's remaining allies to switch recognition and pressuring officials into skipping the inauguration. How the international community and Taiwan's important unofficial partners respond will determine the success of Beijing's efforts.

**The main point:** With Lai Ching-te of the Democratic Progressive Party winning the 2024 presidential election, Beijing will work to poach Taipei's 12 remaining formal diplomatic allies. It will also likely exert renewed pressure on governments around the world to further isolate Taiwan, including working to reduce attendance at Lai's inauguration in May 2024.

\*\*\*

## **The Debate over "De-Sinicizing" School Curricula in Taiwan: Partisan Politics or a Reclamation of Heritage?**

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.*

During a press conference held on December 4 in Taipei—[titled](#) "Press Conference on the Overall Review of the Educa-

tion Policy of the Tsai Ing-wen Government: De-Sinicizing History Education” (蔡英文政府教育政策總體檢記者會：去中國化的歷史教育)—Taipei First Girls’ High School (臺北市立第一女子高級中學) Teacher Alice Ou (區桂芝) [criticized](#) education guidelines that had been passed in 2019 as being “shameless,” and “a crime deserving more than 10,000 deaths.” In a move that was deemed by the “History Education New Three-Self Movement Association” (歷史教育新三自運動協會) as “de-sinicizing” Taiwanese education, Taiwan’s Ministry of Education (MOE, 教育部) *108 Curriculum* (108課綱) suggested only [15 classical Chinese texts](#) for the curriculum—a 50 percent reduction from the originally suggested [30 classical texts](#). [According to Ou](#), the inclusion of classical Chinese text is not only important for language proficiency, but also for teaching morals and philosophy. The press conference ended with a series of demands, including abolishing the [“Taiwan independence-style” 108 Curriculum](#).

Reactions to this press conference were mixed. [According to an internal poll of National Taiwan University \(NTU, 國立臺灣大學\) students](#), 38 percent of the respondents agreed with Ou, 23 percent disagreed, and the rest were neutral. In response, a 2019 curriculum review committee member [pointed out](#) that the *108 Curriculum* simply provided guidelines for teachers. Additionally, the MOE [stated](#) that classical Chinese is not being abolished from Taiwanese school curricula, as it still accounts for 35-45 percent of high school literature textbooks. Presidential candidates also weighed in on the topic, with Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) presidential candidate Hou You-yi (侯友宜) [stating](#) that he would chair a national affairs conference to review the curriculum guidelines if elected; and Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨) presidential candidate William Lai (賴清德) [emphasizing](#) the government’s position that the guidelines were simply a point of reference. Meanwhile, Taiwan People’s Party (TPP, 民眾黨) presidential candidate Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) [argued](#) that that China and Taiwan have “the same language, ethnicity, history, religion and culture,” but “different political models and lifestyles.” He further stated that, “We do not have to abandon the whole culture just because we are in competition with China.” A (non-Taiwanese) writer for the Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post*, almost certainly in line with the Chinese government’s position, [opined](#) that “There is no need to politicise something inherently good just because you are anti-communist.”

Debates regarding the proper place of Chinese heritage-related historical and literary content in Taiwan’s schools, in relation to Taiwan’s unique culture, history, and identity, have long been

intertwined with Taiwanese politics. The issues unveiled at the December press conference are but the latest example of political controversies over school curricula content that reach back more than 20 years, and connect directly with broader debates surrounding Taiwanese identity.



*Image: Members of the “History Education New Three-Self Movement Association” hold a press conference in Taipei to protest alleged “de-sinicization” (去中國化) in the government’s education guidelines (December 4, 2023). (Image source: [China News Service](#))*

### **Previous Textbook Controversies**

Beyond the Taiwan-China debate, there have been other criticisms of the Taiwanese government’s 2019 decision to reduce the prevalence of classical Chinese texts in secondary education. For instance, a [survey](#) conducted of senior high school students found that many were frustrated that, although there was a decrease of classical texts within textbooks, the General Scholastic Ability Test (GSAT, 學科能力測驗) still featured a great number of these works. As a result, many found that they had to learn the texts on their own outside of class hours, which they noted could also exacerbate the rural-urban divide. Overall, the survey noted that it was important for the MOE to apply any changes holistically—if the curriculum changes, then the exam must change as well.

Still, fixating on this moment in time risks ignoring the greater context in which these reforms were enacted. As outlined in a [previous article](#), cultural policy when the KMT first arrived in Taiwan aimed at legitimizing the party’s rule and de-“Japanizing” the Taiwanese population by uniting both newcomers and the existing Taiwanese population under a traditional Chinese identity. From the 1950s to the 1980s, history taught under the ruling KMT government [“adopted a China-centric historical view, focusing on the glories of China’s past and touching only cursorily on the history of Taiwan.”](#) It was not until 1997, under the Lee Teng-hui

(李登輝) Administration, that [Taiwanese history was taught as distinct from—although still supplemental to—Chinese history](#).

Taiwanization (and “de-sinicization”) of Taiwanese history [continued under the Chen Shui-bian \(陳水扁\) Administration](#). In 2004, Taiwanese history was taught as an individual subject for the first time, with the founding of the Republic of China (ROC) taught as a component of Chinese—not Taiwanese—history. These changes, which were the result of a DPP-mandated committee of scholars addressing curriculum reform, depicted Taiwan’s history as a concentric circle, with “[Taiwan as the core, China in the middle layer and the world on the outside](#).” Upon implementation, they experienced pushback in the form of protests and opposition from the KMT, who argued that such a move was tantamount to “[turning one’s back on one’s ancestors](#).”

The subsequent administration of Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) represented [a return to more Chinese-centric views on Taiwanese history](#), with the government suspending the academic guidelines introduced by the Chen Administration and releasing its own revised history textbooks and curriculum. In response, [students from over 150 high schools](#) demanded that the guidelines be withdrawn in 2015. Some [criticisms](#) raised were that the new guidelines depicted the KMT in a more positive light: such as portraying the 228 Incident (二二八大屠殺) as the result of a civil war between the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, 中國共產黨), and failing to mention social movements fighting for democracy under KMT rule, implying by omission that the lifting of bans on media and alternative political parties was the “[result of KMT beneficence](#).” [In late July 2015](#), after months of protests and following the suicide of student protestor Lin Kuan-hua (林冠華), protestors occupied the Ministry of Education. However, the [occupation](#)—during which Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and Ko Wen-je visited the protestors—ended prematurely due to exhaustion and a typhoon.

Recognizing these criticisms, the Tsai Administration rescinded Ma’s academic guidelines [one day after Tsai’s inauguration](#). At the same press conference, Education Minister Pan Wen-chung (潘文忠) announced that a new review committee would be formed to develop new academic guidelines in an “[open and transparent process](#).” The 40-member committee that was tasked with creating Taiwan’s *108 Curriculum* [also included](#) four students who had participated in the 2015 protests.

Despite recent assertions that the decrease of classical Chinese texts was a political choice made expressly to “de-sini-

zize” academic curricula, the recommendation initially came from the [Association of Taiwanese Literature](#) (ATL, 台灣文學學會) with the aim of [improving Taiwanese students’ reading comprehension scores](#). In 2015, Taiwan fell to [23<sup>rd</sup>](#) in the [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s \(OECD\) Programme for International Student Assessment \(PISA\)](#) rankings, which measures the effectiveness of education systems. The ATL attributed this decline to the disproportionate number of classical Chinese texts included in Taiwan’s national curriculum, as well as a heavy reliance on rote memorization. Since the implementation of the *108 Curriculum*, however, Taiwan’s academic performance seems to have improved; according to the 2022 PISA findings, [Taiwan outperformed the average, ranking fifth in reading](#). (As a side note, in 2018, before the new guidelines were introduced, Taiwan ranked [16<sup>th</sup>](#).) Seemingly, despite controversies and criticisms, the *108 Curriculum* was successful in achieving its goal of improving Taiwanese student’s reading comprehension.

### **Using Outrage for Politics**

In addition to debate generated domestically, People’s Republic of China (PRC) state actors had a hand in amplifying the outrage. The Taiwan Information Environment Research Center (IORG, 台灣資訊環境研究中心) [found that](#) the CCP released 142 articles related to discussion of the *108 Curriculum*, 84 of which mentioned the DPP. Negative criticisms in the articles included [accusations](#) that the reforms demonstrated that Taiwan’s government was “forgetting one’s ancestors” (a criticism similar to those levied in 2004 by the KMT) and “being rebellious.” A [Global Times article](#) that discussed the incident also misleadingly stated that Ou’s comments “gained wide support from student groups across the island.” The article mentioned the [same NTU student survey cited by the Central News Agency](#), but only reported that 38 percent agreed with Ou, while failing to mention the other responses.

By placing the debate within a moral framework, some have aimed to de-emphasize the political nature of the identity conflict within Taiwan. For instance, the *SCMP* writer asserted that teaching classical Chinese texts is “[inherently good](#),” while the *Global Times* [argued](#) that Ou was raising this criticism as “someone in the education system, not driven by factional struggles but purely from the perspective of educational integrity and respect for history.” However, such framings ignore the reality that the process of constructing national identity is itself political, and that education connected to identity has the power “to change the world, to change the way people see themselves, to mobilize loyalties, kindle energies, and articu-

late demands.” [1] Identity [informs voter’s political interests](#) and is a powerful means of galvanizing voters. Additionally, the political nature of Taiwanese identity is felt even more keenly when China has a vested interest in how Taiwanese people delineate their own boundaries of nationhood.

Still, whether criticism of policies is apolitical or not, it does not change the fact that all citizens of Taiwan should be allowed to take part in deciding how Taiwanese identity and history is taught and understood. As a [recent petition](#), released by the Taiwan Association of Cultural Policy Studies (TACPS, 臺灣文化政策研究學會) has pointed out, democratic governance is critical when navigating difficult policy decisions. Debate over what exactly is defined as “Chinese” or “Taiwanese” will continue to impact different areas of Taiwanese government policy. Accordingly, it will be important for the incoming Lai Administration—just as it has been for past administrations, and will be in future administrations—to find a balance between implementing reforms and honoring potentially contrasting identities through transparent and inclusive decision-making processes.

**The main point:** Accusations this past December that the Tsai Administration was “de-sinicizing” Taiwanese education were merely the latest in a long history of textbook controversies that wrestle with defining Taiwanese history and culture in relation to China. This debate shows that—despite Taiwanese people increasingly identifying as Taiwanese and not as Chinese—the question of how to position China in relation to Taiwanese identity is still an important issue for Taiwanese people and needs to be discussed through ongoing, open, and democratic processes.

[1] Rogers Brubaker, “In the name of the nation: reflections on nationalism and patriotism,” *Citizenship Studies* 8, no. 2 (2004): 116.