

Taiwan's Role in the Global Democracy Movement: Civil Society Innovation, Resilience, and Engagement



Ben Levine, Benjamin Sando,
Adrienne Wu, and John Dotson

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About the Global Taiwan Institute

GTI is a 501(c)(3) non-profit policy incubator dedicated to insightful, cutting-edge, and inclusive research on policy issues regarding Taiwan and the world. Our mission is to enhance the relationship between Taiwan and other countries, especially the United States, through policy research and programs that promote better public understanding about Taiwan and its people.

Ben Levine is a program assistant at the Global Taiwan Institute. He graduated from George Washington University with a MA in Chinese Language and Culture. Ben received his BA from Boston University majoring in international relations, with a functional concentration in international economics and a regional concentration in Asia. Previously, Ben was awarded a fellowship from the Taiwan Education and Research Program at GWU to research Taiwanese defense policy and hypothetical US responses. He also was awarded a Huayu Enrichment Scholarship in August 2022, allowing him to spend 9 months in Taipei at National Chengchi University studying Mandarin. His research focuses on Taiwan's defense policy and various social and economic issues in Taiwan.

Benjamin Sando is a research fellow at the Global Taiwan Institute, where he investigates PRC united front influence operations and hosts the *GTI Insights* podcast. He previously worked at the Doublethink Lab NGO in Taipei, Taiwan, studying PRC united front strategy for the China Index project. Sando holds an MA in Asian Studies from the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service. He completed his BA at Stanford University, where he majored in International Relations and minored in Mechanical Engineering. Sando has lived in Seoul, South Korea, as a researcher at the ROK National Assembly Research Service and the Yonsei University Institute for Sinology. Fluent in Mandarin and Korean, his writing has been published by the *Global Taiwan Brief*, Council on Foreign Relations, *East Asia Forum*, *The Diplomat*, *NK News*, and others.

Adrienne Wu is a program manager at the Global Taiwan Institute and the host and producer of *Taiwan Salon*, GTI's cultural policy and soft power podcast. She is a member of the UC Berkeley US-Taiwan Next Generation Working Group and a member of the Foreign Policy for America's Next Gen Initiative. Previously a Taiwan Delegate for Strait Talk 2023 at George Washington University, she is currently a Strait Talk facilitator-in-training. Before joining GTI, she graduated from Ritsumeikan University and Kyunghee University with a Dual Master's Degree in International Relations. She spent seven years living in Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan—including three years of teaching English in Japan and Taiwan and a year of study at Waseda University while pursuing her BA in Honors East Asian Studies from McGill University. She also worked at the Presidential Precinct to help facilitate the Mandela Washington Fellowship Program for young African leaders.

John Dotson is the director at GTI. John has performed extensive writing and research on a range of political and national security issues related to US policy in East Asia, to include Chinese propaganda and influence efforts, military-civil fusion efforts within the People's Liberation Army, and patterns in military coercion efforts directed against Taiwan. He is a proficient Mandarin linguist, who has performed extensive original research in indigenous Chinese language sources. John holds an MA in National Security Studies from the US Naval War College, and a Master of International Public Policy from Johns Hopkins-SAIS.

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Cover image: Sunflower Movement protesters gather in Ketagalan Boulevard on March 30, 2014.

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Introduction

Over the course of nearly four decades, Taiwan has experienced a transition from a one-party authoritarian state to a vibrant and pluralistic democracy. Despite this impressive success in building a more open and democratic society, Taiwan remains threatened by intense pressure directed against the island and its people by the rigidly authoritarian People's Republic of China (PRC). The PRC's ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) directs a range of coercive and subversive political warfare measures against Taiwan, which are intended to undermine the island's democratic governance and to pave the way for annexation of Taiwan under conditions of full CCP political control.¹

In the midst of this intensive pressure, individuals and organizations from across the range of Taiwan's civil society have engaged in an impressive effort to defend Taiwan's hard-earned freedoms. As a threatened front-line democratic state, Taiwan's experience offers valuable lessons for democracies worldwide grappling with the transformation of the information environment, disinformation, economic coercion, and the subversive influence of authoritarian regimes.

Aided by a generous grant from the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD), throughout 2024 the Global Taiwan Institute (GTI) engaged in research and outreach efforts intended to illuminate the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Taiwan, and how their efforts to uphold Taiwan's free society connect to and contribute to Taiwan's role in the broader global democracy movement. This report places particular focus on the efforts of Taiwan's civil society organizations in three areas: the work of civic tech organizations to com-

bat online disinformation and build international partnerships; the ways in which NGOs are pushing back against malign PRC economic influence and coercion; and the efforts of civil society actors in Taiwan to forge closer collaboration with international organizations in the fields of democracy promotion and human rights.

In the midst of this intensive pressure, individuals and organizations from across the range of Taiwan's civil society have engaged in an impressive effort to defend Taiwan's hard-earned freedoms.

¹ John Dotson, *The Chinese Communist Party's Political Warfare Directed Against Taiwan: Overview and Analysis*, Global Taiwan Institute, May 2024, https://globaltaiwan.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/OR_CCP-Political-Warfare.pdf.

Section 1: Taiwan's Civic Tech Movement: Strengthening Democracy, Combating Disinformation, and Advancing Global Collaboration

By: Ben Levine

Taiwan stands alongside Ukraine as one of the democratic states most threatened by directed authoritarian information operations. Amid this threat environment, Taiwan's civic tech community has become a global leader in leveraging technology to reinforce democratic governance, combat disinformation, and promote international collaboration. Platforms like vTaiwan, CoFacts, and Auntie Meiyu have all demonstrated how civic technology can create more inclusive, transparent, and participatory democratic processes.

GTI has conducted past research and outreach with Taiwan's civic tech community, such as our 2023 collaboration with the Taiwan Information Environment Research Center (IORG, 台灣資訊環境研究中心) to research and illuminate the "America Skepticism Theory" ("疑美論") propaganda narrative within Taiwan's media and online discourse.² GTI continued outreach with civic tech organizations in 2024, to include hosting the public seminar *Innovating Citizen Engagement: Taiwan's Leadership in Civic Technology*. This discussion, involving Ipa Chiu (co-founder of the civic tech community g0v.tw), Carol Hsu (leading developer of the LINE fact checking bot "Auntie Meiyu" [美玉姨]), June Lin (senior program manager for Asia-Pacific programs at National Democratic Institute) and Richard Haddock (assistant director at the Sigur Center for Asian Studies at the George Washington University), highlighted the importance of collaboration, youth engagement, disinformation

2 Chihhao Yu, *US Skepticism Narratives and Where They Come From*, Taiwan Information Environment Research Center (IORG), August 2023, https://iorg.tw/_en/a/us-skepticism-238; and John Dotson, *Chinese Information Operations against Taiwan: The "Abandoned Chess Piece" and "America Skepticism Theory"*, Global Taiwan Institute, August 2023, https://globaltaiwan.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/OR_ASTAW0807FINAL.pdf; and "America Skepticism Theory": *Anti-American Propaganda and Its Impacts in Taiwan's Information Environment*, Global Taiwan Institute public seminar, August 9, 2023, <https://globaltaiwan.org/events/august-9-america-skepticism-theory/>.



Image: Speakers at GTI's September 2024 seminar on issues involving the civic tech movement in Taiwan (September 17, 2024).³

defense, and the export of Taiwan's civic tech tools to other democracies contending with authoritarian pressure.⁴

Collaboration as a Pillar of Democratic Resilience

Collaboration is a key tenet of Taiwan's civil tech community. Collaboration strengthens democratic resilience by allowing members of the public to weigh in and offer their opinions on issues that directly affect them. For the Taiwanese public, faced by the threats of disinformation and authoritarian influence, collaboration allows ordinary citizens to engage in discussions on how to overcome and persevere through these challenges.

Platforms like vTaiwan, which is a "decentralized open consultation process that combines online and offline interactions, bringing together Taiwan's citizens and government to deliberate on national issues," epitomizes this collaborative approach.⁵ As a digital consultation

3 Image source: Taken by GTI staff.

4 Global Taiwan Institute, "Innovating Citizen Engagement: Taiwan's Leadership in Civic Technology," *Global Taiwan Institute*, September 17, 2024, <https://globaltaiwan.org/events/innovating-citizen-engagement-taiwans-leadership-in-civic-technology/>.

5 vTaiwan, "vTaiwan," *vTaiwan*, accessed December 14,

platform, vTaiwan allows citizens, government officials, and stakeholders to discuss complex issues that directly impact their day-to-day lives. It has been instrumental in shaping key national policies by facilitating non-partisan discourse and ensuring that diverse perspectives are heard. This participatory model illustrates how civic tech can bridge gaps between government and citizens, fostering trust and transparency.

However, since only a small percentage of Taiwan's population engages on the vTaiwan platform, more work is needed to broaden its appeal among the general population.⁶ The challenge of ensuring broad public engagement is not unique to Taiwan's civic tech community—rather, it is one faced by civil tech communities globally. Initiatives to expand the percentage of people who participate in civic tech projects could include engaging with underrepresented groups, older generations, and marginalized communities. More engagement with these communities would allow for a better understanding of not only how problems affect these communities, but also would better inform solutions on critical issues and would result in a more representative sample of citizens.

Another critical aspect of collaboration is sustained institutional support. Volunteer-driven efforts like g0v—a “decentralized civic tech community with information transparency, open results and open cooperation as its core values”—have played a crucial role in promoting transparency and citizen participation.⁷ However, as Richard Haddock

2024, <https://info.vtaiwan.tw/>

6 Global Taiwan Institute, “Innovating Citizen Engagement: Taiwan’s Leadership in Civic Technology,” *Global Taiwan Institute*, September 17, 2024, <https://globaltaiwan.org/events/innovating-citizen-engagement-taiwans-leadership-in-civic-technology/>

7 g0v, “g0v.tw,” g0v, accessed December 12, 2024, <https://g0v.tw/intl/en/>

pointed out in GTI’s September 2024 seminar, volunteer-driven models are difficult to sustain at scale.⁸ Institutional support from the government or key stakeholders is essential to ensure that platforms like vTaiwan have the financial and logistical capacity to achieve long-term impact.

Combating Disinformation in the Digital Era

Disinformation is a global challenge; however, Taiwan has developed innovative and community-driven strategies to address it. Facing campaigns fueled by bots and false information spread via avenues such as the popular messaging application Line, Taiwan’s civic tech community has adopted strategies centered on community engagement, hybrid methods of fact-checking, and technological innovation.

One of the most effective tools in this fight against disinformation is CoFacts, which is an “open-source, citizen-driven, collaborative fact-checking platform in Taiwan that aims to combat disinformation and fake news.”⁹ This allows for a crowdsourced approach to exposing disinformation, with users acting as the first line of defense. By empowering ordinary citizens to flag and verify false claims, the platform fosters a sense of shared responsibility in protecting the integrity of public discourse.¹⁰ This

g0v.tw/intl/en/

8 Global Taiwan Institute, “Innovating Citizen Engagement: Taiwan’s Leadership in Civic Technology,” *Global Taiwan Institute*, September 17, 2024, <https://globaltaiwan.org/events/innovating-citizen-engagement-taiwans-leadership-in-civic-technology/>.

9 Rights CoLab, “Cofacts,” Rights CoLab, accessed December 10, 2024, https://rightscolab.org/case_study/co-facts/

10 Billion Lee, “The Bot Fighting Disinformation: The Story of Cofacts,” *Taiwan Insight*, October 12, 2022, <https://taiwaninsight.org/2022/10/12/the-bot-fighting-disinforma->

Institutional support from the government or key stakeholders is essential to ensure that platforms like vTaiwan have the financial and logistical capacity to achieve long-term impact.

participatory model highlights how everyday citizens can play a role in defending democracy against disinformation and authoritarian pressure.

Older citizens are particularly vulnerable to disinformation spread through platforms such as Line, which is especially popular in Taiwan. To address this, the “Auntie Meiyu” (美玉姨) app provides targeted support by identifying “discerning fake news and rumors that are forever prevalent within [Line].”¹¹ This innovative initiative delivers fact-checking straight to users, and allows for real-time fact checking in both group chats and direct messaging. Auntie Meiyu achieves this by maintaining a large database of known false information or disinformation, and checking a message that a user receives against information in the database. The current database includes Gogolook’s own phone number database, the Criminal Investigation Bureau’s national database, the website “Have I Been Pwned?” and the fact-checking web platform “MyGoPen.”¹²

Global Engagement and Knowledge Sharing

Taiwan’s unique approach to disinformation combines a diverse set of stakeholders with innovative technology. Civil society, journalists, government, and tech platforms collaborate to monitor and respond to false information. This agile, cross-sectoral strategy is a model that is effective at countering disinformation. Taiwan’s civic tech movement extends beyond its borders, as the country seeks to export its innovations to the world. Platforms like vTaiwan and CoFacts serve as models that can be adopted or adapted by other countries.

tion-the-story-of-cofacts/

11 Carol Hsu, “Auntie Meiyu,” *Auntie Meiyu*, accessed December 12, 2024, <https://www.checkcheck.me/en/>.

12 Ibid.

Taiwanese civic tech leaders like June Lin have emphasized the importance of sharing Taiwan’s lessons with other democracies.¹³ Carol Hsu, the programmer who created Auntie Meiyu, has emphasized the value of Taiwan’s hybrid model—which merges crowdsourced fact-checking with AI verification—as a potential model for other democracies to adopt.¹⁴

As new technologies like deepfakes and generative AI become more sophisticated, Taiwan is meeting the moment by using AI to counter disinformation.

Countries like South Korea and Japan have explored how Taiwan’s participatory democracy model could be integrated into their own governance systems.¹⁵

Beyond tools and platforms that have worked to effectively counter disinformation domestically, Taiwan is positioning itself as a thought leader in the export of these strategies on the global stage. By engag-

ing in forums with like-minded countries, Taiwan can give best practices on how to counter authoritarian influence.¹⁶ This global engagement also reflects Taiwan’s broader strategy to strengthen democratic resilience on an international scale: as authoritarian regimes increasingly use technology as a tool of influence and control, Taiwan’s proactive sharing of its digital democracy model can serve as a counterweight.

Adapting to Technological Advances

As artificial intelligence (AI) continues to mature as a technology, Taiwan’s civic tech community is working to harness the benefits of AI while navigating the risks. While AI can help support public

13 Ibid.

14 Global Taiwan Institute, “Innovating Citizen Engagement: Taiwan’s Leadership in Civic Technology,” Global Taiwan Institute, September 17, 2024, <https://globaltaiwan.org/events/innovating-citizen-engagement-taiwans-leadership-in-civic-technology/>

15 Ibid.

16 “AI Challenges and Government Governance Responses: Taiwan - Korea Dialogue,” *Civil Service Development Institute*, January 16, 2025, <https://www.hrd.gov.tw/en/48108/48115/48853/56741>

participation and decision-making in the civic tech process, it also poses risks related to disinformation, algorithmic bias, and surveillance. Taiwan's civic tech leaders are acutely aware of these challenges and have developed solutions to mitigate them.¹⁷

As new technologies like deepfakes and generative AI become more sophisticated, Taiwan is meeting the moment by using AI to counter disinformation. The island's ability to adapt its tools and strategies underscores the importance of agile systems that can respond to emerging threats. This proactive approach offers a valuable lesson for other democracies: disinformation threats will continue to evolve as technology improves, and democratic systems must be nimble enough to evolve alongside them.

17 Global Taiwan Institute, "Innovating Citizen Engagement: Taiwan's Leadership in Civic Technology," *Global Taiwan Institute*, September 17, 2024, <https://globaltaiwan.org/events/innovating-citizen-engagement-taiwans-leadership-in-civic-technology/>

Section 2: Civil Society Resilience against the People's Republic of China's Economic Influence

By: Benjamin Sando

The relatively short physical distance and linguistic and cultural connections between Taiwan and China have fostered a host of cross-Strait business relationships since restrictions on investment and trade were eased in the 1990s. These relationships have been displayed in a range of economic activity—particularly in the form of Taiwanese investors setting up manufacturing facilities in China, as with the Foxconn company whose operations straddle both the Taiwanese and the People's Republic of China (PRC) economies.¹⁸

Cross-Strait economic ties have also cultivated channels through which business people acting on behalf of the PRC state can use financial muscle to achieve outcomes favorable to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), a phenomenon called “economic influence.”¹⁹ For example, the online shopping giant Shopee Taiwan—partly owned by the PRC firm Tencent Holdings Ltd.—has facilitated illegal cash transfers between PRC and Taiwanese entities. Some allege that these cash transfers are used for unlawful foreign political donations to Taiwanese politicians.²⁰ Meanwhile, the PRC government regularly employs boycotts and other non-tariff barriers to restrict imports of Taiwanese

When it comes to the PRC's use of boycotts and other coercive means to restrict Taiwanese imports, Taipei has struggled to implement countermeasures due to Taiwan's small size *vis-à-vis* the PRC economy.

products in response to policies it opposes—another form of economic influence.²¹

The Taiwanese government has introduced regulations to limit PRC firms' ownership of Taiwan-based entities in critical sectors. In most industries, PRC firms are barred from owning more than 30 percent of shares of Taiwanese firms.²² However, the Taiwanese government has often struggled to enforce this regulation, as some PRC firms employ shell companies or third parties to obtain shares greater than 30 percent in Taiwanese firms, thereby giving them a *de facto* controlling stake.²³ When it comes to the PRC's use of boycotts and other coercive means to restrict Taiwanese imports, Taipei has struggled to implement countermeasures due to Taiwan's small size *vis-à-vis* the PRC economy.²⁴

18 Michael Nakhiengchanh, “U.S. Defense Officials Discuss Taiwan Strait Stability,” *Taiwan News*, April 10, 2024, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/news/5908644>.

19 Audrye Wong, “The Extent and Limits of China's Economic Influence,” *The Diplomat*, March 12, 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/03/the-extent-and-limits-of-chinas-economic-influence/>.

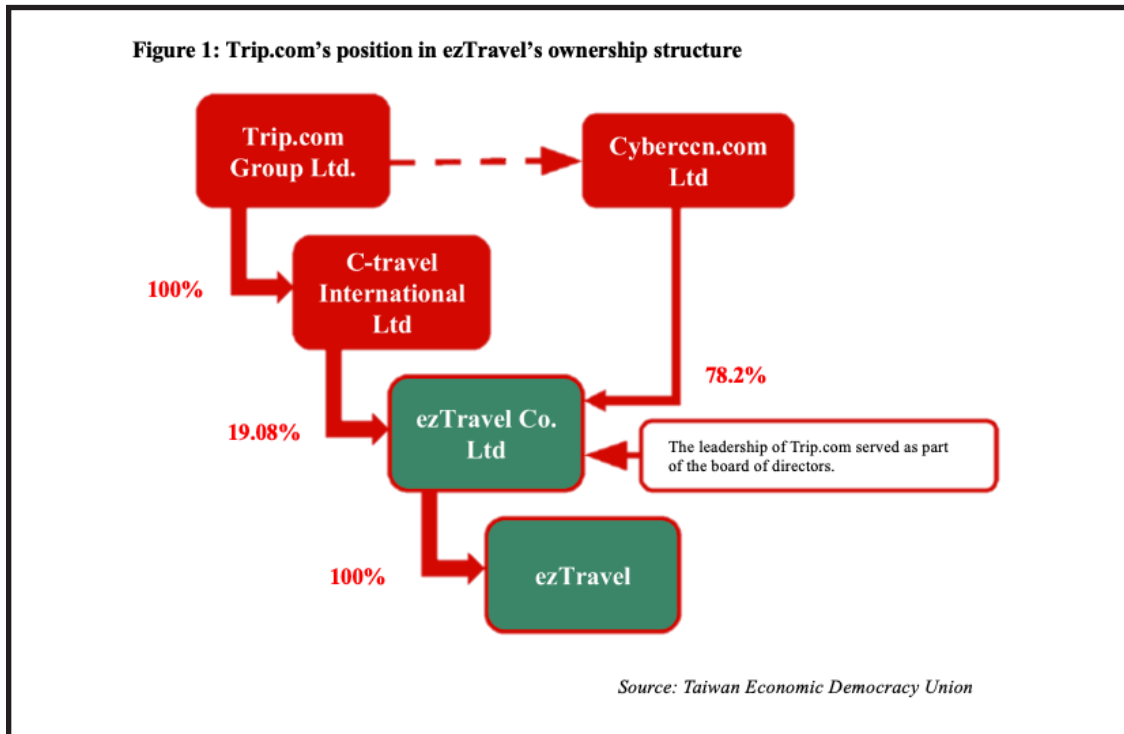
20 Chen Yu-fu and Jason Pan, “Union says an investigation of Shopee is necessary,” *Taipei Times*, July 14, 2023, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2023/>.

21 Zoë Weaver-Lee, “Combating Beijing's Multifaceted Economic Coercion Strategy against Taiwan,” *Global Taiwan Brief*, February 8, 2023, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2023/02/combating-beijings-multifaceted-economic-coercion-strategy-against-taiwan/>; and Emily Feng, “The Latest Thorn in Taiwan-China Tensions: Pineapples,” *NPR*, March 7, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2024/03/07/1225536623/taiwan-china-tension-pineapple>.

22 “PRC Investment in Taiwan: Things You Need to Know,” Winkler Partners, accessed December 18, 2024, <https://winklerpartners.com/prc-investment-in-taiwan-things-you-need-to-know/>.

23 Jukka Aukia, “China's Hybrid Influence in Taiwan,” *Hybrid CoE Research Report*, no. 9 (April 2023): European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/20230406-Hybrid-CoE-Research-Report-9-Chinas-hybrid-influence-in-Taiwan-WEB.pdf>.

24 Shang-su Wu, “China's Pineapple Ban Exposes Taiwan's Vulnerability,” *East Asia Forum*, April 24, 2021, <https://eastasiaforum.org/2021/04/24/chinas-pineapple-ban-exposes-taiwans-vulnerability/>.



Case Study #1: The Company ezTravel and Hidden Ownership Relationships

In the face of limited government resources to investigate and enforce such investment activities, a handful of civil society organizations have mobilized to monitor and reinforce Taiwan government regulations limiting PRC ownership of Taiwanese firms. The Taiwan Economic Democracy Union (TEDU, 台灣經濟民主聯合) has pioneered advocacy efforts related to countering the economic influence of the PRC in Taiwan. For example, TEDU recently used open source business data to investigate the ultimate beneficial ownership of Taiwan-based tourism company ezTravel.²⁵ The investigation was triggered by an incident involving a PRC national who stayed at a luxury hotel in Paris owned by Taiwan's Evergreen Hotels. The PRC national, an internet influencer, live streamed his protest that the Taiwan-owned hotel was not displaying a flag of the People's Republic of China.

25 Min-yen Chiang, "Chinese Economic Coercion and Taiwan's Grassroots Counteraction," lecture presented at the Global Taiwan Institute, Washington, DC, October 23, 2024, <https://globaltaiwan.org/events/dealing-with-prc-economic-influence/>.

Figure: Trip.com's position in ezTravel's ownership structure. Figure source: Taiwan Economic Democracy Union²⁶

Reports then surfaced that ezTravel had subsequently de-listed the Paris hotel from their booking platforms.

Researchers at TEDU analyzed business records to unearth the fact that ezTravel's parent company, ezTravel Co. Ltd, was wholly owned by affiliates of Trip.com, a Singapore-based travel company (see Figure 1). According to TEDU, all nine members of Trip.com's board of directors are Chinese nationals. Furthermore, two of the nine are members of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a CCP body under the direction of the CCP's United Front Work Department (UFWD, 統一戰線工作部).²⁷ Given the relationship of the ultimate beneficial owner of ezTravel to the PRC government, TEDU has argued that this case is a

26 Figure source: Min-yen Chiang, "Chinese Economic Coercion and Taiwan's Grassroots Counteraction," lecture presented at the Global Taiwan Institute, Washington, DC, October 23, 2024, <https://globaltaiwan.org/events/dealing-with-prc-economic-influence/>.

27 Jake Chung, "Civic groups call for government probe into Chinese investment in ezTravel," *Taipei Times*, November 6, 2020, <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/front/archives/2020/11/06/2003746460>.

likely example of PRC circumvention of Taiwanese investment regulations. TEDU has organized multiple press conferences to raise awareness about ez-Travel, prompting public statements in response by the government of Taiwan.²⁸

Case Study #2: Apple Daily Taiwan and Investments by PRC-Backed Individuals

Besides the capacity of PRC actors to influence decision-making in Taiwan-based firms, civil society actors like TEDU are also concerned about data privacy concerns stemming from Taiwan firms' business relationships with the PRC. This issue rose to the mainstream of public discourse when the PRC government invoked the 2020 Hong Kong national security law (香港國家安全法) to target a Hong Kong-based newspaper, the *Apple Daily* (蘋果日報). The CCP prosecuted *Apple Daily* and its owner, Jimmy Lai (黎智英), for its editorial stance in favor of the Hong Kong pro-democracy movement.²⁹

This prosecution embroiled the Taiwanese subsidiary of *Apple Daily*, which had operated in Taiwan for 20 years. In 2021, a Hong Kong court ordered *Apple Daily Taiwan* to surrender its assets to a Singaporean buyer, Joseph Phua (潘杰賢).³⁰ The assets included 20 years of *Apple Daily Taiwan*'s investigative data,

28 Ibid.

29 Jessie Pang and James Pomfret, "Jimmy Lai: What to know about national security trial of Hong Kong media tycoon," Reuters, November 22, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/national-security-trial-hong-kong-media-tycoon-jimmy-lai-whats-happened-so-far-2024-11-20/>.

30 Taiwan Economic Democracy Union [台灣民主經濟聯合], "Update on the status of personal data after Taiwan Apple turns off the lights (November 2023) - Action and Investigation Report of the China-Hong Kong Capital Observatory [台蘋熄燈後個人資料狀態現況更新 (2023年11月) - 經民連中港資觀測站行動暨調查報告], December 1, 2023, <https://www.edunion.org.tw/thinktankreport/%E5%8F%B0%E8%98%8B%E7%86%84%E7%87%88%E5%BE%8C%E5%80%8B%E4%BA%BA%E8%B3%87%E6%96%99%E7%8B%80%E6%85%8B%E7%8F%BE%E6%B3%81%E6%9B%B4%E6%96%B0%EF%BC%882023%E5%B9%B411%E6%9C%88%EF%BC%89-%EF%BC%8D%E7%B6%93/>.

including sensitive information regarding Taiwanese citizens and political figures. TEDU immediately raised concerns that the transfer of archived data through the sale would infringe upon article 41 of Taiwan's *Personal Data Protection Act* (個人資料保護法). TEDU convenor Lai Chung-chiang (賴中強) alleged that the Singaporean buyer had received funding from the PRC and intended to use *Apple Daily Taiwan*'s data archives for purposes beyond running a news site.³¹ Again, TEDU organized successive press conferences to raise public awareness about this case of possible PRC economic influence. In December 2021, Taiwan's Ministry of Culture responded to TEDU's concerns by issuing an injunction against the expatriation of *Apple Daily*'s archived data.³²



Image: Members of the Taiwan Economic Democracy Union (TEDU) hold a press conference to protest the sale of the Taiwan edition of the *Apple Daily* newspaper (August 25, 2022). TEDU's research helped to expose the suspected PRC connections of its Singaporean buyer, as well as the risks posed by the newspaper's archives falling into the hands of the PRC.³³

31 Shelley Shan, "Apple Daily warned on transferring personal data," *Taipei Times*, August 26, 2022, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2022/08/26/2003784194>.

32 Taiwan Economic Democracy Union, "Update on the status of personal data after Taiwan Apple turns off the lights (November 2023) - Action and Investigation Report of the China-Hong Kong Capital Observatory."

33 Image source: "蘋果日報交易失控 文化部必須介入保護個資" ("Apple Daily Deal Is Out of Control / Culture Ministry Must Intervene to Safeguard Investments"), Taiwan Economic Democracy Union, Aug. 25, 2022, <https://www.edunion.org.tw/newsrelease/%E8%98%8B%E6%9E%9C%E6%9>

In 2022, Joseph Phua completed the takeover of *Apple Daily Taiwan*. In a public event, TEDU then reported the sale to the Shilin District Prosecutors' Office in Taipei as a possible violation of the *Personal Data Protection Act*.³⁴ Though the prosecutors' office opted against a lawsuit, the Ministry of Culture nonetheless fined *Apple Daily Taiwan* for infringement of the aforementioned law.³⁵ This example illustrates the critical role played by Taiwan's civil society in pressing its government to take action to resist alleged PRC economic influence.

NGO Outreach for Resisting Economic Boycotts

Resisting the PRC's coercive boycotts against Taiwanese imports presents a more significant challenge to civil society. Though mitigation strategies for this kind of economic influence transcend Taiwan's capital-poor civil society, groups such as TEDU have advocated for international trade alliances that would offset the damage from the PRC's coercive economic campaigns. In June 2023, the German international NGO Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF) collaborated with TEDU to

7%a5%e5%a0%b1%e4%ba%a4%e6%98%93%e5%a4%b1-%e6%8e%a7-%e6%96%87%e5%8c%96%e9%83%a8%e5%bf%85%e9%a0%88%e4%bb%8b%e5%85%a5%e4%bf%9d%e8%ad%b7%e5%80%8b%e8%b3%87/.

34 Wen Yu-te and Jason Pan, "Apple Daily data transfer leads to judicial complaint," *Taipei Times*, June 14, 2022, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2022/06/14/2003779872>.

35 Taiwan Economic Democracy Union, "Update on the status of personal data after Taiwan Apple turns off the lights (November 2023) - Action and Investigation Report of the China-Hong Kong Capital Observatory."

organize an international forum titled "How Democracies Counter the PRC's Economic Coercion."³⁶ During this forum, experts from TEDU, Taiwan academia, and foreign countries shared insights gained from episodes of the PRC's economic coercion and best practices for resisting this pressure. Informed by this forum, TEDU has advocated for a "Democratic Defense Trade Agreement" between like-minded democracies.³⁷ Under such

an agreement, democracies would agree to purchase exports that have been sanctioned by the PRC government, thus eradicating the coercive power of this action. Such an agreement would formalize successful examples of trade diversion, such as when Japanese importers mobilized to buy Taiwanese pineapples that had been arbitrarily subjected to PRC coercive economic sanctions.³⁸

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36 Rebecca Kuo, "International Forum: How Democracies Counter the PRC's Economic Coercion," *Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom*, June 19, 2024, <https://www.freiheit.org/taiwan/international-forum-how-democracies-counter-prcs-economic-coercion>.

37 Min-yen Chiang, "Chinese Economic Coercion and Taiwan's Grassroots Counteraction," lecture presented at the Global Taiwan Institute, Washington, DC, October 23, 2024, <https://globaltaiwan.org/events/dealing-with-prc-economic-influence/>.

38 Kaname Sugimoto, "Taiwanese Pineapples Gain Higher Market Share in Japan After China Import Ban; Pineapple Import Share Rises from 1% in 2020 to 9% in 2023," *The Japan News*, March 21, 2024, <https://japannews.yomiuri.co.jp/business/market/20240321-175901/>.

Section 3: Increasing Taiwan's Regional Integration and Resilience through Shared Values and Action

By: Adrienne Wu

Democratic Values, Human Rights and Activism

In addition to enhancing Taiwan's resilience domestically, Taiwan's vibrant civil society and Taipei's commitment to good democratic governance can be leveraged to gain opportunities for broader international engagement, and to showcase the role that Taiwan plays in protecting and advancing democratic values and human rights. Although Taiwan's international engagement is limited through traditional channels of diplomacy, Taiwan's civic organizations are able to bolster people-to-people engagement with like-minded groups abroad. If Taiwan is viewed as a defender of shared democratic ideals and values, it will be better positioned to gather greater public support (and potentially greater resources) to ensure its continued survival.

As noted in our 2024 report, *Taiwan's Fight for Global Democracy: The Role of Civil Society*, Taiwan's decision to embrace the role of "standing on democracy's first line of defense" has positioned Taiwan in contrast to the PRC, while simultaneously giving Taiwan opportunities to participate in international fora—such as the 2021, 2023 and 2024 Summits for Democracy and the Copenhagen Democracy Summit.³⁹ Taipei was also chosen as the location for 2025 RightsCon summit, with RightsCon citing reasons for their decision such as Taiwan being a "leading democracy in the region" and "recognized globally for the freest online environment and greatest human freedom in Asia, a whole-of-society approach to human rights, and a vibrant civil society community."⁴⁰ Considering that the

39 "President Tsai Delivers 2021 National Day Address," ROC Presidential Office, October 10, 2021, <https://english.president.gov.tw/News/6175>; John Dotson, Adrienne Wu, and Will Kiern, *Taiwan's Fight for Global Democracy: The Role of Civil Society*, Global Taiwan Institute, July 2024, https://globaltaiwan.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/OR_TW-Fight-for-Democracy.pdf

40 RightsCon, "About and Contact," <https://www.rightscon.org/about-and-contact/>.



Image: President Lai Ching-te addresses the opening of the 2025 Halifax Taipei forum.⁴¹

2025 RightsCon summit garnered the participation of over 2,800 participants from 150 countries and 1,800 proposals from 125 countries, the summit was an excellent opportunity for more people to visit Taiwan and for Taiwan's civil society to gain important global connections.⁴²

Moreover, the Halifax International Security Forum, a forum that states its mission as "reinvigorat[ing] strategic cooperation among democracies" held a forum in Taipei for the first time in order to focus on Taiwan's unique security challenges.⁴³ The decision was closely related to Taiwan's civil resistance efforts, with Robert Tsao, the founder of United Microelectronics Corp and a backer of the civil defense organization Kuma Academy, credited as one of the sponsors behind the Taipei-based forum.⁴⁴ As the 2025 Halifax International

41 Image source: "President Lai attends opening of 2025 Halifax Taipei forum," February 20, 2025, Office of the President Republic of China (Taiwan), <https://english.president.gov.tw/NEWS/6911>.

42 Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Thailand, "RightsCon 2025 kicks off in Taipei," February 27, 2025, roc-taiwan.org/th_en/post/7860.html.

43 Halifax International Security Forum, "Mission," <https://halifaxtheforum.org/mission/>; Halifax International Security Forum, "HFX Announces its First-Ever Forum for Taipei," November 24, 2024 <https://halifaxtheforum.org/press/hfx-announces-its-first-ever-forum-for-taipei/>.

44 Halifax International Security Forum, "HFX Announces

Security Forum in Taipei demonstrates, there is a direct correlation between Taiwan firmly aligning itself as a fellow democratic nation and growing international interest in discussing Taiwan's security and resilience. This sentiment was also voiced by Halifax International Security Forum President Peter Van Praagh, who stated at the forum's launch that "Taiwan is a vital democracy whose continued freedom and security is important not only to the people of Taiwan but to the security of the entire world."⁴⁵

In contrast, the PRC's increasingly hostile attitude toward foreign NGOs has continued to create more opportunities for international organizations to engage with Taiwan. Following the PRC's passing of the *Law of the People's Republic of China on Administration of Activities of Overseas Non-Governmental Organizations in the Mainland of China* (中華人民共和國境外非政府組織境內活動管理法) in 2016, NGOs like Reporters without Borders, the National Democratic Institute, the International Republican Institute, Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit and the European Values Center for Security Policy have all opened offices in Taiwan.⁴⁶

As the 2025 Halifax International Security Forum in Taipei demonstrates, there is a direct correlation between Taiwan firmly aligning itself as a fellow democratic nation and growing international interest in discussing Taiwan's security and resilience.

Recent US-driven initiatives have also taken note of the value that Taiwan provides for capacity building for NGOs and civil society. Beyond continued engagement through the Global Cooperation and Training Framework—which also expanded this year to include Canada as a partner⁴⁷—the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) has signed on as a sponsor for TaiwanAID's NGO Fellowship Program, which gives NGO workers from Southeast Asia, South Asia and Northeast Asia the opportunity to come to Taiwan and learn from Taiwan's civil society.⁴⁸ Some themes that are covered in the program include community development, human rights, media and information technology and LGBTQ+ issues.

During our event on connecting Taiwan to the world through LGBTQ+ rights, Outright International's

Whitney Pfeifer discussed how the organization's Global LGBTQI+ Inclusive Democracy and Empowerment (GLIDE) Initiative—which was a collaboration between Outright International, Synergía - Initiatives for Human Rights, and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)—had partnered with the Taiwan Equality Campaign to help activists in Japan and South Korea use democratic practices and political processes to advance LGBTQ+ rights in their own countries.⁴⁹

pressemittteilung/taiwan-ist-ein-wichtiger-wertepartner-fuer-uns; European Values Center for Security Policy, "Taiwan Office," <https://europeanvalues.cz/en/taipei/>.

⁴⁷ Global Cooperation and Training Framework, "Mission," <https://gctf.tw/en/IdeaPurpose.htm>.

⁴⁸ Taiwan Aid, "2024 NGO Fellowship Program," <https://www.taiwanaid.org/en/news/50075>.

⁴⁹ Global Taiwan Institute, "Connecting Taiwan and the World Through LGBTQ+ Rights," November 6, 2024, <https://globaltaiwan.org/events/connecting-taiwan-and-the-world-through-lgbtq-rights/>.

its First-Ever Forum for Taipei?"

⁴⁵ Amaravati Today, "Halifax Security Forum Launch | Military & Security | Peter Van Praagh Presser | Taipei, Taiwan," Youtube, February 20, 2025, 3:10 to 3:23, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpSZF80VXF>.

⁴⁶ Jessica Batke, "Does China's Foreign NGO Law Present a Non-profit Opportunity for Taiwan?" *China File*, July 25, 2018, <https://www.chinafile.com/ngo/analysis/does-chinas-foreign-ngo-law-present-non-profit-opportunity-taiwan>; National Democratic Institute, "NDI Announces Plans to Open a New Office in Taiwan," October 28, 2020, <https://www.ndi.org/publications/ndi-announces-plans-open-new-office-taiwan>; International Republican Institute, "IRI to Open Office in Taiwan," October 28, 2020, <https://www.iri.org/news/iri-to-open-office-in-taiwan/>; Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, "Taiwan ist ein wichtiger Wertepartner für uns," March 21, 2023, <https://www.freiheit.org/de/>

Additionally, panel speaker Young-im Lee noted that the case of Taiwan was cited by South Korean couples who were pushing for the legalization of same-sex marriages in South Korea.⁵⁰ Therefore, Taiwan civil society's work on LGBTQ+ issues has not only helped domestic Taiwanese LGBTQ+ communities, but has played a role in integrating Taiwan regionally and becoming known internationally.

Despite this forward momentum, there are still some enduring challenges. One area where the United States has fallen short is the still unfulfilled mandate of *The Taiwan Fellowship Act*.⁵¹ Under the *Act*, the American Institute of Taiwan, with the cooperation of the Taiwanese government, was urged to establish a two-year Taiwan Fellowship Program that would place US government employees in Taiwan government offices and NGOs to learn Mandarin Chinese, and to gain first-hand experience of work and life in Taiwan. Although signed into law by then-President Joseph Biden in 2022, the Taiwan Fellowship Program has still not been established as of early 2025. This led some senators—including then-Senator, now Secretary of State Marco Rubio—to pen a letter of concern to then-Secretary of State Antony Blinken in spring 2024.⁵²

Strategic Communications and Countering Disinformation

In the face of the CCP's escalating use of information warfare, countering the CCP's global narrative on Taiwan and finding ways to counter disinformation have become increasingly important for Taiwan's re-

silience.⁵³ While these efforts are important for Taiwan's domestic population, they are also important for signaling Taiwan's intentions to the international community and asserting Taipei's goals. The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine further emphasizes how important information politics are for winning over public opinion and gaining international support. In particular, international analysts have praised Ukraine for using social media for “rallying support in the West”⁵⁴—an especially important factor considering that Ukraine was in need of outside support and arms sales from the United States and Europe.



Image: Participants in the first “Whole-of-Society Defense Resilience Committee” (September 26, 2024). The committee and its activities represent an early-stage effort to integrate the disaster relief and civil defense capabilities of NGOs with those of government agencies.⁵⁵

With clear parallels between cross-strait relations and the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, it stands to reason that Taiwan's government and civil society would consider strategic communications as an important part of building up their resilience. In the establishment

50 Ibid; Hae-rin Lee, “11 same-sex couples file lawsuit after district offices deny marriage registrations,” *The Korea Times*, October 10, 2024, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2024/10/281_383994.html.

51 U.S., Congress, Senate, *Taiwan Fellowship Act*, 116th Cong., 2nd sess., introduced in Senate 27 July 2020, s. 4327, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/4327>.

52 Ed Markey, “Markey, Rubio, Colleagues Urge Biden Administration to Finalize Agreement to Implement U.S.-Taiwan Fellowship Program,” press release, May 15, 2024, <https://www.markey.senate.gov/news/press-releases/markey-rubio-colleagues-urge-biden-administration-to-finalize-agreement-to-implement-u-s-taiwan-fellowship-program>.

53 See: John Dotson, *The Chinese Communist Party's Political Warfare Directed Against Taiwan: Overview and Analysis*, Global Taiwan Institute, May 2024, https://globaltaiwan.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/OR_CCP-Political-Warfare.pdf.

54 “War of words - how Ukraine uses strategic communication to beat Russia on the information front,” Swedish Defence Research Agency, April 21, 2023, <https://www.foi.se/en/foi/news-and-pressroom/news/2023-04-21-war-of-words---how-ukraine-uses-strategic-communication-to-beat-russia-on-the-information-front.html>

55 Image source: “President Lai Presides Over First Meeting of Whole-of-Society Defense Resilience Committee,” ROC Presidential Office, Sep. 26, 2024, <https://english.president.gov.tw/NEWS/6810>.

of Taiwan's Whole-of-Society Resilience Committee—an initiative to integrate the disaster relief and civil defense capabilities of NGOs with those of government agencies—the Committee was described by President Lai Ching-te (賴清德) as “a platform through which we can communicate and coordinate on our national resilience strategy.” The committee has included the protection of information networks as one of its five key areas of concern.⁵⁶

During GTI's event on “Multilateralizing Digital Resilience and the Role of Taiwan” in December 2024, Taiwan Digital Diplomacy Association (TDDA, 台灣數位外交協會) Founder and President Chiayo Kuo highlighted that, in her role in the Whole-of-Society Resilience Committee, she advocated for the importance of maintaining public communication during wartime.⁵⁷ As part of increasing Taiwan's preparedness, TDDA created the Cyber Defense Network

Project—a series of workshops that put participants in the roles of public affairs workers, content creators, IT technicians and overseas Taiwanese—and asked them to imagine how they would respond to a Chinese invasion of Taiwan.⁵⁸ Not only do these workshops emphasize the importance of a whole-of-society response, but they also build upon Ukraine's example of using

international communications networks to gain international support—which would hopefully include material support as well.

Once again considering Ukraine's response to the Russian invasion as a model for building Taiwan's resilience, recent months have seen Ukraine losing to Russia when it comes to disinformation.⁵⁹ This demonstrates that not only does Taiwan need to make the necessary preparations to maintain public com-

munications during an invasion, but that it also must continue to counter disinformation narratives. If Taiwan is trying to use these communication strategies to appeal to international audiences, then countering disinformation domestically is insufficient: countering disinformation globally is also essential.

After Taiwan's 2024 elections, Doublethink Lab introduced the Taiwan POWER Model, an outline of the main characteristics of Taiwan's approach to countering

foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) that is meant to help others create their own whole-of-society approaches to countering disinformation.⁶⁰ Additionally, as Adam King of the International Republican Institute stated during our event, NGOs can help connect Taiwan with other like-minded partners to share these strategies—which in turn can increase Taiwan's international engagement and tell Taiwan's story to gain international support: “If you want to advance Taiwan's digital resilience, it must become the recognized international leader in the space, but it can't do that alone.”⁶¹

If Taiwan wants to use communication strategies to appeal to international audiences, then countering disinformation domestically is insufficient: countering disinformation globally is also essential.

56 “President Lai presides over first meeting of Whole-of-Society Defense Resilience Committee,” ROC Presidential Office, September 26, 2024, <https://english.president.gov.tw/NEWS/6810>.

57 Global Taiwan Institute, “Multilateralizing Digital Resilience and the Role of Taiwan,” December 11, 2024, <https://globaltaiwan.org/events/multilateralizing-digital-resilience-and-the-role-of-taiwan/>.

58 Taiwan Digital Diplomacy Association, “Cyber Defense Network Project for Taiwan: An Exercise for The Country's Digital Resilience,” Medium, February 10, 2023, <https://medium.com/@taiwandiplomacy/cyber-defense-network-project-for-taiwan-an-exercise-for-the-countrys-digital-resilience-317be3907e41>.

59 Global Taiwan Institute, “Multilateralizing Digital Resilience and the Role of Taiwan.”

60 Ben Graham Jones, “Taiwan POWER: A Model for Foreign Information Manipulation & Interference Resilience,” Medium, August 9, 2024, <https://medium.com/doublethinklab/taiwan-power-a-model-for-resilience-to-foreign-information-manipulation-interference-70ea81f859b7>.

61 Global Taiwan Institute, “Multilateralizing Digital Resilience and the Role of Taiwan.”

Conclusions

Taiwan's civic tech community has emerged as a global leader in demonstrating how digital tools can be used to safeguard democracy. Through initiatives like vTaiwan, CoFact, Auntie Meiyu, and Gov Zero, Taiwan has shown how collaboration, community-driven fact-checking, and global knowledge-sharing can bolster democratic resilience. Taiwan's approach to disinformation—emphasizing volunteer-driven platforms, hybrid fact-checking models, and culturally specific interventions—offers a model for other democracies grappling with similar issues. As more countries face the challenges posed by AI, authoritarianism, and rapid digital transformation, Taiwan's experience serves as a powerful example of how civic technology can support democratic governance in the modern era.

The intensive economic coercion and malign economic influence directed at Taiwan by the PRC has also prompted civil society actors to develop innovative tools for analyzing these threats. Without the research and publicity efforts made by the Taiwan Economic Democracy Union and other groups, there would be far less available information and public knowledge regarding the extent of PRC economic infiltration of the island. Such efforts illustrate the vital role that grassroots research organizations can play in buttressing—and in some cases, prompting—the measures taken by government agencies.

Finally, Taiwan has also emerged as an international leader in demonstrating how a vibrant civil society—first developed amidst civil resistance to authoritarian rule, and later further tempered by the need to push back against external authoritarian pressure—can share the benefits of hard-earned experience in the fields of democratization and human rights. Amidst

a global environment of disinformation, political polarization, and technological disruption, Taiwan's contributions extend beyond its own borders. By sharing its tools, knowledge, and democratic principles with like-minded groups around the world, Taiwan's civil society has made considerable contributions to the global effort to defend democracy.

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