

Saving Tâi-gí: Taiwan's Largest Heritage Language

Carissa Cheng

Deterrence over Disruption: Taiwan's Remedies to PRC Cable-Cutting

Gahon Chia-Hung Chiang

Taiwan's Europe Imperative

Baosheng Guo

The Potential Upside of Taiwan's Exclusion from the 2025 Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Leaders Meeting

Jess Marinaccio

Lai Ching-te's Fragile Presidency and the Politics of Survival

Truong Tuan Kiet and Huynh Tam Sang

Saving Tâi-gí: Taiwan's Largest Heritage Language

By: Carissa Cheng

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Before 1945, the [most widely spoken language](#) in Taiwan was *Tâi-gí* (also known as Taiwanese [台語] or Taiwanese Hokkien). It was used across many of Taiwan's ethnic communities, especially Taiwan's ethnic majority population (sometimes referred to as the "Holo" or "Hoklo" population). However, due to [almost a century of language repression policies](#), *Tâi-gí* use has declined sharply. [Over 60 percent](#) of Taiwanese people believe *Tâi-gí* is at risk of becoming endangered, but [only 37.2 percent](#) of Taiwanese believe the Ministry of Education's (教育部) efforts are enough to save Taiwan's "[heritage languages](#)," including *Tâi-gí*. [1] Despite *Tâi-gí*'s former status as Taiwan's *de facto* national language, there is little contemporary political effort, even from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨), to incorporate it in public life. Indeed, it was not until 2019 that Taiwan launched a public [television channel](#) using primarily *Tâi-gí*, which recently saw its [budget slashed](#).

Linguist Kenneth Hale once [said](#), "Losing any [language] is like dropping a bomb on the Louvre." To understand Taiwan's *Tâi-gí* crisis, I talked with six *Tâi-gí* scholars and activists from Taiwan and the United States. Together, we discussed the history of *Tâi-gí* repression from Japanese colonization to martial law, the major challenges faced by current-day activists trying to preserve the language, and lastly new, creative policy suggestions and program ideas for revitalizing *Tâi-gí*.

Language Repression in Taiwan

Tâi-gí language repression began when [Japan acquired Taiwan in 1895](#) after winning the First Sino-Japanese War. The Japanese [believed](#) that only their language—a "modern" language—could spread "modern" ideas and instill the superiority of Japanese culture. Nevertheless, flexibility in Japan's language policies allowed a [nascent Taiwanese Language Movement](#) to emerge. The father of *Tâi-gí*, Ông Iòk-tek (王育德), taught *Tâi-gí* at Meiji University in Japan, where he also wrote articles pushing for acceptance of Taiwanese language, culture, and sovereignty.

During the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) martial law period from 1949 to 1987, language policies became stricter. When the KMT arrived in Taiwan, [most Taiwanese people did not speak Mandarin](#). They spoke Japanese and/or a heritage language like Hakka or *Tâi-gí*.

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However, to uphold the legitimacy of the “Republic of China,” the KMT required that [only Mandarin be used in public life](#), including in classrooms, government announcements, and on TV. “Mainlanders” (外省人) who came with the KMT to Taiwan touted their [Mandarin fluency](#) as superior over “native” Han Taiwanese (本省人). As a result, Holo parents stopped teaching their children *Tâi-gí* to protect them from being bullied or punished.

Lim Cheng-iu (林貞佑), a *Tâi-gí* scholar from National Cheng Kung University (國立成功大學), observed that during martial law, *Tâi-gí* preservation efforts were most visible in the United States, where overseas Taiwanese were free from the KMT’s language ban. Lim’s research revealed that since language was one of the only things Taiwanese migrants could carry with them from their homeland, it became a key way for them to “[stay rooted](#) in a new land.” Taiwanese Americans attempted several times to start [monthly *Tâi-gí* publications](#), with the latest one—[*Tâi-bûn Thong-sìn BONG Pò*](#) (a merger of the US-based *Tâi-bûn Thong-sìn* and Taiwan-based *Tâi-bûn Bong-Pò*)—still in publication today. They also congregated to hear *Tâi-gí* church sermons on Sundays. Through everyday conversation, they preserved vocabulary that was forgotten in Taiwan. Professor Shih Mu-min (石牧民) from National Taiwan Normal University (國立臺灣師範大學) also observed that their American-born children were further motivated to learn *Tâi-gí* to better understand [their unique identity](#) within the sea of other immigrant communities in the United States.

Leading up to the end of martial law, small pockets of resistance emerged. For example, when the KMT began [confiscating](#) the so-called “Red Cover Bibles” because they were written in *Tâi-gí*, the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan loudly protested, [garnering international Christian concern](#). After martial law was lifted in 1987, Taiwanese-language television shows, news, and songs experienced a renaissance. Since then, both DPP and KMT candidates have [used *Tâi-gí* in their campaign speeches](#), and starting from 2001, all Taiwanese primary schoolers are [required to take a local language course](#).

Throughout history, individuals both in Taiwan and overseas have worked together to preserve *Tâi-gí*. Nevertheless, difficult challenges remain.

Modern Challenges

In the 1980s, *Tâi-gí* activists were foremost [concerned about](#) how *Tâi-gí* should be written. The Presbyterian Church of Taiwan used the Peh-ōe-jī (POJ) system

to Romanize the language, while other scholars used Mandarin characters with extra tonal markings. Even though standardization remains an issue, with primary schools in Taiwan still teaching different *Tâi-gí* writing systems, many of the scholars I interviewed viewed other challenges as more crucial.

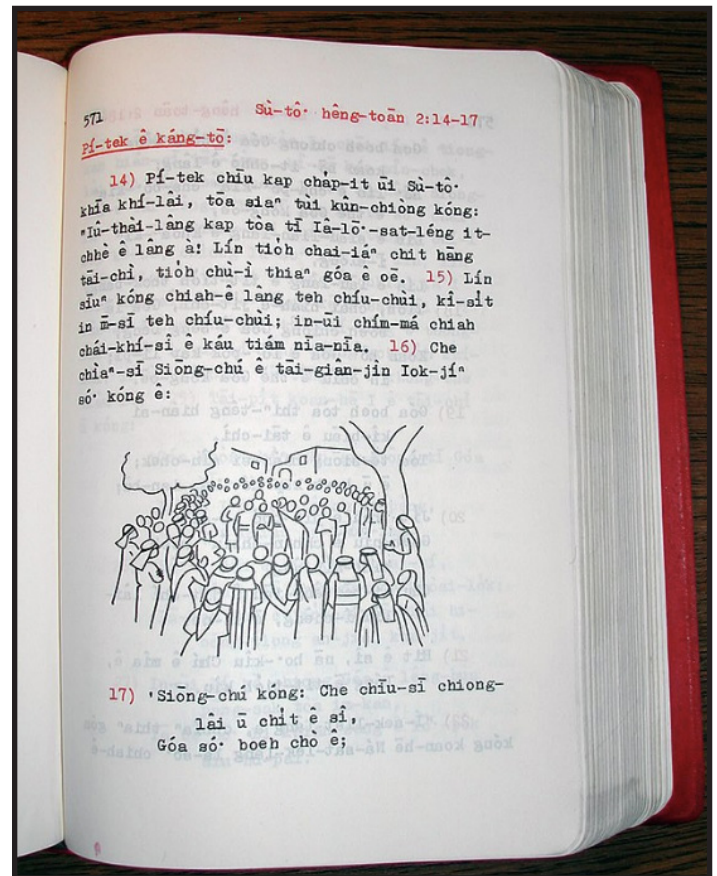


Image: Page from a “Red Cover Bible”, the most popular version of the Bible in Taiwan during the 20th Century. (Source: [Wikipedia](#))

One of the biggest challenges for the *Tâi-gí* preservation effort are the divisive ethnopolitics of *Tâi-gí* activism: firstly, pro-independence politics; and secondly, inter-ethnic conflict (what Professor Tiun Hak-Khiam (張學謙) from National Taitung University (國立台東大學) calls “Holo chauvinism”). Both problems are illustrated in the name “*Tâi-gí*” itself.

Most native *Tâi-gí* speakers reject alternate names such as “*min nan*” (閩南) or “Hokkien” because these names originated from the KMT, who wanted to emphasize *Tâi-gí*’s Southern China (Fujian) origins. [2] Tiun also pointed out that the “*min*” in “*min nan*” means “barbarian,” making the term derogatory. For those who view Taiwan as a separate political and cultural entity from China, they have no desire to reinforce the KMT’s rhetoric that Taiwanese culture comes from China. “As

a Taiwan independence guy, I myself would never call it ‘*min nan yu*’ (閩南語), I would call it ‘*Tâi-gí*,’” says Shih.

However, he acknowledged that emphasizing the movement’s pro-independence politics alienates people, such as those who vote for the modern-day KMT party, who do not share the same political convictions. Professor Catherine Chou (周怡齡) from National Chengchi University (國立政治大學) also pointed out that the some *Tâi-gí* activists refuse to translate their content into Mandarin as a sort of anti-unification political statement, which although understandable, limits the accessibility of already-scarce *Tâi-gí* content. “You can only find some of these online resources if you search in *Tâi-gí*,” she explains, yet searching in *Tâi-gí* is only accessible for those already comfortable with [typing](#) the language. Ultimately, [Khin-Huann Li and Liam Mathura](#) criticized the partisan aspect of the *Tâi-gí* movement as a major detriment to its development.

Additionally, some ethnic minority activists, such as Hakka or indigenous activists, have their own qualms about the term *Tâi-gí*, which translates to “language of Taiwan.” Tiun Hak-Khiam recalled that when Taiwan first democratized, some *Tâi-gí* activists misguidedly attempted to force *Tâi-gí* onto ethnic minorities, telling them: “If you’re Taiwanese, speak Taiwanese.” Tiun emphasized the need to express solidarity with other Taiwanese ethnic communities and their attempts to preserve their own languages to overcome this mistrust.

Another major issue is the lack of immersion for Taiwanese children. Even though local language classes are required for primary school students, these classes only meet 1-2 hours a week, and thus do not produce fluent bilingual speakers. These *Tâi-gí* classes also still use Mandarin as the medium of instruction, diminishing their effectiveness.

The final major obstacle is the lack of government funding for domestic and overseas heritage language initiatives. As Chou points out, the majority of *Tâi-gí* content (e.g. textbooks, social media, history websites) are created by unpaid volunteers who must also juggle day-jobs, which is unsustainable in the long-term. Instead, the government must do its part. For example, the Taiwanese government funds the Taiwan Center for Mandarin Learning Initiative (臺灣華語文學習中心) to promote Traditional Chinese learning in the United States and Europe, but it does not have any equivalent effort for Taiwan’s heritage languages. Tiun believes that Taiwan’s Mandarin-centric programs are ineffective because it is extremely difficult to compete with the better-funded Mandarin learning programs

from the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and that in his opinion, emphasizing “traditional” literature, calligraphy, and culture is not engaging for most youth. Instead, he calls for Taiwan’s cultural diplomacy to be inclusive of heritage language content to create a more visible distinction between Taiwan and the PRC that could attract international youth to study in Taiwan.

Visions for a Multilingual Taiwan

In 2019, Taiwan passed the [National Languages Development Act](#) (國家語言發展法), which granted equal recognition to indigenous and heritage languages. However, the legislation has so far proved to be mostly symbolic, and no new initiatives have been implemented. The six scholars I spoke with offered a wide range of recommendations, mostly to the Taiwanese government, on how to accelerate and improve the efficacy of *Tâi-gí* language preservation. Most importantly, Tiun reminded me that these recommendations could easily be applied to all of Taiwan’s heritage languages. “You not only have to save your own language, but you also have to learn other people’s languages,” he said.

Education, Employment, Entertainment

Firstly, *Tâi-gí* language efforts can be radically improved within the classroom. In a 2020 [paper](#), Tiun highlighted that even before bilingual education can be implemented, certain societal prejudices must be corrected. Teachers and parents must actively dissociate heritage languages from [connotations of gang culture or low socioeconomic status](#). Moreover, teachers need to correct parental misconceptions that bilingualism will impede children’s ability to learn Mandarin. Society must also understand that heritage languages can indeed communicate “modern” ideas such as science and technology. Last year, Academia Sinica (中央研究院) hosted [a series of sociology lectures in *Tâi-gí*](#) precisely to prove this point. Yu-Ru Huang, the former Culture Director for the Houston Taiwanese School of Languages and Culture, agreed that “the best way to preserve *Tâi-gí* is not to treat it like a fossil, but to keep it alive.” For example, she would love to see Taiwanese youth use *Tâi-gí* in memes.

Once parents, teachers, and students accept that bilingualism is an asset, rather than a detriment, Tiun encourages teachers to be as immersive as possible by implementing “mother-tongue first bilingual education” ([母語優先的雙語教育](#)). He argues that teachers must use the target heritage language as the medium of instruction and flexibly alternate between the heritage language and Mandarin, thus training students to think in both languages at the same time. Written

signs and verbal announcements should also be made in both languages. Chou applauded Taiwan's very first [Tâi-gí immersion school](#) in Kaohsiung as a prime example. In Hakka or indigenous majority areas, Tiun encourages immersion schools to employ their heritage languages as well.

Tiun acknowledged that this type of intensive bilingual education would require many more teachers to become fluent in a heritage language, and thus would require the government to incorporate heritage language training into teachers' colleges. In fact, requiring heritage language fluency for teaching, as well as other government jobs, would be highly beneficial to the revitalization movement, as it would offer a direct pay-off for learning the language. With more Taiwanese people incentivized to learn a heritage language, the supply of *Tâi-gí*-fluent teachers is bound to rise to meet demand.

Nevertheless, many of the scholars told me that the classroom alone had limits. What about when students go home? Tiun suggested that the government can open free adult learning centers for parents who wish to improve their own heritage language fluency, as well as subsidize bilingual children's storybooks, television shows, and [social media content](#), such as the vibrant YouTube channel "[Tâi-lâm mōe-á kà lí kóng Tâi-gí](#)" (A Tainan Girl Teaches You *Tâi-gí*). Shih highlighted that overseas Taiwanese fluent in their mother tongue can equally participate in heritage language content creation. His dream is for a high-quality piece of *Tâi-gí* entertainment to go viral around the world, bringing global attention to Taiwan's heritage languages.

International Friendships and Programs

Throughout my interviews, many scholars pointed towards other countries as inspirational. Tiun told me, "Switzerland is ... a model, underscoring that different language communities should enjoy equal status within the state." In that vein, many interviewees recommended international collaboration as another strategy for preserving *Tâi-gí*.

Firstly, *Tâi-gí* language activists must strategically identify countries that would be sympathetic to Taiwan's language effort. Professor Liu Chan-Yueh (劉展岳), the Taiwan Studies Chair at INALCO in Paris, pointed out that French society has always believed that speaking French is necessary for understanding its culture, even if French is no longer a global *lingua franca* like English. Therefore, he found that French people interested in Taiwan were easily convinced of the importance

of Taiwan's heritage languages. These shared values also make France a friendly place for Taiwanese artists to display their identity, through exhibitions such as [Art Paris](#). Huang shared similar positive experiences visiting Barcelona, where Catalonians sympathized with Taiwan's geopolitical situation, including regional language preservation. Overseas Taiwanese living in these countries who are fluent in the local language are uniquely equipped with the cross-cultural skills to introduce Taiwanese language and culture to these friendly communities. To help them, Tiun recommended that the Taiwanese government invest in a robust collection of *Tâi-gí* teaching resources for faculty in Taiwan and abroad. Lastly, the Taiwanese government could participate in international conferences such as the [Foundation for Endangered Languages \(FEL\) Conference](#).

Since [the largest overseas Taiwanese community lives in the United States](#), many scholars believed that US-Taiwan *Tâi-gí* programs would be the most popular. Chou suggested that Taiwan should collaborate with organizations like the [Keng-lâm Su-īⁿ \(Mosei Academy\)](#), a *Tâi-gí* language school in San Jose, California. Tiun envisioned a program where students from Taiwan and the United States could learn *Tâi-gí* together. Lastly, Huang encouraged Taiwanese Americans to push their universities to offer *Tâi-gí* classes and their local museums to offer arts exchange fellowships to Taiwanese artists.

Ultimately, our scholars hope that programs like these would spread awareness and appreciation for *Tâi-gí* around the world. In the meantime, for any English-speakers feeling inspired to start learning *Tâi-gí* on their own, Chou provided [an online set of resources](#).

Conclusion

When thinking about Taiwan's most pressing issues, heritage language preservation seldom comes up. Yet, for these six scholars, preserving *Tâi-gí* is worth a life-long commitment. Shih shared that although language preservation may not single-handedly change Taiwan's geopolitical situation, Taiwanese people and government should invest in it—firstly, as a form of reparations for the trauma of language repression; secondly, to keep the language from becoming extinct; and thirdly, to honor their ageing grandparents, the only demographic which still commonly speaks *Tâi-gí* in Taiwan. Tiun emphasized that multilingualism would set Taiwan apart from "the suppression of minority languages in the People's Republic of China" and demon-

strate its commitment to “democratic principles and popular sovereignty.” As Taiwan fights to be recognized as a unique political and cultural entity, Lim reminds us: “before we expect other people to respect our culture, it is important to show that we respect our own culture first.”

The main point: From Japanese colonization to the present, *Tâi-gí*’s historic marginalization illuminates Taiwan’s struggle to establish its own cultural and political identity. To revitalize *Tâi-gí* and other heritage languages, the Taiwanese government must invest in “mother-tongue first bilingual education,” employment incentives, and content creation. They must also support overseas Taiwanese in integrating *Tâi-gí* into cultural diplomacy efforts. Only then can Taiwan create a distinctive, collaborative, and vibrant multilingual society.

[1] Heritage language is a term used by linguists to refer to languages other than the “dominant language.” (For example, the dominant language of Taiwan is Mandarin Chinese.)

[2] The preference for the term “*Tâi-gí*” over “Hokkien” or “Southern Min” was affirmed by all five interviewees, and the author’s personal experience with native *Tâi-gí* speakers.

Deterrence over Disruption: Taiwan’s Remedies to PRC Cable-Cutting

By: Gahon Chia-Hung Chiang

Gahon Chia-Hung Chiang is a legislative staff member in the office of Legislator Kuan-Ting Chen (陳冠廷), focusing on Taiwan’s national security, and also serves as the Youth Representative to the Taichung City Government. He holds an MA in International Relations from National Taiwan University.

In July this year, a Taiwanese court handed down a criminal conviction for the destruction of an undersea communications cable. The Chinese captain of the *Hong Tai 58* (宏泰58號), a bulk carrier, was [sentenced to three years](#) in prison after his vessel loitered in February in a government-designated no-anchor zone (禁錨警戒區) and severed a critical submarine cable between Taiwan and Penghu. The incident caused over NTD 17 million (USD 520,000) in damages to Chunghwa Telecom (中華電信) and temporarily disrupted vital civil and government communications. Although the defendant claimed negligence rather than malice, the court found him guilty of gross dereliction of duty. The

ruling marks not just a judicial milestone but a strategic one. Undersea cables are no longer mere commercial assets—rather, they are infrastructure representing Taiwan’s sovereignty.

Taiwan is beginning to see gestures of support from its partners. In Washington, a bipartisan duo—Senators John Curtis (R-UT) and Jacky Rosen (D-NV)—has introduced the [Taiwan Undersea Cable Resilience Initiative Act](#). The bill calls for the US State Department to lead a cross-agency effort to counter threats to Taiwan’s undersea cables—including support from the Pentagon, Department of Homeland Security, and the US Coast Guard. The law would require the US government to assist Taiwan in boosting its monitoring architecture, building early-warning systems, launching joint patrols with Taiwan’s coast guard, and—should sabotage occur—imposing Magnitsky-style sanctions on People’s Republic of China (PRC) actors.

Whether or not the bill passes in the US Congress, the Taiwanese government must establish its own resilience mechanisms to thwart PRC attacks on its undersea cables. These mechanisms must span three critical domains: the rule of law, multi-domain monitoring, and repair capacity. Without those pillars, any external support may be undermined by internal frailty.

The Rule of Law

Taiwan has made some institutional strides in its recent legislation related to undersea cable security. In mid-2023, after a [string of suspicious cable breaks](#) near the Matsu Islands of Taiwan, the Legislative Yuan (立法院)—controlled by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨)—rushed to amend the *Telecommunications Management Act* (電信管理法), making intentional damage to undersea infrastructure a punishable crime. The deterrent was promising, but short-lived. PRC vessels were suspected of causing [two additional breaks](#) in the first two months of 2025. As with many other issues in Taiwan’s national security toolkit, legal whack-a-mole is no match for systematic prevention.

In this, Australia and New Zealand offer blueprints. Since the 1990s, these two countries have introduced “[submarine cable protection zones](#)”—government-designated maritime corridors where anchoring, dredging, bottom trawling, and other high-risk activities are banned. One Australian [protection zone](#) near Perth spans 60 nautical miles and plunges to a depth of 2,000 meters. The rules are enforceable, and violations carry [legal and financial penalties](#). This model not only codifies deterrence, but it also [shares responsibilities between the state and private operators](#)—a hallmark

of resilient infrastructure governance.

By contrast, Taiwan has yet to establish a formal legal framework for submarine cable protection zones. While certain maritime areas are monitored through Chunghwa Telecom's [Submarine Cable Automatic Warning System](#) (SAWS, 自動示警系統) and patrolled by Taiwan's Coast Guard Administration (海巡署), these zones currently lack binding legal restrictions on potentially deceptive activities. To help close the gap, the Executive Yuan (行政院) has approved draft [amendments](#) this September that would require vessels navigating through Taiwan's territorial sea to keep their Automatic Identification System (AIS)—a technology through which ships communicate—switched on and transmitting accurate information, with the bill now under deliberation by the Legislative Yuan. Even with this progress, Taiwan should consider adopting the Australia/New Zealand model for restricting certain maritime activity, like trawling and anchoring, in protected areas.

Undersea cables are as vital as high-voltage power grids to Taiwan's resilience. Their protection should not stem from *ad hoc* responses alone, but must be backed by enforceable legal obligations and penalties. In recognition of this, legislators from the ruling DPP—including Chen Kuan-Ting (陳冠廷), Chang Hung-Lu (張宏陸), and Su Chiao-Hui (蘇巧慧)—have held inter-agency meetings with the Ministry of Transportation (交通部), the Ministry of Digital Affairs (數位發展部), and the Ministry of the Interior (內政部) to explore the feasibility of creating such zones. [1]

Multi-Domain Monitoring

When it comes to monitoring threats to its undersea cables, Taiwan possesses a handful of technological tools but still lacks systems that can provide breadth of vision and real-time responsiveness. Chunghwa Telecom's aforementioned SAWS [can detect](#) vessels over 20 meters in length traveling at speeds below 5 knots when they enter within one kilometer of a submarine cable route. It automatically transmits warning messages to the ship's bridge, advising quick passage and instructing them not to loiter or anchor. Yet, its effectiveness [depends heavily](#) on the AIS and is of limited use when vessels transponder or operate without notification.

In order to gain the upper-hand in real-time monitoring, Taiwan must scale up its intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities. This includes advancing indigenous satellite development, most notably the synthetic aperture radar (SAR)-equipped [FORMOSAT-9 program](#) (福衛九號). Two FORMOSAT-9

satellites are scheduled for launch in 2028 and 2030. These satellites are expected to support persistent land and maritime surveillance, and if deployed in sufficient numbers, could even detect covert intrusions, such as rubber boats approaching Taiwan's coastline.

Simultaneously, Taiwan should leverage high-frequency commercial satellite imagery from providers like [Planet Labs](#) and Maxar, integrate geospatial data with intelligence partners such as the United States and Japan, and deploy AI-enabled anomaly detection tools. Together, these approaches would allow Taiwan to identify suspicious loitering patterns near critical infrastructure, such as undersea cable junctions, and build a real-time awareness chain that extends from early warning to prosecutable evidence.

Command of information has never been solely about data possession. Data possession must be paired with the ability to act swiftly and credibly in ways that alter an adversary's strategic calculus. Taiwan needs to build a response protocol that turns monitoring data into evidence, and evidence into deterrence.

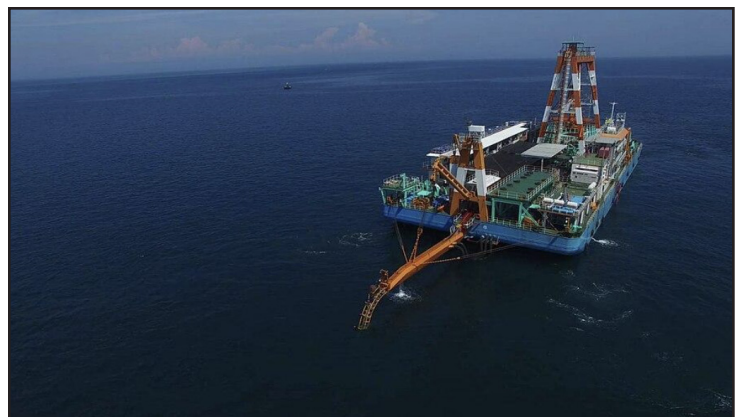


Image: The construction of the Taiwan-Penghu submarine cable. (Image source: [Taipower/Wikimedia Commons](#))

Repair Capacity

The final layer of Taiwan's cable protection is physical resilience. Cable repair is no longer a logistical afterthought, but rather a strategic asset. Taiwan is a member of two regional cable maintenance zones (YOKOHAMA and SEAIOCMA), which offer six vessels that could theoretically serve Taiwan's repair needs. However, [none of them](#) are Taiwan-owned. Worse, [global capacity is aging](#). According to the [International Cable Protection Committee](#), which Taiwan rejoined this year under the name of Chinese Taipei, the world's 48 cable ships are, on average, [nearly 30 years old](#). If sabotage becomes routine, relying on third-party dispatch is a strategic liability.

Rather than passively waiting for assistance in times of crisis, Taiwan should take the initiative by proposing a regional, multi-role cable repair ship program, jointly developed with the United States and Japan and designed for dual civilian and military use. In peacetime, such a vessel could be commercially operated and maintained. During contingencies, it could serve as a platform for restoring strategic communications and defending critical infrastructure. This would demonstrate Taiwan's role as a responsible stakeholder and contributor to Indo-Pacific security.

The main point: Each PRC cable sabotage incident is more than a disruption. It is a test of Taiwan's resilience. Taiwan must make sabotage costly, predictable, and futile. That requires law, sensors, and ships all working in concert. Undersea cables are vulnerable. Taiwan must not be.

[1] These meetings were not open to the public and therefore have not been reported by the media.

Taiwan's Europe Imperative

By: Baosheng Guo

Baosheng Guo is an MA student in Asian Studies at George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs. He has published articles in The Diplomat, Taiwan International Studies Quarterly, and other Taiwan academic journals.

Recent events indicate that Taiwan's Lai Ching-te (賴清德) Administration is strengthening its diplomatic ties with Europe. One factor contributing to this shift is Taipei's uncertainty and unfavorability towards the Trump Administration's Taiwan policy. This has reduced the Taiwan government's confidence in the United States as a partner and compelled the Lai Administration to focus on its European diplomacy—particularly in areas such as shared democratic values, defense cooperation, and security guarantees.

Taiwan's Recent Diplomatic Engagements with Europe

Since President Trump took office in January 2025, Taiwan has conducted a series of diplomatic engagements with European leaders that hint at a policy of moving from reliance on the United States to partnership with Europe.

On May 8, 2025, the Taiwan government [held a commemoration ceremony](#) for Victory in Europe Day (VE Day) for the first time in Republic of China (ROC) his-

tory, marking the anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe. In the past, the ROC only commemorated the victory of the allies in the Asian theater of World War II, on September 3. This unprecedented ceremony indicates the Lai Administration's desire to begin a new chapter of cooperation with Europe.

On June 4, 2025, Joseph Wu (吳釗燮), the Secretary General of Taiwan's National Security Council, [stated](#) at the Taiwan Trilateral Forum in Berlin, Germany: "Europe is now waking up to the Indo-Pacific, not just diplomatically. We see this awakening in action." Wu emphasized the increasing significance of Taiwan's geopolitical position to Europe.

On July 22, 2025, President Lai Ching-te [met with](#) members of the European Parliament's Special Committee on the European Democracy Shield at the presidential office in Taipei, and made the argument that Taiwan and the European Union not only have close economic and trade ties, but also share the values of democracy and freedom. During the meeting, President Lai expressed his hopes that [Europe and Taiwan would continue to work together](#) to safeguard democracy and freedom, to build more resilient societies.

On August 5, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA, 外交部) and the Prospect Foundation (遠景基金會) convened the [the Ketagalan Forum: 2025 Indo-Pacific Security Dialogue](#) in Taipei. The keynote speeches were delivered by Boris Johnson, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, and François de Rugy, former President of the French National Assembly. The inclusion of two well-known European leaders is a symbol of Taiwan's renewed focus on relations with the European Union and the United Kingdom.

On August 28, 2025, Shieh Jhy-wei (謝志偉) [became the new representative](#) to Belgium and the EU, following [serving](#) as the representative to Germany during the administrations of Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) and Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文). He is well-known as the "[deep green warrior](#)," due to his stance on Taiwan's independence and his past struggles with China for diplomatic space. Indeed, his term in Germany from 2016-2025 was marked by noteworthy developments in the Taiwan-Germany relationship. In September 2024, [two German warships](#), the frigate *Baden-Württemberg* and the frigate *Frankfurt am Main*, were deployed to the Taiwan Strait. Meanwhile, Shieh attended numerous [fora](#) aimed at countering the influence of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, 中國共產黨), organized by exiled Chinese dissidents in Europe. Compared with his predecessor (who was an economist), Shieh's new appointment as EU ambassador indicates that the Taiwan

government is comprehensively strengthening its diplomatic relations with Europe, aiming for firmer collaboration in areas such as security, defense, and democratic values.



Image: Taiwan's former representative to Germany Shieh Jhy-Wey (second right) attends a press conference announcing the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Taiwan and Germany on mutual legal assistance. (Image source: [Central News Agency](#))

Positive Reactions in Europe

The above events are clear signals that the Lai Administration is intentionally developing relations with Europe, and strengthening security cooperation with the EU and the UK. Concurrently, Taiwan's efforts have been met by greater European support. On May 30, 2025, French President Emmanuel Macron [warned that the outcome of the war in Ukraine](#) could have consequences for Taiwan: "If we consider that Russia could be allowed to take a part of the territory of Ukraine without any restriction... how would you phrase what could happen in Taiwan?" Macron argued that inconsistent support for territorial integrity would undermine the credibility of democratic nations worldwide. The French president not only criticized Trump's diminishing support for Ukraine, but also sought to defend Taiwan.

At the July 11 leader's summit held in Taiwan, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Macron [underscored the growing strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific](#), including Taiwan. The remarks by two of Europe's most important leaders indicate a goodwill response to Taiwan's request for help from Europe. On July 27, when asked by *The Telegraph* about a potential conflict with China over Taiwan, British Secretary of State for Defense John Healey said that ["if we have to fight, as we have done in the past, Australia and the UK](#)

[are nations that will fight together."](#) These statements reflect the UK's resolve to be a contributor to security in the Indo-Pacific.

A Breakdown in US-Taiwan Cooperation Spurs Taipei's Shift to Europe

Why did the Lai Administration start to shift greater focus towards diplomatic relations with Europe? I argue that the reason lies with the United States. When President Trump took office this year, his international policy significantly undermined the confidence and trust of the Taiwan government.

First, Trump abandoned previous traditions of values-based diplomacy in favor of transactional agreements, prioritizing economic profit over a shared interest in democratic ideals. Second, the Taiwan government was shocked by the Trump Administration's initial weakening of support for Ukraine, and feared that Taiwan would suffer the same fate if a PRC invasion were to occur. Finally, President Trump's tariffs on Taiwan, the canceled transit of President Lai Ching-te, and immense pressure on semiconductor factories to invest in the United States, have undermined the feeling of trust between the two nations and negatively impacted Taiwan's interests.

Misalignment on Values

The Biden Administration [prioritized the promotion of democracy in its foreign policy](#), framing the global context as a conflict between democracy and autocracy. As the leader of the free world, Biden argued that the United States must defend democracies, including Taiwan and Ukraine. Former Taiwan president [Tsai Ing-wen also frequently echoed](#) Biden's emphasis on democracy, progressive values, and the rule of law in the face of China's challenges.

In contrast, Trump in his second term has heavily relied on extreme realism and a "might makes right" foreign policy. Unlike Biden, Trump [declined to make a declaration committing to Taiwan's defense](#) if China invades. Instead, Trump has focused only on economic gain in the US-Taiwan relationship, and has even [threatened to charge protection fees](#) for protecting the island.

Trump's Inconsistent Ukraine Policy

Since Russia invaded Ukraine, the Taiwanese government has constantly promoted the narrative that Taiwan has the same geopolitical status and interconnected fate with Ukraine. Joseph Wu, the Foreign Minister of Taiwan under the Tsai Administration, emphasized the importance of ["defending Taiwan by defending](#)

[Ukraine](#)...the fate of Taiwan, like that of Ukraine, will be a crucial test the world's democracies must not fail." However, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has acknowledged that the United States faces [a multipolar world](#), which may be perceived by Taipei as Washington's concession of a Chinese sphere of influence in East Asia.

Meanwhile, Taiwan's anxiety was compounded when the United States, in the [words](#) of Oxford Professor Margaret Macmillan, "sided against its own democratic allies and with Russia and other authoritarian states, such as North Korea and Belarus, in voting against a UN resolution that condemned Russia's aggression."

Trump's Coercive Policies towards Taiwan

Finally, the Trump Administration has carried out several coercive measures towards Taiwan that undermine Taipei's trust. The US State Department refused to allow President Lai to transit through New York on his way to visit diplomatic allies in South America—contrary to the [custom that had been developed](#) under previous US administrations.

Meanwhile, Trump has [imposed a 20 percent reciprocal tariff](#) on goods imported from Taiwan—which is higher than the 15 percent rate applied to Japan and South Korea. At the same time, Trump has repeatedly threatened to impose high tariffs on imported semiconductors, [potentially as high as 100 percent](#), to push chip manufacturers to build factories in the United States. These actions have coincided with [declining public trust](#) in the United States in Taiwan, thus encouraging Taipei to seek other diplomatic and economic partners.

Europe: A Redoubt for Taiwan

Given the uncertainty and unreliability of Trump's Taiwan policy, the Lai Administration has turned its attention to Europe. From World War II to the present, European countries have consistently emphasized the importance of democracy, multilateralism, humanitarianism, and international cooperation. Thus, Europe has a demonstrated interest in the democratic values shared by Taiwan. The Czech Republic and the three Baltic countries of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania, which were once deeply oppressed by the communist Soviet Union, have been especially enthusiastic about strengthening diplomatic relations and cooperation on democratic values with Taiwan.

Moreover, Europe is a strong global partner that can help Taiwan address many of its challenges. The [EU](#)

and the [UK](#) have already outlined Indo-Pacific strategies that aim to reinforce stability, security, and shared prosperity in the Indo-Pacific, including in Taiwan. Additionally, Europe plays an important role—second only to the United States—in the United Nations, NATO, and other international organizations. In the event of a Taiwan Strait conflict, European nations may become a leader among third-party countries advocating for intervention on behalf of Taiwan.

Conclusion

The distinguished political scientists Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye [have asserted](#) that, "The continuation of Trump's current foreign policy would weaken the United States and accelerate the erosion of the international order that since World War II has served so many countries well—most of all, the United States." Trump's second-term Taiwan policies have affected the long-time feelings of goodwill and friendship between Taiwan and the United States. In this context, Taiwan is leaning into relations with Europe.

Therefore, in addition to strengthening relations with allies in Asia such as Japan and the Philippines, it is necessary and urgent for the Lai Administration to continue its focus on enhancing diplomatic relations with Europe. In doing so, Lai can render the region not only an economic and technological partner for Taiwan, but also a potent defense and security ally.

The main point: In the face of the Trump Administration's foreign policy focus on economic gain over mutual benefit or shared democratic values, the Lai Administration has increasingly turned to Europe to find partners who share Taiwan's democratic values, and who would safeguard Taiwan's interests in the case of a cross-Strait conflict. In response, European leaders such as French President Emmanuel Macron have made positive, affirming declarations about the importance of Taiwan's safety and security.

The Potential Upside of Taiwan's Exclusion from the 2025 Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Leaders Meeting

By: Jess Marinaccio

Dr. Jess Marinaccio was most recently employed as an Assistant Professor of Asian Pacific Studies at California State University, Dominguez Hills. She also previously worked for Tuvalu's Foreign Affairs Department as well as its Embassy in

Taiwan. Dr. Marinaccio researches Pacific understandings of diplomacy and Taiwan's Pacific fisheries and has published in journals including *The Contemporary Pacific*, *International Journal of Taiwan Studies*, *The Journal of Pacific History*, *The Journal of Global History*, *Nations and Nationalism*, and *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*.

For the Pacific Islands region (also known as Oceania), which includes countries like Fiji, Samoa, and Tuvalu, the [Pacific Islands Forum \(PIF\)](#) is undoubtedly the most important regional organization. PIF creates venues where Pacific Island countries [gather](#) to make and issue communal decisions on regional and international issues, and most of the Pacific's significant statements on climate change, sovereignty, statehood, and a range of other matters [are released](#) through PIF. The annual [PIF Leaders Meeting](#) is the premiere decision-making venue for Pacific leaders, with decisions reached at the meeting [channeled](#) into international fora like the United Nations General Assembly.

However, Pacific leaders are not the only attendees at PIF Leaders Meetings. This is where Taiwan comes into the picture. Typically, dialogue partners, or countries that [“strategically engage with the Pacific Islands Forum,”](#) are also able to attend the meeting (although, of course, some parts of the meeting are open only to Pacific leaders). China [is classified](#) as a dialogue partner, as are the United States and 19 other countries. Although it is not identified as a dialogue partner, Taiwan is a [“development partner”](#) and participates under the name “Taiwan/Republic of China.” Typically, this means that Taiwan can send representatives to major PIF meetings where these representatives interact mainly with the Pacific Islands that recognize Taiwan (Tuvalu, Palau, and Marshall Islands, as of September 2025). This arrangement is based on a 1992 PIF Leaders decision on relations with Taiwan, where leaders [agreed](#) that a “Taiwan/Republic of China-Forum Countries Dialogue” would be held at the PIF Leaders Meeting venue and countries could attend at their discretion.

Conflicts Over Taiwan's Attendance at PIF Leaders Meetings

In the past, PIF Leaders Meetings have [resulted](#) in conflict between that year's Pacific host country and China and/or Taiwan. For example, during the 2024 meeting in Tonga, the first edition of the meeting communiqué posted online [included](#) text confirming the 1992 Leaders decision on relations with Taiwan. China's Special Envoy for Pacific Island Countries Affairs, Qian Bo (錢波), [expressed opposition](#) to the language, and a new version of the communiqué text was later posted with all references to Taiwan [removed](#). The PIF Secretariat

defended itself by [noting](#) that the text referencing Taiwan had not been the final version of the communiqué, which is what prompted the second version of the text to be posted. Many Pacific leaders and analysts have [viewed these incidents](#) as unfortunate distractions from the work of PIF on issues that are actually important to the Pacific, like climate change.



Image: Representatives from the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and Taiwan signed a new cooperation agreement to support ocean governance in February of this year. (Image source: [Taipei Trade Office in Fiji](#))

The year 2025 has proved no exception in this trend of Taiwan-China clashes at PIF Leaders Meetings. The 2025 meeting [was held](#) from September 8 to 12, and the host was Solomon Islands, a country that [maintained](#) diplomatic relations with Taiwan until 2019, after which it developed extremely close ties with China. In 2022, Solomon Islands [signed](#) a security agreement with China [despite pleas and threats](#) from the United States and others to take a different course. Solomon Islands' then-Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare subsequently [refused](#) to attend the second United States-Pacific Islands Forum Summit in Washington, DC in 2023, in order to avoid a “lecture” from the United States. During the 2024 PIF Leaders Meeting, Solomon Islands also reportedly [tried to strip](#) Taiwan of its development partner status within PIF.

Before the 2025 meeting, news began circulating in June and July that Solomon Islands was [denying](#) visa applications lodged by members of the Taiwan delegation preparing to attend the event. Subsequently, Taiwan's Pacific allies began [expressing](#) their [opposition](#) to a PIF Leaders Meeting where China and other dialogue partners would be present but Taiwan would not, and the prime minister of Solomon Islands Jeremiah Man-

ele had to make a choice. He ultimately [decided](#) to disinvite all dialogue and development partners from the meeting, justifying this by [explaining](#) that a review of Pacific regional architecture had not yet been completed, and it would not be appropriate for dialogue and development partners to attend. The 2025 meeting would be just for Pacific Island countries.

Few countries [were fully satisfied](#) with this approach, especially because the United States and China (as well as other dialogue partners) [have embassies](#) in Solomon Islands and could still potentially organize bilateral meetings with Pacific leaders attending the 2025 meeting. Meanwhile Taiwan, which does not have representation in Solomon Islands, could not. The United States [supported](#) Taiwan's attendance at the meeting, and, for a period of time, Taiwan's ally Tuvalu [threatened](#) not to attend if Taiwan could not participate. Another PIF member, New Zealand, also [voiced](#) dissatisfaction with Manele's decision. Although by the end of the 2025 meeting, PIF Leaders eventually [confirmed](#) Taiwan's place as a development partner, conflict over Taiwan's participation loomed over preparations for the event.

How Conflicts Over Taiwan's Attendance at PIF Leaders Meetings Help Taiwan

What happened to Taiwan at the 2025 PIF Leaders Meeting amounts to what I would call a small-scale rejection. Prime Minister Manele's exclusion of Taiwan was not an indefinite expulsion from PIF Leaders Meetings, but was drastic enough to garner widespread attention. I posit that Taiwan's exclusion (along with all other dialogue and development partners) from the 2025 PIF Leaders Meeting—and any other [small-scale rejections](#) Taiwan has faced at PIF meetings over the years—helps rather than hurts Taiwan's official and unofficial diplomacy in the Pacific. The fact that the final communiqué for the 2025 PIF meeting [included a reaffirmation](#) of the 1992 PIF Leaders decision that allows Taiwan to engage with PIF members is a testament to this idea.

If Taiwan is allowed to participate at a Leaders Meeting with no complaints or drama from the host country or China, it can assert a regional presence in the Pacific but, in practice, its engagement at the meeting [is centered on](#) its allies at events held on the sidelines. Yet, when Taiwan is rejected from a meeting or its name is withheld from a communiqué, it can have a much more expansive regional impact, and the disadvantage is really to China instead of Taiwan for the following three reasons:

Perceptions of China as a bully turn sympathy towards Taiwan

When Taiwan experiences small-scale rejections at PIF Leaders Meetings, China is perceived as bullying not only Taiwan but also Pacific Island countries. When Solomon Islands excludes Taiwan from a meeting, other leaders and analysts [wonder](#) if this is what the Pacific Island country really sought to do or whether such action was forced by China. In their histories, Pacific Island countries have [experienced](#) colonization and suppression by European powers. After gaining their independence (or continuing to fight for self-determination), these countries do not welcome being pushed around by yet another power. That China can bully Taiwan in the Pacific reminds PIF members that the balance of power is not in Taiwan's favor, a recognition that can give way to widespread sympathy. It [sets off alarm bells](#) that China may be a dangerous and risky partner despite the large amounts of aid it can provide to Pacific nations.

Desire for consensus and congeniality at PIF meetings prompts even China's allies to defend Taiwan

When Taiwan experiences small-scale rejections at PIF Leaders Meetings, it is not simply Taiwan's Pacific allies that come to its defense—China's allies also speak on Taiwan's behalf. In the run-up to the September 2025 PIF Leaders Meeting, Samoa—which does not recognize Taiwan—[threatened to boycott](#) the meeting if Taiwan was not allowed to attend. After the prime minister of Solomon Islands decided to exclude all dialogue and development partners from the meeting, Fiji, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea, none of which recognize Taiwan, [expressed disappointment with](#) the exclusion of PIF partners (although they may not have specifically named Taiwan). In the past, PIF has experienced disruption and members have even [withdrawn](#) when consensus and collegiality, which are seen as critical to Pacific methods of decision-making, have not been maintained. Consequently, when Taiwan's attendance at a PIF Leaders Meeting is challenged, this is viewed as [threatening](#) PIF members who have official relations with Taiwan and, by extension, PIF's unity and stability. Given this, even Pacific countries that recognize China may support Taiwan if this helps to maintain congenial relations with Taiwan's Pacific allies.

Excluding Taiwan focuses attention on Taipei's messaging

When Taiwan's name is removed from a PIF communiqué text, there is friction about Taiwan meeting with its allies at a PIF Leaders Meeting, or Taiwan is excluded from a meeting, attention turns to Taiwan. Media

outlets [explain](#) Taiwan’s unique situation repeatedly and discuss why Taiwan experiences conflict with China, why it is typically [able to attend](#) PIF Leaders Meetings despite protests from China, and which countries [support](#) Taiwan. Media outlets closely [track](#) Taiwan’s statements about PIF and [boost](#) them. As one example, in 2025, New Zealand’s public broadcaster *Radio New Zealand* [published](#) statements from Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs calling for Taiwan’s participation at the 2025 Leaders Meeting. Therefore, even when Taiwan is excluded from a PIF Leaders Meeting, it becomes one of the stars—along with China. As Pacific analysts have [noted](#), issues like Taiwan-China competition distract from Pacific priorities and the “real tragedy lies in the fact that this so-called ‘divisive issue’ is neither of our making, nor particularly central to our own strategic or developmental priorities.” Yet, the attention is undoubtedly good for Taipei because it keeps Taiwan in the Pacific public eye and continues to educate the public about why Taiwan does not view itself as part of China.

Conclusion

If Taiwan were to be stripped of its position as a PIF development partner and blocked from all future meetings of PIF Leaders, this would be disastrous for Taiwan and its foreign policy in the Pacific. Although Taiwan might continue to maintain official bilateral relations with some countries, complete removal from PIF would essentially erase Taiwan’s presence at the regional level. It would also enable and empower China to strengthen its relationship with the broader Pacific region and finalize [multilateral agreements](#) it has attempted to push in the past.

However, if Taiwan remains a PIF development partner while suffering myriad small-scale rejections and setbacks, this instead reinforces Taiwan’s place as a multilateral actor at the regional level. Although (or, perhaps, because) Taiwan was excluded from the 2025 PIF Leaders Meeting, the final communiqué for the meeting [reaffirms](#) Taiwan’s place as a development partner even though only three of the 18 PIF member countries recognize Taiwan. Even as nations succeed in removing Taiwan from a communiqué text, they [fail](#) to keep the removal quiet, and even as they attempt to exclude Taiwan from a Leaders Meeting, they ultimately have to [exclude](#) all other partner countries and inadvertently cause an official decision to be made supporting Taiwan’s participation at PIF. In an uncertain diplomatic environment where Taiwan has dwindling official support, small-scale and clumsy rejections boost Taiwan’s presence in the Pacific more than they erase it.

The main point: Taiwan was excluded from the 2025 PIF Leaders Meeting, which is a critical annual meeting for the Pacific region. However, the minor slights and inconveniences Taiwan has sometimes endured at this forum can actually strengthen, rather than weaken, Taiwan’s position in the Pacific.

Lai Ching-te’s Fragile Presidency and the Politics of Survival

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After the January 2024 national elections in Taiwan, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨) retained the presidency but [lost control](#) of the Legislative Yuan (LY, 立法院). With 60 combined seats, the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨)-Taiwan People’s Party (TPP, 台灣人民黨) coalition now holds the advantage over the DPP’s 51 seats, giving it enough leverage to downplay and block DPP President Lai Ching-te’s (賴清德) policy proposals.

The DPP’s biggest attempt to shift the balance of power in the LY—an [unprecedented](#) recall campaign in summer 2025—turned into a bitter political defeat. Initiated by civil society groups and openly [endorsed](#) by President Lai, the “[Great Recall](#)” (大罷免) campaign sought to unseat 31 KMT legislators on the grounds of obstructing bills and budgets. However, by the time all of the recall votes were counted on August 23, [not a single](#) KMT legislator had lost their seat. The controversial campaign inadvertently [strengthened](#) the KMT-TPP opposition. Riding on the momentum of victory, the KMT Chairman issued a [statement](#) that same day calling for unity in Taiwan, accusing the Lai Administration of pursuing dictatorship and focusing on political infighting while neglecting economic development.

Under these circumstances, the prospect of altering the balance in the LY prior to the next legislative elections in 2028 seems unlikely. After the failed recall attempt, the seat distribution in the LY remained unchanged, with the KMT-TPP coalition continuing to hold a majority. In addition, the fact that none of the

31 KMT legislators were recalled in the recent recall attempt suggests that it would be difficult for the Lai Administration to initiate any more recalls during the remainder of its term.

On the same day as the second round of recalls, on August 23 Taiwanese voters entered a critical referendum to decide the future of the island's [nuclear energy](#) program. Though the number of overall voters failed to reach the minimum threshold needed to execute the measure, over 74 percent of those casting ballots (more than 5 million voters) [supported restarting](#) the Maanshan Nuclear Power Plant. In the 1980s, nuclear energy supplied [more than half](#) of Taiwan's electricity demand, but by May 2025 the ruling DPP government had completed a [phase-out](#) of all nuclear energy. Therefore, the nuclear energy referendum initiative—[launched](#) in May by the TPP with the KMT's backing—sought to reactivate the plant.

Anti-nuclear policy has long been a core feature of the DPP's [platform](#). Since the late 1980s, the DPP has tied this stance to social movements, and under former President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) administration, the slogan of a "[nuclear-free homeland](#)" was formally codified into law. The party's main argument centers on safety risks, yet in practice, nuclear energy has continued to enjoy [significant public support](#).

The Lai Administration was fortunate that the referendum result was rendered [invalid](#), as it failed to meet the legal threshold: by law, the support of at least one-quarter of all eligible voters (about 5 million "yes" votes in this case) is required for passage. Yet, the proposal garnered only [4.34 million "yes" votes](#), falling short of the 5 million required.

Lai's Declining Approval Ratings

The DPP's challenges do not stop there, as recent public opinion surveys revealed alarmingly low approval ratings for President Lai. A TVBS poll released on August 11, covering over 1,044 respondents, showed that only [28 percent](#) of respondents were satisfied with his performance, down from 32 percent in May. Another [survey](#) conducted by the Taiwan Public Opinion Foundation between August 4-6 (with 1,079 participants) recorded Lai's approval rating at its lowest since he took office in May 2024: with just 33.3 percent expressing satisfaction, while 54.4 percent disapproved.

Many observers [argue](#) this decline reflects voter fatigue with Lai's repeated emphasis on a narrative of resistance to China, as opposed to focusing more on pressing domestic issues such as the economy and people's livelihoods. Compounding this, the Lai Administration

has also faced sharp [criticism](#) from the opposition and certain domestic industries after the United States, under the second Trump Administration, imposed a [20 percent tariff](#) on Taiwanese exports—which is higher than the 15 percent rate applied to the island's neighbors, namely [Japan](#) and [South Korea](#).

Slim Chances for a Lai Recall

These combined factors are steadily eroding President Lai's domestic legitimacy, posing a significant challenge to his governing capacity just over a year into his term. Amid such mounting difficulties, however, Lai is unlikely to consider resignation as an option. In Taiwan's history, no president has ever chosen to step down. Even if the KMT-TPP alliance sought to pressure Lai through a recall, it is highly improbable that such an effort could be successful.

Article 2 of Taiwan's *Additional Articles of the Constitution* [stipulates](#): "Recall of the president or the vice president shall be initiated upon the proposal of one-fourth of all members of the Legislative Yuan, and also passed by two-thirds of all the members." As noted above, the opposition alliance of KMT and TPP holds a combined total of 60 seats, which are only nine more than the DPP's 51. This slim margin makes it virtually impossible to secure the two-thirds threshold required to advance a recall motion.

Meanwhile, President Lai has shown no indication of considering resignation. Instead, following the unsuccessful recall campaign, his discourse is centered on fostering meaningful [dialogue](#) and steering clear of direct confrontation with the opposition; however, he has proposed no concrete actions moving forward.

At the same time, he has opted for a sweeping cabinet [reshuffle](#) to address the current crisis. A total of [10 new appointments](#) were made in this shake-up, including officials in key positions including Kung Ming-hsin (龔明鑫), Minister of Economic Affairs; Yeh Chun-hsien (葉俊顯), Minister of the National Development Council; Lin Yi-jing (林宜敬), Minister of Digital Affairs; and Li Wen (李聞) along with Vincent Chao (趙怡翔), Deputy Secretary-Generals of the National Security Council. A source close to the president [revealed](#) that the cabinet reshuffle was aimed at strengthening public resilience amid current turbulence (particularly the tariff shock), deepening ties with the United States, and addressing mounting political and military pressure from China. Nevertheless, there has been no sign that the above knots will be effectively untied. The reshuffle replaces old officials with new ones, but structural issues, such as the DPP's political deadlock between the KMT-TPP grip, remain unchanged, rendering breakthrough ap-

proaches unlikely to materialize.

The Survival Politics: Finding Ways Forward

Based on President Lai's call for dialogue with the opposition and his decision to overhaul the cabinet, several predictions can be made about his potential political moves. First, the DPP leader may consider an outreach and compromise with the KMT and TPP in exchange for a short-term period of political calm. Given the strong public support for restarting the Third Nuclear Power Plant, the DPP could concede to restarting the plant, thereby winning the voters' favor while easing opposition pressure. In return, President Lai might demand that the KMT [refrain](#) from blocking his proposal (first [made](#) in February) to raise defense spending above 3 percent of gross domestic product. Though difficult, such a compromise could allow Lai to demonstrate to voters that he can work effectively with rival parties to uphold Taiwan's security.

At the same time, the appointment of a new Minister of Economic Affairs [signals](#) the government's determination to deepen trade negotiations with Washington in pursuit of a more favorable deal for Taiwan. This prospect appears realistic, as US Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick revealed on September 11 that both sides were [close to reaching](#) an agreement. However, significant hurdles remain before a formal announcement can be concluded. To finalize a deal, Taipei will likely have to make substantial [concessions](#): such as opening its market to goods produced under American regulatory standards, importing American agricultural products, or increasing arms procurement from the United States, and accepting Trump's demand for a "[50-50](#)" split in semiconductor production between Taipei and Washington. The difficulty lies in the fact that importing US agricultural goods would [impact](#) Taiwan's food and farming sectors, while other key industries, particularly automobiles and semiconductors, could also endure negative effects. Moreover, with repeated attempts to increase defense spending despite [legislative roadblocks](#), President Lai must prudently weigh his policies in order to avoid inflaming the already precarious situation in which he finds himself.

Taiwan will hold [local elections](#) next year to select leaders and councils across multiple levels of government. These elections are widely seen as a barometer of public trust in the DPP government and an informal "referendum" on Lai's leadership. Furthermore, key local posts, particularly mayoral positions in major cities, could serve as [stepping stones](#) for presidential hopefuls in 2028. The party that secures an advantage in the

local races will gain a decisive edge in building political momentum, mobilizing voters, and preparing for the national elections in 2028.

Recognizing this importance, Lai is almost certain to prioritize efforts to win over voters by calling for "[unity](#)." In fact, this is the very approach he has been pursuing through the "[Ten Lectures on National Unity](#)" (團結國家十講) since June, aimed at uniting the people, political parties, and the nation as a whole in his vision of promoting Taiwan's progress while holding out against external threats. However, this effort appears to have been [abandoned](#) after just four speeches, as the public response has not met expectations. It appears the government may have spotted the necessity to postpone the speeches in order to refine the content.

In a nutshell, in the face of mounting challenges, President Lai has sought to improve the situation by reshuffling his cabinet and calling for dialogue with the opposition. These actions demonstrate Lai's understanding that political stalemate and diminishing approval ratings have hindered his ability to govern efficiently. In the future, Lai may seek to win back trust among the public and alleviate partisan tensions through fostering receptiveness and dialogue. On this basis, he is expected to pursue a fragile compromise with the KMT, intensify trade negotiations with the United States, and expand voter outreach efforts centered on national unity. The road ahead will be fraught with difficulties, and it remains to be seen whether Lai can engineer a breakthrough—or whether he will remain a lame duck until the 2028 general election.

The main point: Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te is facing a hostile legislature, falling approval ratings, and trade pressure from Washington, reshaping his desired role from that of an ambitious reformer to that of a cautious survivor. To address these challenges, President Lai could decide to broker a compromise with the KMT on nuclear policies to gain support for his own proposals; intensify trade relations with the United States; or highlight unity to appeal to voters.
