A Study of the Correlation between Local Head/Representative Elections and Presidential Elections in Taiwan*

MOMMA Rira**

Abstract
In Taiwan, it is generally said that the results of the nationwide local elections, and in particular the local head/representative elections that are contested in 22 counties and cities, influence the results of the presidential elections that are held about one year and two months later. This paper analyzes, based on elections data, whether the theory that there is a correlation between the two elections is based on facts. The results of the rudimentary analysis showed that the number of votes won in the local head/representative elections is linked to the results of the next presidential election to a certain degree. On the other hand, this paper points out that the momentum gained in local head/representative elections can also easily be lost through various situations that arise in the interval between the nationwide local elections and the presidential elections (in particular, incidents that are provoking in relation to Taiwan’s identity).

Introduction
Major elections are held in even-numbered years in Taiwan. These are the nationwide local elections and the national elections (presidential elections and legislative elections) (these two national elections are held on the same day). In Taiwan, it is generally acknowledged that the local head/representative elections and presidential elections, which are held during these nationwide local elections, are correlated, and that the political party that wins the local head/representative elections will maintain its momentum and carry its advantage into the presidential elections that are held about one year and two months later.

This paper attempts to verify if this perception is accurate by extracting past results of nationwide local elections and presidential elections. The current combination of nationwide local elections and national elections was established from the nationwide local elections held in November 2014 and the national elections held in January 2016, and there is only one case for comparison with the past. Accordingly, this paper also includes the elections before that for its analysis, although certain conditions are different, strictly speaking; these were the elections for county magistrate and special municipality mayor held in 2009 and 2010, as well as the presidential election held in January 2012. All the official titles used are current as of the time of the respective elections.

** Director, Regional Studies Department, National Institute for Defense Studies.
1. Case Study 1: 2009 and 2010 Local Head/Representative Elections, and 2012 Presidential Election

This section jointly analyzes the county magistrate elections held on December 5, 2009 (15 counties and cities of Taiwan Province and two counties of Fujian Province), and the special municipality mayoral elections held on November 27, 2010 (Taipei City, Kaohsiung City, New Taipei City, Taichung City, and Tainan City). These local elections were held after Ma Ying-jeou of the Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party; hereinafter, “KMT”) won the 2008 presidential election with 7,659,014 votes (percentage of votes: 58.5%). In this election, Hsieh Chang-ting of the Democratic Progressive Party (hereinafter, “DPP”) lost with a significant percentage, with 5,444,949 votes (percentage of votes: 41.6%).

In the 2009 county magistrate elections, KMT won the mayoral seat in 12 out of all 17 counties and cities that were contested, as contrasted with the DPP that won only the four counties of Yilan, Yunlin, Chiayi, and Pingtung (the remaining county, Hualien, was won by an independent candidate). However, there were no significant differences in the total number of votes won by each party for the 17 counties and cities. KMT won 2,094,518 votes (percentage of votes: 47.9%) while the DPP won 1,982,914 votes (percentage of votes: 45.3%). The difference was about 110,000 votes (difference in percentage of votes: 2.6 percentage points).

In the 2010 special municipality mayoral elections, KMT won the elections in northern and central Taiwan, namely the cities of Taipei, New Taipei, and Taichung, while the DPP won the elections in Tainan City and Kaohsiung City. However, the victory was reversed in terms of the total number of votes won by each party; KMT candidates won 3,369,052 votes (44.5%) against the 3,772,373 votes (49.9%) won by DPP candidates. This is indicative of the extremely strong support that the DPP enjoys in the southern part of Taiwan. By making a simple comparison of the combined results for these two years, KMT was victorious in 15 counties and cities with a total number of 5,463,570 votes. In comparison, the DPP won in only six counties and cities, but with a total of 5,755,287 votes, exceeding that of KMT’s by close to 300,000 votes. Although the DPP lost in the elections for the respective counties and cities, we could say that it demonstrated potential for winning in the presidential election, in which the whole of Taiwan is regarded as one electoral district.

However, in the 2012 presidential election, Ma Ying-jeou of KMT won 6,891,139 votes (percentage of votes: 51.6%), while Tsai Ing-wen of the DPP won only 6,093,578 votes (percentage of votes: 45.63%). KMT took an overwhelming victory in terms of the number of seats in the local head/representative elections in 2009 and 2010, but lost to the DPP in terms of the total number of votes when the whole of Taiwan is considered as a single electoral district. Nevertheless, it rebounded in the 2012 presidential election. This could probably be attributed to positive appraisal by the people of Taiwan towards the stability of cross-strait relations under Ma Ying-jeou’s administration. The track record includes the immediate resumption of consultations between administrative agencies of China and Taiwan, which were discontinued from the end of Lee Teng-hui’s administration to the two terms (eight years) of Chen Shui-bian’s administration, the start and increase of direct flights between China and Taiwan, and the signing of various agreements such as the cross-strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) that was concluded in June 2010 and entered into force in September the same year.
2. Case Study 2: 2014 Local Head/Representative Elections and 2016 Presidential Election

Of the nationwide local elections held in 2014, this paper focuses on the elections for special municipality mayor in the six special municipalities of Taipei, New Taipei, Taoyuan, Taichung, Tainan, and Kaohsiung (Taoyuan County had been elevated to the status of special municipality to become Taoyuan City) and the county magistrate elections in 16 counties and cities. In the six special municipality mayoral elections, KMT won only in New Taipei City, while the DPP won in the four cities of Taoyuan, Taichung, Tainan, and Kaohsiung. The election in Taipei City was won by an independent candidate (Ko Wen-je). With regard to the statistics, KMT won 3,385,081 votes (percentage of votes: 40.8%), the DPP won 3,979,329 votes (percentage of votes: 47.97%), and independent candidates won 929,565 votes (percentage of votes: 11.2%). In the 16 counties and cities, KMT won in five counties (1,605,596 votes; percentage of votes: 40.5%), the DPP won in nine counties and cities (1,850,777 votes; percentage of votes: 46.7%), and independent candidates won in two counties (505,286 votes; percentage of votes: 12.8%) respectively.

KMT’s President Ma Ying-jeou had been popular at the time when the 2012 presidential election was concluded, and KMT probably had the vision of incorporating that popularity into the 2014 elections for county magistrates and special municipality mayors, and linking that with the next KMT presidential candidate. Although KMT lost to the DPP for the total number of votes won in the 2009 and 2010 county magistrate and special municipality mayoral elections, it took the local head/representative seat in 15 out of 22 counties and cities. Hence, the various resources held by the local governments could be capitalized for KMT’s benefit. However, a dispute arose over Taiwan’s ratification of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement, signed in June 2013 by China and Taiwan. This dispute ignited a protest against the KMT government in the form of the Sunflower Student Movement, which lasted from March to April 2014. Various points have been cited as the background factors leading to this incident, but the fact remains that there had been a momentary increase in the number of Taiwanese citizens who felt that Ma Ying-jeou’s administration had drawn too close to China before and after this period. In November 2015, President Ma Ying-jeou met with General Secretary Xi Jinping in Singapore. At this time, however, the meeting was meaningless as there were no particular intentions to reach some form of political consensus through preliminary arrangements. The only fact recorded in history was that the head of state of China and Taiwan had met. The act by President Ma Ying-jeou, who was already in a politically hopeless situation, to create a legacy was not appreciated by the people of Taiwan.

The next presidential election that was held in January 2016 was conducted with the condition that all candidates must not have served as president before. Chu Li-luan and Wang Jin-pyng were seen as strong presidential candidates within KMT, whose inferior position had been anticipated from before the election. However, the two members decided to adopt a wait-and-see approach and did not announce their intention to run for president. Against this backdrop, Hung Hsiu-chu, who was clearly pro-unification, put her name forward and was nominated as the party’s official candidate.

---

1 According to materials released by the Mainland Affairs Council of the Executive Yuan, a comparison of the Taiwanese public’s perception of the speed of interaction between China and Taiwan in March 2014 and July the same year produced the following results: “Just right” 44.8%→36.4%, “Very fast” 31.3%→36.8%, “Very slow” 14.2%→14.7%, “I don’t know” 9.7%→12.2%. This was the only time, since the record in April 2004, when “Just right” exceeded “Very fast.” (Mainland Affairs Council of the Executive Yuan, Zhonghua minguo taiwan diqu minzhong dui liang’an guanxi de kanfa [Views of the People of Taiwan Area of the Republic of China on Cross-Strait Relations], December 2014.)
presidential candidate for a period of time. However, as she stood no chance of winning the election, Chu Li-luan, who was then the Chairman of KMT, put his name forward in part to take responsibility for the situation. However, he suffered a crushing defeat with 3,813,365 votes (percentage of votes: 31.0%). The DPP’s candidate (Tsai Ing-wen) won 6,894,744 votes (percentage of votes: 56.1%), while the People First Party’s (PFP) candidate (James Soong) won 1,576,861 votes (percentage of votes: 12.8%). Hence, the DPP won a sweeping victory in this election.

3. Case Study 3: 2018 Local Head/Representative Elections and 2020 Presidential Election

(1) DPP severely defeated in the local head/representative elections – Election results for the six major cities

Of all the counties in Taiwan, the ruling party DPP won only in the six counties and cities of Taoyuan City, Tainan City, Keelung City, Hsinchu City, Chiayi County, and Pingtung County. The opposition party, KMT, took a sweeping victory in 15 counties and cities, including New Taipei City, Taichung City, Kaohsiung City, Chiayi City, Changhua County, Yunlin County, and Nantou County. For Taipei City, independent candidate, Mayor Ko Wen-je, was re-elected for a second term after a close fight. The following is a report that focuses on the six major cities with symbolic conditions and results in the county magistrate elections.

[Kaohsiung City] The “Han Wave” storm that led KMT reclaim its mayoral seat for the first time in 20 years

The DPP had won the mayoral elections in Kaohsiung City for five successive terms lasting 20 years since 1998. To begin with, the majority of the population felt that the DPP had a strong base in the city, and even the DPP Headquarters as well as its candidate, Chen Chi-mai, were presumed to have been confident of Chen’s victory in this election. The result, however, was that KMT’s candidate Han Kuo-yu won 892,545 votes (percentage of votes: 53.9%) and declared a complete victory over Chen Chi-mai, who won 742,239 votes (percentage of votes: 44.8%). Chen had an almost perfect background for taking on this election in Kaohsiung City; he was a native of Kaohsiung City, and was a doctor who had also served as a member of the Legislative Yuan elected by Kaohsiung City, acting mayor, minister, and senior leader of the DPP. On the other hand, Han was a mainlander in Taiwan and the son of a junior military officer under KMT, and was a parachute candidate with no relation to Kaohsiung City, having served previously on the Taipei County Council and as a member of the Legislative Yuan elected by Taipei County (now New Taipei City). Han’s victory, notwithstanding that, could be attributed to the following factors: (i) Elections activities taking place across a wide area beyond the boundaries of Kaohsiung City were covered extensively by media that were strong supporters of KMT, and became a popular topic of conversation. At the same time, Han appealed strongly to members of the Kaohsiung electorate who normally work in the north, such as in Taipei City; (ii) Han attracted support widely from the younger generation on social media; (iii) Han received strong backing from the influential Kaohsiung City Farmers’ Association Chairman; (iv) Han, who successfully secured his position as a representative of the general masses, was widely accepted by the citizens of Kaohsiung.
[Taichung City] Loss by the incumbent DPP mayor with a high rate of satisfaction for his administration

KMT’s Lu Shiow-Yen defeated the incumbent DPP mayor, Lin Chia-Lung (who won 619,855 votes, percentage of votes at 42.3%) with 827,996 votes (percentage of votes: 56.6%). The DPP, which saw solid chances for victory in Kaohsiung City and Tainan City, originally regarded Taichung City as its decisive battlefield and anticipated a sure-win. Taichung citizens’ assessment of Lin was by no means low, and it should have been a fight that was definitely not unfavorable to the DPP, even while it remained unpredictable. However, as the main battlefield moved unexpectedly to Kaohsiung City, there is a possibility that the central committee of the DPP fell one step behind in its elections campaign in Taichung City.

[Tainan City] Narrow win by DPP in district where victory was certain

Tainan City is characterized as a place where the DPP will certainly win regardless of who the candidates are, and is regarded as a place where the DPP has an overwhelming advantage. Former Premier of the Executive Yuan, Lai Ching-te, was elected in the 2010 elections with 619,897 votes (percentage of votes: 60.4%), and was re-elected thereafter in the 2014 elections with 711,557 votes (percentage of votes: 72.9%), with a margin of about 450,000 votes. While the DPP’s candidate, Huang Wei-Che, defeated KMT’s candidate, Kao Su-Po, in this election, Huang was treading on thin ice with just 367,518 votes (percentage of votes: 38.0%). Although the votes were split because the six people with the largest number of votes from the six major cities were nominated for the mayoral election, it was certainly difficult to imagine that the DPP had emerged from the Tainan fight with winning votes of just below 40%.

[New Taipei City] KMT candidate who won by diluting his KMT character

KMT’s Hou Yu-ih was elected with 1,165,130 votes (percentage of votes: 57.1%), defeating the DPP’s Su Tseng-chang who received 873,692 votes (percentage of votes: 42.9%). Su lost with a margin of close to 300,000 votes. Hou took an overwhelming victory over Su in Zhonghe District, Yonghe District, and Xindian District, which were districts of New Taipei City with a large number of eligible voters. These were also districts with large populations of mainlanders in Taiwan, and were strong bases of support for KMT. The DPP’s greatest concern was that New Taipei City had the largest number of eligible voters in Taiwan (3,264,128 people), and the public sentiment was overwhelmingly supportive of KMT’s candidate. However, looking at this election, both Hou and Han, who won the election in Kaohsiung City, engaged in their election campaigns by diluting their KMT characters. Both camps analyzed the situation as being not necessarily advantageous to a KMT candidate, although it was not disadvantageous as well. Based on this, they chose to engage in election campaigns that did not place any emphasis on their KMT character. This strategy drew attention.

[Taoyuan City] DPP incumbent re-elected with a comfortable margin despite unfavorable winds for DPP

The incumbent DPP mayor, Cheng Wen-tsan, won 552,330 votes (percentage of votes: 53.46%), close to 60,000 more votes than in his previous election. He defeated KMT’s candidate, Chen Shei-Saint (407,234 votes; percentage of votes: 39.41%). It was a complete victory for Cheng,
who won more votes than Chen in every district. He even won Chen with a margin of 7,000 votes in Zhongli District, where KMT had scored a strong victory in the previous election with a margin of 15,000 votes. Not only was the DPP candidate re-elected amidst a difficult fight across the board for incumbents, former office-holders, and fresh candidates, he also came under the spotlight for scoring a higher number of votes and percentage of votes than in the last elections. Cheng explains that he gained the people’s understanding toward the efforts of the city government by solving complicated matters with simple methods. However, this alone cannot fully explain Cheng’s great victory. Taoyuan City is a region where many Hakka people live (historically, a large percentage of the Hakka people are supporters of KMT). In addition, there were already many KMT supporters in the city to begin with, due to the presence of the Army Command Headquarters in the city. Given these reasons, victory would be uncertain without elements that can attract many voters who are supporters of KMT. Hence, it is believed that Cheng resonated with many citizens of the city regardless of their background or occupation, due to the fact that his city administration activities were carried out in a way that was close to the community.

(Taipei City) Independent mayor re-elected with a close margin of 3,000 votes
As the DPP did not back its own candidate in the previous mayoral elections, DPP supporters came to support Ko Wen-je instead. However, the coordination was poorly managed in this election, and the DPP put forward its own candidate. For this reason, Ko only won 580,820 votes (percentage of votes: 41.1%), while KMT’s Ting Shou-chung won 577,566 votes (percentage of votes: 40.9%) and the DPP’s Yao Wen-Chih won 244,641 votes (percentage of votes: 17.3%). As the race was so tight, Ting’s defeated team requested for a recount. The Taipei District Court announced the results on December 13, but Mayor Ko remained victorious even after the recount.

(2) Reasons for DPP’s Defeat in the 2018 Nationwide Local Elections
The reasons for the DPP’s defeat in the 2018 local head/representative elections lie in the weak support for President Tsai Ing-wen and a failed election strategy.

(i) Weak support for President Tsai Ing-wen
Tsai’s administration had a high approval rating of 69.9% (disapproval rating of 8.8%) at the time of its inauguration in May 2016. However, in November 2016, six months after its inauguration, its approval rating had slipped to 41.4% while the disapproval rating had risen to 42.6% in a complete reversal of the trend. Thereafter, any rise in approval rating above the disapproval rating proved to be just a temporary phenomenon. By December 2018, approval rating had fallen to 24.3% while

3 495 ge lizhangming quan jizhu! Wang Haoyu choukao Zheng Wencan miaoda dianbao Han Guoyu [Cheng Wen-tsan Remembers the Names of All the 495 Borough Wardens in a Pop Quiz by Wang Haoyu and His Immediate Answers Electrocuted Han Kuo-yu], Sanli Xinwen Wang [SETN], May 16, 2019.
4 Wei fanpan! Beishi yanpiao jieguo chulu Ke Wenzhe ying Ding Shouzhong 3567 piao [The result of the Recount for the Taipei Mayoral Election Showed Ko Wen-je Defeated Ting Shou-chung by 3,567 Votes], Ziyou Shibao [Liberty Times], December 13, 2018.
A Study of the Correlation between Local Head/Representative Elections and Presidential Elections in Taiwan

the disapproval rating had climbed to 60.3%.^5

One of the factors leading to these circumstances was the failure of the administration to deliver a fresh image as “elderly men with KMT affiliations” appointed to key government posts when the administration was first inaugurated. Although the appointment of Lin Chuan as Premier of the Executive Yuan (although he had served as the Minister of Finance during Chen Shui-bian’s presidency, he was not affiliated to the DPP), Feng Shih-kuang as Minister of National Defense (member of KMT, oldest member of the cabinet and former Air Force General), David Lee Tawei as Minister of Foreign Affairs (member of KMT and diplomat, and currently Secretary-General of the National Security Council), Lin Bih-jaw as Secretary-General to the President (member of KMT, and served as Deputy Secretary-General to the President during Lee Teng-hui’s presidency), and Katharine Chang as the Minister of the Mainland Affairs Council (KMT-affiliated diplomat, female, and currently Representative of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in Austria) imbued the government with a sense of stability, it created a cabinet with a conservative image that did not reflect the characteristics of the DPP. This caused disappointment among DPP supporters.^6

The second factor was the opposition to the pension reform for civil servants, teachers, and veterans advanced by Tsai’s administration. The pension reform had been deemed necessary since the time of Ma Ying-jeou’s administration, because it was predicted that the pension systems for civil servants, teachers, and veterans would become bankrupt in 2031, 2030, and 2020 respectively if they were left in their current state. However, as veterans and retired civil servants were also eligible voters who were eager to vote, Ma’s administration could not take the step of carrying out the painful reforms. On the other hand, Tsai, with her serious and earnest personality, probably perceived the pension reform as unavoidable. Hence, Tsai’s administration approached the matter directly and took drastic measures.^7 As a result of the reform, the retirement allowance and pension funds for the military, civil servants, and teachers, which had been on the verge of bankruptcy, were spared that fate for the next 30 years. Furthermore, the government had succeeded in reducing costs of 1.4243 trillion yen for the next 50 years through the reform. Although the DPP government emphasized these results,^8 there was significant opposition to the reform. In the 2018 nationwide local elections, as many as 173 retired police officers ran for the respective elections; of these, eight were elected as members of the parliament, six were elected as the township mayors, 18 were elected as township councilors, and 41 were elected as chiefs of villages.\(^9\) This result suggested that a large number of the voters were dissatisfied with the

---

^5 Refer to the results of the questionnaire survey conducted by the Taiwanese Public Opinion Foundation (accessed on December 25, 2018).

^6 Takeuchi Takayuki, “2016 Nen no Taiwan – Tsai Ing-wen Seiken no Tanjo to Osoi Ikoki Seigi” [Taiwan in 2016 – The birth of Tsai Ing-wen’s Administration and a Late Transitional Justice], Ajia Doko Nenpo [Yearbook of Asian Affairs], 2017.

^7 Junren niangai tongguo Cai Yingwen: Jianju de renwu women yiqi zuodao le [Military Pension Reform Passed Tsai Ing-wen: We Have Accomplished an Extremely Difficult Mission Together], Ziyou Shibao [Liberty Times], June 21, 2018.


pension reform and felt a sense of crisis.

The third factor was that the general populace and corporations in Taiwan viewed the policy to phase out nuclear power, advanced by Tsai’s administration, with anxiety. As phasing out nuclear power had been one of the commitments that Tsai made during the presidential elections, it was inevitable that she would make a move toward realizing that. However, a major power outage occurred across the whole of Taiwan in August 2017. This was caused by an interruption to the supply of natural gas to thermal power stations as a result of human error. Although the nuclear power plants did not cease operation at the time of the incident, it once again brought into sharp relief concerns that suspension of the operation of nuclear power plants could cause power shortages. For this reason, even in a referendum conducted at the same time as the elections, many people called on the government to abolish Paragraph 1, Article 95 of the Electricity Act (corresponding to Japan’s Electricity Business Act), which sets out provisions on phasing out all nuclear power by 2025.

(ii) Failed election strategy

The DPP made several mistakes in the 2018 local head/representative elections. Its first mistake was to fully bring out the DPP’s character as the polar opposite of KMT, and the public did not follow along with its efforts to effectively remove KMT from Taiwan’s political sphere. This policy included the restoration of indigenous rights, proposal of judicial reform, and further, the aforementioned pension reform as a part of “transitional justice.” These policies put the spotlight on areas that had been neglected since the era of authoritarian rule under KMT, and also incorporated an element of depriving those from outside the province, who had been given preferential treatment, of their vested interests. Furthermore, it established a committee to deal with KMT’s “ill-gotten party assets,” and judged that much of KMT’s revenue constituted “ill-gotten assets” (such as land prices, rent income from buildings, etc.).

The policies described above may have been predictable policies for the DPP, which was established in rebellion against KMT’s authoritarian rule. However, Taiwanese voters no longer resonated as strongly with that as they did before. Despite this divergence of attitude with Taiwanese voters, the DPP’s executive department rushed into the election campaign without realizing this nor making the necessary changes to its strategy. Rather than “transitional justice,” the voters’ awareness was probably directed toward economic issues such as economic revitalization and employment growth. In the 2018 local head/representative elections, while they were in the minority, DPP mayors were also elected with higher votes than in the previous election in Hsinchu City and Keelung City, as well as in Taoyuan City. It may be that the DPP had implemented practical policies with easy effects and which were deeply rooted in the community, as well as resident-oriented policies.

The second mistake that the DPP made in its election strategy was that it turned itself into an “elite” political party. This becomes apparent in the comparison of Han and Chen, who contested against each other in Kaohsiung City. While Han’s father was an alumnus of the Republic of China Military Academy, and a mainlander in Taiwan who had fought the Japanese, he was not a senior military officer who formed the traditional KMT elite. Han himself was a regular mainlander in Taiwan who was born and raised in a military dependents’ village. Furthermore, Han was a “parachute candidate” equipped only with background factors that were disadvantageous to a mayor running in
Kaohsiung City. For example, he had served as a member of the Taipei County Council in Taipei County and a member of the Legislative Yuan elected by the same county, and as manager at Taipei’s Fruit and Vegetable Wholesale Market. However, Han proclaimed himself as the “old, ugly and bald vegetable vendor,” and provided the people with an image of the common man. He boasted often during the election campaign, but this was never denounced as a gaffe and instead gained him popularity. Moreover, the election campaign was carried out in a way that sought to dilute the character of KMT as much as possible. These efforts won over the hearts of the Kaohsiung people.

In contrast, Chen has abundant political experience. At 53 years old, he was also relatively younger. To begin with, Chen should have been the perfect candidate for the election in Kaohsiung City, but the election became a fight between the DPP elite and a representative of the common people. Although Han’s camp demonstrated skill in its election tactics, there is a possibility that the DPP, which had served as the central government for eight years in the past and for two-and-a-half years this time, had gradually become disengaged from its core supporters in the southern part of Taiwan. This is considered to be a reason behind the significant fall in the number of votes won by the DPP in the south, which should have been a favorable voting district for the DPP to begin with.

(3) Victory for Tsai Ing-wen in 2020 Presidential Elections on the Back of Antipathy toward China

The political parties that have taken power since the first election of the president by the people was held in 1996, are KMT in 1996, the DPP in 2000 and 2004, KMT in 2008 and 2012, and the DPP in 2016 respectively. In Taiwan’s presidential elections, being an incumbent president worked in the favor of candidates aiming to serve for a second term, and ensured that they were re-elected. However, the possibility emerged in 2020 that there may be a change of presidents for the next four years. Graph 1 shows clearly a party that wins more votes in total than the rival parties in the nationwide local elections, and takes victory in the next presidential election in four out of five times. The only exceptions are the local head/representative elections in 2009 and 2019 and the presidential elections in 2012. By making a simple analogical inference based on that, it was predicted at the end of 2018 that the DPP would have an advantage in the presidential elections in 2020. However, the result was completely different, and the DPP’s Tsai Ing-wen was re-elected.

Table. Changes in number of votes won by each party

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>KMT</th>
<th>DPP</th>
<th>Independent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>5813699</td>
<td>4379244</td>
<td>4184865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2922551</td>
<td>4184865</td>
<td>442442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>5694163</td>
<td>759004</td>
<td>5463570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>6891139</td>
<td>4990677</td>
<td>3813365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>6102876</td>
<td>2744586</td>
<td>4397956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>4977697</td>
<td>4977697</td>
<td>4674904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>6471970</td>
<td>4295267</td>
<td>5449494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>5755287</td>
<td>6093578</td>
<td>5830106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>5894130</td>
<td>6894744</td>
<td>4897730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2677834</td>
<td>1185961</td>
<td>369588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1668401</td>
<td>704385</td>
<td>1441001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1507173</td>
<td>1576861</td>
<td>1507173</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Prepared by the author based on data from the Central Election Commission
(i) DPP leadership set in its view of putting forward Tsai Ing-wen as its election candidate

As Tsai Ing-wen, who was defeated in the 2018 local head/representative elections, had resigned as the chair of the party, an election for the chair was held on January 6, 2019. This election was contested by Cho Jung-tai, Secretary-General to the President (59 years old) and You Yinglong, Chairman of the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (62 years old). Cho had been recommended jointly by influential people who were younger than Tsai Ing-wen, beyond party factions, such as Cheng Wen-tsan, Mayor of Taoyuan City, who won this local head/representative election, Lin Yu-chang, Mayor of Keelung City (assumed office as acting chair of the DPP after Tsai’s resignation), and the defeated Lin Chia-lung (Minister of Transportation and Communications). This election was set up as a fight between Cho, who was reform-oriented while bashing himself in the current administration, and You, who represented the voices of the anti-Tsai camp. As a result, Cho Jung-tai was elected as the chair with 72.6% of the votes. Against the background of Cho’s victory was the expression of the will of party members, who wished to put Cho up as a symbol of unity beyond political factions. Nevertheless, the voting rate had been unusually low at 16.9%. This hinted at an atmosphere within the DPP of giving up on the next presidential elections.

Cho’s term would last till May 2020, and his mission was to restore the strength of the party and establish a system toward the presidential elections. Most importantly, he had to review the reasons for the party’s defeat in the nationwide local elections, and set out a new direction for the DPP. With regard to this point, Lin Yu-chang said, “In the future, we should not bring up the DPP’s past contributions to democracy in Taiwan. Taiwan has already experienced three changes of government regime, and the DPP had taken power twice. The people of Taiwan no longer owe the DPP anything. The DPP should win the support and approval of the Taiwanese people through its future contributions to Taiwan.” These remarks represented a fundamental problematization of the DPP’s defeat by a member within the party itself. Since the inauguration of Tsai Ing-wen’s government in May 2016, the DPP had strongly promoted transitional justice, depriving KMT of its financial base and advancing efforts to rectify the policies put in place during KMT’s authoritarian rule. Although some of these efforts were accepted by the Taiwanese people, the drastic way of advancing these measures lacked the power to appeal to the moderate voters who neither support KMT nor the DPP, and who make up the majority of the voters in Taiwan. The DPP needed to promote, to the maximum extent, policies that were strongly attractive to non-partisan voters.

On the other hand, there remained, to a certain degree, core independent forces within the DPP’s supporter base who were not necessarily party members. These people perceived Tsai Ing-wen’s policies, which were based on maintaining the status quo, as a betrayal to themselves. Lai Ching-te increasingly felt that he had to put himself forward as the presidential candidate,

---

10 “Minshinto Shusekisen – Chuchen-so Daihyo no Cho Jung-tai shi ra ga Todokede / Taiwan” [Elections for DPP Chair - Report from Cho Jung-tai, Representative of the Middle Class/Taiwan], Fokusai Taiwan [Focus Taiwan], December 14, 2018.
11 Xinwen yan/Fan-ying... Dangnei fuyuan de xinren toupiao [News Eye/For or Against Tsai... A Vote of Confidence inside the Party to the Office of the President and the Executive Yuan], Lianhe Xinwen Wang [UDN], December 30, 2018.
13 Ogasawara Yoshiyuki, Professor, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Facebook (December 5, 2018).
owing to a sense of anxiety and responsibility that the DPP would certainly lose in the presidential elections if things were left as they were. However, Tsai Ing-wen and the executive department of the DPP were set in their view toward Tsai’s re-election. Tsai and the executive department worked on persuading Lai while waiting for his impetus when he first declared his intention to run for president to weaken. This was done by postponing the party primaries from the period it had originally been scheduled for. Although that ended in disorder, Tsai Ing-wen won the party primaries in part due to the growing urgency of the situation in Hong Kong. Thereafter, Lai Ching-te accepted the vice president candidacy. For Tsai Ing-wen, this signified that they would also absorb the votes of independent, non-partisan voters. As for Lai, if he did not hold a prominent position on the political front after leaving his position as the Premier of the Executive Yuan, he would lose his political influence and not even be able to aim for the 2024 presidential elections. Taiwan’s constitution does not set out any provisions concerning the authority or power of the vice president, but it is definitely a position from which one can easily put forward proposals to the president. It is believed that Tsai made the rational decision of aiming to run in the next presidential election by becoming the candidate for vice president, winning the presidential election alongside Tsai, and maintaining a certain degree of influence as the vice president. In Taiwan, a figure who is able to complement the weakness of the presidential candidate is often nominated as the vice-presidential candidate for election by the people.

### Figure. Complementary relationship of popularly-elected presidential and vice-presidential candidates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President</th>
<th>Vice president</th>
<th>Complementary elements to the president</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lee Teng-hui</td>
<td>Lien Chan</td>
<td>Young, good family background, party elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chen Shui-bian</td>
<td>Lu Hsiu-Lian</td>
<td>Female, elderly, champion of independents, from the northern part of Taiwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma Ying-jeou</td>
<td>Siew Wan-chang</td>
<td>Elderly, economic expert, native of the same county, from the southern part of Taiwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wu Don-Yih</td>
<td>Elderly, native of the same county, from the central part of Taiwan (also popularly-elected mayor in Kaohsiung)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsai Ing-wen</td>
<td>Chen Chien-Jen</td>
<td>Male, elderly, scientific background, Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lai Ching-te</td>
<td>Male, young, scientific background, independent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


(ii) KMT’s failure to unite despite its victory

We could say that KMT took a complete victory in the 2018 local head/representative elections. This was captured as an important step in advancing toward the 2020 presidential election with an advantage. This was firstly substantiated by the fact that the number of voters who supported KMT across the whole of Taiwan exceeded the number of voters supporting the DPP as of the end of November 2018, and increased the likelihood of strengthening the party’s momentum toward the upcoming presidential election one year and two months later. Secondly, in counties and cities under the leadership of those affiliated with KMT, KMT would be able to advance the elections campaign in a way that was advantageous to them during the presidential elections.

Under these circumstances, the natural flow of events should have been the strengthening of the authority of Chairman Wu Den-yih, who led KMT to victory, and Wu should have run as
KMT’s official presidential candidate in the 2020 presidential elections. In reality, however, there were hardly any voices calling for Wu to run for president, and he could not even run for the party primaries for the election of KMT’s presidential candidate. The party primaries were centered around the fight between Han Kuo-yu and Terry Gou, the founder of Foxconn Technology. Ultimately, Han Kuo-yu maintained his momentum, won the party primaries, and became KMT’s official presidential candidate. In September, Terry Gou left KMT and for a time, showed signs that he was preparing to run in the presidential elections as an independent candidate. Hence, there was a sense of unease and uncertainty with regard to the unity within the party. Former Premier Chang San-cheng, who had for a time declared that he would run in the presidential elections, was nominated as the vice-presidential candidate who would be Han Kuo-yu’s running mate.

In addition to Han Kuo-yu’s reconciliatory stance toward China, which was revealed amidst the heightening tensions in Hong Kong that will be detailed later, his loss of momentum could also be attributed to several other factors. Firstly, the switch to the presidential campaign about half a year after assuming office as the mayor of Kaohsiung was regarded as a moral issue that was used as ammunition against him, such as criticism toward his lack of responsibility as a politician. This continued to leave significant ill effects, as demonstrated by the implementation of a mayoral recall election in Kaohsiung City in June 2020 and the confirmation of his recall by close to 940,000 votes, exceeding the 890,000 votes that he won when he was elected as the mayor of Kaohsiung City. Moreover, although Han Kuo-yu had visited the United States in February 2019 before he became the official presidential candidate of KMT, he was not acknowledged by the U.S. government during his visit. This was vastly different from the hospitality that the U.S. government showed to Tsai Ing-wen on her visit to the country in 2015 when the DPP was the opposition party. Even after Han became the official KMT presidential candidate, he did not make the visits to countries such as the United States and Japan, which is a common practice for the opposition candidate. It is likely that Han’s camp had sensed beforehand that any foreign visits by Han would not produce any results, and therefore made up other reasons for not conducting the visits out of concern that such visits would instead create negative press for Han. Furthermore, it could also be pointed out that Han had been perceived critically by the Taiwanese electorate as he had made gaffes on many occasions, and therefore raised the question of whether he was of a suitable character to be the president.

(iii) Hong Kong situation that changed the flow of the 2020 presidential elections
From April 2019, the Hong Kong situation, in which prolonged demonstrations on an unprecedented scale were held to protest against revisions to the extradition bill (officially, the “Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill”), was the event that started to have the greatest impact on Taiwan’s presidential elections. Although Tsai Ing-wen was among the first to express moral support for the situation, Han initially skirted the issue by declaring that he did not know about it. This could be inferred as an attempt to avoid giving the Chinese authorities a bad impression, but it provoked antipathy among the Taiwanese people who were strongly opposed to the “one country, two systems” principle advocated by Xi Jinping’s administration. As the demonstrations in Hong Kong grew to a scale of 1 million people, then 2 million people, Tsai Ing-wen’s approval rating among the Taiwanese people grew as well. According to an opinion poll conducted by TVBS (conducted on September 25-27, 2019), Tsai Ing-wen’s
approval rating was 50% in contrast with Han Kuo-yu’s 38%, with 12% of the respondents being undecided. According to a survey conducted by the Taiwanese media (conducted on September 25-29, 2019), based on the running partners of Tsai Ing-wen with Lai Ching-te, and Han Kuo-yu with Chu Li-luan, the Tsai/Lai team received an approval rating of 44% against 35.3% for the Han/Chu team. The Cross-Strait Policy Association, a DPP-affiliated think tank, published the following approval ratings (based on a survey conducted on October 19-20, 2019): 49.9% for Tsai, 32.9% for Han, and 6.6% for Lu Hsiu-Lian (vice president during Chen Shui-bian’s presidency, who could still possibility run as an independent). Hence, all the opinion polls showed that Tsai Ing-wen was ahead of Han Kuo-yu by a margin ranging from nine points to 17 points.

The Hong Kong situation triggered a strong recognition that the presidential election is a matter of Taiwanese identity. Hence, Tsai Ing-wen, who presented a clear stance, gained a strong and unshakeable advantage. Conversely, if there had not been such significant developments in the Hong Kong issue, Tsai Ing-wen would probably not have been spared a close fight in the presidential election.

(iv) Tsai Ing-wen’s re-election boosted by support from the U.S.

The United States also demonstrated clearly its support of Tsai Ing-wen’s administration in various ways, and this was one of the key factors contributing to the turnaround of Tsai’s election campaign. On July 8, 2019, the Trump administration approved the sale of 108 tanks, air-defense missiles, and other arms. Compared to the navy and air force, which had achieved a certain degree of progress in updating their main weapons, the updating of the army’s main weapons, represented by tanks, had been deferred. In this sense, there is significance in America’s visible display of its preferential treatment to Taiwan by selling it the M1A2T tanks, which are in active service and being used by the U.S. Army. Although Taiwan would have to carry out completely different maintenance on these new tanks than its existing M60A3 tanks, the sale was also an unspoken declaration of the United States’ intention to continue looking out for Taiwan going forward. Furthermore, the United States decided in August to sell 66 new F-16C/D BLK70 fighter aircraft to Taiwan, which could be described as the latest F-16 model. As this was the first time in 27 years that the United States was selling fighter aircraft to Taiwan, the preferential treatment given by the Trump administration to Taiwan was clear for all to see. In addition, naval vessels and aircraft of the U.S. Navy and Air Force were also particularly active in the waters and airspaces around Taiwan in 2019. Moreover, during Tsai’s transit in New York, a party was held with the attendance of guests including UN Ambassadors of friendly countries of Taiwan in New

---

14 Can! “TVBS Mindiao” Han Guoyu luohou zai kuoda Ting-han fan-lan zuqun ye jianshao [Disastrous! “TVBS Public Opinion Poll” Shows Han Kuo-yu is Getting Further Behind with a Reduced Number of Han Supporters in the Pan-Blue Group], Ziyou Shibao [Liberty Times], October 2, 2019.
15 Han-Zhang pei, Han-Zhu pei, Han-Zhou pei dou yiyang, Cai-Lai pei jun 44% lingxian [Han and Chang, Han and Chu, or Han and Chou Pairs Make No Difference; They All Fall Behind Tsai and Lai by 44 Percentage Points], Ziyou Shibao [Liberty Times], October 2, 2019.
16 Liang’an Zhengce Xiehui mindiao Cai Yingwen zhichidu dasheng Han Guoyu [Cross-Strait Policy Association’s Public Opinion Poll Shows Tsai Ing-wen’s Great Victory over Han Kuo-yu], Ziyou Shibao [Liberty Times], October 22, 2019.
York. This could not have taken place without the approval of the U.S. government nor disclosure to the media.

The Taiwanese electorate pays close attention to whether or not their president is trusted by the U.S. government, in view that this has direct bearing on Taiwan’s security. In this respect, while there is no denying that Tsai Ing-wen had contributed to the intensifying conflict between the United States and China in the international environment, she had succeeded in making a display of the strong relationship between United States and Taiwan. On the other hand, Han Kuo-yu had completely failed to win over the United States as his ally.

Conclusion
At the point when the local head/representative elections ended in 2018, it was considered extremely likely that KMT’s candidate would win the 2020 presidential election. Elections data to date also indicated a strong possibility that KMT would win the presidential election. Based on these observations, it was clearly easy to establish the basic hypothesis that the party winning a higher number of total votes in the local head/representative elections would have the winning edge in the next presidential election. However, it was also clear, at the same time, that there are exceptions to this hypothesis.

On the other hand, the principle that an incumbent president with a second term left has always been re-elected was also proven true in 2020. In cases where there is an external threat, there appears to be a strong tendency for voters to develop a sense of purpose toward mobilizing the will of the people under the incumbent president. However, a ruling party that has been in power for two terms lasting eight years easily attracts criticism and dissatisfaction toward its policies, and to date, changes in political power have been taking place without exception. Tsai Ing-wen’s administration, which began its second term in May 2020, is supported by the people with a high approval rating of 61%. This can be attributed to the high rating that Tsai’s administration received for its success in controlling the novel coronavirus pandemic. Tsai Ing-wen’s administration may appear to be rock-solid, but it has to be careful, because if it were to stumble upon the restoration of everyday life, it would be criticized by the voters as well as the opposition. While KMT is going through a phase of recovery, it faces a difficult situation with regard to finding opportunities for rebuilding the party’s strength. This is because in addition to its defeat in the presidential elections and Legislative Yuan elections, the Mayor of Kaohsiung was recalled with a large number of votes, and it is also expected to face defeat in the mayoral by-election for Kaohsiung City in August. Given the growing trend of a strong Taiwanese identity among the Taiwanese people, it is highly likely that there will be calls for KMT to be dissolved and reborn as the Taiwan Nationalist Party.

The “Law of the People’s Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region” was enacted on June 30, 2020, effectively stifling the “one country, two systems” principle in Hong Kong. In response, Tsai’s administration set out various policies to support Hong Kong citizens. With the intensification of the U.S.-China conflict, the United States is likely to continue supporting Taiwan, and the strong consciousness of the Taiwanese identity will probably be sustained in the immediate future. The next focus will be on

---
18 Cai zhengfu 520 zuixin mindiao chulu! Wang jingtan: Nanyi zhixin... [The Result of the Final Public Opinion Poll for the Tsai Administration before May 20 Came Out! Surprised Netizens: This is Hard to Believe...], Zhongguo Shibao [China Times], May 18, 2020.
whether or not the DPP, which has an advantage over KMT, will be able to achieve a breakthrough in the 2024 presidential election and overcome the hurdle of a ruling party remaining in power for two terms (eight years), which has not been broken so far.