

Briefing Memo

The Key Points on Taiwan's Presidential Election

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Preface

In Taiwan, a Presidential election involving a direct vote by the citizens of Taiwan has been held every four years since 1996. Saturday, January 16, 2016 has already been set as the next election date, gradually drawing increasing attention not only from within Taiwan but also the neighbouring countries. The key issues that can be observed from the past Presidential elections are as follows:

- (1) 1996: The execution of the first democratic presidential election by the public. Intimidation from China's short-range ballistic missiles launch training in the northern and southern coastal waters of Taiwan (the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis continuing on from the previous year) and the dispatch of two aircraft carriers task forces to the Taiwan Straits by the Clinton administration.
- (2) 2000: A three-horse election campaign due to the split among the Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party; hereinafter referred to as "KMT"). The intimidating live TV broadcast by Premier Zhu Rongji(朱鎔基) of China against Taiwan, and the opposition from the people of Taiwan right before the election. Chen Shui-bian(陳水扁) and Annette Lu(呂秀蓮) of the Democratic Progressive Party (hereinafter referred to as "DPP") were elected with a winning percentage of less than 40%, and achieved the first change of government through a peaceful method in Greater China.
- (3) 2004: The influential figures of the Pan-Blue group (camp of the KMT) that fought against one another in the previous election cooperated with each other to nominate presidential and vice-presidential candidates, for a head-to-head against the existing president and vice-presidents of the DPP. A shooting incident aimed at the president and the vice-president occurring on the day prior to the voting day. Although it was seen that the Pan-Blue parties were in an advantageous position, the situation took a new turn with the incumbent President Chen Shui-bian and Vice President Annette Lu being re-elected by 30,000 votes.
- (4) 2008: The stagnation of the DPP over a period of eight years, deteriorating relations with China and with the U.S., and the opposition by the Taiwanese people against the corruption of those surrounding the president ended with Ma Ying-jeou(馬英九) and Siew Wan-chang(蕭萬長) of the KMT winning with the highest number of votes (about 7,660,000) and the highest percentage of votes (58.44%) during the presidential election of 2008 and the battle between the new candidates, resulting in another change of government. There was a dramatic improvement in relations with China right after Ma Ying-jeou took office as the president, and there has also been progress in relations with the U.S. and with Japan.
- (5) 2012: Ma Ying-jeou was re-elected by a margin of about 800,000 votes on the basis of a stable relationship with China and foreign relations (Wu Den-yih(吳敦義) took over as the vice-president). Tsai Ing-wen(蔡英文

文) was defeated with a larger than expected disparity, possibly influenced by criticism against Tsai by a US official which could have been perceived as a non-supportive stance.

As of September 2015, this paper aims to conduct an analysis of the situation on the sixth presidential election in Taiwan, and to introduce the key points of this upcoming election.

The Characteristics of the Democratic Presidential Election in Taiwan

Eligible voters over 20 years of age (about 18 million people) cast a vote and the pair of candidates that ranks first will be elected as the president and the vice-president. The awareness of the Taiwanese voters has been high from the start, and as regards the voting rate in the nationwide local head election in 2014, those for the direct control mayoral election (six main mayors) stood at 66.31%, while those for the election for the head of the other prefectures and cities scored 70.40%. However, the voting rate of the past five presidential elections has been considerably high at an average rate of 77.9%, which is an indication that presidential elections have caught the attention of the people in Taiwan.

The term of office of the President is four years and is limited to two consecutive terms. Since the current President Ma Ying-jeou is in his second term in the office, new candidates will run against each other at the next Presidential Election. Moreover, when taking into consideration that Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) was elected as President in the National Assembly of the Republic of China in 1990, and was elected in the democratic presidential election in 1996, the three presidents elected by the people in Taiwan are all serving their two terms. Sometimes the disparity has been marginal as in 2004 but in general the situation has been advantageous for the current office. Furthermore it can be perceived that there is an awareness of maintaining some kind of balance among the voters so administration is changed every two years.

Key Factors—Relations with China and the U.S.

The issue that the voters in the Taiwanese Presidential Election consider important are the candidates' policies towards China. The key point in the next election is whether to place the "One China" principle, and the "1992 Consensus" as the foundation for the interaction between China and Taiwan. The "One China" principle is a view that the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China both belong to one state called China, and the "1992 Consensus" is seen as the interaction confirming this principle. Yet it is not clearly specified what type of governmental this single China will be. Not surprisingly, China views the People's Republic of China as China, and Taiwan views the Republic of China as China. In particular, while Taiwan states that the details of the "One China" principle should be "discussed with each other", China on the other hand has not accepted this. Additionally, Taiwan's DPP maintains the stance that the "1992 Consensus" has never existed. China wants to maintain the status quo as regards the relationship between Taiwan and China, by getting the DPP to accept the "One China principle and the "1992 Consensus" and prevent the independence of Taiwan for the time being.

Another significant concern for the voters for Taiwan is whether the president can build a good relationship with the U.S. It seems that President Chen Shui-bian has attracted criticism not only from China but also from the U.S. as a "trouble maker," causing tension in relations between China and Taiwan. This was due to him introducing the notion of "One Country on Each Side" in August 2002, which emphasizes that China and Taiwan are two separate countries, and conducting a "consultative referendum" with regard to the direction of the relations between China and Taiwan. In contrast to this, President Ma Ying-jeou has proclaimed a "three no's" policy, which are "no

unification, no independence, no use of force” and has self-acknowledged himself as a “peace maker”. China has also welcomed the Ma Ying-jeou administration, promoting it as boost for interaction between China and Taiwan. The U.S. is pleased with the easing of tensions between China and Taiwan and is on good terms with the Ma Ying-jeou administration.

As regards the next Presidential Election, candidate Tsai Ing-wen of the DPP (party leader) visited the U.S. for two weeks in the end of May 2015 and received an exceptionally warm welcome from the U.S. officials, including becoming the first presidential candidate to be permitted to visit the Department of State. The reason behind the warm reception is that, unlike the 2012 election, Tsai Ing-wen has made it clear that her policy is to maintain the status quo of the relationship between China and Taiwan, but other contributing factors may be that the U.S. has high expectations of Tsai Ing-wen being elected, along with the current tension in U.S.-China relations. Furthermore, the two other candidates have yet to visit the U.S. as of the end of September.

Another Key Factor That Holds the Key—the Legislative Elections

Another factor that is important for the stability of the government is the state of affairs of the legislative elections. During the Chen Shui-bian administration period of 2000 to 2008, the Pan-Blue groups led by the KMT accounted for more than half of the Legislative Yuan. For that reason, the Office of the President and the Executive Yuan (DPP), and the Legislative Yuan (more than half of which were Pan-Blue groups led by the KMT) were in opposition to each other, resulting in a dysfunctional administration for eight years.

The current Legislative Yuan (Eighth) has 113 seats and 112 members, consisting of 65 KMT, 40 DPP, two People First Party, three Taiwan Solidarity Union, and two Others. Up to this point, the DPP has never received a majority of the votes in the legislative elections, but some researchers on Taiwan have pointed out that there may be a possibility of winning a majority in the next election. The basis for this is that the DPP had a sweeping victory in the Taiwan nationwide local head election held on November 29, 2014. In this election, of the six municipality mayors the DPP took hold of two seats, Taichung and Taoyuan, from KMT. At the same time, the DPP easily secured Kaohsiung and Tainan, and in Taipei an unaffiliated mayor close to the DPP was elected. Even in New Taipei City, where it was thought that KMT would win by a wide margin, they secured victory by a small difference of 24,528 votes (they were only 1.28 percentage points apart in terms of share of the votes). In other prefectures, the DPP raced ahead. If the DPP can win the election and also win majority of the votes at the Legislative Yuan, then they will formulate the majority in the congress, and a considerably more stable political administration than the Chen Shui-bian administration can be expected.

Conclusion

With regard to China relations, Hung Hsiu-chu has voiced opinions that lean more towards unification compared to those of Ma Ying-jeou. Although on a personal level James Soong maintains a good relationship with China, as a politician he is interested in maintaining the status quo of Taiwan. From the standpoint of China, the favorable situation would be for one of these parties to win the election. However, the vice-president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Institute of Taiwan Studies, analyzed that the DPP would be sure to recover power. Thus Tsai Ing-wen continues to maintain a strong position.

For argument’s sake, if the DPP were to win the Presidential Election, what could be the outcome? China wants a peaceful unification with Taiwan and does not want to make enemies of the people in Taiwan. China will probably implement political measures to damage the authority of the DPP administration, without damaging the

livelihood of the Taiwanese citizens. What may happen is the suspension of the summit meeting between the Straits Exchange Foundation (Taiwan) and the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (China). The summit meeting was set up for the first time in nine years straight after the Ma Ying-jeou administration comes to power, and since then was held 11 times until August 2015. After the birth of the Ma Ying-jeou administration, the Straits Exchange Foundation and the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits have signed 23 agreements, such as the ECFA, and have contributed to the promotion of exchange focused on economics and trade between China and Taiwan. Even if a DPP administration was to come into power, although it may not break these agreements, it may avoid initiating new negotiations. There is a possibility that, as with the Chen Shui-bian administration period, it may choose to substantially ignore them, taking the stance of, “But now when it comes to judge a man, after I listen to what he insists on, watching what he will actually do, then I will judge him”. The meetings between the top officials of the Legislative Yuan Mainland Affairs Council and Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council that deals with practical issues between Taiwan and China, and were held three times during the Ma Ying-jeou administration, may also be shelved.

President Ma Ying-jeou committed to the “diplomatic truce” and has proposed, in regard to the volume of aid, not to fight over diplomatic allies with China. China has not given a direct answer to this proposal, as it does not recognize Taiwan as a state. However in reality, during the Ma Ying-jeou administration the number of Taiwan’s diplomatic allies has stabilized. The formation of a DPP government could bring about a change to such stability, and a conflict could erupt between China and Taiwan over diplomatic allies.

Furthermore, China is refraining from blatant military actions against Taiwan as it did during the 1996 Presidential Election, when it learned that such actions would incite the resentment of the Taiwanese people. Nonetheless, China has never abandoned the military option against Taiwan. It has been routinely updating its short-range ballistic missiles and cruise missiles, enhancing its long range air defense missiles, advanced fighters, airborne early-warning system (AWACS), and assault landing crafts and improving its cyber warfare capabilities. The People’s Liberation Army has consistently aimed to organize weapons and equipment to “liberate” Taiwan and conduct necessary training and to build war-waging capabilities that would put off or stop the U.S. army from intervening in situations arising in the Straits of Taiwan.

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