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**Taiwan's 2014 Local Elections: Implications for  
Cross-Strait Relations**

**Matthew Southerland**

**Policy Analyst, Security and Foreign Affairs**

**Kevin Rosier**

**Policy Analyst, Economics and Trade**

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## Background

On November 29, 2014, Taiwan held a series of local elections for 11,130 positions, including mayors, county magistrates, city and county councilors, township chiefs, and village and borough chiefs. The Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT), which holds both Taiwan's presidency and a majority in Taiwan's legislature, won only six of the races for the mayors and county magistrates of 22 cities and counties\* (see Table 1 for a complete overview of all 22 elections). These were the most important races, because, in general, these mayors and county magistrates govern the most populous jurisdictions of any positions that were up for election. The opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) won 13 positions, and three more went to independent candidates. Among the winning independent candidates, one was endorsed by the DPP. Seven of the 13 positions won by the DPP were won by the KMT in the 2009 and 2010 local elections. One independent candidate won a position previously held by the KMT. In the 22 races, the DPP earned 5,830,106 votes (47.55 percent) and the KMT earned 4,990,677 votes (40.7 percent).<sup>1</sup>

The KMT struggled in mayoral and county magistrate elections in several cities and counties where it had governed for many years or was expected to perform strongly. Independent candidate Ko Wen-je, who the DPP endorsed, won the mayoral election in Taipei City, which has had KMT mayors for the past 16 years.<sup>2</sup> In Taichung City, DPP candidate Lin Chia-lung was elected mayor, defeating the KMT's Jason Hu, who had been mayor since 2001. Moreover, KMT incumbent Eric Chu won reelection in the New Taipei City mayoral race by only 1.28 percent of the vote, despite expectations he would win handily.<sup>3</sup>

In other local elections, the KMT maintained a larger number of city and county councilor seats than the DPP, but the DPP increased its number of seats by 12.79 percent. Although the KMT still holds more township chief positions than the DPP, the DPP raised its number of township chiefs by 58.82 percent.<sup>4</sup> The DPP increased its number of village and borough chiefs by 650 percent, from 52 to 390, but the KMT maintained its place as the party with the largest representation among village and borough chiefs, with 1,794 positions.<sup>5</sup>

The Chinese government has adopted a moderate stance toward the local election results, although it continues to use rhetoric reflecting its concerns about the DPP. Immediately following the elections, a spokesperson for China's Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO)<sup>†</sup> said, "We have noticed the results of this election. We hope compatriots on both sides of the Strait will cherish the hard-won achievements in cross-Strait relations and jointly preserve and continue to advance the peaceful development of cross-Strait relations."<sup>6</sup>

## Preliminary Analysis

The KMT's overwhelming defeat indicates widespread popular dissatisfaction with the incumbent party and with Taiwan's economic performance. Most voters were concerned primarily with local issues, including wages, housing prices, and food safety.<sup>7</sup> The Ma Administration's cross-Strait policies were not a major issue in these elections; however, growing skepticism toward China among Taiwan voters may have driven some, especially youth, to vote against the KMT's candidates.

The DPP's performance in the 2014 local elections places the party in a strong position as Taiwan's 2016 presidential election campaign approaches.<sup>‡</sup> Nevertheless, there are other factors that likely will have a greater impact on the result of the upcoming election, such as the forthcoming selection of the KMT and DPP presidential candidates, those candidates' cross-Strait policy platforms, both parties' campaign

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\* The KMT won only one of the races for the mayors of Taiwan's six major municipalities—Taipei City, New Taipei City, Taoyuan City, Taichung City, Kaohsiung City, and Tainan City.

† The TAO is a cabinet-level agency in China's State Council that oversees China's cross-Strait policy.

‡ The DPP won presidential elections twice in Taiwan with the 2000 election and 2004 re-election of Chen Shui-bian.

strategies, the Chinese government's response to a strengthened DPP, and whether the KMT reforms itself and repairs its image among Taiwan voters.

Although Chinese government spokespersons may criticize policy platforms with which Beijing disagrees, Beijing likely will take a measured approach to the 2016 election campaign. The Chinese government has learned from previous Taiwan presidential elections that threatening actions and statements directed at a particular candidate and the Taiwan electorate tend not to deter enough voters from supporting the candidate, and may even mobilize voters to back the candidate. Faced with the prospect of the election of Lee Teng-hui in 1996, Beijing responded with missile tests near Taiwan; Beijing also protested Chen Shui-bian's 2000 bid with threats by then premier Zhu Rongji.<sup>8</sup> Both Lee and Chen nonetheless won those elections, and the Chinese government took a much less heavy-handed approach to subsequent Taiwan presidential elections.

Given the DPP's large margin of victory in the 2014 local elections, the Chinese government almost certainly will expand its communication with the DPP—a move it already had begun to make before the races. During his visit to Taiwan in June 2014, TAO director Zhang Zhijun met with Chen Chu, the DPP mayor of Kaohsiung City—marking a rare meeting between a Chinese central government official and a serving DPP official.<sup>9</sup> Through these interactions, Beijing likely seeks to ensure the trajectory of cross-Strait relations does not change dramatically. However, there is no indication Beijing will change its baseline policy on the status of Taiwan's sovereignty.

In the run-up to Taiwan's 2016 presidential election, Beijing almost certainly will continue to promote cross-Strait rapprochement and economic integration, which it views as beneficial to achieving its goal of political unification with Taiwan. In addition, Beijing could try to influence the 2016 election by applying the same subtle techniques it reportedly used in prior elections, including encouraging Taiwan businesspeople in China, who are largely pro-KMT, to return to Taiwan to vote.<sup>10§</sup>

Worried about a potential return to the presidency by the DPP, the Chinese government probably will continue its efforts to win “hearts and minds” in Taiwan. However, Beijing faces a challenge in winning over Taiwan public opinion. Taiwan voters are increasingly concerned that cross-Strait economic ties will harm Taiwan's economy and political autonomy, and their identification with China continues to decline. Recent polls in Taiwan indicate a record low number of Taiwan citizens identify as “Chinese and Taiwanese;” the number of citizens who identify only as “Taiwanese” reached a new high of 60.4 percent.<sup>11</sup> This growing Taiwan identity and popular concerns about cross-Strait relations are likely to be key factors in Taiwan's 2016 presidential election.

A more active youth vote also will play an important role in Taiwan's upcoming election. Taiwan has experienced a resurgence of civic activism in recent years, especially among the youth. This trend was on display during the 2014 local elections through strong youth participation in a campaign to enlist citizens for election monitoring and a campaign to recall several legislators, both of which were grassroots initiatives.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>§</sup> Western and Taiwan media have reported on various ways the Chinese government may have attempted to influence Taiwan's elections. For example, according to Taiwan businesspeople in China, officials from the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee's United Front Work Department, an organization through which Beijing promotes unification with Taiwan, encouraged them to return to Taiwan to vote in previous elections. The United Front Work Department's activities include conducting outreach to Taiwan businesspeople in China as well as people in Taiwan, including students and academics. In addition, leading up to the 2014 local elections, a Chinese state-owned airline, Air China, as well as other Chinese and Taiwan airlines, provided reduced fares for flights from China to Taiwan. Furthermore, the Chinese government did not intervene to remove a large campaign poster supporting KMT candidates in the Taipei and Taichung mayoral races that had been placed outside the Shanghai World Expo Exhibition and Convention Center. Yimou Lee and Faith Hung, “RPT-Special Report-How China's Shadowy Agency Is Working to Absorb Taiwan,” Reuters, November 28, 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/11/28/taiwan-china-special-report-pix-graphic-idUSL3N0T11N020141128>; Chiu Yen-Ling, et al., “2014 Elections: Taiwanese Campaigning for KMT in China: Report,” *Taipei Times*, November 27, 2014. <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2014/11/27/2003605412>.

**Table 1: Results of 22 Mayoral and County Magistrate Elections**

\* indicates a position formerly held by the KMT

Ind. = Independent

City/County	Winning Party	Winner's Name	Percentage of Votes
Taipei City	Ind. *	Ko Wen-je	Ind. (57.16%), KMT (40.82%)
Taichung City	DPP *	Lin Chia-lung	DPP (57.06%), KMT (42.94%)
Taoyuan City	DPP *	Cheng Wen-tsang	DPP (51%), KMT (47.97%)
Keelung City	DPP *	Lin Yu-chang	DPP (53.15%), KMT (27.47%)
Hsinchu City	DPP *	Lin Chih-chien	DPP (38.36%), KMT (37.85%)
Chiayi City	DPP *	Twu Shiing-je	DPP (51.41%), KMT (45.50%)
Changhua County	DPP *	Wei Ming-ku	DPP (53.71%), KMT (39.58%)
Penghu County	DPP *	Chen Kuang-fu	DPP (55.34%), KMT (44.66%)
Chiayi County	DPP	Helen Chang	DPP (63.09%), KMT (34.09%)
Kaohsiung City	DPP	Chen Chu	DPP (68.09%), KMT (30.89%)
Tainan City	DPP	Lai Ching-te	DPP (72.9%), KMT (27.1%)
Yunlin County	DPP	Lee Chin-yung	DPP (56.98%), KMT (43.02%)
Yilan County	DPP	Lin Tsun-hsien	DPP (63.95%), KMT (36.05%)
Pingtung County	DPP	Pan Men-an	DPP (62.93%), KMT (37.07%)
Hualien County	Ind.	Fu Kun-chi	Ind. (56.53%), KMT (27.62%)
Kinmen County	Ind.	Chen Fu-hai	Ind. (52.77%), KMT (33.35%)
New Taipei City	KMT	Eric Chu	KMT (50.06%), DPP (48.78%)
Hsinchu County	KMT	Chiu Ching-chun	KMT (46.94%), Ind. (44.82%)
Miaoli County	KMT	Hsu Yao-chang	KMT (46.59%), DPP (28.37%)
Taitung County	KMT	Justin Huang	KMT (54.41%), DPP (45.59%)
Nantou County	KMT	Lin Ming-tai	KMT (50.96%), DPP (49.04%)
Lianchiang County	KMT	Liu Tsen-ying	KMT (66.25%), KMT (33.75%)

Source: Central Election Commission (Taiwan), *2014 Elections for Local Officials*. Staff translation.

[http://vote2014.nat.gov.tw/zh\\_TW/IDX/indexC.html](http://vote2014.nat.gov.tw/zh_TW/IDX/indexC.html).

Note: The table lists the percentage of votes for the winner and the runner-up in each race.

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- <sup>1</sup> Central Election Commission (Taiwan), *2014 Elections for Local Officials*. Staff translation. [http://vote2014.nat.gov.tw/zh\\_TW/IDX/indexC.html](http://vote2014.nat.gov.tw/zh_TW/IDX/indexC.html); *United Daily News* (Taiwan), “9-in-1 Elections.” Staff translation. <http://udn.com/vote2014/analyze#session07>; and Central Election Commission (Taiwan), *Taiwan Local Elections of 2014*. <http://engweb.cec.gov.tw/files/11-1030-5692.php>.
- <sup>2</sup> Austin Ramzy, “Independent is Elected Taipei Mayor as Taiwan’s Governing Party Falter,” *New York Times*, November 29, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/30/world/asia/independent-is-elected-taipei-mayor-as-taiwans-governing-party-falters-.html>.
- <sup>3</sup> Central Election Commission (Taiwan), *2014 Elections for Local Officials*. Staff translation. [http://vote2014.nat.gov.tw/zh\\_TW/IDX/indexC.html](http://vote2014.nat.gov.tw/zh_TW/IDX/indexC.html); “Taiwan Insider Vol.1, No. 10,” *Thinking Taiwan*, November 30, 2014. <http://thinking-taiwan.com/taiwan-insider-vol-1-no-10/>.
- <sup>4</sup> Democratic Progressive Party Department of International Affairs, “Post-Election Newsletter Released,” December 1, 2014. <http://english.dpp.org.tw/december-newsletter-2014/#jump5>; Central Election Commission (Taiwan) Database, Staff Translation. <http://db.cec.gov.tw/>.
- <sup>5</sup> Central Election Commission (Taiwan), *2014 Elections for Local Officials*. Staff translation. [http://vote2014.nat.gov.tw/zh\\_TW/IDX/indexC.html](http://vote2014.nat.gov.tw/zh_TW/IDX/indexC.html); Central Election Commission (Taiwan) Database, Staff Translation. <http://db.cec.gov.tw/>.
- <sup>6</sup> Chen Jianxing, “State Council Taiwan Affairs Office: We Hope Compatriots across the Strait Will Jointly Preserve and Continue to Advance the General Situation of Peaceful Development of Cross-Strait Relations,” Xinhua (Chinese edition), November 29, 2014. Staff translation. [http://www.gwytb.gov.cn/wyly/201411/t20141129\\_8190623.htm](http://www.gwytb.gov.cn/wyly/201411/t20141129_8190623.htm).
- <sup>7</sup> Rupert Hammond-Chambers, *Taiwan Elections: Opposition Wins by a Landslide* (U.S.-Taiwan Business Council, December 1, 2014). [http://www.us-taiwan.org/reports/2014\\_november29\\_election\\_analysis\\_us-taiwan\\_business\\_council.pdf](http://www.us-taiwan.org/reports/2014_november29_election_analysis_us-taiwan_business_council.pdf).
- <sup>8</sup> Alan D. Romberg, *Rein In at the Brink of the Precipice: American Policy toward Taiwan and U.S.-PRC Relations* (Washington, DC: Henry L. Stimson Center, 2003), pp.174-175, 192.
- <sup>9</sup> Katherine Wei, “DPP and Kaohsiung Mayor Express Welcome to Zhang,” *China Post* (Taiwan), June 25, 2014. <http://www.chinapost.com.tw/taiwan/national/national-news/2014/06/25/410929/DPP-and.htm>.
- <sup>10</sup> Gunter Schubert, “Assessing Political Agency across the Taiwan Strait: The Case of the Taishang,” *China Information* 27:51 (March 2013): 58-59.
- <sup>11</sup> National Chengchi University Election Study Center, “Changes in Taiwanese/Chinese Identity of Taiwanese as Tracked in Surveys by the Election Study Center, NCCU (1992-2014.06),” July 9, 2014. <http://esc.nccu.edu.tw/course/news.php?Sn=166#>.
- <sup>12</sup> J. Michael Cole, “324: Police Brutality or Commensurate Response?” *China Policy Institute Blog*, March 27, 2014. <http://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/chinapolicyinstitute/2014/03/27/324-police-brutality-or-commensurate-response/>; Deng Kaiyuan, “Netizens Call: Everyone Come Monitor the Elections,” *Commonwealth Magazine* (Taiwan), November 27, 2014. Staff translation. <http://www.cw.com.tw/article/article.action?id=5062706>; Liu Ziwei, “Democracy is Not Just Voting: Taiwan Voters Exercise Their Recall Rights,” BBC (Chinese edition), December 4, 2014. Staff translation. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/zhongwen/trad/china/2014/12/141204\\_tw\\_democracy\\_vote](http://www.bbc.co.uk/zhongwen/trad/china/2014/12/141204_tw_democracy_vote).