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Taiwan Opposition Party Wins Presidency and Legislative Majority in Historic Elections

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Election Results

On January 16, 2016, Taiwan held presidential and parliamentary elections to select its 14th president and vice president and to fill all 113 seats of the 9th Legislative Yuan (LY), Taiwan's parliamentary body. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen and her running mate Chen Chien-jen won the election with 56.1 percent of the vote, while the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, or KMT) presidential candidate Eric Chu finished with just 31.1 percent (see Table 1). This marks the second time in Taiwan's history that a candidate from the DPP, Taiwan's traditionally pro-independence party, will hold the presidency. The DPP also won an outright majority of seats in the LY for the first time, taking 68 seats compared to 35 for the KMT and 10 for other parties.¹

Table 1: January 2016 Taiwan Presidential Election Results

Party	Candidate		Votes	Percentage
	President	Vice President		
Democratic Progressive Party	Tsai Ing-wen	Chen Chien-jen	6,894,744	56.1%
Kuomintang	Eric Chu	Jennifer Wang	3,813,365	31.1%
People First Party	James Soong	Hsu Hsin-ying	1,576,861	12.8%
Total:			12,284,970	100%

Source: Taiwan's Central Election Commission, *Presidential and Vice Presidential Election*, January 16, 2016.
<http://vote2016.cec.gov.tw/en/IDX/indexP1.html>.

Dr. Tsai won in 18 of Taiwan's 22 counties and cities (see Appendix, "Taiwan 2016 Presidential Election Results by Voting District"). Urban areas in particular supported Dr. Tsai: In New Taipei City and Kaohsiung City, Taiwan's most populous districts, Dr. Tsai won 52 percent and 68 percent of the vote, respectively.² Meanwhile, of the four voting districts that supported Mr. Chu, Taitung County and Hualien County make up only 0.9 percent and 1.3 percent of Taiwan's total population, respectively, while Lienchang County and Kinmen County are small outlying islands in close proximity to Mainland China.³

The transition to a DPP-led LY also marks a significant turning point for Taiwan politics. Nationwide, DPP candidates received 44 percent of the vote in LY elections, compared to 27 percent for the KMT.⁴ The decisive victory grants the DPP well over the 57 seats needed for a majority in the LY, while the KMT loses the 64-seat majority it secured after the 2012 general election.⁵

In response to the election results, China's Taiwan Affairs Office* released a statement reiterating that "[China] will continue to adhere to the '1992 Consensus'† and resolutely oppose any form of 'Taiwan independence' splittist activities. On the major principles of safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity, our determination is as strong as a rock."‡ A Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson said, "There is only one China in the world. Both the [M]ainland and Taiwan belong to one China. China's sovereignty and territorial integrity brook no division. This basic fact and consensus of the international community will not be changed by the result of the election in Taiwan."‡

DPP's Focus on Economic Issues Key to Victory

The 2016 election brought about a shift in emphasis from traditional sovereignty concerns to economic ones.‡ Taiwan's electorate, which has grown largely dissatisfied with the state of the domestic economy and is increasingly worried about Taiwan's growing economic dependence on China, voted in support of the DPP's plans for boosting economic growth while maintaining the political "status quo"‡ with China.‡ During the KMT administration under President Ma Ying-jeou (2008–2016), Taiwan's economic growth slowed significantly amid stagnant wages, unemployment in Taiwan's largely high-skilled workforce, weak entrepreneurial innovation, and low inbound investment.‡

The severity of these domestic economic problems, and the KMT's inability to address them during the Ma Administration, may explain why Dr. Tsai won the election.‡ During the campaign, KMT presidential candidate Chu prioritized Taiwan's external economic relations, particularly with China, diverging from the sentiments of many voters who fear that Taiwan is growing overly dependent on China.‡ Meanwhile, Dr. Tsai's campaign focused on supporting Taiwan's domestic economy, including increasing innovation and employment, expanding social welfare services, and improving long-term senior care systems for Taiwan's aging population.‡ Setting aside the sensitive question of Taiwan's sovereignty, Dr. Tsai was able to focus her campaign primarily on domestic economic issues, which helped her secure the presidency.

Implications for Cross-Strait Relations and the United States

With the DPP's victories in the presidential and LY elections, the party can pursue its economic and cross-Strait goals. Given voters' hesitancy over further economic integration with the Mainland, Taiwan's new government will seek to review all concluded and pending agreements under the Cross-Straits Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA),** which have been the source of significant dissent in Taiwan, culminating in the 2014 Sunflower Movement.‡ The DPP has stated it will not seek to overturn existing agreements under ECFA, but "will attempt to improve their implementation," and that future agreements will be contingent on the passage of a cross-Strait supervisory bill in the LY to monitor all agreements between China and Taiwan.‡

* The Taiwan Affairs Office is an agency within China's State Council that is responsible for overseeing China's cross-Strait policies.

† The "one China" principle states that both Taiwan and China are a part of a single "China." The "1992 Consensus" is a tacit understanding reached between the KMT-led government of Taiwan and Mainland China that interprets the "one China" principle such that each side maintains its own definition of "one China." Richard C. Bush, *Uncharted Strait: The Future of China-Taiwan Relations*, Brookings Institution Press, 2013, 120–122; Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Canada, "The 1992 Consensus: Foundation for Cross-Strait Peace and Stronger International Links," September 7, 2011. <http://www.roc-taiwan.org/CA/ct.asp?xItem=219017&ctNode=150&mp=77&nowPage=4&pagesize=15>; and Xinhua (English edition), "Backgrounder: 1992 Consensus on 'One-China' Principle," October 13, 2004. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-10/13/content_382076.htm.

‡ The term "status quo" is undefined but may be interpreted to mean sustaining Taiwan's current high degree of political and economic autonomy without taking concrete steps toward unification with or formal independence from China. William Sharp, Jr., "Taiwan: Tsai Ing-wen's Real Challenge," *Diplomat* (Tokyo), September 29, 2015. <http://thediplomat.com/2015/09/taiwan-tsai-ing-wens-real-challenge/>.

§ For more analysis on Taiwan's economy and its impact on the 2016 elections, see Kevin Rosier, Sean O'Connor, and Rolando Cuevas, "Taiwan's Economy amid Political Transition," *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, January 6, 2015. <http://origin.www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/Taiwan%27s%20Economy%20amid%20Political%20Transition.pdf>.

** For more analysis of ECFA and the Sunflower Movement, see the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission's 2015 *Annual Report to Congress*, November 2015, 491–492 and 496–497.

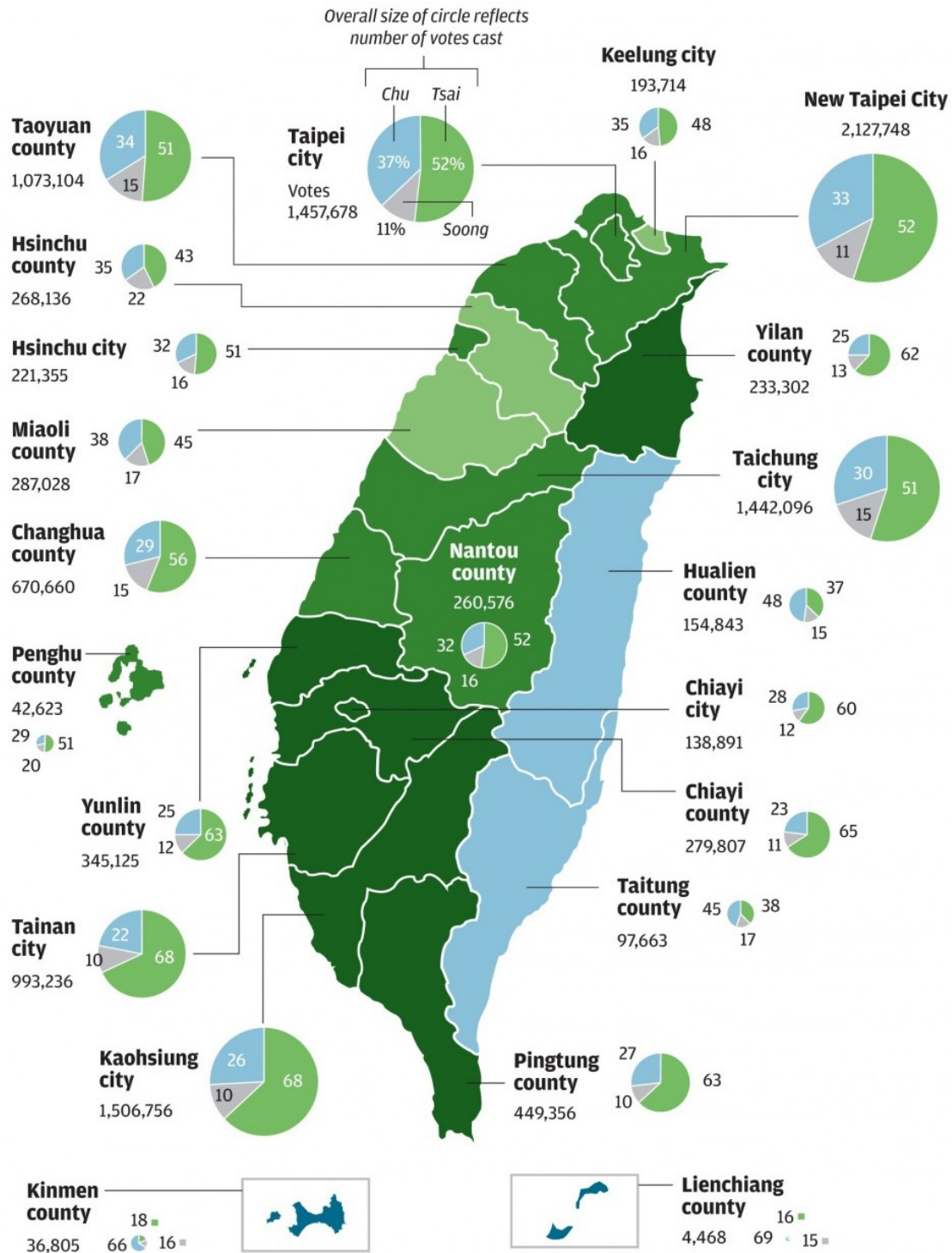
The DPP's traditionally pro-independence stance notwithstanding, Dr. Tsai's comments on cross-Strait relations suggest she will pursue a pragmatic approach that, in a departure from the last DPP president Chen Shui-bian (2000–2008), would not seek to explicitly promote pro-independence policies. In her victory rally following the election results, Dr. Tsai said, "Maintaining the 'status quo' is my commitment to the people of Taiwan and the international community. ... There won't be provocation and there won't be surprises."¹⁵ Even so, it is unclear how Beijing will approach relations with the Tsai Administration when it takes office in May 2016. Chinese leaders' anxieties about the DPP's past embrace of pro-independence policies may drive a newly hardline approach to cross-Strait relations, particularly on government-level interactions.¹⁶

In U.S.-Taiwan relations, the new DPP-led government will likely prioritize Taiwan's participation in the U.S.-led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) over the China-backed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)* as part of an effort to expand its trade liberalization and diversify its export markets beyond the Mainland.¹⁷ The DPP's focus on the TPP and the party's historical political ties to Taiwan's agricultural sector suggest it might be more inclined toward and politically capable of making key concessions on market access for U.S. pork products as a means of finalizing negotiations toward a U.S.-Taiwan Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), which it may see as setting the foundation for Taiwan's future TPP candidacy.¹⁸ On security matters, U.S.-Taiwan relations can be expected to evolve as the DPP develops its defense policy, which will likely emphasize indigenous military research and development (including the development of a submarine program) and strengthening asymmetric capabilities.¹⁹

* RCEP is a prospective free trade agreement initiated by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and includes China as a key member.

Appendix

Taiwan 2016 Presidential Election Results by Voting District



Note: Green indicates support for Dr. Tsai. Blue indicates support for Mr. Chu. Gray indicates support for the third party candidate, Mr. Soong. Darker colors indicate a higher margin of victory.

Source: South China Morning Post (Hong Kong), "Infographic: See the New Taiwan," January 18, 2016.

http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1902280/infographic-see-new-taiwan?utm_source=&utm_medium=&utm_campaign=SCMPSocialNewsfeed.

Endnotes

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