



Center for Asian Democracy

Taiwan Local Election

2022 Pre-Election Report

CAD Research Brief 22.01.04

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November 2022 // University of Louisville

Cover Image: [CNN, Han 2020](#)



Country Profile

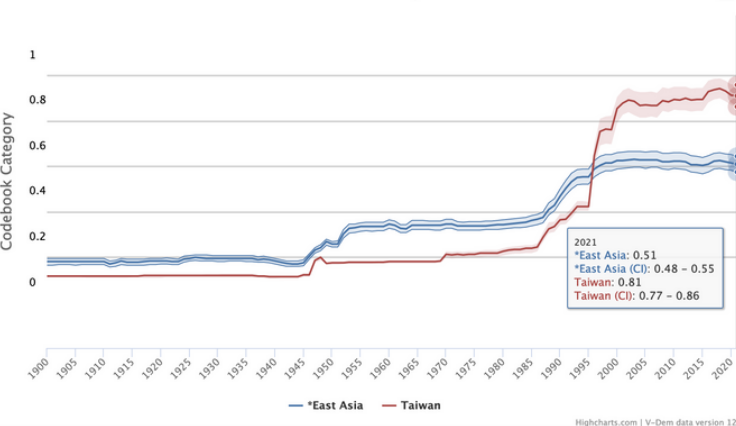
Overview

The Republic of China (ROC), Taiwan is a liberal democracy in East Asia with a population of nearly 24 million. Taiwan is a constitutional republic, operating within the Five-Power system devised by Sun Yat-Sen. The Five-Power system has five leading branches, or Yuan: The Executive, Legislative, Judicial, Control, and Examination Yuan. The Five-Power system is led by the President of the ROC.

Measures of Democracy

Taiwan, while recently facing substantial autocratic pressures from Mainland China, has continued to perform well on democratic indexes. V-Dem's liberal democracy ratings by country show this point by placing Taiwan's democracy in the top 10-20% globally. Furthermore, V-Dem's measures of electoral and liberal democracy show Taiwan's electoral democracy index of 0.81 is higher than East Asia's rating of 0.51. Taiwan's liberal democracy index score of 0.7 is also substantially higher than East Asia's rating of 0.42. For both indexes, there is a similar upward trend with both graphs starting around 1945 when the nationalist government of the Republic of China (ROC), led by the Kuomintang (KMT), took control of Taiwan, and then democratized around 1990. In 1987, 40 years of martial law came to an end, with elections following a few years later.

Electoral Democracy Index



Media Freedom

Taiwan is ranked 38/180 on the Reporters Without Borders Media Freedom Index. Taiwan ranked the highest out of all Eastern Asian countries. While Taiwan's media and the press are considered free, there are political and socioeconomic factors that raise concerns. Taiwan has one of the lowest media trust rates amongst world democracies, and the media is politically polarized.

POLITICAL INDICATOR	33 74.78
ECONOMIC INDICATOR	49 51.88
LEGISLATIVE INDICATOR	40 79.01
SOCIAL INDICATOR	57 77.69
SECURITY INDICATOR	25 87.02

INDEX 2022

38 /180

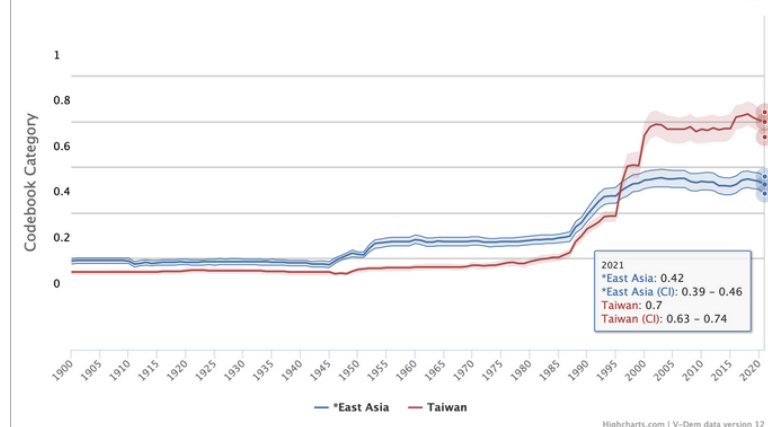
Score : 74.08

INDEX 2021

43 /180

Score : 76.14

Liberal Democracy Index



Election Profile: Taiwan's 2022 Midterm Election

This midterm election mainly reflects local-level politics; however, it will also represent how the public feels about their elected officials' handling of the pandemic, pressure from mainland China, and the economy.

On November 26, 2022, twenty-two mayoral or county head positions are scheduled for election, three of which are highly contested races and will reflect recent political challenges.

The mayoral and county magistrate elections are conducted using a first past the post voting system (FPTP). FPTP voting allows third-place candidates to impact outcomes by diverting support from one of the front-runners. This is important to note because Taipei's mayoral election has three candidates, and predictions of that race are unclear due to FPTP.

There are also multiple city council positions up for re-election. Those races will not be discussed in detail in this report. These races are decided through a multi-member district (MMD) voting system. Because of the nature of the MMD, these races allow smaller parties to be elected, making it harder for the DPP and the KMT to secure these elected positions.

Explaining Taiwan's Main Political Parties

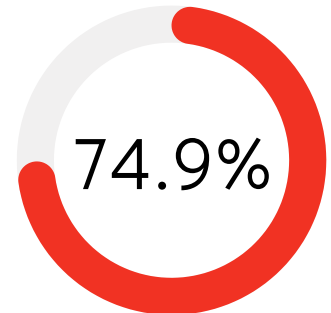
DPP: Democratic Progressive Party

The DPP leads the Green-camp and currently holds the presidency and the legislature. The DPP is known for wanting some distance between Taiwan and China; however, that view varies within the party. The "Light Green" camp understands the potential for conflict with China and the need to sustain the benefits of cross-Strait economic relations. The "Deep Green" camp wants complete Taiwan independence. This election will reflect public opinion towards their handling of the pandemic, the economy, and the China challenge.

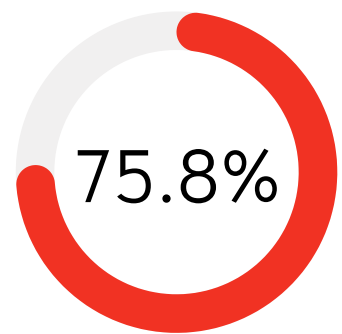
KMT: Kuomintang, or Guomindang (GMD)

The KMT leads the Blue camp and is seen as a pro-China, anti-USA party; however, it has recently made efforts to change that view (i.e. KMT officials coming to the USA to speak). These opinions range within the camps, where the "Light Blue" camp wants to keep some political distance from China, while the "Deep Blue" camp aligns with the KMT's original stance of reunification with China.

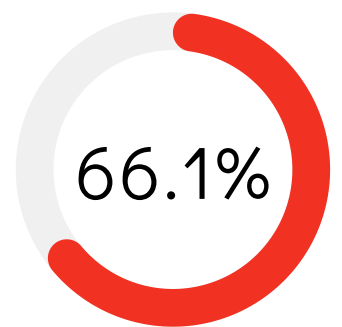
Recent Voter Turnout



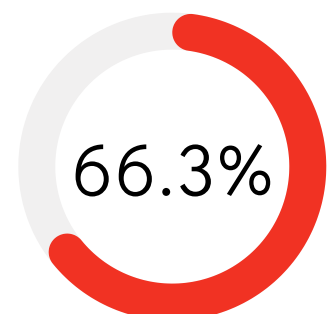
2020 Presidential Election



Average Presidential Turnout (1996-2020)



2018 Local Election Turnout



2014 Local Election Turnout

Leading Mayoral Candidates in 3 Taiwan Districts

Taipei Mayoral Race

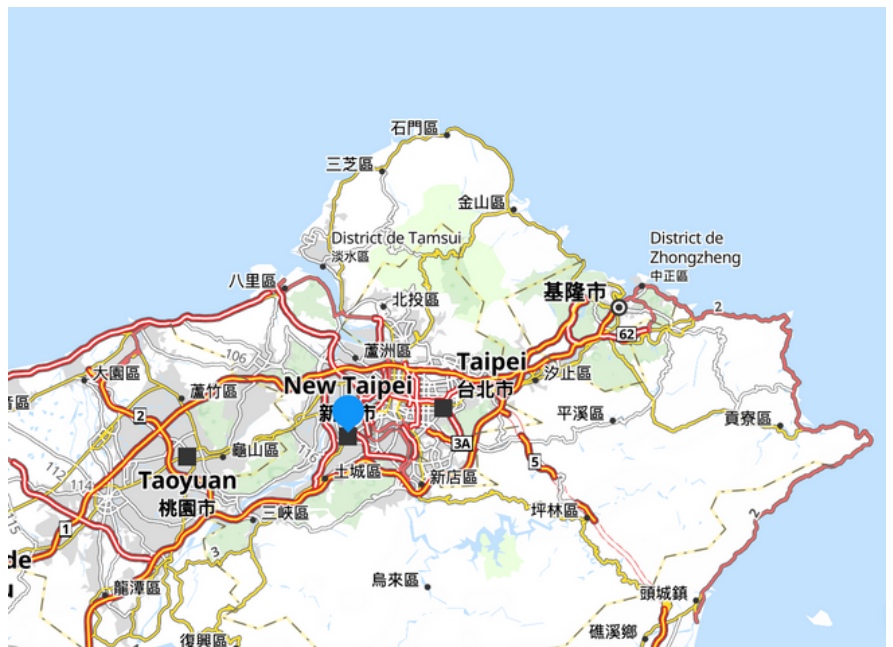
Taipei is Taiwan's capital; therefore, this election can have national political ramifications. The KMT's candidate is Chiang Wan-an (43), legislator and great-grandson of Chiang Kai-shek. As the great-grandson of the party's founder, Chiang Wan-an is very well-known and popular within the party. Chiang Wan-an calls for "one Taipei, four developments, five major hubs," saying that Taipei needs to become more a more international, livable, and technological and innovative city. The DPP announced that they will run its Minister of Health and Welfare Chen Shih-Chung. He wants to improve traffic, increase social housing and funding, and establish an international affairs department. Chen said he entered politics because he was disappointed in the current mayor of Taipei, and he is considered to be a strong candidate. The third candidate is Huang Shan-shan, who has worked as Taipei city councilor for 21 years and deputy mayor for 3 years. Huang Shen-shan, running as an independent, is somewhat controversial due to Huang not being an actual member of the TPP, but a member of the People First Party. She wants to address and fix climate change, energy issues, housing justice, and the high cost of living.

New Taipei Mayoral Race

The current mayor of New Taipei is Hou You-yi, a member of the KMT who is running for reelection. Hou You-Yi is consistently ranked as one of the most popular politicians in Taiwan, and his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic is overall favorable. According to a recent poll, his satisfaction rating as a mayor is 70%. The DPP's mayoral candidate is the former Minister of Transportation and Communications Lin Chia-Lung. Lin is expected to have a challenge in beating Hou since New Taipei is KMT-leaning. Lin wants to focus on urban planning and increasing public transportation.

Taoyuan Mayoral Race

Historically, the KMT has won Taoyuan; however, in 2018 the KMT lost Taoyuan to the current DPP mayor Cheng Wan-tsan. In efforts to bring back KMT support for the region, the KMT is running former premier and vice presidential candidate Simon Chang. Within the party, there have been some leading KMT voices that don't support Chang's nomination, representing the factional infighting among the KMT. The DPP originally nominated former Hsinchu mayor Lin Chih-chien; however, he was accused of plagiarizing his MA thesis and withdrew from the Taoyuan mayoral race in August 2022. The DPP replaced his nomination with Taoyuan DPP legislator Cheng Yun-peng.



Public Attitudes Regarding Democracy

The 2019 [World Values Survey](#) captures Taiwan's attitudes about democratic institutions. This brief section highlights representative indicators from the most recent WVS polling on attitudes toward democracy, liberal rights, and institutional rights.

Democracy

How Democratically is this Country Being Governed Today?	
Rating	Percentage
Not at all democratic	1.9
2	0.9
3	2.8
4	3.0
5	12.0
6	8.8
7	16.7
8	22.4
9	11.1
Completely democratic	20.4
(N)	(1,223)
Mean	7.37
Desviación típica	2.13
N	(1,223)

How Important is Democracy to You?	
Rating	Percentage
Not at all important	0.1
2	0.1
3	0.4
4	0.3
5	4.3
6	2.5
7	5.7
8	16.9
9	15.5
Absolutely important	54.1
(N)	(1,223)
Mean	8.96
Desviación típica	1.47
N	(1,223)

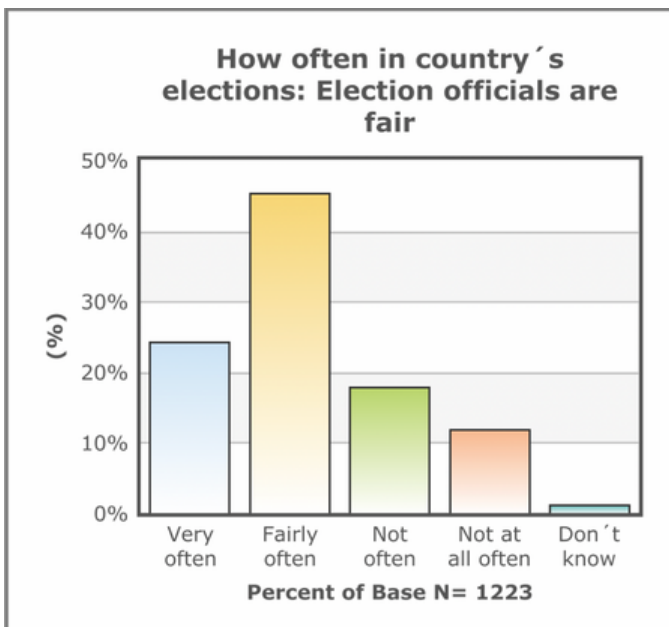
Taiwan's respondents generally report positive views of the current democratic governance of the country, with most values falling in the upper-half of the scale. With that said, only 20% believed the country was totally democratic in 2019. Taiwan also report high personal importance of democracy, with the mean value (8.96) being higher than regional democracies like Japan (8.70) and South Korea (7.9).

All tables and graph via [World Values Survey Online Analysis](#)

Liberal Rights

When asked about the necessity of protecting civil rights as a characteristic of democracy, most respondents placed themselves in the top half of the scale of agreement. The country's average score on this indicator (7.85) is on par with other Asian democracies including Japan (7.88) and South Korea (7.2).

Civil Rights Protect people's liberty against oppression	
Rating	% / Total
Not an essential characteristic of democracy	3.0
2	0.5
3	1.1
4	1.9
5	9.2
6	5.9
7	14.7
8	19.8
9	11.9
An essential characteristic of democracy	32.0
(N)	(1,223)
Mean	7.85
Desviación típica	2.19
N	(1,223)



Confidence in Electoral Institutions

Trust in election officials to be impartial administrators of democracy is key for democratic legitimacy, and high in the country even by regional standards. According to the WVS data, 69.5% of respondents believe that election officials are fair either often or very often. This compares favorably with the other wealthier regional democracies, such as South Korea (72%)

Democracy: Challenges and Sources of Resilience

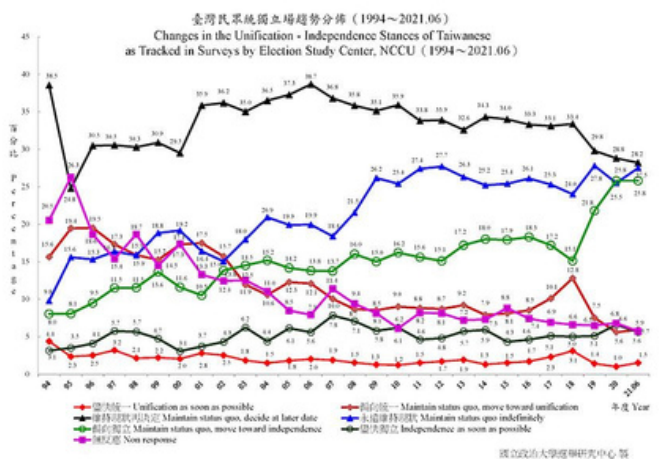
The China Challenge

In 2019 during a keynote address, China's President Xi Jinping reaffirmed the China-Taiwan political philosophy of "one country, two systems." China policy remains a strong division between the two main parties, the DPP and the KMT. In this keynote address, President Xi did not formally announce an exact date for the reunification of China and Taiwan; however, he stressed that this should not be a generational problem, and claims this to be an inevitable process to take place, even by force if necessary. In October 2022, President Xi restated his goal of reunification in the Chinese Communist Party Congress. In this speech, President Xi warned against international interference, and echoed the threat to use force. Xi stated, "We will continue to strive for peaceful reunification with the greatest sincerity and the utmost effort, but we will never promise to renounce the use of force, and we reserve the option of taking all measures necessary." There has been reports of increased Chinese military drills surrounding the island, which some view as a threat of violence. Despite these remarks and actions from China's leadership, Taiwan continues to be one of the strongest democracies in Asia.

Political Party Polarization and Renewal

The cleavages between the Green and the Blue camps remain profound, although new movements are injecting youthful energy challenging polarization. A recent poll conducted by the Election Study Center of National Chengchi University highlights that only 1.5 percent of the public supports immediate unification while 5.7 percent of respondents supported immediate independence from China. The highest preferred relationship with China is to maintain the status-quo indefinitely and or decide at a later date, with a combined total of about 55.7 percent. This mirrors the gradual creation of new Taiwanese movements mobilizing to deepen the country's democratization. An example of this development is the Sunflower Movement. The Sunflower Movement was a student-led movement that physically occupied Taiwan's national legislature for three weeks in 2014. They opposed a proposed free trade agreement with China, and through their activism inspired more open discussion of deepening Taiwan's democracy

Graph and figures via Election Study Center of NCU



Robust Civil Society

Mainland China is quick to push the idea that during the time of COVID-19, the pandemic has exposed flaws within democratic governance. China notes failure to have an economic rebound, and over all success in managing the pandemic. However, with efforts from the public, businesses, and the public, Taiwan has managed to rebound quickly. Taiwan has leveraged contact tracing, apps, "civic hackers," and "radical transparency" to effectively combat misinformation surrounding the pandemic; the Taiwanese government is willing to listen and directly work with citizens; the public is actively ensuring accountability from the government; and Taiwan's free-wheeling media committed itself to airing news and updates about COVID-19 around the clock. Taiwan's handling of the pandemic is the most recent example of Taiwan's democratic resilience despite a period of democratic backsliding.



Caccination center in Hsinchu city, Taiwan, July 16, 2021.
Photo via Office of the President, ROC (Taiwan)

Spotlight on the Campaign Trail

Taipei Mayoral candidates Chiang Wan-an (KMT) (left), Chen Shih-chung (DPP) (middle) and Vivian Huang (Independent) (right) at a televised debate Nov. 2022

Source: [Taipei News](#), SetTV, TVBS



DPP and Green camp activist supporting United States House Speaker Nancy Pelosi as she visits Taiwan in August 2022.

Source: [PBS](#); [Reuters Pictures](#)

New Taipei Mayor Hou Yu-ih (left), KMT Chairman Eric Chu (middle) and Taichung Mayor Lu Shioh-yen (right) announce their KMT re-election bid for the mayoral race.

Source: CNA, [Focus Taiwan News](#)



Further Reading

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[House Speaker Nancy Pelosi meeting Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen in August 2022](#)

About the Center for Asian Democracy

The mission of the Center for Asian Democracy, established at the University of Louisville in 2006, is to promote research and teaching about democracy and the prospects for democratization in Central, South, Southeast, and East Asia. Through publications, conferences, workshops, visiting scholars programs, colloquia, and research projects in Asian countries, the Center creates a forum for studying political dynamics in this vital region. The Center is currently led by Interim Director, Dr. David Buckley, Paul Weber Chair of Politics, Science and Religion and Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Louisville.

About the Author

The substantive research of this report was conducted by CAD Graduate Research Assistant, Toree Doll, under the supervision of Dr. David Buckley. Toree Doll is a first-year political science MA student, with interests in US foreign policy, economics, and democratic trends in Asia. Toree is also a UofL undergraduate alumna, where she earned a B.A. in Political Science, a B.A. in Economics, and minored in Chinese language.

Acknowledgments

CAD thanks Graduate Fellow Jarett Lopez for excellent work formatting this report. The conclusions and recommendations of this Center for Asian Democracy publication are solely those of its author(s) and do not reflect the views of the center, its leadership, or other scholars.

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