

## *External and Internal Factors Shaping the Outcomes of 2024 Elections in Taiwan*

Gang Lin and Weixu Wu

Taiwan is scheduled to hold elections for its chief executive (called president on the island) and legislative organ (Legislative Yuan) on January 13, 2024. Similar to the previous “two-in-one” elections in 2020, external factors are again exerting significant influence on the outcome of the electoral competition among Taiwan’s ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), the opposition Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT), and Taiwan People’s Party (TPP). In August 2023, the DPP presidential candidate and Vice President William Lai Ching-te, made a transit visit to the United States en route to Paraguay. Meanwhile, KMT presidential candidate Mayor Hou Yu-ih of New Taipei City visited Japan before his September trip to the United States. Following this, Taiwan People’s Party candidate Ko Wen-je embarked on his second American trip of the year in early October. The partisan competition during the election season on the so-called “diplomatic battleground” has spotlighted Taiwan’s growing political and security reliance on the United States and Japan.<sup>1</sup> Lai’s trip is aimed at maintaining U.S. trust, given his self-identification as “a pragmatic worker for Taiwan independence” in the past and recent remarks of setting “walking into the White House” as the objective of his position once elected. Meanwhile, Hou’s strategy is to regain trust from both the United States and Japan. In fact, Japan has

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maintained more intimate and closer ties with the DPP than with the KMT since the KMT former chairman Lee Teng-hui, who claimed to be a Japanese citizen before he was 22 years old, had his party membership revoked in 2001.

## **1. Washington's Political Preference Towards the Different Parties in Taiwan**

As for the United States, its attitudes towards the two main parties have varied over years. Towards the end of Chen Shui-bian administration, the Bush administration considered Chen's ambition for Taiwan independence as troublemaking, especially in the context of global anti-terrorist war endorsed by, among other countries, the People's Republic of China on the mainland. As a result, the Bush administration preferred the KMT's return to power prior to the 2008 elections. As a new round of U.S.–China strategic competition gradually emerged following President Obama's announcements of “pivot to Asia” and “Rebalance to Asia and the Pacific” consecutively, the White House has become increasingly concerned about the ongoing economic and social integration across the Taiwan Strait. This integration could eventually lead to political convergence between the two sides. Meanwhile, the KMT witnessed factional struggle between President Ma Ying-jeou and then-Legislative Speaker Wang Jin-pyng. The Sunflower Movement happened in opposition to closer economic ties between Taiwan and the mainland. Additionally, the KMT suffered a setback in the 2014 nine-in-one elections,<sup>2</sup> and struggled with indecision regarding who should run for the post-Ma presidency. In contrast, the DPP presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen performed well in the “qualified exam” on her May 2015 trip to the United States. All of these factors have shifted American preference of future leader in Taiwan from the KMT to the DPP. Such a preference continues in the 2020 electoral campaigns, despite the DPP's debacle in the 2018 nine-in-one elections and internal conflict between the incumbent Tsai and then-Executive Head (called president of Executive Yuan or premier) William Lai. Although KMT presidential candidate and Kaohsiung Mayor Han Kuo-yu made a trip to the United States in the summer of 2019, he failed to receive an endorsement, possibly due to his advocacy for closer economic ties with the mainland, among other factors.

Will Washington continue to prefer DPP's Lai to KMT's Hou? The DPP has shown more collaborative with Washington in balancing against

the mainland, especially given the escalating strategic competition between China and the United States. This competition, particular in the wake of Russo-Ukraine war, has unavoidably reshaped American perception of a similarly assertive China on the issue of Taiwan. For the United States, does the most significant difference between the DPP and KMT candidates lie in the issue of Taiwan's independence or unification with the mainland in the future, or their ability to act more cautiously and prevent triggering military conflicts across the Taiwan Strait, thereby not further complicating the already troublesome U.S.-China relations? Is Ko Wen-je acceptable to either Beijing or Washington or both of them, even though he is less likely to win the elections without a strong party organization behind him?

## 2. Beijing's Political Preference Towards the Different Parties in Taiwan

Another important external factor comes from the Chinese mainland. Beijing has consistently stated that the outcome of Taiwan elections cannot change the fundamental fact that Taiwan is part of China. While the Chinese government on the mainland has never explicitly expressed a preference for different parties during the electoral period, it has always shown appreciation for any parties that accept the one-China principle and support peaceful development of cross-Strait relations—the DPP is obviously out of the list. The mainland's military exercise in the Taiwan Strait in 1996 and then-Premier Zhu Rongji's warning words suggesting that Taiwanese voters should not support candidates advocating Taiwan independence in 2000 are widely interpreted as a way of influencing the outcomes of Taiwan's elections. Regardless of effectiveness of these actions, Beijing was clearly satisfied with Ma Ying-jeou's election victories in 2008 and 2012. It is worth recalling that on the eve of the first two-in-one elections in 2012, several Taiwanese business leaders with economic ties to the mainland, including Cher Wang, daughter of Wang Yung-ching, expressed strong support for the 1992 Consensus (九二共識 *Jiu'er gongshi*), a campaign slogan of the Ma camp. Even during a period when the KMT was experiencing a decline prior to the 2016 elections, PRC president Xi Jinping met with Ma Ying-jeou in Singapore in the capacities of leaders from the mainland and Taiwan sides, respectively. Looking ahead to the 2020 elections, Beijing's clear objective was to end the DPP's rule in Taiwan, especially following the KMT's unexpected victory in the nine-in-one elections one year earlier.

Applying the same logic, Beijing may anticipate a victory for the KMT in the upcoming 2024 elections. Two key reasons support this expectation. First, the KMT secured a notable victory in the 2022 nine-in-one elections, controlling 14 cities or counties out of 22, with the support of more than 69 percent of total electorate in these “blue” areas. In contrast, the DPP only managed to control five cities and counties, representing 26 percent of total electorate. During these elections for city mayors and county magistrates, over 50 percent of voters cast their ballots for the KMT, while the DPP received less than 42 percent of votes. In the six major metropolitans, the KMT secured mayorships in Taipei, New Taipei, Taoyuan, and Taichung, while the DPP retained mayorships only in Tainan and Kaohsiung. However, it is important to note that the KMT’s success in the 2022 nine-in-one elections does not necessarily suggest its victory in the 2024 two-in-one elections, as these elections operate at different levels and focus on distinct topics. Furthermore, the DPP has maintained its majority in the Legislative Yuan since 2016 and the party’s incumbents in that organ have developed stronger connections with Taiwanese businesspeople compared to the KMT. These incumbents are more likely to be reelected than the fresh candidates for the Legislative Yuan and they can benefit the DPP’s presidential candidate by securing votes from the same constituents. Nevertheless, the DPP’s fiasco in the 2022 nine-in-one elections at least reflects public dissatisfaction with the party’s governance at local levels. Subsequently, the dissatisfaction may possibly lead to a shift in political power at the higher level, as the past experience has indicated. Historically, the outcomes of the 2000, 2008 and 2016 presidential elections were harbingered by the 1997, 2005 and 2014 elections at the city and county levels, respectively.

Secondly, escalating political and military tensions across the Taiwan Strait, coupled with the extension of compulsory military service for Taiwanese youth, have raised concerns among the general population regarding the possibility of an imminent war between the two sides. Public opinion surveys indicate that few people in Taiwan are really prepared to fight for Taiwan’s independence against the mainland. The recent Russo-Ukraine war has also eroded people’s confidence in the likelihood of the United States deploying military forces to defend Taiwan. While the United States continues to increase arms sales to Taiwan, it is viewed as both costly and ineffective due to the widening military power disparity across the Taiwan Strait. Some in Taiwan also

question whether Washington's strategy of arming Taiwan as a "porcupine" can serve as a real deterrent or might actually provoke the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to take military action. This atmosphere may enhance the credibility of the KMT's strategy, which seeks to establish peaceful relations with the mainland by leveraging the ambiguous 1992 Consensus while relying on the United States for security. Even DPP's William Lai has quietly changed his campaign slogan from "resisting against China and protecting Taiwan" (抗中保台 *kangzhong baotai*) into "maintaining peace and protecting Taiwan" (和平保台 *heping baotai*). In the hope of fostering rational choice-making among the Taiwanese people between peace and war and between prosperity and decline, during William Lai's transit visit to the United States, the PLA conducted a military exercise in the East China Sea and the mainland's Ministry of Commerce declared that more than 2,500 items of Taiwanese exports to the mainland are under investigation and may lose their preferential treatment under the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA).

On the part of the DPP, William Lai has said that Beijing wants to create a war atmosphere in the 2024 election to force the Taiwanese people to choose the political party preferred by that mainland. In response, the mainland's Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council stated that the mainland has never intervened in Taiwan's elections, and criticized the DPP for provoking Cross-Strait confrontation and attempting to win over votes.<sup>3</sup> Given the political distance between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, direct and overt mainland intervention in Taiwan's elections could provide the DPP an opportunity to play the "resisting against China and protect Taiwan" card, potentially swaying public opinion on the island and undermining the KMT's advantage. The mainland's official statement is therefore a rational choice aimed at not pushing voters towards candidates unfavorable to Beijing, reflecting on past instances of "negative effectiveness," such as the military tension in 1996 and the Chou Tzu-yu incident in 2016 during the election seasons.

### 3. Domestic Factors Shaping the Electoral Outcomes in Taiwan

Internal factors are also significant in shaping the outcomes of Taiwan's elections. After all, domestic factors are more directly related to people's voting behavior. The two main political parties involved in Taiwan's elections for more than three decades are divided not only on the issue

of national identity but also on issues related to economic growth, social distribution, and environmental protection. The KMT has an elitist tradition, giving high regard to big enterprises and cross-strait relations in promoting Taiwan's economic development. On the contrary, the DPP has a grassroots orientation, focusing more on social distribution and transitional justice. In recent years, however, the two parties have adjusted their economic and social policies to win over median voters. Both parties have talked about reducing energy consumption, developing new energies, ensuring social welfare and equality, and promoting education and native culture. The DPP, however, opposes nuclear energy more vigorously and highlights the multi-cultural roots in Taiwanese society to neutralize Chinese influence on the island. While the KMT's Ma administration emphasized the role of the mainland market in Taiwanese economic growth, Tsai has been more concerned about "overreliance on a single market" and more interested in promoting a "new southbound policy" (新南向政策 *xin'nanxiang zhengce*). The fundamental difference between the two main parties remains whether Taiwan should be more attached to or detached from the mainland, both politically and economically. The KMT is a party for unification by name (the Chinese Nationalist Party) and historically advocated such a goal. Although over the past three decades the party has gradually distanced itself from this vision and moved towards maintaining the *status quo*, it still opposes the idea of Taiwan independence. In contrast, the DPP included the "Taiwan Independence Clause" (台獨黨綱 *taidu danggang*) in its party platform in 1991, the same year when the KMT authorities passed their National Unification Guidelines (國家統一綱領 *guojia tongyi gangling*). Such an ideological divide in Taiwan is fundamentally shaped by people's self-identification and their positions on the issues of unification and independence. Much literature has shown that more people nowadays identify themselves as Taiwanese rather than as Chinese or both, and more people support independence rather than unification. According to a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) survey conducted by the Taiwan Election and Democratization Survey 2020, 59.4 percent of respondents identified themselves as Taiwanese, 3.4 percent identified themselves as Chinese, and 32.7 percent as both Chinese and Taiwanese.<sup>4</sup> Among those who identify as Taiwanese, the DPP has a higher support rate (52 percent) than other parties, but among those with dual identities, the KMT has a higher support rate (40.7 percent).

Due to decades of “de-Sinicization” on the island and comprehensive influence from the United States, the political and social landscape of the island has undergone great changes. According to various polls conducted on the island, the supporting rate for DPP’s William Lai is the highest (above 30 percent), while the independent tech billionaire Terry Gou has the lowest support (less than 10 percent). KMT’s Hou Yu-ih and TPP’s Ko Wen-je are facing a “prisoner’s dilemma,” because they lead each other in different polls (around 20 to 25 percent), but both are still significantly lower than William Lai. The question of whether Hou Yu-ih and Ko Wen-je can combine their supporters in the so-called blue and white coalition (藍白合 *lanbai he*) has become a hot issue. Compared with Hou Yu-ih, Ko Wen-je has a higher level of support among median voters and the young generation. However, Ko’s TPP is considerably weaker than the Hou’s KMT in party organization and election mobilization at local levels. It is clear that Beijing is looking forward to seeing the blue and white or a non-green coalition, so as to increase the probability of “removing the DPP from the power” (下架民進黨 *xiajia minjindang*). It remains unclear, however, whether the KMT and the TPP can really collaborate as a coalition and, even if they do, whether they can defeat the DPP. This depends on, among other factors, whether Gou would persist in running until the end and whether Washington has really no preference among William Lai, Hou Yu-ih, and Ko Wen-je.

In brief, both external and internal factors have variably shaped the outcomes of elections in Taiwan in the past and will continue to do so in the upcoming ones. U.S. policy towards Taiwan, particularly its political preference for different parties during the election season, has an unavoidable impact on the campaign issues of various parties and the voting behaviors of ordinary citizens. The same can be said about the changing tune of mainland’s Taiwan policy and the degree of its involvement in party politics on the island to achieve a preferred electoral outcome. To a greater degree, the U.S. factor and the mainland influence on the island are functions of changing U.S.-China relations. While the ruling DPP would very much like to take advantages of the strategic competition between the two countries by taking side with Washington, the opposition KMT prefers stable and cooperative relations between the two great powers, playing a better role as a bridge between them. Meanwhile, party politics in Taiwan are underlined by money politics tacitly and policy debates openly, particularly during the election season.

#### 4. U.S.-China Strategic Competition and its Impact on Taiwan's Elections

This special issue includes five articles that address external and internal factors pertaining to Taiwan's upcoming elections. Weixing Hu and Weizhan Meng argue that U.S.-China strategic competition and mutual distrust will have a negative impact on the future development of cross-strait relations. They contend that the politics in Washington and more infatuated relations between Taipei and Washington may lead the cross-strait relationship in an uncertain direction. Washington has emerged as a major force reshaping dynamics across the Taiwan Strait, believing that an armed conflict in the Strait is inevitable. However, the escalation of war threats and arming Taiwan will generate security anxiety and trigger a security dilemma between Washington and Beijing. This action-reaction spiral could lead to rising tensions and even armed conflict, as has been seen in the Russo-Ukraine conflict. According to Hu and Meng, the term *status quo* in the Taiwan Strait is complex and lacks a commonly accepted definition. Both Beijing and Taipei do not want to stay at the *status quo* but are also cautious not to rock the boat. They tend to take incremental steps to tilt the *status quo* in their favor. Cross-strait dynamics usually arise from one side altering the *status quo*, promoting a forceful reaction from the other side, with both sides seeking support from the United States. Washington also seeks to manage what it perceives as the *status quo* to serve its national interest. Interestingly, support for a peaceful *status quo* has provided a converging ground among the three parties, with Washington and Beijing as two major players, and Taipei being the weaker party, akin to the saying "the dog wags the tail but not the tail wags the dog." The intensifying U.S.-China competition complicates the efforts to ease the strained cross-strait relationship. As U.S.-China relations continue to deteriorate, U.S. domestic political alignments and partisan politics have become the primary drivers of its China policy. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, however, the real danger for war is rooted in domestic politics, not in power competition at the level of the international system. Hu and Meng argue that using the power transition theory to predict war between China and the United States is flawed. According to them, the so-called "power transition" between China and the United States, with China catching up with or even overtaking the United States in the short run, is overstated. It is not countries' domestic politics and foreign policies, rather than their relative power position, that



determine whether they go to war or not. The authors caution against being swayed by distorted rhetoric about an imminent U.S.-China war, because perpetuating such misperceptions can become a self-fulfilling prophecy of war between rival powers.

Qiang Xin and Jialin Wang concur with Hu and Meng that the escalating rivalry between the United States and China on the Taiwan issue has led to increased tensions in the Taiwan Strait. They assert that the growing divergence in the two countries' strategic perceptions of Taiwan has played an indispensable role in shaping policies related to the island. The United States predominantly views the Taiwan issue from the perspectives of geopolitics security, ideological dichotomy, and great power competition. In contrast, China primarily views the issue of Taiwan in terms of sovereignty and territorial integrity, considering it a domestic matter of "a family shared by cross-strait Chinese." China also sees unification as a necessary milestone of achieving Chinese national rejuvenation. According to Xin and Wang, these divergent strategic perceptions, which run almost parallel and do not intersect, have given rise to contrasting and usually conflicting political narratives, policy-making rationale, and policy behaviors pertaining to Taiwan. This has significantly eroded the potential for policy consensus in the Taiwan Strait. As the power imbalances between China and the United States have diminished and their strategic rivalry has intensified, the two states' strategic perceptions of the Taiwan issue have been increasingly parallel, each following its own policy logic. Consequently, the inherent misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and animosities stemming from these parallel perceptions have hindered the possibility of reaching a consensus to navigate the turbulence and manage the contentious Taiwan issue between the two countries. Looking ahead, Xin and Wang express a degree of pessimism. According to them, in the foreseeable future, it is certain that the United States will continue to exploit Taiwan as a strategic tool to contain and undermine the Chinese mainland. The U.S. will prioritize strengthening its substantive relationship with Taiwan and advocating for increased international involvement in the Taiwan issue. In response, China will employ all necessary measures to counter U.S. attempts to interfere in the Taiwan issue and protect its national security and territorial integrity. However, considering that both China and the United States are unwilling to be drawn into a disastrous military conflict, it is crucial for them to gain a better understanding of each other's strategic perceptions and political concerns. This understanding will enable

them to navigate the complex Taiwan issue wisely and prevent dangerous escalation, they conclude.

The article by Wenxing Zhou and Jing Chen explores the changes in U.S. Taiwan policy since the escalation of the Russo-Ukraine conflict in late February 2022. They have observed the profound impact of the Ukraine war on the United States, noting that the trend of “Ukrainization” in U.S. policy regarding Taiwan has gained momentum. The war has set a new context for policy debates among American government officials and strategic analysts, leading to an increasing presence of Taiwan defenders who tend to emphasize the impact of the war on Taiwan and advocate for U.S. military defense of the island. More notably, they find that the European battlefield has injected fresh impetus for Washington to alter its Taiwan policy. However, based on a three-level theoretical framework guided by neoclassical realism, Zhou and Chen argue that the Ukraine war serves as a catalyst for expediting Washington’s policy changes related to the Taiwan but has not reshaped U.S. strategic calculations on the issue. It is the perceived shift in power dynamics between China and the United States that guides Washington’s policy directions regarding Taiwan. Furthermore, they contend that mounting U.S. concerns about China’s domestic governance model and its foreign policy approach contribute to the interpretation of America’s strategic thinking on China. This, in turn, enhances Washington’s inclination to play the Taiwan card to counter Beijing’s burgeoning influence. Following this logic, U.S. Taiwan policy change under the Biden presidency represent more of a continuity than a departure from the policies under presidency of Trump. Zhou and Chen employ descriptive analysis of original data and a content analysis method using government documents and congressional legislative proposals to explain the correlation between U.S. policy changes and the Ukraine war. Their findings suggest that the war has accelerated Washington’s policy adjustments regarding Taiwan. The article concludes that as U.S. perceived shift in U.S.-China power distribution and Americans’ threat perception spiral persist, Washington is expected to play the Taiwan card more wildly and further reinforce the trend of “Ukrainization” of its Taiwan policy in near future.

All three aforementioned articles have keenly observed the changing U.S.-China relations in a broad context and the specific Washington-Taipai connections. They have noted that Washington’s strategic considerations on China are influenced by some people’s perception of a power transition between these two great powers. It is undeniable that the global

power structure has undergone great changes over the past three decades. However, these changes have been characterized by a shift from bipolarization towards multi-polarization, involving multiple actors at various levels with uncertain directions. Simplifying or reducing complex changes in power relations in the world to an inexorable struggle and even confrontation between two great powers—an existing power and a rising power—is empirically inaccurate and normatively dangerous.

## **5. Money Politics and Policy Debates in Taiwan's Party Politics**

Another two articles observe Taiwan's partisan legislature intertwined with money politics and the highly debated energy policy through quantitative analysis and historical comparison, respectively. Chao Chen, Hua Tang, and Rui Wang employ public materials released by Taiwan's Supervision Yuan and Legislative Yuan and establish two networks of members of the 9th Legislative Yuan (2016–2020): the Contribution Similarity Network (CSN) connecting legislators with similar political donations and the Joint Proposal Network (JPN) connecting legislators with co-sponsorship records in the early stage of legislation. Both of these networks are informal networks, unlike formal ones such as parties and legislative committees. They find out that similar political contribution is an important factor in the bipartisan co-signing behavior among legislators for less controversial bills, such as those related to financial and industrial development proposals. However, these contributions have no significant effect on “vote-risk proposals,” which include policies on labor and human resources or environmental protections, as these proposals are prone to social backlash. In general, legislators within the same political camp (pan-green, pan-blue, and others) are more likely to cosponsor proposals with each other than with their political opponents. However, money connection sometimes cross the party line, resulting in a certain number of co-sponsorships among legislators from different parties. Their findings, obtained through a unique methodology addressing such a seldom-covered research topic have revealed the specific characteristics of “crony capitalism” in Taiwan's legislature. This research suggests that money politics is important, as opposed to party politics, and the logic of the former does not completely align with that of the latter. One interesting point made by this article is that the social networks within the pan-green communities are denser, and the same enterprises are more

inclined to donate to multiple pan-green legislators simultaneously. If the candidate's incumbency advantage and party background are important factors shaping his or her fundraising ability, as current research literature suggests,<sup>5</sup> pan-green legislators may enjoy better chance than their counterparts in the pan-blue camp, thus potentially maintaining the DPP's advantage in the Legislative Yuan after the 2024 elections.

In addition to money politics, public policy issues also hold significance. The KMT and the DPP are divided on two most controversial issues: how to handle the cross-strait relations and strike a balance among three values: (1) ensuring an adequate supply of electricity for both industrial development and people's livelihood, (2) reducing carbon pollution from thermal power, and (3) minimizing the risks associated with nuclear energy. While the DPP has consistently taken anti-nuclear energy stance as its political tradition and "divine tablet," the KMT's position on the issue has become more ambivalent, especially after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident. After three cycles of alternation in the ruling party in Taiwan, the KMT has experienced serious internal divisions over its nuclear energy policy. In their quest for votes, KMT presidential candidates have preferred to maintain their ideational continuity, demonstrating a pro-nuclear energy stance from an island-wide perspective rather than expressing skepticism to it for the sake of their constituencies in New Taipei City, where the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant (FNPP) is located. Both the KMT's Chairman Eric Li-luan Chu and Hou Yu-ih were more concerned about restarting the FNPP when they served as New Taipei City mayor. When they compete in presidential elections, however, they follow the party's line to embrace nuclear energy.<sup>6</sup>

The article contributed by Hong Tian and Gang Lin conducts a narrative analysis of the FNPP policy network in Taiwan from the dual perspectives of institutions and ideas to explain how they influence policy process. Defining the ruling party as policy community, the main opposition parties as intergovernmental network, and issue network as the third player in the FNPP policy network, this article argues that in the authoritarian Taiwan the policy community (KMT) dominated the first three stages of the policy process, including agenda-setting, policy formulation, and decision-making, directly pushing the FNPP policy into the implementation stage. Since Taiwan's democratization, institutions and ideas have interacted to shape the behavior and decision-making of more policy actors in the policy network. The KMT hoped to solve energy crisis and power shortage by establishing the FNPP, while the DPP aimed

to gain more votes by opposing nuclear power. Both parties altered between serving as the policy community and intergovernmental network alternatively. The issue network consisted of citizens and social organizations, whether anti-nuclear or pro-nuclear, who aimed to influence governmental decisions through social movements and participation in policy process. However, transforming ideas into embedded institutions is not an easy task. It can only happen when a certain idea becomes more influential than others and is disseminated and strengthened by capable policy actors. In the FNPP policy network, anti-nuclear organizations successfully spread their ideas throughout Taiwan, benefiting from the prevailing anti-nuclear sentiment after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident. However, influenced by the “August 15 power outage” incident, pro-nuclear groups won the Referendum on Using Nuclear Energy to Support Green Energy in 2018, successfully abolishing the deadline for the “non-nuclear homeland” from an institutional level. Nonetheless, the failure of the “Restart of the FNPP Referendum” at the end of 2021 suggests that this policy challenge from the issue network may be unsustainable. This indicates that the sustained interaction between issue networks and institutions can strengthen their own ideas and make them widely disseminated. In addition, the timing chosen by issue networks can help strengthen the diffusion and influence of their own ideas.

## **6. Conclusion**

Both political contributions from the business circle and policy preference in electoral debate are related to voters’ party identification and political positions. These are just two variables among other domestic factors that influence people’s voting behavior in Taiwan. One unique feature in Taiwan’s electoral politics is that the state of U.S.-China relations has an inexorable impact on voters’ calculations and partisan preference. As mentioned earlier, the ruling DPP is more willing than the opposition KMT to take side with Washington in its strategic competition with the Chinese mainland. As a weaker player in the trilateral game, however, Taiwan would be forced to make a difficult choice once the two greater powers become embroiled in an impending military conflict simply, as both are crucial for the island’s development and security. Being a typical island economy, Taiwan’s economy has gradually developed an asymmetric structural dependence on the mainland for market and labor, while relying on the United States for high-tech supply

chains among other things. The geographic proximity and the huge cross-strait economic interests provide the basis for the mainland's steady implementation of "promoting politics through economics" (以經促政 *yì jīng cù zhèng*) towards Taiwan. With the substantial enhancement of the mainland's hard power, the asymmetric power advantage of the mainland over Taiwan will continue to expand, strengthening the former's self-confidence in resolving the Taiwan issue. Meanwhile, Taiwan's internal political logic and its close connections with United States, relying on the latter for security protection, will continue to exist for a long time. In the long-run, if U.S.-China relations can return to normal, the persistent influence of the mainland factor on Taiwan's domestic politics might eventually overtake the short-term impact of the U.S. factor that has become even more visible in recent years amid the wake of deterioration of Washington-Beijing ties, as observed by several authors in this special issue.

## Notes

- 1 "Zhongbang kuaiping: Laiyoushi vs. houanxin, zongtong daxuan waijiao zhanchang qifeng" (Commentary: "Presidential Race Lai versus Hou on the Diplomatic Battleground), United Daily News, 3 August 2023, <https://udn.com/news/story/123307/7344579>.
- 2 Referring to nine different elections of officials at the city or county level and below, including (1) mayors of six metropolitan cities, (2) council members of six metropolitans, (3) mayors or magistrates of 16 cities and counties, (4) council members of 16 cities and counties, (5) township chiefs, (6) township representatives, (7) village and neighborhood chiefs, (8) district chiefs for aboriginals in plain areas, and (9) district chiefs for aboriginals in mountain areas.
- 3 Compilation of Press Conference by the Taiwan Affairs Office of the PRC State Council, 14 June 14, 2023, [http://www.gwytyb.gov.cn/xwdt/xwfb/xwfbh/202306/t20230614\\_12542234.htm](http://www.gwytyb.gov.cn/xwdt/xwfb/xwfbh/202306/t20230614_12542234.htm).
- 4 TEDS2020-T was conducted in Taiwan from 12 December 2019 to 10 January 2020, with 2,847 samples, see [http://teds.nccu.edu.tw/intro2/super\\_pages.php?ID=intro11](http://teds.nccu.edu.tw/intro2/super_pages.php?ID=intro11). Data analyzed here were collected by the research project of TEDS 2020-T and directed by Prof. Chi Huang.
- 5 Ding-ming Wang, "The Political Contribution Act and An Empirical Analysis of Campaign Contribution Data," *Journal of Electoral Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (2007), pp. 121-144; Wallance Jui-Ching Chen, Taiwan qiye de zhengdang lianmeng celue: liwei xuanju de zhengzhi xianjin fenxi

2008-2012 (Party Alliance Strategies for Taiwanese Companies: Analysis of Political Contributions for the Legislative Elections 2008–2012), Master's thesis at National Taiwan University, 2019.

- 6 “Energy Policies of 2024 Presidential Candidates: Wen-Je Ko and Yu-ih Hou Propose Extending Nuclear Power plants’ Lifespan and Incorporating Nuclear as Clean Energy,” *Energy OMNI*, 12 August 2023, <https://www.energy-omni.com/en/news/article/9D4Zx49NmfMQ0hub>.