



POLICY BRIEF

Taiwan's democracy and the China challenge

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Taiwan's democratic progress over the last 20 years is remarkable, but the looming presence of China could threaten the future of the island's democracy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Taiwan faces a special and perhaps unique challenge in balancing democracy and security. Its only security threat is the People's Republic of China (PRC), which has long since declared the objective of "reunification" to end Taiwan's *de facto* independence and self-rule, and has refused to renounce the use of force to achieve that goal. The emergence of Taiwanese nationalism in the early 1990s, a result of democratization, complicated relations across the Taiwan Strait. Even if China did not exist and was not 90 miles away from the main island controlled by Taiwan, its democracy would still be challenged. Its economy has matured, growth has slowed, social and economic inequality has increased, and civil society activism reflects a growing disenchantment in some quarters with the performance of representative institutions.

Taiwan's transition to democracy came after four decades under an authoritarian regime, imposed by the Kuomintang (KMT) government that assumed jurisdiction over Taiwan in 1945. Even then, movement toward popular rule was gradual and negotiated, between the KMT regime and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which had emerged as the main opposition party. Since the democratic transition was completed in 1996, there have been three transfers of power between the KMT and the DPP. What emerged was a semi-presidential system in which regular elections have allowed the public to reverse policy trends it did not like and empowered the legislature, the media, and civil society to check the executive.

However, the political system's performance has been less than stellar. It remains fairly gridlocked and largely consumed by long-standing differences over domestic issues, such as how to maintain

economic competitiveness and ensure equity, whether to end reliance on nuclear power, and so on. The current DPP administration under President Tsai Ing-wen faces a multi-pronged pressure campaign from the Chinese mainland and, more generally, political leaders have been unable (or unwilling) to formulate the tough choices surrounding Taiwan's China challenge, much less to make those choices or articulate them to the public.

INTRODUCTION

There is an inherent tension within democratic political systems between the maintenance of democratic ideals, including the rule of law, and the need to protect national security. American administrations at war have proscribed civil liberties, for instance through the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II. Strong nationalistic sentiment in Japan in the 1920s helped enable military aggression in the next decade. In contrast, political leaders in Finland reached a consensus during the Cold War that in order to preserve the country's national independence, political speech that might provoke the Soviet Union could not be allowed. Israel probably represents the best case of a democracy balancing national security challenges with an open society, but is probably also the exception that proves the rule.

Taiwan faces a special and perhaps unique challenge in balancing democracy and security. Its only security threat is the People's Republic of China (PRC), which has long since declared the objective of "reunification" to end Taiwan's *de facto* independence and self-rule, and has refused to renounce the use of force to achieve that goal. Beijing is steadily developing the military capabilities it needs to bring about unification by force.

Indeed, the danger to Taiwan is real, and the democratic transition that was coming to fruition in the early 1990s complicated the job of adequately addressing the threat. Democracy unleashed a

pent-up current of Taiwanese nationalism and, over time, a broadly held sense of identification with Taiwan itself. For the past decade, for example, over 90 percent of those surveyed have said that they are either Taiwanese only or Taiwanese and Chinese; less than 10 percent say that they are Chinese only. But a strong self-identification with Taiwan does not mean that a majority of the public believes that Taiwan should be an independent country, an idea to which Beijing is firmly opposed. Still, since the early 1990s, the central and most divisive issue of Taiwan's domestic politics has been how to address the challenge of an increasingly strong China. Should Taiwan engage economically but avoid political negotiations? Should it enter into political negotiations whether or not the public consensus exists to do so? Should it declare *de jure* independence? Should it reject unification? Or avoid making a choice as much as possible?

Two of Taiwan's recent presidents—Lee Teng-hui (1988-2000) and Chen Shui-bian (2000-08)—played on Taiwanese nationalism to gain and hold political power, putting national security at some degree of risk. Ma Ying-jeou (2008-16) was more cautious and believed that avoiding provocation of China and promoting economic interdependence was the best way to keep Taiwan safe. Tsai Ing-wen, president since May 2016, has eschewed provocation and pledged to "maintain the status quo." For its part, Beijing does not accept Tsai's pledges and instead dogmatically asserts that the goal of Tsai and her Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) is *de jure* independence. Beijing has sought through harder and softer means to undermine her political standing, including stealing away Taiwan's diplomatic allies, conducting displays of force near the island, and providing generous incentives for Taiwan entrepreneurs, job-seekers, and students to relocate to the mainland. China has also sought to penetrate the Taiwan political system to its advantage, and because that system is sharply polarized on independence and other issues, formulating a China policy that is both sensible and broadly supported is even more difficult.

Even if China did not exist and was not 90 miles away from the main island controlled by Taiwan, its democracy would still be challenged. Its economy has matured, growth has slowed, and entrants to the job market do not necessarily possess the skills that companies need. Positioned between more advanced economies like the United States on the one hand and up-and-comers like China, Taiwan therefore struggles to maintain competitiveness. To make matters worse, social and economic inequality has increased, and the share of retirees in the population is growing and the birth rate has long since declined to a low level. Civil society activism reflects a growing disenchantment in some quarters with the performance of representative institutions. Even though the Taiwan public generally favors democracy as a political system, it does not necessarily approve the policy performance of their own democratic system.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Taiwan's transition to democracy was incremental and negotiated. The process began in the early 1980s with a decision by then-President Chiang Ching-kuo to end authoritarian rule and culminated in the presidential elections of 1996, which, for the first time, were conducted on a direct, popular basis. Yet from the very beginning until the present day, Taiwan's domestic political arrangements have been inextricably linked with the island's relationship with China.

Taiwan was a prefecture of Imperial China's Fujian province from the late 17th century and formally became a province beginning in 1884. China ceded the island to Japan after losing the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95. During World War II, the government of the Republic of China (ROC), led by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and dominated by his Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT), declared the return of Taiwan to China as one of its war aims. Franklin Roosevelt readily agreed because he wanted China's help in preserving post-war peace. The Cairo Conference of late 1943 ratified this decision, in the

process denying the people of Taiwan a say in their future—an option of which FDR was quite aware.

Taiwan returned to Chinese jurisdiction soon after the United States dropped nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. The United States directed that Chiang Kai-shek's ROC government accept the Japanese surrender on Taiwan and take control of the island. Cautiously welcomed by the populace, the new authorities soon subjected the Taiwanese to predatory, corrupt, and arbitrary rule. A minor clash that occurred in the capital city of Taipei on February 27, 1947 quickly mushroomed the next day into an island-wide rebellion against the KMT regime. A crackdown by army troops from the Chinese mainland soon ensued, and about 20,000 people died in the incident (known thereafter as "2-28"). Much of the violence was excessive and indiscriminate.

Meanwhile, civil war had broken out on the mainland between Chiang's ROC government and Mao Zedong's Chinese Communist Party (CCP). By 1949, Chiang's forces had lost the war and the ROC government was transferred to Taiwan. But Chiang made the illusory vow that the war would continue and that Taiwan would be the base for "glorious mainland recovery." For him, the continuing state of war dictated restrictions on political activity in Taiwan:

- In 1948, the KMT regime instituted the "Temporary Provisions Effective During the Period of National Mobilization for Suppression of the Communist Rebellion." This measure suspended the provisions of the 1946 ROC constitution regarding civil and political rights, as well as two-term limits for the offices of president and vice president.
- In 1949, the regime declared martial law, which criminalized political dissent and mandated that political "crimes" would be tried in military courts. There ensued a period of intense repression of suspected communists and local oppositionists, known since as the "white terror."

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- Based on the rationale that the ROC government was the government of all of China; that the legislature and the national assembly (which selected the president) had been elected on an all-China basis; and that the mainland of China was under communist control, elections for those bodies were suspended.
- The ROC's intelligence agencies conducted widespread purges to root out communist spies, advocates of an independent Taiwan, and domestic dissent.

In addition, Chiang's regime believed that 50 years of Japanese rule had drained the Taiwanese of their Chinese cultural and political identity, and so sought to teach the populace how to be Chinese again. The education system was a key instrument for this re-culturalization.

One exception to this hard authoritarian system was elections at the local level, for magistrates, mayors, and local assemblymen. The KMT saw instrumental value in these elections because it could play off two or more local, native Taiwanese factions against each other. Also, when a locally popular independent ran against an official KMT candidate, the central party could use the scale of the KMT victory as a barometer of grassroots officials' performance. The other exception was the KMT's decision in the late 1950s and early 1960s to foster economic development based on a strategy of export-led growth. The result, two-plus decades later, was the emergence of a middle class that began to push for a more open political system.

Then, around 1970, two parallel and transformative trends began. The first was the gradual grooming of Chiang Ching-kuo to succeed Chiang Kai-shek, his father, as Taiwan's paramount leader. The younger Chiang had carried out the purges of the 1950s and earned a reputation as something of a thug, but he later developed an image as a man of the people. More importantly, he recognized the pressures for more political participation. Even though the

regime would not allow new elections for mainland seats, it did institute "supplementary elections" for the legislature and the national assembly, to reflect the growth of Taiwan's population since the original elections were held in the late 1940s. It co-opted loyal native Taiwanese into the regime. Opposition to KMT rule began to grow.

The second trend was the deterioration of the ROC's international position. With the help of the United States, it had preserved its status as the government of China in international organizations like the United Nations, but as more and more third-world countries became independent, support for Mao's People's Republic of China government (PRC) mounted. In 1971 the PRC replaced the ROC in the U.N., an event that seriously undercut the KMT regime's all-China rationale for the denial of democracy in Taiwan. The decision of the United States to switch recognition from the ROC to the PRC in 1978 undercut Taiwan even further. The domestic opposition movement, known as the *dangwai* ("outside the party" or "outside the KMT") grew in strength, and repression temporarily grew tighter in response.

It was at this point that Chiang Ching-kuo began moving Taiwan toward democracy. He likely understood that the KMT's performance in promoting economic development and running elections would help keep it in power. Stimulated in part by opponents of authoritarian rule in the U.S. Congress, Chiang saw the need for a new, values-based relationship with the United States, now that diplomatic relations and the mutual defense treaty of 1954 were gone. Recognizing that China had embarked on Taiwan-style economic reform, he also believed that shifting to political reform would keep Taiwan ahead.

So in 1985 he began maneuvering to bring political change. When, in September 1986, the *dangwai* opposition declared itself to be a political party (technically a violation of law), Chiang did not order a response. A few days later he told Washington

Post publisher Katherine Graham that he would lift martial law, which he accomplished in the summer of 1987 (although a national security law was put in its place). Chiang passed away in January 1988, but his successor, Lee Teng-hui, a Taiwanese, was determined to continue the effort.

There then ensued a complex and incremental process in which Lee and the reformers around him had to do enough to satisfy those who wanted democratization right away, while also mollifying those who wanted no change at all. The DPP and other opposition groups used demonstrations to keep up the pressure (but negotiated with the authorities on the rules of the road of the protests). Lee Teng-hui constructed a coalition composed of more moderate members of the KMT and DPP to overrule the more radical members of each party.

One key turning point was the lifting of the temporary provisions in 1991, which restored the civil and political rights in the constitution. Another was the unfreezing of the membership of the Legislative Yuan and the National Assembly to remove those members who were representing mainland districts (whom the DPP called “old thieves”) and replacing them with individuals who were elected on some basis by the people of Taiwan. In the end, the government bought out the old members. The first popular election for the National Assembly occurred in 1991 and the first one for the Legislative Yuan took place in 1992. At that point, the election of the president was still done indirectly by the National Assembly, but a constitutional amendment in 1994 instituted direct, popular elections for president. The first contest was in March 1996, which Lee Teng-hui won handily after a campaign that included China’s test-firing ballistic missiles into waters off of Taiwan.

The China issue continued to affect Taiwan’s domestic politics, but in a very new way. The Beijing government was growing more insistent that the time had come for movement toward unification, the incorporation of Taiwan into the PRC system,

using the same formula of semi-autonomy that is employed for Hong Kong (as originally implemented, the system guaranteed the civil and political rights of Hong Kong people but denied them the power to elect democratically all senior political leaders).¹ Chinese leaders had hoped to do that deal with Chiang Ching-kuo, who came from China and advocated his own form of unification. They thought that growing economic interdependence between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait would foster political reconciliation. But democratization had effectively given the Taiwan public, which opposes unification on China’s terms, a seat at the negotiating table with China. It also fostered a strong Taiwanese identity and freed people to discuss and advocate the option of a Taiwan that was independent by law as well as by fact (a sentiment that alarmed the PRC).

Since the mid-1990s, a central issue in Taiwan’s democracy has been how to cope with the reality of a China whose power is growing in tandem with its ambition for unification. Different Taiwan leaders have sought to balance costs and benefits in different ways. Arguably, the public is more realistic and pragmatic about the slim prospects for an independent Taiwan. At the same time, it is not clear that China is willing to adjust its approach to accommodate the reality of a Taiwan public whose views and power have evolved greatly in the last three decades.

HOW DOES TAIWAN’S DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM WORK?

Taiwan has a semi-presidential system of governance, similar to that of France, which contains elements of both a presidential and parliamentary system. The president and vice president are elected by a simple majority popular vote to 4-year terms, and are eligible to run for a second 4-year term upon completion of their first term. The president serves as head of state, and in that capacity, appoints a premier to serve as head of government. The premier presides over cabinet

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meetings that decide on policies and prepare policies and budgets, but the constitution reserves to the president authority over policies regarding national defense, foreign affairs, and cross-Strait relations.

The premier serves at the pleasure of the president. The president can remove the premier and shuffle the cabinet at his/her will. Since the adoption of the semi-presidential system two decades ago, Taiwan's president often has responded to scandal or setback by shuffling cabinet members and replacing the premier.

Taiwan's legislature has the authority to conduct a no-confidence vote against the premier. If the legislature votes to remove the premier, the president has the authority to dissolve the legislature. Due to the uncertain outcomes and high costs of such a sequence of actions, no legislature has conducted a vote of no confidence against a premier.

Taiwan's government is comprised of five branches of government, as stipulated by the constitution of the Republic of China. The constitution divides government into the Executive Yuan, the Legislative Yuan, the Judicial Yuan, the Control Yuan, and the Examination Yuan. The Executive Yuan serves as the cabinet. Cabinet ministers are appointed by the president on recommendation of the premier.

The Legislative Yuan (LY) functions as a unicameral lawmaking body. Of the 113-seat body, 73 members are directly elected in single-seat constituencies by simple majority vote, 34 are elected in a single constituency by proportional representation vote (each voter therefore casts two ballots). In addition, six LY members are directly elected in aboriginal constituencies by proportional representation vote. Legislative members serve 4-year terms. Elections for the LY occur at the same time as presidential elections.

The Judicial Yuan administers the court system, which includes a supreme court, whose justices are appointed by the president with approval of the

legislature for a lifetime appointment. Below the supreme court, there are district courts and high courts.

The Control Yuan serves as a government ombudsman, monitoring public service and investigating instances of malfeasance or corruption. Its members are appointed by the president and approved by the legislature for 6-year terms.

The Examination Yuan is a legacy of mainland China's imperial examination system. The body consists of the Ministry of Examination, which recruits and selects officials for civil service through competitive testing, and the Ministry of Personnel, which oversees the functioning of the civil service.

In addition to the central government, Taiwan also maintains local governments divided into 13 counties, three cities, and six special municipalities.

Ingrained in Taiwan's political system is a largely representative model, whereby elected and appointed officials make major decisions. Referenda were previously difficult because of high thresholds for placement on the ballot and passage. The DPP-controlled LY has lowered those bars, and 10 referenda were voted on in November 2018. Ironically, those referenda that passed regarding energy policy and same-sex marriage contradicted DPP policy. (Passing amendments to the constitution remains exceptionally difficult and essentially requires the two major parties to agree on the measure.)

Taiwan has undergone three peaceful power transitions through direct-voting elections, going beyond Samuel Huntington's two-turnover test of democratic consolidation.² Unlike other third wave democracies in Asia such as Thailand, Cambodia, or the Philippines, Taiwan has not experienced democratic backsliding or military takeover. Rather, Taiwan's political system has enabled the emergence of a vibrant civil society, an active free press, and an independent judiciary—key self-correcting mechanisms of democratic societies.

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Partly as a consequence of these developments, Taiwan now boasts a strong human rights record, a high degree of transparency, healthy checks and balances, a well-functioning universal health care system, and limited criminal violence. The process of widening norms on what constitutes political corruption has made progress, and public toleration of political corruption has declined dramatically.³

TAIWAN VIEWS OF DEMOCRACY

Taiwan residents also have gained greater confidence in the suitability of their democratic form of governance. According to four iterations of the Asian Barometer Survey, the proportion of the

populace who believe “democracy is suitable for our country now” has risen from 59 percent to 75 percent between 2001 and 2014. Moreover, the polls conducted in 2010 and 2014 showed that there was broad approval of the idea that democracy is the best form of government, whatever its problems (90 and 88 percent respectively). There was also clear and strong opposition to strongman, praetorian, one-party, and technocratic forms of government.⁴

TABLE 1: TAIWAN ATTITUDES ON DEMOCRACY IN GENERAL

	SUMMER 2001	WINTER 2006	WINTER 2010	SUMMER-FALL 2014
Democracy may have problems; still best form of government.	N/A	N/A	90%	88%
We should get rid of parliament and elections and have a strong leader decide things.	22%	18%	17%	16%
Only one political party should be allowed to stand for election and hold office.	18%	12%	10%	8%
The army should come in to govern the country.	8%	7%	5%	4%
We should get rid of elections and parliaments and have experts make decisions on behalf of the people.	17%	N/A	14%	12%

Source: Yun-han Chu et al., “Re-assessing the Popular Foundation of Asian Democracies: Findings from Four Waves of the Asian Barometer Survey.”

TABLE 2: ATTITUDES ON TAIWAN'S DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM

	SUMMER 2001	WINTER 2006	WINTER 2010	SUMMER-FALL 2014
Satisfaction with the way democracy works.	53%	59%	70%	64%
Democracy is capable of solving problems in society.	58%	62%	65%	61%
Democracy is suitable for our country.	59%	68%	74%	78%
How much of a democracy is our country (full or with minor problems)?	N/A	53%	63%	60%
Democracy is more important than economic development.	11%	16%	16%	19%
Protecting political freedom is more important than reducing economic inequality.	N/A	N/A	17%	21%
Democracy is always preferable.	45%	50%	52%	47%

Source: Yun-han Chu et al., "Re-assessing the Popular Foundation of Asian Democracies: Findings from Four Waves of the Asian Barometer Survey."

Still, support for democracy in Taiwan depends somewhat on how the questions are asked, and the overall result reveals some degree of ambivalence. By only modest majorities, respondents believed that democracy has performed well and even that Taiwan truly was a democracy. Most startling, however, were two types of findings. The first was the strong opposition to the idea that democracy was more important than economic development and reducing economic inequality. Those priorities, it seems, are more important than the governing process by which they were promoted. Second was the result that only around half of those surveyed thought that democracy was "always preferable" to other forms of government.

On the issue of political participation, there was also great variation. In the 2012 World Values Survey, 71 percent of Taiwan respondents reported either modest or no interest in politics. But 60 percent of respondents said that they always voted in local elections and 71 percent said they did so in national elections (10 and 5 percent respectively said they never participated). 82 percent believed

elections offered voters a genuine choice either very often or fairly often. 86 percent believed that elections were very or rather important in making it possible for their families to make a good living (thus linking politics to economic aspirations). Regarding other forms of political activity, the most common were signing petitions and attending peaceful demonstrations, but with only around a quarter of respondents participating in either. Thirty-six percent of respondents said that in the year prior to the survey they on one occasion had signed a petition; 22 percent said they had joined a boycott; 26 percent said they had attended a peaceful demonstration; and 36 percent said they had joined a strike.⁵

While such consolidation of support for democratic governance is notable, it is not irreversible. One of the best ways to evaluate the quality of democratic institutions is through their ability to resolve central issues that the public is most concerned about. In key quality of life areas such as job creation, affordable housing, and income distribution, Taiwan's political system has not met the expectations of its voters.

President Tsai Ing-wen is the latest leader in Taiwan to run her campaign on the promise of reinvigorating the economy, increasing job opportunities, and reviving hope among youth for a better future. Her immediate predecessors put forward similar pledges and—based on low approval ratings at the end of their terms—seem to have come up short in delivering on them.

There has been a popular current of political discourse in Taiwan arguing that Taiwan's elite benefit disproportionately from Taiwan's economy, and that Taiwan's tax code aggravates (rather than ameliorates) the wealth gap. Despite the bipartisan call for reforms to level the playing field, successive leaders from both political parties have yet to legislate reforms that would narrow the wealth gap. Similar public frustrations also are evident around social issues. Tsai's election elevated expectations for progress on marriage equality and LGBT rights that have not yet been met, in part due to opposition from influential groups in Taiwan, including the Presbyterian church.

President Tsai's election also ushered in expectations for political reforms to improve the performance of Taiwan's government. After criticizing former President Ma Ying-jeou for consolidating power in the presidency and marginalizing the Legislative Yuan's oversight role during her campaign, Tsai has not shown initiative to push forward enhanced legislative oversight of her administration's initiatives. She also has not delivered progress on redressing problems with disproportionality in distribution of seats through the legislative election process. Tsai has dealt with transitional justice issues, including by apologizing for past mistreatment of aboriginal communities, shedding light on injustices committed during Taiwan's authoritarian period, and recovering ill-gotten assets from the Kuomintang political party.

In short, Taiwan's democratic model has become entrenched and accepted by the Taiwan people. Such progress has enabled civil society to take

root, a free media to flourish, and an independent judiciary to serve as a check on abuses of power. At the same time, successive presidential administrations have struggled to deliver progress on quality of life issues topping the lists of concerns of Taiwan voters.

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Taiwan voters have ushered in three transfers of power between the Kuomintang and the Democratic Progressive Party in the past two decades. While domestic issues played a significant role in each of the presidential elections, cross-Strait issues also figured prominently. During this period, there has been a stable distribution in preference for maintaining the cross-Strait status quo, at around 60 percent according to polling by the Taiwan National Security Survey.⁶ Such consistency of voters' preference for maintaining the status quo has limited space for fringe or populist parties or politicians to emerge and significantly alter Taiwan's political discourse.

Following a period of heightened cross-Strait tensions under Chen Shui-bian, Taiwan voters elected Ma Ying-jeou in 2008. In addition to cross-Strait issues, frustration with corruption and political polarization also informed voter attitudes. Ma campaigned on a promise to calm cross-Strait tensions and secure the benefits of China's rapid economic expansion for Taiwan's own development.

During his presidency, Ma pushed Taiwan in the direction of social and economic integration with the mainland. The pace of Ma's efforts, and the lack of public consultation and support for them, precipitated the Sunflower movement—a student-led protest in 2014 that succeeded in halting the Ma administration's efforts to implement a cross-Strait service trade agreement. The protestors argued that too much cross-Strait economic integration would create a slippery slope to political integration, an outcome they opposed.

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The success of the Sunflower movement in focusing public attention on the need for caution on cross-Strait integration provided the backdrop for Tsai Ing-wen's candidacy. While pledging to maintain the cross-Strait status quo, Tsai also advocated in her campaign for safeguarding Taiwan's democracy, diversifying Taiwan's trade and investment flows through a "New Southbound Policy," and preserving distance in cross-Strait educational and cultural ties.

Thus, in the 2008 and 2016 presidential elections, Taiwan voters demonstrated their preference for balancing the perceived excesses of the incumbent's approach to cross-Strait relations by shifting the presidency to the other party. Such a voting pattern and the clear preference for the status quo has not translated, however, into progress by any leader to forge an enduring centrist consensus on how to stabilize the relationship with the mainland and explore even tentatively how to resolve the fundamental dispute with Beijing.

Partisans in both major political parties maintain entrenched concerns about the implications of the other's policy on cross-Strait issues. Broadly speaking, supporters of the DPP and of the small parties that share its views fear that a KMT government will deepen cross-Strait economic integration past the point of no return and cause Taiwan to become subsumed politically by the mainland. Similarly, supporters of the KMT and allied conservative parties fear that a DPP government will end the Republic of China and replace it with a Republic of Taiwan, eliminate any cultural or social identity in Taiwan with the mainland, underestimate the strength of Beijing's resolve on cross-Strait issues, and at some point provoke a cross-Strait conflict.

The biggest beneficiary of a divided Taiwan is the mainland. China is united in its single-minded pursuit of unification while Taipei is divided in how to respond. This has enabled Beijing to significantly increase pressure on Taiwan as Taipei remains largely consumed by its own partisan debates.

In recent months, Beijing has shrunk Taiwan's international space by luring away diplomatic allies and obstructing Taiwan's participation in international fora. On security issues, Beijing has intensified its military presence around the entirety of Taiwan. Economically, Beijing has announced preferential policies to attract Taiwan's young innovators and companies to relocate to the mainland, just as it has sought to intimidate foreign companies into accepting Beijing's nomenclature on Taiwan as a condition for acceptance of their operations there. And internally, Beijing has used a multi-pronged approach involving money, propaganda, cyber operations, civic groups, and organized crime to influence public discourse in Taiwan on cross-Strait issues in directions favorable to the mainland's preference for peaceful integration.

In the face of a multi-pronged pressure campaign from the mainland, Taiwan's political system remains fairly gridlocked and largely consumed by long-standing differences over domestic issues. Political leaders have been unable (or unwilling) to formulate the tough choices surrounding Taiwan's China challenge, much less to make those choices or articulate them to the public. The mass media is focused on sensations and scandals. Taipei is not responding to growing pressure from Beijing by advancing economic reforms needed to attract foreign investment, or making trade-offs to forge closer economic ties with key trading partners such as the United States and Japan, or allocating resources to increase the proportion of Taiwan's overall government budget for internal security and national defense.

Although the two of us are citizens of one of the less functional political systems in the democratic world and probably have no right to make suggestions on how Taiwan's democracy might be improved, we do so in part because the United States contributed to and took pride in Taiwan's transition to representative government, and also because the stakes are high for the fate of the island's

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population. We offer seven suggestions for Taiwan, two for the United States, and one for China:

For Taiwan:

- Focus on institutional changes that are procedurally achievable rather than initiatives that require constitutional amendments that are difficult to pass at best.
- Build a centrist consensus between the leaderships of the two major parties (and with minor parties if possible) on the need to make the political system more effective in addressing the challenges Taiwan faces.
- If possible, delineate boundaries between the major parties on where they should cooperate (as wide as possible) and where competition is appropriate (limiting it to what is necessary).
- With a leadership consensus in place, create a work plan to apply its centrist orientation to address pressing policy issues (economic competitiveness, energy, social welfare, youth opportunity, defense, etc.).
- Use the implementation of that work plan to regain the public's confidence in the ability of the political system to address society's problems.
- Carry out institutional changes in the Legislative Yuan and the Judiciary to reduce incentives for members to engage in political conflict.
- Politicians should be responsible for educating the public on the policy options that are reasonably viable in the context of the challenges Taiwan faces.

For the United States:

- Privately urge leaders in both of Taiwan's major political parties to advance institutional changes that are achievable and that would enhance the performance of the government, and to oppose calls for constitutional amendments on issues

relating to sovereignty questions that would serve as a wedge between the United States and Taiwan.

- Maintain a consistent declaratory policy of not supporting Taiwan independence and opposing efforts by either side of the Taiwan Strait to alter the status quo.

For the People's Republic of China:

- Take seriously the views of the Taiwan public (however discordant they may sometimes seem) and the centrality of the democratic system through which those views are expressed (despite its weaknesses). If China is ultimately to achieve its objectives concerning Taiwan, that will require fundamental changes, which in some cases will require amendments to the ROC constitution, which in turn can only occur if there is a very broad public consensus that those changes are in their interests.

CONCLUSION

Taiwan's democratic consolidation over the past 20 years is nothing short of historic and is a definitional feature of many Taiwan residents' identity. Taiwan citizens have demonstrated grit and fortitude to transform the island into a flourishing and vibrant democracy. Those same attributes will be called on in the coming years to sustain Taiwan's gains while addressing China's complex challenge, so that Taiwan can continue serving as a democratic beacon for the region and the world.

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