

# **Dynamics of Democracy in Taiwan**

## **The Ma Ying-jeou Years**

edited by Kharis Templeman, Yun-han Chu, and Larry Diamond

## Contents

*List of Illustrations*

*Acknowledgements*

1 The Dynamics of Democracy During the Ma Ying-jeou Years  
*Kharis Templeman, Yun-han Chu, and Larry Diamond*

### Part 1 Party Politics and Elections

2 The 2012 Elections

*Shelley Rigger*

3 The DPP in Opposition

*Austin Horng-En Wang*

4 The KMT in Power

*Nathan F. Batto*

5 The Party System Before and After the 2016 Elections

*Kharis Templeman*

### Part 2 Democratic Institutions and Governance

6 The Challenges of Governance

*Yun-han Chu and Yu-tzung Chang*

7 Legislative Politics

*Isaac Shih-hao Huang and Shing-yuan Sheng*

8 Watchdog Institutions

*Christian Göbel*

9 Managing the Economy

*Pei-shan Lee*

### Part 3 Public Opinion and Civil Society

10 Assessing Support for Democracy

*Yu-tzung Chang and Yun-han Chu*

11 Trends in Public Opinion

*Ching-hsin Yu*

12 The Impact of Social Movements

*Dafydd Fell*

13 Who Are the Protesters? Why Are They Protesting?

*Min-hua Huang and Mark Weatherall*

14 Social Media and Cyber-Mobilization

*Eric Chen-hua Yu and Jia-sin Yu*

### Part 4 Looking Outward

- 15 Cross-Strait Relations  
*Szu-yin Ho*
- 16 In the Shadow of Great Power Rivalry  
*Dean P. Chen*

*Bibliography*

*The Contributors*

*Index*

*About the Book*

## **Outline of the Book**

The chapters in this volume provide a variety of perspectives on politics in Taiwan during the Ma Ying-jeou years. Together they cover four aspects of Taiwan's democratic development: party politics and elections; democratic institutions and governance; public opinion and civil society; and looking outward.

### ***Part 1: Party Politics and Elections***

Part 1 covers the major elections of 2012 and 2016 and developments in Taiwan's party politics.<sup>i</sup> In Chapter 2, Shelley Rigger leads off with an analysis of the 2012 presidential and legislative elections, in which Ma Ying-jeou and the KMT legislative majority were reelected in the face of a strong challenge from Tsai Ing-wen and the DPP. The debates, controversies, and outcomes of these elections, Rigger argues, were a reflection of both Taiwan's maturing democracy and its narrowing options for changing its international status. Twelve years under Chen Shui-bian and Ma Ying-jeou had made clear just how tight the constraints on Taiwan's policy choices had become. Both Beijing and Washington had resisted Chen's efforts to expand Taiwan's international space, and while both initially rewarded Ma's more constrained and accommodating policy direction, Beijing's long-term goal of unification did not change. For Taiwanese voters, these external forces were part of a set of difficult questions about how best to improve the island's economic trajectory, as post-industrialization and globalization reshaped social relations in ways that left many Taiwanese deeply dissatisfied.

Ma's landslide victory in 2008 was driven in part by excessive expectations about what he could deliver for the economy. As these deflated and the global financial crisis threw Taiwan's economy into a sharp recession, Ma's public approval ratings slumped into the low thirties, and he appeared vulnerable to defeat by a reinvigorated DPP led by chairwoman Tsai Ing-wen, perhaps aided by a third-party run by former KMT member and PFP chairman James Soong. But in the end, the 2012 election campaign was tempered by realism, and boiled down to a contest of credibility between candidates and parties that Taiwanese voters already knew well. Both the KMT and DPP kept their promises modest, and both leading presidential candidates sought to portray themselves as guardians of the status quo, although they defined that status quo differently. While the race was hard-fought and both sides landed some stinging blows, the campaign's respective visions focused more on practical problems and realistic solutions, moving the election away from the pattern of ideological polarization that characterized previous contests.

Ultimately, Rigger argues, the majority of voters decided that giving Ma Ying-jeou a second term was the safer choice. Ma carried 51.6 percent of the vote to Tsai Ing-wen's 45.6 percent, a much narrower margin than in the previous contest, but still a clear win. (Soong's third-party spoiler campaign drew little support in the end as voters concentrated on the Ma-Tsai contest.) In the Legislative Yuan contests, the KMT lost a net total of eight seats but retained a majority of 64 seats in the 113-seat body. After gaining six seats in by-elections in 2009–2010, the DPP continued its recovery from its disastrous 2008 showing, picking up an additional seven seats to put it at 40. Under Legislative Yuan rules, this increase to above one-third of the seats ensured the DPP co-convenor positions on most legislative committees, giving the party considerably more influence over the legislative process. And the PFP and TSU, both minor parties that had been shut out in the 2008 elections, each managed to obtain enough party-list votes to cross the 5 percent threshold; both held three seats in the new legislature, giving them each the right to form a party caucus and participate in cross-party negotiations.<sup>ii</sup> Thus, although

the KMT retained its majority, it faced a much more challenging legislative environment in Ma's second term than in his first.

One of the most surprising and consequential political developments during this period was the rapid revival of the DPP. After its devastating setbacks in the 2008 elections, the former ruling party appeared hopelessly defeated, divided, and demoralized. The DPP's presidential candidate Frank Hsieh had won under 42 percent of the vote, and the party retained less than a quarter of the seats in the Legislative Yuan under a new, more majoritarian electoral system. Some observers thought it would take a generation or more for the party to recover as a serious electoral force, if it ever did. Yet within two years the DPP was again running competitive campaigns for most local offices and had recovered considerable ground in public opinion.

A key element in this rapid turnaround was the emergence of Tsai Ing-wen as party chairwoman. Prior to her entry into the contest for chair in 2008, Tsai was an outsider to the DPP leadership, without either a power base inside the party or much of a public profile. Thus it is a bit perplexing how she managed not only to win the party chair's position but also gradually to build up a position of dominance within the DPP that cleared the field for her to be the party's presidential nominee in both 2012 and 2016. In Chapter 3, Austin Wang explains the resurgence of the DPP, and Tsai Ing-wen's emergence as its clear-cut leader, as the consequence of four factors. First, the depth of the DPP's 2008 defeat led to a consensus in the party that something fundamental had to change, and Tsai offered a clean break with the past: she was a moderate, not linked to any faction, relatively young (fifty-two at the time) and a woman, and had never run for political office on her own before. She had joined the party only four years before, and her most recent previous political experience was as deputy premier under Su Tseng-chang from 2006 to 2007. In the party chair's election in May 2008, she won a decisive 57 percent of DPP member votes, besting the much older, pro-independence firebrand Koo Kuan-min. Second, because Tsai did not belong to any faction, she emerged as a compromise candidate acceptable to all the major DPP power-brokers. Her personality and consensus-oriented management style also won over critics and allowed her gradually to centralize authority within the party without openly threatening the position of party heavyweights. Third, Tsai managed to push through several institutional reforms that improved the party's electoral prospects: she replaced closed primaries with public polls to choose district legislative and council candidates, personally negotiated who the party would put up in local executive races rather than holding intraparty competitions, and centralized nominations for the legislative party list. When the DPP won several legislative by-elections in a row and actually obtained more votes than the KMT did in local elections in 2009–2010, this convinced many party members that the DPP was on the right path under Tsai's leadership and would be competitive in 2012 and beyond. Finally, Tsai and the DPP headquarters invested considerable resources in developing a centralized and sophisticated social media campaign for the 2012 and 2016 general elections, providing a standardized set of recommendations about branding, website design, micro-targeting, and live-streaming events for all the party's candidates. The centralization of the DPP's online campaign resources further strengthened Tsai's influence over the party's campaign messaging and tactics.

Tsai retained these strengths within the DPP even after she lost the 2012 presidential race to Ma Ying-jeou. Though she had to resign as chairwoman, she was returned to that role after the Sunflower Movement sparked a wave of criticism of her successor, Su Tseng-chang. By the time of the 2016 campaign, Tsai's grip on the party was quite firm, and she had no challengers for the DPP nomination. Wang argues that the DPP was effectively "presidentialized"—with power

centralized in the hands of the party's presidential candidate—even before Tsai Ing-wen was inaugurated as president in May 2016.

A similar transformation into a “presidentialized” party occurred within the KMT. As Nathan Batto explores at length in Chapter 4, Ma Ying-jeou's dominance over the KMT eventually reversed the traditional direction of accountability in that party: rather than the party leader serving at the pleasure of party elites and grassroots members and pursuing the KMT's collective goals, the president instead set the political agenda and used the party as a tool to serve his own political purposes. Batto focuses on two episodes that were critical to redefining the KMT's party image: the battle in 2013–2014 to pass the Cross-Strait Services Trade Agreement, and the debate in 2015 over whether to move away from the 1992 Consensus. In both of these episodes, grassroots KMT politicians resisted moves by President Ma to move the party in a more pro-China direction. Facing pressure from an electorate that was trending in the opposite direction, these politicians needed the KMT's position on cross-Strait relations to be attractive to the median voter, not to the party's deep-Blue base. Ma had a different calculation. After winning reelection in 2012, his focus was on implementing policies that would deepen the integration of Taiwan's economy with the Chinese mainland's, regardless of public opinion, and he proved willing to spend a tremendous amount of political capital to try to win passage of the CSSTA.

After Ma resigned as party chair following the KMT's sweeping defeats in the 2014 local elections, the ruling party was left without a clear leader—an unfamiliar situation for a presidentialized party, and one that touched off a struggle for primacy among Ma, new party chair Eric Chu, Legislative Yuan speaker Wang Jin-pyng, and the party's 2016 presidential nominee Hung Hsiu-chu, among other players. The battle over the KMT's China discourse took place in the midst of this power struggle. Hung, who came from the KMT's deep-Blue Chinese nationalist wing, moved away from the party's carefully crafted 1992 Consensus position and toward the PRC's preferred formulation of “one China, same interpretation,” and she appeared indifferent to how her Chinese nationalist rhetoric would be received by the electorate. Most of the rest of the party resisted her rhetorical moves, but they dared not completely repudiate the views of someone they had nominated to be their presidential standard-bearer. Only in October 2015 did other party elites finally step in and execute a late switch of candidates, replacing Hung with the more moderate and experienced Chu, who duly returned to the party's previous messaging. But by then, the KMT appeared headed for certain defeat in the presidential race, and increasingly likely to lose its majority in the legislature as well. The repeated moves of its leaders—first Ma, then Hung—in a pro-Beijing direction had the effect of repositioning the party much further from the median voter on cross-Strait issues in 2016 than it had been in 2008 or 2012. Thus, the unprecedented repudiation of the party at the ballot box in 2016, Batto argues, had much to do with the failure of KMT leaders to follow shifts in public opinion on cross-Strait relations.

The 2016 elections were unprecedented in other ways as well. In the legislative elections, the DPP won a majority of the seats for the first time in its history, sweeping out many incumbents whose long records of constituent service and dense political networks proved to be no match for the national anti-KMT wave. A record eighteen parties registered for the party-list vote, including several new parties that sprang up in the wake of the Sunflower Movement and the 2014 local elections. The most successful of these, the New Power Party (NPP), managed not only to cross the 5 percent party-list threshold but also to win three district seats, making it the third-largest party in the new legislature. As a sometime ally of the DPP, the NPP effectively

replaced the TSU, which failed to cross the threshold and lost its three seats. Many commentators interpreted the 2016 election campaign as marking a fundamental break with the previous party system and expected the results to usher in a critical realignment around issues such as economic redistribution, labor rights, same-sex marriage, and environmental protection—issues orthogonal to the China question that had long divided all parties in the legislature.

However, as Kharis Templeman argues in Chapter 5, this critical realignment did not actually happen. Taiwan's party system was remarkably stable and well-institutionalized for a young democracy: electoral volatility was low, partisanship was high, and both elites and masses were broadly committed to the legitimacy of electoral competition to decide who governs. In addition, Taiwan's two leading parties both featured strong party organizations with distinctive brands, clear differentiation of positions on Taiwan's relationship with the PRC, and loyal followings in the electorate.

Despite the striking headlines, Templeman argues that the 2016 elections did not mark a major realignment away from the long-standing pattern of Blue-versus-Green electoral competition, but rather a sharp swing toward the DPP and away from the KMT. The relative success of the NPP depended crucially on pre-electoral coordination with the DPP, whose voters supported its three winning district candidates at about the same rate that they did DPP nominees elsewhere. By contrast, all the other new “third force” parties that did not cooperate with the DPP and attempted to run on issues unrelated to the China cleavage fared much worse, all failing to win enough party-list votes to cross the 5 percent threshold for seats. Overall, there was little evidence to suggest that 2016 was a “critical election” that fundamentally reordered the previous pattern of party competition. The implication was that future elections, especially national-level ones, were still likely to feature a DPP-KMT duopoly and to turn on each party's positioning on the all-important China question.

And indeed, that pattern held true over the next four years. Tsai and the DPP suffered from a steep decline in popularity that began shortly after her inauguration, as many previous supporters became increasingly disillusioned and frustrated with the Tsai administration's reform priorities. This dissatisfaction culminated in a sweeping defeat for the DPP in the November 2018 local elections, when the party lost seven of the thirteen local executive positions it held—shockingly including the southern special municipality of Kaohsiung, a deep-Green city that most political observers had assumed would never elect a KMT candidate. Most noteworthy, however, is that the biggest beneficiary of the DPP's struggles in these elections was not the social movement-linked “third force” parties, but instead the KMT, which swept right back into power in many cities and counties that it had lost in 2014. Reports that the KMT was in terminal decline after the 2016 elections, it turned out, were greatly exaggerated, and the party again looked like a serious threat to unseat the DPP in 2020.

In the wake of the DPP's defeat, Tsai was forced to resign as party chairwoman, and she looked increasingly unlikely to win reelection in January 2020. Yet she and the DPP enjoyed their own remarkable political turnaround in only a year's time—mostly thanks, once again, to the increasing salience of the China issue. Tsai's response to a speech on Taiwan given by Xi Jinping in January 2019 was widely lauded in the media and online, and it gave her approval ratings a much-needed boost. The sudden emergence in June of a new protest movement in Hong Kong against PRC political restrictions on the territory also heightened concerns in Taiwan about Beijing's intentions, and the CCP's tone-deaf response further eroded what little appeal remained of the one-country, two-systems model that Xi had offered as the formula for unification.

Tsai also won a contested DPP primary for the presidential nomination against her former premier, William Lai. Though this challenge at first looked like it might fatally damage the DPP's electoral chances, Tsai rallied the party behind her and eventually even added Lai to the ticket as the vice presidential candidate, helping the party to close ranks in time for the elections. Tsai was also helped when two prominent political figures who had flirted with an independent run decided not to enter the race: Ko Wen-je instead founded a new political party, the Taiwan People's Party (TPP), and Terry Gou, chairman of the manufacturing giant Foxconn, decided to endorse the PFP's James Soong instead. Thus the presidential election once again turned into a straight-up Blue-versus-Green contest. Finally, the KMT nominated as its presidential candidate Han Kuo-yu, a populist-style politician who had won a stunning upset victory in the Kaohsiung mayor's race in 2018. Han began his term as mayor with high popularity ratings, and polls taken in the early spring showed him leading Tsai Ing-wen by twenty percentage points or more. But Han made no concessions in his rhetoric about cross-Strait relations even as the Hong Kong protests ignited, instead doubling down on Ma's talk about opening up to the PRC and making vague promises that Taiwan would have economic prosperity without compromising its security under his watch. With relations between the United States and the PRC at their rockiest in decades, and a rising sense of political doom engulfing young generations in Hong Kong, Tsai increasingly looked like the safer choice to protect Taiwan's sovereignty and security. Han's support in the polls steadily declined, and by the late fall he appeared almost hopelessly behind.

In the end, Tsai Ing-wen won reelection with 57 percent of the vote—an even higher share than she had carried in 2016, and on much higher turnout—and the DPP held on to its majority in the legislature. Han's rhetoric excited and mobilized the deep-Blue KMT base to turn out in high numbers, but his repeated inability to articulate a credible vision for how to protect Taiwan's security in the face of a rising threat from the PRC made him unappealing to much of the rest of the electorate—especially to the “naturally independent” generation of voters under age forty, who also turned out at high rates to support Tsai. The 2020 election results thus provided further evidence that the China issue in Taiwanese politics was not fading away, and that the party system would continue to be structured around how to manage the island's fraught and complicated relationship with the PRC.

## ***Part 2: Democratic Institutions and Governance***

The chapters in Part 2 cover the performance of Taiwan's core political institutions during the Ma era. One of the most perplexing patterns of the Ma presidency was his repeated struggle to advance his ambitious policy agenda, despite enjoying a huge KMT majority in the legislature, a resounding electoral mandate for a shift in policy, and an enormous concentration of formal institutional power in his hands. Over Ma's two terms, only about half of all bills that the Executive Yuan introduced to the legislature were actually adopted in some form. In Chapter 6, Yun-han Chu and Yu-tzung Chang explain these struggles as a consequence of the decline of governing capacity of the political system. A wide range of factors—structural, institutional, and ideological—combined to create daunting hurdles for the Ma administration in most areas of policy. Taiwan's eroding international competitiveness, aging population, and worsening fiscal capacity limited the resources available to Ma's government to advance new initiatives. The legislature turned out to be hard to control even under “unified” one-party rule, as the opposition DPP, Legislative Speaker Wang Jin-pyng, and the KMT party caucus all found ways to delay, block, or significantly modify priority legislation introduced by the Executive Yuan. The legislature's greater role in policy formation also created many new access points for

stakeholders to object to policy change, or to carve out exceptions for individual interest groups, industries, or firms. The capacity and autonomy of the vaunted “developmental state” bureaucracy that had overseen Taiwan’s postwar economic miracle had also declined, and Ma oversaw a collection of ministries that were constrained by unprecedented scrutiny from civil society groups and legislators, additional accounting and ethics rules, and other burdensome checks on their freedom of action. They also faced a media industry dominated by either openly partisan or excessively sensationalist outlets, and the growth of social media use further undermined the traditional Taiwanese deference to expertise and objective policy analysis. Finally, a new cohort of “young rebels” who had been educated under the new Taiwan-centric educational curriculum emerged on the political scene during Ma’s second term, and they became especially effective at social mobilization and symbolic politics. Together, these factors caught the Ma administration off-guard and left it at a loss for how to respond to the opposition to the CSSTA that burst into the open in 2013–2014. As a consequence, Chu and Chang argue, the governing capacity of the political system became so degraded during the Ma era that it was simply no longer able to respond effectively to the many international and domestic policy challenges that Taiwan faced.

One of the key constraints on rationalized policymaking in Taiwan is the ascendance of the Legislative Yuan and its unusual structure and organization. Curiously, winning a majority *in* the legislature does not guarantee a party complete control *over* the legislature (a fact that is not well understood even by most who are acquainted with Taiwanese politics). As Isaac Huang and Shing-yuan Sheng explain in Chapter 7, the Legislative Yuan is quite decentralized in comparison to most other representative assemblies around the world. Neither the government nor the majority party is consistently able to set the legislative agenda. Bills drafted and introduced by the Executive Yuan are given no special priority on the docket over any other proposed legislation. The majority party cannot block opposition parties from submitting their own bills and, under some conditions, bringing these up for review in committee instead of majority versions. Thus, individual legislators and opposition parties are provided with multiple points of access in the legislative process. Political party caucuses, too, no matter how large or small, are given equal bargaining rights in a peculiar institution known as the party negotiation mechanism (PNM), which functions as a kind of “super-committee” of last resort to resolve interparty disputes of all kinds. Agreements struck within the PNM are binding on all party caucuses and read into the legislative record without a roll-call vote—in effect a form of approval by unanimous consent. During the Ma era, about half of all successful legislation was adopted under these rules, which required agreement from all party caucus representatives. Thus, KMT control over the Legislative Yuan was more mirage than reality for much of the Ma era.

Another critical part of Taiwan’s democratic system is its “watchdog institutions”—the Judicial Yuan and Control Yuan, the prosecutor’s offices under the Ministry of Justice in the Executive Yuan, and other specialized investigative and ethics bodies. These were the focus of significant public scrutiny and dissatisfaction during the Ma era, including a major judicial scandal that broke during his first term and led to the resignation of the chief and deputy chief justices for bribe-taking. Ma’s response was to create the Agency Against Corruption (AAC), an office within the Ministry of Justice tasked specifically with investigating political corruption. As Christian Göbel details in Chapter 8, this new agency blurred the previous division of labor between other watchdog bodies, most notably the Ministry of Justice’s Investigation Bureau and the ethics bureaus embedded into most government branches. Although the creation of the AAC came with considerable fanfare, Göbel argues that it brought little additional benefit to existing

anticorruption efforts and imposed significant costs, and it never was able to shake the accusation that its investigations were politically motivated. Wiretapping also increased dramatically compared to the previous Chen Shui-bian administration, including the Legislative Yuan's own phone lines, as the case involving Speaker Wang Jin-pyng revealed. Political accountability in the Ma era did not revert back to the “bad old days” of KMT dominance, when corruption was embedded in the political system to the highest levels; instead, it had much in common with the previous Chen Shui-bian era. Nevertheless, given high public concern about political corruption and rising distrust of the government, politicians, and political parties, the relatively minor reforms of accountability institutions attempted during the Ma era represent a significant missed opportunity to strengthen their legitimacy, and that of Taiwan's democracy.

Part 2 ends with a critique of Taiwan's economic institutions. Taiwan's economic performance over the past two decades appears disappointing for a couple reasons: its domestic investment as a share of GDP is consistently low, and its foreign direct investment has been at or near the bottom of world rankings for some time. Taiwan's “developmental state” model, based on a high-capacity regulatory state, government control over key “upstream” sectors (such as banking, energy, and transportation), foreign exchange and capital controls, and government-directed investment into strategic growth sectors such as electronics, semiconductors, and biotechnology—all managed by technocrats who operated with little pressure or scrutiny from interest groups or the legislature—had produced an economic “miracle” that featured rapid growth with low inequality. But by the 2000s, this model appeared to have run out of steam. Taiwan's annual growth rates fell significantly, from 6.6 percent for the 1990s to 4.9 percent for 2000–2007. Starting salaries stagnated: adjusted for inflation, college graduates entering the work force in 2016 earned no more on average than their predecessors did in 1997.

In Chapter 9, Pei-shan Lee argues that this economic stagnation can be traced back to the failure to craft a new developmental paradigm, one in which democratic governments could still effectively promote and guide economic growth despite facing new scrutiny and pressure from media, the legislature, and interest groups. The rising influence of groups that objected to elements of the old developmental state model—nuclear energy, environmental degradation, weak labor rights protections, and so forth—made the old ways of directing economic policy increasingly unworkable. But this old model was not replaced by a new economic governance structure that was able to address long-standing economic problems, promote entrepreneurship and dynamism, and provide an effective social safety net while still deepening Taiwan's economic integration with the rest of the world. The Chen Shui-bian administration failed to rise to this challenge, as divided government, polarized politics, and Chen's increasing focus on a symbolic independence agenda hindered the development of a political consensus behind a new economic paradigm. But the Ma administration also failed to craft a new model, despite more politically favorable circumstances. Both administrations suffered from what Lee argues is an “unsuccessful transition” from authoritarian to democratic governance, in which the ascendance of individualistic and group-based policy appeals and a new rights-based political discourse have given rise to an “anti-developmental” populism that has blocked creation of a new economic policy consensus for the democratic era.

### ***Part 3: Public Opinion and Civil Society***

The chapters in Part 3 cover important trends in Taiwanese public opinion, as well as the origins and patterns of a sharp rise in social activism during the Ma era. In Chapter 10, Yu-tzung Chang and Yun-han Chu draw on several rounds of survey data collected for the Asian Barometer

Survey (ABS) project to examine trends in support for democracy. They find a mixed picture. On the positive side, the liberal democratic value orientation of Taiwanese has steadily increased since the late 1990s: public opinion data show rising support for the principles of political equality, popular accountability of leaders, political liberties, checks-and-balances on government officials, and pluralism. They also find consistent increases in the share of respondents saying that democracy is suitable for Taiwan, and expressing what they call “authoritarian detachment”—the rejection of all authoritarian alternatives to democracy. On the less positive side, Chang and Chu find evidence of significant and repeated declines in levels of trust in democratic institutions. The large majority of Taiwanese now do not express trust in the president, courts, national government, political parties, and legislature. Trust in the civil service, military, and local governments, while significantly higher, has still fallen over the four ABS waves, and is now below half of all respondents in each case. The only major institution to record increases in public trust over the past two decades is the national police, which saw an uptick to above 50 percent in the most recent survey, in 2014. Overall, these results are consistent with a broader decline in trust in institutions in most democracies around the world, and they raise concerns about the long-term ability of Taiwan’s democracy to sustain public support in the face of serious foreign and domestic policy challenges. But unlike in some other regimes threatened with democratic backsliding, the normative commitment to democratic values, and to democracy as the most preferable system of government, is now very high among Taiwanese, and is highest among the youngest cohorts. Democratic values do appear to have become a part of the Taiwanese citizen’s DNA.

In Chapter 11, Ching-hsin Yu examines trends in key public opinion indicators over the Ma era. Taiwan’s partisan politics are consolidated around a two-party system centered on the KMT and DPP, and partisanship is relatively high for a young democracy, with between 55 and 60 percent of the electorate expressing a preference for a political party in public opinion polls. But the share of the electorate identifying with one or the other of the major parties shifted significantly during the Ma era: identification with the KMT dropped by nearly twenty points, from a high of 39.5 percent of respondents in 2011 to only 20.8 percent in 2016. Over the same time period, DPP partisans increased by about five points, from 24.9 to 29.9 percent. In addition, despite the KMT’s apparent electoral dominance during much of the Ma era, the share of the electorate identifying as exclusively Taiwanese continued to rise over this period, until it leveled off after 2014. Yet the shares of the electorate favoring independence or unification remained remarkably stable, and clear minorities, in every survey between 2008 and 2016: over the whole era, support for independence, either now or sometime in the future, increased only from 23.1 to 24.9 percent of respondents, and support for unification remained virtually unchanged, at 10.3 versus 10.2 percent. Instead, a large majority of Taiwanese continued to express support for maintaining the cross-Strait status quo. Thus, Yu argues, the increase in Taiwanese identity has had less to do with partisanship, attitudes toward cross-Strait relations, or short-term political competition, and more with the long-run effects of Taiwan’s transition to democracy on different generational cohorts. Ma’s rapprochement with the PRC did not lead to an increase in support for unification, but neither did it cause a rise in pro-independence attitudes.

What the Ma-era rapprochement did cause was a surge in protests and other social movement activities. As Dafydd Fell describes in Chapter 12, the scale, scope, and impact of social movements gradually increased over this period, culminating in the Sunflower Movement opposition to the CSSTA and occupation of the Legislative Yuan. Fell notes that the nature of activism, including who joined protests, changed significantly: during the Chen Shui-bian years,

participants in street demonstrations were disproportionately older Taiwanese, but the social movements that emerged during the Ma presidency attracted a much younger set of activists. The targets of protests, too, gradually expanded, from relatively focused demonstrations such as that against the visit of ARATS chairman Chen Yunlin to Taiwan in 2008 and the proposed construction of the Kuo-kuang Petrochemical Plant in Changhua in 2011, to a much broader coalition of protesters demonstrating about issues ranging from indigenous land rights and LGBTQ issues to media control and constitutional reform. The members of activist groups gradually learned from one another, built personal relationships, and created a formidable network of grassroots organizations that could be mobilized quickly to demonstrate in the streets, disseminate information, and swing public opinion toward their cause. By the end of the Ma era, public opinion polls showed a marked increase in youth interest in politics and activism, and turnout among young voters hit historic highs. Fell argues that this surge in social protest was linked to the Ma administration's open hostility toward civil society groups that had enjoyed a voice in policymaking in the previous Lee and Chen administrations. The KMT suspected that most of these groups were working directly with the DPP, shut them out of decisionmaking processes or refused to engage in dialogue, and attempted either to close down or to reshape many of the advisory bodies serving various government ministries. With few avenues to influence policy development inside the government, then, members of these groups increasingly directed their energy into the streets as the most effective way to express opposition to controversial decisions by the Ma administration.

In Chapter 13, Min-hua Huang and Mark Weatherall use four waves of ABS data to take a closer look at just who these activists were: their ages, social and educational backgrounds, ideological orientations, and expressed motivations for participating in protests and other social movement activities. They find that, in contrast to the Chen Shui-bian era, protesters during the Ma years were younger, better-educated, more likely to believe that elected officials were corrupt, and more likely to express a strong Taiwanese identity, although somewhat surprisingly they were no more likely than the general population to express negative views about Chinese influence on Taiwan. Protest participants were also at least as fervently committed to democratic principles as were other Taiwanese, implying that, while they were directly challenging the legitimacy of some of Taiwan's core democratic institutions (such as the Legislative Yuan), they did not reject democracy as their preferred political system or express support for authoritarian alternatives. Thus, Huang and Weatherall argue, this deep reservoir of support for democracy helps explain how the Sunflower Movement standoff was ultimately defused peacefully and Taiwan's democratic institutions were able to survive largely intact.

One other distinguishing factor of protests of the Ma era was the widespread use of social media to aid in political mobilization. As Eric Yu and Jia-sin Yu document in Chapter 14, the increase in Internet penetration, prevalence of online news consumption, and use of social media accounts were all associated with an increase in political activism in Taiwan during the Ma years. Indeed, the transformation in how voters got their political news during this period was rapid and profound: in 2008, blogging on websites such as The Wretch was still a significant source of political commentary, including from high-profile political figures, but by 2016 Facebook had become the dominant platform on which to make political statements online. Yu and Yu note that several of the major protest events during the era initially relied mostly on online networks to mobilize protesters, including the Wild Strawberry demonstrations against the visit of ARATS chairman Chen Yunlin in 2008, the White-Shirt Army protests against the death of a conscript in military detention in 2013, and the Sunflower Movement protests against the

CSSTA in 2014. Nevertheless, although online networking—or “cyber-mobilization”—made it easier to rally a crowd to turn out to the streets, it could not ultimately substitute for a lack of offline social movement structures. For instance, the Wild Strawberry demonstrations in 2008 eventually petered out because of a flat organizational structure without clear leadership, a small offline presence, and arguments over goals and tactics. It is easy to overlook that the rise in online mobilization during the Ma era also contributed to the more consequential creation of offline networks of activists, as demonstrators met each other and cooperated on protest events, built in-person relationships through shared experiences, and learned from each other about strategy, tactics, and tools. Thus the Sunflower Movement protests were ultimately so large and influential not merely because many of the participants were linked to each other on social media platforms like Facebook, PTT, LINE, or WhatsApp, but also because many preexisting activist groups, as well as political parties, joined the demonstrations and could draw on several years of experience organizing against the Ma administration.

#### ***Part 4: Looking Outward***

The final part of this volume covers Taiwan’s key relationships with the United States, Japan, and above all the People’s Republic of China. In Chapter 15, Szu-yin Ho describes the strategy behind Ma Ying-jeou’s cross-Strait policies, and the successes and ultimate limitations of the rapprochement that Ma initiated with Beijing. The key diplomatic challenge for Ma was to find a formula to describe cross-Strait relations that would be acceptable to Beijing, without compromising the ROC’s claim to sovereignty and a separate, legitimate existence in the interstate system. The ambiguous 1992 Consensus was the result, and when Beijing made it known that it would not object to this formulation, Ma made it the centerpiece of his strategy for improving relations with the PRC. As Ho details, Ma’s National Security Council used the 1992 Consensus formula to improve Taiwan’s diplomatic position at three levels. First, at the symbolic level, Ma’s endorsement of a form of one-China principle, albeit one carefully crafted to emphasize for a domestic audience that he did not intend to pursue unification, allowed his administration to find common ground on which to engage in negotiations about more substantive issues. Second, at the international level, Ma’s team worried from the beginning about how Taiwan-PRC rapprochement could affect its other relationships, including the all-important one with the United States, and emphasized to its other partners and allies that Taipei’s outreach to Beijing would be beneficial for all. Third, at the practical level, the Ma administration had to walk a tightrope on the many symbolic points of contention with Beijing—on the one hand, choosing its official language carefully, such as referring to the PRC as “mainland China” to be consistent with the ROC constitutional framework, but on the other routinely seeking to move beyond diplomatic hang-ups and get to real “nuts-and-bolts” issues in the cross-Strait relationship. Ho argues that Ma’s strategy eventually produced significant benefits for Taiwan: his government was able to sign twenty-three agreements with the PRC, improve relationships with the United States and many other countries in the region, and not lose any more diplomatic allies. In late 2015, Ma was even able to meet on equal terms with CCP chairman Xi Jinping in a historic meeting in Singapore—the first in-person meeting between leaders of the two sides since the founding of the PRC in 1949. But the ultimate limitations of this grand strategy became apparent in Ma’s second term, and Ho argues that they were rooted more in domestic factors than international or cross-Strait ones. The opposition DPP sharpened its attacks on rapprochement and reframed them in terms of the effects on the distribution of wealth, and the Ma administration struggled to rebut these criticisms. In addition, the “early

harvest” agreements of Ma’s first term had been “all gains, no pain”—the PRC lowered tariff barriers on imports much more than Taiwan did—but the CSSTA included concrete concessions by both sides that generated a deep sense of insecurity and sparked fierce opposition from the affected sectors. The politics of trade could also all too easily morph into the politics of identity: the prospect of mainland Chinese publishing houses operating in the Taiwanese publishing industry, for instance, was framed by opponents as an existential threat to Taiwan’s distinct culture and its democratic practices and values. Thus, the Ma administration’s grand strategy eventually foundered on the shoals of domestic public opinion, despite the considerable early successes it was able to achieve.

The volume concludes with a broad look at Taiwan’s strategic environment and how it changed during the Ma era. In Chapter 16, Dean Chen argues that the deterioration of Sino-American and Sino-Japanese relations ultimately did as much to undermine Ma’s cross-Strait rapprochement with the PRC as did any other factor, even though leaders in both Washington and Tokyo lauded the dramatic improvement of cross-Strait relations that began in 2008. As the rivalry intensified between China, on the one hand, and the United States and Japan, on the other, the KMT’s ideological commitment to a single Chinese nation effectively joined Taiwan in a pan-Chinese union with the PRC in international disputes. For instance, the Ma administration’s positions on maritime territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas were for the most part identical to those of Beijing’s, even though Taipei explicitly refused to cooperate with the PRC to assert these common claims. In contrast, Washington and Tokyo were mostly aligned in their common security interests, and therefore took similar positions on these issues. Though the Obama administration remained firmly committed to the longstanding One China policy of the United States to maintain peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, the Ma government’s China-leaning policy contradicted, at least to some extent, the strategic postures of the United States in the Asia Pacific. Thus, even as the United States and the international community welcomed Ma’s conciliatory moves to mend fences with Beijing and promote deeper socioeconomic cooperation across a variety of venues, the increase in Sino-American strategic competition ultimately made Ma’s rapprochement efforts less beneficial to US interests.

When Ma Ying-jeou came into office in 2008, he argued that there was room for Taiwan simultaneously to maintain peaceful relations with China, friendly relations with Japan, and close relations with the United States. His grand strategy was premised on the assumption Taiwan could “have it all” and not have to choose sides between the three preeminent powers of the western Pacific. But by the end of his presidency in 2016, the balance of power in the region, and each country’s perception of national interests and threats, looked very different. The rise of the People’s Republic of China in international stature and power, the deep and alarming authoritarian turn it took under Xi Jinping, and its more assertive and aggressive behavior in all manner of international arenas combined to eliminate much of the space for creative diplomacy that Taiwan enjoyed when Ma first took office. At the end of the Ma years, the greatest reason for pessimism about the future of Taiwan was not Taiwan’s confrontational domestic politics, its constrained economic decisionmakers, its flawed policymaking processes, or its declining trust in democratic institutions. It was, instead, the gradual transformation of the regime across the Strait, from an opportunity for Taiwan and its people into a threat.

---

i. For the 2008 legislative and presidential elections, see Rigger, “Party Politics and Elections,” in our previous volume on the Chen Shui-bian years.

ii. Taiwan has a multitier electoral system in which voters cast two ballots for the legislature: one for a

---

candidate in one of seventy-three single-member districts, and a second for a national party list, in which thirty-four seats are distributed proportionally to all parties that pass a 5 percent threshold. Indigenous voters elect six representatives of their own, from two nationwide constituencies with three members each, using the old single nontransferable vote (SNTV) system.