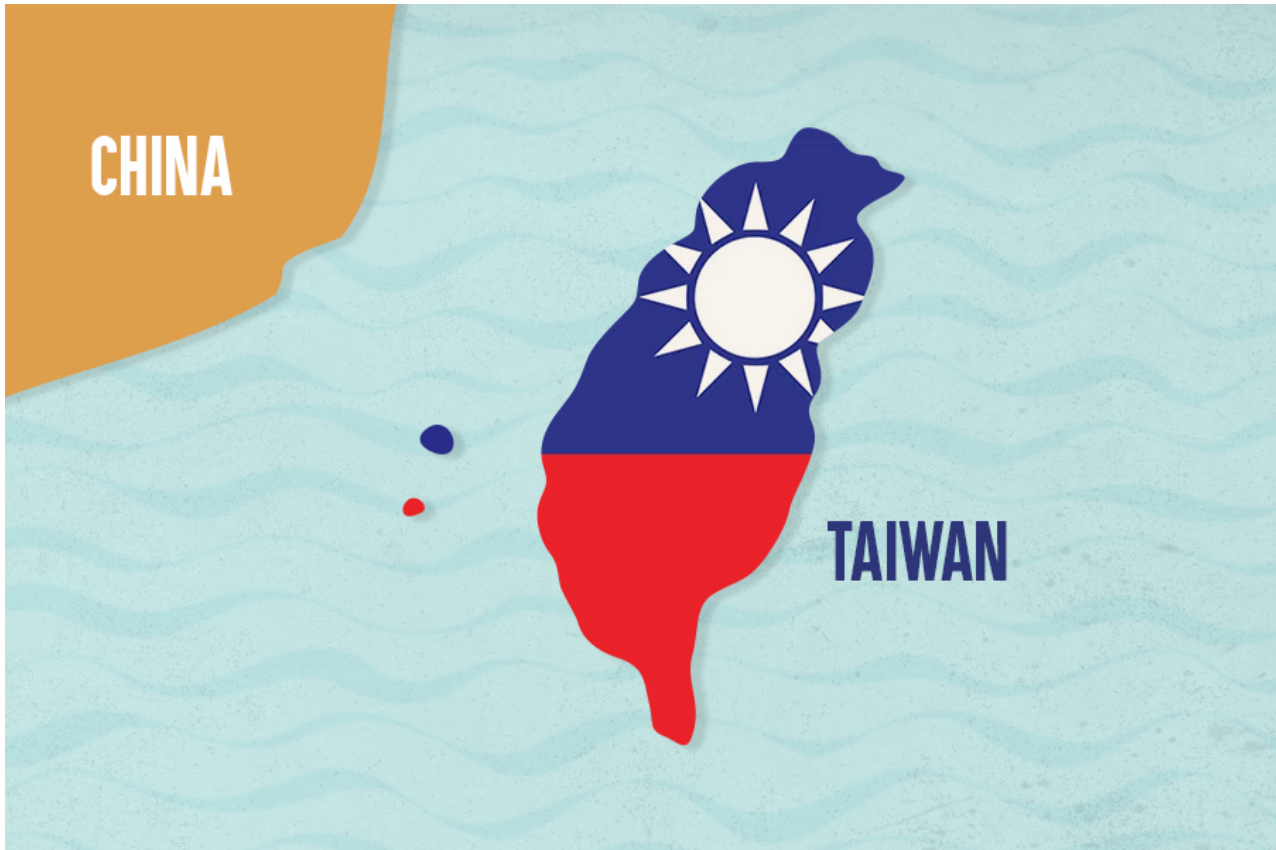


# Taiwan Local Elections: A Message to Self and the World

[the-pulse.in/taiwan-local-elections-a-message-to-self-and-the-world](https://the-pulse.in/taiwan-local-elections-a-message-to-self-and-the-world)

by [Dr Manoj Kumar Panigrahi](#) Contributors ⌚ 5 mins 4 December 2022



26 November 2022 will remain a special day in the history of Taiwan. The day when Kuomintang (KMT) floored the local elections against its prominent competitor Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), in the touted "9-in-1" election. It is called "9-in-1" because voters in Taiwan's 22 cities and counties vote for nine local government posts, including city mayors, county magistrates, and members of city and county councils.

Since 1987 when Martial Law was lifted in Taiwan by KMT, leading to the first directly elected President in 1996, Taiwan has come a long way down the democratisation road. In the local election of 2022 for the city mayoral and provincial positions, KMT won 13 of the 21 city mayoral positions, including four of the six biggest special municipalities, which constitute 70% of the total 23.3 million people in Taiwan.

The election was also coupled with a referendum, which aimed at two questions. First, reduce the voting age to 18 from 20 and second, let its citizens run for election once they reach 18 years of age from the current 23. To disappoint many youngsters, the referendum fell short of the threshold of 9.62 million "yes" votes. It could muster only 5.65 million "yes" and 5.02 million voters "opposed to it.

Looking into the past three "9-in-1" elections in Taiwan (See image below), the ruling party at the centre has always been at a loss. In 2009-10, although the KMT was in power, the DPP took over the majority of seats. In 2014, when DPP under President Tsai Ing-wen was elected to power post-Sunflower movement, which led to the voting out of KMT from power, KMT slowly started to pick the seats in the local counties and provinces. Moreover, in the last 2018 provincial elections, KMT only did better than its 2014 performance. Such voting patterns essentially prove that the issues for the local and national are two different ball games.

This article will focus on some of the key outcomes from Taiwan's 2022 "9-in-1" election". One may agree that the cross-strait tension was pushed to a new height when China conducted its military drill around Taiwan in 2022, post-US House of Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan. Some of the missiles fired by China also overlapped with some contentious regions in which Japan was also a claimant. Given China's highly volatile reaction, it is, therefore, necessary for countries to observe the local elections in Taiwan closely and to understand what message they send to the world.

First, the election result has given KMT another chance to portray itself as a party that stands by the citizens of "Taiwan". The label "pro-China" on its side has hurt KMT since the 2016 national elections. KMT's last President, Ma Ying-jeou, was elected twice and labelled pro-China, leading to the Sunflower movement in 2014. "Revenge voting" is quite prominent among Taiwanese voters. Unlike many places, the Taiwanese voters do not forget the past and make sure the elected representative is recalled if he/she strays from the promises made during the campaign period.

The beauty of democracy where a candidate was recalled, and the KMT was labelled as a "pro-China" party was seen in the past. In the last 2018 election, KMT's Han Kuo-yu was elected mayor of Kaohsiung city in the south. With all the pomp and show he got elected, it also pushed him down quite hard. Mayor Han was recalled 18 months after his election and was replaced by a DPP candidate. One key event which jeopardised Han's position was his visit to China soon after he took over the Mayoral position. The voters saw it as "too soon-too much" by Han, accompanied by his bid to run for President of Taiwan against DPP's Tsai Ing-wen. Such a move by Han gave a wrong signal of Han being not serious enough about his position.

Second, in the 2022 elections, which saw KMT coming to power at the local level, one might see the rise of "city diplomacy" between Taiwan and China. Which in turn might hope to reduce the tensions in the region. This is also a positive direction to think that not all is lost between Taiwan and China, irrespective of the tensions. Given the lack of diplomatic recognition and the constant claim by China over Taiwan, Track 2 and beyond has taken over to maintain a status quo and connection between the straits.

Third, the recent election also signals that the referendum and elections should not be mixed. Yes, it saves time and money but dividing the nation to choose attention from electing someone to power and getting something changed is a dual-edged sword, dividing attention among people's minds from key issues.

Fourth, the KMT win in most cities will bring a sense of relief among China's "Taishang" (Taiwanese business community). Since Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan, China has banned more than 100 companies from exporting more than 2000 of their goods to China. Given that most of Taiwan's trade occurs with China, such trade disruption might bring a huge loss to the Taiwanese manufacturers who solely put their profit or trade towards China. This also allows Taiwanese manufacturers to look beyond China for their export destination. As the saying goes, "don't put all your eggs in one basket". It shall be followed in the right terms.

Among all the cities won by the KMT, the most important one which likely missed by most Taiwan watchers in Taoyuan. The incumbent mayor of DPP was likely known for running for the President in 2024 as he completed his two terms as city mayor. His alternative candidate from DPP was defeated at large by KMT, creating a headache for the DPP strategists.

In the end, though, the KMT win will be seen as a victory for pro-China forces, and China might leverage this win to pump its narrative. This was an election, with domestic issues on the play, rather than national ones. The DPP's slogan, "Vote for DPP, Vote for Democracy", couldn't save itself from being routed in the election. The defeat also led DPP President Tsai to resign from her position. Now that the power transition is on peacefully at the local level, all eyes shall move to the national level elections late next year. This again, will be an interesting angle to look at.

### TaiwanElectionsChinaGeopolitics

**Disclaimer:** "The views, thoughts, and opinions expressed in this article belong solely to the author, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the author's employer, organisation, committee or any other group or individual."

### Dr Manoj Kumar Panigrahi

Dr. Manoj Kumar Panigrahi, is an Assistant Professor and Director of Centre for Northeast Asian Studies in Jindal School of International Affairs, O.P. Jindal Global University. He teaches courses on Taiwan History and Politics, and Cross-strait relations between Taiwan and China. He has co-edited a book titled "Drifts and Dynamics: Russia's Ukraine War and Northeast Asia".



## **Related Articles**

---

30 October 2022

**[Is India ready for the challenges posed by Xi Jinping's Third Term Presidency?](#)**

---

by [V. Mahesh Adithya](#)

🕒 4 mins [Bookmark](#)

27 November 2022

---

## **Russia and India: A time-tested Partnership**

---

by [Shivam Tiwary](#)

🕒 4 mins [Bookmark](#)

3 December 2022

---

## **Can Indian Politics move away from Electoral Populism?**

---

by [Nivya Murthi](#)

🕒 10 mins [Bookmark](#)

---

## **Feature Articles**

---

11 January 2023

---

## **DMK Vs. Governor clash underlines a pattern followed by opposition ruled states**

---

by [Anand Krishna](#)

🕒 8 mins [Bookmark](#)

9 January 2023

---

## **Millennial Khadi: India's Success Story.**

---

by [Shivam Tiwary](#)

🕒 5 mins [Bookmark](#)

8 January 2023

---

## **Doval-French counterpart meeting signals ever evolving strategic partnership between India and France**

---

by [Anand Krishna](#)

🕒 5 mins [Bookmark](#)