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## Taiwan's 2024 Presidential Election

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2024 can be dubbed the 'Election Year' of the world, with over 60 countries headed toward elections. One of the first elections of the year was conducted in Taiwan on January 13. With 71.86 percent of voter turnout, the 2024 elections saw a three-way fight between the candidates for the top position. The Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) candidate, William Lai, got elected over his competitors Hou Yu-ih from the Kuomintang (KMT) and Ko Wen-je from the Taiwan Progressive Party (TPP). This article would like to dissect the elections and their pre-and post-cross-strait affairs before the 2024 presidential elections and what lies ahead for cross-strait affairs.

### Prior to the 2024 Presidential Elections

The 2024 elections reflected a similar pattern to China in the past, increasing its military muscle against Taiwan primarily during elections. In the past, in 1995-1996, China had launched missiles similarly before the elections to increase pressure on the Taiwanese voters. Such tactics were used to stop the vote, favouring the then DPP Presidential candidate Chen Shui-bian, whom Beijing saw as a pro-independence leader.

In 2024, a few days before the election day, China significantly increased its air space violation over Taiwan. First, on January 9, China launched a rocket that flew over Taiwan, triggering an emergency response across the island as a 'missile flyover'. Although it was a mistake in translation, it caused panic among the non-Chinese-speaking population across Taiwan. Second, a new trend of balloon flights can be seen flying over mainland Taiwan. As per the Ministry of National Defense of Taiwan, such flights occur during the day hours. This brings a challenge of surveillance on Taiwan's Critical Infrastructure (CI), risking crucial sites being spied on.

With the rise of digitization, there has also been increased digital interference by China in Taiwan to influence elections, otherwise known as 'cognitive warfare'. Roy Chun Lee, Taiwan's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, in an interview stated, "Actual military conflict is quite unlikely, is our assessment based on different factors, but the invasion has already started in the digital world by China." Having a pro-Beijing candidate in the top position in

Taipei, will further China's position on the 'One-China Principle' and the '1992 Consensus' where it states there is only one China and the People's Republic of China (PRC) is the sole representative of China.

### Reviewing the 2024 Presidential Election Result

The 2024 presidential elections were another proof of free and fair elections in Taiwan. Table 1 below shows the total votes and voting percentage received by the three parties in the Presidential elections. For the first time in Taiwan's presidential elections, a party has secured a continuous third term, making the 2024 election unique.

Party	President Candidate	Total Votes Received	Vote %
Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)	Lai Ching-te	55,86,019	40.05
Kuomintang (KMT)	Hou Yu-ih	46,71,021	33.49
Taiwan People's Party (TPP)	Ko Wen-je	36,90,466	26.46

Table 1: 2024 President Election Overview

Source: Central Election Commission, Taiwan (ROC)

With DPP's 'democracy vs autocracy', KMT's 'not sending people to war', and TPP's 'deterrence and communication', the results that one expected were mixed. It was a three-way race that led to the DPP's victory in presidential elections but an unclear majority in the Legislative Yuan (equivalent to the Parliament of India). In 113 seats, DPP managed to secure 51, KMT got 52, TPP received 8, and KMT leaning two independents received one each. It is reasonably expected that to have the legislature to function, the parties will need to come together at a compromise. Both DPP and KMT, even if they secure the two independent candidates to support, will still run short of an absolute majority. Therefore, the importance of the TPP's eight legislatures is more crucial than ever. Before the election, KMT and TPP wanted to form a coalition, but the lack of agreement on who should be the

Presidential candidate and other fundamental issues led to them fighting the election independently. Though TPP is considered a third alternative to the age-old KMT and DPP in the Taiwan election atmosphere, Professor Dafydd Fell, a long-time Taiwan election watcher, disagrees. According to him, TPP "...Is not an alternative party. It is really just based on whatever Ko Wen-je says or thinks that day."

### **Future Impact on Cross-strait Relations**

As mentioned in an earlier article, president-elect William Lai favours a pro-independence stance for Taiwan. However, in his consecutive remarks later, he maintained his views towards the cross-strait to keep it as a 'status quo'.

In response to William Lai's victory, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded by saying, "Whatever the results of the election, the basic fact that there is only one China in the world and Taiwan is part of China will not change, and the international community's prevailing consensus on upholding the one- China will not change." It reiterates the 'One-China Principle' mentioned earlier. Responding to China's statement, Taiwan's Foreign Ministry said Beijing should "...Face up to reality and abandon its efforts to pressure Taiwan".

The immediate fallout of the 2024 elections was Nauru switching its diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China on January 15. Though the plan to switch the diplomatic recognition must have been in process even before the election, the announcement's timing accelerated with DPP's victory. With the switch, the total diplomatic allies stood at 12 for Taiwan.

Since 2016, when Lai's predecessor and current President, Tsai Ing-wen, took office, Taiwan has lost ten diplomatic allies. One of the challenges that President-elect Lai will face is how to stop losing more diplomatic allies under his presidency. Secondly, Lai will face an uphill task of resuming talks with China's leadership. It will be a wait-and-watch for the world until May 20 for Lai's presidential inauguration speech on the vital policy goals he will be pursuing.

### **India's Response to the Taiwan Elections**

India's Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, on January 18, 2024, responded to India's stance on the Taiwan elections, stating, "We have taken note of the recent developments in Taiwan. India has strong and growing people-to-people ties, cultural, educational, trade, and investment links with Taiwan. Government of India facilitates these exchanges and looks forward to continuing them for shared prosperity and development."

The response was one of the most crucial developments from India in its relations with Taiwan. It acknowledges its non-political and non-diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Beyond the border tensions between India and China, Taiwan has increasingly become an essential partner for investments in India. With major Taiwanese companies like TSMC and Foxconn setting up their plants and developing semiconductors in India, bilateral relations in economic terms are growing between the two sides.

India stands to gain on another front with DPP's win which is the continuity of the New Southbound Policy (NSP) initially initiated by the current President Tsai in 2016. With President-elect William Lai coming to power, one can be hopeful for the NSP to be still in action. With the NSP, India and other focused nations can only increase their engagement with Taiwan through a non-political manner under different variables furthering ties between all the sides.

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