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Taiwan's 9-in-1 local elections: Implications for 2016

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Introduction

In November 2014, Taiwan undertook a largescale exercise in democratic competition, with the simultaneous election of over eleven thousand public officials. The election results were interpreted as a categorical reversal for the ruling Kuomintang (KMT).² The KMT share of the popular vote was among its worst ever nationwide performances (just over 40%), and the party ceded control of a number of previous strongholds. In terms of the highest level of office on offer, the party won six of 22 mayoral and commissioner contests, its worst showing since 1997 when it won eight of 23 available seats. The opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) increased its share from six mayoral and commissioner seats (from 2009 and 2010 when elections were held separately), to 13 out of 22. A DPP-endorsed independent with no political experience, Ko Wen-je (Ke Wenzhe 柯文哲), won the marquee contest for Taipei City, beating the KMT candidate, Sean Lien (Lian Shengwen 連勝文), scion of the fabulously wealthy political family that had given us earlier benchmarks in electoral futility, including Lien Chan's (Lian Zhan 連戰) third place in the 2000 presidential election. Top KMT figures, including the Premier, the party's Secretary-General a number of Vice Chairs and former Chairman Ma Ying-jeou (Ma Yingjiu 馬英九) resigned their Party roles to "accept responsibility" for the electoral catastrophe. The elections appeared to hand the initiative to the DPP in the run-up to legislative and presidential contests scheduled for January 2016. In special municipality elections in 2010, when the DPP won two of the then five posts, it signalled a rebound from the nadir of landslide losses in national elections in 2008, and encouraged the party to think that Tsai Ing-wen (Cai Yingwen 蔡英文), competitive in losing the Taipei City race, could win the presidency in 2012. She did not, but overseeing the 9-in-1 gains as Chair of the DPP, Tsai will be a more competitive candidate in 2016. Opinion polls during the summer of 2015, spanning the political spectrum, show Tsai as the front runner by a considerable margin.

The scale of the KMT's losses was surprising in its breadth and magnitude. The DPP encroached on traditional KMT territories in the central and northern parts of Taiwan to such an extent that, with the exception of New Taipei City, the remaining areas where the KMT holds majorities are predominantly low density

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² See for instance Frank Muyard, "Voting shift in the November 2014 local elections in Taiwan: Strong rebuke to Ma Ying-jeou's government and policies and landslide victory for the DPP." *China Perspectives*, (2015): 55-61.

rural areas in the less developed eastern side of the island. The enduring truism of Taiwan's political geography that the south is green (DPP) and the north is blue (KMT) is now only half right: the DPP continues to hold sway in the south. In the two major southern municipalities, DPP incumbents in Tainan and Kaohsiung were re-elected with 73% and 68% of the vote. The KMT lost northern strongholds of Taipei, Taoyuan, Keelung and Hsinchu. The one saving grace was New Taipei City, which now-Chairman Eric Chu (Zhu Lilun 朱立倫) held on to by a margin of just over 1% against the veteran Yu Hsyi-kun (You Xikun 游錫堃), who had served as Chen Shui-bian's (Chen Shuibian 陳水扁) Premier and was roundly considered a sacrificial no-hoper. Chu's ugly win saved the three "northern princelings" from total defeat-and marked him as the major "winner" of the elections. While Sean Lien failed in his attempt to replace another KMT princeling, Hau Lung-bin (Hao Longbin 郝龍斌), son of former Premier Hau Pei-sun (Hao Baicun 郝柏村), as Taipei Mayor, John Wu (Wu Zhiyang 吳志揚) blew a 20 point lead in the supposedly safe seat of Taoyuan.

A setback of some kind for the KMT in the 9-in-1 elections was not unexpected; after all the party had 7 years' of policies to defend during a period of global economic recession and several episodes of social discontent at home. However, Ma Ying-jeou, who has twice been comfortably elected President, had presided over a remarkable transformation in Taiwan's fortunes. The president has won praise and plaudits in Beijing, Tokyo and Washington for his conciliatory approach to cross-Strait relations and adroit management of Taiwan's role in territorial conflicts in the East China Sea. On the surface, President Ma has facilitated a transformation in the temperature of cross-Strait relations, by many measures the friendliest they have ever been.³ His quick embrace of the "1992 Consensus" led to successive cross-Strait economic deals, the suspension of competition for diplomatic allies, and expanded opportunities for Taiwan's participation in international organizations. And while economic growth has endured ups and downs, Taiwan has suffered less than other advanced economies. What, then, can explain the conclusiveness of the KMT's defeat in the 9-in-1 elections? And what are the implications for the upcoming presidential and legislative elections in January 2016?

All politics is local?

Political dynamics at the local level in Taiwan are often relatively immune to national political issues. Local networks and factions play a crucial role in channelling resources to supporters, and local elections are usually about the

³ Although some Taiwanese commentators note that the warmth and goodwill that Ma has generated has not led to a reduction in the number of missiles directed at Taiwan from across the Strait in Fujian Province.

competition to control access to these resources.⁴ To a certain extent, the political parties, their national policy preferences or performance, are not usually deterministic at this level of competition, except that the party in charge at the national level is often better placed to acquire and distribute funds to supporters.⁵ But in November 2014, parochial interests appear to have taken a back seat, and the cliché that “all politics is local” cannot mask the island-wide trend. Of course, across such a large number of electoral contests, there were many examples of idiosyncratic political dynamics. For instance, in Taipei City Sean Lien was an unusually inept candidate, while Ko Wen-je captured the post-Sunflower zeitgeist with a highly unusual “insurgent” campaign. Lien’s campaign was peppered with tone deaf faux pas which contributed to the prevailing sense of an arrogant young princeling and political neophyte flailing out of his depth. Ironically, Ko’s own political inexperience, manifest in a number of public relations gaffes, became a badge of honour. The difference lay in Ko’s humble demeanour and indifference to politicking. In the post-Sunflower environment these characteristics resonated strongly with many of the city’s voters. While Lien marshalled his superior financial resources in a remorseless quest to find and throw mud that would stick to his opponent, Ko guilelessly delivered his vision for Taipei; a better functioning and more participatory city free from the malice and machinations of partisan politics. That he was also able to exploit social media to do so was the icing on top, re-creating the kind of “Yes We Can!” buzz that surrounded Barack Obama’s presidential campaign in 2008.

From Taipei Mayor down through the hierarchy of positions one can find other examples where particular contextual features could account for specific results. However, the scale of the KMT’s losses suggests a more general trend. Consider how even the KMT’s most popular candidates fared. Eric Chu, the apparently bullet-proof incumbent mayor of New Tapei City, for instance, polled 62% in January, yet only just squeaked past Yu Hsyi-kun. In the months since the 9-in-1 elections, KMT politicians and sympathetic media commentators have averred that local electoral performance is of little relevance or consequence when it comes to national elections. Their point is that the electorate felt comfortable punishing the KMT because local politics does not involve “national issues”, such as central economic policy and cross-Strait relations. When these issues are at stake, they argue, voters will return to the more trusted guardianship of the KMT. The DPP often does well in local elections where governance rather than national security is at stake. Whether voters are willing to exchange the KMT’s proven platform for engaging China for the unproven one they were presented with—and rejected—in

⁴ Through its years of authoritarian rule and monopoly on state finances the KMT developed powerful and enduring local networks, which is one reason for the party’s ability to flourish post-democratization.

⁵ Note that the KMT was still able to comfortably out-perform the DPP at the municipal council and local chief level.

the presidential campaign of 2012, is one of the few causes for optimism in the KMT camp.

Alternatively, KMT supporters cling to the idea that this was a protest vote, a wake-up call based on transient anger and shallow discontent that will be assuaged once President Ma stands down. However, the KMT's woes run deeper than the unpopular president alone. With its conservatism, gerontocracy and princelings, the party has lost touch with an increasingly substantial part of the electorate, neglecting its changing demographics and preoccupations. The extent of the estrangement should have been clear when two years of large-scale popular protests culminated in students occupying the legislature for three weeks in March/April 2014. Inexplicably, the KMT, which had long proven so skilful in adapting from authoritarian rule to the conditions of democratic competition, failed to heed the warnings. Instead they brought out the dusty old playbook that had served them so well; using vastly superior financial resources to attack opponents via negative campaigning and leveraging long nurtured local networks. In the post-Sunflower era, these tactics failed to move voters, particularly the younger generation who's lived reality of stagnant wages, poor job prospects and little hope of ever getting on the property ladder makes them the most alienated of all.

The KMT's tone-deafness was neatly encapsulated by Jason Hu (Hu Zhiqiang 胡志強), a veteran KMT figure who lost his position as Taichung Mayor after 13 years in city hall. Hu was on the right track when he explained that the KMT had lost because it did not understand young people.⁶ But he then proceeded to dismiss them as materialistic ingrates ("if you give them an iPhone 5, they are still mad at you because you did not give them an iPhone 6"). Hu was clearly not paying attention to the predominantly youth-led social movements that culminated in the Sunflower occupation, itself the perfect embodiment of the seriousness, dedication and sacrifice of many young Taiwanese. Another "victim" of the 9-in-1 elections was John Wu, who blew a 20 point lead in Taoyuan. The son of former Taipei Mayor and KMT Honorary Chairman Wu Po-hsiung (Wu Boxiong 吳伯雄), Wu also demonstrated a lack of empathy indicative of the KMT's perceived arrogance. Commenting on the effects of the proposed development of Taoyuan's airport on property prices, a key issue in this middle-class commuter belt near Taipei, Wu retorted: "If you think houses are expensive don't buy one, no one's forcing you to buy."⁷ The unconcerned arrogance of the rich, powerful and politically connected is not unique to Taiwan, but it complicates the political landscape when this demographic is disproportionately benefiting from and promoting closer economic ties across the Strait.

⁶ <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2014/12/01/2003605691>.

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9BtfSzwotI>.

Taiwan Identity and cross-Strait relations

In a recent op-ed in the pro-independence *Liberty Times* (自由時報), the Director of Academia Sinica's Institute of Sociology, Michael Hsiao (Xiao Xinhuang 蕭新煌), argued that “the formation of a new Taiwanese identity represents a paradigm shift in public opinion”. Hsiao’s argument in “Taiwanese is the new status quo” is that agreement on the parameters of national identity has consolidated during the past eight years, concretizing further after the Sunflower movement. “Being Taiwanese” is the lived reality of the majority of people in Taiwan, which includes the internalization of democratic freedoms, and as such, “upholding the status quo” means the continuation of Taiwan’s separate and distinct experience. If Hsiao is right about the consensus on “Taiwan identity”, and polling data suggest he may have a point, the Ma administrations have been operating out of kilter with public opinion.

For much of the democratization era, national identity was the major cleavage in Taiwanese society and the major fault line in Taiwanese politics. But after the apotheosis of Taiwanese identity during the rule of Chen Shui-bian, a period in which all politics seemed to be refracted through the lens of Taiwanese identity and Chen’s “Taiwanization” agenda, it has declined in salience in political discourse, to the extent that Taiwanese identity virtually disappeared from the political menu on offer under Ma. For President Ma Ying-jeou, Taiwanese identity was neither expedient, given his focus on improving relations across the Strait, nor ideologically attractive given his predilection for *Chinese* national identity. Reversing many of Chen’s initiatives, Ma has sought to “de-Taiwanize” and “re-Sinify” Taiwan by incorporating it into narratives about the Chinese nation.⁸ My research on thousands of Ma’s speeches since 2008,⁹ shows that Taiwanese identity has all but disappeared from the presidential lexicon—with the notable, and transparently instrumental, exception of his election campaigns.¹⁰ At the same time that both major parties have, for different reasons, downplayed Taiwanese identity,¹¹ an unmistakable trend has emerged in the way that Taiwanese people

⁸ Chris Hughes, “*Revisiting identity politics under Ma Ying-jeou*”, in Jean-Pierre Cabestan and Jacques deLisle eds. *Political Changes in Taiwan Under Ma Ying-jeou*. Routledge, 2014.

⁹ Jonathan Sullivan and Eliyahu Sapir (2013) Strategic cross-Strait discourse: Comparing three presidential terms. *China Information* 27(1): 11-30; Jonathan Sullivan and Eliyahu Sapir (2012) Ma Ying-jeou’s presidential discourse. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 2012 (3): 1-34.

¹⁰ For instance, as a presidential candidate in 2008, Ma ran a full page ad with the headline message “堅決主張台灣的前途必須由台灣人民自己決定”, a sentiment not greatly endorsed thereafter.

¹¹ For much of the Ma administrations, the DPP has also relatively downplayed Taiwanese identity. The traumatic unravelling of Chen’s eight years in power led to a period of retrenchment and internal debate about the role of Taiwanese identity in the party’s platform. Nervous of reminding voters of Chen’s ideological excesses, the party has downplayed identity. Thus, it is erroneous to see the resurgent salience of Taiwanese identity as a DPP-led phenomenon.

report seeing themselves. Reliable academic surveys have been asking representative samples of Taiwanese people at regular intervals for two decades how they define their own identities. From the early 1990s, the trend has been away from identifying as solely Chinese to a combination of Chinese and Taiwanese, and finally, in recent years, a majority of people claim to identify as Taiwanese only. This is partly the result of demographic trends, but as the links between China and Taiwan have increased via business and tourism, the feeling of being distinctly Taiwanese has become stronger. Instead of bringing them closer together, exposure to their “cousins across the Strait” via tourism and other social exchanges has increased Taiwanese peoples’ feeling that they are different from Mainlanders, even when they identify with aspects of Chinese culture. Despite losing its overt salience during Ma’ tenure, the latent identity cleavage exists and retains the potential to be a driver of Taiwanese mass political behaviour and elite political competition, particularly in terms of cross-Straits policy, which should be a real concern for proponents of deepening economic integration and ultimate political unification.

Common ground between the CCP and KMT is embodied by the shared endorsement, if not understanding, of the “1992 Consensus”, which has proven useful as the basis for the détente policies of the last seven years. It has also ossified as the major distinction between the DPP and KMT. With President Ma quickly endorsing the “1992 consensus” upon election in 2008, the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) resumed dialogue for the first time since the mid-1990s and quickly endorsed an agreement to allow regular weekend charter flights across the Taiwan Strait, soon followed by agreements to allow mainland tourists to visit Taiwan, direct shipping links, daily cross-Strait flights and improved postal services. These practical successes paved the way for the much more ambitious, and within Taiwan politically contested, Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA). Despite vociferous opposition, ECFA passed in June 2010, removing tariffs on hundreds of products and became the centrepiece policy of Ma’s first term. Compounding the perception among some that things were moving too fast, Ma introduced the idea of pursuing a Peace Accord with China at the outset of his re-election campaign, removing it from sight when public reactions appeared negative. He then overstepped the mark again by trying to force the cross-Strait Service Trade Pact agreement through the legislature without proper oversight as had previously been agreed. The Service Trade Pact would have opened up the services market on both sides and the Ma administration argued that the pact would increase Taiwan’s competitiveness (as part of broader efforts to sign free trade agreements with major trading partners). Ratification of the pact first stalled in the legislature after several lawmakers, including KMT Speaker Wang Jin-pyng (Wang Jinping 王金平), raised concerns about a lack of

consultation between the government and legislature. It then became the trigger for the Sunflower student occupation when the government attempted to railroad the bill through the legislature. The Sunflower movement was not solely about cross-Strait economic deals, or China policy or Taiwanese identity. Instead it was the interface of two further long-term trends in Taiwan: the emergence of a new economic cleavage based on class and generational value change. Both of these processes intersect with identity to create a potent social force that the Ma government and KMT more broadly has not fully accepted or devised a strategy to appeal to. Instead the party has blamed students for naivety and the opposition for indoctrinating them. Neither is correct, and the KMT must face up to the reality that its message and delivery are failing to resonate with younger cohorts.

Class and value change

Some cohorts within the KMT share with the CCP the hope and expectation that deeper and more extensive economic integration will draw the two sides toward eventual political union. To that end the ECFA (and CSTSA) was not merely an economic agreement, but despite the political furore that surrounded its adoption, ECFA's fortunes have foundered on the economic outcomes of its implementation. In short, there is a feeling that ECFA has failed to deliver *generalized* economic benefits to the people of Taiwan.¹² Neither President Ma's government nor ECFA itself are to blame for the global economic recession. Indeed, the Taiwanese economy rebounded impressively in 2010. But the point is that the recovery was largely unfelt by large sectors of society—particularly the young, where unemployment and cost of living issues has led to pervasive feelings of *relative deprivation*. The economic crisis and recovery, refracted through the opportunities and challenges of ECFA have exacerbated wealth gaps, giving rise to a new economic cleavage based on class.

Because of the unusual equality of growth during Taiwan's "economic miracle," combined with the dominance of national identity during the democratization process, class has never been particularly salient in Taiwan. But since the global financial crisis Taiwan has seen the emergence of inequalities that it hasn't witnessed in generations. The reality for many Taiwanese is stagnant wages, unaffordable houses, unemployment, poor social mobility and feelings of economic insecurity. Reflecting on these developments, Tsinghua University scholar Zheng Zhenqing's economic data show how "under the influence of the global financial crisis a new axis of class politics has emerged."¹³ Wu Yushan at

¹² Douglas B. Fuller, "ECFA's empty promise and hollow threat," in Jean-Pierre Cabestan and Jacques deLisle eds. *Political Changes in Taiwan Under Ma Ying-jeou*. Routledge, 2014.

¹³ Zheng Zhenqing, "Taiwan's Wealth Gap and the Evolution of Electoral Politics after the 2008 Global Financial Crisis." *Asian Survey* 53, no. 5 (2013): 825-853.

Taiwan's Academia Sinica agrees that "class politics based on wealth gap has become new driving force of party politics [. . .] the dominant social cleavage [has shifted] away from identity towards distribution."¹⁴ Qi Dongtao at the National University of Singapore similarly argues that class divisions and class awareness have increased dramatically since ECFA.¹⁵ When the global financial crisis decimated Taiwanese exports, President Ma and the KMT promoted growth by opening up to the Chinese economy via the vehicle of ECFA and those with capital and mobility benefitted from increased opportunities, while the majority did not. On a battery of economic and lifestyle indicators Ma has performed worse than the second Chen administration.¹⁶ The failure of ECFA on economic grounds allowed the DPP, which promotes more of a balance between growth and distribution, to cast itself as a protector of social and economic justice. Qi's research shows that the DPP is increasingly seen as the party of the people in contrast to the perception of the KMT as the party of the rich and powerful.¹⁷ This was borne out in voting behavior in the 2012 presidential election: People who felt they were worse off voted for the DPP controlling for identity variables.¹⁸ Academia Sinica researcher Nathan Batto has shown that within the substantial recent decline in identification with the KMT, poorer urban dwellers are even more likely to abandon the party, which he also interprets as further evidence of an emerging class cleavage.¹⁹

Exacerbated by economic conditions, there is a growing disconnect between Taiwanese, especially younger cohorts, their representatives and politicians. Alienation is commonplace in mature democracies, but it is a recent development in Taiwan (turnout for instance averages 75% across five presidential elections). The common thread among young Taiwanese I have spoken to recently is that politics is passing them by, or rather that politics and their lives are running on parallel tracks. During the second Ma administration in particular, a significant number of youths have taken to the streets over a range of different causes.²⁰ They are fed up with the failure of the main parties to put aside their self-centred and self-serving partisan battles. This alienation is magnified by government policies

¹⁴ Wu Yu-shan, "From Identity to Distribution: Paradigm Shift in Taiwan Politics A First Cut", American Association for Chinese Studies, New Brunswick, Oct 11-13, 2013.

¹⁵ Qi Dongtao, Globalization, Social Justice Issues, Political and Economic Nationalism in Taiwan: An Explanation of the Limited Resurgence of the DPP during 2008–2012. *The China Quarterly*, (2013) Vol 216, pp.. 1018 – 1044.

¹⁶ Zheng, "Taiwan's Wealth Gap", 2013.

¹⁷ Qi, Globalization, Social Justice Issues, Political and Economic Nationalism in Taiwan, 2013.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Nathan Batto, "Declining KMT Party ID", June 28 2015. Available at: <http://bit.ly/1JjVAdC>

²⁰ Ho Ming-sho, "The resurgence of social movements under the Ma Ying-jeou government," in Jean-Pierre Cabestan and Jacques deLisle eds. *Political Changes in Taiwan Under Ma Ying-jeou*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2014.

that have marginalised them economically and rejected their lived reality as Taiwan-identifiers. The astonishing scale of the Sunflower occupation was the apotheosis of these feelings.

The late Shi Tianjian argued that democratization did not cause a significant cultural shift in Taiwan. Indeed he cites survey data showing how democratization reinforced Taiwanese peoples' commitment to traditional cultural norms, which in turn lead people to define democracy as government by benevolent guardians.²¹ Such attitudes may help explain the resilience, flourishing even, of the KMT since democratization. Shi argued further that Taiwanese with traditional values may understand democracy via the idea of minben (民本). In minben doctrine the goal of government is to benefit the people, but it differs from western forms of democracy in the means used to achieve this goal, the standards for evaluating it and the associated rights and responsibilities of the people in relation to government. Ultimately, the legitimacy of a government is judged solely by its policy outcomes for the people. Shi argued that a significant proportion of people with traditional cultural ideas had a particular understanding of government based on minben, a kind of 'guardianship democracy'. In Taiwan this would explain why "despite its authenticity as a [liberal] democracy, the political system in Taiwan is a disappointment to some of its citizens" (p. 9). Amid the drama of the Sunflower occupation, such views were clearly expressed by older cohorts in the media, and opinion polls demonstrated a clear clash of values elicited in the values of older and younger citizens. The resilience of traditional values is being challenged among young Taiwanese who have grown up with different norms. For example, the norms associated with internet culture where there is little deference to authority and obvious scepticism and distrust of government. The rallying cry for Sunflower protesters (as well as students protesting curriculum reform) was that the government's decision making was opaque, a "black box". Like citizens of other democracies, young Taiwanese are demanding transparency and do not accept traditional views of performance based legitimacy or deference to "guardians". This is a change that requires all political parties to acknowledge. With its "old guard" conservatism and arrogant dismissal of young citizens, the KMT has much ground to make up if it is to appeal to younger voters.

Thinking ahead to 2016

The DPP has resumed its championing of welfare and economic justice issues that had previously been subsumed under Chen's identity politics. To maximize the appeal of its (relatively) redistributive policies, the DPP will require a careful

²¹ Shi, Tianjian, *The Cultural Logic of Politics in Mainland China and Taiwan*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

calibration of the party's message on Taiwanese identity; it has found it difficult to articulate a vision for the nation's identity that does not also invoke potentially problematic relations with China. A comprehensive review of its China platform through an open consultation process provided an indication of the difficulty inherent in appealing to voters' sense of Taiwanese identity, while reassuring them that they have a workable China policy. Ultimately, the party's compromise position made no real advance on the "Taiwan Consensus" advanced by Tsai in 2012. The conundrum for the DPP is that the Taiwanese identity that has been discarded by Ma could be both a trump card and a liability. In recent months Tsai has adopted a position that appeals to the moderate middle and won plaudits in the US for its moderation. The same cannot be said for Hung Hsiu-chu (Hong Xiuzhu 洪秀柱), the KMT's presidential nominee, whose views on China are not shared by the majority of Taiwanese. Hung is an advocate of faster and more comprehensive economic integration leading to political unification. Until now a relatively marginal character in the KMT, Hung has a reputation for pugnacity but a sketchy electoral record. She secured the deputy speaker position as a balance to the "local wing" Speaker, Wang Jin-pyng. In a polity where pragmatism is the norm, at least at election time, Hung's commitment to old ideals and the pursuit of unification with China is unusually steadfast.

Hung's nomination is inconsistent with the trajectory of Taiwanese public opinion (although they do represent a segment of society): much of the electorate is moving firmly in the opposite direction both on China and "traditional" attitudes. While many Taiwanese have been alarmed by the haste of Ma's embrace of China, Hung has lavished praise on the outgoing president, and if elected would seek to deepen his integration policies. Hung also has an uncompromising personal style that is likely to turn off younger voters. Lacking President Ma's veneer of urbane sophistication and carefully packaged image of Confucian temperance, Hung is an accidental candidate; the last woman standing when all others sought to avoid what looks like a poisoned chalice, or were blocked by factional battles. KMT Chairman Eric Chu had the best chance of challenging Tsai, but he refused to stand from the outset.²² Wang Jin-Pyng, figurehead of the KMT's "local wing", was willing to stand and promised to be competitive against Tsai. But Wang's possible candidature was halted by his embroilment in a long and bitter battle with President Ma's China-leaning faction. The entrance of the veteran James Soong into the race augurs even worse for the KMT. Opinion polls suggest that in a three horse race Tsai's victory is virtually assured.

The impact on Taiwan's political landscape could be significant. At this juncture, six months out from the election, a victory for Hung looks unlikely. A more likely outcome is one that has to date been unthinkable: that the KMT may

²² His promise to constituents in Xinbei City not to run provided him with the perfect cover.

lose both the presidency and control of the legislature for the first time. If the KMT suffers a heavy loss, giving Tsai a strong mandate and a legislative majority, the party will face potential ruptures. Factional cleavages in the party are longstanding. The battle between reform minded and traditional elements was one of the stories of Taiwan's democratisation. Despite several splinter parties breaking off, the core party has held together because it has had superior resources and political capital. But if substantial losses in 2016 compound the loss of its control over local politics, the KMT will be weakened and may no longer be able to cover over some of the cracks in its ranks. Despite his unpopularity Ma's faction retains influence, as does an elder generation of pro-China advocates and their princelings. On the other hand, Eric Chu is the obvious leader of a younger generation of more Taiwan-focused KMT politicians. A catastrophic performance in 2016 could go a number of ways. If Chu is held responsible, as incumbent party Chair and most viable candidate who refused to stand, more conservative, China-leaning elements will have the upper hand. Yet, a disastrous electoral performance may be what the KMT needs to renew itself post-Ma. While Chu would be the undisputed leader of a new generation committed to reforming the party, a generation of gerontocrats have shown little willingness to depart from the stage.

The Ma era is approaching the endgame, and his legacy is mixed. His achievements in cross-Strait relations are impressive, and the momentum towards economic integration is formidable. However, Ma's tenure has ignited and exacerbated tendencies in Taiwanese society that are not beneficial to the KMT, at least not in the short term timeframe that includes the 2016 elections. The party retains superior resources and will remain a powerful political force, but the prospects for victory in 2016 are poor. Having been bypassed by the civic movements that eventually coalesced under the Sunflower banner, it appears that the DPP has now succeeded in getting across its message of economic justice and harnessing discontent with the KMT. However, winning election is different from governing—as the DPP's previous experience of executive power demonstrated. The key for the DPP will be the legislature. If the party can do the unthinkable and win a majority it will have a substantial effect on Taiwanese politics—albeit the range of policy options are, ultimately, circumscribed by the reality of economic interdependence and the imperatives of one China. In the longer term, all political parties will have to reckon with transformative trends in Taiwanese society, with Taiwanese identity, economic security and generational value change to the fore. With the nomination of Hung Hsiu-chu, the KMT does not seem to have got that message yet.