

**Track Two Dialogue on
EU-China-Relations and Cross Strait Relations
London, LSE, 29-31 May 2009**

A workshop jointly organised by Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), Berlin, London School of Economics (LSE), London and Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS), Shanghai, with the friendly support of the Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH, Stuttgart.

Discussion Paper
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Taiwan's 2009 Local Executive Elections: Significance and Prospects

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On December 5, 2009 Taiwan will hold local elections in up to 23 cities and counties.¹ These will include contests for city mayors, county magistrates and their county and city councils. It is easy to dismiss these elections as no more than insignificant local contests that have minimal bearing on Taiwan's democratic system and cross-Strait relations. In this short paper, I will examine both the historic and potential contemporary significance of these local executive elections. The second objective will be to examine what are the possible results and consequences of these elections. Can we expect the DPP to recover sufficiently to repeat its previous local electoral triumphs of the 1990s? Or is a rerun of the KMT's landslide victories of 2005 and 2008 more likely? Both scenarios would have implications for the state of Taiwan's democracy. The former would suggest Taiwan remains a vibrant multi-party system, in which alternation of ruling parties is still possible. The latter would suggest that Taiwan is remains on the trajectory towards a one party dominant system, a path that it set out on in 2005.

Historical significance of local executive elections

Democratic national level elections are a relatively new phenomenon in Taiwan, with the first direct parliamentary and presidential elections being held less than two decades ago. In stark contrast, local elections were first held on the island in the 1930s, during the Japanese colonial era. After the arrival of the Republic of China administration on Taiwan in the late 1940s, one of the first types of elections introduced was for city mayors and county magistrates. These elections were first held in 1946 and have been held without interruption for over six decades. Although the local elections were held on a single party basis until the late 1980s, independent or non KMT candidates could also stand, and sometimes even won these executive positions. This meant that when an organized opposition, the so called Tangwai (黨外) movement began to develop in the 1970s, these elections offered space to challenge KMT domination. Under martial law local elections were Taiwan's democratic holidays.

The local executive elections played a critical role in the career development of numerous opposition politicians and the opposition movement as a whole. Some of the most important early victories for the Tangwai movement came in these elections. For instance, the success of the Yu Teng-fa in Kaohsiung County, Hsu Hsin-liang's victory in Taoyuan in 1977, You Ching winning Taipei County in 1989 and Chen Ting-nan winning in Yilan in 1985. In a number of these cases, these victories led to long-term opposition domination in these counties. At a time

¹ At the time of writing it is still not yet clear whether elections in Taipei County, Taichung City and County, Tainan City and County and perhaps more districts will be postponed as a result of administrative upgrading or district mergers.

when the KMT had a built in majority in national parliaments, these arenas were in essence rubber stamp institutions where the opposition parliamentarians could only put up symbolic resistance to KMT policies. In contrast, the local executive posts also offered opposition politicians invaluable administrative experience, with their first taste in actually implementing policies. For instance, the opposition's early experiments in old age welfare and local language education provisions took place in local executive districts.

Even after the lifting of the party ban and the introduction of full national level elections in the early 1990s, local executive elections played an important role in Taiwan's multi-party system development. In 1993 the DPP successfully employed a social welfare and anti-corruption platform in the local elections. This was to be critical in the DPP's efforts to broaden its own issue appeals and its support base during the 1990s.² Moreover the campaign had a significant impact in placing old age welfare issues on the centre of Taiwan's political agenda and changing political norms on the state's role in providing universal rather than selective welfare programmes. In 1994 the DPP's Chen Shui-bian won the mayoral election for Taiwan's capital city. During his four years as mayor, Chen did implement some radical policy initiatives and had rather high public satisfaction levels. Although Chen failed to win re-election, his experience did help him rise to prominence within the DPP but also reassured voters that the DPP could handle government responsibility. In fact many of the DPP's government ministers in the period between 2000-2008 had experience of local executive administration. The role that these local elections played in Taiwan's party system development can be seen by the way the DPP tended to fare far better in local executive elections than either grassroots, presidential or parliamentary contest. For instance, in the local executive contests of 1993 the DPP exceeded 40 percent of the vote share for the first time and in 1997 the DPP vote and seat share exceeded the KMT's for the first time.

More recently the significance of these local executive elections in the realignment of Taiwan's party politics has been apparent. The KMT's disastrous defeat in 1997, only a year after winning the presidency should have been heeded as a warning to the party of the dangers of a top down nomination system and the resulting divisive rebel candidates. In addition to nomination failures, a string of KMT corruption scandals and dissatisfaction with crime levels eroded the public confidence in the KMT. For the DPP, its 1997 victory gave it a critical boost following its poor showing in 1995-1996. This can be seen in Table 2 where after the party's support levels had been static since 1994; in 1997 they began a significant upward trend that continued through to late 2000.

² For a detailed discussion of this process see Dafydd Fell, *Party Politics in Taiwan* (2005).

Local executive elections have also played a critical role in the development of Taiwan's largest party, the KMT. Local executive experience is now increasingly viewed as a prerequisite for career development to the highest political levels. For instance, Ma Ying-jeou's election and experience as Taipei mayor was critical for him to build up the political capital to be a credible candidate for the presidency. Similarly, when we start looking for who will be the KMT's presidential candidate in 2016, it is almost certain to be limited to politicians that have been elected to one of Taiwan's more prestigious cities or counties.³ Figures such as Lien Chan and Wu Po-hsiung are the last of a dying breed, politicians that could rise to the top through the party state system and without the need to go through the local executive electoral process. The significance of these elections for politicians' career development can be seen by the large numbers of national level legislators that have been contesting local executive nomination for this year. With the planned merging of electoral districts and administrative upgrades, it seems likely that the importance of these positions will be further enhanced.

Table 1: Local Executive Elections 1997-2005 Vote and Seat Shares

	1997 Loc Exe	2001 Loc Exe	2005 Loc Exe
KMT	42.1 (34.8)	35.2 (39.1)	51 (60.9)
DPP	43.3 (52.2)	45.3 (39.1)	42 (26.1)
NP	1.4 (0)		0.2 (4.3)
PFP		9.9 (4.3)	1.1 (4.3)
TSU		2.4 (8.7)	1.1 (0)

Note 1: Party abbreviations: NP: New Party, PFP: People First Party, TSU: Taiwan Solidarity Union

The influence of the local executive elections was further reinforced when they were last held in 2005. From Table 1 we can see how damaging the election was to the DPP, winning only 6 out of a possible 23, while the KMT and its allies won the remainder. In many ways this election deserves the label of a critical election far more than 2008. This was the first year when the KMT effectively was able to use the political corruption issue to attack the DPP. In fact this set a precedent for the KMT's campaign equation of DPP=poor government ability+economic

³ I would suggest that these include Taipei City, Taipei County, Taoyuan County, Taichung, Tainan and Kaohsiung.

mismanagement+political corruption that would be equally effective in the national elections of 2008. Secondly, the trends towards a two party system of the KMT as the largest party and the DPP a medium or small party had its foundations in this election. This can be seen by comparing the 2005 results with previous local executive contests. Thirdly, party identification surveys in Table 2 suggest that the public opinion swing that essentially led to the KMT’s landslide in 2008 took place three years earlier in 2005. Although we cannot prove causation, Table 2 shows that one of, if not the biggest shift in Taiwan’s party support levels occurs during this campaign period between late 2004 and late 2005. In contrast, there was a high degree of stability in party support levels for the final three years of the Chen administration. In other words, the DPP had already effectively lost the presidential election in 2005.

Table 2: Party Identification for Taiwan’s Main Parties 1992-2008 (December figures)

	1992	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
KMT	33.8	29	30.5	34.5	24.2	30.3	35.3	14.5	14.1	18.9	21.4	21.9	33.2	34.7	35	33.3
DPP	5.4	12.1	13	11.2	15.8	21.2	23.2	26.6	24	24.5	25.1	26.3	20.6	19.3	19.8	21.7
NP		5.6	8.4	9.1	6	3.5	3.3	1								
PFP								17.5	15	13.4	11.2	7.1	2.9	2.1	1.2	1.2
TSU									1.5	1.7	2.1	2.7	2.9	2.6	1.2	1.3
Indep.	60.8	53.3	45.1	43.6	53.3	44.3	37.7	40.2	44.2	40.4	39.3	41.5	39.8	40.6	42.2	41.1

When we consider previous local elections we can see much variation in whether local or national variables are decisive. In the early period the balance was clearly on the side of local factors. The factional background of the candidate, level of local factional unity, the candidate’s charisma and wealth, level of local grassroots mobilizational support, the strength of the candidate’s support networks and the organizational strength of the local party branches were all far more important than national level campaigning. The first time where national level campaigning began to have a serious impact on these local executive campaigns was 1993. As mentioned above the DPP used social welfare and anti-corruption appeals, which were countered by a strong nationwide campaign in support of KMT candidates by President Lee Teng-hui. At the time it appeared that the 1993 results proved the power of Lee’s appeal and also that the local KMT party organizational machine remained effective. As a former Propaganda Chief from the KMT explained, “In 1993 the KMT’s factional strength was still strong, and the KMT’s control over local politics was also still strong.”⁴ Nevertheless, by 1997 the political

⁴ Interview by author, October 19, 2001.

environment had changed, as “The KMT’s grassroots support began to falter after 1996, and in the 1997 local executive election.”⁵ This meant that the DPP’s national campaign, designed by propaganda chief Chen Wen-chien was able to swing the balance in favour of national variables. As the former KMT Propaganda Chief recalled, “There were many criminal cases, like the Bai Bing-bing case, it was a mess. Then the political corruption issue was always on the agenda. The KMT was struggling to defend itself, so that year we suffered blow after blow.”⁶ There was a similar pattern in 2001, partly because the executive elections were held simultaneously with the national legislative elections. The atmosphere of the 2005 local executive elections was actually rather similar to that in 1997. In other words, the national wave of anger related to a string of DPP linked political corruption scandals was as destructive as the wave the KMT faced in 1997. This meant that the DPP lost in constituencies where it had held power for long periods such as Taipei, Yilan and Nantou and also suffered landslide defeats in many of the districts where it had won in its peak election of 1997, such as Keelung, Taichung City and Taoyuan County. Even in districts where the DPP was especially strong and was fronted by popular incumbent candidates, the DPP margin of victory was often quite narrow. For instance, in the DPP’s stronghold of Tainan County the margin of victory was only 3%. Of course, even that year there were exceptions to this rule, where local factors overrode the national wave. For instance, though Penghu has traditionally been a KMT stronghold the KMT candidate only won by 2% and in Yunlin the DPP bucked the national trend by winning that county for the first time in its history.

Significance of 2009 elections

The 2009 local executive election will come a year and a half into the Ma’s first presidential term. Thus we can view it as a mid-term electoral test. Moreover, although there will be other important elections in 2010 it probably will be the nearest to a nationwide election before the next presidential and legislative elections in 2012.⁷ Comparative evidence suggests that voters will often punish the incumbents in what are often viewed as second rank elections. For instance, both the incumbent Conservatives under Thatcher and New Labour under Blair suffered serious setbacks in local and European elections, but still came out on top in general elections. Thus the 2009 elections will be the first real test of the popularity of the Ma government. The same is true for the new leadership of the DPP under Tsai Ying-wen, as these elections will viewed as a judgment on her

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ This may not eventually be the case if all the proposed elections are postponed as a result of administrative reforms.

first year and a half. Of course this is a rather simplistic way of looking at elections as a variety of national and local factors will determine the outcomes. Nevertheless elections are judged by parties and mainstream media political analysts as being a test of a party's leadership. Thus both leaders of the DPP and KMT would be under pressure to resign if the results are unsatisfactory.

One of the most interesting features of recent public opinion has been how Ma's popularity plummeted even faster than Chen Shui-bian's in their first years in office. After winning election with a record high of 58 percent in March, Ma's public satisfaction rate had fallen to 23 percent by October 2008. If we consider that Ma's public satisfaction rate was as high as 80 percent in 2005, then it is clear that Ma has lost considerable popularity.⁸ Of course, one key factor in this trend (a factor he shares with Chen) is that Ma had raised unrealistic expectations during the election campaign and thus it was inevitable many would be disappointed.

If we presuppose that voters will be using these local executive elections to punish or reward Taiwan's parties we need to establish some standards regarding what aspects of the parties' past year performance are likely to be influential. The probability of voters taking the election as an opportunity to give a verdict on the KMT is greater as the party controls not only the national parliament and presidency but also the vast majority of local executive positions. At the local level voters perception of the performance of (mainly KMT) local executives will be a factor. On the national level the main areas voters are likely to judge the Ma government will be:

1. Handling of the economic crisis
2. Overall administrative performance of the government
3. Overall evaluation of Ma's performance
4. The closer economic & political relationship with China (including increased tourists, direct flights, loosening trade restrictions, the defacto official state to state negotiations in the form of the Chiang-Chen talks)
5. Handling of political corruption cases concerning former DPP government figures
6. Performance on the ROC's international space
7. Legislative performance of the KMT dominated legislature
8. Handling of political protests

For those voters that decide to vote on the performance of the DPP then there are likely to be three main standards employed. Firstly, voters may be making a judgment on the performance of the current incumbent DPP local executives in six southern counties and cities. A second performance factor will be a judgment on the reforms and strategies of the DPP under Chairwoman Tsai Ying-wen; to what

⁸ http://www.tvbs.com.tw/FILE_DB/DL_DB/rickliu/200608/rickliu-20060803102418.pdf

extent has she actually revitalized the party and removed the damaging reputation that the party developed in the last years of the Chen administration. A final potential factor related to the DPP that may influence voters will be Chen Shui-bian. This may seem odd considering he has been out of office for a year and is being tried for corruption. However, Chen and his trial remain a major news story. In fact, media attention on the Chen trial has been extremely helpful for Ma in his first year as it has served to distract media attention away from the economic crisis facing his administration. Even though Chen was not a candidate in 2008, many voters used the elections as a protest against the perceived failures of his administration. With the continued media focus on his case, this could still have a lingering effect.

So how important should we expect these various local and national level variables in determining the 2009 elections. I will first look at national level and then some local variables. In previous elections party leaders did seem to have significant positive or negative impacts on elections at the local level. In 2008's legislative election KMT candidates were extremely anxious to persuade Ma to campaign on their behalf, while many DPP candidates were scared of being associated with Chen. In May 2009 neither of the two main party leaders had particularly high public satisfaction levels, Ma has recovered some support to a level of 41 percent, while Tsai Ying-wen has fallen to 29 percent. Nevertheless neither is able to arouse the kind of voter passions either negative or positive that we witnessed in the DPP era.

Compared to many new democracies Taiwan's voters have relatively high levels of identification with political parties. Therefore we would expect shifts in party support to have an impact in 2009. Survey data on party identification in Table 2 suggests that though there has been a slight decline in KMT support and slight increase in DPP support, these changes are unlikely to have a major impact on these elections. In Tsai's first year as DPP chairwomen she has moved very cautiously, perhaps too cautiously in reforming the party. On the positive side this has prevented extremists from breaking away but also limited the scope to attract new supporters or win back former voters. At this stage it appears that Tsai has neither satisfied nor enraged either the party extremists or the party's moderate reformers.

Another variable we need to evaluate is whether either party can be expected to promote influential campaign issues or political communication styles in the same way as in previous years. For instance, the DPP's effective use of welfare+crime+anti corruption appeal in 1997 and the KMT's use of anti corruption+DPP maladministration+ anti Chen sentiment + economic problems in 2005. So far there are not any signs that the parties do have influential themes prepared. Most of the main initiatives listed above are related to Taiwan's external relations, issues that rarely play a major role in these local elections. Of course, the

DPP will attack the KMT for its economic mismanagement and globally governments will get blamed for high rates of unemployment. The DPP will also link Taiwan's economic problems to closer economic integration with China. However, although there have long been concerns over whether economic ties will result in Taiwan losing political sovereignty in the long term, many of the economic agreements in Ma's first term are popular, and economically in Taiwan's interest. For instance, direct flights and increasing Chinese tourists. From the perspective of European universities, it is hard to understand why Taiwan has not actively tried to liberalize regulations on allowing Chinese students to attend higher education in Taiwan. Generally, despite recent demonstrations, voters appear relatively satisfied with the pace of the development in cross-Strait relations. So we should not expect this issue to be decisive. The last time Taiwan's economy was in a similar crisis was in 2001, and despite heavy KMT emphasis on this issue to attack the DPP, the KMT had its worst ever parliamentary result. This suggests that the DPP is unlikely to gain too much mileage from the economic mismanagement attack. It is true that Ma's Premier Liu Chao-hsuan also lost popularity as a result of the economic crisis and perceived poor administration, but like Ma he has shown a degree of recovery in recent months. A final potential influential issue could be the question of administrative districting changes, however, it is not clear whether this will favour any party and may just become a valence issue.

In a number of previous elections failures in parties' nomination systems was an important factor in their success or failure. Although the nomination process is still ongoing for many districts, particularly for the KMT, we can see some important trends at this stage. Firstly, the KMT has maintained its primary system for nomination where negotiations fail to create a single candidate. This means that the KMT should still be able to maintain its improving record of avoiding the kind of damaging rebel candidates that split the KMT vote so badly in the 1990s. Secondly, the DPP has temporarily abandoned primaries and replaced them with negotiations and centralized nomination. This has created a degree of dissatisfaction in more competitive districts where candidates have complained about the arbitrary and non transparent nature of the new process. To date only one DPP candidate is threatening to run as rebel due to dissatisfaction with the nomination process, this is in Tainan County. Based on current opinion polls this could result in a KMT victory or the DPP rebel winning. A third important trend is that the DPP has struggled to find viable candidates in many districts, even in districts such as Keelung or Penghu, where the DPP had once controlled local government few experienced DPP politicians have expressed interest in standing.

A major national level factor that will probably make this election unique will be the lack of third challenger parties. In previous elections, particularly in 2001 third parties split the vote of their allied party, enabling the real rival to win

election. However, the complete defeat of the NP and TSU in 2008 and effective merger of the PFP into the KMT means that the DPP and KMT are likely to contest most districts on a one on one basis. This development is likely to be more favourable for the KMT as in the past splinter Blue parties have been far more damaging in splitting the Blue vote than rival Pan Green parties. At this stage we cannot rule out new parties being formed to contest the 2009 local elections, but such parties would have little chance of success in these single member district contests. Moreover, new parties are far more likely to emerge from the Green side of Taiwanese politics, because at this stage the Blue camp remains quite united.⁹

At the local level we can also see some trends by examining voter satisfaction surveys with the incumbent local executives. With most districts in KMT hands this does place greater pressure on the KMT. The surveys show a mixed picture, with two Blue executives especially unpopular in Taipei and Taitung County, but KMT incumbents seeking re-election in Changhua, Miaoli appear popular, as do DPP incumbents in Yunlin and Pingtung.¹⁰ If national level variables do not override local politics in this campaign, then we can expect voter satisfaction with incumbents and incumbent advantage to be highly influential. With most seats in KMT hands, many KMT incumbents seeking re-election, most DPP incumbents coming to the end of their terms, and most unpopular KMT executives in districts where the DPP is weak (for instance Keelung, Taitung), the KMT does generally have the advantage in most contests.¹¹

Predictions and potential consequences

At the time of writing there have not yet been many opinion polls asking voters their voting intentions for these upcoming elections. Therefore I have put together a very simple prediction model. In Table 3 I have categorized the 23 districts into (1) KMT win, (2) Competitive KMT advantage, (3) Too close to call, (4) Competitive DPP advantage, (5) DPP win. The judgment over which party has the advantage will be based on incumbency, and election results in 2001, 2005 and the two elections of 2008.

⁹ In the long-term Taiwan's political history suggests that significant Pan Blue splinter parties are more likely to emerge. I suggest that such a development may occur in the future, perhaps as a result of disputes over Ma's succession or over political relations with China.

¹⁰ 【2009-05-27/聯合報/A4 版/要聞

¹¹ The exception to that pattern is Taipei County.

Table 3: Local Executive Election Predictions for 2009

District	Variables	Result	Special Features
Keelung	4 X KMT win + KMT incumbent	KMT win	
Taipei County	3 X KMT win + KMT incumbent 2001 DPP	Too close to call	Weak KMT candidate vs. Strong KMT
Yilan	3 X KMT win + KMT incumbent 2001 DPP	Competitive KMT advantage	Long history of DPP control prior to 2005
Taoyuan	4 X KMT win + KMT incumbent	KMT win	
Hsin Chu County	4 X KMT win + KMT incumbent	KMT win	
Hsin Chu City	4 X KMT win + KMT incumbent	KMT win	
Miao Li County	3 X KMT win + KMT incumbent 2001 Indep	KMT win	
Taichung County	4 X KMT win + KMT incumbent	KMT win	
Taichung City	4 X KMT win + KMT incumbent	KMT win	
Nantou County	3 X KMT win + KMT incumbent 2001 DPP	Competitive KMT advantage	DPP lost in 2005 due to split ticket
Changhua County	3 X KMT win + KMT incumbent 2001 DPP	Competitive KMT advantage	DPP has won this twice
Yunlin County	2 X KMT (2001 & 2008 LY) 2 X DPP win 2005 & 2008 Pres DPP incumbent	Competitive DPP advantage	DPP Magistrate involved in legal case
Chiayi City	2001 Indep 2005 KMT 2008 KMT LY 2008 KMT Pres KMT incumbent	Competitive KMT advantage	Strong KMT incumbent
Chiayi County	3 X DPP (2001, 2005, 2008 Pres, 2008 LY tie DPP incumbent	Competitive DPP advantage	DPP has nomination problems as incumbent retires
Tainan County	4 X DPP DPP incumbent	Competitive DPP advantage	DPP nomination problems unresolved + incumbent retires
Tainan City	3 X DPP DPP incumbent 2008 Pres Ma wins	Competitive DPP advantage	Incumbent retires
Kaohsiung County	4 X DPP DPP Incumbent	Competitive DPP advantage	Incumbent retires and KMT strong candidate
Pingtung County	4 X DPP DPP incumbent	DPP win	
Hualien	4 X KMT KMT Incumbent	KMT win	
Taitung	2001 PFP 2005 Indep 2008 X 2 KMT Ex KMT incumbent	Competitive KMT advantage	Ex KMT incumbent may stand
Penghu	3 X KMT 2008 LY Indep	KMT win	
Chinmen	2001 & 2005 NP KMT 2008 Pres Indep 2008 LY	Competitive KMT advantage	Incumbent retires
Mazu	2001 & 2005 PFP KMT 2008 Pres KMT 2008 LY	Competitive KMT advantage	Incumbent retires

Based on this simple formula, if all elections are held the chances of seeing a significant DPP revival look slim. This table predicts nine easy wins for the KMT; these are mainly districts where the DPP has increasingly given up hope. These include some counties where the party has actually held power in the past such as Hsinchu County and districts where it has never challenged seriously such as Miaoli County. The second category is districts which should be competitive but the KMT has a distinct advantage. There are seven districts in this category. These are districts where though the KMT has won in the last few elections, the DPP has a strong support base and a recent record of holding power up to 2005. Districts in this group include Yilan, Changhua and Nantou. Apart from recent election results, the fact that KMT candidates are mostly the current incumbents also favours the KMT. In addition, this KMT advantage category also includes three districts where the competitive challenger may actually be an independent, such as Taitung. These so called independents are in reality Pan Blue politicians that left due to nomination disputes or because their corruption records make them hard for the KMT to nominate. Five of the six current DPP districts have all been categorized as Competitive DPP advantage. However, even in these districts we could see some surprises. We should not forget that the DPP won by rather narrow margins in a number of these districts in 2005. For instance, despite being the incumbent in Tainan County the DPP only won by a margin of three percent. Another weakness that the DPP has is that in four of these five districts its incumbent will retire, while in another the incumbent may be seriously damaged by her pending legal case. The only case I have categorized as a DPP win is Pingtung, where it has an incumbent seeking re-election. Even here the DPP candidate cannot relax as he only won in 2005 as a result of the Blue vote being divided by an independent Blue candidate and Ma and Hsieh were almost tied in the 2008 presidential vote.

The one county I have categorized as too close to call is Taipei County. It is actually quite likely that this election will be postponed due to administrative upgrading. Based on the formula it should be a Competitive KMT advantage but the KMT incumbent Chou Hsi-wei is widely perceived as having a poor administrative record and he could be challenged internally in a KMT party primary and externally by the former DPP county magistrate Su Chen-chang. In fact, the most recent polls suggest that Su would win this contest if held today. This is undoubtedly a factor in the KMT hoping to see the election postponed and of course this would not be the first time the KMT has used this kind of administrative method to avoid electoral defeat. Back in the 1970s when the party felt threatened by the Tangwai in Kaohsiung city, it used administrative upgrading as an excuse to make the Kaohsiung mayoral position an appointed rather than elected post.

Preliminary Conclusions

These elections will be a severe test for both parties. This is partly due to the nature of the results in 2005. In 2005 the DPP only won six seats, so if it wins less than six seats this time the election should be seen as a defeat for the party and Tsai would be under pressure to resign. This would mean the party would be further demoralized and need to embark on a new set of party reforms under a new leadership. On current evidence the DPP would probably be satisfied if it is able to hold on to six seats and if it increased to seven or eight it would have performed beyond expectations. A result in which the DPP only wins three or four seats would not be impossible and should be sufficiently bad to force a change in the DPP's chairperson. It looks unlikely that the KMT will perform badly enough to force its chairman to resign. This would only be conceivable if the DPP wins two extra seats and a few seats go to independents.

It is unfortunately uncertain how many elections will be conducted this year. The elections will however, represent the first major test of public opinion on the KMT since Ma came to power and of the new DPP under Tsai Ying-wen. At this stage we cannot be sure whether local or national level variables will be decisive. However, if as I predict there is little change in the party balance of seats compared to 2005, then Taiwan's party system of 2008 will be maintained. In other words, Taiwan will probably remain a two party system with one dominant and one small challenger party, a system that at least on the surface resembles Taiwan in the late 1980s for the time being.

Is such a party system inevitable for the next few electoral cycles? At this stage I see four possible scenarios could lead to a transformation in this party system (1) The KMT splits over either/both presidential nomination for 2016 or China policy, (2), The KMT becomes embroiled in political corruption cases to a similar level to the DPP in Chen's second term or the KMT in the 1990s, (3) The KMT agrees to a radical reform of the electoral system to create a proportional system, (4), the emergence of a new political cleavage that can replace the dominance of national identity and which the existing parties are unable to dominate. Taiwan's political history over the last two decades, suggests that only the first two scenarios are more likely and that even these would produce less radical change to the political system.

Table 4: National Level Elections Vote and Seats Shares 1996-2008

	1996 Pres	1998 LY	2000 Pres	2001 LY	2004 Pres	2004 LY	2008 LY	2008 Pres
KMT	54	46.4 (54.7)	23.1	28.6 (30.2)	49.9	32.8 (35.1)	51.2 (71.7)	58.45
DPP	21.1	29.6 (31.1)	39.3	33.4 (38.7)	50.1	35.7 (39.6)	36.9 (24)	41.55
KMT rebels	14.9 & 10		36.8					
NP		7.1 (4.9)		2.9 (0.4)		0.1 (0.4)	4 (0)	
PFP				18.6 (20.2)		13.9 (15.1)	0 (0.9)	
TIP		1.5 (0.4)		0 (0)				
TSU				8.5 (5.8)		7.8 (5.3)	3.5 (0)	

Note 1: KMT rebels in 1996 were Lin Yang-kang and Hau Pei-tsun (14.9%) and Chen Lu-an (10%), KMT rebel in 2000 was James Soong (36.8%)

Note 2: Election types: Pres: Presidential, LY: Legislative Yuan

Note 3: Party abbreviations: NP: New Party, PFP: People First Party, TIP: Taiwan Independence Party, TSU: Taiwan Solidarity Union

Note 4: The PFP won one seat out of its three official candidates in 2008. The PFP only had one (unsuccessful) district level candidate in 2008, who won 47.04% of the vote in Lienchiang County. This only amounted to 2064 votes and represents 0.02% of the national vote share. The successful PFP candidate won an aboriginal constituency seat with 11,925 votes; however votes for the aboriginal constituencies were not included in the Central Election Commission's party vote share figures.

Note 5: The party vote share figures for the 2008 legislative election are from the party list votes.