

Taiwan's Electoral System and the 2026 Local Elections

Webinar Report

August 19, 2026



Institute for Security & Development Policy

Stockholm Taiwan Center

ABOUT ISDP

The Institute for Security and Development Policy is a Stockholm-based independent and non-profit research and policy institute. The Institute is dedicated to expanding understanding of international affairs, particularly the interrelationship between the issue areas of conflict, security and development. The Institute's primary areas of geographic focus are Asia and Europe's neighborhood.

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Speaker



Ching-Hsin Yu is a Research Fellow at the Election Study Center (ESC) as well as a joint Professor at the Graduate Institute of Development Studies, National Chengchi University (NCCU) in Taipei, Taiwan. He also serves as an Election Commissioner of the Republic of China (Taiwan). He earned his Ph.D. in political science from Pennsylvania State University in the United States in 1995.

In addition to public service, he has devoted himself to studying party politics, public opinion, electoral systems, and elections. His recent studies include political accountability, political campaigns, political identity, party politics, and issues related to Taiwan's democratic transition and cross-Strait relations.

Moderator

Yi-Chieh Chen, Research Fellow at the Stockholm Taiwan Center, Institute for Security and Development Policy.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

The Stockholm Taiwan Center of the Institute for Security and Development Policy organized a webinar for the Digital Taiwan Lecture Series on August 19, 2026 to explore Taiwan's electoral system and the upcoming local elections, scheduled for November 28, 2026.

Taiwan's democracy has undergone a remarkable transformation since martial law was lifted in 1987. A major milestone came in 1996, when Taiwan held its first direct presidential election, marking significant progress in establishing its democratic system. Thirty years later, Taiwan stands as one of Asia's most vibrant democracies.

Amid growing geopolitical tensions in the Indo-Pacific region and the increasingly complex cross-Straits relations, Taiwan's elections have attracted significant international attention. However, while election outcomes are widely discussed, the electoral system itself is often overlooked. Understanding how Taiwan's elections are structured is essential, as electoral rules shape political representation, influence policymaking, and determine how political leaders are selected.

This report summarizes the key takeaways from the webinar, starting with a map of Taiwan's electoral system and its unique features. On November 28, 2026,

Taiwan will hold its local elections to elect city mayors, county magistrates, county councilors, township mayors, township councilors, and village chiefs for a four-year term. In the webinar, the speaker further explained these elections and used them to discuss Taiwan's current political climate and related issues.

The webinar was recorded and made available on [Youtube](#).

TAIWAN'S ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Taiwan's current electoral system includes a variety of elections at different levels. Historically, the first election in Taiwan was a local election, held under the Japanese rule in 1935 to elect city and township councilors. The Kuomintang (KMT) continued this policy to strengthen their regime's legitimacy. This allowed the KMT to penetrate Taiwanese society by co-opting local elite, while meeting constitutional requirements without fearing a loss of national power. Nonetheless, these local elections cultivated political elites and strengthened civil society, which contributed to a smoother transition to full democracy. From 1969 onwards, national elections were held to elect the Legislative Yuan (parliament). These elections allowed only the KMT to exist as the legitimate political party, limiting democracy. Only after abolishing the authoritarian regime

in 1987 were additional political parties allowed to exist alongside the KMT and participate in elections. That marked the beginning of Taiwan's full transition to democracy and the state it is in today. Taiwanese people now can choose their political representation in presidential elections, Legislative Yuan elections, and local elections.

Taiwan's electoral system is not uniform, with the executive branch using national presidential elections and local elections to elect magistrates and mayors. The legislative branch consists of the Legislative Yuan as the national legislative body and local councilors elected in local elections.

The type of voting differs depending on the type of election. In the upcoming local elections in November, the elections of executive heads will use first past the post (FPTP) system while the single non-transferable vote (SNTV) system under multi-member districts will be used for local legislative elections.

While FPTP refers to a single-winner voting system, SNTV means that a voter casts a single vote for a candidate in their district; with a certain number of seats allocated per district, the candidates with the most votes get the seats. SNTV creates strong nomination capacity and helps coordinate vote equalization within a political party. This also means bigger parties tend to have more capacity, while

smaller parties tend to have more difficulty competing for seats.

In addition to using SNTV in the local legislative elections, Taiwan's electoral system features high female representation, representation of indigenous communities, and a high turnout rate under a volunteer, non-absentee voting system.

Feature 1: Female Representation

The Taiwanese electoral system has significant gender regulations. In national elections for the Legislative Yuan, the main national legislative body, the portion elected through the list proportional representation system has a 50 percent gender quota. In the other elections, such as the local elections, a quarter of the seats must go to women. However, the required level of female representation differs by electoral level. The pattern is that the lower the election level, the lower the female representation. This results in a high proportion of female representation in the Legislative Yuan, followed by the metropolitan city level and county level, with the lowest percentage at the township level.

Feature 2: The Representation of the Indigenous Communities

Taiwan's elections protect indigenous communities' representation. In the Legislative Yuan, 6 out of 113 seats are reserved for indigenous candidates.

Although indigenous people make up only 2.5 percent of the population, this quota gives them at least 5.3 percent of the seats. This ruling of overrepresentation prevents the indigenous people from being politically marginalized by the Han majority in Taiwan. The indigenous population may also select its own candidates and hold separate elections to choose district chiefs.

Feature 3: High Turnout Rate and Non-Absentee Voting

Depending on the type of election, turnout generally ranges from 60-75 percent while national elections often attract more voters than local elections. The turnout does not differ significantly by gender, yet, it has shown a generational trend, with younger generations voting less than older generations. The data show that the 62-70 age group tends to be the most active in voting.

On the voting system front, Taiwan uses a voluntary voting system and does not allow absentee voting. A voluntary voting system tends to have lower voting turnout than a mandatory voting system, making Taiwan's high turnout rate an outlier. Even though the current system functions well, there have been discussions about legalizing absentee voting for people living abroad or in a different location than where they are registered. Yet there is insufficient desire to implement it. The lack of desire not only originates from

low public confidence in the supervision of absentee voting but also from potential influence from China, for instance, Chinese cyberattacks on Taiwan's voting system.

Additionally, Taiwan's electoral system allows voters to vote on only one specific date, and votes are counted the same evening with preliminary results released around 7 PM. To maintain efficient vote counting, there is concern that the flexibility of absentee voting would reduce efficiency. The lack of motivation to change the policy may also be linked to the current high turnout rate, since people deem it unnecessary because voter turnout in Taiwan is already high.

If there were a move to accept overseas voting, it would likely start with overseas voting for referendums, as they are already not tied to local vote-casting. Changing the voting location in local elections would be the final stage in this policy shift.

ISSUES TO BE WATCHED IN TAIWAN'S 2026 LOCAL ELECTIONS

On November 28, 2026, Taiwanese people are heading to one of the 17,649 polling stations to vote for their local representatives. There will be elections for the county magistrates and city mayors, which is the election of one representative per municipality or county. Taiwan is divided into 6 municipalities and 16

counties, which means there are 22 seats to distribute. Taiwanese voters will also be able to vote for their local county councilors, township mayors, township councilors, and village chiefs.

Apart from the approval rate of the current President and satisfaction rate of the leaders from different political parties and non-partisan voters' stances, this year, voters' voting decisions may be influenced in part by both livelihood issues and Chinese influence.

1. The Approval Rate of the President and Election Result Predictions

In Taiwan, a county or municipality's political color is determined by the political party of the elected magistrate or mayor. In the 2022 local elections, the results were considered a loss for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). They won 5 seats, all in southern Taiwan. The KMT won 14 seats, and the Taiwan People's Party (TPP), a newcomer in that election, won 2 seats. The TPP seats are in Hsinchu City and Kinmen County. Given the DPP's significant loss in 2022, the 2026 elections may turn out differently.

The expected political outcome is that the KMT and TPP may need to form strategic alliances to counter the DPP in certain areas. In a realistic seat prediction, the KMT has 11 safe seats, while the DPP and the TPP have 5 seats and 1 seat, respectively. This suggests 5 counties/cities will be highly competitive, since

the political colors there are unclear. In this context, it is difficult to predict which party may be considered successful in this election.

The statistics suggest the DPP is currently unpopular, with President Lai's approval rating below 50 percent. However, compared with former President Tsai Ing-wen's first term in office, a low approval rate halfway through the term is quite standard. This is especially true given that KMT chairperson Cheng Li-wun's approval rating is below 30 percent. In other words, elections in November are expected to be highly competitive, as the current DPP president has low popularity during the midterm while the KMT chairperson's satisfaction rate is also below 30 percent.

2. Key Election for TPP's Survival

This election is seen as a crucial battle for TPP's survival. So far, its local-election tactic has been to elect only one candidate per district to centralize resources. Smaller parties find it difficult to survive in Taiwanese politics, partly because of the electoral system. Under the SNTV system, if a party runs multiple candidates, its voting base may be divided. Furthermore, smaller parties find it difficult to win seats as magistrate or mayor, as they need a larger voter base in that region. In general, strong representation of the TPP in council elections will be vital to its survival, as without many electoral seats in councils

it is unlikely to gain consistent support in the future. However, even if they manage to get some seats in councils this year, the 2028 general elections will likely be a struggle.

3. The Impact of the Non-partisan/Independent Voters

Taiwan's election results often depend on non-partisan voters, especially in highly competitive elections which none of the party is certain about the potential results. These voters account for about 35-40 percent of the population. They call themselves independent and claim to have no known party affiliation. Although these citizens have no clear preference for political parties, they do participate in elections, which affects election results. These voters tend to be influenced by short-term events such as corruption, scandals, and individual issues. One example is the protests in Hong Kong in 2019 and 2020, which motivated some non-partisan voters to vote for the DPP at that time. Individual candidates are also more important than parties to non-partisan voters. They evaluate candidates based on their performance instead of the performance of the candidate's political party.

4. Livelihood Issues

For the upcoming elections, a few issues related to local governance and the current state of the Taiwanese economy

are relevant. Taiwan's economy has been growing at a historically fast rate because of its position as a technological hub amid the rapid development of artificial intelligence. However, salaries across Taiwan's society are not keeping pace with GDP growth for most people outside tech-related industries. In addition to low salaries and inflated prices for household products, housing prices are also rising sharply. The government has implemented loan controls, but no positive effect has been observed yet. With these rising costs, Taiwanese people worry about the cost of living. Other governance issues shaping this election include food safety and school lunches. This stems from a crisis involving contaminated soybean oil and an announcement by the Taipei mayor about serving free school lunches, which sparked debate.

5. The Role of Chinese Influence

The most pressing issues in Taiwanese politics currently pertain to cross-strait relations and information warfare dynamics. This is related to "China's interference", which is not a new topic in politics but certainly is taking new shapes. There used to be a belief that China's influence was more prominent in national elections than in local elections. It has become clear that this is not the case, and China also attempts to interfere with Taiwan's local elections.

China has increased its use of soft

power, sharp power, and gray-zone tactics in campaign and non-campaign strategies. For example, during election campaigns, China conducts military drills around Taiwan. China also provides material incentives for pro-China candidates and organizations. Another strategy involves leveraging Taiwanese business groups to achieve specific electoral outcomes. A more recently popularized tactic is cyberattacks and the spread of misinformation through social media. With these strategies, China aims to have Taiwanese people vote for more pro-China candidates.

In addition, China attempts to swing Taiwanese voters through functional strategies that show the real benefits for supporting China. Several industries in Taiwan still rely on cross-Strait supply chains and the Chinese market and would benefit from lifting import bans. Counties that support the current opposition parties tend to intend to lift import bans on China, which is attractive to some voters.



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