

# How To Size Up Taiwan's 2012 Election

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# Signs of A Maturing Democracy



# Taiwan's Democratic Consolidation

- The 2012 presidential election is the 5th popular election for the highest executive office since the country completed its democratic transition in 1996.
- The 2012 parliamentary election is the 7th election for the national legislature since the introduction of popular re-election of the LY in 1992.
- Competitive democratic elections and power rotations have become normalized. Also the partisanship has become steadily crystallized.
- The citizens' confidence in the democratic system had suffered a setback due to the protracted political gridlock and the escalation of conflict over national identity between 2000 and 2008 but has been gradually restored in the recent past.

# 2012 Voter Turnout: 74.4%

- The passion of the island's electorate remains high but no longer at a traumatic level.
- Despite the prevailing perception of a very tight race prior to the election and the synchronization of the two national elections, the turnout rate has continued its gradually sliding trend as a young democracy is coming of age. It dropped by 2% from 2008 and more than 8% from 2000.
- This year the *de facto* turnout rate should be around 85% if one excludes eligible voters who are physically unable to vote.
- Signs of over-mobilization have gradually dissipated. The scale of mass rallies was still impressive but it has drawn a steadily smaller crowd.



Figure 1: Voter Turnout in Presidential Election



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# The Waning of National Identity Cleavage in 2012

- The first national election where the Taiwan independence issue was not on the agenda.
- The DPP held back its frontal challenge to the legitimacy of the state structure or the R.O.C. Constitution.
- No more tactical moves to tie a provocative referendum to a presidential race.
- The national identity issue is overtaken by the debate over the “1992 Consensus”.
- Politics of polarization has taken on a milder and less divisive character.
- Aspiration for Taiwan independence has been replaced by the fear of being infiltrated and assimilated by China.
- Ma’s “three No’s” pledge helped in part neutralize this anxiety and hold off this potentially explosive issue.

# An Election with Civility

- Ma Ying-jeou's mainlander background was never an issue, neither was Tsai Ying-wen's female or marital status.
- No major disputes over the fairness or freeness of the election.
- No more bizarre incidences or dubious shocking events on the eve of the election day.
- Both camps practiced negative campaigning, but were conducted by and large within the limits of reason and popular tolerance.
- The DPP camp gracefully and calmly accepted the results.





# An Election with Substantive Debate and Meaningful Choice

- Three issues define the presidential race.
- The first and foremost issue is Cross-Strait relations. Ma Ying-jeou's more conciliatory approach was subject to a timely popular approval.
- The second issue is about the integrity, capability and experience of the leadership.
- The third issue is about which party is more capable of addressing the economic challenge brought about by the Euro crisis in the short run and the growing socio-economic inequality in the long run.



# Making Sense of the Election Outcomes



# What Accounts for Ma's Victory

- Taiwan electorate found no reason to replace an incumbent with a proven track record with someone with unknown quantity.
- A majority of the voters (51.6%) were not persuaded that they should unseat an incumbent president who has brought peace to the Strait, earned the trust of major allies, expanded the island's international space, managed the impact of the global financial crisis relatively well, and kept his promise of delivering clean politics.
- Stability-conscious middle class and the business community want to stay on the course of cross-Strait rapprochement and preserve the momentum of re-invigorating Taiwan's economic vitality.

# What Accounts for Tsai's Failure to Expand DPP's Electoral Base

- The DPP's cosmetic adjustment to its China policy did not bode well at both fronts. It is too vague to convince the independent voters and too timid to galvanize its traditional supporters.
- The decision to place emphasis on the issue of socio-economic equality did not give the DPP a decisive competitive advantage as the KMT is inherited with the legacy of a catch-all party and ideological eclecticism.
- The DPP ticket was not as strong as it can be. Tsai's running mate turns out to be a liability.
- The DPP strategy to prop up James Soong's electability turned out to be counter-productive.
- Tsai only recovered DPP's electoral strength (45.6%)



# Why Ma's Winning Margin Surpassed Most People's Expectations

- The answer lies in the question itself.
- The perceived tightness of the race prompted many reluctant and lukewarm pan-Blue and independent voters to come out, many more Taiwanese expatriates to return from the mainland, and some of James Soong's loyalists to split their votes between the presidential and parliamentary race.
- The turnout rate in the Pan-Blue strongholds is higher than the Pan-Green strongholds.

# Why the election had appeared to be too close to call?

- Ma entered the race with a 34% approval and 53% disapproval rate. There were many disenchanted pan-Blue voters.
- No reliable poll figures due to high proportion of respondents refusing to indicate their preference.
- Prediction was influenced by an outdated received view assuming that the polls tend to underestimate the DPP candidate's real electoral strength.
- It was very difficult to predict James Soong's electoral strength (2.8%) due to strategic voting.
- Both camps wanted to sustain the popular perception of a tight race for different reasons.



# The Election Carries Multi-faceted Political Significance



# The Emerging Political Landscape in the Shadow of China's Rise

- This election consolidates the political coalition behind the KMT policy of cross-Strait political conciliation and economic cooperation.
- It strengthens the legitimacy of the 1992 Consensus as the race is functionally equivalent to a referendum vote on the issue.
- The center of political gravity has been shifted. The de jure independence agenda (new constitution, new nation, UN membership, and self-determination) is overtaken by the more pragmatic debate over how to maximize the gain and minimize the cost and risk that came with cross-Strait economic integration and the larger process of economic globalization.

# Less Political Obstacles to Cross-Strait Economic Integration

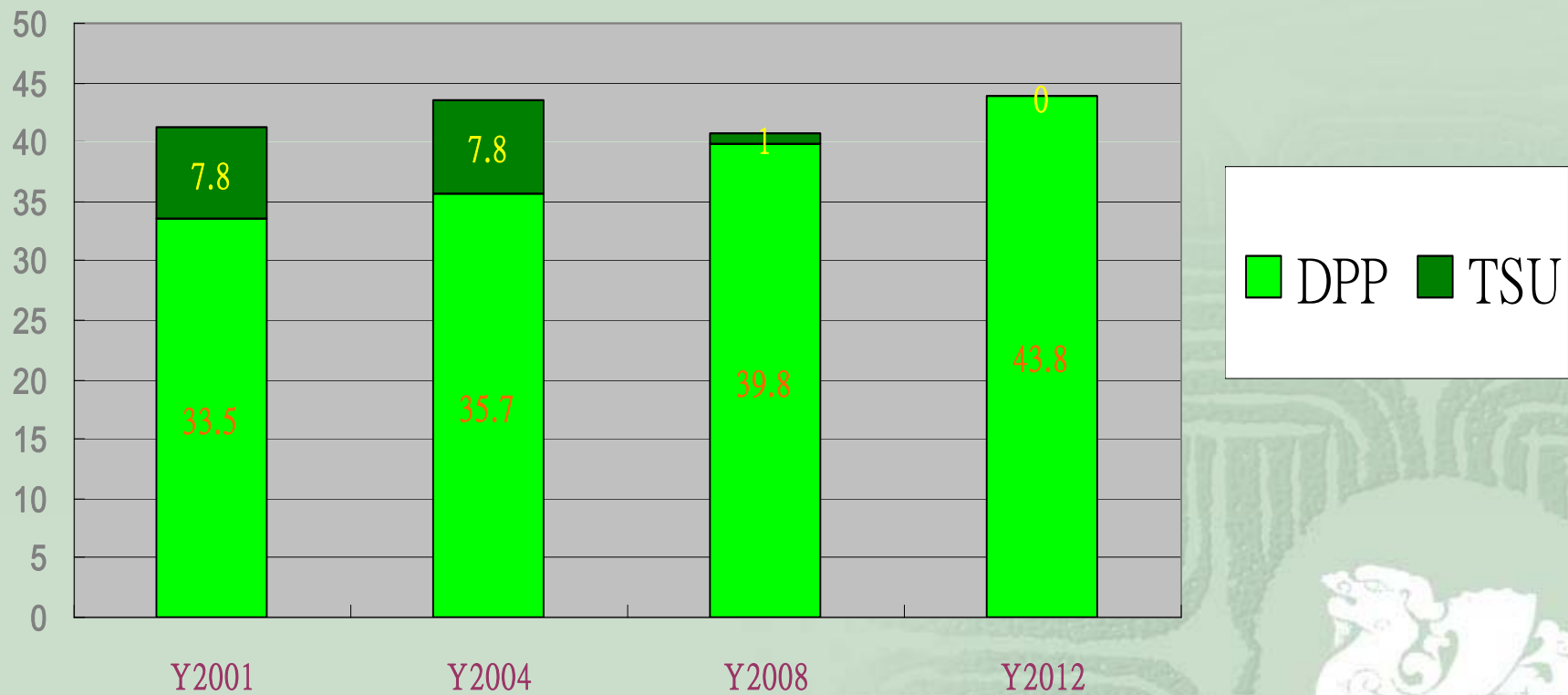
- Ma enjoys a convincing win and the KMT enjoys a unified government with a reduced but still solid majority in the Legislative Yuan (64 + 3 out of 113).
- Ma's administration will be more confident in pursuing its strategy of harvesting the peace dividends. It will accelerate the post-ECFA trade negotiation, expand cultural and education exchange, welcome more mainland Chinese tourists, and push for more international space.
- While many low-hanging fruits were picked, there are many more left to be picked.
- The DPP will revisit its foot-dragging strategy as Tsai Ying-wen openly pledged that her party will not turn back the clock.



# Consolidating A Two-Party System

- Under the new electoral system (since 2008), both the KMT and the DPP have consolidated its dominance in its respective political camp and squeezed out its minor allies.
- The DPP has retained its electoral strength in the LY election. However, it is not yet ready to construct a winning coalition without a major adjustment to its political platform.
- The single-member district rule solidifies the political demarcation between the North and the South.

Figure 2: DPP and TSU's Popular Vote in LY District Election (% of total vote)



# The Precarious Minor Parties

- The TSU and the PFP barely survived this time.
- Neither of them constitutes the critical swing votes in the LY.
- But they will have their voice heard as they are eligible to form their own party caucus and have a seat at the closed-door inter-party negotiation table that decides the fate of most legislations.
- Neither the TSU or the PFP will be able to outlive the political longevity of their respective charismatic founder.



# Many Challenges Ahead

- The domestic policy agenda will consume Ma's most political capital and energy during his second term.
- To overcome the resistance to economic openness, speed up the FTA negotiations with major trading partners and prepare Taiwan for TPP.
- To accelerate the restructuring of the economy to upgrade and diversify Taiwan's exports.
- To cope with the worrisome demographic trend.
- To provide the younger generation with a level playing field and opportunities for upward mobility.
- To address the growing income inequality with tax reform, improvement in the productivity of service sector, and rectify the misallocation of human resources.

