THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

WHAT DO PEOPLE IN TAIWAN AND THE UNITED STATES THINK ABOUT TAIWAN'S SECURITY SITUATION?

Thursday, January 9, 2025

PANEL DISCUSSION:

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HASS: Good morning from a snowy and sunny Washington, D.C. My name is Ryan Hass. I am the director of the China Center and the Koo chair in Taiwan Studies at the Brookings Institution. And today I am delighted to have the opportunity to moderate an event on public opinion trends in the United States and Taiwan regarding Taiwan, cross-strait issues and foreign policy trends more broadly. Today's event is being co-hosted with the Election Study Center at National Chengchi University, which is a leading research center in Taiwan that studies election behavior and public opinion. I'm going to be in considerately brief and introduce our panelists so that we can maximize our time for discussion. But I encourage everyone to go to the websites of this event to learn more about their background and accolades.

Our first two panelists are joining us from Taiwan. First is Research Fellow and Director of the Election Study Center Dr. Lu-Huei Chen, who is jointly appointed as professor in the Department of Political Science at National Chengchi University. Our second is Nathan Batto. Nathan is an associate research fellow at the Institute of Political Science at Academia Sinica. He is also jointly appointed as an associate research fellow in the Election Study Center at National Chengchi University. Importantly, he is also the hand behind the famous Frozen Garlic blog. So I encourage everyone to check that out when they have time. And our third panelist is Craig Kafura, who is the director of public opinion and foreign policy at the Chicago Center on Global Affairs. Craig, welcome. I believe Craig is joining us from Chicago today.

So with that background of context out of the way, I want to dive right into our discussion. And I'm going to ask each of you a question to get us started. We'll start with Dr. Chen and then Nathan and then Craig. What has struck you most about trends in public opinion data in Taiwan and in the United States about Taiwan’s security situation? Do the publics in Taiwan, the United States, have a shared view of the level of threat that Taiwan is facing today? Dr. Chen.

CHEN: Okay. So they conducted by the Election Study Center in last October and highlights that the majority of Taiwanese perceive China as a significant threat in the coming decade. Specifically is about 64% of respondents identify China's territorial ambition as the critical threat to Taiwan's security. However, only 24% believe that Chinese People's Liberation Army, PLA, will launch an

attack on Taiwan within the next five years. So these findings suggest that the sentiment of anger and anxiety among the Taiwanese public toward China, while the substantial cost associated with military aggression, may deter an immediate attack. Important question arising, otherwise, regarding Taiwan's capacity for self-defense and the likelihood of aligned intervention. So, I believe we'll discuss this question in detail in support of subsequent section.

HASS: Yes. Great. Thank you for setting that stage. Nathan, over to you.

BATTO: Yeah. So, Lu-Huei is the expert on polling here. I'd like to thank the Brookings Institution and the ESC for holding this event of the way. Lu-Huei is the expert on polling here, I'm just going to offer a few comments. I think that one of the most important differences in the United States and Taiwan on this is that in the United States, there is something of a bipartisan consensus on Taiwan. It's one of the few areas in which there is an agreement. In Taiwan, in contrast, there are tremendous partisan differences on everything we're going to talk about today. Attitudes towards China are at the heart of Taiwan's political cleavage. And so every aspect of what we're going to talk about today, threat perception, sense of agency on how to deal with things, the proper strategy on how to deal with China, support for military budget, everything is shaped by partisan considerations. So within Taiwan, you ask if there is a shared perception in the United States and Taiwan? Well, within Taiwan there is not a shared perception of the situation.

HASS: Interesting. Well, we'll come back to that in a moment. But before we do, Craig, over to you.

KAFURA: Thank you, Ryan. And my thanks also to Brookings and the Election Study Center for hosting this. I think everyone knows the Election Study Center. If you've ever looked at a poll from Taiwan about identity or cross-strait relations, you've seen ESC’s' work. Really thrilled to be getting to talk to them today.

So Dr. Chen is completely correct. 64% of Taiwanese view China's territorial ambitions as a critical threat. In a parallel survey that we ran in the United States with INDSR, the Institute for National Defense and Security Research, about 48% of Americans say the same thing about China's territorial

ambitions. So there is a bit of a disconnect. They're both concerned, but obviously this is a much more it's feels much greater for Taiwan. They're much closer to China. At the same time, strikingly, for me, it's not at the top of anyone's list of threats. In that same survey, Taiwanese were more concerned about the low birth rate crisis in Taiwan, more concerned about potential energy shortages and Americans were much more concerned about weakening US democracy at home and other sort of domestic challenges. So while both the US and Taiwan. Have some shared views about China, they also have deep domestic problems, and they're primarily concerned about those at the public level.

And you asked about sort of striking trends in US opinion toward Taiwan. For me, the really striking one is how stable American views were toward Taiwan for decades of council polling. From the 70s up through the 2010s, American views of Taiwan were sort of middling. We have this “feeling thermometer” that asks people to rate countries from 0 to 100, and Taiwan bounced between 40 and 52. And in the last couple of years, it's bounced up six degrees. In our 2024 survey, Americans gave it a 58, the same as they gave South Korea, a longtime US ally, a very prominent country on the world stage. So there have been some really interesting recent shifts in how Americans think about Taiwan and sort of their affinity for Taiwan.

HASS: Interesting, Nathan, you are touching upon partisan differences within Taiwan a moment ago, and I was wondering if I could turn back to you to unpack that a little bit. I was just in Taipei right before Christmas with a Brookings delegation, and we met with the leaders of all three political parties. And it was striking to listen to the narrative and the description of the environments that they each provided, because it was if they were each living in separate ecosystems with very little overlap between each other. But for people who don't follow this on a day to day basis, what divides or separates the views of the main political parties in Taiwan? I think you're on mute right now.

BATTO: I'm sorry.

HASS: No problem.

BATTO: Since the transition to democracy, Taiwan is best understood as a single dominant political cleavage polity. Everything revolves around questions of how Taiwan relates to China, of China broadly conceived. We've been looking for a second issue dimension for decades, both scholars and politicians. And we thought, you know, it might be pensions, American beef or pork, gay marriage, corruption, inflation. And none of that really has any staying power. Those issues come and go. Nuclear energy is the closest thing to a second dimension. But even that's mostly been absorbed over the last 20 years by this main dominant issue.

So in Taiwan, you have a situation in which everything is basically a valence issue. We all want a good economy. We all want good transportation infrastructure. We want better income equality, we want better health care, and we don't really care how it happens. You know, in the United States, there's a Republican way to build a road. And there's a Democratic way to to do education or whatever. In Taiwan, there's really not. People just want those things done and done well. That leaves us with China. And we are, we, that this China cleavage has lots of simple facets. The most important is identity. Who are we? Who do we want to be? But it also touches on different idea connected dimensions, including Taiwan's future status. And for our purposes today, how do we deal with the PRC right now? And these answers tend to be highly correlated, although not exactly the same. So the DPP, which now holds the presidency, has a strong Taiwanese nationalist position. For them, the worst, worst possible outcome would be to be absorbed in some way by China and to become Chinese. That is, well, they think of them, they think of Taiwan's rightful position in the world as part of the International Community of Democracies. And so they want to get closer to those democracies, especially the United States. The KMT has a much more complicated view, the relationship with identity because it is it has both our people who have a Chinese identity and people of Taiwanese identity, as well as people who just have a Taiwanese identity. It's a more complicated coalition. The KMT does not reject the idea that Taiwan should be part of the world's democratic community, but it also doesn't reject the idea that Taiwan should be part of the Chinese world or broadly conceived. And they definitely think that Taiwan and China should have more interaction.

The third party is a new party, the TPP, the Taiwan People's Party and it was founded around a former Taipei mayor, Ko Wen-je, who was a kind of a populist who has run on an anti-establishment

appeal. They don't have any real position on China. They think of it as something the two big parties use to manipulate voters, to force them to vote for them to stay in power. And it leads to corruption. So the TPP is kind of stuck in the middle with not really any position. But they say we'll do all those valence things and we'll do them better than you because we won't be corrupt. The problem is right now their, Ko Wen-je, their former chair is under investigation for corruption. So that's kind of a problem. The legislature -- the presidency is by the TPP, the legislature has no majority party. The TPP holds the balance of power and for whatever reason it has decided to ally itself with the KMT and follow the KMT's lead. So what we're faced with right now is an intense, divided government, a competition for power between the executive and the legislature. And that shapes all how Taiwan responds to all of these questions about dealing with China. I think I'll stop there.

HASS: That's great. That's really clear. Dr. Chen, before we turn to American politics, is there anything that you'd like to add to this question? I think you're on mute.

CHEN: Maybe I can talk about Taiwan's identity. Because the concept of the Taiwa'sn identity has undergone significant change over the past few decades and correlated closely with political attitudes and electoral trends. So I use data from face-to-face and telephone interviews conducted between 1996 to 2024, and we can find Taiwan identity is strongly associated with partisan preference, position on Taiwan independence and the Democratic Progressive Party, DPP's vote share. So the perception of unfriendly Chinese government has intensified. So particularly following the 2019 Hong Kong anti-extradition movement. Since then, the proportion of respondents in Taiwan who view China as unfriendly has the first above over 50%. So it further reinforces Taiwan identity.

So if we go back to take a look at which factor affects people's Taiwan identity, we can find people's legal education, even gender and generational cohort and also their ethnic background. All of these factors affect their power and identity. So people, younger generation and the older generation, they tend to have a higher level of Taiwan identity. And the people of their ethnic group belong to, we call Minnan-jen or Taiwan-jen and they are more likely to identify themselves as Taiwanese. So we can find between 1996 to 2020 for Taiwan, Taiwan identity plays a more significant role in Taiwan's electoral politics.

HASS: How does gender affect views of identity?

CHEN: Generally, females are more likely to identify themselves as Taiwanese.

HASS: That's very interesting.

CHEN: Yeah.

HASS: Craig, can I turn to you? You were speaking earlier about how the sort of the sea level among the American populace is rising on Taiwan. But what does that tell us, if anything, about whether the American public has a preference in polling data on what type of policy the United States should pursue towards Taiwan?

KAFURA: Yeah. So it's sort of an interesting balance. So we've seen this rising sort of embrace of Taiwan, but I think the embrace is a bit shallow. So for example, when we ask about different actions the United States could take to support Taiwan's international position, like supporting its inclusion in international organizations or signing a US go on free trade agreement, we get, you know, majority support, 59, 62% in that range. And we don't get a lot of opposition. But we also get really high proportion of Americans saying they don't know. And these issues just aren't that front of mind. When we ask Americans, do you want to support a country that you feel warmly towards? They say, yeah, sure, there aren't a lot of costs.

And I think when costs come in, that's where things get a little less clear, because on the one hand, Americans like Taiwan and they see US-Taiwan relations as good for US national security. And there's a clear preference for aiding Taiwan in a crisis, in some ways, providing arms and military supplies, providing food and medical equipment. Putting sanctions on China if there's an invasion. But how willing are Americans to actually put US forces in the mix? And I think that's where you start seeing much stronger opposition because that's a much more real scenario for Americans. Another clear preference we found in our polling is that the public's top priority in US-China relations is to

avoid a military conflict with China. So some of Americans sort of saw preferences toward hating Taiwan or running into other very strong preferences to avoiding major power war.

And then when we ask about sort of the how the US should pressure Taiwan on cross-strait relations, what we find is that a very narrow majority, 51%, say the US should pressure Taiwan to maintain the status quo. There's not a lot of support for pushing Taiwan to unify with the mainland. And then there's another 36% of Americans who say the US should actually push Taiwan toward independence, though I will note not all of those Americans are also willing to commit US forces to defend Taiwan. So there's a bit of a you know, if we think you should do this, but good luck.

HASS: Yeah. It's really interesting. Dr. Chen, when we started this conversation, you noted that 64% of people who are polled in Taiwan view China as a critical threat. And so I want to ask how that translates to the fence. What is survey data? Tell us about the willingness and readiness of the people of Taiwan to defend themselves against a potential Chinese military action?

CHEN: Okay. When we asked respondents their willingness to fight in the event of a Chinese invasion, about two thirds of respondents expressed willingness, while one quarter indicated reluctance. However, confidence in Taiwan's national military is evenly divided. 40% of respondents express confidence, while equal proportion lack confidence. So, people in Taiwan are willing to fight against Chinese invasion, however, we, people in Taiwan don't have confidence in Taiwan's military.

HASS: That's a bit of a paradox.

CHEN: Yep.

HASS: Craig, what is polling data? Tell us about this...Yeah, please, Nathan, go ahead really quickly.

BATTO: Whenever I hear questions like how many percent are willing to defend Taiwan, I always wonder what the what the baseline should be. Do we have a number for what other countries would say in that question? Do we have a number for how many Pakistanis would be willing to defend

Pakistan against an Indian attack? Or how many Ukrainians would have been willing to defend Ukraine in 2012 or in 2018? What is high and what is low? Some of these numbers may sound high and low, but I don't know that we have a number. I grew up in the Cold War. There were plenty of Americans who wouldn't have defended the United States in case of an attack. So I never know what to make of that number.

HASS: I have heard that the number of people who identify as being willing to defend Taiwan in polling data is higher than the number of Ukrainians that were expressing willingness to defend Ukraine ahead of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. You are all the experts on this, so please feel free to disabuse me of that if I have that wrong. But that is a, you know, a point of reference to your observation, Nathan, of what is the you know, what's the comparison? Craig, how does this look from the U.S. side? What is polling data? Tell us about the willingness of the American people to come to Taiwan's defense in the instance of a military contingency?

KAFURA: So this is a question that we've been asking about for almost as long as we've been doing the Chicago Council surveys. I think we first asked about this back in 1982, which I have somewhere on a shelf back there. And at the time, support for using U.S. forces to come to Taiwan's aid was really low and it remained quite low in the upper teens, mid to late 20s for decades, up into the 20 tens. But as. But there's been two major trends that have started to reshape that. So first, there has been a growing friendliness toward Taiwan. Taiwan has been in the news more. It's been in the news in a sort of alliance context, a strong relationship context. More Americans have been exposed to Taiwanese products, whether physical or cultural. There's just been more exchange between the US and Taiwan. And at the same time, American views of China have absolutely crashed across every type of question we ask.

Americans view China in a more negative light. They're more concerned about U.S.-China trade. They're more concerned about China's role in the world. And those two factors of favorability toward Taiwan increasing and that of China falling off, I think is helping to push support for getting involved in Taiwan. Contingency higher. It's not a majority support in our 2024 survey. One question we found 43% of Americans favored using US troops in some capacity if China were to invade. And when we

ask more specific questions, we get slightly different numbers. There's broad support for providing some forms of aid that don't put US forces directly in conflict. And this we modeled this question after our questions on Ukraine. And Americans sort of feel similarly.

They want to provide food and medical supplies. 74% favor doing that. 72% favor imposing economic and diplomatic sanctions on China, and 59% favor sending arms and military supplies to Taiwan. That's down a few points from 2022. I think there's some concerns about the costs of the big US aid packages for Ukraine and Israel, one that in Taiwan ought to be a bit of a strain. And then when we get to actually committing US forces into conflict, we don't have majority support. And where I think that's really coming into play is the concerns about getting directly into conflict with China. And we've asked a series of different questions about a blockade scenario over the last few years. And every year we make the scenario a bit more specific.

We make it more clear that this could put the US and China at war. And the more we emphasize that potential conflict, the lower the support gets. And I'll note that seems to also be the case among policymakers. We've done some surveys of foreign policy opinion leaders in recent years, and we see the same basic pattern. There's high support for hitting Taiwan through these non-direct military means. But there's a real reluctance to commit US forces directly into the conflict.

HASS: And is that pretty broadly consistent across partisan lines? Right?

KAFURA: Yeah. Interestingly, Taiwan is one of the issues where we don't have big partisan gaps in our surveys. When I started working on American foreign policy and public opinion in the early 20 tens, we didn't see big partisan differences on all of our issues. But over the decade, it's just every single issue seems to be getting more and more polarized by party. Taiwan is one of the exceptions, and support for all of these policies is very bipartisan. Only a few points different up or down.

HASS: Well, your findings are interesting, particularly in light of the fact that President Biden is the first president in American history to declare four times publicly that the United States would come to

Taiwan's defense if attacked. So that's striking. And the fact that it has not had an appreciable effect on public opinion views about this question.

KAFURA: Well, to be fair, we also ask about, you know, should the US send US forces to defend other US allies, treaty allies. And Americans don't always support doing that either.

HASS: Yeah.

KAFURA: Support for defending South Korea for a very long time was under 50%. Right now, it's just barely over 50. Even during the Cold War, support for defending NATO's allies in Europe or Japan from the Soviets was only in the 60s. Americans are understandably reluctant to commit to what could be a nuclear war with a hostile power.

HASS: So, Nathan, you are in Taiwan and you follow Taiwan politics and public opinion very closely. How do Taiwan citizens perceive what Craig has just described about the level of U.S. commitment to their defense? I think. I think you're on mute.

BATTO: It's a good thing I didn't say anything useful. The Taiwan public opinion [inaudible] has asked the question over the last few years, if China attacks Taiwan, do you believe the United States will send military troops to assist in the defense of Taiwan? In 2020 and 2021, you had 60 and 65% expressing confidence that the United States would send military troops. In March of 2022, so one month after Russia invades Ukraine, that drops to 34%. So just craters. And over the next year, it kind of slowly went back up a bit to the low 40s. Then they didn't ask the question for a while. And November 2024, so just after Trump was elected, they asked the question again, and now only just under 30% believed the United States would send troops. So there is a clear decline over the last five years in confidence in the United States.

The American Portrait Survey, which is a survey done by some of my colleagues in Academia Sinica and actually executed, carried out by the Election Study Center. So, Lu-Huei probably knows this data better than I do, or certainly knows better than I do. They look at what makes American signals

credible to the Taiwanese public, asking what kind of policies would make respondents believe that the United States would send support? And they found that the two most powerful signals were naval and air patrols and presidential comments. In other words, they want to see real action. And they want to see real statements from the top. And you can see that clearly in Ukraine, which is a real thing, and in Trump's comments, which are very ambiguous. And again, there's a huge partisan difference in the TPLF data, in the most recent poll, 48% of DPP supporters believe that the US would send military assistance, only 15% of KMT supporters do. The TPP supporters are somewhere around the national majority of the national average at about 31%. So, I mean, these are pretty low levels of confidence in American assistance. And this affects how they make decisions about all kinds of other things, all other kinds of military preparation.

HASS: Well, I want to ask you all about this then. If there's low levels of confidence in Taiwan about America coming to Taiwan's defense in a military contingency, what does that do to perceptions of increasing defense spending? What does public opinion polling tell us about support or opposition to defense spending, both in the United States and Taiwan? And does the low level of expectation of American involvement create pressure, political pressure for increasing defense spending? Dr. Chen, maybe we can start with you and then Nathan, and then we'll turn to Craig for the US perspective.

CHEN: Okay. Intel and public opinion on defense spending reveal a divided about the result. We can find nearly half of the respondents expressed support that we allocate funds for education, economic programs and or social welfare toward defense, while 41% oppose such major. And another question we asked whether they want to increase the tax to support our defense spending. Approximate 48-49% of respondents indicate awareness to support increased tases to both defense spending, while only about 46, was opposed. So these kind of divide, divided opinion on increased defense spending in Taiwan.

HASS: Interesting. Nathan.

BATTO: You turn on the microphone first. I'm glad Lu-Huei answered that first to give you the public opinion angle, because I want to answer this question not from a public opinion angle, but rather from

my hat as a legislative scholar. In isolation whenever the Taiwan announces a military purchase from the United States, this usually met with a positive reaction. And from that I would judge that public opinion is not against spending more on the military. But as Lu-Huei said, it's a question of tradeoffs. And you, in the legislature, you see this really acutely right now. But the reason I want to not talk about public opinion is that we are three years away from the next general election. This is the time to ignore public opinion and fight partisan battles because like I said, they are having a battle royale to to determine who's going to run the government, the executive or the legislature for the next three years. And what you're getting in the legislature right now is quite a bit of questions about, you know, next year's general budget and they're trying to divert a lot of money to local governments, which might come at the expense of things like social welfare programs or military programs. And right now, the legislature isn't really looking for win-win solutions. They're kind of in a scorched earth, you win, I lose mentality right now. So right now, you know, you might say that public opinion is not against military spending. But I don't know that that's the most important consideration right now. Taiwan's politics are often more conflictual than consensual. And this is one of those times right now.

HASS: Right? Right. Craig, how's it look from the US side?

KAFURA: Well, in the US, you're about to enter a period of, you know, sort of unified government under Republicans. And while there is this tradition of Republicans being deficit hawks and you heard a little bit of chatter about that, I don't think that's the way to constrain US defense spending. I think Republicans will be happy to spend more amounts of money on the military. And there is some support among the public for that, especially among their own constituents. So in our surveys in 2024, we found about half the Republicans among the public supported expanding defense spending, 20% overall of Americans. But there's also not a lot of appetite for cutting defense spending in the US, only about 26% of public favors that. And it's interestingly very, very similar among these foreign policy opinion leaders that we studied. 51% of Republicans in that survey also favored expanded defense spending. So I think you're going to see sort of a push for escalation on the defense side. I think some of that is going to be driven by concerns about low US stockpiles.

We've heard about, you know, the US sort of giving away large sized, large chunks of. Weapon stocks that we would need for future conflicts. There's going to be pressure to replenish those. There's gonna be pressure to help companies build up new production lines. I think you're going to see efforts at maybe revitalizing US shipbuilding or working with allies on that front. So I do think you're going to see more money flowing into the defense side. How much of that will be specifically focused toward Taiwan? That I'm not sure. We've heard talk about the Taiwanese looking to buy a really, really big chunk of arms from the US very early in the Trump administration. We'll see how that goes. I hesitate to predict anything with the Trump administration. It's always a bit of a wild ride.

HASS: Well, we'll keep things interesting for sure. Nathan, there's a term that's popular in Taiwan called America's Skepticism. We have sort of danced around this. Touched upon it, But I thought we could just center on this for a moment. Can you describe what that term means, America's skepticism and how it is used by political actors in Taiwan? And for what purpose?

BATTO: Yeah. So the term you're talking about is [Taiwanese], and it's a discourse that holds that the United States is not a reliable partner. And so it's best not to get too close or too committed or too dependent on the United States. And so some of the common arguments in this discourse are that the United States will not come to defend Taiwan if China attacks the United States. Only actions own interests. It doesn't have a broad global interest. So its best interest in its best interest not to get into war with China. And even if they wanted to defend Taiwan, maybe the United States doesn't have the capacity anymore to do that. Another thing you hear is that the United States and China are engaged in the great power competition. And so China, like Taiwan, should avoid becoming just a chess piece in this great power competition. Let them fight it out. It's not our business. You hear? You hear that? Taiwan is best if it maintains good relations with both sides and should keep equal distance from both sides. And then you hear that the United States only sells arms to Taiwan, not for really defensive purposes, just to make money. And sometimes you'll hear that they sell, though, the lousy, antiquated, outdated arms that they no longer want for high prices. That's not true. I won't pay full freight or full price for its it's its arms. And we got the new stuff. Which is why. Because which is why we have we're not getting stuff as quickly as promised because, as Craig said, the factories are

overloaded right now. But this this course is a full. There are lots of different parts of this. And its a, it's basically a discourse that says you can't trust the United States.

Once again, this is partisan in domestic politics. These arguments always come almost always come from the KMT side of the spectrum and usually from the very deep Chinese-oriented members of the KMT and sometimes from the TPP, never from the TPP side. There are two ways to think about this American skepticism discourse. One is to see it as coming from the PRC as part of the PRC is unification political warfare. And it's true that the PRC pops out these arguments in both its official diplomatic and media statements and unofficially in social media, on the Internet, in places where it's harder to see. And so it's very common for TPP politicians to see the KMT figures making these arguments and say, look, you're just parroting PRC propaganda. You are. You are a useful tool for all the PRC. The KMT would look at that and reject that argument and say that's yeah, so the PRC has a propaganda arm.

We know that we're not idiots, but that's not why we're skeptical. We're skeptical for good reasons. The American public policy has always been strategic ambiguity. You've always said, don't be sure you were dependable, Ally. And Trump makes that, you know, amplifies that predilection. So they would say we have good reasons to have a little bit of skepticism towards the United States. We did hear these kinds of arguments being made. Some of these not all but in the last presidential election, both the KMT and the TPP presidential candidates. Talked about not wanting to be a chess piece involved in the great power competition.
So you do hear these arguments echoed sometimes in domestic politics. But that doesn't mean that they are, you know, just mindlessly parroting PRC party lines.

HASS: Right. Now, earlier in our conversation, Nathan, you said that the two most powerful signals that the United States is capable of sending are presidential statements and air and naval patrols in the past several years, you know, President Biden has made unprecedented statements about Taiwan and the level of visible air and naval activity by the United States around Taiwan has increased. Has this had an effect upon discourse around America's skepticism, or is it not strong enough of a signal yet to chip away at it?

BATTO: Well, I don't know. That's a good question. I would, I would say that this is wired into the partisan politics and a few statements by an American president is not going to re-orient partisan lines. And you know, this is the partisan line. Yes, it's going to take more than a few statements from Joe Biden or from Donald Trump.

HASS: Right. Right. Okay.

KAFURA: So that's where I try to jump in. I just know those statements were also walked back by his staff very quickly. So I think that sort of, if there's any effect you're going to get from presidential statements, you have to actually stand by the presidential statement. You can't say, we didn't really mean to say that. That's great because that might actually push things the opposite direction.

HASS: Right. Right. Another issue that has been very prominent and I think followed closely in Taiwan is the issue of Ukraine. Dr. Chen, I wanted to ask you, how do events in Ukraine impact public attitudes in Taiwan about security issues? And specifically if Ukraine is forced to cede land for peace? What impact do you think that will have on politics in Taiwan?

CHEN: Okay. The public remain uncertain about the connection between Ukraine and Russia war and cross-Strait relations. So during our survey, we asked if Russia wins the war against Ukraine, how likely do you think it is that China will follow Russia's example to invade Taiwan? Is about 40% say it's likely, but over 55% say it's not likely. However, despite this uncertainty, people in Taiwan believe that Taiwan's relationship with key allies, such as the United States and Japan, are viewed favorably. So survey data indicate that 72% of respondents believed that Taiwan relations with Japan enhances national security and 62% regard US-Taiwan relations as beneficial for security. Yeah, so these allies appear to bolster public confidence in Taiwan's ability to address potential threats.

HASS: Right, right. Well, Craig, I wanted to sort of ask the opposite side of this question to you. There are prominent supporters and advisers to President Trump who have argued publicly that the United States should wind down its commitments in Europe and the Middle East in order to prioritize and

focus and concentrate resources upon China and the defense of Taiwan. How does how is this argument viewed amongst the American public? Do we have any insights or polling data that could shed light on it?

KAFURA: Yeah. So it's an interesting question. It's not a question we've asked directly, but just based on all of the other questions we ask about American views on Europe and Asia and the Middle East, I don't think it has a lot of play among the public. So when we ask sort of broadly about regions in the world and how important they are for the United States, Americans see Asia and then Europe as the most important regions for economic growth. But when we ask about military security, it's Europe at 42% and then the Middle East and Asia are tied around in a sort of low 20s. If I look specifically at your questions about arms sales to Taiwan and Ukraine, most Americans who support providing arms to Taiwan in a crisis also support providing arms to Ukraine now and vice versa. There are some Republicans, about 19%, who only favor providing arms to Taiwan and not Ukraine. But that's a pretty small portion of the public.

That's about 6% of Americans overall. And there seems sort of overlap between views of dealing with China and dealing with Russia. That also shows up in questions about critical threat. So half of Americans view China's territorial ambitions as a critical threat. Most of those Americans also view Russia's territorial ambitions as a critical threat. So there's not this sense that we need to divest from Europe and focus on Asia. In the you know, a decade ago when the pivot was a big concept.
We had some questions back then about should the US pivot away from Europe in the Middle East. And there was never huge supportive of the public. It was always sort of a tossup. I'll note the Middle East is a little bit different views about how the US should deal with conflicts relating to Israel and its neighbors or Iran, or dealing with Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapon. Those responses are not as related to views of Russia or China. That seems to be sort of an additional set. But you would think that arguments by Trump supporters would resonate most with Republicans, and that doesn't really seem to match the data here either.

Republicans are more likely to want to get involved in, sort of, Israel-related conflicts, not less likely. And also note on use of US troops, Americans who support using US troops to defend Taiwan or to

defend Japan from Chinese aggression also support defending our NATO allies from Russian aggression, whether that's in the Baltics or Germany or other NATO allies. So there's a fair amount of I don't think that there's a big support among the public for pulling out of Europe and focusing everything on Asia. And then just to follow up on Dr. Chen's notes on the sort of precedent-setting nature of Ukraine. We asked the parallel item in the United States. And Americans do think that there's a precedent being set. And Americans do think it's likely that if Russia wins the war against Ukraine, that China will follow suit and invade Taiwan. So hopefully that's not the case.

HASS: Yeah, let's hope so. It's also interesting that there is a divergence between US and Taiwan public attitudes on that question.

BATTO: Can I jump in here, and I think that even in Taiwan, among the most hawkish defense advocates in the DPP, they would not want to see Ukraine be abandoned. The DPP's idea of their vision of the Taiwan's place in the world, as I said earlier, is as part of the international community of democracies. And so you can't say that and then say, but Ukraine’s not important.

HASS: Right.

BATTO: For the DPP's own vision of itself and a good future for itself and its own national security, they have a reason to want Ukraine to be taken care of as well.

HASS: Yeah. How strongly do Taiwan people identify with democracy? Are public views about democracy and its effectiveness shifting at all? Or are they do they remain high?

CHEN: I think if we compare with other Western democracies, the survey indicator is about, I think it is about the same. We have strong commitment to democracy.

HASS: I have several questions that we've received from our global audience that I would like to present to you. The first comes from Luke Thompson, who's a political research analyst at Americans for Prosperity. He asks, what is the future of the KMT and the party in Taiwan? They have lost three

presidential elections in a row and young people are increasingly embracing Taiwanese identity. Will there be an opportunity for them to become a more Taiwan centric conservative party going forward? Nathan, do you want to start us off or Dr. Chen?

CHEN: I think Nathan can answer this question.

BATTO: Are you sure?

CHEN: Yeah [laughter].

BATTO: I think the KMT's biggest problem right now is that they don't have a clear, positive vision for the future. They had one. 15 years ago based on the '92 consensus and integrating into the Chinese economy, everybody getting rich and avoiding war. That vision is kind of falling apart in the face of things more authoritarian, China, slower Chinese economic growth and more Chinese aggression. And KMT really hasn't figured out a clear, positive message to sell to the public yet. And so until they do that, I think they might be limiting themselves to doing well in local elections, which they can still do.

HASS: Dr. Chen, do you want to add to that at all?

CHEN: I think in local elections we don't have a China issue or we don't have a China factor. So candidates for KMT are more likely to, easier to win local elections. However, go to presidential elections, I think KMT cannot handle China issue. So at this point, also during 2024 elections we can find people under 40, age under 40, they are, about over 50%, they vote for Ko Wen-je. So KMT cannot attract young voters. Neither did the DPP, Lai Ching-te. So, I think how to deal with the China issue and to attract younger voters, as I just demonstrated that young people are more likely to identify as Taiwanese. So I think these two issues are critical to the survival of KMT.

HASS: Very clear. Thank you. I have a methodology, methodological question that I want to ask you, Dr. Chan, and then we'll turn to Craig for the final question. The question comes from Chris Carteron,

who is the president of Tri-Orient Investments. He asks, given that people in Taiwan are often not so willing to be open about very personal concerns, how should the world read polls and surveys that try to express the people's fears over an attack or willingness to come to Taiwan's defense? How do research organizations such as National Chengchi University's Election Study Center address this issue?

CHEN: Nathan, do you have an answer for this?

BATTO: I'm not sure people in Taiwan are hesitant to express their opinion.

HASS: Okay. Craig, we have a question from a [unintelligible] who's a research analyst for ISIS and US National University of Singapore. And the question is basically, how does Taiwan security question impact US-Asia alliances? Is it possible that this aggregate views of Taiwan from views toward America's support for allies in Asia more broadly?

KAFURA: Yeah, it's a good question. I would say that Americans clearly think about their alliances in Asia, their relations with countries in Asia differently depending on the country in question. It's not just, here's all our countries in Asia and here's how we think about them as a bloc. So when we ask Americans about South Korea, for example, Americans think about South Korea primarily, it seems in the context of North Korea and concerns about North Korea. When concerns about North Korea are higher, when North Korea's in the news more prominently, Americans are more likely to say, yes, we would come to the defense of South Korea. And consequently, when news about North Korea drops off, American support for defending South Korea drops off because the threat seems less prominent.

When we ask about Japan, Americans seem to think about Japan security issues primarily in the context of China, although this might also be because Japan's security issues are primarily in the context of China. And so we get lower levels of support for defending Japan than we do South Korea, because we're asking about different potential conflicts.

We've also asked about Australia, for example, a longtime US ally. And I think Americans, when it comes to Australia, are a little bit perplexed about, well, Australia is very far away from these countries. Do we need military bases there? They don't think about Australia necessarily as being part of these sort of East Asia security issues. And so Americans do think about Taiwan differently than these other potential countries. There are some similarities, obviously. When we ask about countries like Japan or Taiwan getting into a conflict with China you see the similar concerns come up. And so you get similar levels of support. To a certain extent, it's a question of. Is the US going to get into a conflict with China, whether it's over the Senkakus or over time? But Americans do feel differently about these countries, whether it's a question of favorability or basing or a policies. So I would say there's a fair bit of, I would also say a surprising bit of nuance in how Americans think about some of these different bilateral relationships.

HASS: It's interesting. Final question. And feel free to tack on any parting comments or reflections from this conversation that you would like to with this final round. But I'll give each of you a chance to weigh in if you choose. It's an Elon Musk question. We received a question from Gary Sands, a senior analyst at Wiki Strat. And I'm going to say his question and then add to it for Craig to weigh in. How worried are people in Taiwan over the influence of China-friendly Elon Musk will be a significant player in President-elect Trump's administration. And then for Craig, how do you think about the role that Elon Musk may play in both policy, but also an influencing public opinion, given the strong megaphone that he has on these issues. But Dr. Chen, we'll start with you and then Nathan, and then we'll give Craig the final word and we'll wrap up. We have about two minutes left so we can be efficient.

CHEN: Okay. I think people in Taiwan are more concerned on Donald Trump, not Elon Musk.

HASS: Excellent. Nathan.

BATTO: I have no idea how people in Taiwan feel about Elon Musk. I barely know how I feel about Elon Musk And I think, I think Lu-Huei is right. I think we're paying attention to Donald Trump and Elon Musk as a secondary concern.

KAFURA: I found a recent Reuters poll, Ipsos Reuters poll: 56% of Americans have an unfavorable view of Elon Musk. I do think by tying himself so closely to the president that he's going to drag down his own approval ratings, not that he may care about that. I will say I think that he has put himself in a very interesting but potentially dangerous position. Donald Trump does not like other people to hog the spotlight. And a lot of Elon's major investments are in things that require a US government assent to keep making money. Tesla factories in China, space launch programs for the United States. I think we'll see if he can ride this particular tiger for the whole four-year term or if he's going to fall out of favor. It'll be interesting to watch.

HASS: It will be interesting to watch for sure. And on that note, I want to wrap up by thanking you, thanking National Chengchi University for being a co-host of this great event. It was substantive and I think it really enriched understanding of public attitudes and trends and public opinion really into Taiwan, cross-Strait issues, US Taiwan issues, as well as security in Asia. So thank you for doing such a service to raising public awareness on these critical questions. Goodbye.