

## The Taiwan Election

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### Q1: Taiwan held a presidential election on March 22. What are U.S. interests in that election?

**A1:** The just-completed election in Taiwan marks the fourth time that the Taiwanese people have gone to the polls to directly elect their president. It is testament to the fact that a country with an authoritarian government can transform itself to become a vibrant and enduring democracy. This is an accomplishment that should be championed by the free peoples of the world. Taiwan's election was free and fair and reflects the choice of the Taiwanese people. The United States has a strong interest in further democratic consolidation and economic prosperity in Taiwan.

### Q2: Will Taiwan's relations with mainland China change as a result of this election?

**A2:** The winner of the election, *Kuomintang* (KMT) candidate Ma Ying-jeou, is committed to a less confrontational stance toward mainland China than that adopted by Taiwan's current president Chen Shui-bian, who has been in office for eight years. Growing cross-strait tension during this period has increased the risk of a military conflict between the mainland and Taiwan, which would almost surely involve the United States. Eased cross-strait tensions that reduce the possibility of a military confrontation serve the interests of all three parties—the United States, China, and Taiwan. On the economic front, Ma Ying-jeou is likely to lift many of the barriers to cross-strait flows of people, goods and services, and investment and quickly establish direct cross-strait cargo and commercial flights, which will ensure that the island is tightly integrated into global business networks, and thereby bolster Taiwan's economic competitiveness and benefit foreign investors as well.

The election also creates a new opportunity to resume cross-strait political dialogue, which has lapsed for a decade. Ma Ying-jeou and his KMT party have consistently indicated a willingness to return to a vague understanding of "one China," which is referred to as the "1992 consensus" because it was reached by Taiwanese and Chinese negotiators in that year. For Ma, each side of the Taiwan Strait must be allowed to have its respective interpretation of one China, and he insists that one China is the Republic of China, which is Taiwan's formal name. If Beijing and Taipei can agree to not dispute the definition of one China, then talks could be launched to address a number of highly contentious issues, including Taiwan's desire for expanded participation in international organizations. Both the KMT and Beijing have held out the possibility of signing a peace treaty that would end the civil war and define a new relationship between the two sides of the strait. However, reaching such an agreement requires overcoming many obstacles and is unlikely to be signed in a short period of time.

### Q3: How will China react to the election of Ma Ying-jeou?

**A3:** Beijing will silently welcome the ouster of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) from power. China will consider taking goodwill gestures to encourage Ma to improve cross-strait ties, but it may wait until after Ma is inaugurated president on May 20. For cross-strait relations to significantly improve, the mainland will have to offer Taiwan much more than it has offered in the past and persuade the Taiwanese people that there are benefits for them in a closer cross-strait relationship. Beijing should create concrete opportunities for Taiwan to participate in the international community and reduce its military buildup opposite the island. If the Mainland fails to take such initiatives, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for Ma Ying-jeou to sustain a policy of good will and cooperation toward China.

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