

TAIWAN ELECTION RESULTS — GOOD FOR INDIA, BAD FOR CHINA

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

In an excruciating but efficient electoral campaign, Taiwan's estimated 69 per cent of 19 million eligible voters surprised everyone by [electing incumbent Vice President Lai Ching-te to become President](#). This is an unprecedented third win for the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), albeit with a smaller majority.

The DPP candidate Lai secured 5.5 million or 40.1 per cent of votes, while the opposition Kuomintang (KMT) candidate Hou Yu-ih got 4.6 million or 33.5 per cent and [Taiwan](#) People's Party (TPP) candidate Ko Wen-je about 3.6 million or 26.5 percent of vote share. The going for Lai is tough, given that KMT and TPP have a majority in the Legislative Yuan where important bills need to be passed. However, despite the political divide, Taiwan sent a clear message to Beijing that its intimidation does not work.

Moreover, by consistently participating in all eight presidential elections with nearly 70 per cent of voters turning up each time since the first elections in 1996, the Taiwanese have questioned the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) claim for representation and political legitimacy. Taiwan's democracy thus stands as a beacon with the communist party-state authoritarian rule clamping down on Hong Kong.

Since the 19th Communist Party Congress in 2017, Beijing has been dishing out its authoritarian party-state "China model" to the rest of the world. It has criticised democracies for being corrupt, cacophonous, ineffective in addressing the Covid pandemic, using money power during elections, and engaging in fraudulent practices. By embracing competitive politics, bringing the decision-making processes closer to the people, periodic elections and maintaining relatively higher growth rates, Taiwan is conveying how shallow and dangerous the "China model" could be.

By electing Lai, the Taiwanese electorate is cocking a snook at Beijing's intimidating tactics that began during the first elections in 1996 when China launched live missile fire across the Taiwan Straits. That did not deter the Taiwanese. In the last few years, China has flown thousands of air and naval sorties, crossed the imaginary median line, intruded into Taiwan's air defence identification zone and even conducted cyber attacks and influenced operations in Taiwan to subjugate the will of the electorate. This did not frighten the Taiwanese either.

Lai, however, will have a tough time during his tenure facing China's reported 2027 invasion scenario. The People's Liberation Army centennial falls in that year and it is speculated that "China's rejuvenation" should start by integrating with Taiwan. To become a maritime power, it was argued that China should first invade Taiwan. Even though President Xi Jinping reportedly denied any such invasion during his November 15, 2023 meeting with US President [Joe Biden](#) in Filoli estate, San Francisco, given China's unpredictable behaviour and disregard for international norms, Lai has to be on guard.

Lai, a professed "pragmatic worker for Taiwan's independence" is constrained by the lack of internal political cohesion, support in the Legislative Yuan, asymmetry in power relations across the Straits as well as lack of explicit support from the international community for pursuing any independence movement. He is likely to mellow down, but remain firm on challenges coming from across the Straits. Significantly, there is a definitive new-found self-respect among the

electorate in Taiwan today that deters China from military invasion.

As the largest democracy, India is weighing its options in the emerging situation in the Taiwan Straits. It is noticeable that India has not sent official congratulatory messages to Taipei, unlike the United States, Europe and other countries. Nevertheless, as China disregards all agreements with India on the borders, and has taken the Kashmir issue to the United Nations thrice in 2019 and 2020, New [Delhi](#) is sending signals of a change in its perception of the “one China” policy. Since 2010, India had not reiterated such a position in any official announcement.

Secondly, as China’s aggressive posturing in the Taiwan Straits increased in the last few years, India advocated “restraint, avoidance of unilateral actions to change status quo, de-escalation of tensions and efforts to maintain peace and stability in the region”. Since the launch of its “Look East” and the recent “Act East” policies, India is dependent on maritime trade and investments flowing through the Taiwan Straits, the South China Sea and other maritime domains. Any invasion of Taiwan is bound to destabilise the region, thus affecting India’s rise.

Thirdly, bilateral contacts have been stepped up between India and Taiwan with the three former chiefs of Army, Navy and Air Force of India visiting Taipei last year and several deals to set up semiconductor manufacturing centres were made by both sides, besides the visits of parliamentarians and increasing people-to-people contacts. Yet, the democratic ideological glue is missing in India’s cautious response to Taiwan’s elections.

Taiwan’s “New Southbound” policy, refurbished under current President Tsai Ing-wen, is likely to be continued by Lai, even though it appears to be losing momentum, specifically regarding the South Asian region. Free Trade Area proposals between India and Taiwan are also in limbo and need fresh thinking and thrust.

At the brass-tacks level, the Indian Election Commission could take a cue from the order, efficiency and swiftness with which vote counting and election results were declared in a span of four hours from the time of closing the voter booths. Even though India has to address over 800 million voters, there are several areas where institutional cooperation is possible for mutual benefit. Intensification of media and civil society interactions is also necessary.

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