

Summary of John Hsieh's Talk

Who Will Win the 2008 Presidential Election? Social Cleavages, Political Parties, and Electoral Politics in Taiwan

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1. Tremendous stability in Taiwan elections

From the viewpoint of electoral politics, Taiwan's political landscape has been changing over the past decades. But this change is quite gradual. Following description provides a general background regarding the development of Taiwan's electoral politics since 1989.

In the 1990s, the PAN-KMT or PAN-BLUE camp regularly obtained 47-48% of vote. We may call this KMT's vote share as "normal vote" in Taiwan.

It would be easier to predict results for legislative than for presidential elections. Because there is just one seat in a presidential election, so many idiosyncratic factors may seep in. On the other hand, in a legislative election, because many seats are available, the idiosyncratic factors will only affect some of the seats at most.

Lee Teng-hui got 54% of vote in the 1996 presidential election, but a lot of his vote share was from traditional DPP voters after China fired missiles of Taiwan coast. Also, in 1996, LTH actually lost almost 25% of the total vote to KMT renegade candidates

In 2000, only 39% of the voters named for DPP. DPP won because of split in KMP (Pan blue) camp.

In 2004, the results from most pre-election surveys indicated that the proposition of "normal vote" seemed to hold until the occurrence of the shooting incident on March 19.

<Pre-election poll right after the shooting incident on March 19, 2004>

Pan-Blue	38.3%
Pan-Green	36.7%
No response	20%
Not voting	4.4%

Political scientists usually use underlying cleavages in Western democracies to judge party strength, such as class, religion, language, urban-rural divides, environmentalism, even though political parties no longer play such a strong role in many Western democracies.

2. What determines attachment to party in Taiwan?

It's always about cross-strait relations. And there is a strong consistency in public attitudes toward cross-strait relations.

<Poll: Independence vs. Reunification, 2003-2006>

	Independence	Status Quo	Reunification
2003	13.5%	52%*	20.4%
2004	21	57*	13.5
2005	21	56*	17

*Many of these respondents have different attitudes – many favor independence or reunification but feel it is not feasible.

The bottom line is: people in favor of the status quo are more likely to vote for KMT than for DPP. Based on the consistency of public attitudes toward cross-strait relations, Taiwan's political landscape in terms of Pan-Green vs. Pan-Blue has been quite stable.

Indeed there is a pro-independence sentiment recently, but very gradual. During his electoral campaign in 2004, Chen Shui-bian and his people thought they would lose the election and were aiming for 2008 or 2012. Thus, instead of moving to the center to win the election, Chen moved to agitate the people at the pro-independence extreme and intended to build up the momentum to change political landscape in the future..

Public opinion toward cross-strait relations changes if we use different question wordings. For example:

“If China does not attack, would you support independence?” The number for independence goes up dramatically – to 60%.

“If China becomes a democracy, would you support reunification? Support for reunification goes to 49%.

In fact, a lot of people answered “yes” to both questions, which indicates that they are flexible.

After reclassifying respondents, we obtained the results as follows:

	Independence*	Status Quo	Reunification**
2003	33%	29.7%	29.1%
2004	43.5	27.4	23.1
2005	40.0	29.2	27.6

* Support under some conditions and would never support unification under any circumstance

** Support reunification under some conditions and would never support independence under any circumstance.

The respondents favoring pro-independence almost always attach to Pan-Green while those favoring pro-reunification attach to Pan-Blue. But which party do the respondents

favoring status quo attach to? Those favoring status quo consistently show strong support for Pan-Blue.

Of status quo respondents who support Pan-Blue

63.2% in 2003

65.2 % in 2004

71.7% in 2005

In Taiwan's society, there is nothing but cross-strait relations as the dominant cleavage shaping people's party attachments.

3. Conclusion

The change in the electoral system for the Legislative Yuan in 2008 (to single member districts) will reinforce this two-camp (or two-party) system.

Under normal circumstances, Pan-Blue or Pan-KMT will win the 2008 presidential election. If Ma Ying-Jeou runs, Pan-Blue will do even better.

Q & A

Q Does it matter who the DPP candidate is?

A Only marginally

Q If KMT nominates a clean candidate without too many problems – is it likely to win Taipei this year?

A If Pan-Blue is united its candidate will win, even a yellow dog.

Q Could the next presidential election also be abnormal?

A Yes, the presidential election is more likely than LY election to be “abnormal” – but still, KMT is likely to be favored