



# Challenges and Opportunities for Democracies: The Case of Taiwan

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- **MP, Taiwan (DPP)**
- **Secretary-General, DPP Legislative Yuan Party Caucus**
- **Non-Executive Vice-President, Liberal International (LI)**

A photograph of a woman with short dark hair, wearing a light blue blazer, sitting at a desk and speaking into a microphone. She is smiling and has her hands clasped near the microphone. There are papers on the desk in front of her.

**2020- Legislator of the Legislative Yuan,  
Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)**

**2024- Chairperson, Taiwan Parliamentary Human  
Rights Commission**

**2010- Associate Professor, Department of Sociology,  
National Taiwan University**

**2008-2009 Chairperson, Awakening Foundation**

**1990 Chief Conductor, The Wild Lily Student  
Movement**

# About Taiwan...

- Colonized by the Netherlands, Spain, and Japan
- A young democracy



(source: pytyczec/www.alamy.com)

- 30** years since our first direct presidential election
- 3** peaceful democratic transfers of power
- #2** Freest country in Asia (Freedom House)
- 40%+** of Members of Parliament are **women**
- #1** Happiest country in East Asia (2026 World Happiness Report)
- #1** most severely attacked by **disinformation** (V-Dem 2024)

# *Part 1*

## The Path of Taiwan's Democracy

# Brief History of Taiwan's Democracy

- 1895 The Qing Dynasty lost Taiwan to Japan after First Sino-Japanese War
- 1895 - 1945 Colonized by Japan
- 1945 Following Japan's surrender in WWII, Taiwan was placed under the ROC Administration (in accordance with the Cairo Declaration)
- 1949 Defeated by the CPP, KMT (Chinese Nationalist Party) fled to Taiwan



1943: U.S. President Roosevelt, U.K. Prime Minister Churchill, and ROC President Chiang Kai-shek met at the Cairo Conference.

The Cairo Declaration stipulated that Taiwan be restored to the ROC, providing a legal basis for Taiwan's post-war status.

(source: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration)

# 1947-1996

## Three Critical Events

### Led to Taiwan's First Direct Presidential Election

- 1947 The February 28 Massacre
- 1979 The Formosa Incident
- 1990 The Wild Lily Student Movement

# 1947 The February 28 Massacre



## ● The February 28 Massacre (1947)

### *It begins with...*

a crackdown on smuggled cigarettes, which sparked intense clashes between authorities and the public. As the Taiwanese people demanded political reform, the KMT government cracked down on the protests, resulting in an estimated 18,000 to 28,000 deaths, including many local intellectuals and elites.

- Martial law was imposed in 1949 and remained in effect for 38 years—making it **one of the world's longest-lasting periods of martial law**
- The tensions between 'mainlanders' and local Taiwanese have deeply influenced Taiwanese self-identity and fueled the rise of **the Taiwan independence movement**

# The 1979 Formosa Incident:

## The big turning point for Taiwan's democracy



A group of democracy leaders associated with **Formosa Magazine** organized a rally on December 10, 1979, Human Rights Day.

They proposed three demands:

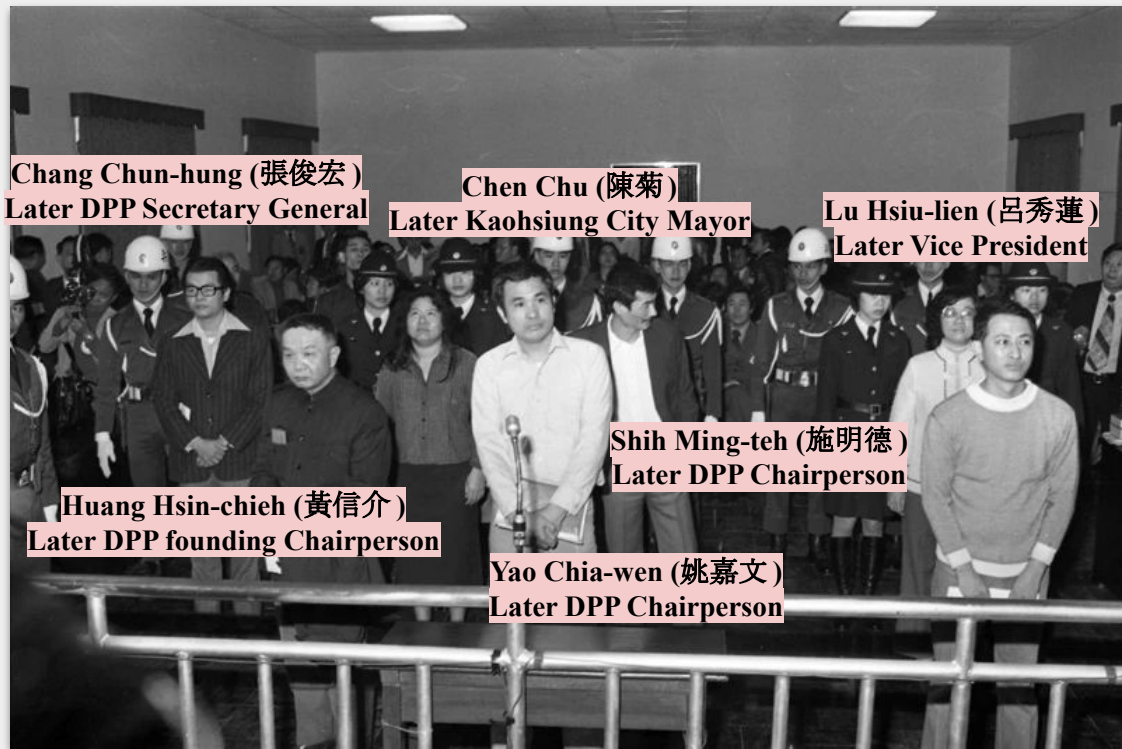
- The lifting of martial law
- The democratic election of the Legislature
- The amendment of the Constitution

Unfortunately, the rally became **a violent clash** between riot police and the crowd

In the following days, **the KMT government started arresting democracy leaders**

# The 1979 Formosa Incident

## Public trial



圖／聯合報系資料

照

International pressure led to **the first-ever public trial**, allowing them to articulate their ideal to the public

Public awareness raised

Afterward, **their families and their defense lawyers ran for public office**

Though elections at that time were limited, they continued to **gain increasing support year after year**

*6,000 students occupied Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall for a week to demand the dissolution of the "Ten-Thousand-Year Assembly"*



President Lee Teng-hui met with students and pledged fundamental democratic reforms.

Leading to **the first full legislative election in 1992** and **the first direct presidential election in 1996**.



**The 1990 Wild Lily Student Movement:  
Pushed Taiwan toward full legislative elections**

## Looking back at our democratic journey of decades

- 1. A legacy of sacrifice**
- 2. People were willing to support shared values and ideals, fueling the movement with energy, money, and ballots**
- 3. Powerful alliance between civil society and the opposition movement**

# *Part 2*

## Challenges for Taiwan's Democracy

—————China

# 1. Economic Threats



- *In 2008*, the KMT president took office and started to develop close economic cooperation with China by **signing the first comprehensive trade** agreement between Taiwan and China
- *In 2010*, investments in China accounted for over 80% of Taiwan's overseas investment
- **KMT was regarded as having shifted its stance from being Anti-Communist to Pro-China**

# The Sunflower Movement (2014)

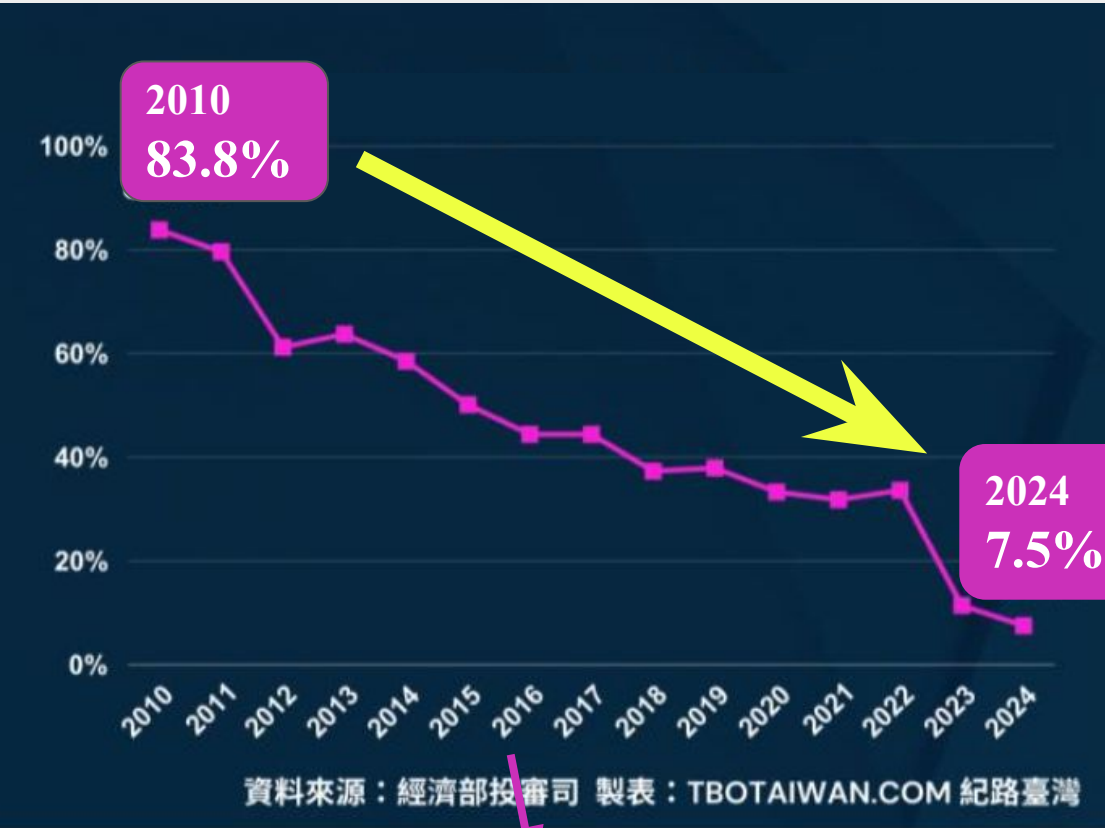


In fear of economic integration would lead to political unification, the movement erupted to **stop further cooperation with China.**

It halted the economic integration agreement and **increased the young generation's political awareness.**



# The proportion of Taiwan's outward investment toward China (as a percentage of total outward investment)



The movement led to President Tsai Ing-wen's sweeping victory in 2016.

Her strategic shift in economic policy resulted in a significant decline in investment toward China

2016: President Ma left office, President Tsai took office

**Economic threats are addressed, but there are more...**

- **Military Threats**
- **Political Threats: Disinformation & Infiltration**

## 2. Military Threats



### Our Solutions:

- President Lai pledged to raise the national defense budget **to 3.3% of GDP by 2030**
- The Legislature is currently deliberating on a special budget bill for a \$40 billion defense program

# 3. Political Threats: Disinformation

Asia | Strait up lies

## China is flooding Taiwan with disinformation

With elections looming, China wants Taiwanese voters to think America is their greatest threat

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IMAGE: XINMEI LIU

Picture sources: The Economist

Taiwan has been ranked as the world's #1 target of foreign disinformation for 11 consecutive years (V-Dem)

### In Response:

- All government agencies are mandated to rapidly clarify and respond to misleading information
- Many NGOs have created independent fact-checking websites as well as tools that can be embedded in social media apps.

# *Part 3*

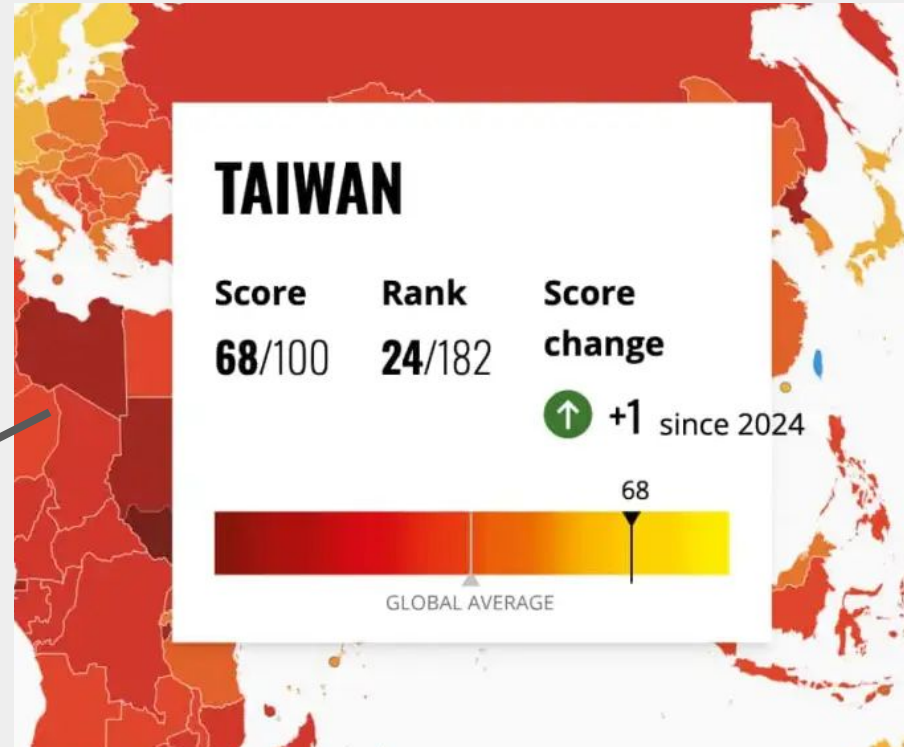
Challenges and Threats also Bring Us *Opportunities*.

# 1. Rising Degree of Transparency

Taiwan is often seen as deeply politically polarized

However, intense cross-party oversight is actually driving a rise in transparency

- Ranked the world's **#24** most transparent country out of the 182 countries surveyed



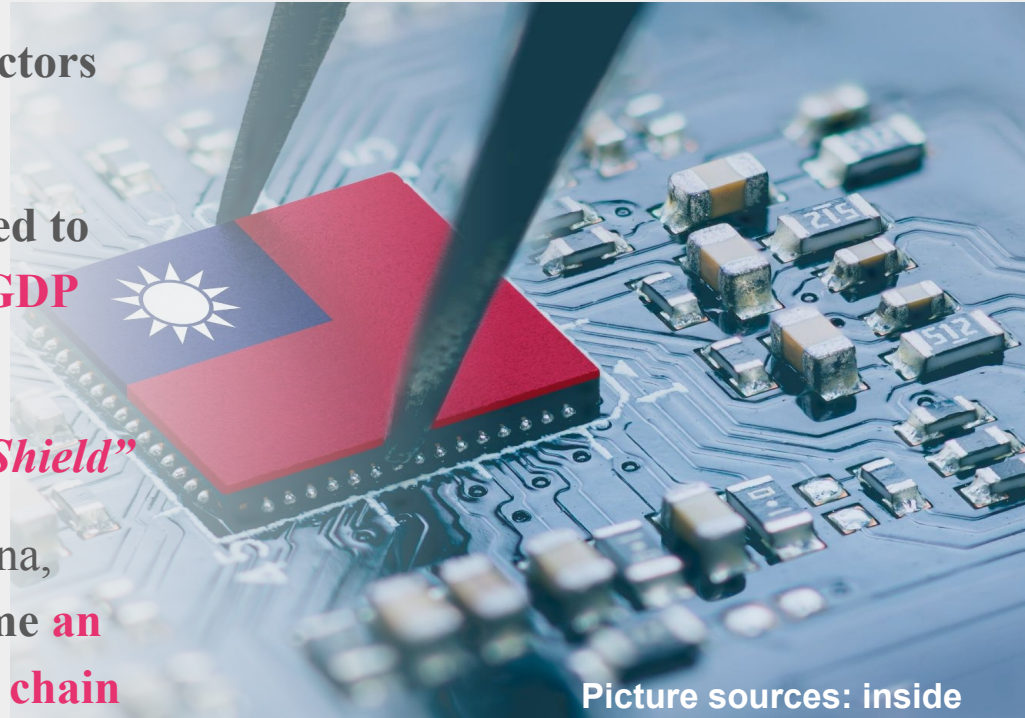
## 2.A Possible “Silicon Shield” and Non-Red Supply Chain

**92%** of the world’s advanced semiconductors are produced in Taiwan

A conflict in the Taiwan Strait is estimated to **cost the global economy 9.6% of global GDP in its first year** (Bloomberg Economics)

This is why the world calls it the **“Silicon Shield”**

As the world recognizes the risks from China, Taiwan is not just ready—we have become **an indispensable part of the non-red supply chain**



Picture sources: inside

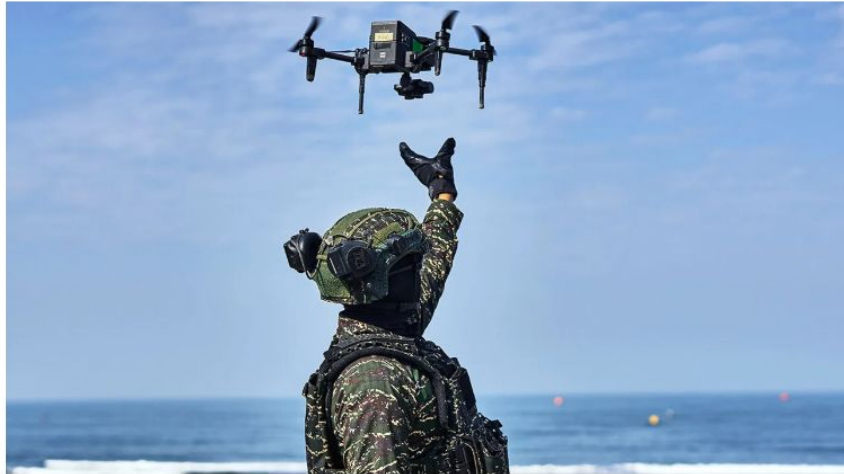
# Emerging Drone Industry is Another Example

Asia | "China-free" drones

## Taiwan's bid to export drones free of Chinese parts is taking off

The island's unmanned aerial vehicles are already in use on Ukraine's front line

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PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES

Picture sources: The Economist

## The Economist:

- A local Taiwanese industry leader has been **developing 100% 'China-free' drones since 2016**
- Half the price of those made in Japan or South Korea
- China currently accounts for 70-80% of global UAV production, which is increasingly seen as a security risk.
- As the West weans itself off Chinese technology, **Taiwan has made a 'flying start' to fill the gap**

### 3. Highly Active Civil Society: The Great Recall Campaign



“Citizens Safeguard Democracy”

Beyond protesting at the Legislative Yuan, citizens launched a recall campaign against 31 KMT lawmakers (out of 36)

While the recall efforts did not succeed, they served as a stern warning to those in power

Triggered by unconstitutional bills passed by pro-China lawmakers, public anger reached a breaking point in 2025, leading 100,000 citizens to surround the Legislative Yuan



# 3. Highly Active Civil Society:

## “Shovel Superheros” for Disaster Relief

During the Hualien disaster, 500,000 people across Taiwan showed up to help.



## Train stations packed with people rushing to help.



In times of crisis  
—whether democratic or  
environmental—  
our people stand up.

This grassroots energy  
transforms vulnerability  
into collective strength.

**Civil society is the  
backbone of our resilience  
and our path forward.**

**You have witnessed every step of our growth and resilience.**

**In today's geopolitical instability, China isn't just a threat to Taiwan; it's a threat to every democratic souls in Asia.**

**History shows us that alone we are vulnerable, but together we are invincible.**

**Solidarity is our superpower—and thank you all for being the superheroes of democracy!**

