

## Taiwan's 2012 Elections – Election Results Analysis

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Taiwan's 13<sup>th</sup> presidential election and its 8<sup>th</sup> legislative elections were concurrently held on Jan. 14, 2012. Kuomintang (KMT) candidate Ma Ying-jeou, the incumbent president, won reelection with a 51.6 percent share of the vote, defeating Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate Tsai Ing-wen and (People First Party Chairman) James Soong, who had joined the race following a signature campaign. In the legislative elections the KMT won 64 of 113 seats in the legislature with a 48.18 percent share of the vote, securing a continued absolute majority.

Originally voter turnout was expected to reach more than 80 percent, because the two major elections were merged for the first time and Ma and Tsai were running neck-and-neck during the entire race so that the election outcome was hard to predict and the campaign fiercer and more nerve-racking than ever before. But surprisingly only 13.45 million of the 18.07 million eligible voters went to cast their ballots for a turnout of just 74.38 percent, the lowest ever registered in a presidential election, which became a focal point in discussions in the wake of the elections.

### Ma Retains Power, Massively Loses Votes

This is how the three pairs of candidates for president and vice president fared in the election: KMT candidate Ma and his running mate Wu Den-yih won 6,891,139 votes for a 51.6 percent share of votes cast. His formidable challenger, the DPP's Tsai and her running mate Su Jia-chyuan, garnered 6,093,578 votes for a 45.53% share of the vote. The PFP's Soong and his running mate Lin Ruey-shiung, whose performance was originally believed to crucially influence the election

outcome, received only 369,588 votes, or 2.77 percent of the vote, as the blue camp gave strong play to the “dump/save” effect. Consequently Ma and Wu were elected the Republic of China's 13th president and vice president.

Although Ma managed to win reelection and retain power, he lost a high number of votes in comparison with the previous presidential election. In 2008 Ma garnered 7,659,014 votes compared to 5,444,949 votes for DPP presidential hopeful Frank Hsieh. Not only that he opened a lead of 2,214,065 votes over his challenger, but he won a 58.45 percent share of votes cast, the highest registered in a direct election of the president. Even the father of Taiwanese democracy, Lee Teng-hui, did not do as well in Taiwan's first-ever democratic presidential election in 1996, taking only 54 percent of the votes cast.

But after four years in power Ma faces a quite arduous road ahead in his second term: The DPP's Tsai-Su ticket won a 4.08 percentage-points higher share of votes cast than the 41.55 percent taken by the Hsieh-Su ticket in 2008. The vote gap between Ma and Tsai narrowed to 797,561 votes. On the other hand Ma's percentage of votes cast slipped 6.85 percentage points to 51.6 percent, although the blue camp had exploited all its administrative resources before the election to lash out at its opposition party rivals. It had also played a dump-save card, claiming that “voting for Soong equals voting for Tsai,” to undermine Soong's popularity at any cost, and even compelled Hualien County Magistrate Fu Kun-chi to clamor “cast the presidential vote for Ma, the party vote for the PFP,” effectively urging voters to split their votes. The “anti-Ma” camp – combining Tsai's 45.63 percent and Soong's 2.77 percent – won a total of 48.40 percent of votes cast. In other words the gap

between the “pro-Ma” and the “anti-Ma” forces has narrowed to 1.4 percentage points so that we could say the two camps match each other in strength.

Given this reciprocal up and down, a look at the most simple figure, the number of votes garnered, shows that Ma has lost 1,416,504 votes after ending his first term in office. In such a political environment the coming four years as president constitute a formidable challenge for Ma.

### Two Small Parties Voted into Parliament Blue Camp Retains Absolute Majority

In the 8th legislative elections the KMT won 64 of 113 seats and are still holding an absolute majority in the legislature. The DPP won 40 seats, the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) and the PFP grabbed 3 seats each, whereas the Non-Partisan Solidarity Union won 2 seats, and 1 seat went to an independent lawmaker.

Since Taiwan adopts a “single seat, dual vote” system for the legislative elections, the 113 seats in the legislature include 79 seats for lawmakers who are directly elected in their constituencies (73 geographical constituencies and 6 aboriginal constituencies) and 34 seats that are allocated in party-list proportional representation. For the directly elected seats the KMT took 48.18 percent of votes cast, winning 48 seats. The DPP garnered 43.8% of votes cast, taking only 27 seats. Although the KMT and DPP were only 4.38 percentage points apart in terms of share of the vote, the KMT won 21 more seats in the constituencies than the DPP.

The disproportionate difference between the blue and green camps’ share of the vote and their number of seats won, highlights the problem of “unequal voting power” in single-seat constituencies. This does not only seriously narrow

small parties’ room for survival, but also goes against the spirit of democratic elections. Therefore voices have again grown louder after the election that advocate a constitutional amendment to review the electoral system. Even Legislative Yuan President Wang Jin-pyng believes there is room for overhauling the electoral system. However, the KMT, which benefits most from campaigning in single-seat constituencies, is certainly not willing to change the rules of the game.

The party list seats are allocated based on the percentage of votes cast, won by each political party. As a result, the KMT won 16 seats with 44.55 percent of the vote and the DPP 13 seats with 34.62 percent of the vote. The TSU, which had not nominated any candidate in the electoral districts, garnered 8.96 percent of votes cast, exceeding the 5 percent threshold, and becoming the third largest force in the Legislative Yuan with three seats. The PFP, which took 5.46 percent of votes cast, gained two seats.

It deserves our attention that the DPP made substantial gains in comparison to 2008 both in the presidential elections and in the districts in the legislative elections growing 4.08 percentage points and 5.15 percentage points, respectively. However, the DPP lost support in the party list vote. In 2008, when the corruption scandal surrounding then President Chen Shui-bian and his family had created the most unfavorable situation for the DPP, it still garnered 36.91 percent of the party list votes. If the DPP, now that it has stepped out of the doldrums, only wins 34.62 percent of the party list votes, losing 2.29 percentage points and gaining one seat less of the proportionally allocated seats than in the previous elections, this is actually a big disgrace.

On the other hand the decline in the DPP’s share of party votes is not surprising at all. Early on when the DPP nominated its candidates for

the party list, it drew fire from people outside the party, because the candidates were virtually all key figures from the DPP's various factions. It was quite obvious that the entire party list was a product of factional bargaining, while there wasn't a single face representing expertise and professionalism, disadvantaged groups, or ethics and virtue among the list candidates. From all sides there were calls for retaliation and even demands that the DPP put together a completely new list. But at the time the DPP headquarters remained unmoved. When the election results were announced and the DPP fared badly as expected with regard to the party list votes, the worries of some inside the party were proven true.

However, although the new legislature will still be KMT controlled, the political landscape within the Legislative Yuan has visibly changed: While the KMT has an absolute majority, the number of its seats in the legislature has plummeted from 81 to 64. In contrast the DPP increased from 27 to 40 seats, while the TSU and the PFP hold 3 seats each. As for the functioning of the Legislative Yuan in the future there will not only be the two major parties, the KMT and the DPP, but also two minor parties, the TSU and the PFP, so that negotiations between the government and the opposition parties will become less predictable.

### Timing of Election Affects Turnout

The Legislative Yuan elections were held concurrently with the presidential election for the first time this year, which markedly increased voter turnout in the legislative elections: While turnout in 2008 stood below 60 percent, it reached 74.47 percent for electoral district votes and 74.33 percent for party list votes. Ironically, although the merged elections pulled up voter turnout in the legislative elections, turnout hit a historic low of

74.38 percent in the presidential election. Historic data show that turnout in previous presidential elections reached 76.04 percent in 1996, 82.69 percent in 2000, 80.28 percent in 2004, and 76.33 percent in 2008, respectively.

Particularly striking is the fact that the typical phenomenon of higher turnout in the north and lower turnout in the south was even more pronounced this time: Since Jan. 14, one week before the Lunar New Year holiday, was chosen as date for the elections, those who wanted to cast their ballots were forced to return to their hometowns twice in in two weeks. Given the exhausting trip across the island and double travel costs, many workers and students were not very keen on returning home to vote. It is pretty obvious why the Ma government gave so much thought to the matter when choosing Jan. 14 as date for the elections.

In the following counties and cities voter turnout was higher than the nationwide average: Taipei City (76.78%), New Taipei City (75.90%), Taoyuan County, (74.69%), Hsinchu City (75.68%), Hsinchu County (76.07%), Miaoli County (74.63%), Taichung City (75.76%), and Kaohsiung City (75.91%). Aside from Kaohsiung City, all other locations are KMT strongholds. A high turnout there does, of course, give Ma a big boost.

Turnout was lower than the nationwide average in the following counties and cities: Keelung City (72.09%), Changhua County (73.46%), Nantou County (71.13%), Yunlin County (68.92%), Chiayi County (72.48%), Chiayi City (73.53%), Tainan City (74.18%), Pingdong County (72.67%), Taidong County (61.79%), Hualien County (64.64%), Penghu County (59.01%), Kinmen County (46.67%), and Lianchiang County (65.79%). Except for Keelung City, the reason for the low turnout is that citizens who work in

the north did not return home (to their registered address) to vote. The lion's share of locations with low turnout was counties and cities with "green voter support higher than blue voter support." A low turnout there naturally affects the overall number of votes garnered by the green camp and makes it impossible to give Tsai a boost.

One month ahead of the election public opinion polls indicated that Tsai would win 45 percent of the vote, Ma 47 percent, and Soong 8 percent, respectively. Eventually Tsai's share of the vote was in line with these expectations, but that Soong's supporters defected to Ma, which widened the gap between the green and blue camps, shows that the blue camp felt a strong "sense of crisis." The gap between the vote shares of Ma and Tsai widened further because voters registered in the south found it difficult to return from their jobs in the north to cast their votes. **B**