



Taiwan — Va-PoReg Country Report

Kailitz, Steffen, et al., 2026: Varieties of Political Regimes (Va-PoReg). Country Report Taiwan, Dresden: Hannah Arendt Institute for Totalitarianism Studies.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/JYEL7U>

[officially known as the Republic of China]

02/26/1898 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Japan]: In 1898, China ceded Taiwan to Japan after being defeated in the First Sino-Japanese War, as confirmed by the Treaty of Shimonoseky signed on 04/17/1895. Subsequently, Japanese forces arrived on the island on 05/29/1895 (Davison 2003, Lamley 2007). In 1898, General Kodama Gentarō assumed authority as governor-general of Taiwan, shifting control from Tokyo. He reduced military influence, placing domestic affairs under Gotō Shinpei, his civil administration chief. The governor-general could issue decrees following Tokyo's policy guidelines. The Japanese colonial regime in Taiwan exercised tight administrative control through the hoko system, a household surveillance system, and local police. It also allowed for limited self-government through the participation of Taiwanese in lower-level government councils and an island-wide consultative council. In 1915, Japanese forces ended Taiwanese armed resistance through a brutal “subjugation” campaign. Afterward, colonial governors became more open to Taiwanese involvement in higher government and educational institutions (Davison 2003, Lamley 2007). According to LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during the specified period. Both LIED and V-Dem’s PCLI classify political liberties as absent. For the relevant period, V-Dem’s JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem’s LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent.

10/25/1945 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Japan, Constitutional Monarchy]/Start Part of Other Country [of China, One-party Autocracy]: During the Cairo Conference from 11/22-26/1943, the Allies agreed that Taiwan would be ceded to the Kuomintang (KMT) government following Japan’s surrender in the Asia-Pacific War. Japan’s emperor ceased war efforts on 08/05/1945, and formally surrendered on 09/02/1945 (Davison 2003, Lamley 2007). On 10/25/1945, Japanese colonial rule over Taiwan formally ended and Taiwan was returned to the Republic of China (ROC). Subsequently, on 10/26/1945, the ROC government officially proclaimed Taiwan a province of China.^{228F¹} The Nationalists aimed to exert control over both the island’s economy and political matters. To fulfill these responsibilities, the central government of Mainland China appointed a provincial administration primarily composed of mainlanders (Lansford 2015). The ROC’s 1946 constitution established key political structures, including a president (indirectly elected) and a national assembly. Moreover, it established three bodies with parliamentary functions: the Legislative Yuan, the National Assembly, and the Control Yuan. Both the Legislative Yuan and the National Assembly were popularly elected. Finally, the constitution also introduced universal, secret, equal, and direct suffrage for citizens over the age of 20 (Rinza 2001).^{229F²} On 02/28/1947, an uprising occurred in Taiwan, briefly overthrowing the provincial administration. While not leading the uprising, the elite demanded increased control over governance and resources. However, military forces brutally suppressed the rebellion on 03/08/1947, with martial law imposed by Chen Yi. Following the incident, a provincial government was established on 04/22/1947 to provide advice on island administration, yet its influence remained limited. Positions in the provincial administration were mainly held by mainlanders, with only a few posts allocated to Taiwanese (Phillips 2007). From 11/21-23/1947, direct elections for the national assembly were held, covering both Taiwan and Mainland China, electing 2.961 delegates from across the country. This was the first election in which women and farmers were allowed to vote. However, fraud was widely reported, and

votes could not be casted in provinces controlled by Communist troops or Soviet forces (Rinza 2001).^{230F³} The politically active Taiwanese were divided into three groups: half-mountain, Taichung, and Ah Hai. While the half-mountain faction collaborated with the Nationalists, the Taichung, comprising Japan-era elites, and the Ah Hai, representing the young elite, harshly criticized Chen Yi's rule (Phillips 2007). In this period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is likewise classified by us as showing that political liberties are absent. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, and V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent.

12/07/1949 End Part of Other Country [of China, Communist Ideocracy]/Start One-Party Autocracy [as independent country]: In 1949, the Government of the Republic of China (ROC) lost the Chinese Civil War and retreated to Taiwan, declaring Taipei as the provisional capital of the ROC on 12/07/1949.^{231F⁴} Taiwan did not achieve national independence in the traditional sense. Instead, the Nationalist Party (KMT) regarded Taiwan as the only remaining free part of the ROC, while Mainland China became the People's Republic of China (PRC) (Rinza 2001). It was intended as a temporary refuge while nationalist forces regrouped to take the mainland but quickly became a de facto independent state (Wang 1951).^{232F⁵} During the subsequent era of authoritarian one-party rule, the parliament's constitutional powers were eroded, and the president announced Temporary Provisions Effective During the Period of National Mobilization for Suppression of the Communist Rebellion. These provisions mandated that all members of parliament of the National Assembly and the Legislative Yuan would serve until Mainland China was recovered (Rinza 2001). On 03/01/1950, Chian Kai-shek resumed the ROC presidency. On 12/11/1951, the Taiwan Provisional Provincial Assembly was established, succeeded in 1959 by the Taiwan Provincial Assembly. This assembly paralleled the functions of the Legislative Yuan but was perceived as more democratic due to direct elections. Nonetheless, the KMT effectively controlled debates and votes. Under Chiang Kai-shek's successor, Ching Chin-kuo, from 175 on the political regime began to liberalize. On 12/06/1980, elections for the National Assembly and Legislative Yuan were held, considered a milestone in competitive elections (Copper 2007). Before these elections, President Chiang Chin-kuo had agreed with Tangwai leaders and other independent candidates to allow their participation alongside KMT candidates. On 09/28/1986, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), the first official opposition party, gained legal status (Copper 2007, Rinza 2001). According to LIED, both executive and legislative elections were held, but they were not categorized as multiparty. According to Polity5, until 1974, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. From 1975 onward, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. Per FH, for 1972 to 1975, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. As classified by FH from 1976 to 1986, the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free. For the years 1949 to 1981, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, and V-Dem's PCLI is also classified by us as indicating that political liberties are absent. For the remainder of this regime period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as showing that political liberties are not truly present. From 1950 to 1974, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, and V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent. From 1975 onwards, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

12/01/1986 End One-Party Autocracy/Start Electoral Autocracy: On this date, the first multi-party election, with the KMT competing against the DPP were held. The KMT won most seats in the National Assembly and Legislative Yuan (Rinza 2001).^{233F⁶} On 07/15/1987, President Chiang Ching-kuo announced the end of martial law in Taiwan.^{234F⁷} In the national elections on 12/02/1989, the DPP won sufficient seats in the Legislative Yuan to propose legislation and control district and city executive offices, encompassing forty percent of the nation's population (Copper 2007). Based on our observations, both executive and legislative

elections were held during this period, but they were not categorized as multiparty, which contradicts the observations of LIED. LIED confirms the absence of competitive elections at this time. By V-Dem's CEI the elections are scored as not really clean from 1986 to 1989. The following two years the elections were classified with an ambiguous cleanliness. Concerning the overall conditions for the elections they were not really free and fair between 1986 and 1988. Afterwards the conditions became ambiguous (V-Dem EF&FI). Per FH's evaluation for 1986 and 1987, the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. For 1988, according to FH, the country is partly free with a score of 8, which we interpret as rather not free. As classified by FH for 1989 to 1991, the country is partly free with a score ranging from 6 to 7, which we place in the rather free category. LIED identifies political liberties as absent. We classify political liberties according to V-Dem's PCLI for 1986 as not really being present. V-Dem's PCLI indicates an ambiguous state of political liberties from 1987 to 1988 and somewhat political liberties from 1989 to 1991. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. In 1987, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. In 1988, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. From 1989 onwards, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive.

12/22/1991 End Electoral Autocracy/Start Electoral Democracy: On this date the National Assembly voted to repeal the so-called Temporary Provisions, authoritarian measures that dated to the time of the KMT's reversion to Taiwan (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 62). The 1991 constitutional amendment provided for elections to be held for the whole national assembly in December 1991, the first non-supplementary elections. In the corresponding elections on 12/22/1991, the KMT won a majority of the seats (69.11 percent) (Rinza 2001). On 12/19/1992, the first non-supplementary Legislative Yuan election was held, resulting in the victory of the opposition party DPP, increasing its representation from 14.4 percent to 31.1 percent (Copper 2007). Voter turnout averaged at 72% (Copper 1992: 74). The 1992 elections were the most free and fair elections thus far, with no candidates being excluded for political reasons, no serious accusations of interference and only a single charge of vote-rigging in the Hualien County. Nonetheless, certain constraints remained: the president was not popularly elected, the media remained state-controlled, giving the KMT a competitive advantage, and local election commissions were largely occupied by ruling party members (Nathan 1993). Based on our observations, both executive and legislative elections were held during this period, but they were not categorized as multiparty, which contradicts the observations of LIED. LIED still indicates no competitiveness for the elections during this period. Since 1992 elections are classified as somewhat clean by V-Dem's CEI and somewhat free and fair since 1991 by V-Dem EF&FI. According to FH, a score of 6 to 7 for 1992 designates the country as partly free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather free. Per FH's scoring for 1993, the country is classified as partly free with a score of 8, which we categorize as rather not free. As classified by FH for 1994 and 1995, the country is partly free with a score ranging from 6 to 7, which we place in the rather free category. For 1996, the country is classified by FH as free, scoring between 2 and 4, which we also place in the free category. Besides, according to LIED no political liberties were present for this time whereas our interpretation of V-Dem's PCLI underlines somewhat political liberties. According to the Polity5 indicator, during this period, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. V-Dem's LDI shows a not really score, which points into the direction of an electoral autocracy.

03/23/1996 End Electoral Democracy/Start Liberal Democracy: On this date, the first direct presidential elections which were considered the first free and fair elections in Taiwan took place (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 62-63). On 03/18/2000, competitive elections were won by the opposition party, DPP, ending more than

fifty years of Nationalist Party rule (Niou/Paolino 2003: 721-40, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 98-99). President Tasi Ing-wen was reelected in presidential elections on 01/11/2020 with 57.1 percent of the vote. During the election campaign, online disinformation, linked to the Chinese government, targeted Tsai, the DPP, and the democratic process. However, these efforts had only a limited impact on the election results.^{235F}⁸ Taiwan is a unicameral representative democracy that holds regular fair and free elections with peaceful transfers of power. The president is the head of state while the prime minister acts as the head of government. The judiciary is independent from other branches of government. Civil liberties and political rights are granted by the constitution and generally respected and enforced. As per FH's classification for this regime period, the country is considered free with a score ranging from 2 to 4, which we also interpret as free in our framework. Moreover, LIED affirms that political liberties are present since 2000. However, our interpretation of V-Dem's PCLI confirms full political liberties since 1997. Concerns regarding China's influence in election results through disinformation campaigns etc. remain yet, seem to have shown limited effect thus far. Most recent general elections were held on 01/13/24. Incumbent Tsai Ing-wen was ineligible to run again, and the DPP elected Lai Ching-te as their presidential candidate, who managed to secure the presidency with 40% of the vote. Voter turnout was high at approx. 71% amid pressure from China. Lai Ching-te seems likely to continue his predecessors China policy and is openly disliked by CPP leaders.^{236F}⁹ Despite political and military tensions with China looming over the elections and manipulation attempts, the election is considered fair and free.^{237F}¹⁰ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED affirms that the elections are competitive ever since the democratic transition. In addition, since 1996 V-Dem's CEI confirms a constantly clean electoral process. The elections are also classified as fully free and fair since 1998 (V-Dem EF&FI). According to the Polity5 indicator, from 1996 to 2003, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. From 2004 onward, the executive was subordinate to or held equal power with other institutions, indicating executive parity or subordination. Until 1999, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. From 2000 to 2008, from 2016 to 2018 and since 2020, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. For the remaining years, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were comprehensive.

Liberal Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Rigger 1999, Schubert 2003)

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taiwan_under_Japanese_rule

² https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Taiwan_2005?lang=en

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1947_Chinese_National_Assembly_election

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1953_Iranian_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat

⁵ <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-taiwan/>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1986_Taiwanese_legislative_election

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martial_law_in_Taiwan

⁸ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/taiwan/freedom-world/2023>

⁹ <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/01/13/asia/taiwan-presidential-election-results-intl-hnk/index.html>

¹⁰ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/taiwan/about-project-election-watch/2024>

References

- Copper, John F. (1992): Taiwan's 1992 Legislative Yuan Election, in: *World Affairs* 155, 71-79.
- Copper, John F. (2007): *Historical Dictionary of Taiwan (Republic of China)*. Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Davison, Gary M. (2003): *A Short History of Taiwan: The Case for Independence*. Westport: Praeger.
- Geddes, Barbara/Wright, Joseph/Frantz, Erica (2014): *Autocratic Regimes Code Book*. Version 1.2. Los Angeles, University Park, Bridgewater: UCLA, Pennsylvania State University, Bridgewater State University.
- Haggard, Stephan/Kaufman, Robert/Teo, Terence (2016): *Distributive Conflict and Regime Change: A Qualitative Dataset (Codebook)*. San Diego/Rutgers: University of California/State University of New Jersey.
- Lamley, Harry J. (2007): Taiwan under Japanese Rule, 1895-1945: The Vicissitudes of Colonialism, in: Rubinstein, Murray A. (Hrsg.), *Taiwan: A New History*. London: Routledge.
- Nathan, Andrew J. (1993): The Legislative Yuan Elections in Taiwan: Consequences of the Electoral System, in: *Asian Survey* 33, 424-438.
- Niou, Emerson/Paolino, Philip (2003): The Rise of the Opposition Party in Taiwan: Explaining Chen Shui-bian's Victory in the 2000 Presidential Election, in: *Electoral Studies* 22, 721-40.
- Phillips, Steven (2007): Between Assimilation and Independence: Taiwanese Political Aspirations Under Nationalist Chinese Rule, 1945-1948, in: Rubenstein, Murray E. (Hrsg.), *Taiwan: A New History*. London: Routledge, 275-319.
- Rigger, Shelley (1999): *Politics in Taiwan: Voting for Democracy*. London: Routledge.
- Rinza, Marianne (2001): Taiwan (Republic of China), in: Nohlen, Dieter, Grotz, Florian & Hartmann, Christof (Hrsg.), *Elections in Asia and the Pacific: A Data Handbook*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 524-570.
- Schubert, Gunter (2003): Das politische System Taiwans, in: Derichs, Claudia & Heberer, Thomas (Hrsg.), *Einführung in die politischen Systeme Ostasiens*. Opladen: Leske+Budrich, 327-362.
- Wang, Gung Hsing (1951): Nationalist Government Policies, 1949-1951, in: *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 227, 213-223.