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*and*

2) a Word file

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**An Election in Taiwan Angers China**



A recent election that took place on the other side of the world could have major **implications** for global politics.

On January 13, people on the small island of Taiwan chose Lai Ching-te to be their next president. Mr. Lai and his Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) won with around 40 percent of the vote.

Why was this election so significant? The big question for the Taiwanese people – and for the rest of the world – is how the election results will affect Taiwan’s relationship with China, its **superpower** neighbour just 180 kilometres away.

**A tough balancing act**

The problem is that the Chinese government insists that Taiwan is part of China. Since the 1990s, it has conducted various threatening activities to emphasize its military readiness to fight for this claim. These drills have included flying military aircraft near Taiwan, conducting missile tests, and deploying naval forces in nearby waters.

Yet Taiwan has been functioning as a **sovereign** nation for decades. It has its own constitution, it holds elections, and it issues passports recognized by many countries. It is also regarded as a beacon of human rights in Asia.

That has left the U.S. in a thorny diplomatic **quagmire**. It must decide which side to support and how much support to give that nation. If it gets the balance wrong, the threat of a conflict with China could escalate.

**First, a little history**

The question of who owns Taiwan has its roots in a **civil war** that was fought on mainland China from 1927 to 1949. The battle then was between two political groups – the Nationalists led by Chiang Kai-shek and the **Communists** headed by Mao Zedong. At stake was control of all of China.

In 1949, the Communists won the civil war and gave the country a new name – The People’s Republic of China (PRC). After the Nationalists were defeated, Chiang Kai-shek, along with about two million troops and supporters, retreated to Taiwan. There, they set up their own government, giving Taiwan the official title it still uses – The Republic of China.

At the time, both the Nationalists and the Communists recognized Taiwan as a part of China. However, the Nationalists did not accept defeat. They maintained that they were China’s only legitimate government and believed that one day they would return to take over the mainland. That never happened.

During this period, Chiang Kai-shek and his military ruled Taiwan with an iron fist, curtailing basic freedoms. But after he died in 1975, Taiwan began to **democratize,** and by the 1990s, it was holding free and fair elections.

**Shifting allegiances**

Meanwhile, changing **geopolitical** positions have clouded the question of Taiwan’s independence.

After the civil war, many Western nations refused to recognize the new government in Beijing. The **Cold War** was underway and China’s communist policies conflicted with Western values. But tensions eased between China and the West in the 1980s.   
In 1979, the U.S. had officially recognized the People's Republic of China and Beijing was starting to loosen its tight controls on the population and beginning to develop and modernize its economy.

Today, only 13 countries recognize Taiwan as a sovereign nation. And at China’s insistence, Taiwan is not a member of the United Nations. Since 2013, however, when the current **hardline** Chinese leader Xi Jinping took power, friction between China and the U.S. has been rising again.

**What’s in it for China?**

Why does China continue to maintain that Taiwan is just another Chinese province? There are several reasons. For one thing, it believes that Taiwan’s separation from China is just a **remnant** of the civil war and is therefore no longer meaningful. For another, Chinese authorities, who strongly promote national unity, say there can only be one sovereign state named China.

As well, Taiwan is strategically located. Controlling Taiwan would give China a military advantage in the Asia-Pacific region – an area it wants to dominate. What’s more, Taiwan, which has a healthy economy, is home to key technology companies. China would like to **capitalize** on that.

**What the election means**

As for the Taiwanese themselves, they hold a range of views about China. Some want to reunite with the mainland, some want to maintain the **status quo,** and some favour complete independence.

However, the election of Mr. Lai, who campaigned on a promise to protect the island’s sovereignty, was seen as showing support for an independent Taiwan. That has angered Chinese leaders, who were hoping for a vote in support of reunification.

Mr. Lai says he wants to avoid conflict, but he also seeks to strengthen ties with the United States and other democracies.

As for President Xi, he says that China is hoping for a “peaceful reunification.” But he hasn’t ruled out using force.

**Playing both sides**

That presents a challenge to the U.S. Officially, it says it is behind a “one China” policy it doesn’t recognize Taiwan as a country separate from China. Still, U.S. President Joe Biden has signalled that he backs Taiwan in other ways. For example, he has sent high-level U.S. officials to meet with leaders there. And he has also said in the past that the U.S. would come to Taiwan’s defence if China decided to invade the country. He has even sent American warships to the Taiwan Strait to demonstrate the U.S.’s strength.

Doing anything more would be a departure from a long-standing U.S. policy of “strategic **ambiguity**.” That would be worrisome, since top American officials believe that President Xi has ordered his army to be ready to invade the island by 2027.

So is there a real likelihood of a war between the U.S. and China? That remains to be seen.

**Taiwan and China**

Taiwan is in the South China Sea, west of Japan. It is separated from the Chinese mainland by the Taiwan Strait. One of the smallest countries in Asia by area, it is home to nearly 24 million people. Nearly all the people in Taiwan are Han, or ethnic Chinese.

China is a large nation in East Asia. With a population of over 1.4 billion, it is the world's second-most-populous country. About a third of the people live in cities. With an area of 9.6 million square kilometres, it is the third-largest country by total land area.

**ambiguity:** an unclear or indefinite position

**capitalize:** to gain a further advantage from a situation

**civil war:** a war between groups of people in the same country

**Cold war:** a period of geopolitical tension between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies, the Western Bloc and the Eastern Bloc, that started after the end of World War II in 1945 and lasted until 1991

**Communism:** a political and economic system that aims to create a classless society in which the major means of production, such as mines and factories, are owned and controlled by the state

**democratize:** to make a country or an institution more democratic

**geopolitical:** connected with the political relations between countries and groups of countries in the world, as influenced by their geography

**hardline:** having very fixed beliefs and being unlikely or unwilling to change them

**implication:** a possible effect or result of an action or a decision

**quagmire:** a difficult or dangerous situation

**remnant:** a part of something that is left after the other parts have been used, removed, destroyed, etc.

**sovereign:** free to govern itself; completely independent

**status quo:** the situation as it is now, or as it was before a recent change

**superpower:** one of the countries in the world that has very great military or economic power and a lot of influence, for example the U.S.

**Comprehension Questions**

1. List at least four important facts about China.

2. List at least four important facts about Taiwan.

3. When did the Chinese civil war occur? Which two main groups fought for control during this 22-year-long conflict?

4. Which group won control of mainland China? What happened to the defeated forces?

5. How has Taiwan changed politically since the Nationalists took control in 1949?

6. What three main political options are available to Taiwan's citizens regarding the island's political future?

7. Who won the recent election in Taiwan? What party does he lead and what policies does this party support?

8. Why is China upset about this election?

9. List at least three reasons why China believes Taiwan should not be independent.

10. What has China's president said about the future of Taiwan?

**Questions For Further Thought**

1. Imagine that you lived in a small country like Taiwan that was located close to a superpower like China, who rejects your right to be a sovereign state. What concerns would you have as a citizen? How might this affect your vote in a national election like the one that Taiwan has just had? Give examples to support your ideas.

2. The article talks about the “long-standing U.S. policy of ‘strategic ambiguity’ with respect to its support of Taiwan. As you see it, why would the U.S. want to maintain a certain neutrality in this situation? Provide reasons to support your thinking.

3. Some observers have drawn parallels between China’s wish to reclaim Taiwan and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, a former Soviet Republic. What lessons do you think Chinese President Xi Jinping may have learned from Russian President Putin’s invasion of Ukraine? How do you think these lessons might impact China’s intentions to reclaim Taiwan? Explain.

**Questions For Online Exploration**

*Note:* The links below are listed at **www.lesplan.com/links** for easy access*.*

1. Meet Taiwan's newly elected president, Lai Ching-te, and learn what his win means for Taiwan:  
**https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2299755075816** [9:26] (podcast)  
**https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/taiwan-china-tsai-ing-wen-president-election-1.5424623**

What did you learn?

2. See how other world leaders have reacted to Mr. Lai's win:  
**https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2299695171643** [1:17]

Which countries support this new government? Which countries do not?

3. Learn more about the complex relationship between Taiwan and China:  
**https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2299471939879** [5:40]  
**https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2299338307650** [4:23]

What questions do you still have?

4. Find out more about why China is angered by Taiwan's election:  
**https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/taiwan-election-china-president-1.7078215  
https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/taiwan-election-1.7083033  
https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2299338307649**[3:48]

What do you predict China's next move will be? Explain.

5. Explore why this election will have implications around the globe:  
**https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2298743363698** [3:43]  
**https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/taiwan-election-tsai-han-1.5421878**

6. Learn more about Taiwan:  
**https://www.worlddata.info/asia/taiwan/index.php  
https://knoema.com/atlas/Taiwan-Province-of-China**

Would you like to visit Taiwan? Why or why not?

**Putting It All Together**

**A. Write the letter that corresponds to the best answer on the line beside each question:**

\_\_\_\_\_\_ 1. **When did the Chinese Communist Party take full control of mainland China?** a) 1914 b) 1939  
 c) 1945 d) 1949  
 e) 1967

\_\_\_\_\_\_ 2. **What is Taiwan's official name?** a) People's Republic of China b) Democratic People's Union of Taiwan  
 c) Formosa d) Republic of Taiwan  
 e) Republic of China

\_\_\_\_\_\_ 3. **Who is the newly elected president of Taiwan?** a) Mao Zedong b) Narendra Modi   
 c) Lai Ching-te d) Xi Jinping  
 e) Chiang Kai-shek

**B.** Mark the statements **T** (**True**) or **F** (**False**). If a statement is **True**, write one important fact to support it on the line below. If a statement is **False**, write the words that make it true on the line below.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ 4. **True** or **False?** The DPP supports reunification with China.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ 5. **True** or **False?** The population of Taiwan is 24 million.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ 6. **True** or **False?** Taiwan is a member of the United Nations.

**C. Fill in the blanks to complete each sentence.**

7. A \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is a conflict between two or more groups in one country. (2)

8. DPP: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Progressive Party.

9. Only 13 countries officially recognize Taiwan as a(n) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ country.

**D. Respond to the following question in paragraph form. *(Use a separate sheet of paper if necessary.)***

10. As you see it, should Taiwan opt for reunification with China or maintain its independence? Give reasons to support your response.

**Assessment Rubric**

This rubric may be helpful in providing students with formative, strength-based feedback and/or assessing students’ responses holistically. This easy-to-modify activity is included in the doc file which you can download from:   
**www.lesplan.com/subscribers**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Emerging** | **Developing** | **Proficient** | **Extending** |
| **Supports thinking** | Answers or reflections are brief and include obvious facts/details/ evidence. | Answers or reflections are general and supported with some relevant facts/details/evidence. | Answers or reflections are clearly supported with specific, relevant facts/details/evidence. | Answers or reflections are insightful and supported with specific, relevant facts/details/evidence. |
| **Shows understanding** | Responses show a basic understanding of the text, topic, issue or message. | Responses are thoughtful and show a general understanding of the text, topic, issue or message. | Responses are thoughtful and show a complete understanding of the text, topic, issue or message. | Responses are insightful and show a deep understanding the text, topic, issue or message. May synthesize ideas or explain the ‘so what’. |
| **Thinks  critically** | Makes straightforward connections or inferences. Focuses on retelling. | Makes logical connections to self (T:S) and/or background knowledge (T:S). Inferences are logical | Makes meaningful connections to self. Considers ideas between texts (T:T).  Inferences are plausible. | Makes powerful connections that go between texts and/or beyond the text (T:W).  Inferences are plausible and insightful. |

