

**TAIWAN'S COMING PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTION: DILEMMA FOR THE DPP
AND CHALLENGES FOR THE KMT**

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Executive Summary

In Taiwan's legislative election held on 12 January 2008, the main opposition party, Kuomintang (KMT) (国民党), won a landslide victory at the expense of the ruling party, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) (民进党).

In a newly reconstituted electoral setup known as the “single-member constituency with two votes” system (单一选区两票制), candidates vied for 113 seats in the Legislative Yuan and voters cast two ballots—one for a single legislator in the constituency and one for a political party.

Out of 113 seats, the KMT won 81, representing about 72 percent of the total while the DPP only obtained 27 seats, less than a quarter of the total.

Obviously, the DPP suffered a crushing defeat. Not only did the party fail to meet its target of 45 seats, it also lost many seats in its traditional stronghold of southern Taiwan.

The biggest loser, of course, was President Chen Shuibian (陈水扁) who doubled as chairman of the DPP. With only 26.3 percent of affirmative votes, his sponsored referendum for recovering the assets of the KMT also failed to pass. He subsequently resigned as party chairman to take responsibility for the DPP's defeat.

The dilemma for Frank Hsieh (谢长廷), the DPP's presidential candidate and its new chairman, is that he will have to swing back and forth between establishing a new distinctive identity for himself and following Chen Shuibian's “deep-green strategy.” Hsieh's best bet, therefore, is not to win the election but to avoid another disastrous defeat.

The challenge for Ma Ying-jeou (马英九), the KMT's presidential candidate, is to ride on the momentum of the KMT's electoral win to capture the presidency on 22 March 2008 in a major victory.

A bigger issue, an issue that overshadows the presidential election, is that of the two referenda: one on Taiwan's application for a membership in the United Nations and one on Taiwan's return to the United Nations as the Republic of China.

Chances are that neither referendum is likely to pass due to insufficient participation. If either referendum on Taiwan's UN bid were to succeed, it would be up to Beijing to interpret its implications for cross-strait relations.