

**CABINET INSTABILITY IN TAIWAN:
EXECUTIVE-LEGISLATURE
RELATIONS, INTRA-PARTY POLITICS,
PUBLIC OPINION AND ELECTION (I)**

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Executive Summary

1. After heavy losses to the Kuomintang (KMT) in the November 2018 local elections, Taiwan Premier William Lai and his Cabinet resigned en masse in January 2019 “to rejuvenate” the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) administration.
2. The frequent turnover of premiers and cabinet members are in reality a common occurrence over the past 19 years in Taiwan after the DPP ended the KMT’s 55-year rule in 2000.
3. Compared to many other countries, cabinet instability in Taiwan has been much more serious since 2000. Taiwan has the highest turnover rate of premiers among comparable countries. During the 2000-2019 period, there were 15 premiers, with an average term of only 1.3 years.
4. Cabinet instability is known to bring about negative political, economic and social consequences. Western scholars have also argued that political instability reduces a country’s gross domestic product (GDP) significantly. The issue of cabinet instability has been a topic of public criticism since the early 2000s.
5. In Taiwan, cabinet instability since the first regime change in 2000 indicates rising challenges faced by the president, forcing him or her to resort to cabinet reshuffling to deal with these challenges. Five major challenges to the president have contributed to Taiwan’s cabinet instability.
6. The first is from the Legislative Yuan, particularly when it is dominated by the opposition party. The second is factional politics in his or her own party. The third and fourth are public criticism of the premier, the Cabinet, or the president. The last challenge is elections, which give the president grounds to improve Cabinet performance and/or re-allocate political benefit through cabinet reshuffling.
7. Based on the study of these five sources of challenge and opportunity, five factors could have accounted for the cabinet instability in Taiwan: (i) conflicts between the

Cabinet and the Legislative Yuan; (ii) factional politics within the party in power; (iii) public disapproval of the premier and/or the Cabinet members; (iv) public disapproval of the president and the premier/Cabinet; and (v) elections.