

Combined Analysis Report on Public Opinion Surveys on Cross-Strait Relations in 2008

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I. Foreword

In order to ensure that the government's formulation of China policy is integrated with public opinion, the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) has commissioned academic institutes and polling companies to conduct public opinion surveys on major cross-strait issues. It has also continued to compile the findings of public opinion surveys conducted by other sectors of society for further analysis and summarization to track the most recent direction and changing trends of public opinion and provide an important basis for the government's policy implementation.

In 2008, Taiwan held a legislative election and a presidential election. Since the assumption of the new government into office on May 20, cross-strait relations have faced a changed situation. This analysis report combines the findings of public opinion surveys conducted over the past year. Some of the opinion surveys reflect the public's views on related issues, which can be used for long-term observations, including the pace of cross-strait exchanges and position on unification vs. independence. Others reflect the public's most recent views on cross-strait issues concerning new circumstances and government policies arising from the change of administration and new developments in cross-strait relations, such as cross-strait negotiations and direct cross-strait sea and air transport links. The public opinions presented by these trends and changes are worthy of attention.

II. Combined Analysis of Public Opinion Surveys

This analysis is based on a total of 108 public opinion surveys on cross-strait issues conducted by various sectors of society in Taiwan in 2008. They include MAC-commissioned surveys conducted by the Election Study Center at National Chengchi University, as well as surveys conducted by other polling organizations. The results of these surveys ([Table 1](#)) are analyzed as follows:

1. Overall Development and Outlook of Cross-Strait Relations

(1) Views on overall cross-strait relations

Between 52.2 and 68.7 percent of the public believe cross-strait relations are getting less tense; 50.6 to 57.9 percent of the public believe the government is able to maintain cross-strait peace and stability; and 62 to 65 percent of the public are confident about political stability and economic development in cross-strait relations over the next four years. In addition, 47 to 62 percent of the public feel optimistic about the future development of cross-strait relations, far higher than the percentage holding a negative view (18 to 36 percent).

(2) Views on Taiwan's overall Mainland policy

Between 59 and 64.7 percent of the public are satisfied with the government's Mainland policy in the initial period after the new administration took office, while 21 to 26 percent of the public are dissatisfied. The satisfaction level fell by about 10 percent (48 to 49.6 percent) three months after the start of the new administration, while the dissatisfaction level increased by about 10 percent (33.3 to 35 percent). Public opinion surveys conducted six months after the start of the new administration indicated that the satisfaction and dissatisfaction levels have both risen slightly, with the former accounting for over half (52.7 percent) of the total. In addition, the majority of the people (68.5 percent) believe the government has improved cross-strait relations, according to a public opinion survey conducted by the Research, Development and Evaluation Commission (RDEC).

Taiwanese people are divided over the issue of whether or not the government's cross-strait policy tilts too much toward mainland China to the detriment of Taiwan's interests. Those agreeing with this position account for 34 to 46 percent, while those who disagree account for 40 to 54 percent. Overall speaking, the majority of the people still believe that cross-strait policy does not tilt too heavily toward mainland China.

2. Cross-strait Exchanges and Pace of Opening

(1) Views on the pace of exchanges

About 50 percent (49.1 percent) of the public support the government's policy and pace of opening up cross-strait exchanges. Between 29.7 and 47.5 percent of the public believe the pace of cross-strait exchanges is "just right," representing the largest share; nine to 35.2 percent of the public believe the pace is "too slow"; and 17 to 37.2 percent believe the pace is "too fast." Compared to the figures before May 20, 2008, the percentage believing that the pace of exchanges has been "too fast" has trended up to around 30 percent.

(2) Views on relaxing cross-strait economic and trade policy

Between 48.4 and 51.8 percent of the public approve of the government's course in relaxing cross-strait economic and trade relations, while 62.2 to 65.8 percent of the public believe the government should strengthen related accompanying measures in conjunction with policy loosening.

(3) Views on cross-strait direct transport links and Mainland tourist visits to Taiwan

The percentage of the public supporting the policy of cross-strait direct transport links has increased from 48.1 percent to 58 percent (based on surveys conducted by the RDEC in April and June), indicating that the people approve the opening up of such links. Between 55.8 and 58.2 percent of the public believe that "cross-strait weekend charter flights" and "Mainland tourist visits to Taiwan" are conducive to the development of cross-strait relations and are optimistic that they will benefit the economy. Since cross-strait direct transport links were officially launched on December 15, 2008, between 61.7 to 67.9 percent of the public agree that such links have helped to improve Taiwan's competitiveness and have had a "positive influence" on Taiwan's economic development. At the same time, 54.8 percent of the public believe that the links are conducive to encouraging investment in Taiwan by overseas Taiwan enterprises and foreign enterprises.

3. SEF-ARATS Negotiations

(1) Overall views on cross-strait negotiations

Between 69.5 and 74.6 percent of the public approve of holding cross-strait negotiations on the basis of the "1992 Consensus (one China, with each side having

its own interpretation)," while only 11.7 to 14.9 percent disapprove. In addition, 71.8 to 74.7 percent of the public support resolving issues related to cross-strait exchanges through an institutionalized negotiation mechanism and also approve of continuing negotiations through "direct talks between government officials" under the SEF-ARATS framework.

(2) Views on the "Chiang-Chen Talks"

The "First Chiang-Chen Talks" were held in June 2008. Between 66 and 67.2 percent of the public feel satisfied with the results of the agreements reached during the talks, while 59.9 to 73.9 percent believe the resumption of talks between the SEF and the ARATS is conducive to peace and stability in cross-strait relations and Taiwan's economic development. The "Second Chiang-Chen Talks" held in November produced four agreements on cross-strait sea transport, air transport, postal services, and food safety cooperation. Between 56.1 and 58.4 percent of the public express support for the agreements. Support for the individual agreements was even higher ("Sea Transport Agreement" [62.9 to 80.9%]; "Air Transport Agreement" [62.7 to 80.4%]; "Postal Service Agreement" [71 to 84.6%]; and "Food Safety Agreement" [66.6 to 69%]). Moreover, 49 to 61.8 percent of the public believe the results of these agreements will benefit or have a positive influence on Taiwan's economy and overall development.

Regarding the prioritization of issues for future cross-strait negotiations, 73 percent of the public believe that economic issues should be discussed first and political issues later. As for the issues to be discussed during the next round of cross-strait negotiations, over 70 percent (75.1 percent) of the public believe that priority should be given to joint crime-fighting, expansion of food safety cooperation, and other issues affecting the order of cross-strait exchanges.

4. Future and Position of the Country

(1) Views on unification vs. independence

Of the six possible positions on this issue, the largest number (34.4 to 44.8 percent) supports "maintaining the status quo and deciding on independence or unification later." In addition, 11.1 to 25.5 percent support "maintaining the status quo

indefinitely." Less than 20 percent (4.3 to 17.5 percent) support "maintaining the status quo and independence later" or "maintaining the status quo and unification later." In sum, the overwhelming majority (64.9 to 91.8 percent) of the public support maintaining the status quo defined in a broader sense (including maintaining the status quo and independence later, maintaining the status quo and unification later, maintaining the status quo and deciding on independence or unification later, and maintaining the status quo indefinitely). The results are consistent with the trends shown in previous surveys. At the same time, only a very small minority (6 to 16.3 percent) support "independence as soon as possible" or "unification as soon as possible" (1.5 to 4.1 percent)

When the survey questionnaire consists of just three questions, the vast majority of the public support "maintaining the status quo" (58 to 71 percent). The proportion of people advocating for "Taiwan independence" (17.5 to 24 percent) is greater than the proportion advocating for "cross-strait unification" (4.7 to 8 percent).

When "maintaining the status quo" is omitted as an option and the people are asked to choose between "independence" and "unification," over 60 percent of the public (65 to 68 percent) support "Taiwan independence," while less than 20 percent (14 to 19 percent) support "cross-strait unification."

(2) Views on the position of the country

Between 75.4 and 81.6 percent of the public agree with President Ma's "no unification, no independence and no use of force" position and support maintaining the status quo in the Taiwan Strait under the framework of the Republic of China.

5. Attitude of the Mainland Chinese Government Toward Taiwan

Between 24.9 and 48.2 percent of the public believe the mainland Chinese government is friendly to the ROC government, while 49.4 to 64.9 percent believe it is unfriendly. Moreover, 30 to 52.7 percent of the public believe the mainland Chinese government is friendly toward the people of Taiwan, while 37.9 to 58.2 percent believe it is unfriendly. Overall speaking, the percentage of the public believing the mainland Chinese government is unfriendly toward Taiwan is still higher. However, the percentage believing that the mainland Chinese government is friendly toward the

ROC government increased by over 10 percent after May 20, 2008, to reach 33 percent (the average in 2007 was about 20 percent). At the same time, there has not been a large change in the percentage believing the mainland Chinese government is friendly to the people of Taiwan.

6. Development of Diplomatic Relations and Participation in International Organizations

Between 67 to 88.9 percent of the public believe the two sides should pursue reconciliation and truce in both international and cross-strait arenas, and jointly participate in the international community, while 4.1 to 21.6 percent of the public disagree with this position. In addition, 51 percent of the public believe that the development of cross-strait relations and the promotion of diplomatic relations with other countries can be complementary.

III. Conclusion

Overall speaking, during the past year, the trend of mainstream public opinion in Taiwan may be summarized into the following several characteristics:

1. The Public is Pleased to See the Development of Cross-Strait Relations toward Peace and Stability

Since assuming office, the new administration has been working hard to improve cross-strait relations and promote peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. Public opinion surveys indicate that the overwhelming majority of the people sense a marked warming in cross-strait relations and feel that the situation in the Taiwan Strait is easing. The people have a high level of confidence in the ability of the government to maintain peace and stability in cross-strait relations, and they hold an optimistic attitude toward the future development of cross-strait relations.

2. Public Opinion Supports the Opening up of Cross-Strait Economic and Trade Relations and Accompanying Management Measures

With regard to the government's large-scale easing of economic and trade restrictions

and promotion of measures to open up cross-strait economic and trade relations, the majority of the people hold a positive and supportive view. Over 80 percent of the public support such measures as establishing new direct flight paths for cross-strait charter flights and direct shipping links. However, the people also have high expectations of the government when it comes to implementing opening-up measures. Such factors as the strengthening of accompanying management measures and the proper performance of risk assessments will have a key impact on whether or not the public continues to support the opening up of cross-strait economic and trade relations.

3. Public Opinion Supports SEF-ARATS Negotiation Mechanism and Planning

Over 70 percent of the public support and are satisfied with the resolution of issues resulting from cross-strait exchanges by negotiations through the institutionalized mechanism between the SEF and the ARATS. The SEF and the ARATS have successfully signed the six agreements during the two rounds of "Chiang-Chen Talks" over the past six months. The majority of the people express approval for the results of the two rounds of talks, believe these results are conducive to Taiwan's economic development, and agree with the government's plan to prioritize economic issues in negotiations.

4. Mainstream Public Opinion Supports Maintaining Taiwan's Status Quo

A relatively high percentage of the public have consistently advocated "maintaining the status quo" defined in a broader sense. "Maintaining the status quo" is the greatest common denominator among the Taiwanese people irrespective of political party affiliation or region. No changes have occurred with regard to the ROC's mainstream public opinion since the change of administration in the country in 2008, and those leaning toward independence as soon as possible or unification as soon as possible remain in the minority. In addition, the overwhelming majority of the people in Taiwan agree with the government's stance of "no unification, no independence and no use of force" and its position on seeking harmonious cross-strait relations while "maintaining the status quo" so as to uphold regional stability and Taiwan's interests.