

Taiwan country brief

Media package

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About the Global Coalition for Tech Justice

The [Global Coalition for Tech Justice](#) is a newly formed global movement to ensure Big Tech plays its role in protecting elections and citizens' rights and freedoms across the world, particularly in the global majority where companies – Meta, Google, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok et al – have been negligent in dealing with the impacts of their social media and messaging products.

In 2024, more than 2 billion people will be entitled to vote in 65 elections across the world, in the biggest and most significant global megacycle of elections so far this century. This will include some of the world's largest democracies like the United States, the European Union, India, Mexico and Indonesia, countries in active democratic decline like Tunisia, and in active oppression of citizens' freedoms. But the relentless spread of online disinformation, hate speech, abuse and manipulation threatens to undermine efforts to advance democracy and freedoms.

About Digital Action

[Digital Action](#) is the convenor and organiser of the Global Coalition for Tech Justice. Since 2019, Digital Action has been mobilising a global network of partners to demand better standards from the governments and corporations responsible for our digital environments.

Taiwan's January 2024 elections: Context and key facts

Taiwan's January 2024 elections open this year's election megacycle, which will see more than 2 billion people head to the polls in over 65 elections spanning the globe. But the upcoming presidential and parliamentary races will also be the testing ground for China's evolving prowess in online disinformation and electoral interference.¹

Taiwan, the self-ruling island democracy that China claims as its territory, is heading to the ballot to elect a new president and members of parliament on 13 January 2024. Incumbent President Tsai Ing-wen from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), will conclude her second and final term in

¹<https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/taiwans-election-2024s-canary-in-the-coal-mine-for-disinformation-against-democracy/>

May 2024 and cannot run again.²

This January, candidates from three main parties are running for president, with the ruling DPP presidential candidate, Lai Ching-te, leading in the polls.³ The established opposition party Kuomintang (KMT) and the relatively new Taiwan People's Party (TPP) are now fighting for second place, experts say.⁴

The ballot comes at a time when China has escalated military activity in the Taiwan Strait and other nearby waters.⁵ As in previous election cycles, China has been trying to influence the election result. And so, China's Taiwan affairs office has characterised Taiwan's presidential race as a choice between "peace and war, prosperity and decline."⁶⁷

Social media: Key facts

Taiwan has a population of over 23 million,⁸ and some estimates put the number of active social media users at a whopping 21.5 million.⁹

Facebook dominates the social media landscape, with almost 50% of adults using the app, as of 2023.¹⁰ However, Facebook's messenger is facing serious competition¹¹ from LINE, the instant messaging app, operated by Japanese internet company LY Corporation.¹² It is the second most used app in Taiwan,¹³ followed by Instagram – attracting less than 20% of users – Twitter and the Taiwanese online discussion forum PTT.¹⁴

While Facebook is most widely used, YouTube is used more frequently on a daily basis, with Taiwanese internet users spending almost 1.5 hours on the video-sharing platform each day.¹⁵ TikTok and Instagram are most popular among younger internet users.¹⁶

² <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Taiwan-elections/Taiwan-sets-next-presidential-election-for-January-2024>

³ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/what-to-know-about-chinas-meddling-in-taiwans-upcoming-election/>

⁴ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/what-to-know-about-chinas-meddling-in-taiwans-upcoming-election/>

⁵ <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/11/27/taiwan-elections-2024-the-3-parties-vying-to-replace-tsai-ing-wen.html>

⁶ <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/11/27/taiwan-elections-2024-the-3-parties-vying-to-replace-tsai-ing-wen.html>

⁷ http://www.gwytb.gov.cn/xwdt/xwfb/wyly/202311/t20231124_12583827.htm

⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Taiwan>

⁹ <https://oosga.com/social-media/twn/#:~:text=Social%20Media's%20User%20Demographics%20in.of%20users%20has%20grown%208.4%20%25.>

¹⁰ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/966613/taiwan-social-media-use-by-platform/>

¹¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/968238/taiwan-communication-software-usage/>

¹² <https://www.lycorp.co.jp/en/>

¹³ <https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites/taiwan/computers-electronics-and-technology/social-networks-and-online-communities/>

¹⁴ <https://www.npr.org/2023/12/22/1221400950/misinformation-is-becoming-more-sophisticated-in-taiwan>

¹⁵ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/966613/taiwan-social-media-use-by-platform/>

¹⁶ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/966613/taiwan-social-media-use-by-platform/>

Social media trends and threads ahead of the 2024 ballot

Chinese disinformation and/or influence operations have become a fixture in Taiwan. And this year, experts posit, is no different.¹⁷ For decades, China has tried to sway Taiwanese voters, including through online campaigns, with the aim of one day peacefully annexing Taiwan.¹⁸¹⁹ In the past such campaigns have sought to portray Beijing in a positive light, appeal to Taiwanese voters to vote for pro-China candidates, and push Taiwanese voters to not vote at all²⁰ – a strategy that has had little effect.²¹

But this election cycle China's approach has become more subtle and, some say, more effective. Rather than a blunt "don't vote for Tsai" message, China's misinformation campaigns have focused on stirring up scepticism about the United States' sustained support for Taiwan's continued independence.²²

More specifically, there's been an increase in AI-generated content, including deep fake videos, targeting pro-independence candidates and stoking fears of conflict, disinformation from bots and Beijing-friendly online influencers trying to persuade voters that the U.S. is not a dependable partner. Mandarin-language friendly TikTok has become the main source of AI-generated deep fakes and election-related disinformation videos, according to Eve Chiu, the CEO of Taiwan FactCheck Center.²³

"There's been rumours of election fraud in Taiwan [on TikTok]. TikTok is not the most popular social media app in Taiwan but Taiwanese people share TikTok videos on Facebook and Line. Many of the election and politics-related videos have come from TikTok recently," she said. "I think it will affect election results because many people still believe in this hoax."

Making matters worse are Meta's and Google's algorithms which favour sensationalist, polarising and toxic content and have helped push out misleading and false information to potential voters. *"The media ecosystem, including the algorithm, prefers low quality information over high quality information. Low quality like disinformation, misinformation, fake news, sensational stuff, rumours, hoax,"* said Chiu, whose organisation has been part of Facebook's Third Party Fact-Checking program.²⁴

Chinese disinformation is also said to piggy-back on domestic issues, like power outages, attacking

¹⁷ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/what-to-know-about-chinas-meddling-in-taiwans-upcoming-election/>

¹⁸ https://books.google.com.tw/books?hl=en&lr=&id=DOcJEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT27&dq=taiwan+temples+prc+influence&ots=WVHpX0fVh2&sig=VmgP0V08-ftkVrKTS4uNT9PvQFQ&redir_esc=v#v=onepage&q=taiwan%20temples%20prc%20influence&f=false

¹⁹ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/what-to-know-about-chinas-meddling-in-taiwans-upcoming-election/>

²⁰ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/what-to-know-about-chinas-meddling-in-taiwans-upcoming-election/>

²¹ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/what-to-know-about-chinas-meddling-in-taiwans-upcoming-election/>

²² <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/what-to-know-about-chinas-meddling-in-taiwans-upcoming-election/>

²³ <https://www.facebook.com/journalismproject/programs/third-party-fact-checking/taiwan-fact-check-center-false-video-china>

²⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/journalismproject/programs/third-party-fact-checking/taiwan-fact-check-center-false-video-china>

the Taiwanese state and its democratic processes.²⁵

One of the election-related misinformation campaigns has already kicked off in May 2022 on Facebook, TikTok and YouTube, according to a December report by research firm Graphika.²⁶ The operation involved a network of over 800 fake accounts and 13 pages about Taiwanese politics.²⁷ Though Graphika wasn't able to identify who was behind the campaign, the suspect social media posts promoted the opposition KMT party, that's seen as pro-China, and slammed its opponents, including the ruling DPP, which favours Taiwan's independence.²⁸

"The content closely tracked Taiwan's news cycle, quickly leveraging domestic news developments, such as controversies surrounding an egg shortage and the alleged drugging of toddlers at a kindergarten, to portray the KMT's opponents as incompetent and corrupt," Graphika researchers wrote.²⁹

Other false narratives peddled across Taiwan's social media platforms in the past have played up food safety and vaccine concerns, war and the possibility of a conflict across the Taiwan Strait.³⁰

Researchers have also warned that domestic platforms are increasingly being used to spread falsehoods,³¹ with half of the false narratives originating inside Taiwan, the other half in China.³² They identified PTT, the Taiwanese online discussion forum, as one of the favourite platforms for China-borne disinformation.³³

Taiwan's National Security Bureau has reportedly tracked at least 1,800 pieces of online disinformation in 2023 – up from 1,400 in the same period last year.³⁴ All of the items came from social media platforms, both in Taiwan and abroad, including TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube.³⁵

Mandarin-language monopolisation

Next to disinformation, China's Mandarin knowledge monopolisation – which toes China's Communist Party line – is also undermining Taiwan's democratic integrity and polluting the

²⁵ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/taiwan-warns-chinese-interference-ahead-presidential-election-rcna128979>

²⁶ <https://graphika.com/reports/agitate-the-debate>

²⁷ <https://graphika.com/reports/agitate-the-debate>

²⁸ <https://graphika.com/reports/agitate-the-debate>

²⁹ <https://graphika.com/reports/agitate-the-debate>

³⁰ <https://www.npr.org/2023/12/22/1221400950/misinformation-is-becoming-more-sophisticated-in-taiwan>

³¹ <https://www.npr.org/2023/12/22/1221400950/misinformation-is-becoming-more-sophisticated-in-taiwan>

³² <https://www.npr.org/2023/12/22/1221400950/misinformation-is-becoming-more-sophisticated-in-taiwan>

³³ <https://www.npr.org/2023/12/22/1221400950/misinformation-is-becoming-more-sophisticated-in-taiwan>

³⁴ <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3246313/taiwan-elections-tiktok-teams-fact-checkers-stop-disinformation-site>

³⁵ <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3246313/taiwan-elections-tiktok-teams-fact-checkers-stop-disinformation-site>

information space of Taiwanese voters, according to Tzu-wei Hung, a research fellow at Taiwan's Academia Sinica.

The aim of this two-pronged approach is for China to peacefully annex Taiwan further down the line. “Monopolising Mandarin knowledge is a long-term infiltration of Taiwanese teens and children, such as using TikTok to create a China-friendly information space. TikTok may lead to digital addiction and affect children’s mental health, making it easier to manipulate or echo Xi Jinping’s dog whistle of “the great revival of the Chinese nation.”

This has also been reflected in Google search results, which reach the majority of Taiwanese internet users thanks to its 90% share of the market.³⁶ A Google search in Mandarin will generate less diverse and numerous results than the same search in English, dishing out a pro-China narrative to Taiwanese users.³⁷ And so, a Google search in Mandarin will generate less diverse and numerous results than the same search in English, dishing out a pro-China narrative to most Taiwanese internet users. “*Pro-Beijing websites often dominate Google's search results in traditional Chinese because they are well-managed in search engine optimization and comply with Google's anti-content-farm spam guidelines. Google also derives considerable ad profits from the internet traffic they generate,*” he said.

In his research, Tzu-wei Hung also found that China’s domestic censorship has spilled over into AI-generated content in Silicon Valley. “*For example, ChatGPT and Microsoft Bing answers differently in Mandarin and English to questions involving sensitive keywords like the Tiananmen incident or the Uyghur genocide. Google Bard repeatedly says it is unable to answer in Mandarin about Falun Gong, organ harvesting, and the Dalai Lama,*” he said.

Big Tech policies and plans for Taiwan’s 2024 ballot

Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram, has announced plans for how it’s going to keep elections safe in November 2023, but little seems to have changed in its approach, compared to previous years.³⁸ The one new policy Meta says will be applied globally is the requirement for advertisers to disclose when they use AI or digital methods to create or alter a political or social issue ad – and only “in certain cases”.³⁹ There appears to be no country-specific plan for ensuring the safety and integrity of the Taiwanese ballot.⁴⁰ The only country-specific election plan available to the public appears to pertain to the 2024 US presidential election.⁴¹

³⁶ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1128859/taiwan-market-share-of-search-engine-websites/>

³⁷ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1128859/taiwan-market-share-of-search-engine-websites/>

³⁸ <https://about.fb.com/news/2023/11/how-meta-is-planning-for-elections-in-2024/>

³⁹ <https://about.fb.com/news/2023/11/how-meta-is-planning-for-elections-in-2024/>

⁴⁰ <https://about.fb.com/news/2023/11/how-meta-is-planning-for-elections-in-2024/>

⁴¹ https://about.meta.com/actions/preparing-for-elections-on-facebook/?utm_source=about.facebook.com&utm_medium=redirect&_ga=2.91337694.555141796.1703689138-1389500115.1703689138

Similarly, YouTube’s owner, Google, appears to have only published a plan for how it’s going to approach the 2024 US ballot.⁴²

In December, TikTok launched its in-app “2024 Election Guide” for Taiwan.⁴³ The project is a partnership with MyGoPen, a Taiwan-based organisation certified by the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN).⁴⁴ The short video app will also provide channels to report content that might breach electoral rules.⁴⁵

⁴² <https://blog.google/outreach-initiatives/civics/how-were-approaching-the-2024-us-elections/>

⁴³ <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/zh-tw/>, <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/zh-tw/tw-election-hub>

⁴⁴ <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3246313/taiwan-elections-tiktok-teams-fact-checkers-stop-disinformation-site>

⁴⁵ <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3246313/taiwan-elections-tiktok-teams-fact-checkers-stop-disinformation-site>