**Determinants of Taiwanese Attitude toward Independence in 2024**

**Introduction**

Taiwan's complex relationship with mainland China represents one of the most sensitive geopolitical flashpoints in East Asia. At the heart of this relationship lies a fundamental question about Taiwan's future status—whether it should pursue formal independence, maintain the status quo, or seek reunification with mainland China. Public opinion on this question has profound implications for Taiwan's domestic politics, cross-strait relations, and regional security dynamics.

This study examines what factors most significantly influence Taiwanese public opinion toward independence in 2024. While previous research has identified multiple determinants shaping Taiwanese preferences—including national identity, economic considerations, generational differences, and security concerns—these factors have typically been studied in isolation, leaving their relative importance and complex interactions underexplored.

As Chu (2004)[[1]](#footnote-1) and Niou (2004)[[2]](#footnote-2) argue, Taiwanese attitudes toward independence and unification are not static positions but rather conditional preferences that shift in response to changing circumstances. Public preferences in Taiwan are heavily contingent on the perceived costs and benefits of different outcomes[[3]](#footnote-3), particularly regarding China's potential military response and the economic implications of altered cross-strait relations. This conditional nature of preferences creates methodological challenges for researchers attempting to measure public opinion accurately, as standard survey questions that force respondents to choose between independence, unification, or the status quo fail to capture the strategic and conditional character of these preferences[[4]](#footnote-4).

The methodological challenge of "preference ambiguity"[[5]](#footnote-5) has plagued research in this field, with many Taiwanese respondents selecting the status quo option in surveys not because they genuinely prefer it, but because this middle position allows them to hide their calculated conditional preferences[[6]](#footnote-6). This pattern aligns with established findings in survey methodology, which show that offering a middle response category significantly increases the proportion of respondents selecting that option (Presser and Schuman, 1980)[[7]](#footnote-7). To overcome this limitation, researchers who study Taiwanese public opinion need more sophisticated approaches to capture the conditional nature of Taiwanese attitudes.

Thus, my research utilizes Chu (2004) and Niou (2004)’s innovative “conditional preference” framework that uses paired conditional questions to directly examine the impact of various factors on public opinion toward Taiwan’s independence and reunification. I argue that Taiwanese preferences toward independence are shaped by a complex interplay between national identity, perceived military threat from China, expectations about economic benefits from cross-strait relations, and generational differences – with no single factor alone sufficient to explain the patterns in public opinion.

This paper makes two main contributions to our understanding of Taiwanese public opinion on independence and unification. First, it systematically evaluates the relative impact of multiple factors on shaping these attitudes, and evaluates which determinants exert the greatest influence in 2024. Second, it advances a theoretical framework that conceptualizes Taiwanese preferences as conditional and strategic, influenced by a combination of identity, security, and economic considerations rather than by any single factor in isolation.

Understanding the complex determinants of Taiwanese public opinion carries significant implications for cross-strait relations, regional security, and international diplomacy. As Taiwan navigates its complex relationship with an increasingly assertive China, policymakers on both sides of the Taiwan Strait—as well as in Washington, Tokyo, and other capitals in the Indo-Pacific - would benefit from a more rigorous understanding of what shapes Taiwanese attitudes toward their island's future status and how these attitudes might evolve in response to changing circumstances.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Previous Research on Determinants of Taiwanese Public Opinion**

Past studies have collectively identified multiple factors shaping Taiwanese public opinion on independence, the status quo, and reunification. Notably Chinese military threat, national identity as Taiwanese or Chinese or both, economic intercedence, party identification, and generational differences. Chu's (2004) analysis of longitudinal survey data reveals that while efforts by Taiwanese leaders to promote a pro-independence sentiment have had some effect, the perception of China's *growing economic potential* and the *increasing inevitability of cross-strait economic integration* have somewhat constrained the popular support for Taiwan independence, particularly among the younger generation[[8]](#footnote-8). Tang’s (2007) analysis of survey data reveals that education, socioeconomic status, and economic considerations influence citizen’s cross-strait attitudes[[9]](#footnote-9). Sobel et al. (2010)[[10]](#footnote-10) also note that cross-strait tensions and specific events like China's missile tests and leaders' speeches have influenced the Taiwanese public to become more independence-minded. Furthermore, Wang (2017)[[11]](#footnote-11) also identifies the feeling of hostility from Beijing, particularly regarding diplomatic isolation, has also been a significant factor in hardening Taiwanese identity and a preference for independence. Lastly, Wang et al. (2025)[[12]](#footnote-12) concludes that while Taiwanese nationalism has risen significantly, the majority still prefer the status quo due to a combination of concerns about China's potential military threat and the economic reliance on China.

**Methodological Limitations in Previous Research**

While these studies provide valuable insights into the determinants of Taiwanese public opinion on cross-strait relations, they often examine these factors in isolation, leaving their interactions and collective influence underexplored. A common issue that challenges accurate measurement of Taiwanese attitudes toward independence is "preference ambiguity."[[13]](#footnote-13) Typical questionnaires only ask respondents to choose one option among reunification, independence, or maintaining the status quo. When asked to indicate a clear preference, survey respondents tend to hide their conditional preferences by selecting the "status quo" answer. This pattern is consistent with established findings in survey design research, which shows that offering a middle position significantly increases the proportion of respondents selecting that category[[14]](#footnote-14). Furthermore, Presser and Schuman (1980) argue that respondents with less intense opinions are more affected by the presence or absence of a middle response category than those who feel strongly about the issue[[15]](#footnote-15). This observation also aligns with the consistent finding that most Taiwanese express a preference for the less intense option of maintaining the status quo[[16]](#footnote-16). However, to achieve a more meticulous examination of Taiwanese public opinion, researchers need to design better questions by incorporating condition sets that better capture the complex essence of strategic, conditional preferences of Taiwanese public.

Recognizing this limitation, Chu (2004)[[17]](#footnote-17) introduces a conditional preference framework to improve the measurement of Taiwanese attitudes. Instead of forcing respondents into static categories, Chu designs a paired-question methodology that asks respondents to express their views on two carefully crafted hypothetical questions:

1. *Taiwan should become a new state if it can maintain peace with mainland China after declaring independence.*
2. *The two sides should unite if mainland's social, economic, and political conditions become comparable to Taiwan.*

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AI-generated content may be incorrect.For each question, respondents could select "agree," "no opinion," or "disagree." By cross tabulating these responses, Chu created a response matrix with nine distinct orientations toward Taiwan's future (in Table 1). This methodology represents a significant advancement beyond conventional surveys that forced respondents to choose between independence, unification, or maintaining the status quo without capturing the conditional nature of these preferences.

Table 1. Nine Orientations toward Unification toward Independence (Chu 2004)[[18]](#footnote-18)

Niou (2004) coincides with Chu (2004) in examining Taiwanese public opinion through a conditional preference framework; however, their fundamental differences lie in the weight they assign to national identity versus strategic calculations in shaping cross-strait attitudes. Chu (2004) argues that national identity is the primary driver of cross-strait attitudes. While he acknowledges that external factors—such as security concerns and economic conditions—can influence the intensity of preferences, but do not fundamentally alter an individual’s underlying identity-based stance. In his model, those who strongly identify as Taiwanese are inherently more likely to support independence, while those with dual identities or stronger connections to Chinese heritage are more open to unification.

However, because many respondents prefer not to make a direct or risky political choice, identity-driven preferences often appear as support for the status quo. Chu’s paired-question methodology was designed to uncover latent identity-driven attitudes by presenting respondents with conditional scenarios—revealing whether their “status quo” preference leans toward independence or unification given the right conditions.

Niou (2004), by contrast, challenges the notion that identity alone determines cross-strait preferences. He argues that Taiwanese public opinion is highly strategic, with attitudes toward independence or unification shaped by both internal and external factors, including[[19]](#footnote-19) national identity (internal factor), China’s military threat (external factor), U.S. security commitments (external factor), Taiwan’s economic performance (internal factor), and China’s economic and political development (external factor).

Rather than treating identity as the dominant force, Niou places it on equal footing with other key factors, arguing that individuals engage in cost-benefit analyses when deciding their stance on Taiwan’s future. His hypothetical scenario approach tests how people shift their preferences in response to different strategic conditions— any Taiwanese hold conditional preferences, with a significant portion willing to shift toward either independence or unification depending on external circumstances. His work demonstrates that Taiwanese preference for the status quo is often a strategic calculation against uncertainty, rather than determined by inherent ideological commitment as suggested by Chu (2004). This perspective challenges traditional survey methodologies that assume preferences remain stable across different contexts. Niou's work suggests how internal and external factors continuously reshape individual decision-making processes even at the grassroots level, suggesting that public opinion on cross-strait relations is better understood as a series of conditional responses to evolving scenarios rather than as determined by fixed political identities.

More recently, Wang et al. (2025) expanded on the frameworks of Chu and Niou utilizing public opinion data from 2002 to 2022, measuring if conditional preferences for independence and reunification still holds for Taiwanese public opinion under two specific conditions[[20]](#footnote-20):

1. *Whether China would declare war following a declaration of independence.*

2. *Whether Taiwan and China are politically, economically, and socially compatible.*

Their findings reinforce earlier research and find that support for independence increases significantly if China does not threaten military action, while support for unification declines when China is perceived as politically/socially/economically incompatible with Taiwan. However, while Wang et al.'s study validates the conditional preferences model, it suffers from key limitations that restrict the depth and explanatory power of its findings.

First, Wang et al. (2025) examine only two conditional variables—military threat and government/social/economic compatibility—when existing literature suggests that Taiwanese preferences are shaped by a broader set of factors, including national identity, U.S. security commitments, Taiwan’s economic performance, generational differences, and party identification. By limiting their scope to just two conditions, their study oversimplifies the complexity of cross-strait attitudes, leaving crucial determinants unexamined.

Second, their approach is primarily descriptive, relying on cross-tabulations rather than advanced statistical methods that could systematically analyze the weight of each factor in shaping public opinion. While their findings effectively identify trends, they do not test the relative weight of different variables. For example, how does national identity compare to economic concerns or military threats in shaping preferences? A more robust analysis would involve a multinomial logit regression as seen in Niou (2004)[[21]](#footnote-21) that measures the independent effect on cross-strait preferences.

By summarizing the contributions and limitations of the contributions in Chu (2004), Niou (2004), and Wang et al. (2025), I am to take one step further using Niou’s conditional preference framework to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of Taiwanese public attitudes.

**Methodology**

This study builds on Niou's (2004) conditional preference framework to examine how Taiwanese attitudes toward independence have evolved over time and uses survey data from the Taiwan National Security Studies (TNSS) conducted in 2024 to capture the newest trends in Taiwanese public opinion following Wang et al. (2025)’s examination of 2002-2022 public opinion data.

**Data Sources**

The dataset for this study is the Taiwan National Security Studies (TNSS), a nationally representative survey that tracks public attitudes toward Taiwan’s security, cross-strait relations, and U.S. foreign policy commitments. The weighed dataset includes responses on preferences for independence, unification, and the status quo, as well as key independent variables that influence these preferences.

**Variables**

This study examines attitudes toward independence as the dependent variable, measured through survey responses indicating support for independence, unification, or maintaining the status quo under various conditions.

*Independent variables include:*

1. National identity *(Taiwanese, Chinese, or both)* – Captures whether identity influences preferences for independence or unification.

2. Age/generational cohorts – Tests whether younger or older generations differ in their cross-strait attitudes.

3. Perceived military threat from China – Measures whether fear of conflict affects support for independence.

4. Mainland Economic integration attitudes – Assesses whether belief in closer economic integration with mainland China influences attitudes.

5. Party Identification *(DPP, KMT, third parties, or non-partisan)* – Determines whether partisan alignment conditions policy preferences.

6. U.S. security commitment – Examines whether belief in U.S. military support affects willingness to support independence.

7. Ethnic Group – Whether ethnic group affiliation (Waisheng, Hakka, Minnan, Aboriginals) display differences.

8. Education Level – Whether educate level associates with attitudes. If so, how much does it attribute to differences?

**Analytical Approach**

This study replicates Niou’s (2004) statistical approach but applies it to more recent data (2024) to assess how Taiwanese public opinion has changed over time. Using crosstabulation and multinomial logit regression, this study evaluates how each independent variable affects the probability of supporting independence, unification, or the status quo in 2024.

*Crosstabulation*

I first present a crosstabulation analysis to examine the relationship between preferences for independence and unification in 2024, providing a preliminary understanding of how Taiwanese respondents navigate these two competing political orientations. By categorizing respondents into unconditional supporters, conditional supporters, and non-supporters for both independence and unification, the crosstab allows for a direct comparison of how these preferences intersect. The results of this analysis serve as a baseline for the multinomial logit regression model, which further tests how various independent variables—such as national identity, economic expectations, and security A screenshot of a test

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|  | Taiwanese | Both | Chinese | Row Total (N) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Unconditional Support (IND) | 85.5 (396) | 14.0 (65) | 0.4 (2) | 463 |
| Conditional Support (IND) | 61.6 (305) | 37.8 (187) | 0.6 (3) | 495 |
| Non‐Support (IND) | 27.3 (77) | 65.6 (185) | 7.1 (20) | 282 |

Table 1. National Identity and Preferences on Taiwan Independence (% within each Independence Category)

Table 1 examines the relationship between national identity (self‐identification as Taiwanese, both Taiwanese and Chinese, or exclusively Chinese) and preferences on Taiwan independence. The results demonstrate a clear association between national identity and independence preferences. In terms of unconditional supporters, 85.5% identify as Taiwanese, while only 0.4% identify as Chinese. This distribution shifts among conditional supporters, where 61.6% are Taiwanese and 37.8% hold a dual identity. Among non‐supporters, however, the proportion of Taiwanese identity drops significantly (27.3%), with the largest percentage (65.6%) consists of those who identify as both Taiwanese and Chinese. Identification as solely Chinese remains low for all 3 groups. But the findings collectively suggest that a Taiwanese-identifying public is likely to support independence, and a more Chinese-identifying group is less likely to endorse it. The Pearson Chi‐Square test is statistically significant (p < .001), indicating A screenshot of a graph

AI-generated content may be incorrect.that national identity plays a major role in shaping attitudes toward Taiwan’s independence.

|  | 20–29 | 30–39 | 40–49 | 50–59 | 60 & Above | Row Total (N) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Unconditional Support | 17.2 (80) | 18.3 (85) | 21.7 (101) | 19.1 (89) | 23.7 (110) | 465 |
| Conditional Support | 21.1 (105) | 20.9 (104) | 21.1 (105) | 15.9 (79) | 21.1 (105) | 498 |
| Non‐Support | 5.3 (15) | 12.1 (34) | 17.8 (50) | 25.6 (72) | 39.1 (110) | 281 |

Table 2. Generational Differences and Preferences on Taiwan Independence (% within each Independence Category)

Table 2 presents the relationship between generational differences and support for Taiwan independence. Among unconditional supporters, the highest percentage (23.7%) is found for those 60 and above, while the lowest percentage (17.2%) is seen for those aged 20–29. Conversely, among non-supporters, the percentage increases steadily with age, reaching 39.1% for those 60 and above (an interesting contrast) , compared to only 5.3% among those in the youngest age group (20–29). The Pearson Chi-Square test is highly significant (p < .001), confirming that generational differences play a crucial role in shaping independence preferences. Younger respondents tend to be more supportive of independence, while older generations exhibit greater opposition.

|  | No Threat | Threat Perceived | Row Total (N) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Unconditional Support | 58.4 (262) | 41.6 (187) | 449 |
| Conditional Support | 17.8 (86) | 82.2 (396) | 482 |
| Non‐Support | 10.0 (28) | 90.0 (251) | 279 |

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Table 3. Perceived China Threat and Preferences on Taiwan Independence (% within each Independence Category)

Table 3 examines the relationship between perceptions of a Chinese military threat and support for Taiwan independence. Among unconditional supporters, a majority (58.4%) believe there is no threat, while 41.6% believe there is a risk of Chinese military action. In contrast, for conditional supporters, the pattern is reversed—82.2% believe China would attack if Taiwan declared independence, while only 17.8% perceive no threat. Finally, in terms of non-supporters, the belief in a Chinese threat is overwhelming (90.0%), whereas only 10.0% see no threat. The Pearson Chi-Square test is also highly significant (p < .001), confirming that the perception of a Chinese threat strongly influences independence preferences. Those who believe China will attack are more likely to oppose independence or support it conditionally, while those who perceive no threat are more likely to support independence unconditionally.

|  | Strengthen | Decline | Row Total (N) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Unconditional Support (IND) | 29.1 (118) | 70.9 (287) | 405 |
| Conditional Support (IND) | 62.2 (272) | 37.8 (165) | 437 |
| Non‐Support (IND) | 87.8 (209) | 12.2 (29) | 238 |

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AI-generated content may be incorrect.Table 4. Attitude toward Economic Integration with Mainland and Preferences on Taiwan Independence (% within each Independence Category)

Table 4 presents the relationship between attitude toward Mainland economic integration and preferences on Taiwan independence. Among unconditional supporters, 70.9% believe that Taiwan’s economic integration with the Mainland should decline, whereas 29.1% believe it should strengthen. Among non-supporters, the pattern reverses: 87.8% support stronger economic integration with the Mainland, while only 12.2% favor decline. Conditional supporters fall between these extremes, with 62.2% supporting stronger integration and 37.8% favoring economic decline. The Pearson Chi-Square test is highly significant (p < .001), confirming that economic perspectives on China are a crucial factor in shaping respondents’ attitudes toward Taiwan independence.

|  | KMT | DPP | TPP | Row Total (N) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Unconditional Support (IND) | 10.7 (34) | 82.1 (262) | 7.2 (23) | 319 |
| Conditional Support (IND) | 36.8 (118) | 37.1 (119) | 26.2 (84) | 321 |
| Non‐Support (IND) | 76.7 (148) | 6.7 (13) | 16.6 (32) | 193 |

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AI-generated content may be incorrect.Table 5. Party Identification and Preferences on Taiwan Independence (% within each Independence Category)

Table 5 presents the relationship between party identification (KMT, DPP, and TPP) and support for Taiwan independence. Among unconditional supporters, 82.1% identify with the DPP, while only 10.7% belong to the KMT. The reverse pattern is seen among non‐supporters, where 76.7% are KMT members, while just 6.7% belong to the DPP. For conditional supporters, respondents display a relative equal distribution among three parties. I was expecting to see if TPP identifiers would be more associated with a "median-voter" image; but ultimately people who identify themselves as either KMT or DPP have exceeded that of TPP. The Pearson Chi‐Square test is highly significant (p < .001), confirming that party affiliation plays a critical role in shaping attitudes toward Taiwan independence.

| Table 6 \*U.S. Involvement) | U.S. Will Defend | Neutral | Row Total (N) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Unconditional Support (IND) | 40.0 (340) | 27.8 (87) | 36.7 (427) |
| Conditional Support (IND) | 42.7 (363) | 36.1 (113) | 40.9 (476) |
| Non‐Support (IND) | 17.3 (147) | 36.1 (113) | 22.4 (260) |

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AI-generated content may be incorrect.Table 6 examines the relationship between perceived U.S. commitment to defending Taiwan and support for independence. The results indicate that expectations of U.S. defense influence respondents’ views on independence. Among unconditional supporters, 40.0% believe the U.S. will defend Taiwan, while 27.8% remain neutral. Conditional supporters, however, have the highest proportion believing in U.S. defense (42.7%), while 36.1% of neutral respondents fall into this category. Among non-supporters, the lowest percentage (17.3%) believe the U.S. will defend Taiwan, while 36.1% are neutral. The Pearson Chi-Square test is highly significant (p < .001), confirming that belief in U.S. defense commitments is associated with increased support for Taiwan independence. Those who expect U.S. military intervention are more likely to support independence, while those who are neutral are more evenly distributed between A screenshot of a test

AI-generated content may be incorrect.conditional support and non-support.

| Table 7 (Ethnic Group) | Hakka | Minnan | Mainlanders | Aboriginals | Row Total (N) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Unconditional Support (IND) | 9.6 (42) | 82.9 (364) | 4.6 (20) | 3.0 (13) | 439 |
| Conditional Support (IND) | 13.6 (66) | 76.4 (372) | 9.9 (48) | 0.2 (1) | 487 |
| Non‐Support (IND) | 14.8 (42) | 66.9 (190) | 16.9 (48) | 1.4 (4) | 284 |

Table 7 presents the relationship between Taiwanese ethnic groups and support for Taiwan independence. Among unconditional supporters, the vast majority (82.9%) are Minnan (Hoklo), while only 4.6% are Mainlanders, 9.6% are Hakka, and 3.0% are Aboriginals. A similar trend is observed among conditional supporters, where 76.4% are Minnan and 9.9% are Mainlanders. Within non-supporters, the proportion of Mainlanders rises to 16.9%, while Minnan representation drops to 66.9%. The Pearson Chi-Square test is highly significant (p < .001), confirming that ethnic identity is a crucial factor influencing preferences for Taiwan independence. Minnan respondents are more likely to support independence, whereas Mainlanders are more likely to oppose it.

|  | Elementary & Below | Middle School | High School | Vocational School | College & Above | Row Total (N) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Unconditional Support (IND) | 10.1 (47) | 15.1 (70) | 28.2 (131) | 8.8 (41) | 37.7 (175) | 464 |
| Conditional Support (IND) | 5.4 (27) | 7.4 (37) | 27.1 (136) | 13.8 (69) | 46.3 (232) | 501 |
| Non‐Support (IND) | 13.2 (38) | 10.4 (30) | 30.6 (88) | 13.9 (40) | 31.9 (92) | 288 |

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AI-generated content may be incorrect.Finally, table 8 visualizes the relationship between education level and support for Taiwan independence. The results suggest that higher education levels are associated with greater support for independence. Among unconditional supporters, 37.7% have attained college education or above, while only 10.1% have elementary education or below. The trend is similar for conditional supporters, with the highest proportion (46.3%) being college-educated, compared to 5.4% with elementary-level education. The non-supporters are more evenly distributed. 31.9% have a college education, and 13.2% have elementary-level education, suggesting that lower education levels correspond with greater opposition to independence. The Pearson Chi-Square test is highly significant (p < .001), confirming that education level is an important factor influencing attitudes toward Taiwan independence.

*Multinominal Regression*

Based on the multinomial logit regression results for preferences on independence (as shown regression table , several key findings emerge regarding the factors influencing Taiwanese public opinion.

| **Covariate** | **Conditional Supporters (B, SE)** | **Non-Supporters (B, SE)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **National Identity (Ref = Both)** |  |  |
| Taiwanese | -0.699 (0.883) | -3.858^{\*\*\*} (0.732) |
| Chinese | 0.618 (0.891) | -1.177 (0.736) |
| **Generational Difference (Ref = 60+)** |  |  |
| 20-29 | 0.319 (0.201) | -1.655^{\*\*\*} (0.310) |
| 30-39 | 0.254 (0.200) | -0.918^{\*\*\*} (0.244) |
| 40-49 | 0.083 (0.195) | -0.705^{\*\*} (0.219) |
| 50-59 | -0.068 (0.206) | -0.205 (0.208) |
| **China Threat (Ref = Yes)** | -1.866^{\*\*\*} (0.153) | -2.531^{\*\*\*} (0.221) |
| **Economic Interdependence (Ref = Decline)** | 1.388^{\*\*\*} (0.147) | 2.858^{\*\*\*} (0.226) |
| **Party Identification (Refer = TPP)** |  |  |
| KMT | -0.055 (0.307) | 1.128^{\*\*\*} (0.334) |
| DPP | -2.095^{\*\*\*} (0.261) | -3.317^{\*\*\*} (0.391) |
| **U.S. Commitment (Refer = Neutral)** | -0.197 (0.161) | -1.100^{\*\*\*} (0.174) |
| **Ethnic Groups (Refer = Aboriginals)** |  |  |
| Hakka | 3.717^{\*\*} (1.430) | 1.156 (0.599) |
| Minnan | 3.278^{\*} (1.418) | 0.504 (0.565) |
| Mainlanders | 4.138^{\*\*} (1.441) | 2.030^{\*\*} (0.618) |
| **Education (Refer = College & Above)** |  |  |
| Elementary and Below | -0.836^{\*\*} (0.262) | 0.426 (0.254) |
| Middle School | -0.905^{\*\*\*} (0.226) | -0.185 (0.253) |
| High School | -0.249 (0.158) | 0.249 (0.189) |
| Vocational School | 0.236 (0.221) | 0.610^{\*} (0.258) |

\* Indicates p .05 two-tailed; entries are maximum likelihood coefficients with standard errors in

parentheses.

**Results and Discussion**

The results of this multinomial logit model provide valuable insights into the factors shaping attitudes toward Taiwan independence and extend Niou’s (2004) and Wang et al’s (2025) analyses by incorporating more recent political, economic, and demographic trends.

Consistent with Niou’s findings, national identity remains a key determinant of independence preferences. Individuals who identify as Taiwanese are less likely to oppose independence compared to those who identify as both Taiwanese and Chinese, while those who identify solely as Chinese **do not exhibit a statistically significant difference** from the reference category.

Generational differences further reinforce the political divergence over independence, with younger respondents (particularly those aged 20–39) displaying a stronger inclination toward supporting independence, either conditionally or unconditionally. Older generations, who have had more direct experience with past KMT rule and potential cross-strait memories and family ties, are more likely to oppose independence or support it only under certain conditions. This generational shift indicates a key development beyond Chu’s (2004) findings: the younger cohorts in 2024, having grown up in a democratic Taiwan with less direct connection to China, are more inclined toward supporting sovereignty as compared to 20 years ago.

While multiple factors influence preferences for Taiwan independence, the results indicate that the perception of a military threat from China is the **strongest determinant of independence attitudes**. Individuals who do not perceive a military threat from China are more likely to support independence unconditionally, while those who do perceive a threat either become non-supporters or support conditionally. This aligns with Niou’s argument that security concerns constrain pro-independence sentiment, reinforcing the idea that external deterrence remains a critical factor in Taiwan’s political landscape.

In contrast, economic integration with China emerges as the strongest pro-status quo force that discourages unconditional support for independence. Individuals who favor strengthening Taiwan’s economic ties with China have a higher tendency to oppose independence. Economic interdependence with China remains a critical factor in shaping Taiwan’s political trajectory, reinforcing arguments that Taiwanese voters may prioritize economic stability over nationalist aspirations.

The impact of party identification function quite as expected, DPP supporters are overwhelmingly more likely to support independence unconditionally, while KMT supporters are significantly more likely to oppose it.

The influence of U.S. defense commitments, however, presents a more complicated effect than Niou originally examined in 2004. While belief in U.S. military support does not significantly differentiate conditional and unconditional supporters, it has a strong impact in reducing outright opposition to independence. This result provides an interesting finding that confidence in U.S. defense assistance primarily acts as a deterrent to pro-China alignment, rather than a direct motivator for pro-independence sentiment.

Ethnic background, an area underexplored in Western academia focuses, continues to shape attitudes toward independence. Waisheng (Mainland-ancestry) Taiwanese remain the most likely to oppose independence, consistent with historical patterns, while Hakka and Minnan individuals tend to support independence conditionally rather than unconditionally. This suggests that while ethnic identity remains a key determinant, the stark ethnic cleavages that characterized earlier decades may be evolving, with greater internal variation within groups.

Finally, education level plays a pivotal role in structuring independence attitudes, though its effect is less evident than the security and economic variables. Higher education correlates with greater unconditional support for independence, while lower education levels are associated with more conditional or uncertain positions. Notably, vocational school graduates are significantly more likely to oppose independence than college graduates, suggesting that socioeconomic background—rather than education alone—may be influencing political attitudes. This adds an important socioeconomic dimension to Niou’s framework, indicating that the intersection of education, class, and political ideology is worth further exploration.

**Conclusion**

Overall, these findings largely support Niou’s original arguments while refining and expanding upon them in key areas. The persistence of national identity, generational shifts, security concerns, economic considerations, and party politics as primary drivers of independence attitudes reaffirm Niou’s framework. However, the results in 2024 also introduce important refinements, particularly in identifying China’s military threat as the strongest determinant impacting Taiwanese conditional preference toward independence, and economic integration as the most powerful predictor of opposition to sovereignty. These findings indicate that while the fundamental forces shaping Taiwan’s sovereignty debate remain largely intact, their manifestations are evolving in response to broader political, economic, and generational shifts.

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3. Niou (2004), p. 558. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Chu (2004), p. 503. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Niou (2004), p. 556. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
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