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Poll could have major geopolitical impact

# Region's eyes on Taiwanese election results

**Focus**  
**GABRIEL DOMINGUEZ**  
**TAIPEI**  
STAFF WRITER

In Taiwan, it's not hard to see why many people are so excited about Saturday's presidential and legislative elections.

Across the self-ruled island, electoral ads have become ubiquitous, particularly in cities, with the candidates' faces and party slogans displayed everywhere from buildings to buses.

Many will have been able to catch a glimpse of one of the presidential candidates as they toured Taiwan's main cities, greeting supporters from the back of pick-up trucks as they make their final pitches.

Add to this almost nonstop media coverage of the contest and the numerous rallies held across the island in recent days — often bringing together tens of thousands of supporters — and you can easily tell that the election campaign has hit a fever pitch.

There's good reason for this.

Many view the upcoming vote, widely regarded as a three-way race between the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), the main opposition Kuomintang (KMT) and the "middle ground" Taiwan People's Party (TPP), as one with potentially significant geopolitical consequences for both Taiwan and the region.

When the island's 19.5 million eligible voters head to the polls, they will not only decide who handles everyday domestic issues. Depending on the outcome, the closely watched vote could also have markedly different security and economic implications, as the strategically located island remains one of the greatest potential flash-points between the United States and China.

"This election is still very much about sending a message on who we are as a

country, where our values stand and that we won't be bullied by China into submission," DPP supporter Tsai Tze-wei said at a rally in Taipei on Thursday.

The 45-year-old taxi driver in Taipei is convinced that the front-runner in the presidential race, current Vice President Lai Ching-te, will offer policy continuity, preserving the cross-strait status quo and ensuring follow-up on outgoing President Tsai Ing-wen's policy of bolstering Taiwan's defenses.

Kuo Chia-wei, a 50-year-old accountant in the capital, disagrees, calling KMT candidate and New Taipei City Mayor Hou Yu-ih the most capable to restore a sense of calm amid the recent turbulence in the island's ties with China.

"Cross-strait relations have only become more tense under the DPP over the past eight years, and now we run the risk of being caught in the middle of a conflict between two superpowers," he said.

The risk of conflict has grown, as China — which has vowed to unify Taiwan with the mainland — steps up economic pressure and military activities around the island. The issue, and how Taiwan's next leader should tackle it, has become the greatest policy difference between the three candidates.

Lai, who has been repeatedly criticized by Beijing as a "troublemaker" for calling Taiwan a de facto independent and sovereign country, has vowed to guide the island of 23.5 million people to increased autonomy and security through closer relations with Washington and like-minded democracies.

The KMT has criticized the independence-minded DPP for stoking tensions with China and called for returning to a policy of engagement with Beijing, with Hou framing the upcoming election as a "choice between war and peace." As for the TPP, its founder and candidate, former Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je,

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**LONGFORM:**  
**The people of Noto**  
**come together to rebuild**  
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The roads of Anamizu, Ishikawa Prefecture, remain littered with collapsed homes and other debris more than a week after a massive earthquake. KYODO

# Airstrikes target Houthi facilities

Move by U.S. and U.K. comes amid attacks on shipping in the Red Sea

**SANAA, YEMEN**  
AFP-JIJ

Heavy U.S. and British airstrikes pounded targets in rebel-held Yemen early on Friday after weeks of disruptive attacks on Red Sea shipping by Iran-backed Houthi forces acting in solidarity with Hamas.

The Houthis have carried out a growing number of attacks on what they deem to be Israel-linked shipping in the key international trade route since the eruption of the war in Gaza sparked by Hamas' unprecedented attack on Israel on Oct. 7.

The rebels have controlled a major part of Yemen since a civil war erupted there in 2014 and are part of the Iran-backed "axis of resistance" arrayed against Israel.

Friday's strikes targeted an airbase, airports and a military camp, the Houthi rebels' Al-Masirah TV station said, with AFP correspondents and witnesses also reporting they could hear bombardments.

"Our country was subjected to a massive aggressive attack by American and British ships, submarines and warplanes," Houthi Deputy Foreign Minister Hussein Al-Ezzi said, according to official rebel media.

"America and Britain will have to prepare to pay a heavy price and bear all the dire consequences of this blatant aggression," he said.

U.S. President Joe Biden called the U.S. and British strikes a "defensive action" after the Red Sea attacks and said he "will not hesitate" to order further military action if needed.

The strikes involved fighter jets and Tomahawk missiles, the U.S. Air Forces Central Command said in a statement. Sixty targets at 16 Houthi locations were hit by more than 100 precision-guided munitions, it said.

"Today, at my direction, U.S. military forces

— together with the United Kingdom and with support from Australia, Bahrain, Canada, and the Netherlands — successfully conducted strikes against a number of targets in Yemen used by Houthi rebels to endanger freedom of navigation in one of the world's most vital waterways," Biden said in a statement.

Unverified images on social media, some of them purportedly of Al-Dailami airbase north of Sanaa, showed explosions lighting up the sky as loud bangs and the roar of planes sounded.

Biden called the strikes a "direct response" to the "unprecedented" attacks by the Houthis, "including the use of anti-ship ballistic missiles for the first time in history."

"These attacks have endangered U.S. personnel, civilian mariners, and our partners, jeopardized trade, and threatened freedom of navigation," he said.

Blaming the Houthis for ignoring "repeated warnings," British Prime Minister

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# Nikkei posts 34-year high, best week in 22 months

**KEVIN BUCKLAND**  
REUTERS

The Nikkei share average scaled a 34-year peak on Friday, recording its best week since March 2022, underpinned by receding bets on an early exit from the Bank of Japan (BOJ) stimulus and sheer momentum as foreign investors returned.

The Nikkei closed Friday's trading 1.06% higher at 35,422.95, after rising as much as 2.25% to 35,839.65 for the first time since February 1990. The index rallied nearly 7% and marked a multidecade high every trading day this week.

Technical indicators were flashing warning signs, however, with one such measure — the relative strength index, or RSI — climbing to 74.55 for the Nikkei. Readings above 70 indicate an overheated market.

Nikkei volatility has spiked over the past two days to reach the highest level since Oct. 31, when the BOJ unexpectedly tweaked policy to allow bond yields to rise further.

"It wouldn't be unusual to see a retracement at any moment of the steepest part of this rally," Nomura Securities strategist Maki Sawada said, adding that she had expected the Nikkei to decline at Friday's open.

The rally was supported by receding bets for an end to the BOJ's negative rate policy at its Jan. 22-23 meeting, following the devastating New Year's Day quake on the Noto Peninsula in Ishikawa Prefecture.

Wage data this week has given further incentive for the central bank to hold fire on any hawkish shift.

At the same time, Finance Ministry data on Friday showed foreign investors bought a net ¥296.2 billion of Japanese equities in the week to Jan. 6, following two weeks as net sellers.

So far this year, the Nikkei has climbed 6.3%, the only major global stock index to post gains other than the U.S. S&P 500, which is up 0.21%. Britain's FTSE lost nearly 2% and Hong Kong's Hang Seng tumbled 4.43%.

"Foreign investors think the Japanese market is relatively better than other markets. It is not as extended as U.S. markets, and the economy is better than Europe or China," said Shinji Abe, an equity strategist at Daiwa Securities.



**Eyes on the top**  
Upcoming tournament could bring change to sumo's upper echelons | **SPORTS, PAGE 6**

**Reform talks**  
LDP begins process of making political funding more transparent | **NATIONAL, PAGE 2**

**Pillars of green wisdom**  
Wars must not distract us from lowering emissions and fighting poverty | **OPINION, PAGE 9**

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# Boeing faces U.S. safety probe over 737 blowout

**RYAN BEENE AND RICHARD CLOUGH**  
BLOOMBERG

The Federal Aviation Administration opened a formal investigation of Boeing's aircraft operations following last week's accident on one of its passenger jets, escalating a quality control crisis at the U.S. plane-maker.

The regulator said the company's production practices must meet demanding safety standards for which it's accountable. The investigation stems from a midair blowout of a so-called door plug on a 737 Max 9 jet operated by Alaska Airlines on Jan. 5.

"This incident should have never happened and it cannot happen again," the agency said in a statement.

The probe compounds troubles unfolding at Boeing after the fuselage panel blew off Alaska Airlines Flight 1282 shortly after takeoff from Portland, Oregon, with 177 people on board. The agency said it aims to determine whether Boeing "failed to ensure completed products conformed to its approved design and were in a condition for safe operation in compliance with FAA regulations."



The FAA's announcement and letter indicate the agency is poised for a broad examination of Boeing's aircraft production operations that could expose the company to "severe" civil penalties, said Jeff Guzzetti, the former accident investigation chief at FAA. Such a probe could go beyond Boeing's 737 Max factory near Seattle to include its plant in Charleston, South Carolina, where it assembles the 787 widebody, as well as key

**The fuselage plug area of Alaska Airlines Flight 1282, which was forced to make an emergency landing on Jan. 5.**  
NTSB / VIA REUTERS

suppliers such as Spirit Aerosystems Holdings, which makes most of the 737 fuselage, Guzzetti said.

"It's a sweeping investigation," Guzzetti said in an interview. It gives the agency "carte blanche to come in and investigate anything they want related to aircraft production processes."

In a letter to Boeing laying out its decision, the FAA said it was notified of "additional discrepancies" on other 737 Max 9 aircraft after the accident, though it didn't provide details. Boeing said it will "cooperate fully and transparently" with the investigations.

The FAA's move heightens the stakes for Boeing, which is already facing heavy scrutiny over a series of quality issues across its aircraft programs. Regulators grounded 171 of the 737 Max 9 jets in operation after the Alaska accident to allow for inspections, prompting Max 9 operators to cancel hundreds of flights.

United Airlines Holdings, the largest operators of the model, found loose bolts on several jets during preliminary inspections. Alaska Air Group has said "loose hardware

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