



Taiwan Public Opinion Foundation

April 2024 Public Opinion Poll – English Excerpt

Released:

April 23, 2024

Taiwan Public Opinion Foundation (TPOF) today released the result of its April 2024 nation-wide poll. This marks the 92nd monthly survey conducted by the TPOF aimed at tracking the development and changes in Taiwan’s public opinion. The full release in Chinese language is available on our official website.

How the Survey was Conducted

This survey was conducted on April 15-17, 2024, with a sample size of 1,084. Adults 20 years of age and older residing in Taiwan were interviewed by telephone using live interviewers. Landline and cellphone numbers were drawn through dual-frame random sampling with a proportion of 70% from landlines and 30% from cellphones. Samples were demographically weighted to adjust for gender, age, education and the district of residency based on the latest statistics published by the Ministry of the Interior. Sampling error is around ± 2.98 percentage points with 95% level of confidence.

Background

President Tsai Ing-wen will conclude her two-term presidency on May 20, 2024, when her DPP successor Lai Ching-te will be inaugurated as the new president. How do Taiwanese people view President Tsai and her political legacy over the last eight years? To fairly evaluate a president's administration and contribution to a country's history, it is just as important to evaluate what a president *did not* do compared to evaluating what he or she did.

During President Tsai's two terms, four major events happened that greatly shaped and defined international community's perceptions of Taiwan during this time. The first was the Covid-19 pandemic that ravaged the world starting in late 2019, and Taiwan's initial success and later difficulties in handling that pandemic. The second was the outbreak of Russia-Ukraine War in February 2022, which elicited many comparisons with Taiwan's tension with China. The third was China's unprecedented military exercises around Taiwan in August 2022 following then U.S. House speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit of Taiwan. The fourth was the deterioration in relations and geopolitical competition between the United States and China that since 2018.

There are at least four major legacies that Tsai will be remembered for broadly in positive light. The first was Tsai's cross-strait policy toward China, which removed the previous KMT administration's framework based upon "92 consensus". The second was Tsai's attempt at reforming the public pension system. The third was the legalization of same-sex marriage. Finally, the confiscation of KMT's party assets was also one of her presidency's major initiatives.

But Tsai will also be remembered for her failures, such as her lackluster reform into Taiwan's judicial system, the poorly received labor law reform into mandatory public holidays, the much-criticized "Forward-looking Infrastructure Development Program", the controversial attempts to promote a Taiwan domestic vaccine amidst a raging Covid pandemic, and the failure of "New Southbound Policy", to name a few.

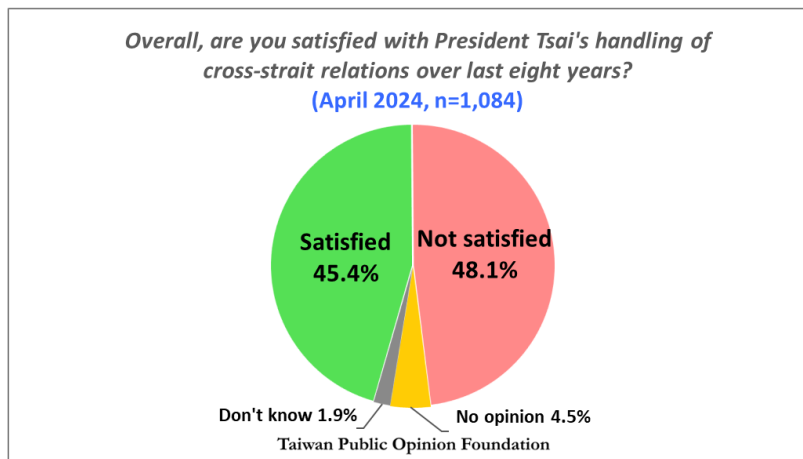
How will Tsai's eight years be evaluated and remembered in the eyes of the Taiwanese public? That's what our polls are interested in exploring.

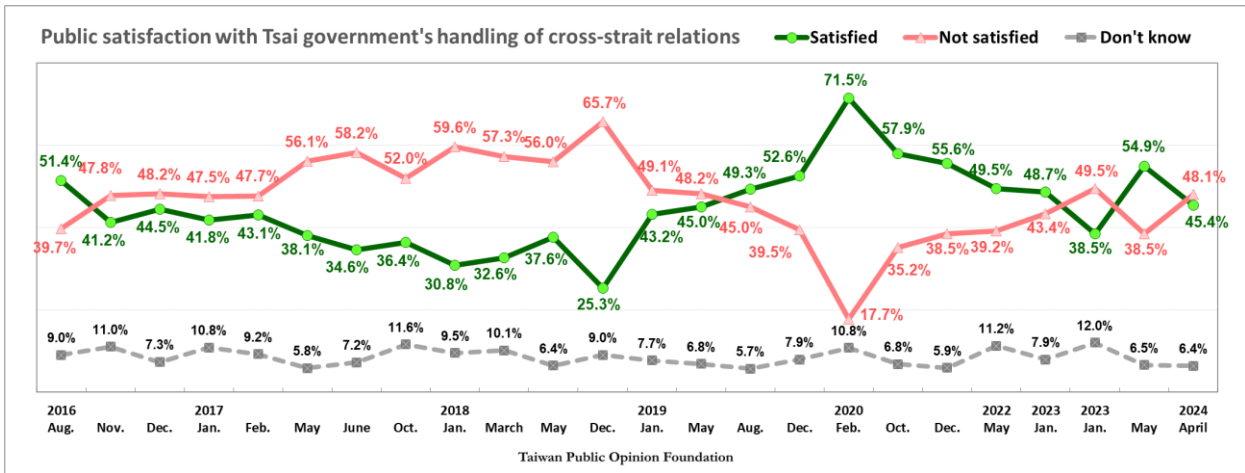
Main Findings:

1. On Tsai government's handling of the cross-strait relations with China over the last eight years, the poll finds among Taiwanese adults aged 20 years and older, 48.1% said they are not satisfied, while 45.4% are satisfied. At the end of Tsai's terms, the public is heavily divided with a slim majority disapproving of her

legacy on the all-important cross-strait relations. How would this impact the upcoming Lai administration? That remains to be seen. A few observations from Tsai's past approval rating on cross-strait relations:

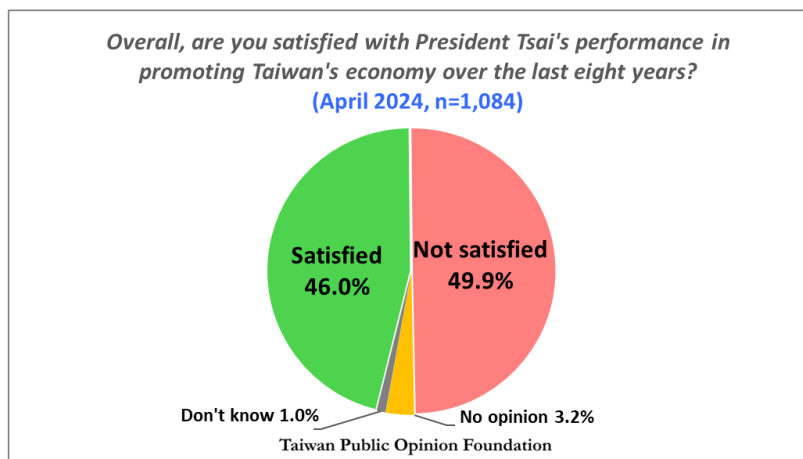
- Tsai started her first term with relatively good approval of her cross-strait policies. In May 2016, a full 51.4% Taiwanese supported her policies toward China, and yet the approval quickly took a nosedive and three months later the majority clearly disapproved of her on the issue.
- The highest mark Tsai government ever scored on cross-strait relations was back in February 2020 at the height of Covid-19 when a record 71.5% approved of her approach toward China. The lowest was back in December 2018 at 65.7% disapproval, after DPP's landslide defeat in the local elections that year.
- Looking back at past eight years, when the cross-strait relations are relatively more tense and the president shows toughness toward China, the approval rate for the president would increase. Conversely, when cross-strait relations are relatively calm and the president appears as passive or lacking action, the approval rate would decline.

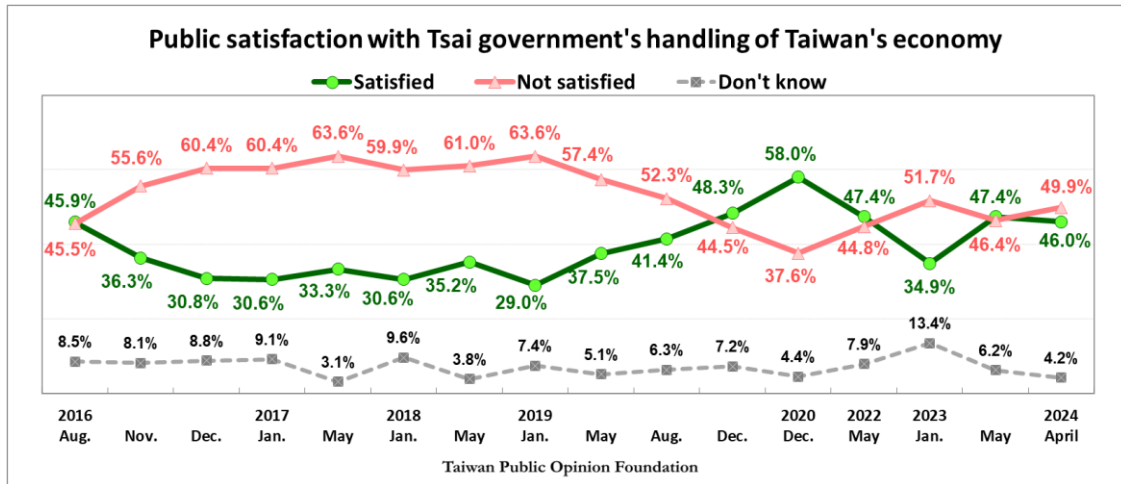




2. On Tsai government's economic performance over the last eight years, the poll finds among Taiwanese adults aged 20 years and older, 49.9% said they are not satisfied, while 46% are satisfied. At the end of Tsai's terms, majority of Taiwanese public clearly were not satisfied with the state of Taiwan's economy under Tsai's management.

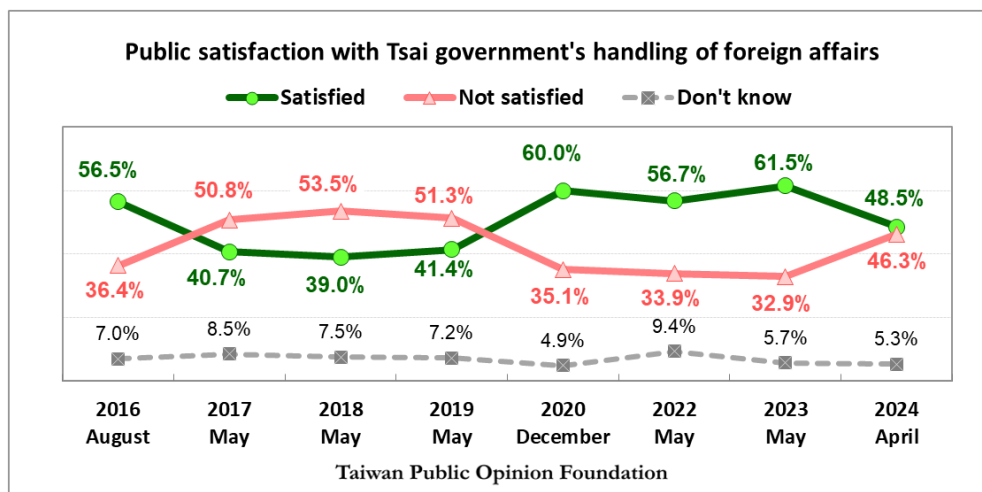
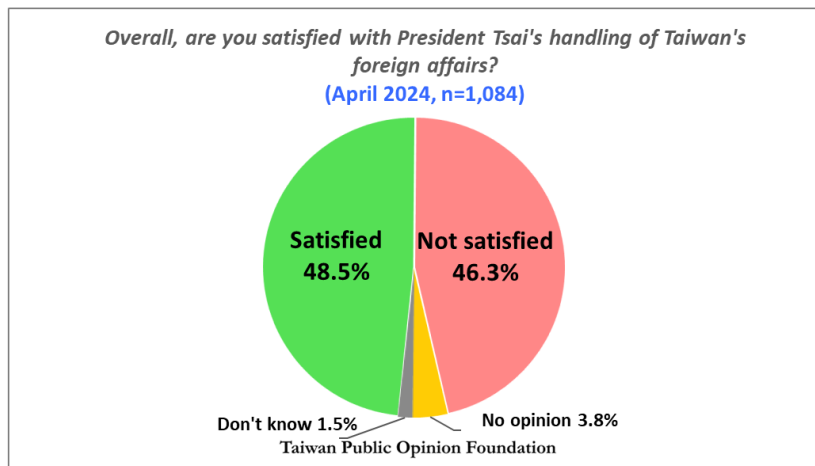
Looking back, at the beginning of Tsai's first term in 2016 the public were willing to give her government the benefit of the doubt. But economic satisfaction turned sharply negative just months into her administration and would remain so until the end of 2019. The initial Covid containment success saw economic satisfaction skyrocketed, but Tsai was only able to maintain it for the first half of her second term, and sentiment turned negative again at the end of 2022, though dissatisfaction over her second term never reached the same high level during her first term.





3. On Tsai government's handling of Taiwan's foreign affairs over the last eight years, the poll finds among Taiwanese adults aged 20 years and older, 48.5% said they are satisfied, while 46.3% are not satisfied. Looking back at past polls, why did Tsai manage to maintain the majority of foreign affairs approvals during her second term but had years of high disapproval during her first term? Considering Tsai's foreign policy teams and core officials remained essentially unchanged from her first to second term, something else must have changed.

One likely key factor was the changes in international circumstances external to Taiwan. As U.S.-China relations deteriorated and strategic competition between two superpowers intensified from 2018 onward, developments in international events from that point turned sharply negative for China's public image. The outbreak of Covid-19 in 2019, the start of Russia-Ukraine War in 2022, China's aggressive military posture toward Taiwan, these external factors helped Tsai government create a facade of "tough on China" domestic image. It also allowed Tsai government to boast to domestic audience of its supposed achievement of having so-called "stronger than ever" U.S.-Taiwan relations as well as good relations with other Western nations.

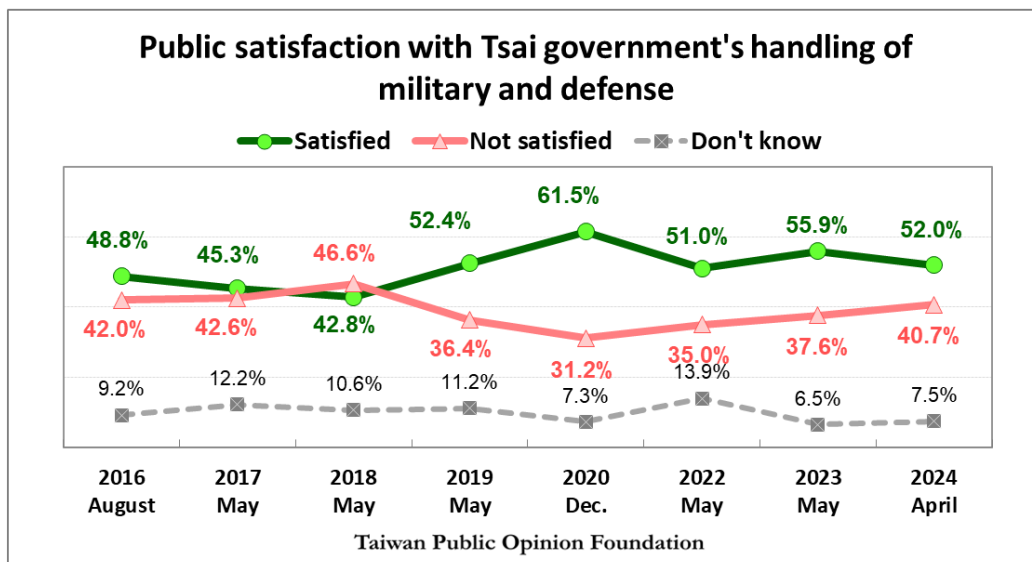
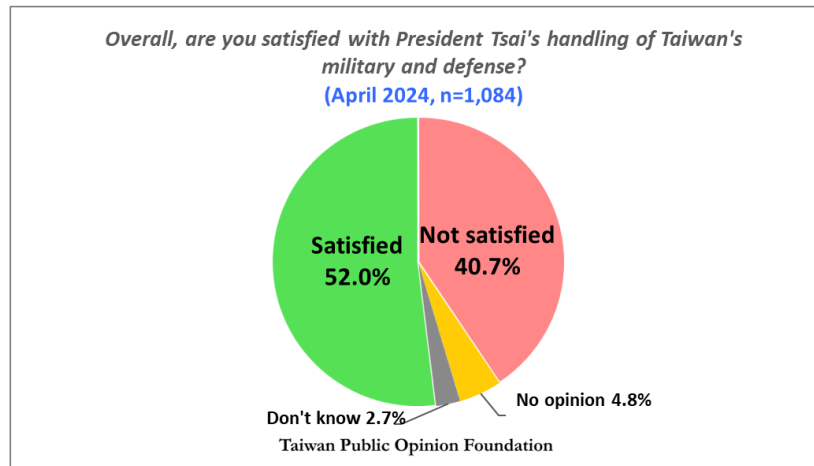


4. On Tsai government's handling of Taiwan's military and defense over the last eight years, the poll finds among Taiwanese adults aged 20 years and older, 52% said they are satisfied, while 40.7% are not satisfied. As can be seen from past polls, 2019 was again the turning point when the public started to see Tsai's handling of defense matters in a positive light, while dissatisfactions noticeably reduced.

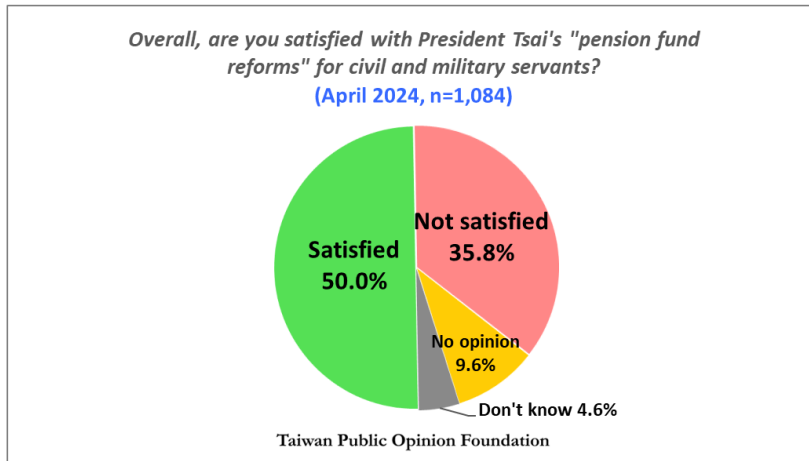
Given its opaque nature and lack of transparency and information from Taiwan's government and military, Taiwanese general public hardly have any reliable way of assessing the actual capabilities and status of the very military that sworn to serve and protect them. These polls, therefore, can only serve as a reference point as to the shifts in Taiwanese public's perceptions of Tsai government's handling of the military, rather than a measurement of their actual confidence in the military.

One of the major defense policy changes the Tsai government committed to, albeit only announced near the end of her second term in December 2022, was the re-extension of military conscription from four-month to one year which TPOF polls

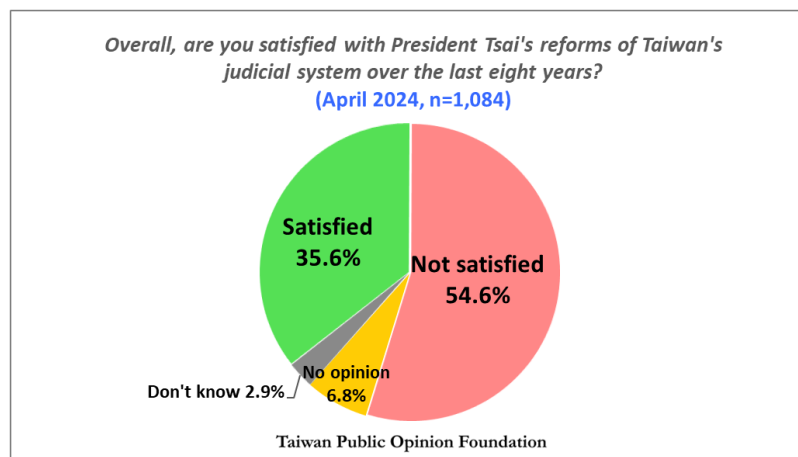
have found to be a change strongly supported by majority public for years. Another likely explanation to the positive shifts in satisfaction is the public perception regarding closer U.S.-Taiwan military relations, including the frequent arms sales and reports of U.S. training of Taiwanese troops.

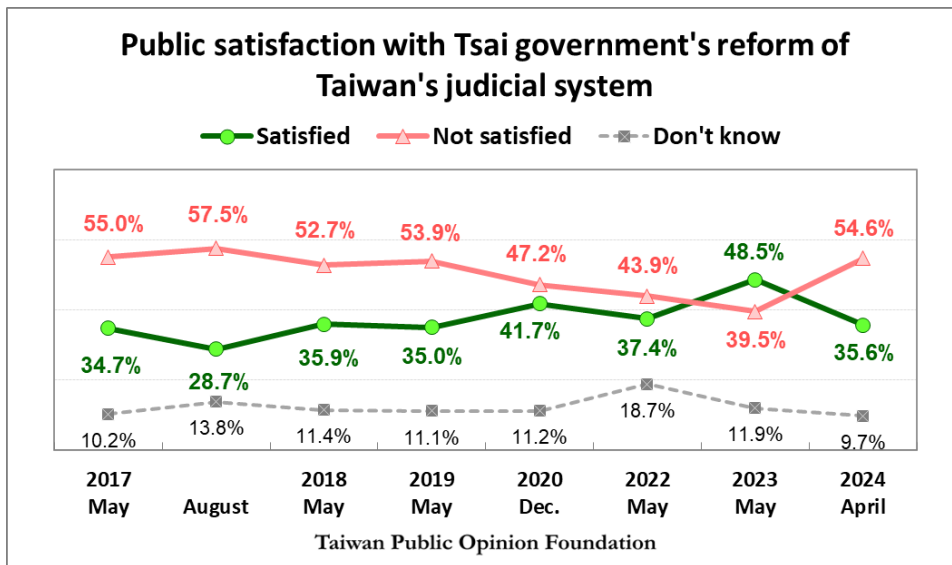


- One of the major policy initiatives during Tsai's first term in office was the pension reforms for civil and military servants in 2017, a move that was very controversial at time and generated a [huge wave of protests](#). More than seven years have passed, the poll finds among Taiwanese adults aged 20 years and older, 50% said they are satisfied with the reforms while 35.8% are not satisfied. In other word, majority of Taiwanese public have accepted the reform as necessary even though it was strongly opposed by civil and military servants and retirees. Should the KMT-controlled Legislative Yuan attempt to overturn this reform it will likely meet with considerable public opposition.

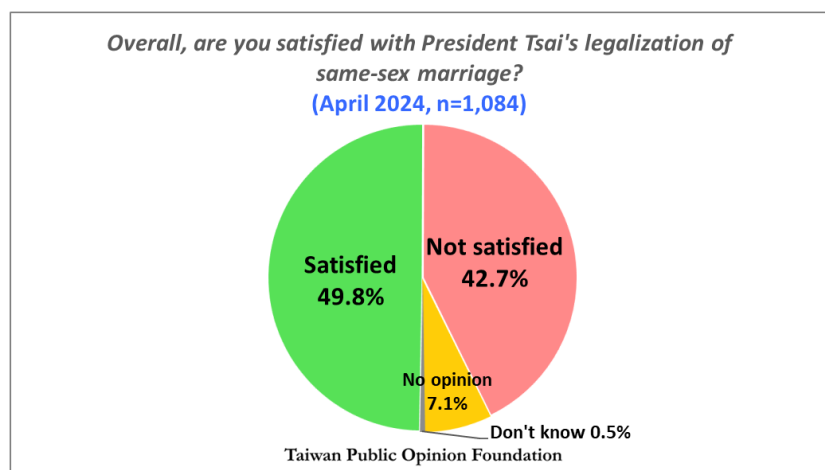


6. Taiwan's judicial system has long been criticized as needing comprehensive reforms and changes, and it was one of Tsai's major promises during her inauguration speech in 2016. However, the poll finds among Taiwanese adults aged 20 years and older, 54.6% said they are not satisfied, while 35.6% are satisfied. Notably, Taiwanese public have disapproved of Tsai's handling of judicial reforms for almost the entirety of her two terms and only recorded a positive approval in May 2023, but it is now firmly negative again. Clearly Taiwanese public are not convinced that Taiwan's judicial system has been sufficiently or correctly reformed under Tsai's terms, and it remains to be seen how the new President Lai will handle this matter.



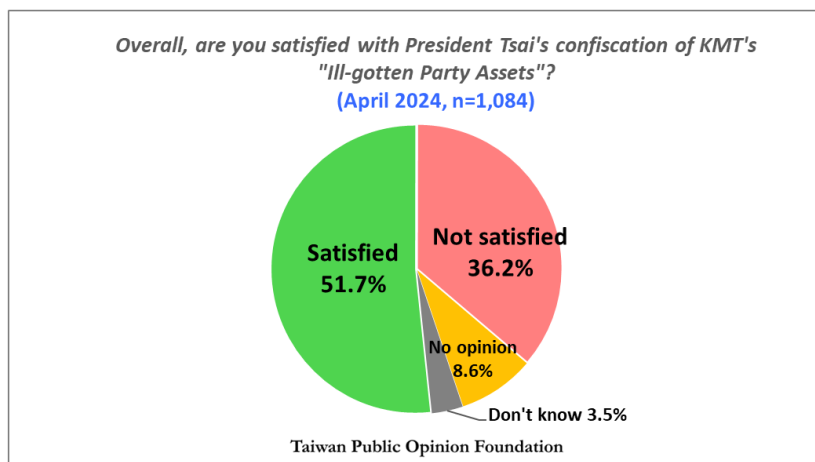


7. Taiwan formally legalized same-sex marriage in May 2019, supported strongly by the ruling Tsai government and its majority in the Legislative Yuan, which made international headlines at the time with many Western media and commentaries praising Taiwan as the first Asian country to have done so. Five year later, the poll finds among Taiwanese adults aged 20 years and older, 49.8% said they are satisfied with this policy change, while 42.7% are not satisfied. This means that the change to allow same-sex marriage has now been accepted by majority of Taiwanese public, even though a significant minority still oppose to it.

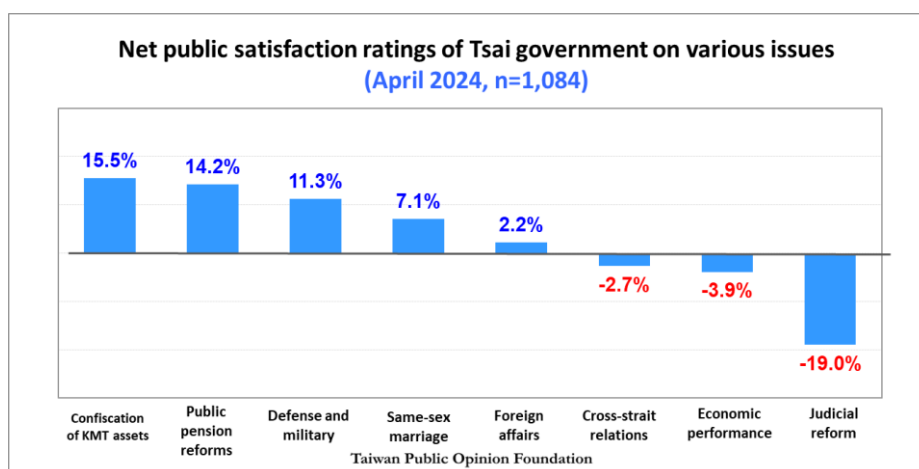


8. One of the first major initiatives during President Tsai's first term in office was the confiscation of opposition KMT party's so-called "ill-gotten party assets", which refers to the assets KMT received or accumulated from the government during the time when Taiwan was under KMT's authoritarian one-party rule. The poll finds among Taiwanese adults aged 20 years and older, 51.7% said they are satisfied, while 36.2% are not satisfied. The Taiwanese majority clearly approved of Tsai

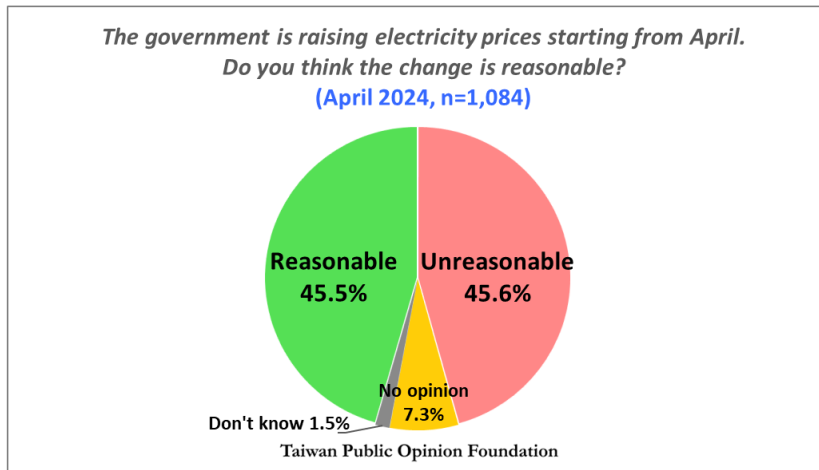
government's moves against KMT's assets, even though it was controversial and met with strong oppositions back then.



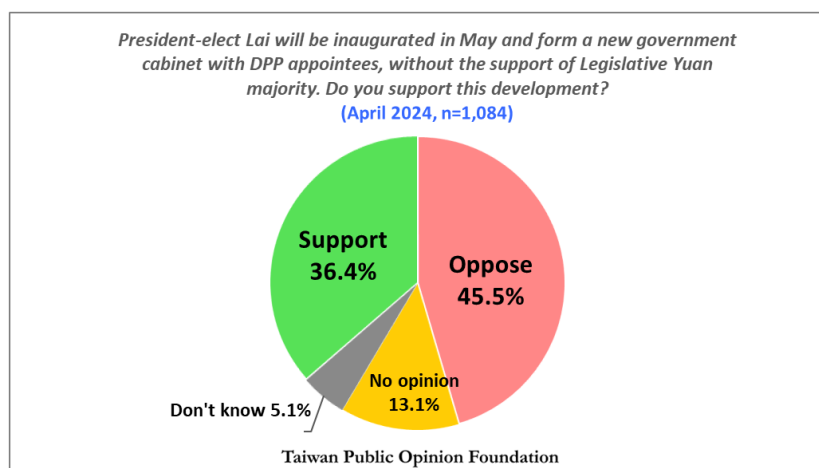
9. Overall, after eight years and at the end of her two-terms Tsai's government received the highest marks on confiscation of KMT assets, public pension reforms, and defense and military matters. She received the lowest mark on the fulfilment of judicial reform, while public satisfactions over foreign affairs and cross-strait relations are somewhat divided.



10. Taiwan government's Ministry of Economic Affairs announced in March that it would start raising electricity prices from April. The poll finds among Taiwanese adults aged 20 years and older, 45.5% think the raise is reasonable, while 45.6% think it is unreasonable. Clearly Taiwanese public are equally divided as to whether the government should raise electricity prices now. Note this is the first time in eight years the Tsai government raised electricity prices. Supporters of the KMT overwhelmingly oppose the raise, while supporters of the ruling DPP overwhelmingly support it. Supporters of TPP are somewhat divided but a slim majority opposes it.

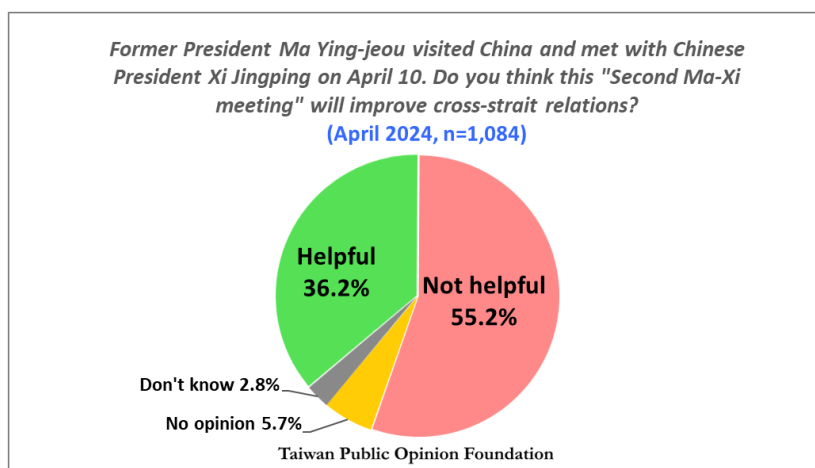


11. President-elect Lai Ching-te will be inaugurated on May 20, 2024. Lai already announced his picks for the Premier of the government and other cabinet posts, who are made up entirely of DPP appointees and no opposition party figures. The DPP currently only has a minority presence in Taiwan’s parliament, the Legislative Yuan, which is currently controlled by a majority coalition between the KMT and TPP. The constitution of the Republic of China (Taiwan) effectively allows the President to appoint the entire cabinet without consultation or approval from the Legislative Yuan in this process. Still, the poll finds among Taiwanese adults aged 20 years and older, only 36.4% support this development, while a majority of 45.5% oppose it. This means that despite Taiwan’s semi-presidential system provides the president with absolute power in appointing government and cabinet posts, the public still seems to desire some sort of parliamentary input and potentially coalition governance.



12. Taiwan’s former President Ma Ying-jeou visited China and [met with Chinese President Xi Jinping](#) on April 10. The poll finds among Taiwanese adults aged 20 years and older, a majority of 55.2% said the meeting will not be helpful for

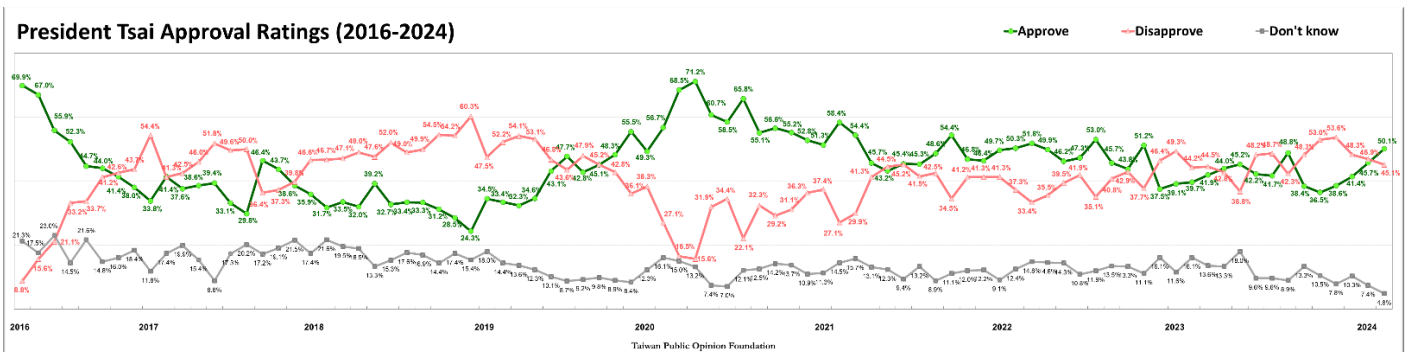
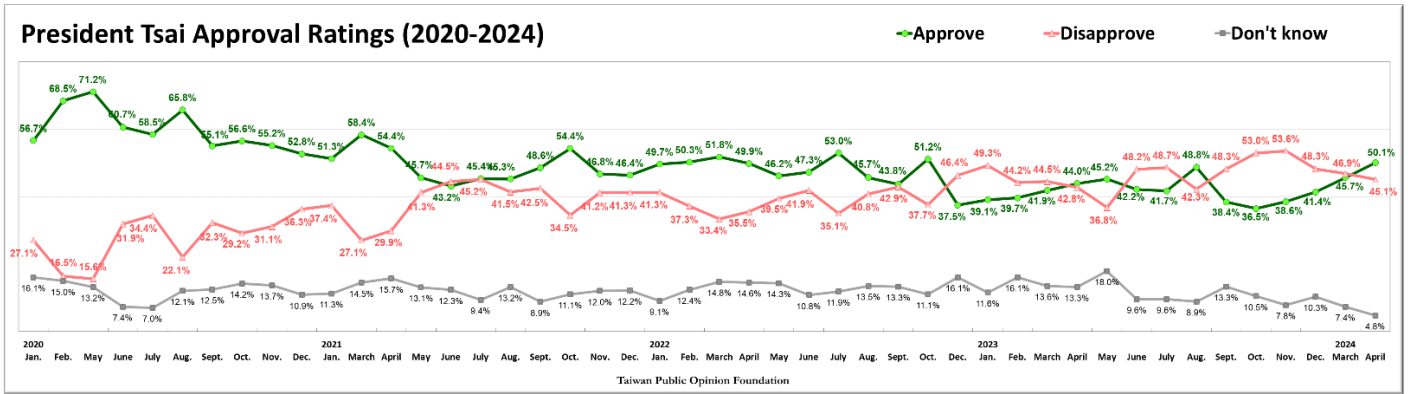
improving cross-strait relations, while 36.2% said it will help. This means that despite Ma's China visits produced considerable fanfare and media coverage especially among some supporters of the KMT, Taiwan's majority public do not see Ma's personal diplomacy as having an positive impact on the country's already tense relations with China.



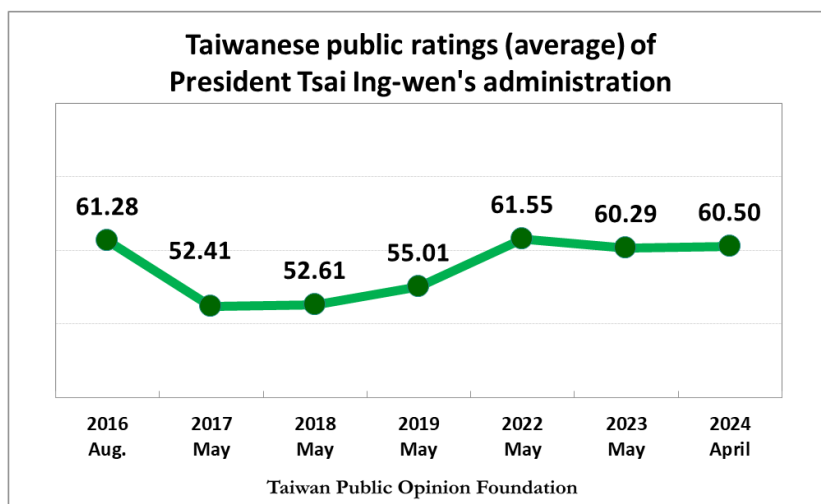
13. On Presidential job approval rating, the poll finds among Taiwanese adults aged 20 years and older, a majority of 50.1% approved of the way Tsai Ing-wen is handling her job as the outgoing President, while a minority of 45.1% disapproved of her. Compared to March's poll Tsai's approval has improved by another 4.4% and this has allowed her to score a positive approval rating at the final month of her eight-years presidency.

Looking back at Tsai's approval ratings across the past eight years, she had four "periods of difficulty" across her two presidential terms. The first was from November 2016 to August 2017, for nine months long. The second was November 2017 to May 2019, for one year and nine months. The third was December 2022 to March 2023, for four months. The fourth and the final one was September 2023 to March 2024, for six months.

Tsai's first term was considerably more difficult compared to her second term. Her approval ratings declined continuously and precipitously for the first year of her in office, and things only turned for the better around the middle of 2019. During her second term her approval ratings skyrocketed following Taiwan's early Covid pandemic containment success, and while later Covid problems and other domestic issues dragged down her approvals in the years that followed, she was able to maintain at least moderate levels of approval for most of her second term.



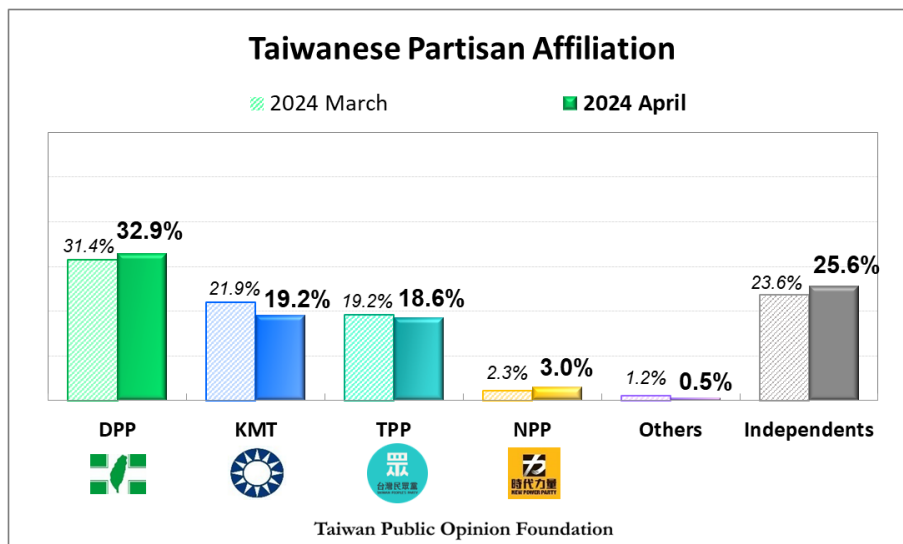
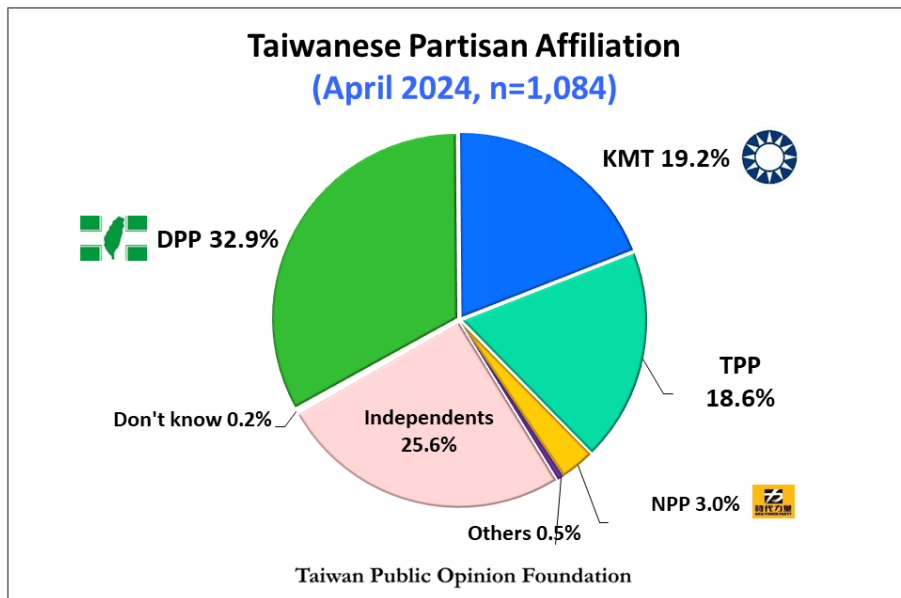
14. How do Taiwanese public overall rate President Tsai? The polls asked respondents to rate Tsai’s administration from a scale from 0 to 100. As can be seen in year-to-year changes, President Tsai at her final year in power has an average score of 60.5 – a bare passing mark. It is worth noting that she scored falling marks for three out of four years in her first term in office, though the averages noticeably improved in her second term.



15. On political party affiliation, the poll finds among Taiwanese adults aged 20 years and older, 32.9% support the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), 19.2% support

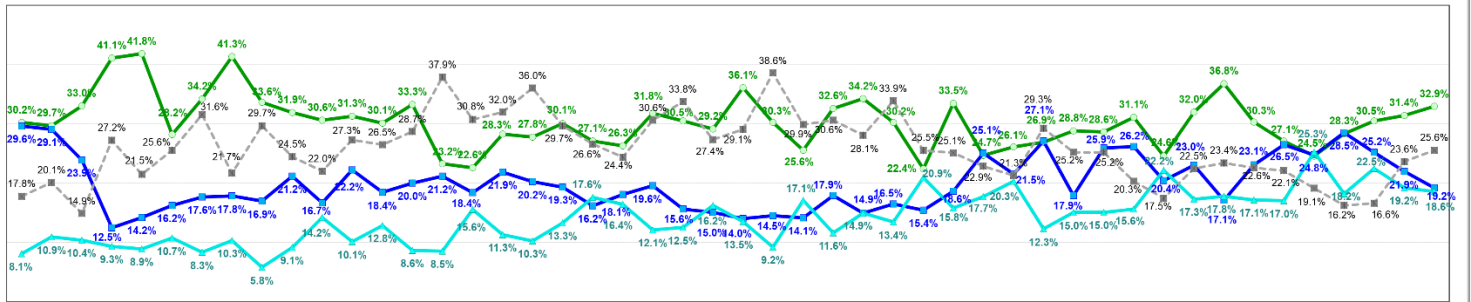
the Kuomintang (KMT), 18.6% support the Taiwan People's Party (TPP), 3% support the New Power Party (NPP), and 25.6% respondents identified themselves as independents.

Overall, there has not been much partisan shift since March, though DPP's lead over other parties widened slightly, this might have to do with celebratory effects in anticipation to Lai's inauguration in May. KMT saw a decline of 6%, while the TPP maintained similar level of support.



Taiwanese Partisan Affiliation 2019 - 2024

—●— DPP
 —■— KMT
 —▲— TPP
 —□— Independents



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