

## **The Analysis of Subjective Indicators of Democratic Resilience**

Democratic countries today face numerous challenges that may threaten the functioning of their democratic systems. In such circumstances, the ability to maintain the operation of a democratic system, or even the capacity to recover to the original democratic state in the face of democratic erosion, has become a critical issue. Scholars have increasingly focused on the concept of “democratic resilience” to address problems arising from democratic erosion or other challenges. This study adopts the definition of democratic resilience by Merkel and Lührmann (2021), emphasizing how a democratic system can remain stable or restore its original democratic condition when confronted with external or internal challenges. Based on the current situation in Taiwan, this survey focuses on three potential threat scenarios: cross-strait relations, public health crises, and misinformation. Its purpose is to explore the extent to which people believe Taiwan can continue to maintain or restore its democratic system in the face of these threats.

This study conducted a survey in August 2024, collecting 1,065 samples. The survey results are shown in Table 1. Overall, Taiwan’s “subjective score of democratic resilience” averaged 3.14 (on a 5-point scale), indicating that the public perceives Taiwan’s democratic resilience to be at a moderately high level. Regarding the three scenarios that could potentially threaten Taiwan’s democratic system, the public believes that Taiwan’s democratic resilience is higher when facing public health crises. Compared to the threats posed by cross-strait relations and misinformation, the public feels that Taiwan is better able to maintain and restore its democratic system, with average scores of 3.36 and 3.21, respectively. On the other hand, the public perceives that if cross-strait relations become extremely tense, leading to democratic erosion, it would be more difficult for Taiwan’s democratic system to recover (2.98), which is the lowest score in this study.

Table 1: Analysis of Subjective Democratic Resilience

| Subjective Threat Factors              | Dimension | Average Score |
|--|-----------|---------------|
| Cross-Strait Relations                 | Maintain  | 3.15          |
|  | Recover   | 2.98          |
| Public Health Threats                  | Maintain  | 3.36          |
|  | Recover   | 3.21          |
| Misinformation                         | Maintain  | 3.10          |
|  | Recover   | 3.05          |
| Subjective Democratic Resilience Score |           | 3.14          |

N=1,065; Scale maximum value: 5

Source: Compiled by this study

In addition, when comparing the difference in the scores between democracy “maintenance” and “recovery”, we found that the scores for democracy recovery are generally lower than those for maintenance. This suggests that while the public believes the democratic system has a stronger capacity to continue functioning during a crisis, confidence in its ability to recover after being damaged is lower. Among the three types of threats, the largest gap between the ratings for “maintain” and “recover” is found in the cross-strait relations, with a difference of 0.17 points between the resilience scores for “recovery” (2.98) and “maintain” (3.15). For public health threats, the gap between “recover” and “maintain” is 0.15 points, while for misinformation threats, the difference is the smallest at only 0.05 points. This shows that the public believes that it will be more difficult to restore the original democratic system to the democratic regression caused by the tension in cross-strait relations.

According to past research and the experience of other countries, when a democratic country faced internal or external threats, executive power often expanded. Therefore, when democratic system is threatened, the priority should be to avoid the endless expansion of executive power. As cross-strait relations become increasingly tense, should more severe situations or incidents occur in the future, it is expected that the executive branch may expand its power to address these potential crises. From a national security perspective, this is necessary. However, from the perspective of democratic resilience, it should be necessary to set limits on the possible future expansion of executive power.

Therefore, we suggest that the executive and legislative bodies should discuss in advance and determine the boundaries of possible future expansion of administrative power, or the red lines that cannot be crossed. For example, it may be necessary to

maintain certain supervisory functions of the Legislative Yuan over the Executive Yuan, the independence of the judiciary, maintain the vitality of civil society, retain regular elections and the fairness of elections, and which government officials need to be elected directly. In addition, the independence of the Central Election Commission must also be guaranteed to ensure that national elections can be conducted fairly. In addition, freedom of expression must be protected to a certain extent. Freedom of speech allows the media, the public, and civil society to expose government mistakes and abuses of power. This oversight mechanism will help maintain government transparency and accountability and prevents the misuse of power.

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