

*International experience bears numerous examples of a ‘ruling party,’ which seemed to hold complete control over a country with no opposition, that ultimately loses its monopoly in power, and leads to a political system based on real competition between political parties. There are opposite examples of when, without any coups in democratic systems, one party gained such popularity and existed without any rivals for a long duration. Taiwan serves as an example of the first type. There the Kuomintang party dominated over the country for about fifty years, losing power only in 2000 and regaining it again in 2008 through democratic means. Numerous examples of the second type can be found throughout Latin America.*

## REAL ECONOMY VERSUS NATIONALISM



VLADIMIR MALYAVIN is the director of the Institute of Russian Research, Tamkang University, Taiwan  
Exclusively for RJ

When the Kuomintang lost its status as Taiwan’s ruling party, it was conditional upon both objective and subjective causes. **The major objective cause was the economic rise of the country during 1970-80s and the birth of the strong middle class who was vitally interested in the democratization of political life.** Among the subjective causes, the top one was the population’s widespread reaction to the authoritative and even repressive nature of the regime combined with its corruption. The main dividing line in interparty squabbling was over the issue of Taiwan’s identity – that is to say, the question of whether Taiwan is a part of China or if it should be an independent state; and while the majority of the Taiwanese prefer the second option, it is, nonetheless, very difficult to fulfill this choice.

The fate of the Democratic Progressive Party of Taiwan is now revealing itself. Coming into power in 2000 at the forefront of a nationalistic mentality, its agenda

– to create an independent Taiwanese republic – turned out to be both unproductive and harmful to the state of the nation’s economic and foreign policy. It should also be noted that corruption was high among President Chen Shui-bian’s associates. All in all, these factors led to the overwhelming defeat of the DPP at the parliamentary and presidential elections, allowing the Kuomintang to come back into power. The case of Taiwan demonstrates that **nationalism is by no means a guarantee of a county’s prosperity and that real politics and economics are far more important.**

In Taiwan there are different groups inside the party; however, as far as I can tell, there are no significant preferences or, conversely, discriminatory steps, from the side of the authorities. Of course, the ruling party uses its administrative resources, for instance, in real estate development business or land speculation, but such rarely emerges as an overt violation of the law. ■

## LATIN AMERICANS LIKE A STRONG-MAN AS A LEADER



W. ALEJANDRO (ALEX) SANCHEZ is a Research Fellow at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs and an international security analyst at the Center for International Policy  
Exclusively for RJ

Latin Americans have a weird vision when it comes to defining what democracy means. Our view is usually not the same as the vision shared by Americans or Europeans. Polls carried out over the years seem to show that **Latin Americans like a strongman as a leader if he (the leader is usually male) will bring order and development to a country**, even if this means sacrificing some civil rights.

Other reasons for one-party dominance can simply be popularity (either of the party or its figurehead), a crackdown on other parties to prevent them from becoming popular, or corruption.

Among other factors, I would also mention **the lack of a developed civil society.** During the recent Peruvian elections there were statements by voters saying that they voted for a candidate because they liked the name of the party or the party’s symbol rather than knowing anything about the party’s ideological platform. With voters like this, it is easy for a well-organized party to come to power and remain there.

Another problem is the lack of charismatic leaders to lead a rival party.

Countries like Venezuela, Colombia, Brazil and Bolivia could be regarded as one-party systems because the popularity of their heads of state/party leaders is crucial to the party staying in power.

There are certainly plenty of examples of crackdowns against potential rivals by the party in power, as well as vote rigging, the shutting down of TV and radio stations along with independent newspapers.

Unfortunately for us, **coercion from our leaders is generally expected.** Indeed, one of the reasons Fujimori in Peru and Alvaro Uribe in Colombia remained popular was because of their tough stance on terrorist groups.

Hugo Chavez is another example. Throughout the majority of his presidency he was a populist. But lately, as 49% of the population – and the wealthy elite in particular, have continuously protested and rallied against him, he has closed down opposition TV stations.

Absolute power can corrupt and it is healthy for a democracy to change its leaders. The question is not so much whether a leader or party in power uses coercion, but to what degree he/it may resort to such tactics. ■