

Taiwanese willing to fight China

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Tanks open fire on May 25 last year at the 33rd Han Kuang military exercises in Penghu.

Photo: Fang Pin-chao, Taipei Times

Nearly 70 percent of Taiwanese are willing to go to war if China were to attempt to annex Taiwan by force, a survey released by the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy yesterday said.

The foundation considers it a fitting time to pose the question as the Chinese military has over the past few years been increasing activity near Taiwan, foundation president Hsu Szu-chien (許世昌) told a news conference in Taipei.

A total of 67.7 percent of respondents said they were willing to go to war to defend Taiwan if China launched an armed assault on the nation to force unification.

The number of people willing to fight to prevent unification with China rose to 70.3 percent among respondents aged 20 to 39, the survey showed.

However, the number of respondents willing to go to war with China as a result of Taiwan declaring independence dropped to 55 percent, the survey showed.

A large majority of respondents — 91.1 percent — said they support maintaining the “status quo,” with 34 percent saying that they wanted the “status quo” to be maintained and would decide whether to support independence or unification based on future developments, it showed.

Respondents that supported “perpetually” maintaining the “status quo” accounted for 27.8 percent, while those who support maintaining the “status quo” before moving toward independence and those who support maintaining the “status quo” before moving toward unification were about equal at 15 percent and 14.3 percent respectively.

Only 2.4 percent of people said Taiwan should immediately declare independence, while even fewer people — 1.5 percent — said that Taiwan should immediately unify with China.

The survey also gauged satisfaction with the nation’s democratic system, which found that 58.2 percent of respondents were dissatisfied with Taiwanese democracy.

The majority of respondents — 54.4 percent — felt “pessimistic” about the future of politics under the nation’s democratic system, while 36.4 percent said they felt optimistic.

However, 94 percent of people said that living in a democratic society is “important,” of which 65.8 percent said it is “very important.”

In addition, 76.4 percent of people agreed with the statement: “Democracy, despite its flaws, is still the best system,” the poll showed.

The commonly held opinion that a majority of young people are “congenitally in favor of Taiwanese independence” could be better put as “congenitally against unification” with China or “born democratic,” as the majority are in favor of maintaining the “status quo,” Hsu said.

“If we factor in questions about whether young people support democracy, we discover that the more people support democracy, the more willing they are to defend Taiwan in the event of an invasion by China,” Hsu said. “I think it is our democratic lifestyle and values that people want to protect.”

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Academia Sinica research fellow Wu Nai-teh (吳乃德) also revealed the results of a similar survey conducted by the academy over the past three years, which found that the percentage of people willing to defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese military invasion has dropped from 75.9 percent in 2016 to 69.1 percent last year and further to 67.1 percent this year.

The Taiwan Foundation for Democracy survey, conducted from Jan. 12 to Jan. 19, collected 1,597 valid samples from Taiwanese living in Taiwan proper and Penghu, and has a confidence level of 95 percent and a margin of error of 3 percentage points.

Additional reporting by CNA

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