

MA Ying-jeou

Mǎ Yīngjiǔ 马英九

b. 1950 *President of Taiwan (2008–)*

Elected president of Taiwan in 2008 after having served as mayor of Taipei, Ma Ying-jeou has become very popular, particularly with young people, for his stands against corruption and for working toward improving the international status of Taiwan as well as economic relations with mainland China.

During Taiwan's 2008 presidential election campaign, Kuomintang (KMT) candidate—and eventual winner—Ma Ying-jeou was often dubbed “Taiwan's Obama” by the Taiwanese media because of his ability to mesmerize youthful voters at campaign events. Like Barack Obama, he attended Harvard Law School. Ma, at 58, is young by Chinese political standards; he is tall, physically fit, and photogenic. He also has a reputation as a “clean” politician who had run a popular administration as the elected mayor of Taipei, Taiwan's capital city. Ma stood out at a time when Taiwan's national politics were clouded with near-daily accusations of corruption, known as “black gold” politics.

Ma is the son of a prominent KMT official from Hunan province in China who had served under Chiang Kai-shek. Ma's father followed Chiang to Taiwan. Ma himself was born in Hong Kong on 13 July 1950.

A bright student, Ma graduated from the prestigious National Taiwan University in 1972 and then came to the United States to study law, first at New York University, where he received a master of law degree, then at Harvard Law School under the tutelage of Jerome Cohen, the

renowned scholar of Chinese law. Ma received his doctorate of juridical science degree from Harvard Law School in 1981. He speaks flawless English.

Upon returning to Taiwan, he became President Chiang Ching-kuo's English secretary from 1981 to 1988. Because of this connection, Ma rose quickly through the ranks of the KMT-controlled government. His impressive résumé includes Chairman of the Research Commission (a cabinet position), 1988–1991; Vice Minister (a cabinet position), 1993–1996; and Cabinet Minister without Portfolio, 1996–1997. He was elected and served as mayor of Taipei (1998–2006), beating incumbent Chen Shui-bian, who would later become Taiwan's president (2000–2008).

Because the old KMT had become very corrupt, Ma attempted a major reform as the party's first elected chairman from 2005 to 2007, focusing on matters such as curtailing bribery. Then, after he decided to run for the presidency, he concentrated on formulating his own campaign. He was elected president by a landslide in March of 2008 for a four-year term ending in 2012. Ma won 54.5 percent of the vote, compared with the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) rival Frank Hsieh's 41.6 percent, winning by more than 2.2 million votes. Under Taiwan's constitution, Ma is permitted to run for a second four-year term should he choose to do so.

President Ma has stated three major policy goals: 1) to improve relations with both China and the United States, 2) to revive Taiwan's sluggish economy, and 3) to improve Taiwan's international standing. In respect to his first goal, Ma immediately sent his vice president-elect Vincent Siew to China and negotiated



Ma Ying-jeou, the current president of Taiwan, is a member of the Kuomintang, Taiwan's Nationalist party. He is often called "Taiwan's Obama" by the Taiwanese media.

with Chinese president Hu Jintao at the Boao Forum for Asia held in Hainan, China, 11–13 April 2008. Former U.S. secretary of state Colin Powell, who also attended

the Boao Forum, remarked that the Hu–Siew meeting was “very good news for the region,” and that “the two sides now have begun down a new path.” As for revitalizing the economy, Ma specifically stated that he wanted to increase economic ties with the mainland by opening Taiwan to direct tourism and encouraging investment across the Taiwan Strait. He also stressed that he wanted to avoid using war as an instrument of policy. Finally, he has sought to improve Taiwan's international stature with China's support rather than following his predecessor's adversarial approach, which had antagonized China and had only resulted in fewer nations recognizing Taiwan's government diplomatically. Ma personally received a special senior envoy from China, Chen Yunlin, Chairman of China's ARATS (Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait) on 6 November 2008, in Taiwan's official guest house in Taipei amidst massive protests by DPP members.

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Further Reading

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