

Leadership and anti-corruption reforms in Taiwan: a comparison of Chen Shui-bian and Ma Ying-jeou

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Abstract

Purpose – This article analyzes the implementation of anti-corruption reforms in Taiwan by two former presidents, Chen Shui-bian (2000-2008) and Ma Ying-jeou (2008-2016).

Design/methodology/approach – A three-tier research approach, including in-depth interviews, questionnaire survey, and descriptive and inferential analysis, is adopted. In addition to Chen and Ma, 11 senior anti-corruption officials who served under both presidents were interviewed by the author. The survey questions cover 12 factors which are later grouped into the five dimensions of ethical leadership, considerate leadership, delegating leadership, participatory leadership, and performance to illustrate the causal relationship between these dimensions and performance.

Findings – Ma's personal ethics are distinct from Chen's in kind but Ma's overall leadership and performance outshine Chen's in degree rather than in kind. While the gap of ethical leadership between two Taiwan presidents is significantly wider than other dimensions of leadership, the outcome of the national integrity is not proportionate to the ethical leadership gap. In other words, personal ethics are not automatically transformed into political will for enhancing anti-corruption effectiveness. Three popular forms of corruption, red envelopes (bribing), influence-peddling, and vote-buying are analyzed in the context of changing political culture through national leadership. Unfortunately, both Chen and Ma produce insignificant contributions based on public surveys.

Originality/Value – Policy-makers and scholars can use these research findings to further explore how ethical leadership can enhance a country's anti-corruption performance.

Keywords Agency Against Corruption, Ministry of Justice Investigation Bureau, Taiwan president, Leadership, Personal ethics, Political culture

Paper type Research paper

Introduction: domestic public perceptions

Taiwan's former presidents Chen Shui-bian (2000-2008) and Ma Ying-jeou (2008-2016) are two iconic national leaders during the post-martial-law era. In the context of democratization, Chen is the elected head of state symbolizing the first rotation of ruling parties in Taiwan and, to some extent, in the Chinese-speaking world. Ma as Chen's immediate successor is the only national leader of Taiwan who held a summit with his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, in Singapore in 2015. This was the first such summit since the end of China's civil war in 1949. Given their different political ideologies, Chen and Ma were fundamentally different in foreign policy and cross straits policy. However, regarding national integrity and anti-corruption, both Chen and Ma vowed to reform and eradicate corruption through legislation and the establishment of a new anti-corruption agency (ACA).



This article examines the impact of national leadership on the outcome of anti-corruption reforms based on in-depth interviews with two former Taiwan presidents and a questionnaire survey of 11 former senior anti-corruption officials. The retired civil servants' views reflect the frontline official observations and perceptions, which have rarely been explored in previous literature on Taiwan.

Anti-corruption is a convenient slogan for politicians as both Chen and Ma vowed to eradicate corruption in their campaign platforms and at the beginning of their presidencies. Ironically, public opinion polls show that both presidents earned poor ratings in anti-corruption related policy and practice (*Liberty Times*, 2016). Studies show that the worsening public perceptions on corruption after the lifting of martial law in 1987 resulted from these three variables: encounter with government bureaucracy, party identity, and the effect of the media (Yu *et al.*, 2013). While the free press is beyond the government's jurisdiction, bureaucracy and party ideology are the part of political culture, which is influenced by the political leader.

Table 1 shows that among various governance indicators in their respective presidential tenure, Chen's approval rating on "advance government integrity" is 14 per cent compared with Ma's 31 per cent. Chen's lower satisfaction rate reflects the negative legacy of his family's corruption scandals. Among the 14 governance indicators, Ma's government integrity performance is ranked 7th with 31 per cent satisfaction and 57 per cent dissatisfaction. This means that the majority of the public disapprove of Ma's anti-corruption performance.

The unprecedented massive protest by the Red Shirt Movement in Taiwan between 16 August and 20 September 2006 broke the record with a million protesters against incumbent president Chen's family corruption. Public opinion polls on the presidents' approval ratings are abundant in Taiwan. However, so far the literature analyzing Taiwan's national leadership and their anti-corruption performance is limited. This article attempts to rectify this research gap by evaluating Chen's and Ma's different approaches to combating corruption.

	Chen's tenure (2000-2008) 5/13/2008 N=1,072		Ma's tenure (2008-2016) 5/9/2016 N=1,024			
	Satisfaction %	Satisfaction %	Dissatisfaction %	No comment %	Satisfaction ranking	Dissatisfaction ranking
1. Handle cross-strait relations	21	47	44	9	1	12
2. Ethnic integration	26	44	43	14	2	13
3. Transportation infrastructure	59	43	42	16	3	14
4. Explore diplomacy	12	38	50	12	4	9
5. Environmental protection	41	37	46	17	5	11
6. Promote social welfare	40	34	50	15	6	9
7. Advance government integrity	14	31	57	12	7	8
8. Improve law & order	24	31	61	9	7	6
9. Eradicate money politics	17	26	62	12	9	5
10. Judicial fairness	16	23	66	11	10	4
11. Improve financial policy	17	22	61	16	11	6
12. Improve economic development	13	21	71	8	12	2
13. Education reform	12	17	70	13	13	3
14. Narrow the wealth gap	-	14	76	10	14	1

Note: These opinion polls were conducted by the TVBS during the final months of two presidents, Chen and Ma, respectively and quoted by the *Liberty Times*, a leading newspaper in Taiwan. Indicator 14 "Narrow the wealth gap", was excluded from Chen's public opinion poll
Source: *Liberty Times* (2016)

Table 1.
Approval ratings of
governance
performance of Chen
and Ma

Literature review: international assessment

Leadership matters for ensuring good governance in an organization. It is even more essential to lead the country when it is in a developing state without an adequate rule of law (Hechanova and Manaos, 2020; Hope, 2017; Klitgaard, 2004). U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken (2021) states that “corruption allows bad actors to abuse their authority and extract unfair gains at the expense of others”. Leadership in an organization has profound influence on the outcome of corruption tendencies because of the lack of checks and balances (Pearce *et al.*, 2008). Wesche *et al.* (2010) found that leadership corruption results from the interplay of individual, organization, and extra-organizational factors. Using cost-benefit analysis to explain the corrupt acts committed by the leaders, they found that the probability of corruption is high when the benefit clearly outweighs the cost. Corruption studies in African countries suggest a similar conclusion between leadership and corruption or poor governance (Nicolaidis and Duho, 2019; Mantzaris, 2016; Naidoo, 2012; Ogbeidi, 2012). These studies may not automatically apply to Asian countries but can serve as a reference of causal relationship between leadership and governance.

Anazodo *et al.* (2015) found that leadership failure, corruption, and poor governance contribute to a development quagmire even though Nigeria has abundant natural resources. A similar study in Pakistan suggests that “ethical managerial leadership can reduce corruption in public organizations in developing countries” (Bashir and Hassan, 2020). They propose that ethical leadership is especially needed when there is an unfair reward system in developing countries.

The above-mentioned literature indicates that leadership can minimize corruption. However, there is limited literature on the causal relationship between ethical leadership and their actual anti-corruption performance. Hanapiyah *et al.* (2018) found that employee compensation as mediator and employee age as moderator affect the corruption level of a company. This article examines two Taiwanese leaders and the efficacy of their national integrity reforms based on the aggregate evaluation of 11 senior civil servants in charge of anti-corruption investigations during their administrations.

The following section examines the international assessment of Chen’s and Ma’s performance based on Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) scores and the author’s in-depth interviews and questionnaire survey findings (see Figure 1).

During Chen’s presidency (2000-2008), there was a deteriorating trend in the CPI rankings. The worst CPI ranking for Taiwan was its 39th ranking in 2008, which reflected the scandals involving Chen’s family corruption during his second presidential term (2004-2008). After Ma assumed office in 2008, Taiwan’s CPI rankings gradually improved. There was a significant improvement during 2011 in Taiwan’s CPI performance from its 36th to 32nd ranking because of the establishment of a new ACA, the Agency Against Corruption (AAC), by Ma. In 2012, Taiwan’s CPI ranking declined from 32nd to 37th with the arrest and indictment of Executive Yuan Secretary-General Lin Yi-shih (Deputy Chair of the Kuomintang [KMT]), who had demanded US\$2 million from a local businessman in exchange for a lucrative state-owned enterprise contract (Taipei Times, 2012). This grand corruption case along with other investigations on the ruling party’s members resulted in lowering Taiwan’s CPI rankings. Nonetheless, the CPI scores during Ma’s administration were slightly better than during Chen’s.

The international assessment using the CPI indicates the different perceptions of the two presidents, which match the domestic public opinion polls conducted by the TVBS as shown in the previous section. To analyze the relationship between leaders in Taiwan and their national integrity performance, the author of this article conducted two interviews and a questionnaire survey as indicated below.

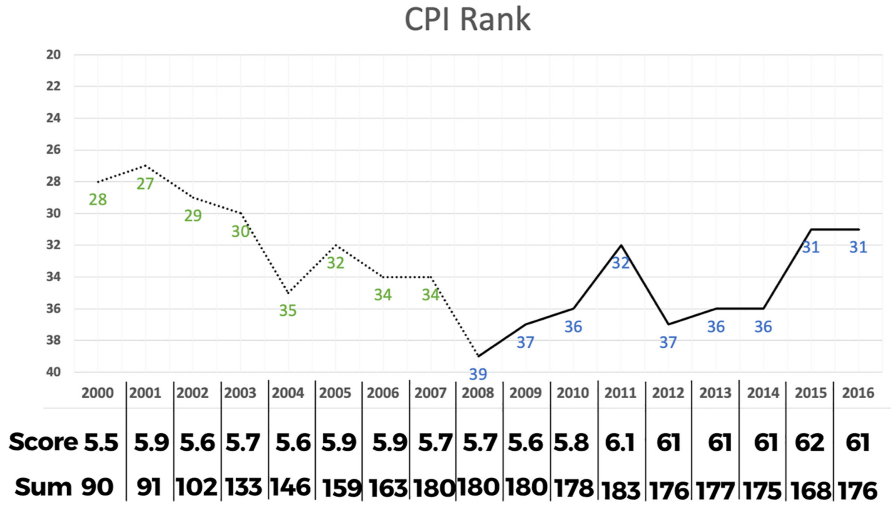


Figure 1.
Corruption Perceptions
Index scores of
President Chen (2000-
2008) and President Ma
(2008-2016)

Note: Starting in 2012, the CPI scoring method was changed from decile rank to percentile rank. The sum is the total of countries assessed
Source: Transparency International (2022)

Methodology

The methodology for this article relies on in-depth interviews, a questionnaire survey, and descriptive and inferential analysis. Trust and professional dialogue are two essential ingredients for capturing the nuances during in-depth interviews. Thanks to the long-term public and private partnerships in corruption studies in Taiwan, the author has extensive connections with senior anti-corruption officials, including prosecutors and the agents from both the AAC as well as the Ministry of Justice Investigation Bureau (MJIB). The interviewees were carefully selected based on anonymity, retirement (to avoid retaliation), public service experience (in-field anti-corruption experience), and service period (all must have served under both Presidents Chen and Ma). This prudent selection process ensures objectivity and insightful information.

The first phase of research began with all 11 interviewees between July and August 2021. The exclusive face-to-face personal interview with President Chen and the written interview with President Ma were conducted respectively in August and September 2021. The second phase consisted of the completion by the selected interviewees of an online questionnaire comprising a five-point Likert scale focusing on leadership and national integrity performance. They were required to substantiate their scores with detailed comments. The third phase of the research was the comparison of the views of the interviewees with the self-assessments of the two presidents.

Interviews with Presidents Chen and Ma

The rise of presidents Chen and Ma signifies two distinct career paths of Taiwan politicians: grassroots vs. elite bureaucrat. Table 2 shows that Chen rose through various elections and his long-term party affiliation with the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), the most influential opposition party prior to his victory in the presidential election in 2000 (Office of the President, 2022). Chen is known for aggressively challenging the then ruling party, the KMT, throughout his political career.

CHEN Sui-bian		MA Yin-Jeou	
Male	<i>Gender</i>	Male	
age 72 (12 October 1950)	<i>Age (birth date)</i>	age 72 (13 July 1950)	
Guantian District, Tainan County, Taiwan	<i>Birthplace</i>	Yau Ma Tei, British Hong Kong	
National Taiwan University (LLB)	<i>Education</i>	Harvard University (S.J.D.) New York University (LLM) National Taiwan University (LLB)	
Mayor of Taipei (December 25, 1994 – December 25, 1998)	<i>Major Political Experience</i>	Mayor of Taipei (December 25, 1998 – December 25, 2006)	
Member of the Legislative Yuan (February 1, 1990 – December 25, 1994.)		Minister of Justice (February 27, 1993 – June 9, 1996)	
Taipei City Councilor (December 25, 1981 – September 28, 1985.)		Vice Chair of Mainland Affairs Council (1988–1991)	
Defense lawyer for political activists in Kaohsiung Formosa Incident (1979)		English Secretary for President Chiang Ching-kuo (1981–1988)	
Democratic Progressive (DPP)	<i>Party Affiliation</i>	Kuomintang (KMT)	
Pro-independence	<i>Political Ideology</i>	Pro-unification (with China)	
May 20, 2000 – May 20, 2008	<i>Presidential Terms</i>	20 May 2008 – 20 May 2016	
Source: Office of the President (2022)			

Table 2.
Personal data of
President Chen and
President Ma

Ma is an icon among political elites in Taiwan. He began his career working as the late President Chiang Ching-kuo’s English secretary/translator during the martial law period (Office of the President, 2022). Ma’s position as secretary to President Chiang was advantageous for his subsequent political career. Ma had an Ivy League education (Harvard Law School) and was respected for his self-discipline and charming personality. His election experiences as Taipei City’s mayor and as president were mostly passive responses to public expectations because of his personal charm and the ruling party’s winning strategy.

The summary of the two presidents’ interviews is shown in Table 3. These are personal recollections of their anti-corruption performance. During the two-hour face-to-face interview on 31 August 2021, Chen was in great spirits (even though he was on medical parole while

	Chen Shui-bian (2000-2008)	Ma Ying-jeou (2008-2016)
Recount of national integrity achievements	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Ended money politics by appointing Chen Ding-nan, a renowned integrity icon, as the justice minister. (2) Initiated the draft of legislation of a new ACA but consistently failed during his presidency because of opposition party objection in parliament. (3) Established the “Money Politics Eradication Action Center” to tackle money politics (Supreme Prosecutors Office, 2019). (4) Dealt with a hostile political culture by assuming the chair of the ruling DPP and consolidating power and mobilizing parliamentary support. (5) Led the wave and mobilized public support by setting various anti-corruption agendas. (6) During the face-to-face interview, Chen repeatedly blamed the corruption investigations of him and his family as the political motivations by the Money Politics Eradication Action Center under the Supreme Prosecutors Office, which he described as the “Judicial Red Guard”. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Established the Central Integrity Committee under the Executive Yuan in 2008. (2) Promulgated the Ethics Guidelines for Civil Servants in 2008. (3) Promulgated the National Integrity Infrastructure Action Plan in 2009 based on Transparency International’s National Integrity System (NIS). (4) Established the AAC under the Ministry of Justice in July 2011. (5) Established the Ethics Office in the Ministry of National Defence in 2013. (6) Promulgated the Act to Implement the United Nations Convention against Corruption in 2015 (Ministry of Justice, 2015). (7) Initiated the Integrity Quality Control Circle (IQCC) in every ministry and pursued accountability to principals and ethics officers during his second term. The Integrity Committee was required to convene every other month during 2012-2016.

Source: Author’s interviews with Chen on 31 August 2021 and Ma in September 2021

Table 3.
Summary of interviews
with Presidents Chen
and Ma

-serving a prison sentence for multiple corruption offences) and highlighted his achievements in detail as shown in Table 3. Similarly, Ma provided written answers with lengthy descriptions of his anti-corruption performance in September 2021 in response to the author’s interview questions.

Chen and Ma are both lawyers by training, which enables them to acquire logical thinking and debating skills. These legal professional capabilities in addition to their personal attraction produced a unique political charisma. In turn, such qualities successfully translated charisma into their success in presidential elections and a high degree of approval ratings in the early stage of presidential office, but did not necessarily produce a significant positive impact in building or reforming national integrity.

During the interview, Chen emphasized at great length his initiation of legislation to establish Taiwan’s first ACA during his two presidential terms. Chen criticized Ma for objecting to his proposed initiation of the ACA but later implemented Chen’s proposal himself. Chen is also proud of delegating power in 2000 to an integrity icon, the late justice minister Chen Ding-nan, to strengthen anti-corruption investigation. Chen blamed the failure of passing the legislation to create the ACA to the objection in parliament from members of the opposition party, the KMT. He also insisted on several occasions that Minister Chen Ding-nan’s sudden resignation in 2005 was a personal decision and not based on political considerations.

On the other hand, in the written interview Ma was proud of establishing a brand new ACA, the AAC, under the Ministry of Justice in 2011 in addition to the existing MJIB. He

firmly believed that a dual system of ACAs could facilitate national anti-corruption efficacy although research has shown that there was sibling rivalry between the AAC and MJIB (Ko *et al.*, 2015). Ma was also the first president to promulgate the “Ethics Guidelines for Civil Servants”, which required all civil servants and military personnel to register and report gift-giving, influence-peddling, dining or feasting, and other unethical behaviour to their in-house ethics unit. All of these self-descriptive achievements by two former presidents provide useful information but their validity can be checked by the facts reported in the news articles. This paper applies an innovative approach of insiders’ evaluation to provide another perspective of what actually happened.

Interviews and survey with insiders

To assess the validity of these two presidents’ respective national integrity performance, the 11 male interviewees were chosen on the basis of their anti-corruption experience under both presidents. These interviewees were interviewed by the author between July and August 2021 for more than two hours each under the condition of anonymity. The author interviewed them again on 18-20 January 2022 to request them to complete an on-line questionnaire. The aim of the survey is to focus on relationship between leadership and national integrity performance. The profiles of the 11 interviewees are provided in [Table 4](#).

The questionnaire (see [Appendix 1](#)) is designed to test the causal relationship between leadership and the outcome of national integrity performance. Leadership is an abstract concept, which refers to the ability to influence and guide followers or other members of an organization. [Stogdill and Coons \(1957\)](#) provides a dichotomous assessment by dividing leadership into the two categories of advocacy and consideration, with a total of 12 dimensions. The advocacy category includes production emphasis, initiating structure, representation, role assumption, persuasiveness, and superior orientation. The consideration category includes tolerance of uncertainty, tolerance of freedom, consideration, demand reconciliation, integration, and predictive accuracy.

This research questionnaire is based on [Stogdill and Coons’ \(1957\)](#) questionnaire, with two modifications. The first change was to consolidate the two dimensions (tolerance of uncertainty and tolerance of freedom) into one (full degree of delegating power) and the second change was the addition of a new dimension (the degree of personal integrity). The questionnaire asks the 11 interviewees to evaluate 12 dimensions (leadership and performance) by assigning their satisfaction level of the individual factors. The level of assessment is divided into a five-point Likert scale: very satisfied, satisfied, moderate, dissatisfied, and very dissatisfied. In addition to scaling, the interviewees were also asked to

Respondent (anonymity)	Years of public service on anti-corruption investigations	Years of retirement as of January 2022
1	33	4
2	31	1
3	37	3
4	28	2
5	12	11
6	30	3
7	39	3
8	34	4
9	33	5
10	41	2
11	40	3

Table 4.
Profiles of the 11 male
interviewees

Source: Compiled by the author based on the 11 interviewees’ responses

provide cases or comments (qualitative description) for each dimension. Each Likert scale is assigned scores from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). The score of each dimension is the average of the aggregate 11 responses. The numbers in brackets indicate the differences between Chen and Ma (see Table 5).

1. Your evaluation on personal integrity of Presidents Chen and Ma.	7. Do they have the determination to adopt a top-down approach in promoting integrity infrastructure?
Chen Shui-bian 1.63 / 5	Chen Shui-bian 2.09 / 5
Ma Ying-jeou (2.37) 4 / 5	Ma Ying-jeou (1.45) 3.54 / 5
2. Your evaluation on their respective performance of national integrity Infrastructure.	8. Do they fully delegate power to subordinates to promote integrity infrastructure?
Chen Shui-bian 2.75 / 5	Chen Shui-bian 2.45 / 5
Ma Ying-jeou (0.79) 3.54 / 5	Ma Ying-jeou (0.91) 3.36 / 5
3. Your evaluation on their respective contributions to institutionalization of integrity.	9. Do they consider anti-corruption officials?
Chen Shui-bian 3 / 5	Chen Shui-bian 2.45 / 5
Ma Ying-jeou (0.54) 3.54 / 5	Ma Ying-jeou (0.55) 3 / 5
4. Are they personally the best spokesperson (representative) of integrity?	10. Are they good at coordinating national integrity infrastructure?
Chen Shui-bian 1.63 / 5	Chen Shui-bian 2.27 / 5
Ma Ying-jeou (2.18) 3.81 / 5	Ma Ying-jeou (1.73) 4 / 5
5. Do they have the courage to assume responsibility of leading national integrity infrastructure?	11. Are they good at integrating anti-corruption agencies?
Chen Shui-bian 2 / 5	Chen Shui-bian 2 / 5
Ma Ying-jeou (0.72) 2.72 / 5	Ma Ying-jeou (0.9) 2.9 / 5
6. Are they persuasive to promote integrity infrastructure?	12. Can they precisely achieve the goals of national integrity infrastructure?
Chen Shui-bian 2.09 / 5	Chen Shui-bian 2.27 / 5
Ma Ying-jeou (1.36) 3.45 / 5	Ma Ying-jeou (1) 3.27 / 5

Note: The differences in scores are indicated within brackets
Sources: Compiled by the author based on the 11 interviewees' responses

Table 5.
Scores for Chen and Ma
for leadership and
integrity performance

Findings

Figure 2 illustrates the gaps between Chen and Ma. These 11 insiders' evaluation presents a steady trend of gaps between the two presidents. Ma's average scores across 12 dimensions are consistently higher than Chen's. The moderate score of 3 presents a watershed between the two presidents. Ma's 12 scores are largely within the range between moderate and satisfactory except Question 5 (2.72/5 courage to assume responsibilities) and Question 11 (2.9/5 effectiveness at integrating ACAs). Chen's 12 scores, on the other hand, are consistently lower than moderate and largely fall in the range between moderate and unsatisfactory except Question 1 (1.63/5 evaluation of personal integrity) and Question 4 (1.63/5 integrity representativeness). Both questions are two sides of the same coin in terms of grouping the concept of ethical leadership, which evaluates personal integrity and integrity representativeness.

The nuances of this questionnaire outcome lie in the comparison. While the gap in ethical leadership (Questions 1 and 4) is distinct between the two presidents, the gaps of the remaining 10 dimensions (evaluating other dimensions of leadership and performance) are not logically as wide as the author expected. The differences in scores across the remaining 10 dimensions are within two points. If the "significant difference" is set by the author at two points, none of all the other leadership and outcome of performance dimensions are as significantly different as the dimension of ethical leadership.

Further findings compare the various factor scores between the two presidents provided by the interviewees. Among the 12 dimensions shown in Table 5 and Figure 2, the top three major differences in scores between Chen and Ma are found in the responses to Questions 1, 4 and 10 (marked in circles). While responses to Question 10 show a gap of 1.73 between Chen and Ma for the dimension of coordination of national integrity infrastructure, which is within the range of the author's definition of "insignificant difference". Adding Question 1 (personal integrity) and Question 4 (integrity representativeness) together, all the interviewees agree that Ma's personal integrity is rated as either very satisfied or satisfied with only one interviewee expressing a moderate score while Chen's integrity is unanimously rated as below moderate (from moderate to dissatisfied and very dissatisfied). The sharp contrast of both presidents' personal image of integrity in the eyes of the 11 interviewees matches public perceptions in various public surveys (*Liberty Times*, 2016).

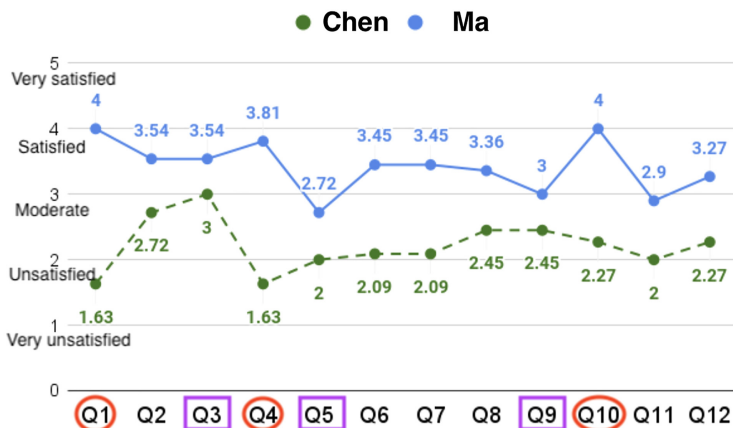


Figure 2. Differences between two presidents' leadership and national integrity performance

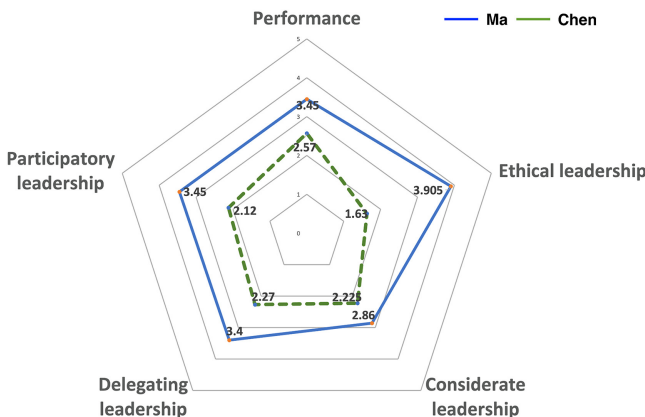
Source: Compiled by the author based on the responses of the 11 interviewees

Questions 3, 5 and 9 (marked in rectangles in Figure 2) show the narrowest gaps in scores between Chen and Ma. Question 3 refers to the institutionalization of anti-corruption reforms, which shows the smallest gap at 0.54. Both presidents' scores are slightly higher than moderate but lower than the satisfied level. Question 5 with the difference of 0.72 refers to courage to assume responsibilities, and Question 9 with a 0.55 gap refers to caring for the subordinates. Combining Questions 5 and 9, the dimension of considerate leadership is illustrated in Figure 3, which shows that both presidents are under-evaluated by all the insiders regarding being considerate to subordinates. Overall, comparing the ratings shows a consistent pattern, with Ma's ratings being higher than Chen's. However, although Chen's and Ma's personal integrity ratings are significantly different, the evaluation of their contributions to national integrity performance differs only slightly.

As an overview, with the exceptions of the average ratings of Ma for Questions 1 and Question 10, the average ratings given to both presidents for the remaining 10 questions were below 4 ("satisfied"). These responses imply either rigid scrutiny standards or a high level of frustration toward both presidents according to the responses to the questionnaire and the author's in-depth interviews and the descriptive comments made by the interviewees.

Further evidence can be provided based on the 11 interviewees to illustrate the gambler's personality of Chen and Ma's prudent bureaucrat's personality. Chen built his career path through various elections from Taipei City Councilman to congressman (Member of Legislative Yuan) to Taipei Mayor to the presidency. These electoral experiences empowered Chen's ability to mobilize public support through agenda-setting. During the author's interview, Chen was aggressive and outspoken as he was in the past, and was proud of being a leader with the three characteristics of "aggressiveness, resilience, and gambler", which correspond to his output, such as appointing an iconic justice minister, delegating power to eradicate money politics, and participating in two presidential elections in the midst of relatively low approval ratings. While two interviewees did not make their comments, other nine interviewees were expressively disappointed with Chen's family corruption scandals and the ineffectiveness of national integrity performance because of the lack of determination and effective mechanism.

Ma, known for his self-discipline, prudence, and frugality, is an elite bureaucrat who benefited from the KMT's long-term dominance, his Ivy League education, and handsome



Source: Compiled by the author based on the 11 interviewees' responses

Figure 3.
Radar map of two
Taiwan presidents'
leadership and national
integrity performance

appearance. Ma's personal integrity is unanimously acknowledged by all the interviewees. Prior to assuming the presidential office in 2008, Ma was proud of wearing his ten-year-old Rockport leather shoes with three-time patches (*Apple Daily*, 2008). Several interviewees observed that the Red Shirt Movement against Chen's family corruption in 2006 gave Ma an unprecedented window of opportunity to launch his national integrity reforms. While taking the anti-corruption wave to win the landslide presidential election in 2008, Ma mishandled this golden opportunity to launch sustainable reforms because of his lack of political will, failure to appoint appropriate personnel, and the weak enforcement of the rule of law. These weaknesses were the result of Ma's "lack of vision and strategic ability", according to an interviewee who was a long-term subordinate working directly under him.

Although some concrete outputs, such as agency-building (the AAC) and in-house bi-monthly integrity committees were put into place, their effectiveness has not met the insiders' expectations. Ma's prudence and self-disciplined integrity are a double-edged sword. He keeps himself clean of any corruption suspicion. However, Ma's lack of delegating powers hinders effective reforms against vested interest groups within the KMT and his subordinates consistently feel frustrated because of the lack of adequate rewards. According to an international expert assessment of the new ACA, the AAC has been described as a paper tiger due to lack of resources and political will (Quah, 2015, 2020). In short, these two presidents' distinct leaderships generate different degrees of performance on national integrity reforms but, in the eyes of insiders, the performance of each did not meet their expectations.

Figure 3 reveals insights of 11 insiders' survey responses, which are rarely heard from the general public or the news media. Most of senior civil servants are either sensitive to express personal assessment regarding their superiors or concerned over retaliation. These interviewees participated in the interviews and survey in an open-minded manner due to their long-term trust with the author.

The radar chart of Figure 3 is based on 12 dimensions, which are categorized into five categories, i.e., ethical leadership (Question 1 personal integrity and Question 4 integrity representativeness), considerate leadership (Question 5 assuming responsibilities and Question 9 caring), delegating leadership (Question 7 top-down approach and Question 8 delegating power), participatory leadership (Question 6 persuasion, Question 10 coordination and Question 11 integration), and the outcome of national integrity (Question 2 overall performance, Question 3 institutionalization, and Question 12 precise goal-reaching). The calculating formula is as follows: dimension score = (sum of Question scores)/number of Questions. For example, the ethical leadership dimension is the sum of Questions 1 and 4 and is then divided by two.

According to 11 insiders' response as shown in Figure 3, Chen consistently trails behind Ma on five dimensions. Nevertheless, none of the scores for these dimensions for two presidents reach or exceed 4 points, which refers to "satisfied" (and well below "very satisfied"). The dimension of ethical leadership shows the widest gap between Chen and Ma. It is worth noting that while the gap of ethical leadership is significantly different, the performance gap is narrower. It seems that personal ethics alone does not lead to high positive output of national integrity.

The considerate leadership dimension received the lowest average score for both presidents. All 11 interviewees expressed dissatisfaction (below moderate) regarding the two leaders' assuming responsibilities and caring for subordinates. Interestingly, Chen was rated low for all four leadership dimensions but the ratings for his performance dimensions were better than those for the leadership dimensions. A reasonable explanation is that Chen's agenda-setting talents and delegation of leadership contributed to his performance although his family corruption scandals were seriously discussed and disapproved of by nine out of 11 interviewees. The other two interviewees did not specifically comment on Chen and his

family scandals but both expressed frustration with the wide gap between the words and deeds of Chen.

The final finding is the relationship between leadership and changes of political culture. Culture is a set of values and expectations. Thus, political culture is the values and expectations embedded in the general public towards the polity. Lucian Pye (1991) defines the political culture as “the composite of basic values, feelings, and knowledge that underlie the political process”. Methodologically values, beliefs, and opinions can be measured by conducting public opinion polls.

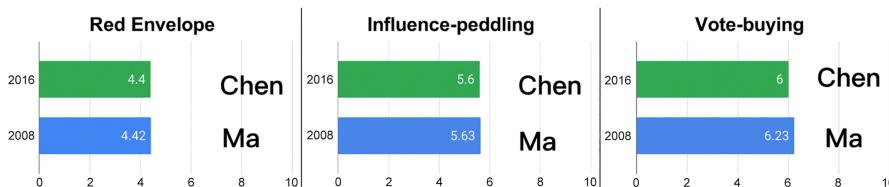
Figure 4 illustrates the changing public perceptions on three popular forms of political culture towards corruption. The AAC consistently commissions the same principal investigator, Professor Jun-Ming Chen, to conduct annual public opinion surveys on integrity governance since 2008. Thus, the data of annual surveys provide a valuable primary source of information for cross-sectional studies on public perceptions on corruption in Taiwan.

From scores of 0 to 10, the respondents in Figure 4 express different degrees of resentment towards various popular forms of corruption behaviours, including red envelopes (bribing officials), influence-peddling, and vote-buying. A score of 0 indicates that the problem is the least serious while a score of 10 shows that the problem is most serious. Two years were selected to compare and contrast the two presidents’ legacies. 2008 is the end of President Chen’s second term while 2016 is the final year of President Ma’s second term.

Across the three popular forms of corruption, Ma wins public approval slightly more than Chen, but there are no significant differences in public perceptions between them. Figure 4 indicates that the general public rates the seriousness of red envelopes in Chen’s administration as 4.42 vs. Ma’s 4.4. The score for influence-peddling for Chen is 5.63 vs. Ma’s 5.6; and Chen’s score for vote-buying is 6.23 vs. 6 for Ma. Considering the sensational national protest of the Red Shirt Movement against President Chen’s family corruption in 2006, President Ma’s approval rating on anti-corruption endeavours is not significantly higher than Chen’s approval rating.

The consensus of all 11 interviewees is that one of the few accomplishments of President Ma is the legislation in 2011 to create the AAC, which is empowered with the mandate to investigate corruption and command and control nation-wide government ethics officers. However, the AAC’s creation was resented by the MJIB and viewed with humiliation and distrust by its officers. Thus, Ma’s solution of addressing the high court judges’ bribery scandals by establishing the AAC created a new problem: endless turf battles between the two ACAs. The sibling rivalry between the AAC and the MJIB persists as an undercurrent hindering the synergy and efficacy of national anti-corruption investigations (Ko et al., 2015).

Lastly, both Chen and Ma failed to change the negative political culture. According to two interviewees’ narratives, although personal integrity is sharply different, both Chen and Ma produced insignificant contributions in terms of changing the political culture concerning corruption. Chen is the first non-KMT politician who took the presidential office through democratic elections. He and his inner circle received quasi-campaign donations through a



Source: Compiled by the author based on public opinion polls published by the Agency Against Corruption (2022) in 2008 and 2016

Figure 4.
National leadership
and changes of political
culture towards
corruption in Taiwan
in 2008 and 2016

private foundation linked to Chen when he was the mayor of Taipei City (1994-1998). After assuming the presidency in 2000, Chen and his trusted followers openly collected political donations in exchange for various lucrative positions such as political appointment, and posts in state-owned enterprises, and government-owned foundations. The numerous hearsay and negative news reports have contributed to the high degree of public dissatisfaction for Chen as shown in [Figure 4](#).

Ma is at the opposite end of the spectrum of personal integrity in comparison with Chen. According to an interviewee with more than 30 years of public service, Ma's personal mistrust of other politicians combined with a high degree of personal integrity sets a unique model in Taiwan's political arena. "Ma shows no remorse [for] his immediate followers who are involved in corruption." Furthermore, "he is too clean to launch major reforms". His uniqueness is also a weakness because of his lack of vision to distinguish integrity from ability. The large number of his mediocre political appointees has resulted in inertia to maintain the status quo instead of making innovative policies. Consequently, the public views Ma as a weak national leader with no political will and not achieving significant progress in changing the political culture in Taiwan.

Conclusion and future research agenda

The 11 interviewees of senior civil servants in charge of anti-corruption investigations under Presidents Chen and Ma have provided a valuable source of insider information and first-hand assessment to supplement the existing literature. Although there is no guarantee for their objectivity, the aggregate responses of all 11 interviewees in comparison with the public opinion polls provide a useful approach for verifying the two presidents' self-reflections and assessment of their performance.

It is also interesting to note the nuances between insiders and the general public. Public perceptions measured by both domestic and international surveys present a coherent trend, in which Ma's approval ratings in combating corruption outperform Chen's. However, only the insiders' interviews and the questionnaire survey reveal that Ma's personal integrity does not necessarily translate into "significant" national anti-corruption performance. The gap in performance between Chen and Ma is therefore not as wide as that relating to their ethical integrity.

This article adds a new dimension to the literature by examining national leadership and the outcome of national integrity in Taiwan. Current literature indicates that ethical leadership is essential to reduce corruption in the public sector ([Bashir and Hassan, 2020](#)). But this article finds that a national leader's personal integrity has only a minor rather than a significant impact on the reforms of the national anti-corruption programme. It echoes [Jon Quah's \(2021\)](#) long-term studies on the anti-corruption efforts of Asian countries. He emphasizes that the political will of the leader along with other external factors are the two important success factors for tackling corruption. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, which equates personal integrity with political will, this article argues that ethical leadership as reflected in personal integrity is just one of the many leadership dimensions for shaping political will.

Finally, both Chen and Ma emphasize the priority of anti-corruption measures during their respective presidencies in the interviews with the author. Nevertheless, the public opinion polls and the insiders' reflections converge coincidentally in expressing their dissatisfaction with the two presidents' anti-corruption performance. The lack of political will of both Chen and Ma is the key weakness in changing the political culture of red envelopes, influence-peddling, and vote-buying.

This research finds that ethical leadership and anti-corruption performance are not in a simple linear relationship. Ethical leadership alone does not guarantee a proportional

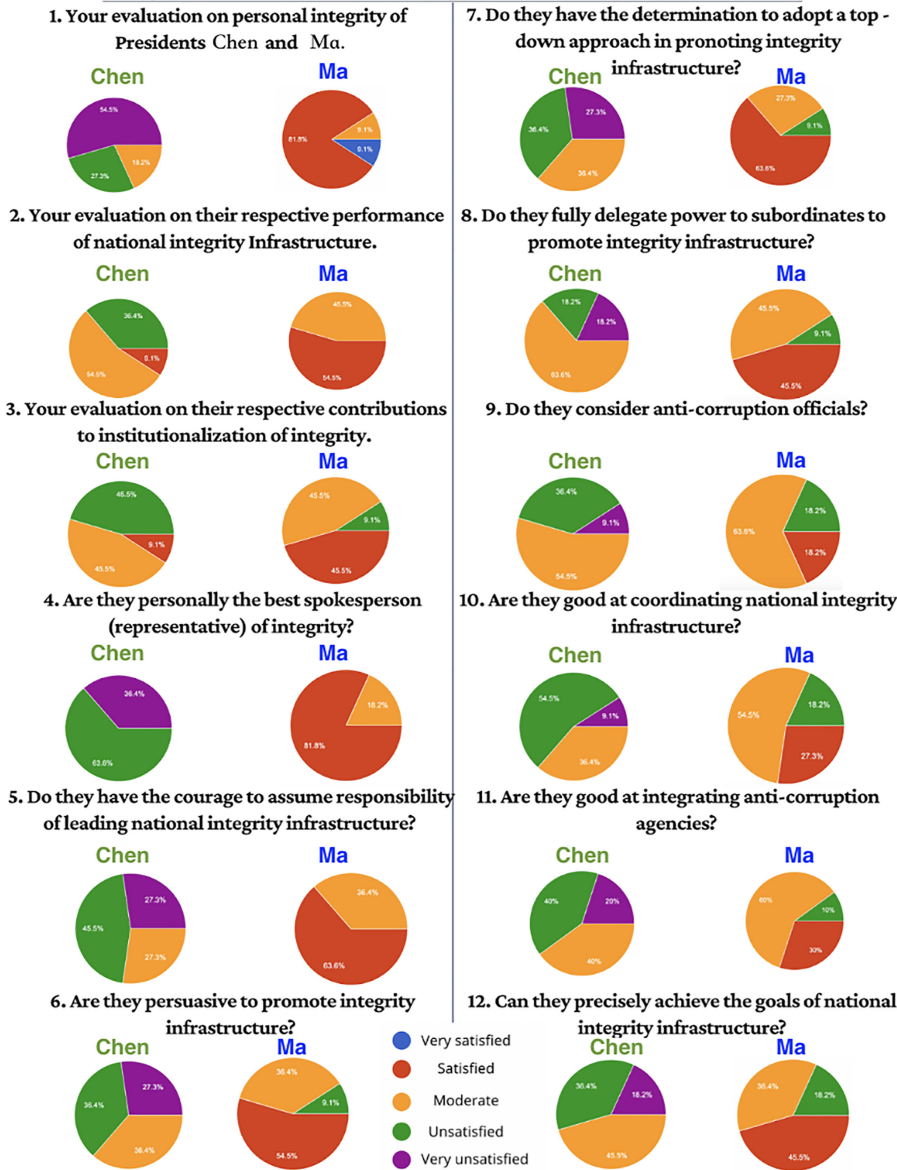
outcome of national integrity reforms. More moderating factors are necessary to ensure a positive outcome of national integrity reforms. Further studies are needed to identify the mechanisms for transforming personal integrity into political will and performance.

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Source: Compiled by the author based on the 11 interviewees' responses to an on-line survey questionnaire on 18-20 January 2022

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