Taiwan is a new democracy in which elections have played a significant role in citizen political participation in the past decades. Mainstream electoral studies have paid much attention to voters’ decision-making processes in elections. Factors that influence voters’ electoral choices, such as partisanship, economic evaluation, candidate qualifications, and policy preferences, are often included in the discussions of voter behavior. Among those factors, citizen partisanship, or party identification, is often cited by scholars as the most consistent and influential one in Taiwan. However, the concept has met with confusing definitions and implications. On the one hand, Taiwan’s political history has shaped a distinct developmental pathway of citizen partisanship. As Taiwan was undergoing a significant democratic transition in the mid-1980s, the party system evolved from a one-party hegemonic system to a two-party system, then to a multiparty system in the 1990s, followed by the formation of two major camps, the Pan-Blue and the Pan-Green, in the 2000s. Citizen partisanship also changed dramatically. On the other hand, as more research was devoted to the exploration of the behavior of partisan voters, political independents were of less concern. In addition to the differences between partisans and independents, there are various types of political independents, whose attitudes and behaviors are different from each other, so study of citizen partisanship in Taiwan calls for examination of these different kinds of independents.

This chapter intends to explore the evolution and distribution of citizen partisanship in Taiwan with a special interest in political independents. Af-
ter a brief literature review, it will examine the historical origins of citizen partisanship and the evolution of the party system in Taiwan. It will then compare attributes and attitudes of different types of partisans and independents, such as political interest, preferences on the issues of unification and independence, support for democracy, voting, and vote choice. In conclusion, a reconsideration of the development of citizen partisanship and its impact in Taiwan is discussed.

Studies of Partisans and Independents

A system of voter identification was developed from the group theory since Campbell and his associates published their classical works on American voters (Campbell, Gruin, and Miller 1954; Campbell et al. 1960). It maintains that citizens tend to psychologically identify and behaviorally support a political group, or party, based on their personal experiences and preferences. The link to a given party will further shape citizens’ political attitudes and issue positions. Party identification is not only a psychological attachment to a political party but also a cue for a citizen’s political actions. Because citizens have different experiences with a political party their identification may have varying strength as a result. Some citizens may develop a strong party identification, others may have a weak attachment to a political party, and still others may possess a neutral feeling toward any groups. Therefore, American voters are typically categorized in one of five categories: Strong Democrat, Weak Democrat, Independent, Weak Republican, and Strong Republican; or in seven categories with the addition of Independent Democrat and Independent Republican (Weisberg 1993, 684).¹

Regardless of its popularity, the concept of party identification has nevertheless suffered from the problems of dimensionality and transitivity (Converse 1966; Petrocik 1974; Weisberg 1980; Niemi, Wright, and Powell 1987; Bartle and Bellucci 2009). Generally speaking, the discussion of attitudes and behaviors of citizens with strong partisanship are less controversial. How to assess independents or citizens with weak partisanship raises a crucial issue so that they will not be treated as a residual category.

Political independents are generally characterized as having positive attributes like prudent judgment and adequate political involvement (Bryce 1929). However, the normative virtues of the political independents have been critically challenged by empirical studies (Campbell et al. 1960, 143). While the debate over what constitutes adequate qualifications of a nonpartisan voter will continue for a long period of time, the increasing popularity
of survey data has enabled scholarly research to reexamine the nature of political independents (Burnham 1970; Dennis 1988; Keith et al. 1992; Magleby, Nelson, and Westlye 2011).

Studies of voters’ party identification in Taiwan, beginning in the early 1970s, have primarily followed the research on American voters. As partisan attachment is widely recognized as one of the most influential factors affecting a voter’s political decisions (Chen 1986, 1994; Chu 1996; Liu 1996, 1997), empirical studies have found that independents in Taiwan are largely female, less educated Minnans and Hakkas (in contrast to the mainlanders) with low socioeconomic status. They have less political interest and pay little attention to political affairs. More recent studies show that the number of independents had increased over time and the political attitudes and voting behaviors of less-educated independents differ from those of highly educated independents (Yeh 1994; Chu 2004; Wang 2010). The empirical evidence confirms the “revisionist” image of the political independent as characterized by the authors of *The American Voter*. It also demonstrates that a clear differentiation between pure independents and partisan leaners in Taiwan is sometimes difficult (Wang and Yu 2011).

Precisely because nonpartisan voters have varying degree of political attributes, their existence has crucial implications to a functioning party system and the health of democracy. Indeed, political independents frequently play a pivotal role in deciding the final outcome of a close election. They also function as a vital balance in an otherwise polarized society. This is especially important for a nascent democracy like Taiwan, where the party system has not yet stabilized. As the current research analyzes Taiwan voters’ partisan identification, it will pay particular attention to political independents in Taiwan.

**Partisanship before 1986**

The development of citizen partisanship had a unique history in Taiwan in its early periods. The tragic incident that occurred on February 28, 1947 (the 2–28 Incident), created a deep antagonism between the incoming mainlanders and the Minnan. The latter learned from the incident that politics could be dangerous, and as a consequence, political apathy began to take root in their society. When the Kuomintang government moved to Taiwan, an authoritarian regime was quickly and firmly established. Constitutionally, the Temporary Provisions were implemented to establish martial law, to provide the president with tremendous discretionary power, and to prohibit the emergence of political opposition. No new political parties were allowed
to be established under martial law. Any dissident opinions targeted at the
government were also subject to repression. Intense political socialization
aimed at enhancing citizen loyalty to the government, which was in reality
loyalty to the ruling KMT, was widespread in the school curricula (Wilson
1970). With the assistance of state-controlled mass media, only selective in-
formation beneficial to the KMT regime was permitted to circulate. Equally
important, the introduction of a political commissar further ensured the
KMT’s unchallenged status in regard to the military. A party-state run by
the KMT, like that of many communist countries, became firmly established
on the island. Under the authoritarian party-state structure, the KMT was
therefore the only significant political party. Citizens in Taiwan were either
KMT members or not. No other political parties were able to compete for
popular support against the KMT, so the situation was similar to that of the
one-party hegemonic system as described by Sartori (1976).

Furthermore, under the name of Fa-tong (the sole legitimate government
representing China), the KMT regime maintained an extensive political struc-
ture as it had done on the Chinese mainland. As “one China” was taken as
given and Taiwan was regarded as one of China’s 36 provinces, the political
connection between the island and the Chinese mainland was emphasized by
a Mainlander dominated regime. The political representation of Minnans and
Hakkas was intentionally suppressed. As a result, a political division rooted in
ethnicity emerged on the island (Wang 1993; Wachman 1994).

Despite the ethnic division, support of the KMT came from two sources.
As indicated in chapter 3, the first group of supporters were the mainlanders
who fled to Taiwan with the KMT government in the late 1940s. Because
they followed the party leaders in the Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese
Civil War, mainlanders have become the core supporters of the KMT (Wu
1995; Shyu, 1997). The second group of supporters has been the Minnan
and Hakka through political indoctrination by the regime. After the disas-
trous defeat on the Chinese mainland, it was crucial for the KMT regime to
establish strong local support in Taiwan. Unlike mainlanders who shared a
similar history with the KMT leaders, Minnans and Hakkas were connected
to the party by a mix of political, economic, and ideological incentives. Po-
litically, a Minnan or Hakka with KMT membership had a better chance of
being promoted in the government. Party membership was a proxy criterion
for national loyalty and carried political expedience for the Minnan and
Hakka who intended to have a career in the government. Economically,
maintaining a close tie with the KMT would benefit businesses. By forego-
ing some prerogative interests, the regime effectively exchanged economic
benefits for the political support of the Minnan and Hakka.
One noteworthy way the KMT regime built grassroots support was through the implementation of local elections. Since the early 1950s, local elections had been the KMT’s main locus for recruiting local elites, distributing economic prerogatives, and marketing the regime’s image of a “free and democratic China” in opposition to totalitarian Communist China. Of course, the outcomes of elections were managed by the KMT regime. Nonetheless, it is also reasonable to argue that local elections gave the Minnan and Hakka experience with party politics and the electoral process. Under the façade of a free and democratic China, the authoritarian KMT regime did provide a certain degree of pluralism in society. Non-KMT independent candidates found some room for political participation in elections. In spite of being outnumbered by the KMT candidates, the non-KMT candidates won seats in various local elections. The appearance and activities of these non-KMT candidates were typical symbols of electoral competition under the one-party hegemonic system. Indeed, there were some non-KMT candidates who consistently won elections in certain regions. The non-KMT elected politicians provided alternative choices for the Taiwan electorate, in particular, those Minnan and Hakka who had no partisan affiliation.

The non-KMT forces continued to grow during Taiwan’s rapid economic and sociopolitical transition. The KMT regime found it more and more difficult to curb the expansion of the non-KMT forces in elections. Worse still for the KMT regime, diplomatic setbacks in the 1970s, such as losing its seat at the United Nations and the termination of formal relations with Japan and the United States, had facilitated further expansion of the electoral arena. The non-KMT candidates found more room for collective action in elections. For example, the group Dang-wai (meaning “outside the KMT”), which appeared in the early 1970s, unified the non-KMT candidates during elections. Members of Dang-wai were able to share common platforms and manifestos without being penalized by electoral regulations. Although Dang-wai members did not formally organize as a political party, they worked together in elections as if they were members of one. The Minnan/Hakka electorate was able to make a choice between the KMT candidates and the Dang-wai candidates in elections. Of course, although they competed against KMT candidates in elections, not all of the non-KMT candidates maintained similar political stances. Nor were all of the non-KMT candidates anti-KMT. Therefore, it would be premature to suggest that a quasi two-party system had taken shape in Taiwan. Nonetheless, the non-KMT forces did grow in one election after another. It was not until the Democratic Progressive Party was formally established in 1986 (although it was still illegal at that time) that a new party
Taiwan Voter

system with two meaningful political parties emerged in Taiwan (Cheng 1989; Lu 1992; Hsieh 2005).

The evolution of the party system before 1986 resulted in a peculiar pattern of citizen-party connectivity in Taiwan. First, a clear and stable partisanship between the mainlanders and the KMT had emerged in the early period when the KMT government moved to Taiwan. The mainlanders maintained a strong affiliation with the KMT due to their close dependence on the KMT in all respects. As the KMT regime made every effort to consolidate its control over the island, material enticements and purposive incentives provided by the KMT were used to facilitate its popularity among the Minnan and Hakka. For example, the KMT regime adopted several liberalization measures in the early 1970s, such as recruiting Minnan and Hakka elites into the party and gradually opening some electoral posts for public contestation, had effectively expanded its connection with the Minnan and Hakka. Together with the mainlanders, the more extensive connections between the KMT and Minnan and Hakka thus helped the KMT to maintain a consistent advantage in elections. However, except for those mainlanders and KMT-friendly Minnan and Hakka, a majority of the citizens in Taiwan were not registered KMT members.

Second, the historical legacy had a significant effect on the development of citizen partisanship in Taiwan. Due to the unique sociopolitical development in the 1950s and 1960s, the label of “political party” acquired negative implications for some Taiwanese. The incident of February 28, 1947, the discriminatory political structure in place since the early 1950s, and the white-terror mentality prevented the Minnan and Hakka from embracing political affairs. Even though they had participated in local elections, their connection to the ruling KMT was weak. If they supported a KMT candidate in elections, it did not mean that they identified with the KMT. In fact, voters generally placed candidates above the party. It was the candidates, not the voters, who were directly connected to the KMT. Strong popular support for KMT candidates did not equate to strong support for the KMT. The candidate’s personal image and connections generally were more important than the party label in elections (Chen 1986). Since the image of political parties was not that welcome, maintaining their stance as nonpartisan could be a good choice for many Minnan and Hakka voters. Also due to the fact that the non-KMT candidates were not allowed to engage in any organized campaign activities under martial law, the Taiwan electorate supporting non-KMT candidates was unable to form a normal partisanship, which KMT supporters could do.

Third, the Dang-wai represented a partially united front of non-KMT
candidates in elections. At the beginning, the name of Dang-wai was merely an expedient way of differentiating non-KMT candidates from their KMT opponents. However, the term gradually acquired special political and organizational meanings. As the political system increasingly liberalized, members of the Dang-wai regularly engaged in island-wide electoral campaigns. Since martial law banned the formation of political parties, Dang-wai members used various names in different elections as common symbols to distinguish themselves. Consequently, the emergence of the Dang-wai provided Taiwan voters with a unique form of two-party competition.

The election of the Taiwan Provincial Assembly is a typical example that illustrates the development of political independents. The elections were implemented in 1951 and ended in 1994. Only two minor political parties, the Chinese Youth Party and the Democratic Socialist Party, which had been established in China during the Second World War, were allowed to present their candidates under party labels. However, as shown in table 4.1, the two minor parties were too weak to win a meaningful number of seats in the elections. Compared with those two parties, independent candidates performed much better. Even though the winning number varied from elections to elections due to a lack of organized campaigns, they managed to win from 15 percent to 27 percent of the electoral vote. They were thus a significant non-KMT force. The majority of Dang-wai independents unified under the DPP after 1986, which fared well in the elections of 1989 and 1994, garnering about 21 percent and 29 percent of the popular vote. The establishment of the DPP also suggested that there was a split among political independents. Those independents who did not join the DPP continued to run for election under a nonpartisan label. Popular support for non-DPP independents did not disappear, although it declined significantly.

The growth of political independents in local elections implies the existence of political space for non-KMT forces. The election results of the Provincial Assembly provide a larger picture in which the KMT was strongly

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<tr>
<td>KMT</td>
<td>78.18</td>
<td>84.21</td>
<td>80.30</td>
<td>79.45</td>
<td>82.43</td>
<td>84.51</td>
<td>79.45</td>
<td>72.73</td>
<td>76.62</td>
<td>76.62</td>
<td>70.13</td>
<td>60.08</td>
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<td>DPP</td>
<td>20.78</td>
<td>29.11</td>
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<td>New Party</td>
<td>2.53</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other parties</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>1.30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>15.79</td>
<td>18.18</td>
<td>20.55</td>
<td>16.22</td>
<td>15.49</td>
<td>20.55</td>
<td>27.27</td>
<td>23.38</td>
<td>22.08</td>
<td>9.09</td>
<td>7.59</td>
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Sources: Data are from the ROC Central Election Commission, the Taiwan Provincial Election Commission, and the Election Studies and Survey Data Archive of the Election Study Center of National Cheng Chi University.
dominant, although at the same time the number of political independents in Taiwan’s political landscape was not insignificant. Unfortunately, other than these macro electoral results, there are little empirical data showing individual voters’ partisanship. Micro studies of individuals’ vote choices were not feasible until the mid-1980s, when academics began to introduce the concept of party identification and its relevance to Taiwan.

In a strict sense, there were only KMT partisans and it was difficult to identify the non-KMT supporters in elections. Although the non-KMT candidates often called themselves independents, their supporters were not exactly the same as “independent voters” according to definitions of party identification. They were voters who supported non-KMT candidates, regardless of how persistent their support would be. True partisan support did not develop until the establishment of the DPP in 1986, when the partisanship of Taiwan voters began to take on a different form than in previous decades. In particular, those who were non-KMT supporters before 1986 would not only support the individual candidates as they had before but also began to adjust to the new party label. Thus, it is difficult to provide a detailed portrait of non-KMT supporters because the fact that they were non-KMT supporters does not necessarily make them independents. Since there was a ban on the formation of political parties, supporters of non-KMT candidates (independent candidates) generally characterized themselves as independents (voters supporting independent candidates) even though they in fact were non-KMT supporters. Consequently, the concept of “independent” that is often cited as a counterpart of party identifiers carries a different connotation.

Equally important, the evolving party system consistently shaped citizens’ partisanship differently than in the previous decades. In particular, Taiwan experienced a new political landscape after the KMT’s disastrous defeat in the 2000 presidential election as some members left the party and organized the People First Party and the Taiwan Solidarity Union. Along with the New Party, a KMT split-off of 1994, they form a part of Taiwan’s multiparty system. The island citizens’ partisanship has become diversified as a result, which can be characterized as multipartisan including identification with the KMT, DPP, NP, PFP, and TSU. Yet in addition to the increase in political parties, a significant characteristic of the party system after 2000 was the formation of the Pan-Blue and Pan-Green coalitions. The Pan-Blue includes the KMT, the NP, and the PFP, while the Pan-Green includes the DPP and the TSU. The key departure point of the Pan-Blue and Pan-Green mainly rests on their different stances with regard to cross-Strait policy. These alliances also have strong impacts on citizens’ vote choice in
Parties, Partisans, and Independents in Taiwan

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elections. Hence, citizen’s partisanship can be also understood in terms of their allegiance to the Pan-Blue Alliance or the Pan-Green Alliance, which presents a bipartisan structure.

Partisans and Independents since the 1990s

Thanks to the rapid advancement of electoral studies since the 1990s, more sophisticated findings about citizens’ partisanship have appeared in Taiwan’s academic community. This section will examine the attitudes and behaviors of partisans and independents in recent decades. Instead of using voter identification with an individual political party, it will use voter identification with the two major political camps mentioned above. Hence, following the prescriptions provided by *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1960), there will be seven categories of partisan: Strong Pan-Blue, Weak Pan-Blue, Leaning Pan-Blue, (pure) Independent, Leaning Pan-Green, Weak Pan-Green, and Strong Pan-Green. In order to provide a more concise meaning of “Independent,” this chapter also uses education as a criterion to divide the Independents into three categories: low-educated, middle-educated, and high-educated. Consequently, there will be comparisons among party identifiers and political independents in terms of political interests, cross-Strait relations, support for democracy, voting, and vote choices. These variables are selected for comparison because they have been frequently identified as important aspects of the study of Taiwan voters. Through the application of these variables with cumulative survey data collected over the past two decades, it is expected that the analyses will contribute to the study of partisanship and the impacts of political independents in Taiwan. Descriptions and measurements of these variables can be found in appendix 4.A1.

General Distribution

The empirical findings regarding citizen partisanship shown in table 4.2 demonstrate certain consistencies and changes during the past two decades. In the early 1990s, when citizens started to experience contested elections between the KMT and the DPP, a majority of the voters identified themselves as nonpartisan. The number of independents was as high as 34 percent in 1992. Next in predominance were the Weak Pan-Blue and Strong Pan-Blue identifiers. As for the newly established DPP, its identifiers numbered far less than those of the Pan-Blue Alliance. This suggests that the KMT
continued to enjoy a clear electoral advantage, as it had before. The number of independents declined in the legislative election of 1995 as only 22.5 percent of the electorate considered themselves as independents. Both the KMT and the DPP had more identifiers. In particular, around 32 percent of the electorate labeled themselves as Weak Pan-Blue. The presidential election of 1996 showed a similar pattern as in 1995 as the percentage of those identifying with the KMT and with the DPP rose. Only slightly less than one-quarter of the electorate identified themselves as nonpartisan. In particular, the KMT had enjoyed a strong surge of identifiers such that the combination of strong Pan-Blue, Weak Pan-Blue, and Leaning Pan-Blue comprised more than 50 percent of the electorate. The number of independents rose again in the elections for legislators in 1998. It seems that the surge of independents resulted from the decline of KMT identifiers. Meanwhile, the number of identifiers with the DPP, either Strong Pan-Green or the Weak Pan-Green, had increased slowly but steadily.

The independents reached their peak in the presidential election of 2000 and the legislative election of 2001. One key reason for the increase of independents had to do with the dramatic change in the party system at that time. On the one hand, the KMT suffered from an internal split before the presidential election, which led to a disastrous defeat in the presidential election and the DPP became the ruling party, 14 years after its establishment. On the other hand, new political parties, such as the PFP and the TSU, emerged in the 2001 legislative election. The unprecedented face of a multiparty system appeared in Taiwan. As political parties exhibited varying degree of quality, many citizens became reluctant to identify themselves as leaning toward a particular party. Thus, being an independent was the optimal choice for many voters. After 2001, the number of independents became somewhat variable in different elections, ranging from slightly more than one-third in the 2008 to about one-quarter in 2012.

One noticeable development was the gradual increase of partisan leaners since 2001. The percentages of both the Leaning Pan-Blue and Leaning Pan-Green categories, with some minor ups and downs, showed an increasing trend through 2012. The increase in partisan leaners resulted mainly from the emergence of coalitional electoral competition at that time; for example, members in the Pan-Blue camp (the KMT, the NP, and the PFP) cooperated in the presidential elections in order to defeat the Pan-Green candidates. However, in the legislative elections, each party in the Pan-Blue camp nominated its own candidates and competed against each other. The coexistence of cooperation and competition in these elections encouraged voters to swing their partisanship between pure independents and leaners.
Last, the percentages of strong party identifiers have been stable over the past two decades. The percentage of Strong Pan-Blue identifiers decreased when the KMT lost the presidential election in 2000, and the number continued to decline in 2001 and 2004 but then showed a slight surge from 2008 to 2012. As for the Pan-Green, winning the presidential election in 2000 did bring growth in the percentage of strong identifiers. The trend did not continue but maintained an average of between 4 percent and 6.5 percent from 2001 to 2012.

**Political Interest**

The general trend of partisan distribution for the past decades, as shown in table 4.2, is rather stable. However, unlike the partisans who have a clear political orientation, it would be imprudent to regard the political independent as a unified subset of the electorate. Many studies have provided a more detailed examination of the political independent, and, among the variables, educational level seems to be the most cited demographic criterion that differentiates subtypes of political independents. These studies argue that

**TABLE 4.2 General Distribution of Partisanship**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong Pan-Blue</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>7.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weak Pan-Blue</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaning Pan-Blue</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>15.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>26.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leaning Pan-Green</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Pan-Green</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>13.1</td>
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<td>13.7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>11.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong Pan-Green</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>7.2</td>
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<td>5.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>NR</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
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**Sources:** Data for 1996–2000 are from the Election Study Center at National Chengchi University, and data for 2001–12 are from the Taiwan’s Election and Democratization Study Project (see List of Data Sources in appendix 4.A2).

**Notes:** 1: Numbers in the table are percentages of respondents in each election survey. 2: The elections in 1992, 1995, 1998, 2001, 2004.12 (December), 2008.01 (January), and 2012 are legislative elections. The elections in 1996, 2000, 2004.03 (March), 2008.03 (March), and 2012 are presidential elections. In 2012, the election for president and legislators were held at the same time.
differences in other demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, and career, do not reveal clear and consistent implications about the attitudes and behavior of the political independent, and the educational differences have continuously drawn researchers’ attention in studies of the political independent. Therefore, this paper will also investigate the educational differences among political independents in Taiwan.

As indicated in figure 4.1, political independents in Taiwan have shown different patterns during the past two decades. In the early 1990s, trends in the percentages of political independents with low-level and middle-level educations were similar until early 2000s. Both categories also accounted for the majority of political independents at that time. Moreover, the percentage of moderately educated political independents has been the highest, while the numbers of least-educated political independents have decreased. By contrast, the highly educated political independent did not account for a very high percentage. Notably, the number of highly educated political independents increased after 2000 and exceeded that of the least-educated political independent. The different developments among the least, moderately, and highly educated political independents should enable researchers to get a more precise understanding about political attitudes and behavior.

The concept of political interest has been considered a driving force of political participation since the publication of *The People’s Choice* (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1948). Those voters with a greater interest in politics would concurrently have more political information and would be more attentive to political activities than those less interested. The literature also suggests a close relationship between political interest and partisanship. Identifying with a political party would provide voters convenient and reliable cues for elections. Moreover, a political party continues to convey political messages to voters all the time. It is anticipated that citizens with a close relationship to a political party would have more political interest than those citizens who do not maintain such a party affiliation. The results in table
4.3 partially confirm these findings. The general pattern indicates, first, that independents have been the most uninterested in politics during the past two decades. Except for the presidential election in 2000 and the legislative election in 2004, independents were more likely to say that they do not have an interest in politics. Second, partisan voters, regardless of their strength of identification, did not have clear associations with political interest. Partisan leaners in the Pan-Blue camp were generally less interested in politics, yet even the stronger partisans in the Pan-Green camp showed an unanticipated low interest in politics. The overall trend suggests a moderate relationship between political interest and partisanship. Even though independents have shown a relative lack of interest in politics, the relationship between partisanship and political interest is not consistent.

Nonetheless, the relationship between independents and political interest has rather consistently and systematically followed educational differences. Figure 4.2 shows a different distribution of political interest among the three types of Independents. The least-educated independent has the lowest political interest compared to the other types of Independent. The percentage of lack of political interest in the least-educated independent exceeds 80 percent. By contrast, the highly educated independent consistently maintains a certain degree of political interest. The political interest of the moderately educated independent, as expected, lies in between. The graph clearly suggests that the least-educated independents have the least interest in politics.

| TABLE 4.3 Distribution of Political Interest among Partisans |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Strong Pan-Blue | 31.4 | 38.1 | 25.4 | 42.1 | 13.5 | 42.4 | 38.9 | 10.8 | 53.3 | 38.9 | 34.5 |
| Weak Pan-Blue   | 34.6 | 35.3 | 24.9 | 35.9 | 7.7  | 42.9 | 34.8 | 14.  | 56.5 | 39.5 | 34.1 |
| Leaning Pan-Blue| 34.9 | 38.2 | 29.8 | 48.4 | 13.1 | 46.4 | 37.4 | 10.1 | 63.3 | 37.7 | 34.6 |
| Independent     | 46.7 | 50.8 | 40.7 | 58.8 | 22.3 | 66.3 | 54.2 | 23.7 | 72.5 | 52.3 | 48.5 |
| Leaning Pan-Green| 21.3 | 5.9  | 26.9 | 34.9 | 12  | 58  | 38.2 | 15.2 | 58.9 | 37.2 | 43.5 |
| Weak Pan-Green  | 33  | 40   | 22.6 | 40.3 | 13.9 | 50.4 | 42.3 | 13.7 | 49.5 | 41.5 | 40.7 |
| Strong Pan-Green| 28.6 | 25.5 | 10  | 36.9 | 1.1  | 52.7 | 43.3 | 19.4 | 69.4 | 53.6 | 45.1 |

Source and Note: Same as table 4.2.
Taiwan Voter

On Cross-Strait Relations

As mentioned above, the point of disagreement between the Pan-Blue and the Pan-Green camps has been their different positions on the issue of unification with China versus Taiwan independence. The choice is not an easy one for the majority of Taiwan citizens to make, and the preference of maintaining the status quo has become the more preferred alternative during the past decades. On average, up to 55 percent of Taiwan voters have chosen neither unification nor independence. This significant number has also implied that support for maintaining the status quo comes from all types of partisan citizen, and particularly from the independents. As indicated in table 4.4, the partisan difference of the two political camps is significant only between the strong party identifiers and the rest of the categories. Both

![Fig. 4.2. Lack of political interest among independents with different educational levels. Data Sources and Notes: Same as table 4.2.](image)

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<td>73.7</td>
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<td>54.3</td>
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<td>29.7</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>35.6</td>
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</table>

*Data Sources and Notes: Same as table 4.2.*
the Strong Pan-Blue identifiers and Strong Pan-Green identifiers (and relatively, the Weak Pan-Green identifiers) have lower support for maintaining the status quo. The Weak Pan-Blue, Leaning Pan-Blue, Independent, and Leaning Pan-Green, by contrast, are strong supporters of the status quo. In particular, Leaning Pan-Blue identifiers are the most likely to choose maintaining the status quo than all other types of partisans. While independents also choose maintaining the status quo, they do not present significant differences from party leaners.

If we take a closer look at independents’ preferences on maintaining the status quo, figure 3 shows that there are noticeable differences among the three types. On the one hand, the highly educated independents have been very supportive of maintaining the status quo. The upward trend also suggests that the highly educated independents have become core supporters for maintaining the status quo. On the other hand, the least-educated independents have been less likely to support maintenance of the status quo. Yet the trend after early 2008 did show a strong increase up to 2012. As for the moderately educated Independents, their preference for maintaining the status quo resembles that of highly educated independents. Also, the attitudes of the moderately educated independents are also more stable than the other two types of independents.

**Support for Democracy**

As a member of the Third Wave democracies, Taiwan has made an admirably smooth and peaceful political transition over the past decades. However, those achievements in democratic transition did not automatically bring about good governance in Taiwan. Like many other Third Wave democra-
cies, the challenges of political transition may not have been associated with the establishment of democratic institutions but, rather, with the new socio-economic issues occurring at the same time. In the past ten years, citizens in Taiwan have encountered sluggish economic development, repeated political corruption, and worsening social inequality. Consequently, the poor economic performance and ineffective governance could have disillusioned citizens about democracy and reminded them of the “good old days” in the authoritarian era (Chang, Chu, and Park 2007).

Fortunately, whether citizens lost their confidence in democracy under poorly performing governments is not clear. Table 4.5 shows that regardless of partisan differences, the majority of citizens have maintained rather strong support for democracy. Relatively speaking, citizens with stronger party identification are also more supportive of democracy. Pan-Green camp identifiers are more supportive of democracy than are Pan-Blue identifiers. The Strong Pan-Green identifiers, in particular, have been the most stable believers in democracy compared with other partisans. As for independents, their belief in democracy is not significantly different from the Leaning Pan-Blue identifiers but is slightly lower than for Leaning Pan-Green identifiers. Independents who are not supportive of democracy present a different picture when the level of education is taken into consideration. As figure 4.4 shows, support for democracy by independents displays a surge as well as a decline over the past decade. Independents’ support for democracy increased significantly from 2000 to 2004, then dropped sharply from 2004 to 2012. Figure 4.4 further indicates that the highly educated independents have been slightly more supportive of democracy than both the moderately and least-educated independents. Yet the three types of independent have moved closer to each other in 2008 and 2012.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 4.5 Distribution of Support for Democracy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong Pan-Blue 51.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Pan-Blue 48.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leaning Pan-Blue 54.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaning Pan-Green 53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Pan-Green 61.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong Pan-Green 70.2</td>
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</table>

Data Sources and Notes: Same as table 4.2.
One of the bedrock arguments made about party identification is the party’s strong impact on citizen’s voting. Citizens with stronger party identification are supposed to have stronger intentions of supporting the party with which they identify in elections. Partisan voters are therefore more likely to vote the way parties request. Table 4.6 presents the trends in not voting among different partisan voters. It shows, first, that stronger party identifiers are far more likely than others to cast their ballots in elections. Except for the Strong Pan-Green voters who had a higher percentage of not voting in 1996, 200412 and 200801, the number of those not voting in both the Strong Pan-Blue and Strong Pan-Green camps has been less than 10 percent. Table 4.6 also shows that weak party identifiers are less likely to vote than strong party identifiers. Both the Leaning Pan-Blue and Leaning Pan-Green identifiers are also less likely to vote than the weak party identifiers. Fourth, except for some elections, political independents tend to be the most unlikely to vote in elections. The general pattern of not voting and partisanship seems to reasonably confirm the conventional wisdom that partisanship does matter to a citizen’s intention to vote or not.

Figure 4.5 provides additional information about different types of political independents and their intention to vote. In the early 1990s, there was no clear difference among the highly, moderately, and least-educated political independent in voting. Noticeably, this pattern changed in 1998, when highly educated political independents refrained from voting, as did the moderately educated political independent, though with a moderate change. This new pattern continued until early 2008. Also noticeably, the least-educated political independents were by no means absent from voting. They were more likely to vote than their more educated counterparts.
Vote Choice

Based on the perspectives of party identification, citizens with a certain partisanship would be expected to be more likely to support a given party in an election. In Taiwan, citizen partisanship is effectively associated with vote choice in elections. As indicated in table 4.7, different types of Pan-Blue identifiers revealed consistent support for their party candidate. Moreover, the strength of identification was also in agreement with the assumption of transitivity, in which stronger identifiers tend to vote for their partisan candidate more than weaker identifiers do. As for independents, in the 1996 election the Pan-Blue presidential candidate, Lee Teng-hui, dramatically outperformed his competitor, Peng Ming-min. More than 41 percent of Independents voted for Lee, while only 4 percent voted for Peng. This sharp difference also accounts for Lee’s strong victory.

As discussed above, the KMT suffered a serious internal split during the presidential election in 2000. This internal split also led to a split among the Pan-Blue identifiers. Only 37.8 percent of Strong Pan-Blue identifiers and 34.8 percent of Weak Pan-Blue identifiers voted for their partisan candidate. The number was even smaller for those Leaning Pan-Blue identifiers. Independents were in favor of the Pan-Green candidate in 2000, which contributed to the electoral success of the DPP presidential candidate, Chen Shui-bian. As for the Pan-Green identifiers, they did not vote for the Pan-Blue candidate. Unlike the Pan-Blue identifier, the partisan boundary for the Pan-Green identifier was more consistent and predictable.

The presidential elections in 2004, 2008, and 2012 were typical Pan-

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<td>28.7</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>9.8</td>
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<tr>
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<td>13</td>
<td>17.7</td>
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<td>20.4</td>
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<td>28.4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>22.5</td>
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<td>18.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong Pan-Green</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
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<td>10.8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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Data Sources and Notes: Same as table 4.2.
Blue versus Pan-Green competitions, in which there were neither internal splits nor strong independent candidates. It is obvious that the impact of partisanship on elections became even stronger over time. Distribution of party identification in the three elections looked reasonable with no obvious deviations. Also, the strength of party identification was relatively consistent. Interestingly, unlike the 1996 and 2000 elections, in which independents one-sidedly favored either the Pan-Blue or the Pan-Green candidate, their vote choice seemed to be more divided. They had a higher tendency to support the Pan-Green candidate in 2004 but were more likely to back Pan-Blue candidates in the 2008 and 2012 elections. As the electoral competition between the two political camps became intense, the influence of independents has also increased. Interestingly, sizeable numbers of Taiwan voters continue to self-identify as independents, as Table 4.7 shows. This could be due to the historical memories of one-party authoritarian rule that makes island citizens reluctant to report partisanship. It could also be the unsatisfactory performance of political parties as a whole, which leads to an

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 4.7 Percentage of Votes for Pan-Blue Presidential Candidate</th>
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<td>Weak Pan-Blue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leaning Pan-Blue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leaning Pan-Green</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weak Pan-Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Pan-Green</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data Sources and Notes:* Same as table 4.2.

*Notes:* (1) The two numbers for the Independent category represent the vote for the Pan-Blue candidate and the Pan-Green candidate, respectively. (2) Since the Pan-Blue and Pan-Green alliances were not formed until after 2000, vote shares of Pan-Blue candidates in 1996 and 2000 elections refer only to those of KMT candidates.
unwillingness of identifying with any party. For whatever reasons, political independents in Taiwan deserve further analysis in future research.

Figure 4.6 shows that highly educated independents were less likely to vote for the Pan-Blue candidate in the presidential election of 1996. In contrast, least-educated independents were strongly supportive of the Pan-Blue candidate. The support for the Pan-Blue candidate in the 2000 election declined concurrently among the three types of independents. The differences in vote choice among independents with different educational levels seen in 1996 disappeared. In 2004, highly educated independents were more willing to vote for the Pan-Blue candidate than their less educated counterparts. The election of 2008 was similar to that of 2000, with the three types of independents not showing much difference. Yet all the independents tended to show considerable support for the Pan-Blue candidate. The highly educated independents turned their backs on the Pan-Blue candidate in 2012. Both the moderately educated and least-educated independents had higher percentages of support for the Pan-Blue candidate. In addition to the changing patterns of vote choice among independents, figure 4.5 also reveals one significant feature: there is a correspondence between the elections that lead to power change and the convergence of vote choice among the three types of independents. The KMT’s loss of power in the 2000 elections was accompanied by unified, declining support of independents. A similar instance occurred in 2008, when the Independents almost unanimously supported the Pan-Blue candidate who won the election.

Concluding Remarks

The evolution of the party system in Taiwan has been closely tied to the development of democracy. The development of citizen partisanship has
taken a distinct route following the process of democratic opening. The long-standing KMT had monopolized the political marketplace early on, relegating citizen partisanship to nonpartisan status if they were not supporters of the KMT. Nevertheless, those nonpartisan citizens participated in elections, supported certain non-KMT candidates, and paved the way for alternative partisanship later on. The establishment of the DPP represents a watershed development in citizen partisanship, having made possible competing partisanship. Additionally, the development of a multiparty system and the formation of Pan-Blue and Pan-Green camps in the 2000s significantly transformed citizen partisanship. There have been both changes and continuity in the party system, as in citizen partisanship. Individually, each political party has certain social bases, yet those bases are somewhat shared by allied parties. That means a citizen might change his or her support from election to election. The difference on the policy of cross-Strait relations has separated the Pan-Blue and Pan-Green as well as supporters of each camp. Citizens seem to be in the situation of a two-party system, which has a distinct partisan boundary that is unable to be crossed. Therefore, a citizen in Taiwan could be either a supporter of the KMT, NP, and PFP, or a supporter of the DPP and TSU.

The distinct historical development of the political situation in Taiwan has also given birth to a considerable number of political independents. Repressive measures by the KMT in the early period generated a hostile political atmosphere for many Taiwanese, so maintaining a politically independent status was a naturally safe and expedient choice, and the implementation of local elections provided these non-KMT citizens channels of participation without committing to any partisanship. The existence of the independent thus went hand in hand with the development of the party system. The independent would later turn into a strong power base for the first meaningful opposition party, the DPP. As Taiwan entered a period of rapid political transition in the late 1980s, Taiwan citizens began to experience true two-party partisanship. This new situation soon transformed again as new political parties continued to emerge in the early 1990s and 2000s. Multipartisanship appeared following the establishment of the NP, the PFP, and the TSU. Nonetheless, the formation of multiple partisanship does not imply the eclipse of the independent, a considerable number of whom still exist in the political marketplace. Also notably, the multiparty system has been in fact more like two-party camps within which citizens are more likely to cast their ballots according to party coalition, especially in presidential elections.

Thus, citizen partisanship has been both continuous and changing. Strong partisan citizens are more consistently affiliated with a given party,
but that is not the case for weak partisans and party leaners. The latter is obvious in the Pan-Blue camp. In contrast, the Pan-Green camp has enjoyed a more stable partisan affiliation with citizens. As for the independents, they generally resemble the conventional picture depicted in *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1960). Given the significant number of independents voting, they are certainly not to be ignored in elections, but they do behave differently according to their different educational levels. Though highly educated independents are less interested in politics and less likely to vote in elections, they do maintain a rather supportive attitude toward democracy and maintaining the status quo in cross-Strait relations. It is likely that these highly educated independents are comparably more autonomous and prudent than the least-educated independents, who are more likely to be mobilized in elections.

Modern democracy needs political parties. Even though the normative functions of the political party might change over times, the political party continues to be indispensable for democracy. More specifically, the formation and operation of the party system significantly affect the functioning of democracy. One of the core assumptions of party politics is a stable connection between citizens and political parties; the majority of the citizens in society are able to voice their preferences through political parties. Yet if a considerable number of citizens do not maintain a regular connection with a political party, it is therefore implied that the political party does not matter much in society. Worse still, a lack of partisan connection also implies a lack of important media transmitting citizens’ political information. Citizens would drift around the political world without an anchor (Wattenberg 1986, 130). Given the evidence of a high degree of overlap in attributes between the pure independent and partisan leaners in Taiwan, a clear classification of leaners is important both theoretically and practically. If we treat leaners as extended partisan voters, then the number of independents is less significant. It also leads to the conclusion that a relative majority of the electorate is partisan and that political parties have penetrated the major part of society. The party system is then accordingly stable. On the other hand, if we treat leaners as equal to independents, then more than one-third of the electorate will be labeled as independents; thus there exists a strong segment of uncommitted nonpartisan voters in elections. The formation and essences of party competition would also be affected because more centrist party appeals, rather than purely partisan-oriented ones, would become dominant in elections. Therefore, the changing partisan alliances of these independents, somewhat including the leaners, continue to play a crucial role in Taiwan’s electoral politics.
### APPENDIX 4.A1. Measurements of Key Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Description and Measurements</th>
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| Directions and strength of party identification | Before 2004, respondents were asked the following questions:  
  i. Do think of yourself as close to any particular party? When respondents answer yes, then they are asked,  
     (1a) Which party do you feel close to? and  
     (1b) Do you feel very close to this party, somewhat close, or not very close?" (strong, weak).  
  ii. When respondents answer no to question (i), then respondents are asked, “Do you feel yourself a little closer to one of the political parties than to the others?” If respondents answer yes, then they are asked (1a) again (leaners).  
  iii. When respondents answer “no” to question (ii), then respondents are regarded as independents.  
  After 2004, respondents were asked slightly different questions.  
  i. Among the main political parties in our country, including the KMT, DPP, PFP, NP, and TSU, do you think of yourself as leaning toward any particular party? (yes, then ask (iii) and (iv); no, then ask (ii)).  
  ii. Do you feel yourself leaning a little more to one of the political parties than the others? (yes, then ask (iii); no will be classified as independent)  
  iii. Which party is that?  
  iv. Do you lean very strongly, somewhat, or just a little to this party?  
| Pan-Blue and Pan-Green identifiers | Citizens who identify with the KMT, the NP, and the PFP are classified as Pan-Blue identifiers; citizens who identify with the DPP and the TSU are classified as Pan-Green identifiers. |
| Political interest | More generally, would you say that you are very, somewhat, not very, or not at all interested in politics? (not interested, very little/not much interested, somewhat interested, very interested) |
| Maintaining the status quo | Respondents are asked: “Concerning the relationship between Taiwan and mainland China, which of the following six positions do you agree with:  
  (1) immediate unification; (2) immediate independence; (3) maintain the status quo, move toward unification in the future; (4) maintain the status quo, move toward independence in the future; (5) maintain the status quo and decide later; (6) maintain the status quo forever. (Items 1 and 3 are classified as pro-unification; items 2 and 4 are classified as pro-independence; items 5 and 6 are classified as maintaining the status quo.)  
| Support for democracy | Respondents are asked, “Some say that ‘Democracy might have some problems, but it is still the best political institution.’ Do you agree or disagree?” (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree) |
Appendix 4.A2.

List of Data Sources


Notes

1. Mainstream wisdom concerning party identification in the tradition of the Michigan school and American National Election Studies have postulated the concept as a long-term psychological attachment to a given group (a specific political party). For a party identifier, party identification is a sense of group identity or belonging. Also by definition, party identification should be stable, not having frequent fluctuations. Therefore, data collection begins with a nonspecific statement asking the respondent:
“Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?” The wording of this question also probes the respondent’s endurance of staying with a political party. Those respondents who answer with either “Republican” or “Democrat” are then asked, “Would you call yourself a strong Republican (or Democrat) or a not very strong Republican (or Democrat)?” This follow-up question allows the researcher to explore respondents’ intensity of party identification. So, the two questions produce four types of party identifier: Strong Republican Identifier, Weak Republican Identifier, Weak Democrat Identifier, and Strong Democratic Identifier.

2. Although minor political parties, such as the Chinese Youth Party and the Democratic Socialist Party, came to Taiwan with the KMT government, they were merely window-dressing since the KMT monopolized all political resources (Tien 1989). Thus, both parties were too weak to challenge the KMT.

3. The actual number of registered KMT members has been in dispute. Some estimate that the party has more than 2.5 million members while others claim that it has had less than one million. The KMT has been reluctant to release its membership. The electoral defeat in the 2000 presidential election has led to a sharp decline in party membership. It is estimated that the KMT now has about 850,000 members (cited from Yu 2002).

4. There were other minor parties during this period. Because they either did not participate in any elections or failed to generate significant political impacts, this research excludes them from the discussion.

References


