The Taiwan Voter

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Taiwan experienced rapid socioeconomic and political changes in the 1960s and 1970s and evolved from an authoritarian to a democratic political system beginning in the mid-1980s. Since the early 1980s, many issues have emerged in Taiwan’s political arena. Some of them quickly disappeared, some temporarily attracted the attention of Taiwan citizens but gradually declined in importance, and still others evolved into highly salient ones and have had deterministic impacts on party competition and, hence, party turnover. Unlike most industrial democracies, in which issues of wealth distribution and materialism/postmaterialism (or fundamentalism/postmodernism) create the most important political cleavages (Dalton 1988; Inglehart 1977, 1990, 1997; Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Moreno 1999), those issues have not evolved into prominent ones for party competition in Taiwan. Instead, during the 1980s, as Taiwan transitioned to democracy, parties competed on the issue of reform versus antireform (stability). The partisan elites of the Democratic Progressive Party framed the reform issues and attracted the attention of Taiwan voters. As a result, the DPP gradually transformed itself into a strong opposition party with the support of about 30 percent of the electorate at the beginning of the 1990s. After political reforms and the resolution of unfair political practices, the party faced the challenge of searching for a new issue to appeal to a larger share of the electorate. So, it shifted the battlefield and framed the independence/unification issue in order to connect with the enduring social cleavages—ethnicity and Chinese/Taiwanese identity. Soon, the issue not only dominated the political discussions of the elites and the public but it also shaped party competition and affected elections.
This chapter, which is based on observation of the period from 1996 to 2012, endeavors to answer the following question: Why have some issues evolved to create important political cleavages that have shaped party competition in Taiwan, whereas other issues have not? Four issues are discussed in this chapter: wealth distribution, environmental protection/economy, reform/stability, and independence/unification. We explore the answer to the research questions from the perspective of the elites and that of the public. From the viewpoint of the elites, we show how they frame and manipulate different issues in the political arena to attain their political goals. From the viewpoint of the public, we show how the voters’ positions on issues coincide with manipulation by the partisan elites and how the voters perceive the importance of the issues.

Issues and Political Cleavages in Taiwan

The importance of issues in politics has long been recognized and emphasized by political scientists. Carmines and Stimson (1989, 3) describe it well in their classic book *Issue Evolution*: “To speak of politics is to speak of political issues.” As they argue, there are many issues in a political system, but the majority of them lie dormant most of the time. Only a few issues occasionally “rise from partisan obscurity and become so contentious, so partisan, and so long lasting that they come to define the party system in which they arise, to transform the grounds of debate which were their origin” (Carmines and Stimson 1986, 901). According to Carmines and Stimson, which issues become salient and which remain dormant depend on the actions of partisan elites and the responses of the mass electorate. First, elites instinctively know that some issues may benefit them, and they work to clarify those issues and frame them in partisan terms. Second, the mass public must alter its cognitive perception of the parties with respect to new issues, care about the differences among parties, and even change its political attitude and vote choice according to its opinions about new issues. When a substantial part of the mass public starts to change its cognition, attitude, and behavior in this way, all parties in the political system are necessarily forced to take a position along the dimensions of the new issue. At this moment, the issue experiences an evolution and affects the agendas of parties, the discourses of the elites, and party identification and vote choice of the mass electorate. Carmines and Stimson illustrate an issue evolution in which the party elites grew increasingly polarized on civil rights in the 1960s and 1970s, leading the mass electorate to become similarly polarized on that issue.
Furthermore, Lipset and Rokkan (1967) argue that political cleavages reflect social cleavages, and social cleavages are determined dramatically by the historic conditions of national and socioeconomic development. Accordingly, specific national conditions lead to a variety of alliance patterns among leaders of various social groups. As a result, these cleavages define the potential social bases of political conflicts. Lipset and Rokkan’s analysis offers a reasonable explanation for the rise of the party systems and voter alignments in advanced democracies. In most advanced democracies, the wealth distribution issue based on class is the most common factor and perhaps the most important political cleavage. However, approximately from the beginning of the 1970s, economic factors and traditional class-conflict models fail to explain contemporary political phenomena. Those who are materially better off protest the most, rather than those who are materially disadvantaged. Traditional political cleavage and theory of class conflict cannot explain this new political trend. Inglehart (1990, 1997) adds a new aspect—postmaterial or postmodern values based on noneconomic issues—to the formation of political cleavages. This new cleavage and the old wealth distribution cleavage are the most important issues in most advanced democracies (Moreno 1999).

Taiwan experienced rapid socioeconomic and political changes in 1960s and 1970s, and evolved from an authoritarian to a democratic political system beginning in the mid-1980s. A great deal of evidence suggests that from the mid-1980s to the beginning of the 1990s, when Taiwan experienced a transition to democracy, reform versus antireform (stability) was the most salient political issue (Cheng and Hsu 1996; Chu 1994; Shyu 1998; Wu 1993). As many new democracies in East Europe and Latin America, the democratic-authoritarian or reform-antireform is the most salient issue (Moreno 1999). Chu (1994) argued that the Taiwan public focused more on issues of political reform than on issues of economy and wealth distribution during this period because the Taiwan government’s economic policies had successfully resolved the problems of wealth accumulation and distribution during the decades that economic development heated up. Hsieh and Niou (1996a) examined the 1992 legislative election and found that the reform/stability issue had the greatest impact on voters’ evaluations of parties, followed by the wealth distribution and the independence/unification issues, with the environment/economy issue having the smallest impact. However, when Hsieh and Niou reviewed the 1993 local elections for county magistrates and city mayors, they found that the independence/unification issue and two valence issues—public work and anticorruption—had important impacts on voters’ evaluations of the parties. Other positional issues such as
wealth distribution, environment protection, and reform had limited impacts (Hsieh and Niou 1996b). Because the debate on independence versus unification was increasingly contested in the 1990s, when political scientists examined the 2001 legislative election, they found that independence/unification was the most influential issue and had considerable impact on voters’ party evaluations and vote choice. The reform/stability issue had some impact and was the second most important political cleavage. The wealth distribution issue also had some impact and a significant effect on vote choice, but the environment/economy issue was still not influential in elections (Hsieh 2005; Sheng and Chen 2003).

Given the research results in previous literature, we may suspect that the impacts of different issues fluctuate in different elections. This chapter will systematically answer why and how some issues have created important cleavages that have shaped party competition in Taiwan while other issues have not. As noted, four issues are examined in this chapter: reform/stability, wealth distribution, environmental protection/economy, and independence/unification. We choose the four issues for two major reasons. First, the reform/stability issue and independence/unification issue have occupied Taiwan election platforms and have polarized Taiwan politics for a long time. The wealth distribution issue and the environmental protection/economy issue marked the old and new left-right issues that shape enduring political cleavages in advanced democracies although Taiwan is not such a case (Hsiao, Cheng, and Achen, chapter 9 of this book; Norris 2004). As parties and politicians in Taiwan raised these issues in elections and in the legislature frequently and sometimes caught the public’s attention, these two issues did not form political cleavages.

The other reason for choosing these four issues is that they are position issues. A position issue is one on which the opinions among the electorate may easily be divided, such as the extent to which we should empower the government. On the contrary, issues such as economic development or anticorruption are valence issues—these are issues that are uniformly liked or disliked by the electorate (Fiorina 1981). Position issues are more likely to develop political cleavages and shape party competition than valence issues since parties can take opposing sides to mobilize the electorate (Stokes 1963). Valence issues have less potential to form a long-term political cleavage because they do not differentiate parties effectively.

Thus, this chapter will dissect the four issues in Taiwan and demonstrate their evolution from the perspectives of both the partisan elites and of the public. We selected the observation period from 1996 to 2012. Data are from two major databases: data on the elections of 1996, 1998, and 2000,
which were collected by the Election Study Center at National Chengchi University, and data on the elections of 2001, 2004, 2008, and 2012, which were collected by the Taiwan Election and Democratization Study project. All of these data are from face-to-face interviews with individuals of the Taiwan public aged 20 and above and are based on probabilistic sampling.

In the following, we first focus on the partisan elites’ role in issue evolution and discuss how partisan elites frame and manipulate the four issues in order to attain their political goals. We also demonstrate how Taiwan citizens perceive the elites’ signals and update their positions on issues. Then, we discuss mass perception of the importance of issues. Last, we conclude with the issue evolution of the four focal issues in Taiwan.

The Framing and Manipulation of the Issues by the Partisan Elites

In the process of issue evolution, the elites of the Dang-wai (the non-KMT forces and the forerunner of the DPP before 1986; see chapter 4) and DPP play an important role, not only because the Dang-wai and DPP elites are strategic politicians but also because they are from the opposition forces when Taiwan endured a transitional period from authoritarian to democracy. They are ambitious to acquire governing power. Politicians of the opposition or minority parties naturally turn to new issues to improve their political situation, whereas politicians of the majority parties naturally seek to maintain the salience of the current agenda (Carmines and Stimson 1989, 12–13). The Dang-wai and DPP elites strategically search for issues that benefit their group’s growth and strength. Furthermore, they frame and manipulate the issues to mobilize the mass public. From the beginning of the 1980s, the Dang-wai and DPP elites have capitalized on four major issues: political reform, social welfare, environmental protection, and Taiwan independence. The issues of political reform and Taiwan independence have been relatively more effective than the other two in terms of issue evolution. In the early 1980s, the Dang-wai and DPP elites used political reform issues to challenge the established authoritarian Kuomintang government and attract voters. After political reform was achieved, the DPP elites switched to the independence/unification issue and acted as an advocate of Taiwan independence from the beginning of 1990s. The success of manipulating issues to mobilize the mass public extended the support base of the DPP in the 1980s and 1990s and brought the DPP to the presidency in 2000 and 2004. However, once the DPP captured power, its room for manipulating issues became smaller for two reasons. First, once the DPP was in power, Taiwan
voters were no longer satisfied with only rhetoric during elections; instead, they wanted to see the actual implementation of the DPP’s campaign promises. Second, the DPP soon found that it was limited by fiscal difficulties; in particular, Taiwan has been in an economic downturn since 2000.

In the following, we will describe issue by issue how the elites have framed and manipulated them. We begin with the very first one that appeared in Taiwan politics—reform versus stability—and end with the most significant issue in Taiwan— independence versus unification.

The Reform/Stability Issue

Taiwan experienced rapid economic development from the beginning of the 1960s through the 1970s and 1980s. As a result, Taiwan society experienced dramatic socioeconomic change and transitioned from an underdeveloped country to an industrialized society in the 1980s. Accompanying this transformation, there emerged a new middle class with more education and sophisticated political skills. This new class and the politically suppressed Taiwanese, whose parents or grandparents had lived on the island before 1948, strongly pushed the dominant KMT government to undertake political reforms. However, the KMT government was reluctant to respond to the prodding. Utilizing a reform-oriented strategy, the Dang-wai gradually attracted the electoral support of Taiwan citizens. Eventually they got enough support to organize a formal party, the DPP, in 1986. Indeed, the Dang-wai got just 13.0 percent of all votes in the 1980 legislative election; however, the share of votes for the DPP (established in 1986) increased to nearly 30 percent by the end of the 1980s (see chapter 4 for details).

The reform/stability issue was the most salient one in the 1980s, during Taiwan’s transition to democracy. Some Taiwan citizens were worried about instability because of the rapid and radical political reform. They tended to identify with the KMT, whereas those taking political reform more seriously tended to identify with the DPP (Sheng and Chen 2003). In a survey conducted in 1991 about the most significant problem in the country, 36.4 percent of respondents mentioned political structure, 14.2 percent mentioned national status and national identity, while only 9.3 percent mentioned wealth distribution (Wu 1993, 6).

The opposition forces made great efforts to promote political reform and earned a reputation for being reformist. There was a considerable number of issues on the reform agenda from the mid-1980s to the beginning of the 1990s, including the lifting of martial law in 1987, termination of the Tem-
Temporary Provisions Effective During the Period of National Mobilization for Suppression of the Communist Rebellion, and with the return to a regular constitutional structure in 1991, full-scale elections of national representatives in 1992, a popular vote for the provincial governors and city mayors of Taipei City and Kaohsiung City in 1994, and direct elections for president in 1996. Even when the large and structural changes were achieved, the DPP continued its reformist role and turned its focus to social and economic reforms. These reforms include anticorruption, anticrime, constitutional reform, dealing with the KMT assets, and social welfare policies. In the process, the DPP legislators sometimes allied with members of the New Party, a newly established small party that sometimes collaborated with KMT legislators. The DPP might not be the owner of the particular reform issue as it was during the earlier period, but it was more active in this respect than the KMT (Sheng 2001).

A survey conducted by the Election Study Center in 1993 asked respondents about their impressions of the two major parties. The results showed that 35.8 percent of respondents perceived the DPP as a radical party, and 32.4 percent of respondents perceived it as a violent party. In contrast, 43.0 percent of respondents perceived the KMT as a conservative party (Liu 1994, 64). Even at the end of 2000 and the beginning of 2001, after the DPP had won the presidency and began to govern the country, the mass public's principal negative image of the DPP was still that it was violent and radical, whereas the principal positive image of the DPP was its contribution to democratic reform (Cheng 2004, 195–98). From figure 5.1, we can see that Taiwan voters on average located the DPP at 3.9 on the reform/stability issue dimension in 1996 and at 4.6 in 2001. However, because of the fierce party competition in the legislature and in the elections, the DPP returned to the reform-oriented position that it had held in the past. The DPP government directed two financial reforms and held referendums on national issues in 2004. The slogan of President Chen’s reelection in 2004 was “Taiwan first, Reform first.” Not surprisingly, the public located the DPP at 3.9 in 2004. In contrast, the public perceived the KMT as taking stability more seriously and as being more conservative in regard to political reform. The public located the KMT at 6.9 in 1996 and did not shift much over the years, until 2008.

In mid-2006, President Chen Shui-bian and his family members were accused of improper trading of shares, misuse of government funds, and corruption. In 2008, after leaving office, Chen Shui-bian was convicted of corruption and money-laundering, shocking the Taiwan public. When more evidence revealed that ex-president Chen had accepted money from
bankers during the second financial and banking reform, the public became even more disillusioned with both Chen Shui-bian and the DPP. In the 2008 election, the KMT presidential candidate, Ma Ying-jeou, took the opportunity to promote reforms in administrative ethics and social justice. He promised to initiate legislation on the criminal liability of illicit wealth of public servants and to comprehensively examine constitutional reform. In contrast, as the governing party the DPP took social stability more seriously than when it was in opposition. The DPP candidate, Hsieh Chang-ting, stressed the importance of consensus on reform. The public’s perception of the two parties’ issue positions along the reform/stability spectrum reflects this situation. In 2008 the public perceived the DPP, which was rated at 4.7, as more centrist than in 2004, while the KMT, at 6.1, was seen as leaning more toward reform than it had been in 2004. Along with this development, both the KMT and DPP have taken a more centrist position since 2008. In such a case, there is less space for parties to manipulate this issue, which leaves the possibility of convergence of their issue position in the future.
Unlike most advanced democracies, in which issues of wealth distribution are salient for party competition, issues of wealth distribution are relatively not so important in party competition in Taiwan. The evolution of this issue in Taiwan has gone through different phases. Before the mid-1980s, both the successful economic policy and the weak consciousness of the working class detracted from the attention given to wealth distribution issues (Chu 1994, 3). At the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, social welfare issues became more prominent due to fierce party competition and the increasing gap between the rich and the poor; however, such issues have become less polarizing, since most parties strive to offer social welfare benefits and none of them want to be seen as opposing benefits. More important, the independence/unification issue has attracted most of the attention of the parties and the electorate. Last, after party turnover in the presidency in 2000, the differences between the parties’ issue positions diminished while the DPP was in power and faced fiscal problems and the KMT stayed with a catch-all strategy on this issue. Later, we will discuss this issue according to its development over time and explain its ups and downs in Taiwan politics.

From the beginning of the 1980s, the parties and candidates emphasized wealth distribution issues more actively than before. This was connected to ethnicity, the most significant social cleavage in Taiwan. When the KMT government was moved to Taiwan in 1949, many mainlanders who worked for the military, public sector, and education sector immigrated to Taiwan with the government; thus, a high proportion of public servants were mainlanders. So the KMT’s social welfare policies in the early era focused more on these groups in order to consolidate its ruling apparatus. In 1987, the newly founded DPP set up a department whose purpose was forming an alliance with social-movement organizations in order to confront the KMT government. Responding to political reforms and to the challenge to its conservative welfare policies, and hoping to obtain widespread supports from the Taiwan voters, the KMT started a small-scale welfare program in the 1980s.

Before the 1980s, small-scale welfare programs did not arouse much discontent because class consciousness was weak. Taiwan’s economy heavily relied on exports and small-scale enterprises, which created many outsourcing industries. When the big outsourcing factories could not accommodate all the contracts, they would farm out their contracts to small subcontractors. In 1986, 63.3 percent of workers in manufacturing industries worked in a factory with fewer than 10 employees (Hsieh 1989, 17). Although these
small-scale enterprises supported the economic development of Taiwan, they hindered the formation of working-class consciousness and stimulated mobility between classes (Chang 1987; Gates 1979; Hsieh 1989). The structure of these small enterprises created more possibilities for Taiwan workers to start their own businesses, and from 1979 to 1987, 35 percent of Taiwan citizens chose to do so rather than be hired by others (Hsieh 1989, 12). Even among employees, 30 percent of them wanted to open their own business in the future (Stites 1985, 238). Moreover, the heads of the small enterprises, as well as society in general, also manipulated this desire for business ownership as a way to deal with unhappy workers (Hsieh 1989). Because the working class in Taiwan prefers starting their own businesses to confronting their bosses, it has been rather difficult to form strong class consciousness among workers.

The issue of wealth distribution stirred up more controversy after the 1980s because the disparity between the rich and the poor grew as a result of the rapid economic development and social transformation. According to a survey on family income, the average income of the top 20 percent of richest families was as much as 4.1 times that of the bottom 20 percent of families in 1980. The ratio of the average income between the top 20 percent and the bottom 20 percent was 5.2 in 1992 (Directorate-General of Budget 2012). From the beginning of the 1990s, not only did the DPP promote wealth distribution legislation, it also actively searched for a new battleground in wealth distribution issues to attract voters. In the 1992 legislative election, one candidate campaigned on the promise of a pension for senior citizens and achieved a significant victory. Later in the 1993 elections for county magistrates and city mayors, many DPP candidates advocated pensions for the elderly (Wang 2003, 81–82). When the DPP candidates were elected, they kept their promise and granted NT3000 dollars to senior citizens. Even though these payments did not last long in many counties because of fiscal difficulties, the DPP acquired a reputation for caring about the social welfare of the average Taiwan citizen. In the DPP’s 1999 survey on the question of a party’s capability to design a fair and reasonable social welfare system, 32.9 percent of respondents considered the DPP qualified while 20.7 percent chose the KMT (Fell 2005, 39). It may be plausible that it was at that moment the DPP achieved ownership of the social welfare issue, especially that of care of the elderly.

However, the DPP’s ownership of that issue did not last long, since the KMT was also competing for it. Worried that the DPP might take all of the credit for advocacy of legislation on social welfare, the KMT not only started to propose a national health insurance program but also struggled
to propose its own version of policies on subsidies for seniors. Eventually, the KMT cooperated with the DPP to pass legislation providing benefits to elderly farmers. Also, in 1995, the KMT government implemented the National Health Insurance program. Although the DPP initially gained the support of the electorate in part from promoting social welfare, both the DPP and KMT found their niches in the wealth distribution issue in the mid-1990s.

In other words, because of fierce electoral competition, a considerable number of social welfare issues became prominent in the Taiwan political arena. When a party or candidate advocates a policy that might benefit a specific group, political opponents may do likewise, or even advocate a more radical extension of the same policy aiming at the same target. Since most Taiwan parties and candidates attempted to take credit for welfare plans and avoid the blame for blocking such plans, the differences between the parties have gradually decreased (Chu 1994; Fell 2005; Sheng 2002; Sheng and Chen 2003). Furthermore, once the independence/unification issue appeared in the Taiwan political arena, it diverted much of the attention of the parties and the electorate from other issues. As Norris (2004, 119) claimed, “In Taiwan the parties were identified mainly by nationalist issues, about relationships with mainland China, rather than by left-right ideology.” Hence, the disparity of wealth distribution failed to form a strong political cleavage on the island.

Indeed, from 2000 to 2008, while the DPP was in power, the party became more concerned about the government’s fiscal capacity and economic development and was not as active in promoting social welfare as it had been prior to that time. In September 2000, the newly elected DPP president, Chen Shui-bian, announced at a press conference, “Social welfare can be put off, but economic development can’t be” (United Daily News, September 17, 2000, 1). Therefore, the differences on the social welfare issue between the parties became smaller. As figure 5.2 shows, in 2000 Taiwan voters on average rated the DPP’s position on the wealth-distribution issue dimension at 6.5, while the KMT on average was at 4.8 on the same issue dimension (questionnaire shown in a2 of appendix 5.A1). However, in 2004, after the DPP had been in power for four years, the rating was 6.0, compared to 5.6 for the KMT. In 2012, the DPP was at 5.4, while the KMT was at 5.1 along the spectrum of wealth distribution; thus, the issue positions of the two major parties in promoting wealth distribution had converged.

Figure 5.2 also demonstrates that the DPP became more centrist on wealth distribution in the perception of Taiwan public. Thus, it is not surprising that many Taiwan voters felt that the DPP had become closer to
business interests and played money politics soon after it was elected (Liu 2003). According to a survey conducted in 2002, two years after Chen Shui-bian became president, 42 percent of the respondents perceived that the DPP was too close to big business and to consortiums and spoke for the wealthy (United Daily News, July 29, 2002, 3).

The small differences between the issue positions of the two major parties has constrained the DPP’s advantage on the wealth distribution issue. A political cleavage due to opposition positions in the wealth distribution issue has been difficult to develop. Take regulations on subsidies for senior citizens as an example. In 2002 the KMT, together with the People First Party, first proposed and passed a regulation to provide subsidies to the elderly except for those with retirement pensions. Instead of discussion on whether the subsidies were affordable for the government and were fair to other minority groups, legislators from different parties competed to propose their own versions of subsidies. Some proposed to broaden the qualifications, while others

Fig. 5.2. Respondents’ issue positions on social welfare/tax raises and their perceptions about the parties’ positions (2000–2012). Source: Appendix 5.A2.
Note: On the horizontal axis, “P” indicates that surveys were conducted after the presidential election; “L” indicates that surveys were taken after the legislative election. In 2012 the presidential election and the legislative election were held at the same time.
proposed to raise the amount of the allowance. Even though a less disputable revision of the legislation was made on June 2003, the parties continued to propose revisions to the qualifications and the amount of the allowance. In total, there were 30 legislative proposals from different parties and legislators in the Fifth Legislative Yuan (Sheng 2005a). From the perception of the public, all of the parties seemed to converge at a neutral place on the wealth distribution issue. Thus, it becomes more difficult for the electorate to differentiate parties on the basis of the wealth distribution issue.

More important, in order to maintain its overwhelming dominance in Taiwan politics, the KMT has adopted a catch-all strategy, not a one-sided one. It will not give up the votes of laborers or farmers even though it may stand closer to public servants and capitalists due to its historical background. It may give wealth distribution issues less priority but will not oppose improving wealth distribution. On the contrary, the DPP, which was established through the strong support of disadvantaged and dissatisfied groups, focuses on social welfare programs to gain votes; however, the KMT’s strategy makes it difficult for the DPP to create confrontational situations effectively.

Overall, although the wealth distribution issue has been a point of contention in elections for a long period of time, it did not emerge as a significant political cleavage in the society. The disparity between the rich and the poor has widened in recent years, however, due to the economic downturn and money politics in Taiwan (Sheng 2013). According to a survey on family income, the average income of the top 20 percent of richest families was as much as 6.2 times that of the bottom 20 percent of families in 2010 (Directorate-General of Budget 2012). If we limit the observations to the top 5 percent of richest families and the bottom 5 percent of families, the ratio in income between them is even greater. It was 32.7 in 1998, 55.1 in 2005, and 93.9 in 2012 (Ministry of Finance 2013). Because of the worsening imbalance in wealth distribution, social welfare issues have become more salient (as evidence will show in the next section), and the parties have used this issue as a means to gain the support of disadvantaged voters. Indeed, in the 2012 election, voters concerned more about social welfare were more likely to vote for the DPP (Sheng 2013). After the election, persisting disputes on wealth distribution issues, such as minimum wage and maximum hours, labor pensions, and pensions of retired public servants, have made the rising gap in wealth a prominent issue in the Taiwan society. From the experience of advanced democracies, wealth distribution becomes a salient issue when there are a large-scale changes or economic depressions, or both
Issues, Political Cleavages, and Party Competition in Taiwan

Issues, Political Cleavages, and Party Competition in Taiwan (Dalton 1996; Lipset and Rokkan 1967). Will the rising gap in wealth in the Taiwan society polarize elites and voters and become an important political cleavage in the future? In our view, the issue of wealth distribution may not be able to single-handedly form a significant political cleavage due to the similar stands of political parties in Taiwan. However, if it aligns with the identity issue, the scenario may be different, a point that we will discuss in the conclusion.

The Environmental Protection/Economy Issue

Since the beginning of the 1980s, the Taiwan public has started to notice the environmental deterioration resulting from rapid economic development. However, the ruling KMT emphasized development, in which economic growth was the top priority, at the expense of environmental protection (Tang and Tang 1997). Protesting the KMT’s promotion and endorsement of heavily polluting industries, several environmental protection groups were organized to confront the KMT government. The DPP played an important role in the protests. In 1986, Lukang residents were mobilized to oppose a DuPont investment that had been endorsed by the KMT government. This protest made DuPont withdraw its project of establishing chemical factories in Lukang. This incident prompted many antipollution protests in the following years. In 1991, when the KMT government decided to build a fourth nuclear power plant in Kongliao, many Kongliao villagers were mobilized to oppose this policy by demonstrations and sit-ins at the proposed nuclear power plant’s location. A violent clash with the police occurred, and a policeman’s death brought the incident to nationwide attention. From then on, demonstrations accompanied the building project of the fourth nuclear power plant. The growing polarization of the proenvironment and pronuclear groups brought the former into closer alignment with the DPP (Ho 2005a, 405–7), which energized its base of support by mobilizing people who cared about environmental protection.

As shown in figure 5.3, when respondents were asked to locate the position of the parties on the environmental protection/economy issue dimension (with higher scores indicating economic development and lower scores as environmental protection), the DPP was rated at 5.0 in 1998 while the KMT had a score of 7.3 (questionnaire shown in a3 of the appendix 5.A1). However, after the DPP became the ruling party, its desire to stimulate economic recovery led it, like the KMT, to favor more developmentalist poli-
cies. When it faced a trade-off between the environment and the economy, most of the time the DPP favored the latter over the former, frustrating many Taiwan voters who cared about environmental issues (Ho 2005b).

Take the construction of the fourth nuclear power plant as an example. After President Chen Shui-bian came in power in 2000, he issued an executive order to halt the construction of the plant in October. This decision brought about severe political battles and resulted in a serious political crisis between Chen, the Executive Yuan, and the Legislative Yuan. Later, the Council of Grand Justices issued the Interpretation No. 520, which stated that the Executive Yuan’s actions had a “procedural flaw” for not reporting to the Legislative Yuan before making the decision to halt the construction. The value of stock market went down at least 2.5 percent as a result. In the end, the Executive Yuan and the Legislative Yuan reached a compromise to restart the construction with a consensus that a “nuclear free homeland” was the objective in the long run. The political compromise appeased the opposition parties, but frustrated people who stood for environment protection and expected the DPP would have made a difference. Although a few DPP leaders continued their fight against the use of nuclear energy and proposed to hold a nationwide referendum on the fate of the fourth nuclear plant, Chen did not endorse their proposal and chose promoting economic development rather than environmental protection as his top priority (Fell 2012, 187–88). The data in figure 5.3 demonstrate that the public has gradually changed its view of the DPP on environmental issues.

In contrast, the KMT was rather stable at around 7.2 on the issue spectrum of environmental protection/economy until 2008. In the 2008 presidential campaign, Ma Ying-jeou promised to initiate land restoration and reductions in carbon emissions. His platform also included the imposition of an energy tax and establishment of green traffic networks and buildings. As for controversial public works, such as the highway between Su-ao and Hua-lien, he promised to respect the results of environmental reports. When Ma Ying-jeou repeated his promises for legislation and policy at the National NGO Environmental Forum (Green Party Taiwan 2009), environmental groups had great hope that he would fulfill them. The perception of the electorate with regard to the KMT’s position on environmental issues was at 6.8 in 2008, which reflected this expectation to some degree. Meanwhile, Hsieh Chang-ting, the DPP presidential candidate in 2008, held to the DPP’s traditional policy, which included ceasing the construction of the highway, and the party was perceived at 5.4 on the issue spectrum of environmental protection/economy.

Although antinuclear protests continued to occur in Taiwan after the
fiasco of halting the construction of the fourth nuclear power plant, this issue failed to catch the public’s attention as it did in 2000/2001. As both the KMT and the DPP are generally in favor of developmental policies, it was not until the Fukushima nuclear incident of 2011 that the safety of nuclear energy became politically significant again. The Fukushima incident, which occurred in Japan on March 11, 2011, turned the public’s attention to environmental protection. When the KMT government requested a budget increase in 2012 to fund the ongoing project of building the fourth nuclear plant, the public loudly and clearly voiced their serious concerns about the safety of nuclear energy. Several environmental groups instituted protests again. A TEDS survey conducted in 2013 showed that 60.1 percent of respondents believed the government should halt constructing the plant, while only 27.3 percent supported the project (Sheng 2014). The DPP seized the opportunity to put forward the proposition of a nuclear-free homeland. The party’s elites also joined in the 309 NO NUKE Parade with environmental groups. To defuse the crisis, the KMT government announced in 2013 that a referendum on the fate of the power plant would be held later. Under the growing pressure, the KMT government finally announced in April 2014
that the construction of the fourth nuclear power plant would be mothballed for three years.\textsuperscript{14} It is worth noting that this move did not represent a KMT position shift because it keeps the option of restarting the construction in the future.

If the KMT continues to emphasize the economy while the DPP stands for environmental protection, this issue may provide a political environment in which to start discussions and debates. However, since the Taiwan public is much more concerned about economic prosperity than environmental protection (as evidence will show in the next section) and the ruling party cares more about economic growth, which is the case for both the KMT and the DPP, the environmental protection issue has difficulty in evolving to become a significant political cleavage (Sheng and Chen 2003). Further, as Inglehart (1990) noted, the new political cleavages of postmaterialism (such as environmental protection) do not necessarily attract votes because the supporters of those new issues are more active on issue agendas rather than being passively dominated by partisan elites. In other words, it is more difficult for partisan elites to manipulate the environmental protection issue. Thus, even when the issue of environmental protection becomes more salient in the Taiwan political area, its influence on party competition and elections may still be less than that of existing political cleavages.

The Independence/Unification Issue

After the achievement of political reforms and the reorganization of unfair political structures, the DPP, with 30.0 percent support of the electorate at the beginning of the 1990s, faced the challenge of finding a new issue to continue its political life. Which issue was the DPP able to maneuver most effectively to attract Taiwan voters in the next stage? Two major issues gradually drew attention from the DPP elites at the beginning of the 1990s. One was the pursuit of Taiwan independence, and the other was the pursuit of a welfare state (as discussed above). When the issue of Taiwan independence was raised in the political arena, it was connected to Taiwan’s most important social cleavages, those of ethnicity and Chinese/Taiwanese identity, so that it was easily perceived by voters and aroused the emotions of substantial portions of the Taiwan public.

Even though the DPP is pro-independence, its position on the independence/unification spectrum has shifted at different times to attain its political goals. In 1991, when it was eager to claim a position for Taiwan independence, the DPP passed the Taiwan Independence Clause just two
months before the National Assembly election. The DPP headquarters issued several full-page and article-style ads on why it advocated a sovereign and independent Republic of Taiwan (Fell 2005, 99). However, it received only 23.6 percent of the vote in the 1991 election, worse than its usual outcome. In the following legislative election in 1992, taking into account that Taiwan voters were not so comfortable with a radical stand on Taiwan independence, the DPP packaged Taiwan independence into a more diluted form and deemphasized the issue. The term “Republic of Taiwan” vanished from its ads and the more moderate “diluted Taiwan independence” replaced “pure Taiwan independence” (Fell 2005, 100).

In 1996, an independence-oriented DPP presidential candidate, Peng Ming-min, made “Want Independence, Oppose Unification, Love Peace” his campaign slogan. Again, this pledge moved the DPP to a more radical independence-seeking position. The public perceived the DPP as an extreme party in this regard and placed it at 2.0 on the independence/unification spectrum in 1996, whereas the public perceived the KMT at 6.1, and the average position of the public’s own view was at 5.2 (figure 5.4, questionnaire shown in a4 of appendix 5.A1). The DPP garnered only 23.1 percent of all votes in 1996. This serious defeat continued in the 1998 legislative election. While the public stood at 5.0 on the independence/unification spectrum, the DPP was perceived at 2.3, far from the public’s average position. The DPP received 29.6 percent of the vote, less than what an ambitious and energetic party would expect.

The continuous electoral defeats prompted the DPP to reconsider its position on the independence/unification issue. Before the 2000 presidential election, the DPP tried to take a centrist stance on the independence issue and to convince Taiwan voters that it had the ability to handle cross-Strait relations. First, the DPP passed the Resolution on Taiwan’s Future, which returned to its original principle of Taiwan self-determination. The second step was Chen Shui-bian’s speech “The New Central Way,” which referred to a vague middle way on the independence/unification issue (Fell 2005, 106). In the 2000 presidential election, Chen Shui-bian was elected with 39.3 percent of the vote. Another key factor that contributed to this victory was that two candidates—Lien Chan and James Soong—ran on the pro-unification side and split the vote.

Chen Shui-bian knew well that he would not be so lucky in the next election. To compete in a single plural electoral system with two parties, the median position might be a better position strategically. From then until the 2001 legislative election, Chen hewed to a centrist position on the independence/unification issue. The first move in this direction was his
inaugural speech, in which Chen declared the Four Noes plus One Without pledge, emphasizing that the new government would take a centrist position on the issue. Taiwan voters did receive this signal and thus revised their image of the DPP. As shown in figure 5.4, the Taiwan public on average located the DPP at 3.1 in this issue dimension. It was the first time that the Taiwan public placed the DPP at this moderate position on the independence/unification issue.

After Chen was in power, he still faced an opposition-controlled legislature. Although some legislators left the KMT and followed James Soong to a new party, the PFP, together the KMT and PFP still held more than half of the seats in the legislature. The situation for Chen’s government was worse since the KMT legislators were much more cohesive than usual because of the serious partisan conflict during the elections and a divided government created after the elections (Hawang 2003; Sheng 2003, 2008). In the meantime, the PFP legislators cooperated with the KMT legislators on most substantial legislation because they shared the same supporting groups (Yu 2005). On the other hand, the DPP faced a challenge from a newly founded party, the Taiwan Solidarity Union, a party more extreme than the DPP on
the independence/unification issue dimension. As a result, Chen's government faced a political dilemma.

In hoping to win a majority in the legislature to implement Chen's campaign promises, the DPP adopted two campaign strategies in the 2001 legislative election. The first was to run a national campaign. Normally, candidates running under a multimember district with a single nontransferable vote electoral system try to distinguish themselves from other candidates of the same party because they target the same bloc of party supporters. Thus, they have incentives to run independent and local campaigns; that is, to focus on serving constituents and bringing pork-barrel projects to their constituency, rather than concentrating on national issues (Sheng 2005b). However, in 2001 the DPP ran its campaign by promoting national campaign ads, and it prohibited its candidates from running independent campaigns. Expecting a coattail effect from the national star, Chen Shui-bian, the DPP candidates followed this policy.

The DPP's second electoral strategy was to declare publicly that it intended to be a government for all people; that is, the government would work for all Taiwan citizens, not only for DPP voters. Therefore, it took a centrist position on the independence/unification issue and did not emphasize either the independence/unification issue or the Taiwanese/Chinese identity issue (Fell 2005, 140–41). Instead, the party emphasized other issues, such as social welfare and the political corruption of the era of the old KMT government. In the 2001 legislative election, the only party emphasizing independence was the TSU. The TSU won 7.8 percent of the vote and 13 seats. The only party emphasizing unification was NP, which nearly disappeared, getting only 2.6 percent of the vote and one seat in 2001.

By pursuing these strategies, the DPP won 33.4 percent of the vote and 38.7 percent of all seats in the legislature. Although the DPP increased its number of seats and became the largest party in the legislature, the 38.7 percent of seats was still not enough to control the legislature. Even if it could get support from the TSU on most important legislative roll-call votes, the total fraction of seats in the Pan-Green bloc (44.5% of the total) still would be outvoted by the opposition coalition, the Pan-Blue bloc, formed by the KMT, PFP, and NP. After the DPP failed to win support from a majority of the voters, it faced a severe fight with the Pan-Blue bloc in the legislature. Consequently, the DPP government was able to accomplish little and could not implement its campaign promises.

Soon after the 2001 legislative election, the DPP found that the TSU had attracted voters who favored an extreme position on Taiwan independence. Several substantial moves showed the TSU's aggressiveness and steadfast po-
sition. For example, the TSU initiated a proposal to revise the President and Vice-President Election and Recall Law to limit the qualification of a presidential candidate: only those born in Taiwan would have the right to be a presidential candidate. Another obvious example was the firm position TSU legislators took, while the Plebiscite Law was under debate, in favor of having substantive issues such as Taiwan independence decided by plebiscite. Also, when creating Regulations for Managing the Relations between Citizens of the PRC and Taiwan, the TSU always stood for very strict restrictions on people from China. Compared to the TSU’s firm stand on the independence issue, the DPP appeared ambiguous and hesitant on the issue.

Fearing that they would lose the electoral support of pro-independence voters to the TSU, the DPP started to shift to a more pro-independence stance after the 2001 legislative election. Constrained by its ruling position, the DPP did not declare for Taiwan de jure independence. Rather, it played a safe game; namely, to consolidate its original voter base by resorting to Taiwan self-determination and Taiwan nationalism. The 228 Hand-in-Hand Rally before the 2004 presidential election was designed to present the DPP as the party that loved Taiwan. Further, the DPP advocated Rectify the Name of Nation and Drafting the New Constitution in the later legislative elections. All of these actions contributed to the party’s position shift to an extreme pro-independence stance in 2004. The Taiwan public discerned this shift and placed the DPP at 2.2, almost the same as its position in 1996 (figure 5.4).

The DPP continued its pro-independence strategy even as President Chen’s second presidential term was almost over. In the cover letter of application for membership in the United Nations, Chen requested the admission of Taiwan (Office of the President, July 20, 2007), which was different from the earlier request, “Readmission of the Republic of China.” The DPP further proposed a referendum that requested the government to continue to apply for membership in the United Nations under the name of Taiwan. The DPP presidential candidate for the 2008 election, Hsieh Chang-ting, supported this referendum despite the opposition of the United States and China. The United States and China worried that the next step of the DPP would be an independence referendum. When Hsieh visited the United States during the election, he stated that an independence referendum would not be necessary since Taiwan was already substantially independent. He claimed that the “cross-Strait common market” policy of his KMT opponent, Ma Ying-jeou, was a preliminary step to unification with China. As a result, the Taiwan public rated the DPP’s position at 2.2 and the KMT’s at 7.4 in 2008 (figure 5.4).
The DPP lost the 2008 election. This defeat led the party to reconsider its claims on the issue of independence/unification. Hsieh had linked an open economic policy with Taiwan nationalism but failed to provide a better substitute policy for Taiwan’s economic recession. This strengthened the public’s impression about the DPP’s lack of ability to deal with both economic and cross-Strait issues. Over half of the Taiwan public (54.3%) thought that the KMT performed better on cross-Strait issues in 2008 (Sheng 2013). Some moderate DPP elites, such as Tuan Yi-kang, claimed that the mass public was tired of the DPP’s dogmatic views on the issue of independence/unification. Furthermore, after 2001 the public in general placed themselves at 4.5–4.6 along the spectrum of independence/unification. According to Downsian median voter theorem, it is expected that parties will seek a more centrist position when most of the public stands at the middle. During the 2012 election, the DPP presidential candidate, Tsai Ing-wen, adopted a moderate strategy on the issue of independence/unification. She claimed that she would unconditionally carry on the existing cross-Strait policies if she won the election. She also admitted the importance of an open economic policy and trade with China and committed herself to dealing pragmatically with the relationship with China. However, she denied the “1992 consensus” and made a vague assertion of “Taiwan consensus.” The mass public still perceived the DPP at 2.6 on the spectrum of independence/unification, even though this was the second closest placement to the center for the DPP since 1996.

In contrast, the Taiwan public perceives the KMT as a pro-unification party. This perception is based on the KMT’s long-standing political declaration in support of eventual unification with China. In 1990, the KMT government set up the National Unification Council. In 1991, the council drafted “Guidelines for National Unification,” which called for a phased approach toward unification. However, Lee Teng-hui, the KMT’s president who held office from 1988 to 2000, maintained a vague position on the independence/unification issue. Early in 1991 and 1992, when the DPP passed the “Taiwan Independence Clause” and advocated a radical Republic of Taiwan pledge in elections, Lee was lenient toward the DPP. His blurred and ambivalent attitude on unification with China made the New KMT Alliance, a hard-line faction on the unification position, accuse Lee of being a supporter of gradual independence. Lee’s attitude toward independence/unification contributed to the departure of the New KMT Alliance from the KMT and its formation of the NP in 1993.

During the campaign for the 1996 presidential election, when facing Lin Yan-kang and Chen Lu-an, two candidates who were strongly pro-
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unification, Lee Teng-hui was still vague about his position on independence/unification. A survey conducted by the Election Study Center in 1996 asked respondents about Lee's position on that issue. The results showed that 23 percent of the respondents considered Lee as favoring unification, 22.1 percent considered him as favoring independence, 23.0 percent thought he favored the status quo, and 31.9 percent were not aware of Lee's position at all (Sheng 2002). This explained why Taiwan voters located the KMT at 6.1 on the independence/unification dimension in 1996.

From 1996 to 2000, when Lee was still the KMT's leader, Taiwan voters considered the KMT as a party inclined to the right of center on the independence/unification issue. This perception changed when Lee left the KMT and became the spiritual leader of the TSU. The KMT reserved the option of unification with China and strongly stood for an open economy with China. After 2000, Taiwan citizens located the KMT at around 7.0 on the unification side of the dimension. In 2008 the KMT presidential candidate, Ma Ying-jeou, announced the No Unification, No Independence, and No Use of Force pledge on the independence/unification issue. Also, in his inaugural speech, he promised to foster more direct exchanges in cross-Strait relations and draft a peace pact with China. After Ma took office, he encouraged friendlier and more peaceful relations with China, such as frequent Chiang-Chen talks, opening direct investment in China, and allowing Chinese tourists and students to visit Taiwan. He also advocated signing the Cross-Strait Financial Supervision and Cooperation Memorandum and the Cross-Strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement to strengthen economic relations across the straits. Although the No Unification pledge seemed to make him a little more centrist, his economic and cultural policies, which encouraged closer relations with China, contributed to his pro-unification position in the public's perception. The public rated the KMT's position at 7.4 along the independence/unification spectrum.

Furthermore, the concurrence between the issue position of the KMT's and DPP's identifiers and the issue position that those identifiers perceive their party to have is noteworthy, as figure 5.5 demonstrates. The issue position of KMT identifiers and their perception of the KMT's issue position correspond to each other. This situation is more apparent when we compare the issue position of DPP identifiers with their perception of the DPP's issue position. The concurrence may not be coincidental. Brody and Page (1972) argue that a voter may be persuaded by a candidate's position and thereby consider that position to be his own. The
public’s perception on issues will be “distorted” by “pre-existing partisan attitudes.” In order to maintain cognitive consonance, party identifiers will selectively absorb information and form their issue position close to their preferable partisan position (RePass 1971). Research on American voters has shown this possibility. For example, Page and Jones (1979), Markus and Converse (1979), and Markus (1982) specify their models with reciprocal causal relationships among party, issue, and candidate factors by a simultaneous-equation statistical method. The concurrence in figure 5.5 implies that partisan elites have influenced Taiwan citizens in shaping their issue position.

Specifically speaking, elites try very hard to attract Taiwan citizens to their side. They frame and develop the issues. They persuade and convince the Taiwan public that certain issues are important and that their position benefits the public the most. The ups and downs of the issue positions of party identifiers show that they recognize the shift of their party’s issue position and that they will shift their issue position accordingly. The DPP identifiers are more likely to be persuaded by the DPP elites, while the Pan-Blue identifiers are less likely to be persuaded by the DPP elites. And the KMT identifiers are more likely to be persuaded by the KMT elites, while the Pan-Green identifiers are less likely to be persuaded by the KMT elites. In other words, when voters pick up the signal of political elites’ rhetoric or action on the issues, or both, they are selectively persuaded. In such a case, we should be able to find that an individual’s party preference affects his issue position so that a concurrence between his position and his perception of his preferable party’s issue position appears, as in figure 5.5.\(^\text{18}\)

For example, the DPP identifiers perceived the DPP’s issue position as more centrist (3.2) on the issue spectrum in 2000, when Chen Shui-bian offered the New Central Way policy. At the same time, the DPP identifiers also moved to a more centrist position (4.3) in 2000. Another example occurred in 2008. When the DPP strongly catalyzed the birth of the Admission of Taiwan to the United Nations referendum and Hsieh Chang-ting claimed that he would not propose an independence referendum because Taiwan was substantially independent, the DPP identifiers placed the DPP’s issue position at 2.0, the most pro-independence stance that they have ever considered for the DPP. Meanwhile, they rated themselves at 2.9, also the most pro-independence placement that they have ever had.

Another interesting phenomenon in figure 5.5 is the trend in the issue position of KMT and DPP identifiers. Compared to their perception of the parties, Taiwan voters tend to be more centrist than their preferred parties,
even though their positions generally fluctuate with those of their parties. This may imply that Taiwan citizens, although standing close to the position of their preferred party, do not consider themselves as extreme as their parties on this issue. In other words, the issue position of party identifiers seems not to deviate from that of independent voters too much on average. Furthermore, not only their perceptions on parties’ issue positions but also their issue positions were prone to be centrist in 2012. Indeed, DPP identifiers perceived themselves at 3.3 on the issue spectrum in 2012 (2.9 in 2008), while KMT identifiers placed themselves at 5.4 in 2012 (5.8 in 2008). Fell argues that the fluctuations of party position were determined by intraparty struggle in the two main parties after 2008 and suggests that the new generation of leaders have sought “more consensual politics” (2011, 93). Convergence to a more centrist stance on the issue of independence/unification for both the DPP identifiers and KMT identifiers may be possible in the future unless political parties on the island become extreme.
The Most Important Problem Facing Taiwan

In this section, we discuss how the public perceives the most important problem the country is facing and whether the public’s perspective responds to the elites’ issue agenda. Survey data were collected after presidential and legislative elections from 1996 to 2012 (questionnaire wordings are in A5 of the appendix 5.A1). Since this is an open-ended question, there are divergent responses. However, we managed to subdivide respondents’ answers into eight categories: economic prosperity, independence/unification/cross-Strait affairs, wealth distribution/social welfare, party/politician’s ability and corruption, social order and national security, political/social reform/stability, environmental protection, and others. Table 5.1 shows the results.

Based on data from the table, we find that the Taiwan public was extremely concerned about economic prosperity, especially in 2001 and 2008, when Taiwan’s economy was in a downturn. Also, the public was concerned about social order and national security, especially in 1996 and 2004, when tensions with China occurred in the Taiwan Strait. Sometimes, the public takes the party or politician’s characteristics (e.g., ability, integrity, and corruption) more seriously. However, economic prosperity, social order, and national security, as well as the party’s and politician’s ability or corruption,

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<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
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<td>22</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Environmental protection</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Economic prosperity</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social order and national security</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Party or politician ability/corruption</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>Refuse to answer</td>
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Sources: Data for 1996 are from the Election Study Center at National Chengchi University, and data for 2001 and after are from the Taiwan’s Election and Democratization Study Project.

Note: After the year, “P” indicates that surveys were conducted after the presidential election; “L” indicates that surveys were taken after the legislative election.
are valence issues, in which there is near-universal agreement on the ends of policy (Fiorina 1981, 18). Since most partisan elites (and the public) take the same side on the valence issues, those issues have little potential to develop into a long-term political cleavages.

Figures 5.6 and 5.7 illustrate only the importance of position issues—specifically, the four focal issues of this chapter—in the perception of the public. Figure 5.6 presents the public’s perspective on those issues in the presidential elections, and figure 5.7 shows the situation for the legislative elections. Several points are noteworthy.

First, from the public’s perspective, the independence/unification issue has been the most important position issue across years both in the presidential and legislative elections. The proportion of respondents who consider this issue most important is much greater than the proportion for other issues (figures 5.6 and 5.7). As previously discussed, politicians have manipulated this issue most of the time. When the Taiwan independence issue was raised in the political arena, it was connected to Taiwan’s most important cleavages, that of ethnicity and Chinese/Taiwanese identity, so that it was easily perceived by voters and aroused the affections and disaffections of substantial portions of the Taiwan public. Also, the independence/unifica-
The independence/unification issue is connected to relations with China, so that it is also related to national security and economic prosperity. This makes the independence/unification issue even more important.

Second, the independence/unification issue is of more importance in the presidential elections than in the legislative elections. Presidential candidates’ election platforms target national voters, whereas legislative candidates target their own constituents. In order to attract voters, it is possible that issues involved in presidential elections tend to be national and important affairs, while issues involved in legislative elections are diverse—from national to local affairs. Even in the same year, the proportion of the respondents considering the independence/unification issue the most important was only 9.0 percent in the legislative election held in January 2008; however, it was 27.0 percent in the presidential election held in March of the same year (table 5.1).

Moreover, the importance of the independence/unification issue fluctuates more in the legislative elections than in the presidential elections. More than 25.0 percent of the respondents perceived the issue as the most important position issue in almost all presidential elections. However, in the legislative elections, only 7.0 percent and 9.0 percent of the respondents...
perceived it as the most important position issue in 2001 and 2008 whereas 25.0 percent did in the 2004.\textsuperscript{20} In 2003, the TSU initiated the Campaign for Rectifying the Name of Taiwan and invited the former president, Lee Teng-hui, to be its spiritual leader. Later they sponsored the Call Taiwan Taiwan parade. Afraid of losing too many pro-independence voters, the DPP and Chen Shui-bian expressed their support for this campaign both explicitly and implicitly (\textit{New Taiwan Weekly News}, September 12, 2003).\textsuperscript{21} Chen Shui-bian also requested national enterprises to change “China” to “Taiwan” in their names. The independence/unification issue had occupied the spotlight in the 2004 legislative election. This further demonstrates that the public gets cues from the parties and politicians in order to shape its perspective on politics. As in the United States, Democrats mention pro-democratic issues more, whereas Republicans uphold conservative values and issues (RePass 1971, 395). Elites’ emphasizing or deemphasizing of a certain issue may affect the public’s perspective on the issue agenda (Chihibber and Torcal 1997, 31).

Last, issues other than independence/unification are not as important from the public’s perspective, but the importance differs across issues. More people consider the wealth distribution issue more salient in the legislative elections than in the presidential elections. Also, as the economic situation has declined, the economically disadvantaged strongly felt relatively exploited; thus, more people paid attention to the wealth distribution issue. So from 2004, a number of respondents (6.0\%) considered wealth distribution the most important problem facing Taiwan (figure 5.7). As for the political reform issue, few voters took it as the most important issue in either the presidential elections or legislative elections, although reform/stability had been the top issue in the 1980s and early 1990s (Hsieh and Niou 1996b). The DPP elites promoted many reform programs, whereas the KMT stressed stability. Political stability occupied the top 10 advertisements of the KMT during elections until the party turnover (Fell 2005, 26). However, the importance of the reform/stability issue faded after Taiwan’s transition to democracy.

The environmental protection issue has the least respondents who perceive it as an important problem. Candidates’ campaign platforms emphasizing economic growth usually get more attention than those emphasizing environmental protection. Furthermore, the ruling party tends to stress economic growth rather than environmental protection. An example is that even though for a long time the DPP claimed to protect the environment, it compromised in favor of economic development when it was in power (Ho 2005b). Thus, it is not surprising that relatively few politicians emphasize
the environmental protection issue. As a result, few respondents consider environmental protection to be an important problem compared to other issues.

Overall, partisan elites’ manipulation of the issues, such as developing an issue, shifting the issue position, and emphasizing one issue while deemphasizing another, has an impact on how Taiwan citizens perceive the issues.

Conclusions

This chapter has examined four issues: reform/stability, wealth distribution, environmental protection/economy, and independence/unification. We have shown how partisan elites frame and manipulate these issues to attain their political goals and how Taiwan voters respond. Research findings show that for all of the four issues, Taiwan voters are able to perceive the parties’ issue positions, shape their own issue position, and make political judgments based on the issues. This shows that issue politics has gradually evolved in Taiwan politics, although the impacts across issues differ.

In the process of issue evolution in Taiwan, the Dang-wai and DPP elites played an important role. They strategically searched for issues that benefited the party’s growth and strength, then clarified and manipulated the issues to mobilize the mass public. Having emerged in the authoritarian era, the DPP emphasized the political reform issues first. After accomplishing political reform, it moved to the issue of Taiwan independence. The DPP elites were successful in raising this issue, so that the party grew gradually in the 1980s and 1990s and won the presidency in 2000 and 2004. However, it lost the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections, and it has not broken through the bottleneck of seat shares (40.0%) in legislative elections. One of the major reasons is that the DPP cannot achieve a breakthrough on issue games.

Following Taiwan’s gradual democratization and political reform in the 1980s and 1990s, it has become more difficult for the DPP to identify new and attractive reform issues. The DPP has tried raising several such issues after 2000, such as the return of the KMT assets obtained in the authoritarian era, revision of the 18 percent preferential interest rates for the pensions of retired public servants, the reform of the constitution, and the restructure of the legislature. The DPP has attained its goal on some issues, but it cannot take all of the credit because several parties were involved in the regulation-making process. Some reform issues, such as preferential treatment for retired civil servants, are still controversial and might only help to consolidate the DPP’s original base of support but not broaden its voter base.
Regarding the environmental protection/economy issue, the debate on whether to continue the construction of a fourth nuclear plant has stirred up mass attention recently. The disaster at the Fukushima nuclear plant in Japan has further stimulated the public’s concern about the safety of nuclear energy. If the KMT government had not been able to defuse the issue, the DPP could have taken advantage of it to attract the electorate. However, the KMT government decided to mothball the construction of the fourth nuclear power plant for fear of losing electoral support even though the option to use nuclear energy was kept open. In addition, as a result of the economic downturn since 2000, the Taiwan public is more concerned about economic prosperity, and the governing party has always considered economic growth as the top priority in its agenda. Without polarizing elites and voters, the environmental protection/economy issue has little chance of evolving into a salient political cleavage.

Thus, the independence/unification issue remains the most influential issue in Taiwan politics because all major parties have clear and polarized positions on it and it is connected to enduring social cleavages—ethnicity and Chinese/Taiwanese identity. As it was demonstrated in figure 5.4, the positions of the parties, in particular those of the KMT and the DPP, are obviously separated more than those in figures 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3. This situation provides partisan elites with opportunities to manipulate the issue in order to attract voters. The Taiwan public in turn responds to the elites, shapes its issue position, and perceives the importance of the issues accordingly. Among position issues, these types of interactions between partisan elites and the mass public is especially effective with the independence/unification issue. Moreover, this issue is relatively important also because Taiwan voters make political decisions based on it (Cheng and Hsu 1996; Fell 2005, 2012; Hsieh and Niou 1996a, 1996b; Shyu 1998; Sheng 2002, 2013; Sheng and Chen 2003). From 2000 to 2008, party positions on the independence/unification issue became more polarized. The Pan-Green’s position on the issue dimension was moving toward a more pro-independence stance. In the meantime, the Pan-Blue’s position was becoming more pro-unification. In 2012, although both the KMT and the DPP were perceived as a little prone to being centrist (the KMT moved from 7.4 to 7.0 on the scale, while the DPP moved from 2.2 to 2.6), the difference between the two parties was still very large. The continuing polarization between the two parties has made the independence/unification issue more salient and has had decisive impacts on the political attitudes and behavior of Taiwan voters. It is quite possible that all parties will keep focusing most of their efforts on framing and manipulating this issue.
Last, the wealth distribution issue in Taiwan has not become as salient as it has been in other advanced democracies even though the disparity between the rich and the poor has become more severe in recent years. Political parties and candidates have frequently manipulated the issue of wealth inequality to gain electoral support from disadvantaged voters. Since they generally attempt to take credit for welfare programs, they tend to outbid each other. The differences between the positions of political parties on wealth distribution are thus small. Indeed, all major parties in Taiwan have little differences on this issue and have difficulty in distinguishing themselves from one another. As a result, the wealth distribution issue has not been polarized to the extent of becoming a significant political cleavage.

Will this issue become an important political cleavage in the future? There are two possible scenarios. The first one is that the welfare distribution issue is absorbed into the dominant cleavage of independence/unification and polarizes political elites and voters. There is evidence that elites of major parties took a ride on the independence/unification issue to evoke the public’s consciousness of wealth inequality in Taiwan. In 2008 and 2012 elections, the KMT fielded the argument that Taiwan’s economic misfortune was related to cross-Strait tension and campaigned on expanding economic relations with China, such as signing the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement. Entrepreneurs of big businesses welcome this proposal and nearly unanimously endorsed the KMT presidential candidate, Ma Ying-jeou. In contrast, the DPP opposed the proposal and advertised ECFA’s negative effects with a dialect limerick popular among disadvantaged groups: “Female cannot find good husbands, male cannot find good jobs, and sons have to find a job in Heilongjiang.”22 Evidence shows that working class and self-employed citizens tend to oppose the ECFA, while business owners and people with managerial responsibilities generally support the accord (Lin and Hu 2011). It is also worth noting that Taiwan voters’ positions on cross-Strait economic exchange are reflected in their partisan identification. Supporters of the Pan-Blue Alliance generally consider the ECFA beneficial to Taiwan’s economy, while the Pan-Green identifiers tend to view the accord negatively. If this situation continues, the welfare distribution issue may be absorbed into the dominant cleavage of independence/unification in such a way that economically disadvantaged citizens are more pro-independence while the advantaged publics are more pro-unification. In such a case, class politics may emerge and wealth distribution may become more salient in Taiwan through the strength of identity issue. Independence and unification cleavage along with class conflicts may aggravate polarization in the Taiwan society.
However, another scenario is also possible that may not contradict the first one. That is, the KMT will slow down its pace with China for fear of losing electoral support due to its contentious nature, while the DPP will be unwilling to sacrifice economic prosperity and will moderate its pro-independence position. The DPP presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen announced in the 2012 election that she would accept all cross-Strait agreements signed between the KMT government and Beijing if she were elected. This shows that the DPP cannot stand against the wishes of big businesses when it is in power. In that case, the elites of both parties may stand close to the centrist position on the major issue dimension and bring a less polarized society to Taiwan.

Appendix 5.A1

Questionnaire Wording

a1: On the reform/stability issue

Looking at Taiwan’s overall development, some people believe that large scale reform is the most important thing, even if it means sacrificing some social stability. Other people believe that stability is the most important and that reform should not be allowed to affect social stability. On this card, the position that large-scale reform is the most important thing is at 0 on a scale from 0 to 10, and the position that social stability is most important is at 10. About where on this scale does your own view lie? As you understand it, about where on this scale does the position of the KMT lie? About where on this scale does the position of the DPP lie? About where on this scale does the position of the PFP lie? About where on this scale does the position of the TSU lie?

a2: On the wealth distribution issue

Regarding the question of social welfare, some people believe that the government should merely maintain the current system in order not to increase people’s taxes. Other people believe that the government should promote social welfare, even though it will lead to tax increases. On this card, the position that maintaining the current system is the most important thing is at 0 on a scale from 0 to 10, and the position that promoting social welfare is most important is at 10. About where on this scale does your own view lie? As you understand it, about where on this scale does the position of the KMT lie? About where on this scale does the position of the DPP lie? About where on this scale does the position of the PFP lie? About where on this scale does the position of the TSU lie?
a3: On the environmental protection/economy issue

Regarding the question of economic development versus environmental protection, some people in society emphasize environmental protection while others emphasize economic development. On this card, the position that emphasizes environmental protection is at 0 on a scale from 0 to 10, and the position that emphasizes economic development is at 10. About where on this scale does your own view lie? As you understand it, about where on this scale does the position of the KMT lie? About where on this scale does the position of the DPP lie? About where on this scale does the position of the PFP lie? About where on this scale does the position of the TSU lie?

a4: On the independence/unification issue

In our society people often talk about the question of Taiwan independence from or unification with China. Some people say that Taiwan should declare independence right away. Other people say that Taiwan and China should unify right away. Yet other people have opinions between these two positions. On this card, the position that Taiwan should immediately declare independence is at 0 on a scale from 0 to 10, and the position that Taiwan should immediately unify with the mainland is at 10. About where on this scale does your own view lie? As you understand it, about where on this scale does the position of the KMT lie? About where on this scale does the position of the DPP lie? About where on this scale does the position of the PFP lie? About where on this scale does the position of the TSU lie? The questionnaire wordings are identical in most years, except for 1996P and 2000P. However, the survey results of the two years with slightly different wordings did not deviate from common expectation much; thus, the authors kept them in the discussion.

a5: The most important problem facing Taiwan

During the presidential (legislative) election campaign, many different problems faced by our country were raised. What do you think is the most important political problem facing Taiwan today? (Open-ended question)

Note: The wording of this question might be slightly different on cross surveys, but the core element of the question is the same: that is, in the respondent’s perspective, what is the most important political problem facing Taiwan today?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Election</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
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<th>NP</th>
<th>PFP</th>
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*Source:* 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.

*Note:* Entries are respondents’ means on a scale of 0 to 10. After the year, “P” indicates that surveys were conducted after the presidential election; “L” indicates that surveys were taken after the legislative election.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Election</th>
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<th>DPP Identifiers</th>
<th>DPP (as perceived by DPP identifiers)</th>
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Source: 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.

Note: After the year, “P” indicates that surveys were conducted after the presidential election; “L” indicates that surveys were taken after the legislative election.

Notes

1. The authors thank the Election Study Center at National Chengchi University for providing the data from the 1996, 1998, 2000 elections, and the Taiwan Election and Democratization Studies Project for providing data from the 2001 to 2012 elections. The coordinator of multiyear project TEDS is Professor Chi Huang (National Chengchi University). The authors are alone responsible for views expressed herein.

2. The measurement of respondents’ positions on the reform/stability issue and their perceived positions of the parties are based on the questionnaire shown in a1 of the appendix 5.A1.

3. Shih Ming-te, a former colleague of Chen, initiated the “Million Voices against Corruption, President Chen Must Go” campaign and appealed to Chen to resign from office. Shih and his followers, all in red shirts, sat outside the presidential office from September until the prosecutors charged Chen and his family with corruption; however, the court did not process the case against Chen in 2006. The reason is that the president has immunity from criminal accusations when he is president, according to the constitution.


5. For more discussion on the ethnic cleavage, see chapter 3 of this book.

6. Even in 2011, in all industries, 78.6 percent of employees worked in companies with fewer than 5 workers while 90.9 percent worked in companies with fewer than 10 workers (Directorate-General of Budget 2012).

7. Since the subcontractors, who usually had worked for the big outsourcing factories, still relied on contracts from the original factories, the owners of small factories
did not consider themselves to be “capitalists” or even “bosses” (Hsieh 1989). Their relations with their employees, who usually had been their former colleagues from the big factories, were more like partnerships, not the confrontational relationships between capitalists and labor.

8. A legislator from a business district once appealed to his electorate in the working class that he had “many well-achieved friends in business. They all used to work as apprentices or workers. They all claimed they have been in difficulty with their bosses when they were hired. However, they all opened their own business later with the assistance of their original bosses. So, workers do not always work for others; someday you will become employers” (Chang 1987, 21; in Chinese).

9. The KMT leaders did not plan full-scale subsidies to the elderly from the beginning. However, via hearings, media attention, and direct petition to President Lee Teng-hui and Premier Lien Chan some legislators from the agricultural districts, such as Chen Chih-ping, Lin His-shan, and Wong Chung-chun, appealed to the KMT leaders to support subsidies for elderly farmers (Sheng 2001, 90–91).

10. One of the reasons for parties to hold onto the independence/unification issue, rather than left-right ideology, may be the failure of the Taiwan public to distinguish between the left and the right. Chen (2003) found out that only half of Taiwan citizens can identify their position along the left-right spectrum, a rather low rate compared to citizens in most democracies. Hsiao, Cheng, and Achen also find that the Taiwan public misunderstands the meanings of “left” and “right” (see chapter 6).


13. An earthquake and the following tsunami severely damaged the Fukushima nuclear plant. The radiation leak endangered the neighborhood, causing the Japanese government to order the evacuation of residents in the area. For months, people were suspicious of food and water from the area because of possible radioactive contamination. Even now, Fukushima residents still cannot return to their homes.


15. The Four Noes and One Without pledge is essentially that as long as China does not have an intention to use military force against Taiwan, Chen Shui-bian would not declare independence, change the name of the nation, push for the inclusion of the so-called state-to-state description in the constitution, or promote a referendum on the issue of independence versus unification.

16. The 1992 consensus refers to a memorandum of a meeting between the semiofficial representatives of China and Taiwan in 1992. It stated that both sides recognized the principle of one China. More specifically, China and Taiwan belong to one China but the definition of one China is based on their own interpretation. However, the DPP denied the existence of 1992 consensus.
17. The Straits Exchange Foundation (the chairman, Chiang Pin-kung, represents Taiwan) and the Association for Relations across the Taiwan Straits (the chairman, Chen Yunlin, represents the PRC) are in charge of most communication and negotiation on nonpolitical issues.

18. To the contrary, a number of studies of Taiwan voters also have shown that individuals’ issue positions may affect their party preferences and party identification (Hsieh and Nio 1996a, 1996b; Hsieh 2005; Sheng and Chen 2003). We do not disagree with this argument and accept the possibility of the reciprocal relationship between issue position and party preference.

19. For a discussion on various issues in Taiwan, readers may refer to the following chapters of this book: chapter 6 on economic issue, chapter 7 on cross-Strait relations, and chapter 9 on wealth distribution.

20. In 2012, the presidential election and the legislative election were held together so that the proportion of the independence/unification issue rose.


22. Heilongjiang is located in northeastern China and has frigid weather in the winter.

References


