

Nonpartisans and Party System of Taiwan

Evidence from 1996,
2000 and 2004
Presidential Elections

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Abstract

Since 1986, Taiwan has entered an era of party competition and witnessed the flourishing of political parties in terms of the number of parties and their relative strength. We find that the vacillation in the proportion of nonpartisanship is remarkable before and after the relinquishing of KMT dominance in 2000. We argue that partisans may conceal their party attachment if their parties fail to live up to their expectations. The experience of the changing Taiwanese electorate has theoretical implications for other consolidating democracies, especially the eastern European countries that also had one single dominant party before regime change.

Keywords independents • partisanship • presidential election • Taiwan • voting

Introduction

Since 1986, Taiwan has entered an era of party competition and witnessed the flourishing of political parties in terms of the number of parties and their relative strength. The long-term hegemonic party – Kuomintang (KMT) – initially competed against the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), formed by the opposition activists that ran elections under the auspices of *tangwai* (outside the KMT) back in the 1970s. In 1994, internal political struggles led a group of ‘non-mainstream’ faction KMT members to break away from the party and establish the Chinese New Party (CNP). After the 2000 presidential election, James Soong, who also broke away from the KMT and came in second in the election, founded the People First Party (PFP). Four months later, the former president and KMT chairman Lee Teng-hui helped organize the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU). Both parties heavily drew members from the KMT; 13

former KMT legislators in addition to 5 independent legislators joined the PFP, and 11 KMT members joined the TSU (Roy, 2003: 235).

While new parties have emerged and old parties have striven to survive, the number of nonpartisans has remained steady at between 35 per cent and 40 per cent for the past decade. Those people who admit no attachment to any party continue to vote, rendering election outcomes unpredictable (Tan et al., 2000). Moreover, the study of partisanship in a developing democracy like Taiwan may supplement the existing literature about the voting behavior of independents. An extensive literature review shows that, as candidate-centered politics has increased and new issues have emerged, political parties in advanced countries have suffered from weakening party identification (Dalton, 1996; Nie et al., 1976; Wattenberg, 1986). They found new generations of voters, new issues, or changing candidate evaluations eroded long-term party affiliations. In Taiwan, however, the party system is undergoing fragmentation and the increase of independents is evident. In this case, parties appear to alienate voters while attempting to exploit potential social divisions. The consequences of such actions may be further weakening of party ties in this young democracy.

The purpose of this article is, therefore, to explore the dynamics of nonpartisanship and its consequences for Taiwan's political system. Our analysis not only deals with the profiles of nonpartisans, but also their positions on the independence issue and their evaluations of political parties. We contend that partisans may conceal their attachment if their parties under-perform; party performance is the major predictor of the vacillation of partisanship.

Partisanship and Nonpartisans

The concept of partisanship first appeared in the 1950s (Belknap and Campbell, 1952; Campbell et al., 1954) and was elaborated by the authors of *The American Voter* (Campbell et al., 1960). It, by definition, refers to long-term psychological attachment with a given party, in the form of shared attitudes and beliefs. Individuals are exposed to partisan influences from family and school, and their partisanship becomes stronger as they age. Through the socialization process, individuals acquire partisan attitudes. The attitudes are further molded when they receive new information and participate in politics (Jennings and Markus, 1984; Niemi and Jennings, 1991). In other words, partisanship anchors people's political attitudes and serves as a guide for political behaviour.

Partisanship is also a source of stability in political systems (Converse, 1969). Since partisanship is a long-term predisposition, it reflects the political psychology of the electorate. The concept of the 'normal vote' – voting on the basis of partisanship – permits us to assess the volatility of voting in a specific period of time (Converse, 1966).

Scholars have applied the concept of partisanship to the study of party systems outside the USA and have found mixed results.¹ In particular, the concept of normal vote is not applicable to rapidly changing party systems (Weisberg and Tanaka, 2001). Partisan realignment occurred swiftly in the Japanese party system despite the long tradition of its previous one-party system. Conflicts among political elites can lead to changes in the party competition space and the corresponding mass partisanship. In other words, the stability of partisanship is contingent on factors other than social bases.

The treatment of political independence explains why the concept of normal vote fits other party systems less well. The traditional measurement of partisanship arrays the attachment towards a party in a two-party system on a one-dimensional scale, where the middle point is political independence. Weisberg (1980) has proved that political independence is a separate dimension and its strength and direction can be measured, though the meanings of these categories have yet to be defined. Strong independents are more educated than weak independents and have higher interest in the campaign. Petrocik (1974) also found 'intransitivities' of partisanship: some independents are more involved in politics than partisans. Nevertheless, Fiorina (1981) opposed the multidimensionality of partisanship, arguing that the concept of partisanship, by definition, excludes 'political independence'. Dennis (1992) identified 'unattached' voters as those who lean toward no political party, contending that 'independents' actually are supportive of the party system. Keith et al. (1992) also found that it is not compelling to accept the concept of multidimensionality as they differentiated 'pure independents' and 'leaners'. In Weisberg and Tanaka's (2001) analysis of Japanese voters, however, they used the multidimensional scaling technique to determine how people perceived political parties. They found that independence is one of the dimensions of the party competition space.

Weisberg and Tanaka's findings reflect the importance of the candidate-tie due to widespread cynicism and dissatisfaction with national politics (Richardson, 1997: 24). The separate dimension of independence, on the other hand, suggests the specific characteristics of people who possess no party affiliation. The genre of independents includes ex-partisans, anti-partisans, apolitical people, and new voters, all having different levels of education, interest in politics, participation, and distinct issue positions (Tanaka and Martin, 2003). The shift between partisans and independents is rather apparent in polls; in a six-wave survey at two-month intervals, 40 per cent of independents became partisans, whereas 15 per cent of partisans became independents (Yomiuri Shinbun, 2004: 151). The case of Japan illustrates the heterogeneity of independents and the problems inherent in characterizing them as a steady group.

We use the term ‘nonpartisans’ as a proxy for ‘independents’ because they possess no party affiliation. We stress that ‘nonpartisans’ are likely to turn out to vote in Taiwan with or without the benefit of a party label as a voting guide. Moreover, this term implies they may have interest in politics and actually have preferences over certain issues, instead of being neutral on politics. For the purpose of measurement, ‘nonpartisan’ refers to people who fall in the following categories: self-labeled independents from all political parties, self-labeled independent leaners, and no-preference individuals, who report no identification with any party and call themselves Independents when asked if they are affiliated with any party.² We consider nonpartisans as people who have such limited attachment to political parties that no party image emerges off the top of their mind when asked to reveal their preference over political parties. They are not necessarily ‘independent’ from any party, candidate, or related social groups; instead, they may have their preferences on parties.

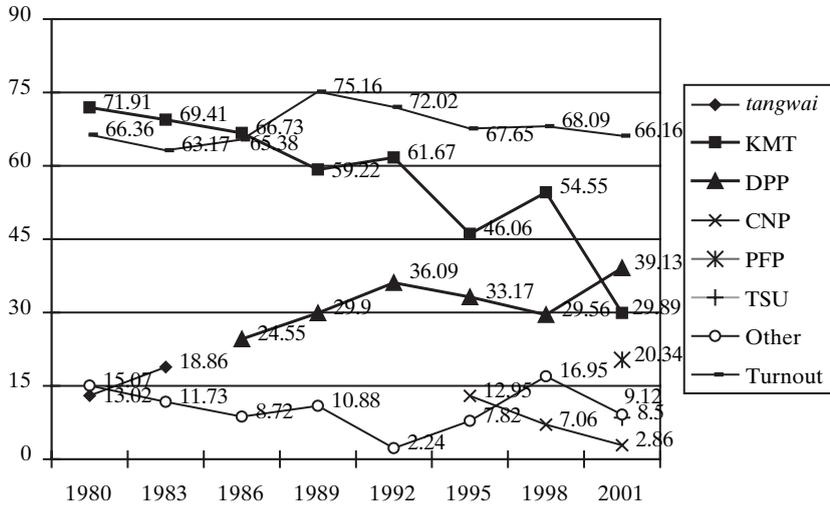
We examine the characteristics of the nonpartisans of Taiwan and follow the changes in the composition of this group of people. Further, we investigate their positions on the independence/unification issue, suggesting that the non-response rate decreased because more educated people joined the ranks of the nonpartisans. How the nonpartisans turn out and evaluate political parties is analyzed in the following section. Last, we utilize a multivariate model to explain nonpartisans’ voting behavior in 2004. This article contributes to understanding of the change in the Taiwanese nonpartisans, which is considered crucial to election outcomes in Taiwan.

Party System of Taiwan

Before the DPP was established in 1986, the KMT had previously faced challenges from the opposition, or so-called *tangwai*, though through repression it had prevented any organized opposition from taking power. In the 1980 supplementary legislative election, Figure 1 shows, the *tangwai* and other independent candidates together won 28 per cent of votes. Three years later, the vote share of the *tangwai* increased to 18.86 per cent of votes, while the independents obtained 11.73 per cent of votes. In 1986, the DPP candidates and 2 independent candidates together received 33 per cent of votes (Tien, 1989: 185). It is apparent that the opposition had garnered one-third of votes, leading to Taiwan entering the era of two-party system.

When Chiang Ching-kuo passed away and Lee Teng-hui succeeded him in 1988, the internal power struggle led to a rift among the KMT factions. Lee was the first president and KMT chairman of Minnan and Hakka heritage, and thus received support mainly from the Minnan KMT members.³ Mainlanders did not trust Lee because of his ethnic background (Tien, 1989: 152). They also feared that Lee would not completely comply with the KMT’s ‘one China’

Figure 1
Voting shares of political parties in the legislative elections, 1980–2001



Source: The numbers of the 1980, 1983, 1986, 1989, and 1992 elections are based on Huang (1992) and the Chinese News Agency (1992.12.19). The other data come from the Election Study Center

formula (i.e. Taiwan should unify with China in the future). Eventually, a number of the mainlander legislators left the party and founded the Chinese New Party (CNP) in 1993. The CNP won 21 seats in the 1995 election, but its seat total fell to 21 in the 1998 election. Seeing the decline in their party's support, most CNP legislators switched to the newly-established PFP, led by James Soong, in the aftermath of the 2000 presidential election.⁴

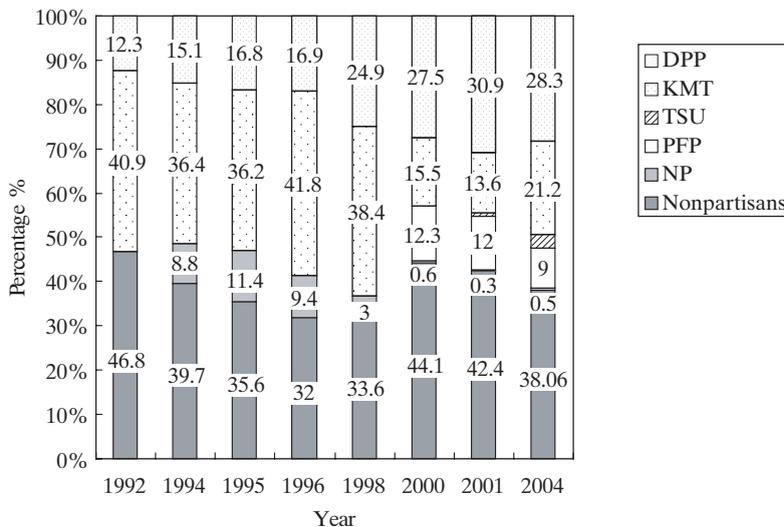
In the 2000 presidential election, the KMT nominated Lien Chan and the DPP endorsed Chen Shui-bian. James Soong refused to cooperate with Lien Chan and took the lead in the beginning of the campaign. Soong's early lead in the race was eventually blown due to his personal financial problems. The DPP candidate, Chen Shui-bian, came from behind to win this three-way race by a margin of less than one per cent of votes. The KMT candidate, Lien Chan, surprisingly, came in third. In the aftermath of the election, factions from the KMT broke away from the party to form the PFP and TSU. On the one hand, Soong's supporters, seeing the KMT struggling to regain its strength, decided to establish the PFP under Soong's leadership. On the other hand, Lien's supporters were sceptical about Lee's support for Lien, urging Lee to step down immediately after the election. A few former KMT Taiwanese members thus formed the TSU under Lee's leadership on the eve of the 2001 legislative election. As the first president elected by popular vote, Lee's charisma attracted so many voters that the TSU won 8.5 per cent of votes. In the meantime, the PFP won 20.34 per cent of votes and the KMT received 29.89 per cent of votes. The DPP, although having the most seats in the Legislative Yuan, succumbed to

the combined forces of the PFP and the KMT. The PFP and the KMT together won 114 out of 225 seats and used their combined legislative majority to block the DPP's bills.

In multiple surveys, respondents were asked, 'In our society, some people refer to themselves as KMTs, some refer to themselves as DPPs, some refer to themselves as PFPs, and still others refer to themselves as TSUs. Among those political parties, with which one do you associate yourself?'. The response of a party affiliation will be followed by the strength question: 'Do you strongly prefer the party or just prefer it?'. If the respondent answers that she does not have any party preference, she will be asked: 'Do you lean towards any party?'. Responses are recorded as 'nonpartisans' if the answers to the first and second questions are 'don't know', 'refuse to answer', or 'not a party supporter'. In other words, respondents who do not mention preference to any party in this set of questions are treated as the nonpartisans. Those who mention party support in the first question are categorized as 'partisans' and are further asked how strongly they prefer their choice of party. If they respond to the second question but not the first, they are considered 'leaners'. The coding scheme is very similar to the seven-point-scale used by the National Election Studies, but party identification and independence are treated as multidimensional attitudes.

Figure 2 displays the declining trend of nonpartisanship between 1992 and 1998 and the dramatic surging proportion of nonpartisanship in 2000. When the

Figure 2
Party identification, 1992-2004

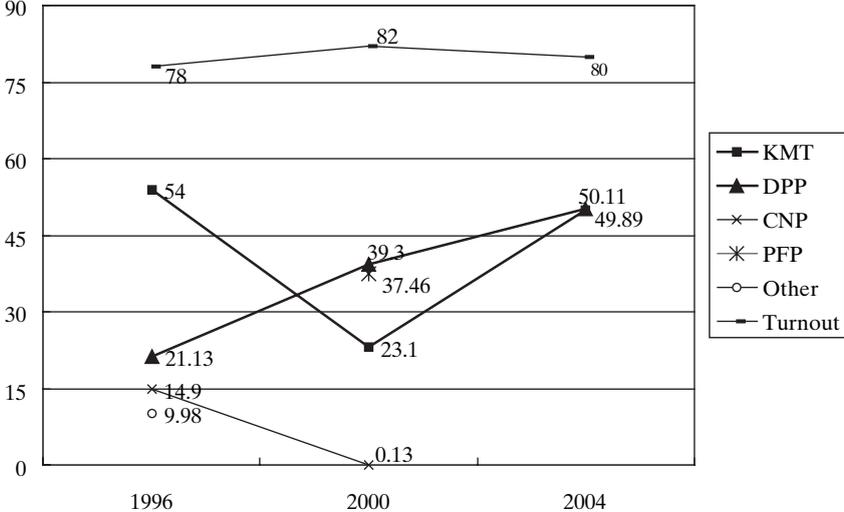


first fully-contested elections occurred in 1992, the percentage of the nonpartisans was as high as 46.8 per cent. In 1994, the KMT, DPP, and CNP competed in the gubernatorial and mayoral elections, and the percentage of nonpartisans dropped to 39.7 per cent. The 1995 legislative election also involved three parties. During this election, the percentage of the nonpartisanship slipped to 35.6 per cent. The 1996 presidential election, the first in which the president was popularly elected, marked a milestone of democratization, and stimulated partisanship; the percentage of nonpartisanship dropped to a low of 32 per cent. After the 1996 election, political independence gradually increased and reached 44.1 per cent in 2000. After the election, the percentage of independents held steady around 41.5 per cent on average (44.1%, 42.4%, and 38.06%).

The increase in nonpartisanship may result from low interest in politics, which Tanaka and Martin (2003) found in Japan. In Taiwan, however, Figure 3 shows that both the 2004 presidential election (80%) and the 2000 presidential election (82%) had higher turnouts than the 1996 presidential election (78%). The turnout rates of the legislative elections were also steady around 68 per cent. In review, Taiwanese did not lose their interest in politics. Instead, people rallied behind political parties during the campaign so that the level of participation has remained steady regardless of the change in the party system.

The emergence of new parties, DPP and CNP, in the 1990s brought in more partisans but a similar increase in the number of parties coincided with the

Figure 3
Voting shares of political parties in the presidential elections, 1996, 2000, and 2004



Source: Election Study Center, TEDS 2004P

surging proportion of nonpartisans after year 2000. The plausible hypothesis is that some partisans were not willing to claim their party attachment because their party performed so poorly that power alternated. In the 2000 presidential election, the KMT split apart and, as a result, lost the presidential office for the first time since it moved to Taiwan. In the 2004 election, the KMT and PFP formed an alliance to challenge the DPP. The DPP won again with a small margin, but the KMT–PFP alliance charged the DPP with manipulating the election result by holding two referenda on the Election Day and misleading people to believe the DPP presidential and vice-presidential candidates were shot and wounded on the eve of the Election Day.⁵ We analyze nonpartisans in the past three presidential elections with descriptive and inferential analyzes to prove that a party’s performance influences the number of people who declare a party attachment.⁶

Data

The 1996 and 2000 presidential election data come from the Election Study Center, National Chengchi University. The National Science Council sponsored these two face-to-face interview projects. Each interview project involved multi-stage probability sampling. The 2004 presidential election survey was administered by Taiwan’s Election and Democratization Study (TEDS). It was also a national sampling survey.

In principle, we follow the method of Flanigan and Zingale (1991), Tan et al. (2000), and Miller and Klobucar (2000), but focus solely on the Taiwanese electorate, emphasizing the dynamics of nonpartisans.⁷ We assume that nonpartisans have distinct characteristics from their counterparts and the composition of nonpartisans becomes more heterogeneous as ex-partisans join nonpartisans. A multivariate analysis will show that dissatisfaction with the governing party, among other factors, creates nonpartisanship.

Identifying the Nonpartisans

Since socialization affects degree of partisanship, it is necessary to analyze the background of partisan and nonpartisans. Gender is important because women tend to receive less political information than men regardless of the level of education (Liu, 1994a: 145). Therefore, the proportion of men possessing partisanship should be greater than women.

The Michigan model states that an individual’s partisanship should grow stronger as one becomes older (Campbell et al., 1960; Converse, 1969). However, Abramson (1976: 478) pointed out that partisan loyalties grow stronger as people become older only when political conditions reinforce partisanship. Nie et al. (1976: 60–1) examined the age cohort from 1952 to 1974 and found that young voters are more likely to fall into the category of

Independents. In Taiwan, Liu (1994b) found that generational differences in partisanship indeed exist; older citizens who have no experience of party competition are not likely to have partisanship. Wu and Hsu (2003: 123) also confirmed that older voters tend to identify with the KMT or call themselves independents. Therefore, we hypothesize that people around 30 years old are more likely to have partisanship because they have experienced democratization and have better education and access to politics than the previous generation.

Furthermore, level of education is a strong determinant of partisanship in that socialization embedded in civic education is the main source of partisanship. In Taiwan's school system, the influence of peer groups is also evident. People of similar social backgrounds, as in ethnicity and gender, are likely to reach the same level of education (Luoh, 2001). From the perspective of political information, the level of education should be related to the possession of partisanship, which entails certain political sophistication (Wu and Hsu, 2003: 123–4).

The area of residence dictates certain context effects on political orientation. Kabashima (1988) found that individuals with different occupations have different patterns of voting in urban and rural areas. Flanigan et al. (1991: 124–8) found that the level of community integration affects people's voting choices. With respect to Taiwan, Hsu (2000), using an ecological-inference model, found that southern electorates have more stable party loyalty than people in northern Taiwan. Before the 2000 presidential election, we assumed that KMT support was uniform across the regions. However, after President Chen, a southerner with strong popularity in the south, won the election, the KMT appeared to retreat from the south. Before the DPP partisanship grows in the South, we expect to see the decline of partisanship in southern Taiwan after year 2000.

In Taiwan, ethnicity is crucial to political attitudes, including partisan orientation, national identity, and issue positions (Lin et al., 1996; Chen, 1997; Hsu and Chen, 1998), and ethnicity by itself has direct effects on partisanship (Yu, 2005). We suspect that Mainlanders tend to have partisanship because of their occupations related to the government and former governing party. Taiwanese and Hakka people are not as homogenous as Mainlanders with respect to occupation; we expect the number of nonpartisans and partisans to be equal among Taiwanese and Hakka people.

Table 1 shows the percentages of nonpartisans within each demographical category and the percentages of various characteristics within nonpartisans. First of all, the share of nonpartisans among each gender group was very close beginning in 2000. As for age, we classify respondents into three groups: between 20 and 35, between 36 and 50, and above 51. Among young respondents who were under 35, only 30 per cent of them claimed that they belonged to no party in 1996, and 38.7 per cent of them said so in 2004. Parallel

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of nonpartisans

	1996		2000		2004	
	Within demographical category	Within nonpartisans	Within demographical category	Within nonpartisans	Within demographical category	Within nonpartisans
Gender						
male	28.5	46.0	46.2	52.0	36.4	51.9
female	35.6	54.0	43.2	48.0	39.7	48.1
Age						
20–35	30.0	40.8	42.9	32.8	38.7	34.4
36–50	31.3	29.4	41.9	34.2	30.6	27.7
51 and above	35.9	29.8	48.7	33.0	45.4	37.9
Education						
elementary	36.9	55.9	53.4	36.1	47.4	47.5
secondary	27.4	35.5	43.6	43.6	32.3	23.4
college	25.2	8.6	34.3	20.3	31.9	29.2
Region						
North	28.1	36.5	38.6	34.0	34.0	39.8
Central	35.0	23.8	52.2	20.5	45.5	23.3
South	35.0	38.8	46.9	42.2	38.8	32.1
East	22.2	0.9	34.7	3.3	41.3	4.8
Ethnicity						
Hakka	24.7	10.6	46.2	13.2	38.3	11.9
Minnan	35.6	82.6	45.9	78.1	39.4	77.8
Mainlander	17.0	6.0	34.5	8.5	24.9	8.4
Aborigine	33.3	0.2	20.0	0.2	34.3	1.8

Note: Northern Taiwan includes Taipei City, Taipei County, Keelung City, Taoyuan County, Hsinchu City and County, and Miaoli County; Central Taiwan composes of Taichung City and County, Chunghua County, and Nantou County; Southern Taiwan has Yunlin County, Chiayi City and County, and Tainan City and County; Kaohsiung City and County, Pingtung County, and Penghu County; Eastern Taiwan has Yilan County, Hualien County, and Taitung County. Entries are row percentages of each category of the demographic variables.

Source: Election Study Center, TEDS 2004P

to the young respondents, the proportion of nonpartisans within the oldest generation increased by 10 per cent from 1996 (35.9%) to 2004 (45.4%). Regarding education, people with elementary education accounted for 36.9 per cent of nonpartisans in 1996, but the percentage increased to 53.4 per cent in 2000 and 47.4 per cent in 2004. Meanwhile, the proportion of people with college education increased from 25.2 per cent in 1996 to 31.9 per cent in 2004. Considering the trend of aging and increasing level of education, the parallel increase and decline between the youngest and oldest group of respondents, and the less educated and most educated group leads to the increasing proportions of old or educated nonpartisans.

The distinction between partisans and nonpartisans also lies in regional differences. In all three of the elections, nonpartisans lived in both northern and southern Taiwan. Compared to people in other regions, residents of central Taiwan were more likely to label themselves as nonpartisans, particularly in 2000 and 2004. Last, Mainlanders indeed were found less likely to lose their partisanship than other ethnic groups in all of the three elections. In 2000, the percentage of nonpartisans among Mainlanders increased to 34.5 per cent, but the percentage fell to 24.9 per cent 4 years later. Among Minnan voters, nonpartisans accounted for 35 to 45 per cent; Minnan people and Mainlanders showed relatively stable proportions of partisanship across the eight years in our sample.

In addition, we also examine the profiles of the nonpartisans in each election by looking at the composition of nonpartisans. In doing so, we can observe how the composition of nonpartisans changes in these three elections. First of all, the difference between the gender groups became less remarkable, particularly in 2000. In 2004, the pattern continued; the proportion of males among the nonpartisans was 51.9 per cent.

Between the 1996 and 2004 elections, eight years passed and new voters emerged while other voters became older. Socialization theory predicts that voters should have stronger party attachments as they grow older because the partisanship learned from their parents during childhood will crystallize with age. Fewer people less than 35 years old were found among nonpartisans in 2004 than eight years ago (34.4% vs 40.8%). Moreover, more nonpartisans are locked in the category of age over 50 years old in 2004 than in 1996 (37.9% vs 29.8%). On the surface, it is a reverse life-cycle effect; that is, people become less party-oriented as they get older. Nevertheless, only the oldest generation has been steadily losing their party attachment. In other words, there probably was a 'generation effect', which means people above 50 years old were more likely to have the same political orientations.⁸ In this case, we suspect that a certain portion of people who were nearly or over 50 years old in 2000 joined the nonpartisan group due to disappointment with the split of the KMT. Overall, the 2000 presidential election corresponded with an increasing gap between the older generation and the other generations in terms of nonpartisanship, with the pattern continuing in 2004.

Table 1 also shows that an increasing share of nonpartisans were highly-educated; people with college education or above accounted for 29.2 per cent in 2004, whereas in 1996 they only accounted for 8.6 per cent. The elementary-educated people accounted for fewer nonpartisans than before; the difference in the level of education between the partisans and nonpartisans decreased. Despite the fact that less-educated people remained a majority of the nonpartisans (47.5% in 2004), the data suggest that nonpartisans were less ill-informed than in the past. The evidence above suggests that the bulk of nonpartisan respondents are poorly educated, and they will remain nonpartisans as they become older. Nevertheless, more highly-educated individuals have joined their ranks and have gradually changed the profile of the nonpartisans.

The increasing share of nonpartisans in northern Taiwan coincides with the fluctuation in southern Taiwan. The fact that the mayors of Taipei City, Keelung City, Hsinchu City, Taoyuan County, and Hsinchu County were KMT members indicates the KMT's advantage in these areas. The rise of nonpartisanship in this region means people in the north became relatively nonpartisan-oriented as their own party, KMT, was not united at the national level. In contrast, many county commissioners in southern Taiwan are DPP members, reflecting the strength of the DPP in those constituencies. In this part of Taiwan, the proportion of nonpartisans has been decreasing. Since the capital of Taiwan, Taipei City, is located in northern Taiwan and public servants concentrated there are highly educated, the rise of nonpartisanship in that area should be attributed to the increasing level of education. As for age, there is no systematic pattern of residents in each area in terms of age, thus we leave this question for further research.

Last, we examine the ethnic characteristics of the nonpartisans. As Table 1 shows, 82 per cent of the nonpartisans identified themselves as Minnan in 1996, but the number decreased to 77 per cent in 2004. That implies that the growth of the number of nonpartisans cannot be attributed to an increase in the number of Minnan respondents. Instead, the share of Mainlanders increased by two per cent in eight years. This result partly confirms our hypothesis that party's underperformance induces nonpartisanship among Mainlanders.⁹

The fundamental characteristics of the nonpartisans can be summarized as follows: the majority of the nonpartisans are Minnan, residents of southern Taiwan, and people with elementary education (six years) or less. In terms of education, however, 29 per cent of nonpartisans were at least college-educated in 2004, where in 1996 they only made up 8 per cent. The proportion of the older generation among nonpartisans has also been increasing. Our findings echo Tan et al. (2000), Wu and Hsu (2003), and Yu (2005) in that older citizens tend to label themselves as independents. This result is at odds with what Campbell et al. (1960: 323–6), Converse (1969), and Keith et al. (1992: 134–5) found, but is consistent with Abramson's (1976) generational change theory. In terms of

education, our evidence shows that nonpartisans have become more educated than before, which coincides with the findings by some American literature (e.g. Dennis, 1992; Keith et al., 1992). Considering the multidimensionality of partisanship, different classifications lead to different conclusions about the educational difference between partisans and nonpartisans.

The changing political profile of nonpartisans implies that they may have different ideas about political parties and political issues than before. Moreover, it is plausible to differentiate partisan and nonpartisans on these two respects. We next examine more closely the changing political psychology of nonpartisans and draw a conclusion from that.

Taking Sides: Voters' Stances on the Independence/Unification Issue

Since partisanship helps shape individuals' perceptions of the political world, nonpartisans should be less informed in terms of political issues. It is expected that the nonpartisans would not have firm issue positions partly because they lack party preferences as their shortcut (Dalton, 1984). When nonpartisans become more and more diverse, however, we expect that some nonpartisans possess party attachment and establish their policy preferences.

Through national and local elections, the independence/unification issue has become a major point of difference between the ruling party and the opposition movement (Hsieh and Niou, 1996a,b). The KMT has insisted that Taiwan is part of China and both sides should unify once China becomes prosperous and democratic, arguing that the fate of Taiwan hinges on peaceful cross-Strait relations. The DPP, however, has suggested that Taiwan should seek more recognition in the international community, such as in non-government organizations and the UN. It also has charged the KMT with eyeing China and compromising Taiwan's sovereignty. In the meantime, since Taiwan has already been a de facto independent country for 50 years, most people are reluctant to embrace any change in the status quo.

To measure public opinion on the independence/unification issue, the Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, has developed a six-category question about the issue position. Respondents are asked: 'Regarding the relations between Taiwan and mainland China, there are a number of different views presented on this card. Which position better represents your view on this issue? To seek unification with China speedily, to seek independence from China speedily, to maintain the status quo now, and seek unification later, to maintain the status quo now, and seek independence later, to maintain the status quo now, and decide what to do later, or to maintain the status quo indefinitely'. For the convenience of analysis, the six categories are condensed into four major categories: pro-independence, pro-unification, maintaining the status quo, and non-response. These four categories reflect people's current stand on the independence/unification issue.

Table 2 confirms our observation that some ex-partisans have turned into nonpartisans over the period between 1996 and 2004. The level of non-response on the independence issue declined from 30.5 per cent in 1996 to 16.7 per cent in 2004. Regarding those people who revealed their issue position, ‘maintaining the status quo’ was their favorite across the three elections; it was greater than 54 per cent in 2004. The proportion of people who support ‘unification’ increased from 14 per cent to 19 per cent and dropped to 12 per cent in 2004, while the ‘pro-independence’ category reversed. Why the ‘status quo’ option has been so popular is related to the whole population, which is beyond the scope of this article. Based on what we have found so far, however, we argue that the increase in educated nonpartisans, which was probably caused by the ex-KMT partisans’ move, contributed to the increased frequency of the ‘status quo’ response because they hesitate to take sides as they become nonpartisans. Moreover, cooperation between the KMT and PFP in the 2004 presidential election probably increased the appeal of these parties to many of people who were pro-unification in 2004, causing the proportion of nonpartisans with this issue position to drop.

The chi-square statistic indicates that there is a significant difference between partisan and nonpartisan respondents’ views about the independence/unification issue. Although the non-response rate fell from 1996 to 2004, non-partisans remained less likely to support either reunification or independence than did partisans. However, the change in the issue position of partisan and nonpartisans indeed occurred as a result of the 2000 presidential election. The data show that the percentage of partisan respondents favoring independence increased after the 2000 election, while the number favoring reunification fell. These changes are consistent with the hypothesis that the KMT’s failure in year 2000 weakened the partisan identification of pro-reunification respondents, and strengthen the partisanship of pro-independence respondents.

Table 2
Issue position of nonpartisans, 1996–2004

	1996		2000		2004	
	Partisan	Nonpartisan	Partisan	Nonpartisan	Partisan	Nonpartisan
Pro-Unification	26.2	14.3	27.9	19.2	18.2	12.8
Status Quo	45.6	44.4	47.4	48.2	49.6	54.3
Pro-Independence	21.4	10.8	18.9	8.4	29.5	16.1
Non-response	6.8	30.5	5.8	24.2	2.7	16.7
χ^2	156.0***		102.7***		141.7***	

Note: ***signifies significance at the 99% level

Source: Election Study Center, TEDS 2004P

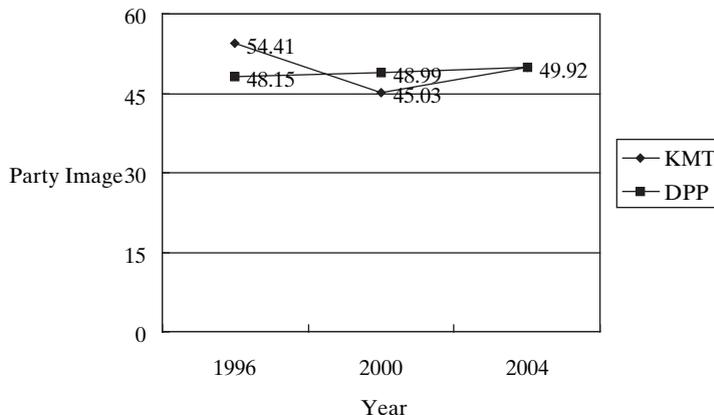
Party Image of Partisan and Nonpartisans

Party images refer to the short-term feelings toward parties. Party images are not as long-standing attachment as party identification; instead, they are temporary judgments about parties. They can be drawn from questions to elicit information about political parties (Wattenberg, 1986). It has been shown that party performance influences the extent to which people identify with political parties (Fiorina, 1981). If a party underperforms, therefore, partisanship may turn weaker and party images become worse. Because the KMT was the governing party in 1996, we expect that nonpartisans evaluated the KMT better than the DPP. In 2000, however, ex-KMT partisans joined nonpartisans and they were disappointed by the KMT's defeat, which should lead to more negative party images of the KMT. As the KMT and PFP formed an alliance and challenged the DPP in 2004, their party images should improve among nonpartisans. Based on the assumption of the ex-KMT partisans joining the nonpartisans, on the other hand, the DPP should receive the same evaluation across the three elections.

The flat line of the DPP evaluation and decreasing line of the KMT–PFP evaluation are shown in Figure 4. The two lines converge on the last time point; the KMT–PFP evaluation plummeted in 2000 and rebounded in 2004 while the DPP evaluation remained the same. Nonpartisans, this figure suggests, merely responded to the KMT along with the PFP. When the KMT and PFP organized an alliance in 2004, some nonpartisans had a better image of the KMT than four years ago.

The results above suggest that the year 2000 marked a shift of partisan voters to nonpartisans and that some of them returned to the KMT in 2004. When

Figure 4
Party image of nonpartisans, 1996–2004



respondents who identified with the KMT or PFP identifiers had more negative evaluations of those parties, nonpartisans had relatively higher evaluations. The KMT–PFP’s coordination in 2004, then, helped them to regain supporters and, as a result, improved their ratings. Therefore, we should expect the party evaluations to help us differentiate partisans and nonpartisans for all years except 2004.

The Making of Nonpartisans

Examining the demographic and psychological factors of nonpartisans over the period between 1996 and 2004, we intend to identify the dynamics of nonpartisans. Using a binary logistic regression model, we are able to explore the relative effects of each variable on nonpartisanship.

Table 3 displays the effects of both demographic and psychological variables on nonpartisans over the three elections. In 1996, nonpartisan respondents were more likely to be young, have a Minnan background, support the status quo, and negatively evaluate the KMT than partisan ones. Gender, age, education, and residence area did not affect the holding of partisanship.

The pattern of nonpartisans observed in 1996 changed in 2000. Female voters were more likely to be nonpartisan than male voters, and the younger

Table 3
Binary logistic estimates of nonpartisans, 1996–2004 (nonpartisanship = 1)

	1996	2000	2004
Constant	-.872(.560)	-2.177(1.006)*	-.541(.453)
Male	.015(.171)	.321(.139)*	.049(.108)
20–35 years old	.635(.269)*	.436(.214)*	.342(.166)*
36–50 years old	.357(.249)	.179(.193)	-.295(.148)*
Elementary	.512(.268)	.322(.230)	.516(.159)**
Secondary	.110(.201)	.238(.166)	.014(.140)
Northern Taiwan	.105(.191)	.809(.469)	.040(.299)
Central Taiwan	.087(.240)	1.263(.482)**	.324(.311)
Southern Taiwan		1.158(.467)*	.165(.302)
Hakka	.529(.363)	.333(.867)	-.195(.323)
Minnan	.777(.318)**	.394(.851)	-.128(.288)
Mainlander		.145(.875)	-.778(.331)*
Independence	-.898(.202)***	-.885(.213)***	-.745(.143)***
Unification	-.661(.206)**	-.434(.166)**	-.387(.154)*
KMT evaluations	-.021(.005)***	.091(.034)**	.015(.026)
DPP evaluations	-.001(.005)	-.084(.040)*	-.026(.025)
Observations	954	982	1654
Log Likelihood	59.60	63.59	93.63
Pseudo R ²	.060	.048	.044

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Standard errors are in the parentheses.

Source: Election Study Center, TEDS 2004P

generation tended to label themselves as Independents. Moreover, more nonpartisan respondents were found among people living in central and southern Taiwan than other areas. In addition, nonpartisan respondents were more pro-status quo than other party identifiers. Last, people who liked the KMT and evaluated the DPP negatively were inclined to be nonpartisan.

The binary logistic model presents the significant effects of age, education, ethnicity, and issue position. Like the previous presidential elections, the youngest generation tended to have weaker party ties than the oldest generation. People between the ages of 36 and 50, however, possessed stronger partisanship than the oldest generation. The elementary-educated were more likely to be nonpartisan than other better-educated people. In terms of ethnicity, Mainlanders were less likely to label themselves as Independents than aboriginals were. Nonpartisan respondents supported neither independence nor unification; people who preferred the status quo were more likely to be partisan than other party identifiers.

We also use first difference as a standardized measure to compare the relative importance of each of the explanatory variables. Table 4 shows the result. It is apparent that the electorate under 35-years old is less likely to become nonpartisan; the first difference, which is derived from the change of the value of the dummy variable between 0 and 1, declines from .1008 to .0402. As for the electorate between 36- and 50-years old, they have become more and more

Table 4
First difference effect of partisanship, 1996, 2000 and 2004

Variable	1996 First difference	2000 First difference	2004 First difference
Male	.0024	.0362	.0064
20–35 years old	.1008	.0513	.0402
36–50 years old	.0577	.0192	–.0431
Elementary	.0855	.0362	.0570
Secondary	.0171	.0259	.0020
Northern Taiwan	.0164	.1088	.0052
Central Taiwan	.0137	.1964	.0384
Southern Taiwan	–	.1746	.0207
Hakka	.0912	.0376	–.0276
Minnan	.1088	.0456	–.0178
Mainlander	–	.0153	–.1315
Independence	–.1276	–.0625	–.1249
Unification	–.0958	–.0365	–.0582
KMT evaluations	–.0033	.0188	.0047
DPP evaluations	–.0002	–.0153	–.0089

Note: Except KMT evaluations and DPP evaluations, the change of values of the independent variable is set up from 0 to 1. The change of values of the KMT evaluations and DPP evaluations is set up as plus and minus half of standard deviation around the mean.

Source: Election Study Center, TEDS 2004P

partisan. The likelihood that a high-educated person is partisan also appears to increase over time, while the probability of being nonpartisan remains consistent for the elementary-educated people. When demographic control variables are included, the influence of all explanatory variables diminishes, except for provincial background. In the 2004 data, the probability change due to Mainlander background is $-.1315$, the highest effect among all variables. With regard to political attitudes, the independence and unification issue position has consistently negative impacts on nonpartisanship. The influence of party images of the KMT and DPP reaches $.0188$ and $-.0153$ respectively in 2000, but both fall in 2004.

The purpose of this multivariate analysis is to show the dynamic of nonpartisans. In 1996, nonpartisans, mostly under 35-years old, were in aggregate pro-status quo and had negative evaluations of the KMT. In 2000, however, nonpartisans turned against both independence and unification (i.e. pro-status quo) and positively evaluated the KMT. This pattern continued in 2004, though party images are not significant. However, nonpartisans used to have negative images regarding the KMT in 1996, but they suddenly felt warm about the KMT in 2000. When the KMT-PFP alliance was formed in 2004, ex-partisans who called themselves independents and the remaining nonpartisans had modest evaluations of the KMT and DPP.

Voting Choices of Nonpartisans in 2004 and their Implications

In order to shed light on the future of the Taiwanese party system, we explore the determinants of voting choice of nonpartisans in the 2004 presidential election. Before analysing the determinants of voting choice, it is of importance to note that half of nonpartisans actually participated in the election. Table 5 shows that 31.70 per cent of nonpartisans voted for Chen while 19.40 per cent of them chose Lien. However, one-third of them refused to reveal whom they voted for. In fact, Chen won more support than Lien by three per cent among the partisan voters while only six per cent declined to answer this question. Considering the 30 per cent of non-response and the voting pattern of partisan voters, there should be more nonpartisans choosing Lien. Although we may not

Table 5
Partisan and nonpartisans' voting choices, 2004

	Chen	Lien	Invalid	No response	Not vote	Total
Nonpartisans	220(31.7)	137(19.4)	21(3.03)	211(30.74)	105(15.13)	694(100.0)
Partisans	512(45.35)	472(41.81)	8(0.71)	75(6.64)	62(5.49)	1,129(100.0)
Total	732(40.15)	609(33.41)	29(1.59)	286(15.69)	167(9.16)	1,823(100.0)

Note: Parentheses are row percentages

Source: TEDS 2004P

be able to break down this category, we can make some inferences based on the analysis of nonpartisans' decision-making.

Two sets of variables, party images and issue positions, are expected to account for the variation of nonpartisans' voting choice. Moreover, individual demographic characteristics are included as control variables. Since nonpartisans are not randomly drawn from the population, it is necessary to examine the multi-collinearity of the independent variables. When some variables are perfectly determined by other variables, the estimates of logistic regression are not unique. VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) and Tolerance indicate the degree of collinearity, so we can drop those variables with VIF and tolerance well above and below 1 respectively. Table 6 displays that only gender, age, education, party images, and issue positions lie in the acceptable range.

To highlight the relative significance of the explanatory variables, we estimate a binary logistic model.

As can be seen in Table 7, party evaluations, particularly of the KMT and DPP, greatly shape nonpartisans' decisions. The impact of nonpartisans' positions on the independence issue is also estimated; the pro-independence people are more likely to vote for the DPP than the pro-status quo people. According to the percentage of change, party evaluations are more important than the issue position regarding voting choice of those claiming to have no party attachment.

To illustrate the impacts of party images and predict the voting behavior of voters who are less than 35-years old, we graph the predicted probabilities against the DPP evaluations and control for the level of education. Figure 5

Table 6
Diagnostics of multicollinearity

Variable	VIF	(VIF)^{1/2}	Tolerance
Male	1.07	1.03	0.938
20-35 years old	2.29	1.51	0.4365
36-50 years old	1.62	1.27	0.616
Elementary	2.10	1.45	0.4757
Secondary	1.37	1.17	0.7311
Northern Taiwan	7.87	2.80	0.1271
Central Taiwan	5.83	2.42	0.1714
Southern Taiwan	7.02	2.65	0.1424
Hakka	3.42	1.85	0.2923
Minnan	4.75	2.18	0.2105
Mainlander	2.89	1.70	0.3463
Pro-Independence	1.09	1.04	0.9184
Pro-Unification	1.16	1.08	0.8592
KMT evaluations	1.10	1.05	0.9082
DPP evaluations	1.07	1.03	0.9341

Source: TEDS 2004P

Table 7
Binary logistic estimates of nonpartisans' voting choices, 2004 (DPP=1)

	Coefficient	S.E.	Percentage of Change
Male	-0.01718	0.32153	-0.0039
20-35 years old	0.338447	0.516136	0.0754
36-50 years old	0.408421	0.467922	0.0887
Elementary	1.548313	0.512979**	0.3289
Secondary	1.143148	0.422928**	0.2294
KMT evaluations	-1.12512	0.197773***	-0.4409
DPP evaluations	1.295919	0.20437***	0.5185
Pro-Independence	0.988501	0.414396*	0.0941
Pro-Unification	0.744886	0.467393	0.0615
Constant	-1.93443	0.879261	
Observations	301		
Log Likelihood	-127.525		
Pseudo R ²	.3768		

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Note: Percentage of change refers to change in probability due to difference between 0 and 1 for gender, education, and age, and difference in one standard deviation for party evaluations and issue positions. See Long (1997). Standard errors are in parentheses.

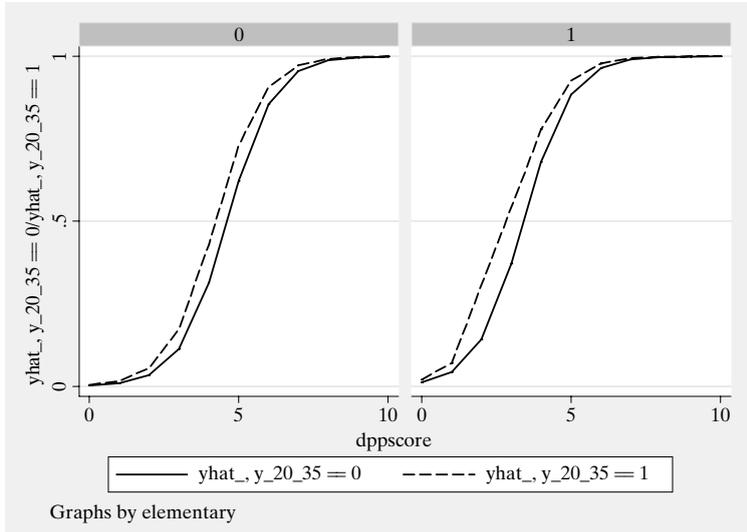
Source: TEDS 2004P

shows that young nonpartisans with secondary or post-secondary education are as likely to vote for the DPP as other nonpartisans, but that young nonpartisans with elementary education are more likely to vote for the DPP than their counterparts. In other words, young and old nonpartisans with high levels of education share the same voting patterns, but they have different ones when they only receive elementary education. When comparing the group of secondary and non-secondary-educated respondents, Figure 6 makes it clear that the difference in education does not lead to different voting patterns for young and old nonpartisans. Young nonpartisans, Figures 5 and 6 suggest, exhibit unique voting behavior only when they fail to go to high school and above, which in Taiwan is not common. In this case, young nonpartisans are expected to vote for the DPP as other voters do so long as they like that party.

Conclusions

Our findings can be summarized as follows. First, the demographic characteristics of the non-partisan voters are presented. We find that citizens who are under 35-years old tend to have no party attachment, which does not match Abramson's (1976) generational change theory. Our evidence also shows that nonpartisan respondents are less educated than in the past. This result is consistent with the findings of Campbell and his colleagues but at odds with more recent results (e.g. Dennis, 1992; Keith et al., 1992). Second, we find that

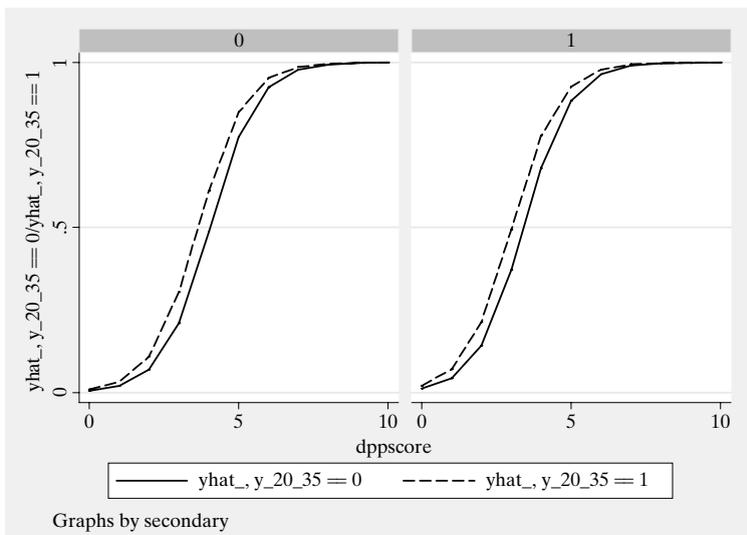
Figure 5
Educational difference in predicted probabilities of nonpartisans as a function of age and DPP party images, elementary education



Note: y_{20_35} refers to age between 20 and 35. The dotted line means the respondents being between 20 and 35 years old. The right panel is the case of being secondary or post-secondary-educated, and the left one is the case of elementary-educated.

Source: TEDS 2004P

Figure 6
Educational difference in predicted probabilities of nonpartisans as a function of age and DPP party images, secondary education



Note: y_{20_35} refers to age between 20 and 35. The dotted line means the respondents being between 20 and 35 years old. The right panel is the case of being secondary or post-secondary-educated, and the left one is the case of elementary-educated.

the nonpartisans positively evaluated the KMT in 2000, but they appeared to be neutral between the KMT and DPP in 2004. In other words, the KMT partisans called themselves independents in 2000 and reasserted their party attachment in 2004. Last, we find that nonpartisans relied on their images about political parties to decide their voting choices in 2004. In other words, nonpartisans still observed how parties fared even after the ex-partisans returned to their camp.

The study of nonpartisan voting behavior should not require following the 'less-beaten path', to use Beck's (1986) term. What we have presented so far suggests that partisanship may also be driven by the success or failure of a major party. Unlike advanced democracies, Taiwanese voters' party ties have weakened at the same time that they have continued largely to respond to long-standing salient political issues. Neither did a new generation enter in politics and change the political landscape in Taiwan. The dynamics of nonpartisans in Taiwan have been characterized mainly by changing political awareness and party images, which strongly suggests the flow of KMT ex-partisans to nonpartisans.

New issues and candidate-politics, Nie et al. (1976), Dalton (1996) and Wattenberg (1986) have all argued, cause the decline of partisanship. According to Beck (1979), the alternation in power occurs in the realigning period and may lead to party alignment. After a long period of a stable party system, party loyalties decline and independence from parties emerges. In Taiwan, however, the change in social cleavage is not the driving force in the alternation of power in Taiwan. Furthermore, our findings imply that the rise and decline of party independence is a function of party performance. The party system in Taiwan may not be in a stable electoral cycle yet, and our findings imply that the rise and decline of party independence is a function of party performance. Therefore, Taiwan's case is better described as reconfiguration driven by party coalitions; party support weakened because partisans were disappointed by their party's performance during the process of reconfiguration. Moreover, party polarization in 2004 intensified party competition, which may open a new era of a two-party system.¹⁰

We should be mindful of the methodological shortcomings of measurement. The 'status quo' category attracted so many nonpartisans that it is necessary to decipher how people perceive 'status quo'. The KMT and DPP have different interpretations of 'status quo'; it could either mean 'Taiwan is part of China' or 'Taiwan is a *de facto* state'. The category may thus contain both pro-independence and pro-unification respondents, which renders our estimates biased. Therefore, we should update our measurement of the issue position and clarify the meanings to the respondents (e.g. Hseih and Niou, 2005; Sheng, 2002; Shyu, 1996; Wu, 1996).

The experience of the changing Taiwanese electorate has theoretical implications for other evolving democracies, especially the eastern European

countries that also had single dominant parties before regime change. Party identification, as Miller et al. (2000) pointed out, steadily increased in Russia, Ukraine, and Lithuania between 1992 and 1997. Miller and Klobucar (2000) compared partisans and nonpartisans in Russia and Ukraine, finding that partisans are more educated than nonpartisans. Moreover, they found that ordinary citizens are very aware of political parties' issue positions, and so are elites. Nevertheless, Miller et al. (2000: 484–5) revealed that people over 56-years old with low income tend to support 'anti-reformists' in both Russia and Ukraine, which may pose some threats to the developing democracies. It remains to be seen whether the development of party identification slows down or declines when a pluralistic regime fails to reform the economy or address other social issues, but the surge and decline of partisanship in Taiwan may suggest that supporters of the long-term dominant party are crucial to those party systems.

'Party identification is the linchpin of our modern understanding of electoral democracy, and it is likely to retain that crucial theoretical position' (Weisberg and Greene, 2003: 115). As we sharpen our technique of estimating the determinant of voting behavior, a re-examination of partisanship and political independence is needed. Needless to say, this task is important in a changing party system like Taiwan. If this article has any contribution to the study of political behavior in Taiwan, it lies in the likely scope and direction of the future research on a more comprehensive concept of party identification.

Notes

1. For a complete literature review on the comparative research of partisanship, please see Tsai (2003: 16–46).
2. Wattenberg (1986: 38–46) discussed this categorization. Also see Miller and Wattenberg's (1983) discussion on no-preference voters and self-labeled Independents.
3. Minnan people refer to those immigrants who used to live in Fujian Province of China and came to Taiwan in the fifteenth century. Hakka people immigrated to Taiwan almost in the same time, but they used to live in the mountain area in between Fujian, Canton, and Jianxi Province. Mainlanders refer to the one million people who fled to Taiwan with the KMT in 1949 and their descendants.
4. After the 1992 legislative election, James Soong, then the chief secretary of the KMT, was appointed as the governor of the Taiwan provincial government. In 1994, James Soong ran for the first governor election and won it lopsidedly. Two years later, Lee Teng-hui ran for the presidential election with Lien Chan and defeated the DPP nominees and other candidates with a large margin. Right after the election, Lee decided to amend the constitution and reduce the supervision power of the provincial government. In other words, the provincial government is simply an agency instead of a government with independent budget and corresponding legislative body.
5. See John Copper's (2004) report on the assassination incident.
6. As so far, there is no research on the change of political tolerance before and after the alternation of power in Taiwan. However, Sheng (2003) and Wu (2002) discussed the

- relationship between political trust, ethnic background, and partisanship. Sheng and Wu shared the findings that partisanship is a strong predictor of the level of political trust; the DPP partisans tend to have higher political trust than the KMT partisans do, in particular after the 2000 presidential election.
7. Also see Yu's (2005) analysis on the sociopolitical base of party identifiers between 1995 and 2004.
 8. Liu (1994b) has suggested that generational differences lead to different ways of thinking of political parties and their performances. According to his generation scheme, people who were born prior to 1949 are classified as the first generation. Some of them were born in Taiwan and even old enough to receive education under the Japanese colonial rule. The rest of this generation is Mainlanders, who are likely to have nostalgia for China. Although the Minnan people of the first generation may feel more positive toward the DPP than Mainlanders do, both groups should have witnessed economic growth under the KMT rule. Therefore, people born in 1944 or earlier, who turned 60 in 2004, usually felt positive toward the KMT.
 9. The numbers in the tables are statistics based on weighted data, and the weighting factors include gender, education, region, and age. Therefore, the baseline of demography is considered; the numbers are adjusted according to the change of population. The provincial background has not been included in the population statistics since 1990, therefore we are unable to weight the data based on this variable.
 10. See Tsai et al.'s (2007) analysis on party polarization. Hetherington (2001) also finds that polarization in Congress raised the importance of party labels among ordinary Americans. Beck (1999), however, suggests that polarization would alienate independent voters.

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