Politics in Taiwan
Voting for democracy

Shelley Rigger
Contents

In memory of Reverend Robert Donnell McCall and Virginia Montgomery McCall, dear friends of Taiwan

First published 1999
by Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE
Simultaneously published in the USA, and Canada
by Routledge
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001
Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group
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Typeset in Goudy by Routledge
Printed and bound in Great Britain by MPG Books Ltd, Bodmin

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rigger, Shelley
Politics in Taiwan: voting for democracy / Shelley Rigger.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
silk paper
1. Taiwan—Politics and government—1945-—2. Democracy—Taiwan.
1. Title.
DC299.R16 1999 320.5'94—dc21 99-12334
ISBN 0-415-17209-6 (hb)

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Recognizing that most readers who have studied Chinese are comfortable with Pinyin romanization, I have used that system to transliterate Mandarin words, both in the text and in the footnotes. Most people in Taiwan use the Wade-Giles romanization system to transliterate their names, so I have followed this convention for proper names (some commonly recognized proper names are sillogonomous; I have used those spellings to facilitate recognition). In the notes I have used Chinese name order for authors of Chinese-language sources and English name order for the authors of sources in English.

1 Voting for democracy

Friday 22 March 1996 was a night of celebration in Taipei, Taiwan. Thousands jammed parks and public squares for huge rallies, then spilled into the streets for impromptu midnight marches. The warm, humid night had a carnival feeling. Vendors sold souvenirs of every description—from commemorative plates to videotapes of other political rallies. The scents of Taiwan's favorite street foods—sausages, oyster omelets and tofu—mixed with the odors of traffic and sewage and incense that permeate Taipei's crowded neighborhoods. What seemingly had drawn all of Taipei's citizens out of their homes was not a holiday; but the final night of campaigning before the island's first-ever direct, popular presidential election. The giant block party was a celebration of democracy, a celebration barely dimmed by Beijing's missile tests just off the Taiwan coast.

Four candidates and their running mates took part in the historic competition, and each stood before his supporters that night. On the grounds of the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall, an enormous mosaic of video screens towered over a stage draped in the white and blue of the Nationalist Party, or Kuomintang (KMT). The screens displayed a succession of celebrities and politicians praising the party's nominees, Lee Teng-hui, the incumbent president of the Republic of China on Taiwan, and his running mate, Lien Chan. As the rally ended, the crowd swayed in unison and sang Lee's campaign theme song, "Hand in Hand," while fireworks exploded overhead.

Within earshot of the Kuomintang gathering, in the plaza adjoining Taipei City Hall, stood another stage, this one draped in the green and purple whale motif of the Democratic Progressive Party's presidential campaign. The throngs gathered before this platform waved their party flags and glow-in-the-dark wands in support of Peng Ming-min and Hsieh Chung-rong, the DPP's presidential and vice-presidential candidates. The location held a special allure for the DPP, which two years earlier had
Voting for democracy

The next day, 76 percent of Taiwan's eligible voters exercised their right to vote on their county's head of state. Fifty-four percent cast their votes for President Lee, defying Beijing's warnings against supporting the incumbent. The government of the People's Republic of China found Lee too sympathetic with the notion of Taiwanese independence, it reinforced its stern rhetoric with missile tests in the waters near Taiwan. The presidential election was a milestone for the first time in Chinese history. For the first time, citizens of a Chinese state were enfranchised with the ultimate political choice. For many observers, the presidential election completed Taiwan's democratization and even those who believed more remained to be done before Taiwan could claim to be fully democratic agreed that the presidential election was a critical milestone in the island's political development. Another milestone came less than two years later, in November 1997, when the opposition DPP ousted the KMT in elections for Taiwan's twenty-one county and city executives. That election was the first in which votes for opposition candidates exceeded KMT votes on an island-wide scale. But if electing their president and giving the opposition a majority were new to the people of Taiwan, elections themselves were familiar. Taiwanese had been casting ballots for local officials for fifty years, while seats in national legislative bodies were opened to popular election as early as 1969.

Formosa Today, a collection of essays published in 1963, paints a bleak portrait of Taiwan in the 1950s. The book has no use for Cold War-inspired pro-Nationalist propaganda. John Israel's essay on politics is especially unpar.

The difficulties of moving from party tussle to democracy are evident in Formosa's local elections. Sometimes, non-Nationalists are given a fighting chance of victory, but the ruling party never allows a real challenge to its supremacy. Democracy has been debased to a contest for the spoils of office.

There is much truth in his description. But what Israel could not have foreseen was that, although profoundly flawed, Taiwan's elections would play a key role in propelling Taiwan toward that jubilant election in March 1996.

The creation of a democratic political system in Taiwan followed a long process of pressure and counter-pressure, struggle, negotiation and compromise between the Kuomintang-led authoritarian regime and its opponents. Although people on both sides shed blood for their views over the years, political change has been smoother and more peaceful in Taiwan than in many other countries. The 1996 presidential election can trace its lineage directly to the mid-1970s, when isolated politicians outside the Kuomintang joined forces in an organized movement that would become Taiwan's first true opposition party. But the reform process also had roots in short-lived democratic movements of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s.

Many factors have shaped Taiwan's political development since 1945. Some are common to many countries - economic development, exposure to mass media, rising levels of education - while others are unique to Taiwan - the leadership of its late president, Chiang Ching-kuo, and the island's precarious international position. This book will look at all of these factors, and trace their role in Taiwan's evolution toward a more democratic political system. Indeed, it is impossible to provide a complete explanation of political change in Taiwan without looking at many different causes, domestic and international, social, political and economic. But while this book will discuss each of these causes, it will pay special attention to a factor that is often overlooked in studies of democratization: the electoral process itself. This is not because elections were the only factor, although I will argue that they were an important one. The reason we will emphasize elections is that most studies - whether of Taiwan or of democratization in general - pay no attention to them as a result of political change, not as one of its causes. This book seeks to add a dimension to our understanding of democratization by showing how elections can help to transform an authoritarian system.

Ordinarily, political scientists think of elections in authoritarian nations as charades aimed at giving a veneer of democracy to undemocratic systems. Indeed, this is often the case. In Taiwan, a major function of elections was to facilitate mobilization; that is, participation that was controlled and channeled by the ruling party. This is why we characterize the ROC's pre-reform political system as "mobilizational authoritarianism." However, as Taiwan's experience demonstrates, the very limited and imperfect elections that are permitted in some authoritarian countries can set down roots that grow in unexpected directions. Our guide for this study is Bolivar Lamounier, a Brazilian political scientist who analyzed the role of elections under authoritarianism in Brazil's political reform process.

But first, what is Taiwan? When it comes to Taiwan, the simplest questions are hard to
Fujianese, or Hoklo. And because Fujian is part of China, most Hoklo people, who constitute about 70 percent of Taiwan's population today, also identify themselves as Chinese. Another 10 to 15 percent belong to the Hakka minority; they, too, are of Chinese provenance. But their ancestors are not the only connection between Taiwanese and China. For centuries, successive Chinese governments claimed Taiwan as a part of China's territory. In the seventeenth century, Spanish and Portuguese explorers made short-lived attempts to colonize the island. In a strange foreshadowing of a later era, when Manchu conquerors defeated the Ming empire in 1664, the Taiwanese adventurer Cheng Ch'eng-kung (known as Koxinga in the West) used Taiwan as a base from which to oppose the newly formed Qing Dynasty. Eventually, the Qing military suppressed Cheng's rearguard action and established jurisdiction over the island.

But Taiwan proved difficult to manage, earning the description "a small rebellion every year, a big rebellion every five years." Thus, the Qing government was never able to assert its authority over Taiwan very strongly, and the islanders grew accustomed to running their own affairs.

In the late 1800s, the Qing Dynasty was in difficult straits. Weakened by rapid population growth, a deteriorating dynastic leadership, and internal strife, the regime was vulnerable to the predations of imperial powers and subversive movements. In the 1840s, China was forced to open treaty ports and give other concessions to Europeans as a result of the Opium War. The following two decades saw China eviscerated by the homegrown Taiping Rebellion, which took more than 20 million lives in its central provinces. In 1895, China suffered a disastrous defeat at the hands of the Japanese. As part of the war settlement, China was forced to cede Taiwan to Japan. For the next fifty years, Japan strove to make Taiwan a model colony. It invested in Taiwan's infrastructure and education, achieving a remarkably high level of economic and social development. At the same time, however, the Japanese promoted a policy of cultural superiority that denigrated Taiwan's Chinese identity and traditions.

At the end of World War II, Japan was forced to surrender its colonies, including Taiwan. Although there was no treaty to settle Taiwan's sovereignty, the Allied powers allowed the Republic of China (ROC) to accept the surrender of Japanese forces on the island, effectively handing control to the ROC leader, Chiang Kai-shek. The ROC called this event "retrocession." But the situation on the Chinese mainland was about to change radically. A civil war between Chiang's Nationalist government and the Chinese Communist Party ended in the Nationalists' defeat. In 1949, Mao Ze-dong declared a new state on the mainland: the People's Republic of China. Just ahead of the communist advance, Chiang and his
government retreated to Taiwan, where they established a regime in exile. At first, most observers believed the communists would advance quickly to Taiwan to take the island, but the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 brought the ROC on Taiwan under the protective umbrella of the United States. Chiang Kai-shek's holdout regime suddenly became a bulwark against communist expansion in Asia.

According to its ruling party, the Republic of China was not defeated, but only biding its time on Taiwan while it waited for an opportunity to recover the mainland and re-establish its rightful rule over all of China. Thus, the institutions of state that the Kuomintang-led government set up on Taiwan were transferred directly from the mainland, including an administration apparatus designed to rule the entire country. For example, the national legislators chosen in China-wide elections in 1947 and 1948 held their seats without facing re-election for more than forty years, for after 1949 they could not be replaced by new representatives from the provinces that had elected them. Likewise, Taiwan had two layers of government to administer almost the same territory: the central government (which also claimed, but of course did not actually rule, the provinces of mainland China) and a provincial government for Taiwan itself.

In addition to these new institutions, the KMT regime introduced a new population into Taiwan's mix. These were the soldiers, government officials and their dependents who followed the ROC government to the island. Although they shared the Taiwan residents' Chinese ancestry and contained within their numbers men and women from every corner of China, these newcomers came to constitute a coherent group distinct from the island-born Taiwanese. Families whose ancestors arrived on Taiwan before Japanese colonization were "originated in this province" (pacheng, normally translated "Taiwanese"), while those who came after World War II were said to have "originated in other provinces" (wuzhiqiang, or "Mainlanders"). Within the Taiwanese group, distinctions among Hoklo, Hakka and Aboriginal people remained, but the split between Taiwanese and Mainlanders became the island's primary social cleavage. The two groups spoke different languages (most Mainlanders were comfortable with Mandarin, even if it was not their mother tongue, while few Taiwanese had learned the ROC's official dialect—before 1945, but the most decisive distinction between them was their unequal access to political influence and power.

In 1991, the KMT changed its policy toward the mainland. It adopted the position that the ROC and PRC were two halves of a divided nation, two entities of equal status in search of a formula for uniting them. The PRC government takes a very different view. To it, the ROC is a defunct remnant that survives only under the protection of an imperialist power, the US. It is still Beijing's position today that China's national destiny will be realized only when Taiwan is restored as a province under the control of the one true, legitimate government of China: the People's Republic. Even though Beijing has offered Taiwan substantial autonomy in a reunified China, it still understands "China" to mean the PRC.

Where does this leave Taiwan? Is it a country? According to both governments—the ROC and the PRC—Taiwan is not a country, but a province of China. Where they disagree is about the nature of the "China" of which Taiwan is a part. In practice, however, Taiwan (or the ROC on Taiwan) functions very much like any other country. It has a clearly defined territory, which it defends with military force. It has a government that decides how to manage the affairs of the 21.6 million people who hold citizenship documents issued by the ROC. It has an economy that is one of the largest and most internationalized in the world. And it even has a limited diplomatic identity; it enjoys official diplomatic relations with about two dozen countries (most of them small and developing), and unofficial relations with many more, and it takes part in a number of international organizations. Ordinarily, these conditions would qualify it as a country under international law, but Taiwan's complicated history twists normal logic. For many years, the government on Taiwan itself meant that Taiwan was not a country. Later, when most other nations switched their recognition to the PRC, Beijing required them to abandon recognition of Taiwan altogether.

The Republic of China on Taiwan is a political entity with all of the characteristics of a country—except formal recognition from other nations. And that may be the closest we will come to defining what it is. As for what it is called, its official name is the Republic of China, but nearly all government statements nowadays appeal "on Taiwan" to the end of two appendages. In ordinary conversation in Taiwan and abroad, it is most often called, simply, "Taiwan." There are those in Taiwan who would see it declare formal independence and abandon any reference to China, but they are a minority, both because the PRC has to take Taiwan by force if it does so, and because most Taiwanese believe themselves to be part of the Chinese nation. In sum, then, the island's status is peculiarly undefined in formal terms, and its future is cloudy. But at the same time, it is capable of acting forcefully and decisively in both its internal and its external affairs. If the existence of the ROC as a country is debated, the existence of the ROC state—the institutions of government and the ROC exercises jurisdiction over its territory and people—cannot be denied. The purpose of this study is to describe the nature of that state and its
of these variables is useful in helping to understand Taiwan's democratization process. Certainly, Taiwan's much-touted economic miracle provided resources, both material and psychological, for ROC citizens to question the authoritarian practices that characterized the island's politics before the mid-1980s. And the actions of President Chiang and other important leaders, both in the regime and in the opposition, must not be discounted. However, these factors cannot explain why Taiwan's democratic transition occurred when it did.

While many forces and conditions contribute to democratic development, one step is indispensable: a decision by political elites to accept democratic institutions. As Huntington points out in The Third Wave, whatever preconditions may or may not exist in a country, purposeful action by the leadership is a necessary condition for democratization. In many cases, successful democratization grows out of a confrontation between existing (non-democratic) elites and pro-democracy opposition forces. Thus, the most broadly explanatory theories of democratization are those which emphasize the negotiated, or "pacted," nature of democratic transitions.

If democratization is the product of a pact between a non-democratic leadership and advocates of reform within society, this opens the question of why the leadership would choose to move in a democratic direction. As Adam Przeworski has pointed out, democracy entails uncertainty for all groups; elites in a non-democratic regime are able to act more freely in accordance with their own interests under authoritarianism than they are under democracy. Why, then, would they accept reforms? First, elites may make an ideological decision that democracy is preferable for their country. Second, the authoritarian elite may decide that because of domestic or international opposition, the regime cannot survive without compromise. In other words, the elite undertakes reform to avoid an even less desirable outcome: popular rebellion, military coup or international sanctions.

In Taiwan's case, both of these factors played a role. As we shall see, the Republic of China was established according to democratic principles articulated by Sun Yat-sen. Its constitution guarantees popular participation and civil liberties. Even as a state of emergency suspended many of its provisions, the constitution stood as an unfulfilled democratic promise. Taiwan's leaders were socialized to believe that their mission was to realize Sun's doctrine in the ROC. At the same time, however, ROC elites were willing to set that mission aside in the face of another goal: maintaining political, economic and military stability in preparation for unifying Taiwan and the rest of China. Thus, for decades, Taiwan's leaders justified authoritarianism even as they paid lip service to democratic aspirations.
This state of affairs might have continued indefinitely. As the PRC's military and diplomatic strength increased, Taiwan became less, not more, secure. The conditions justifying the authoritarian elite's deviation from its ideological ideal had not abated when it decided to implement democratizing reform. To explain the timing of this decision we must look to the second motivation, avoiding a situation even less favorable to the elite than the uncertainties of democracy. In Taiwan's case, the regime faced severe internal and external threats - the loss of support from the United States and the United Nations, financial scandals, popular dissatisfaction - that brought its long-term survival into question. Above all, the regime found itself facing a growing opposition movement determined to bring about reform of the ROC political system. Ultimately, the élite recognized that authoritarianism was unsustainable, a realization consistent both with the élite's ideological predisposition in favor of democracy and with the preferences of Taiwan's friends in Washington.

After 1972, Taiwan's diplomatic isolation was accelerating rapidly. Chiang Ching-kuo, the ROC president and ruling party chair, along with the members of his inner circle, decided to improve the regime's domestic and international image by broadening the range of political opportunities open to ROC citizens. Twenty years later, Chiang's successor, President Lee Teng-hui, sat down with the opposition at the National Affairs Conference to negotiate constitutional changes that would cement democratic reforms; in short, he made a pact with the opposition. But why? What did the opposition bring to the negotiating table that could persuade the regime to accept its demands? This book will argue that the opposition's decisive resource was popular support, expressed through elections. Even though the KMT won majorities in most elections, the fact that candidates who openly criticized the regime steadily increased their vote share revealed that the KMT's mobilizational authoritarianism was breaking down. At the same time, interest groups and opposition-oriented publications gave voice to popular demands for reform. But elections proved most important, because elections gave the opposition regular opportunities to democratize its popularity and to publicize its ideas. For that process to qualify as democratization, opposition-oriented publications. But elections were a fundamental, institutionalized component of the ROC political system. They also were its Achilles' heel.

Most of the literature on Taiwan's political reform focuses on widely accepted theories of democratization. These studies generally define democratization in procedural terms, as the introduction of free and open elections. Thus, they treat democratic institutions, especially elections, as the result of the process - the dependent variable - and they offer a variety of causes - independent variables - to explain why elections emerged. But like this book, some recent studies take a different approach. Two political scientists at National Taiwan University, Ho Fu and Chu Yun-han, have suggested that elections should be treated not as the dependent variable in the study of Taiwan's political reform, but as an independent variable that can help to explain how and why the ROC has moved to a more democratic direction. They write, "elections for national lawmakers not only have increasingly acquired the normal function of popular accountability and system legitimation in a representative democracy, but in the transition they actually functioned as a catalyst of democratization in Taiwan." If we want to treat elections as an explanation for democratization, we cannot use elections to define democratization. In a study like this one, the existence of regular elections does not in itself qualify a state as democratic. Because this study treats elections as an independent variable, we must define democracy more precisely. Of course, no definition will satisfy everyone. Some political scientists would even argue that no country is fully democratic, because all political systems include undemocratic elements: campaign finance systems that give the wealthy disproportionate access to politicians; economic inequalities that make political participation more difficult for some citizens than others; and mass media that fail to provide complete, unbiased information to every voter.

In this book, we will use a procedural definition of democracy developed by Samuel Huntington. He wrote that:

- a 20th century political system is democratic to the extent that its most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote.

This means that in a democracy, the chief executive and the legislature are chosen through an electoral process that is free, honest and competitive; the political opposition must have the opportunity to participate in elections as an organized entity, and to formulate, articulate and disseminate its policy positions and ideological viewpoints; and, voters must not be constrained by fear of punishment or a government-imposed lack of choice among political candidates. Once elected, these decision-makers must be capable of creating and enforcing policy at the national level, without interference from non-elected executive officials, the military or foreign powers. By this...
definition, we can say that the RCC on Taiwan achieved democratization with the 1996 presidential election.13

Hu's suggestion that elections are not only the result of democratization but also one of its causes opens an extraordinarily fruitful avenue for research. However, no Taiwan specialist has yet produced a fully developed analysis of the dynamics of the relationship between elections and democratization in the RCC. In particular, we need a way of addressing two fundamental questions: Why would an authoritarian state institute elections? And how, specifically, do elections help bring about democratization? Fortunately, Bolivar Lamounier's work on political reform in Brazil provides a framework for exploring these questions. Like Hu and Chu, Lamounier finds the electoral process to be, "not the symbol and culmination of a transition ... but almost the point of departure of the process."14

At the core of Lamounier's argument is the notion of reform as a "mobile horizon."15 The motion of this horizon in an increasingly democratic direction constituted the reform process in both Brazil and Taiwan. And elections were one of the most important engines driving that process. Elections, Lamounier argues, were acceptable to both regime and opposition in Brazil because they appeared to provide a process through which the range of what was possible (the "horizon") could move forward at a controlled pace. In Taiwan, too, elections were a sufficiently moderate mechanism to pacify all but the most hard-line authoritarians within the regime, while at the same time they held enough promise of change to win the cooperation of all but the most radical oppositionists. In other words, mobilizational authoritarianism offered the best of both worlds: elections provided the appearance, both domestically and internationally, of a political system consistent with Sun's ideology, and at the same time facilitated cooperation and helped channel popular political energies into support for the regime. Meanwhile, authoritarian institutions - the insulation of the central government from popular pressure, one-party politics, corporatism, and so on - ensured that policy-making would remain under the control of KMT leaders in the party and state - or so it seemed.

"Opening through elections"

Lamounier's theory of opening through elections begins with a question: Why did political scientists fail to anticipate the democratic breakthrough that occurred in Brazil in 1974? First, he found that social scientists were too busy building reasons why the military regime would not fall to notice growing evidence that change was imminent. Even before the watershed 1974 elections, Brazil was in a period of liberalization: authoritarian pressures were easing, and the state was allowing a wider range of political activity. Lamounier suggests that scholars might have anticipated that liberalization would lead to a democratic opening had they paid more attention to what he calls the "calculation of decompression."

An interactive model in which the various actors, whatever their ideologies, calculate the costs of the status quo and of alternative solutions. From this point of view, electoral and competitive mechanisms may seem even to frankilly illiberal political actors, and even to hard-line military officers, to be a rational form of accommodation to highly uncertain situations.16

Once begun, he argues, decompression has its own momentum, driven, to a great extent, by elections: "the process of decompression produces its own effects. Competitive elections can have liberalizing effects within non-competitive political systems. The existence of an electoral calendar with a minimum of credibility is in itself a source of pressure in this direction."

Second, no regime can institutionalize itself unless it has a legitimacy formula that fits its nation's ideology and history. Even before 1974, Brazil had a tradition of elections and a strong democratic strain in its national ideology. Thus, a regime that did not adhere to democratic norms needed to justify itself on other grounds. As Lamounier points out, legitimacy is at least as important to state employees (such as police, soldiers and public servants) as it is to ordinary citizens, because they are the people who must enforce the rules and carry out policy decisions. The search for a legitimacy formula also is influenced by international forces, including international models, international opinion and a state's particular international role and entanglements. All of these considerations, he states, are relevant to Taiwan as well as to Brazil.

The second question Lamounier addressed is: Why would an authoritarian regime institute elections? Brazil's military regime perceived elections as a safe, moderate way to offer a legitimacy formula that was consistent with Brazilian history and ideology, but would not commit the state to any particular substantive policy outcomes. The regime could control the trajectory of the "mobile horizon" because it "could monopolize the initiative regarding the politico-institutional changes to be made."17 Meanwhile, setting up an electoral process helped the opposition to work within the system, reducing the threat of subversion and insurgency. Even if elections are flawed procedurally, and even if elected officials have little influence over policy-making, if the opposition
perceives that it has some chance of gaining a foothold in the power structure through the electoral process, it may well choose to "play the game." Lamouvier's data show that as Brazil's opposition began to achieve victories at the polls, its commitment to the electoral process increased. What the regime was not expecting, of course, was that the opposition eventually would use these victories to press for a more meaningful policymaking role for elected officials.

This brings us to Lamouvier's most fundamental question: How do elections bring about the decomposition of an authoritarian regime? Lamouvier identified six processes through which Brazilian elections helped bring down the military government. First, despite institutional manipulations that kept the regime in power— including "legal or institutional changes which directly or indirectly affected the electoral chances of the opposition," "direct intervention in the legislative branch" and providing the executive with special powers to override legislative decisions—members of the opposition (and some ruling party members) began to use elected offices as platforms for criticizing the regime. Even though the regime maintained its legislative majority, voters knew who the anti-authoritarian politicians were, and they used their ballots to support them. The message coming from the electorate was clear, and even ruling party politicians had to shift their positions in the direction favored by the voters if they wanted to be re-elected.

Sending messages about issues was the second way Brazilian voters used elections to undermine authoritarianism. Lamouvier calls these elections plebiscitary. Votes in plebiscitary elections are not driven by ordinary concerns such as the performance of the regime or the promises of the opposition, but by the desire to make a pronouncement about the regime and the situation of the country as a whole.14 Paradoxically, this effect is strongest when the power of elected officials is weakest: voters are not afraid to send a strong symbolic message if they know the people they elect have little power, since their choices will have few practical consequences. In other words, knowing that built-in obstacles will prevent the opposition from overturning the political order or implementing radical new policies frees citizens to cast protest votes.

Third, elections are a potent tool for political socialization and education. Among other things, they create party identification among voters, making it difficult to halt or roll back electoral reform. Through elections, parties develop clearly defined images among voters. In Brazil, the electoral process highlighted the ruling party's commitment to the government and to the upper class; the opposition came to be viewed as the party of the poor and of pro-reform forces. Fourth, opposition victories inspire the opposition to get its own house in order, because suddenly it has something to lose. Fifth, the messages voters send in elections strengthen reform factions within the authoritarian regime. Finally, the momentum of elections eventually carries the opposition into power, and the authoritarian regime, reduced to minority status in elected bodies, is forced to yield control.20

Taiwan's "opening through elections"

Why does this study focus on elections? As we have said, international forces, political leadership and socioeconomic development played important roles in Taiwan's reform process, and many scholars have explored these dynamics. But these explanations leave important questions unanswered. Why did Taiwan's leaders choose reform instead of continuing the repressive practices that had kept them in power in the past? And once they chose reform, why did they lose control of the process? Also, is Chen Ming-tong has pointed out, leadership and socioeconomic development cannot explain the timing of the reforms, because "In the twenty years after Taiwan's economic take-off began in 1970, there was no relationship between the opposition party's vote share and economic development."42 For decades, critics of the theory that socioeconomic development would lead to democratization used wealthy, authoritarian Taiwan as a counter-example. Why did Taiwan, which for so long seemed immune to the democratizing forces of economic development, finally respond to those pressures in the 1970s? Chen, like Lamouvier, looks to the internal dynamics of politics, especially electoral politics, for a more satisfying explanation. Indeed, each of Lamouvier's major insights—the need for a legitimacy formula, the calculus of decomposition and the momentum of elections in authoritarian decomposition—resonates in significant ways with Taiwan's experience.

The legitimacy formula

The search for a workable legitimacy formula has been an abiding concern of Taiwan's ruling party. At the end of World War II, the KMT expelled the Japanese colonial authorities and imposed its government on Taiwan with little thought of consulting the local population. It immediately set to work creating a one-party state that placed a mainland-born political elite above the native-born Taiwanese. In 1947, frustration over the regime's heavy-handed treatment of the local population enraged in a violent uprising, which the KMT quashed with military force. This event, dubbed the February 28 (or 2-28) Incident, created a wedge of distrust between the Taiwanese, who constituted about 85 percent of Taiwan's
population, and the Mainlander minority that dominated the ROC state. Under these circumstances, the KMT was challenged to find a legitimacy formula capable of securing the loyalty of the Taiwanese people and ensuring unity within the regime. It settled on a formula combining two strains: democratic ideology and a commitment to recovering mainland China. Over the course of Taiwan’s political reform process, the emphasis of the legitimacy formula shifted from mainland recovery to democracy.

The KMT’s ideological foundation is the political thought of Dr Sun Yat-sen, summarized in his Three Principles of the People: nationalism (minzu), popular sovereignty or democracy (minsheh) and economic justice (minjilin). Sun asserted that democratic governance – complete with constitutional supremacy, separation of powers and other institutional arrangements associated with Euro-American liberal democracies – was the appropriate model for China’s long-term political development. He also recognized that achieving this objective would take time, so he designed a series of incremental steps to lead China toward democracy. First, he said, China needed military government to secure its independence from foreign powers and warlords. Once its borders were secure, the nation would enter a period of “political tutelage” during which the executive branch and the Kuomintang would rule with special powers while raising the citizens’ civic and educational level. Once the citizens were ready to take on the responsibility of their own governance, the period of constitutional government would begin, and the ROC constitution would be implemented fully.

The retreat to Taiwan left the KMT-led ROC government facing unanticipated challenges. Under the new circumstances, the ROC’s democratic framework and ideological tradition took on a new dimension. The KMT’s attachment to democracy, although imperfect and abstract, became its primary claim on international sympathy and support. It was “Free China,” throughout the Cold War, the Western world compared Taiwan favorably with “Red China.”21 Thus, propagating Sun’s democratic ideology was an important element of the KMT regime’s domestic and international legitimacy formula.22 In the long run, however, this democratic ideology was to haunt the KMT’s efforts to maintain a one-party political system. As Jiaoshih Joseph Wu put it, “Sun’s revolution and the democratic ideas advocated by him formed a legacy that people could utilize to challenge the authoritarian rule of the KMT government and which contributed to the rise of the democracy movements of the 1980s.”23

Sun’s writings do not give a precise time line for realizing constitutional government. Nonetheless, the promise of full democracy is omnipresent in ROC ideology, and deviation from that norm required justification. This brings us to the second component of the KMT regime’s legitimacy formula, mainland recovery. From its founding early in this century, the KMT’s rallying cry has been national unity and sovereignty. Through decades of warlordism, Japanese occupation and civil war, the ROC government carried this standard. After it lost the civil war and moved to Taiwan, the regime continued to insist that its mission was to restore legitimate government (i.e., ROC rule) to all of the territory claimed by the Qing government in the late nineteenth century, including Taiwan, Tibet and Outer Mongolia. Fulfilling this destiny would require great and noble sacrifices on the part of all patriotic Chinese. Among these sacrifices were the delay of full constitutional government and the implementation of emergency measures that limited the degree to which Sun Yat-sen’s democratic dream could be realized. ROC leaders constantly referred to democracy as their goal, but they insisted that this objective must be pursued gradually.

In the 1950s and 1960s, when the threat of PRC attack was strong and civil war rhetoric was at its height, few on Taiwan questioned either the desirability or the plausibility of mainland recovery. The few who expressed such opinions openly risked long prison sentences. After the February 28 Incident, few people doubted the KMT’s willingness to use draconian methods to silence dissent. One who did challenge the regime was the Mainlander intellectual Lei Chen. Let’s efforts in the early 1960s to found a political party earned him ten years in prison. Another indication of the degree to which mainland recovery dominated the KMT’s agenda during these years is the heavy representation of the military on the party’s all-important Central Standing Committee. From 1957 to 1969, nearly a third of the CSC members were military men.

Despite the regime’s best efforts to keep the dream alive, the plausibility of the ROC recovering mainland China by force grew increasingly remote over the years. At the same time, confidence in Taiwan itself increased. The economic miracle that unfolded in the 1960s and 1970s convinced a growing number of Taiwan’s residents that emphasizing the island’s own development was more likely to yield a good life for its people than continuing the preoccupation with mainland recovery. At the same time, Taiwan’s international position was deteriorating, and international support for the mainland recovery project was dwindling. In 1971, Taiwan lost its seat in the United Nations, and with it, its status as the internationally recognized government of China. The following year, President Nixon visited the PRC, setting in motion the process of derecognition of the ROC by its most important ally. Meanwhile, the influence of international models was growing. Human rights advocates questioned the ROC’s characterization as “Free China” and called
attention to the regime’s authoritarianism and unmet democratic promises. Taiwanese dissidents living overseas voiced increasing criticism of the regime. These international set-backs increased the pressure on the KMT to reinvent itself.

As the likelihood that the ROC would recover the mainland diminished, the KMT leadership shifted its rhetoric from mainland recovery to the “reunification” of China under Sun Yat-sen’s three principles. To this day, the ruling party’s stated goal is the convergence of Taiwan and the PRC on a common democratic and capitalist model that will permit their peaceful and voluntary reintegration. However, the likelihood of such a convergence strikes most Taiwanese as exceedingly remote, and many are convinced that even if the PRC and Taiwan were to converge, Taiwan would stand to lose a great deal more than it would gain by wedding itself to such a vast, political, economic and demographic entity. In sum, the shift from mainland recovery to reunification failed to persuade most Taiwanese that democratization should be delayed further, and by the mid-1970s, cries for lifting the restrictions on civil liberties promoted in the ROC constitution had grown very loud indeed. The mainland recovery component of the ROC’s legitimacy formula could no longer justify short-changing its democratic promise.

Of course, the fact that many Taiwanese no longer accepted the KMT’s reasons for maintaining an authoritarian state need not have brought that system down; the KMT could have resorted to repression. But according to Lamontier, a regime without a workable legitimacy formula is untenable; it feels pressure from its supporters as well as its subjects. The fact that the first major challenge to the ROC regime on Taiwan came from Lei Chen, a trusted and respected insider, illustrates this point, as does the constant jockeying for position by high-level KMT factions. To hold party, state and society together, the search for legitimacy continued, and pressure for democratization increased.

Along with the search for legitimacy, wrote Lamontier, authoritarian regimes need to appear consistent with their own past practices. Both Brazil and the ROC had electoral traditions that complemented their democratic ideologies. These traditions forced the two regimes to at least maintain, if not increase, the role of elections. Even under Japanese colonialism, some Taiwanese were exposed to elections, although in a very limited way. But in 1946, the ROC introduced grassroots elections with universal suffrage in the form of township representative contests. In 1950, the electoral calendar expanded to include elections for township heads and municipal executives and council members in Taiwan’s nearly two dozen counties and cities. In 1951, Taiwanese elected the first Taiwan Provincial Assembly. These elections continued on a regular schedule without significant interruption, along with elections for village executives and councils. In 1969, a few seats in the central government became open to election. Direct elections in the 1970s and 1980s filled a handful of supplementary seats in the Legislative Yuan (the ROC legislature) and the National Assembly (which elected the ROC president before 1996, and still is responsible for amending its constitution). In fact, as Table 1.1 illustrates, few years have passed without an election since the ROC assumed control.

Taiwan’s early elections had many limitations; in fact, there still is much to criticize in the late 1990s. Studies of ROC elections emphasize both the institutional weakness of elected officials and the degree to which elections reflect patron-client relationships and calculations of self-interest, as opposed to a desire for representative government. However, as Lamontier observes in his discussion of Brazil, the fact that voters are not motivated by party identification or issue preferences does not necessarily undermine the usefulness of elections as a tool of political reform. Whatever their motivations for choosing a particular candidate may be, citizens who are accustomed to casting ballots on a regular schedule and having those ballots determine the identity of office-holders will learn to value this process and expect it to continue. Even if the powers of elected officials are limited, winning office brings significant rewards for both office-holders and their supporters. Thus, both groups have a stake in continuing the electoral process. In Taiwan, as in Brazil, scholars dismiss elections as a mere formality at their peril, for ROC citizens clearly have invested much in elections, both emotionally and materially. And, as Wu reminds us, the KMT itself inflated the importance of elections, claiming legitimacy based, in part, on its “outstanding electoral performance.”

The calculus of decompression

Lamontier observed that decompression, or liberalization, rests on the authoritarian regime’s calculation that it can control the pace and direction of political reform. This confidence allows the regime to undertake a reform process that (as it learns too late) has a momentum and direction of its own. There is no question KMT leaders believed that the institutional framework they put in place in Taiwan would give them a firm grip on the liberalization process. These institutions are explained in detail in Chapter 3, but some of the most important are worthy of mention here. First, until 1991, the KMT regime maintained a firewall between the central government and the electoral system, ensuring that the top decision-makers would be selected by the KMT’s core leaders.
authentic grassroots leaders, whom it then coopted into the party. Local factions and individuals competed fiercely among themselves for votes in grassroots contests, but nearly all of them were affiliated with the KMT, and they rarely questioned its policies or ideologies. However, it would be unwise to dismiss this centrifugalistic electoral behavior as unimportant; even though elections in pre-reform Taiwan had little or no effect on national policy, at the local level these elections were fiercely fought and highly valued. One indication of this phenomenon is Taiwan's consistently high voter turn-out. In fact, as Figure 1.1 shows, voter turn-out is generally very high in Taiwan, but paradoxically, it is highest in grassroots

Figure 1.1 Voter turn-out in elections

Source: Chi Kang-ju, Political Development of ROC (Zhenghui Mingzuo de Zhenghui Ferkai), Taipei, Yuenyi Cultural Publishing Company Ltd, 1996, pp. 1086-1089; Lin Chih-ling, "Local Elections and the Mechanization of the KMT" in Chen Ming-zhong and Zhang Yongqian, eds., Basic-level Election and Socio-Political Change on Both Sides of the Taiwan Strait, Taipei, Yuenyi Publishing Company Ltd, 1998, pp. 182-181. Note: National elections include Legislative Yuan and National Assembly elections; municipal elections are municipal executive elections; sub-munic. elections are municipal council elections. Turn-out gives for periods in which both Legislative Yuan and National Assembly occurred is an average of the two turn-outs.

Voting for democracy

Another consequence of the SVMW electoral formula is its tendency to provide well-organized parties with large "seat bonuses." If a party can estimate its potential vote share accurately, it will be able to calculate precisely the number of seats it can win in a given district. If it is further able to allocate its votes among its candidates evenly, it can turn a relatively modest vote share into a much larger percentage of seats won. Small parties and independent candidates find it difficult or impossible to maximize their performance under this system, leading to their disproportionately low representation in elected bodies, as Table 1.2 shows.

This recalls Lainson's observation that the Brazilian military regime's electoral manipulations "have much more effect on the conversion of votes into seats than on the distribution of votes itself." As Hu Fu and Chu Yu-hsuan put it in a discussion of the KMT's persistent seat bonuses,

These simple statistics explain why the [opposition] DPP has placed so much emphasis on democratic reform, without which much of their hard-won electoral support has been wasted. This also explains why the ruling party has been willing to initiate the transition. With these archaic arrangements, there is little chance that the opposition . . . posed a real challenge to the KMT regime.

In light of the KMT's well-constructed arrangements for maintaining power, it is not so difficult to understand why this authoritarian regime was willing to give ground on demands for limited political reform. But why was the opposition willing to accept these unfavorable terms? Despite the repression Taiwan's political dissidents faced in the 1970s, opposition activities continued to participate in elections. While some opposition activists complained that elections were a useless formality, the opposition

Table 1.2 Seat bonuses in Legislative Yuan elections (percentage of seats won minus percentage of votes won)

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<td>KMTs</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>+16</td>
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<tr>
<td>TWU/DPP</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td>-12</td>
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<td>Independent</td>
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constant intensified its electoral effort. The reason for this was, as Lamsonner suggests, opposition politicians' recognition that elections provided a consistent and relatively safe mechanism for expanding their influence.

Even when the offices opposition candidates were elected to fill carried with them little policy-making authority, they did confer significant status (not to mention immunity from prosecution for statements made in the legislature). Meanwhile, electoral campaigns were an opportunity to transmit the opposition's message to huge numbers of citizens. Although the KMT held an overwhelming majority in every elected body in the land, the possibility of incremental victories—especially in such high-profile contests as municipal executive and supplementary legislative elections—encouraged opposition politicians to work within the system.

Authoritarian decomposition

The notion of authoritarian decomposition implies that the direction of political change is antithetical to the interests of the regime. Thus, some scholars might argue that the concept does not apply to Taiwan, since the regime itself led the democratization process. For example, Chao and Myers make a strong case that President Chiang Ching-kuo's personal leadership was the single most important factor driving Taiwan's democratization. But as they explain, Chiang believed in a 'Chinese-style democracy in which only the virtuous elite could represent the people and govern them'; he was no advocate of mass, unfettered pluralism. Yet by the end of the century, Taiwan's political marketplace had become extremely mature. Non-stop revelations of political corruption had worn since put to rest any illusions that a virtuous elite was governing the island. So even if Chiang Ching-kuo and the KMT regime were devoted to a particular kind of democratization, they eventually lost control of the process. To understand why, Lamsonner points us toward elections.

According to Lamsonner, elections have momentum and consequences apart from their role in selecting office-holders, and these forces push the liberalizing regime in the direction of more and more meaningful elections. One of the first signs of liberalization in Taiwan was the KMT party reform of 1972. The early 1970s marked a shift in party leadership from President Chiang Kai-shek to his son, Chiang Ching-kuo. Although the elder Chiang remained in office until his death in 1975, the succession began several years earlier. According to Bruce Dickson, an expert on KMT party history.

The new generation of leaders believed that more rapid political reform was necessary for the survival of the party. The main goals and tasks of the KMT changed. Rather than concentrating on plans to retake the mainland, the party devoted more of its energy to issues of immediate concern to Taiwan and its own reputation. It underwent both functional change (such as a greater concentration on elections) and generational change, as new leaders with new skills were introduced to important posts at all levels of the party bureaucracy.

Two important aspects of this reform targeted the electoral system. First, the KMT decided to recruit more native Taiwanese in order to shed its image as a Mainlander-dominated exile party. Party leaders hoped that a more indigenous party would have greater electoral appeal and legitimacy. Second, President Chiang Ching-kuo sought to improve the quality of elected local officials by taking a more active role in cultivating and nominating 'good government' candidates to replace local bosses. This increased emphasis on elections also meant that the KMT began to use elections as an institutionalized feedback mechanism on the party's performance.

This is not to say that the party suddenly decided to give the voters everything they wanted. As the aching of a KMT organization heads attest, the blame for electoral losses fell not on policy-makers, but on the party's strategies responsible for mobilizing the KMT's electoral machine. So while Dickson makes a good case that the KMT was more willing to listen to messages from the electorate than it had been in the past, its primary concern continued to be winning elections.

Accompanying these changes in party organization and strategy in the 1970s was a limited, but noticeable, relaxation in the repression of dissidents. While critics of the regime continued to risk arrest even into the early 1990s, the so-called 'White Terror' that reigned from the February 28 Incident through the 1960s was easing by the early 1970s. The clearest evidence of this change was the proliferation of opposition magazines in the 1970s.

These publications shared two central themes: the desire for democracy and the demand for fair and equal treatment for the Taiwanese majority (which I will call 'ethnic justice'). The regime did not fully tolerate these publications; they were routinely and regularly harassed, censored, confiscated and closed. However, unlike in the earlier period, when long prison terms silenced dissident editors, the opposition journalists of the 1970s faced relatively mild penalties, most often economic sanctions aimed at the publications themselves. They played a cat-and-mouse game with the government, reopening sanctioned publications under slightly different names, registering as book series to evade censorship, and generally defying the regime's efforts to put a stop to their
activities. Rather than acting decisively against them, the government attacked the publications piecemeal.

Activists demanding democratization and ethnic justice grew bolder in other ways, too. In 1977, supporters of opposition candidate Hsu Hsiu-liang noted when they thought he was about to be deployed out of a country executivehip. Two years later, activities from the dissident magazine Formosa (Maidas) sponsored a rally in the southern city of Kaohsiung. When the rally turned violent, police arrested the magazine’s leaders, including someone who were not even present at the rally. In the short run, the regime’s swift and punitive reaction shifted opposition activities. But public opinion quickly turned against the government, as many Taiwanese found its reaction disproportionate and brutal. The tide of sympathy and outrage found expression in the 1980 supplementary elections, when the wives and attorneys of several defendants sought National Assembly seats. These candidates did extraordinarily well, in one case winning a district’s highest vote total. Their performance was interpreted widely as a statement of sympathy and support for the Formosa group, and a gesture of protest against the regime’s heavy-handed treatment of dissidents.

In sum, by 1980, the KMT government was finding it increasingly difficult to suppress dissent and ignore calls for further liberalization. When it did take strong action, as in the Kaohsiung Incident, it incurred a heavy cost, as revealed in the 1980 election results. Repression also cost the ROC dearly in increasingly precious international support. Elections drove up the cost of repression further because once an opposition activist had been elected to office, he or she not only enjoyed elevated public stature and legitimacy, but also had access to the bully pulpit of public office. Suppressed isolated dissident intellectuals was one thing; suppressing elected officials whose popularity had been demonstrated at the polls — and most of whom possessed extraordinary charisma — was another matter. As Hu Fu puts it, “it became increasingly costly for the ruling elite to use repressive measures against popularly elected opposition leaders. To do this the KMT regime had to pay a considerable price, at the cost of its own legitimacy.”

Another sense in which elections complicated the regime’s efforts to control the reform process was the expectation created by the electoral calendar. Canceling elections when the outcome looked unfavorable to the ruling party was simply too risky. Even KMT politicians would have protested, since they, too, had a great deal at stake in elections. Indeed, the only significant interruption in the ROC electoral calendar came in 1978, in response to US President Jimmy Carter’s decision to normalize relations with the PRC. Even some opposition leaders believed the postponement was justified, given the ROC’s sudden and severe reversal of fortune.37

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Lamouéri’s analysis emphasizes the importance of elections for creating sites for criticism of the regime — and not only by the regime’s opponents. He noted that Brazilian law-makers of the pro-regime ARENA and opposition MDB parties alike used their positions to speak out against the military government. Likewise, gaining elected office offered ROC politicians the opportunity to criticize the regime — and created pressure for them to do so. In the early years of the reform, most criticism came from opposition politicians, some of whom took advantage of legislative immunity to speak freely. Over the years, KMT politicians added their voices to the chorus of criticism, especially on such popular issues as controlling corruption and seeking UN membership for Taiwan. As Joseph Wu writes.

KMT leaders face challenges from their own elected representatives who are increasingly demanding a role in party policy-making. They argue that as popularly elected representatives of the people, they have more right to decide KMT policy than the top decision-makers, including the president, the premier or the members of the Central Standing Committee, none of whom are popularly elected.38

After 1990, the legislature was more than a bully pulpit for critics of the regime; even with a KMT majority in the legislature, the party leadership lost some important legislative battles, including a 1993 contest over a financial disclosure law.

Another dimension of Lamouéri’s analysis is his characterization of some elections as plebiscites; again, Taiwan’s experience supports the theory. In particular, the 1980 legislative election fits Lamouéri’s definition of a plebiscitary contest. In 1980, the opposition was small and weak; some of its leading figures were in prison or exile. Still, opposition candidates made their strongest showing yet in 1980. Many of these candidates themselves were the relatively unknown spouses and attorneys of the Kaohsiung defendants. Their startling electoral success can only be understood as a plebiscite on the regime’s treatment of the opposition, when Lamouéri calls “a pronouncement about the regime and the situation of the country as a whole.”39 The supplementary legislative elections held in the 1980s were, as Lamouéri expects, especially conducive to plebiscitary voting because their function was symbolic. Given the overwhelming majority of seats occupied by senior legislators, virtually all of whom voted the KMT line, no one expected that the results of these elections would alter national policies directly. The sole logical reason for choosing opposition candidates was to send a message to the ruling party. Yet, the Dangwa’s vote share increased (see Figure 1.2).
Symbols or protest voting may not carry much expectation of influencing national policy in the short term. However, the long-term consequences of such voting can be profound. This was the case in Taiwan. First, as Lamontier predicts, the feedback provided by plebiscitic elections reinforced the reform faction within the KMT leadership. This dynamic operated on two levels. First, the reformers were able to demonstrate that the cost of retreating from, or even slowing the pace of, reform would be a substantial loss of popular support and legitimacy. By casting their ballots for the opposition, voters demonstrated their support for continued reform. KMT hard-liners' arguments in favor of slower reform flew in the face of tangible evidence that a significant and growing segment of the population opposed their position. Surveys of Taiwan residents' political attitudes showed these election results. For example, in 1984, 41 percent agreed that "government affairs should be decided by top government leaders." By 1990, the proportion had fallen to 33 percent, and in 1996, it was down to 30 percent. Likewise, in 1984, more than half of those surveyed agreed that multiple political parties would lead to chaos; by 1990, only 18 percent believed this, while 65 percent believed an opposition party was necessary to supervise the government.46

Second, the reformers used their electoral successes against their hard-line opponents within the regime. Especially after Lee Teng-hui succeeded Chiang Ching-kuo as president in 1988, elections became a weapon in the struggle for power between factions in the KMT leadership.48 For example, conservatives fought to maintain the privileges of the senior legislators (those elected on the mainland in the 1940s), but a Council of Grand Justices sympathetic to reform forced the seniors to retire in 1991, a move that enjoyed overwhelming popular support. Opening the national law-making bodies to complete re-election further eroded the KMT's dominance. The rationale for keeping the seniors in office was the civil war. Once new parliamentarians were elected, it became much more difficult to justify other abridgments of the constitution on the same basis. For example, if Taiwan could safely elect new law-makers, why not the provincial governor? Instead, by 1991, more than three-quarters of Taiwan's residents believed the governor and big-city mayors should be popularly elected.49

And if the provincial governor could be elected, why not the president?

Lamontier's analysis predicts that electoral success will increase the opposition's organizational strength and popularity. This, too, is evident in the Taiwan case. As Huang Teh-fu writes, "Local elections and the limited opening of representative bodies to electoral competition expanded the opposition's political leverage and ability to mobilize."50 Throughout the 1970s, the opposition steadily intensified its efforts to form a united movement. They called their movement the Dangwai, which means "outside the party" (i.e., outside the KMT). Activists organized a variety of groups to house their pro-opposition activities. In the late 1970s, Dangwai politicians established a chain of service centers to coordinate campaign efforts across district lines and to assist with grassroots recruitment. Opposition politicians defied election laws forbidding coordinated campaigning, sponsoring joint rallies and publicizing their cooperative relationships. And as the Dangwai's organizational framework solidified, popular support for the movement, as measured by election results, also grew. Dangwai candidates' vote share in supplementary legislative elections doubled from 8.3 percent in 1980 to 16.7 percent in 1983. In the 1986 legislative race, held just three months after Dangwai activists founded the Democratic Progressive Party, DPP candidates captured 22 percent of the vote.51 In other words, elections provided a venue for the opposition to improve its organization, while its improved organization helped the opposition attract more votes.

Elections also helped to strengthen party identification and enthusiasm for democratic institutions in general.52 This is a function Hu Fu labels

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Figure 1.2 Dangwai/KMT vote shares.


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 Voting for democracy

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As President Chang Ching-kuo gradually assume his father's roles in the KMT party and ROC state in the 1970s he guided a subtle shift in priorities. Although the leadership continued to cling to the goals of mainland recovery and unification, it gave greater emphasis to policies aimed at improving the status and stature of Taiwan itself. Of course, Chiang Ching-kuo did not extend his reforms to bring about the end of KMT rule on Taiwan; on the contrary, he sought to ensure the party's long-term survival by modernizing and 'Taiwanizing' it. To do so, he encouraged recruitment of native Taiwanese into the party leadership (especially at the local level), nomination of Taiwanese for elected office and a more active role in the nominating process for the party's candidates. As a result, the KMT grew more responsive to society and to the aspirations of its own members; in effect, a new government based on democratic accountability replaced the authoritarian regime. The new government was, like the old, led by the KMT, but it was a very different KMT than had existed forty years earlier.

One of the most profound changes the KMT underwent during the reform process was its split in 1993. This, too, can be traced to electoral pressure. In 1991, the KMT faced a rebellion within the party: The conservative faction, which called itself the New KMT Alliance (NKA), demanded that the party take a stronger stand in favor of unification, and that it punish the DPP for including a pro-independence plank in its party platform. The KMT leadership, however, recognized that most Taiwanese— including many KMT politicians— did not approve of strong unificationist language, and would oppose efforts to crack down on the opposition. Accommodating the NKA's demands "would run the risk of alienating the majority of native Taiwanese." Choosing voter preferences over party unity cost the KMT its unity: two years later, the NKA broke away from the KMT and formed the Chinese New Party. The loss of the New Party reduced the KMT's legislative majority to the barest of margins in the 1995 election and forced the ruling party to negotiate with the opposition on a range of legislative proposals.

Within an authoritarian regime, elections redistribute power from bureaucrats to reformers. Taiwan's experience further suggests that they redistribute power from the regime center to the grassroots by increasing the regime's reliance on the individuals directly responsible for delivering votes—party activists, candidates and local networks; factions. These are the people who can provide tangible evidence of ruling party legitimacy. As Lamontier points out, even if an election's significance is symbolic, the plebiscitary messages it generates are important. In the final analysis, the ruling party needs to win. And once it faces significant opposition, winning requires the active cooperation of grassroots election...
workers. Taiwan's experience offers many examples of this phenomenon. Above all, most observers agree that - despite Chiang Ching-kuo's original goal of replacing local bosses with good government candidates - the democratization process has increased the clout of local politicians. As the regime loosened its restrictions on opposition activity, elections became more competitive. In order to win, local politicians had to redouble their efforts. In exchange for this extra effort, local factions demanded more control over nominations and ratcheted up their expectations of material rewards. When the party center denied local politicians the benefits or nominations they expected, some rebelled. In many cases, they simply refused to give a particular campaign their best effort. In other cases they covertly supported opposition or independent candidates. In a few cases, factions defected from the party entirely, and affiliated with the opposition. In short, reform gave local factions political leverage over the party center. The result was that party policies had to alter more closely to the desires of local politicians, whose primary concern was re-election. Politicians and voters alike favored the continuation and expansion of reform, creating upward pressure on the party-state.

According to Chen Ming-tong, the KMT's disappointing performance in the 1997 municipal executive elections, when it nominated good government candidates "made the KMT slow its pace of fighting local factions. In the 1981 and 1983 mayoral elections, the factional nominees for mayor exceeded the non factions ones." In 1989, the party attempted to reassert the good government strategy. The effort backfired, and the party lost 7 municipal executivehips as well as 21 Legislative Yuan and 15 Provincial Assembly seats. Huang Teh-fu has calculated the percentage of KMT nominees linked to local factions and their likelihood of victory in legislative and Provincial Assembly elections. Both figures declined steadily from the 1970s until 1986, at which point they rebounded sharply. In 1992, 82 percent of the KMT's successful legislative candidates had factional affiliations - compared to an average of 53 percent in the six previous legislative contests. In sum, writes Chen:

As Taiwan's political system becomes more democratic, elections are increasingly becoming the only institution that can allocate political power legitimately. To solidify its power base at the grassroots level and to face the opposition challenges in elections, the KMT has increased its political involvement in local society. Local factions have once again become most crucial allies.

The expansion of electoral competition was possible in Taiwan because both the regime and the opposition recognized the benefits of a "mobile horizon." The ruling party believed it could use elections to enhance its legitimacy in an unstable era. At the same time, it expected to control the pace and direction of reform, because it was confident of its electoral ability. The opposition saw elections as an opportunity to gain influence and to reach a larger audience. Although dissidents recognized the limitations of the electoral system, the majority of them were convinced that working to change the system from within was the most fruitful course open to them. And so the horizon began to move. No one anticipated, however, how fast or how far it would go. Each election created pressure for further reform, as elected officials found themselves forced to compete for votes in a society that valued participation. Elections incited Taiwanese citizens with partsanship and democratic values; they created opportunities to send pre-reform messages to the regime; they altered the balance of power between hard-liners and reformers and between state and society. By 1996, the horizon of the possible in Taiwan's political system had moved far beyond what anyone had anticipated or predicted even five years earlier. Four presidential candidates stood before their supporters and the world, staking a claim to Taiwan's newborn democracy.
2 Learning to vote
The origins of Taiwan's electoral system

The Japanese era
Throughout the nineteenth century, Japan's leaders worried that their nation would attract the attention of European and North American empires looking to expand into the Pacific. Thus, the Meiji period, which began in 1868, was marked by vigorous campaigns to convince the West that Japan was neither a nuisance nor a savage, but a modern nation on the road to economic and political self-development. When China signed the Treaty of Shimonoseki ceding Taiwan to Japan in 1895, the Japanese government seized the opportunity to establish a model colony on the island. Taiwan would prove that the Japanese could out-colonize those who might dream of colonizing Japan. As it turned out, the project was a success. Within two decades, Taiwan no longer required subsidies from Tokyo. And by the time the Japanese withdrew from the island in 1945, Taiwan outpaced mainland China in nearly every measure of material development – per capita income, economic infrastructure, health, educational attainment, and so on. Decades later, this gap contributed to serious problems.

Japan's Taiwan policy responded to a variety of competing concerns. First, the Japanese worried about subversion from mainland China. As Japan and China moved toward war in the 1920s and 1930s, colonial authorities intensified their efforts to keep the island free of influences from the mainland. Japanese policy combined assimilation and discrimination. For example, students in the widely available primary schools studied a Japanese curriculum. However, Taiwanese university students were steered toward technical fields (such as medicine) and away from potentially "subversive" disciplines (such as social sciences), while graduates faced employment discrimination.

Meanwhile, the Japanese colonial government strove to maintain Taiwan's social stability and economic prosperity. Their most difficult challenge on this front was on-going resistance from Taiwan's indigenous peoples. The Japanese insistence upon eradicating the Aboriginal people's way of life – and exploiting the resources of their mountain homelands – provoked violent confrontations. In 1930, an Aboriginal attack on a police outpost in the central mountains left more than two hundred Japanese dead. The Aboriginal fighters and their families eventually were wiped out, but the incident shook the island's Japanese community.

A third important factor shaping Japanese policy in Taiwan was the shifting political climate in Tokyo. While conservatism reigned among Japanese officials at Taipei, Taiwanese found a more sympathetic hearing among liberal forces in the home government. The Diet enacted a number of political reforms for Taiwan over the objections of the Taipei authorities. Taiwanese who advocated local autonomy for the island thus found encouragement in some quarters, but also faced daunting obstacles, especially when they attempted to expand their activity from Japan to Taiwan itself. The authorities on the island had ample resources to keep the activists on edge, threatened and factionalized. Nonetheless, in the 1920s a home rule movement appeared.

Taiwan's movement for greater local autonomy began in 1918. Taiwanese students living in Tokyo found inspiration in President Woodrow Wilson's campaign for national self-determination and human rights; they took further encouragement from Japanese rhetoric (addressed to Western governments) asserting the principle of racial equality. In 1921, a group of Taiwanese in Japan founded the Taiwan Culture Society. Japanese authorities tolerated the group, although they declared some of its activities illegal. The organization advocated for a Taiwanese parliament to check and balance the colonial administration; it submitted petitions to the Diet annually requesting a parliament and a Taiwanese representative in the national legislature. Despite harassment and persecution by colonial authorities, more than 17,000 Taiwanese signed these petitions between 1921 and 1934. Some students even used their vacations to travel from village to village in Taiwan stamping for home rule.

In 1927, the Taiwan Culture Society split. The moderate faction founded the People's Party, which "worked to legalize labor unions and win a larger role for Taiwanese in local governance." This marked a shift in the home rule advocates' approach: instead of fighting for an islandwide parliament, they pushed for locally elected assemblies and councils at the prefectural level and below. When the People's Party split in 1930, one of the offshoots was the League for Local Self-Government.

As it turned out, the new strategy meshed with Tokyo's own plans. In 1919, Tokyo for the first time dispatched a civilian to be Taiwan's governor. The following year, islanders gained a modicum of political
36 Politics in Taiwan

participation when the colonial government established assemblies in each of Taiwan’s prefectures. These appointed representatives were charged with advising local executives; most were Japanese. Of the Taiwanese members, a handful urged greater autonomy for Taiwan, but the great majority were conservatives. In 1921, the colony’s governor-general appointed nine Taiwanese to his consultative council, the highest office Taiwanese would obtain under the Japanese empire.

In the early 1930s, with war on the horizon, Japan needed the support of its Taiwanese subjects — especially the landlords, whose economic contributions and social influence were great. The central government handed the colonial authorities a mandate to institute local elections in 1935, in which voters would choose half the members of local assemblies, with the other half to be appointed. The assemblies’ job was to “discuss and act on the local budget, certain local tax matters, and a few unimportant administrative questions.” The effect of the reform was to “draw local elites into a political apparatus controlled by the colonial authorities, and also to set them against one another and make them dependent on the high-ups.” The franchise for these early elections was extremely limited: only men over the age of 25 who paid more than five yen in taxes each year could vote, and voter rolls and campaign materials were subject to police approval. In 1935, 187,000 persons were qualified to vote, comprising 14.6 percent of Taiwan’s Japanese residents and 3.8 percent of the Taiwanese population.

The decision to permit local elections eliminated all hope of establishing an island-wide parliament, but most home rule advocates accepted their partial victory and made the best of it. In 1935, the League for Local Self-Government voted to support candidates in the local elections, effectively changing its mode of political participation from social movement to electoral competition. According to Chen Ming-tong and Lin Jih-wen, elite in the home rule movement made the shift to electoral politics because they recognized it was the only mode of participation available to them.

The electoral process the Japanese instituted in Taiwan mimicked the system used in Japan itself. Administrative orders stipulated one vote per elector, with no transfers among candidates. Electoral districts followed administrative boundaries. To equalize representation, the number of members elected from each district varied according to district population. The winners in these multi-member races were those who received the largest number of votes, until all the district’s seats were filled. Taken together, these regulations established a system of single, nontransferable voting in multi-member districts (SVMM).

As the League for Local Self-Government soon discovered, the SVMM formula presents political organizations with daunting challenges. The League hoped to maximize its representation in the first local elections by dividing its support among several candidates in each district. This strategy was impossible in most areas, where the League’s organizational base was weak. However, in Taichung the League was confident enough to implement a unified electoral strategy. It chose four candidates, who agreed to limit their campaign expenditures and staff size, emphasize issues in their campaigns and refrain from door-to-door campaigning. The goal was to present a united front that would carry all four candidates to victory.

As it turned out, the League’s efforts founded on the same shoals that would frustrate political strategies for generations to come. As Chen and Lin put it, “As soon as electoral combat began, the agreement fell apart,” with the result that the League won only two of the four seats it contested. In Pingtung, where the League also felt strong, too many home rule candidates were nominated; only one out of the five managed to win a seat. In other prefectures, the League left its nominees alone, with better results. In Chiayi and Tainan, the League’s candidates won three out of three and four out of four seats, respectively. In Taipei, the single League candidate won more votes than any other candidate. The lesson of this first election was thus high-minded campaigns based on issues and collective restraint are a less effective way to win SVMM elections than individually managed campaigns in which socially prominent candidates mobilize supporters on their home turf. As Chen and Lin write,

The situation in Taichung reflects the difficulty facing a rational party under the SVMM system. If it chooses to follow the path of publicizing and promoting its ideas, it immediately will face the problem of dividing votes. If only one candidate adopts the strategy of localized campaigning, it will be impossible to maintain the agreements negotiated beforehand. Thus, carrying out local elections not only factionalized local elites, but also made it impossible for existing anti-government elites to resist this trend.

After 1935, Taiwan’s assemblies had 172 members. Of these, 109 were Japanese (60 appointed and 49 elected), and 63 were Taiwanese (26 appointed and 37 elected). In 1937, another round of elections took place, and the governor-general’s advisory council was enlarged to 40 members, including 17 Taiwanese. These early elections had lasting political consequences. They neutralized the home rule movement by redirecting its leaders’ energy away from the struggle for a Taiwan parliament, toward electoral competition. They divided local elites,
encouraging ambitious Taiwanese to develop individual political bases instead of joining organized movements. They rewarded elites who took a local rather than island-wide perspective, and they diminished incentives to join a united opposition. In a more positive vein, however, the elections introduced Taiwanese to regular, peaceful political participation. As of 1931, almost 300,000 Taiwanese were registered to vote, and more than 3,000 had held elective office.

These reforms were short-lived. By the late 1930s, military adventurers had displaced civilian authorities in Tokyo, a development which spilled over into colonial policy. On Taiwan, policies promoting assimilation and mobilization for war and war productionBrushed aside the tentative steps toward home rule. Nonetheless, Taiwan's brief experience with elections set the tone for the future. As George Kerr writes, "The Formosans were becoming familiar with all the devices of political campaigns and electioneering ... elements of training and experience that ultimately were to form a frame of reference for future (post-Surrender) demands and expectations." Lai, Myers and Wei echo this view, writing: "the Taiwanese started to become accustomed to the idea of having local government on local elections. This was certainly one of several reasons why the KMT initiated local elections in Taiwan as early as it did, in April 1946."

Retrocession
Taiwan returned to Chinese control upon the Japanese surrender in 1945. ROC president Chiang Kai-shek dispatched a military leader, General Chen Yi, to the island to serve as its first Chinese governor in five decades. One of Chen's first items of business was instituting local elections. In 1946, Taiwanese chose representatives to district, city and township consultative councils. These elections gave the Taiwanese more representation than they had under the Japanese, and more than other Chinese provinces enjoyed at the time. Competition in the elections was keen; almost 37,000 candidates vied for fewer than 8,000 seats. Above the district level, representatives were chosen indirectly; lower-level assemblies elected those above them. The provincial consultative assembly, in which more than 1,000 candidates competed for 30 seats, chose Taiwan's representatives to the ROC government on the mainland. The provincial body, which was charged with advising and interpreting the provincial administration but had no legislative authority, generated great public excitement. Its early meetings turned into rousing forums for criticizing the provincial administration.

The 1946 elections shared a great deal with elections under the Japanese. Among the 1,180 candidates for the provincial consultative council, for example, 38 percent had held seats in advisory bodies under the Japanese. Another 6 percent were anti-Japanese political activists, while most of the rest belonged to the colonial era political elite. In fact, between 1945 and 1947, years that Chen and Lin call the "honeymoon period," the switch from Japanese to Chinese sovereignty had little effect on Taiwanese elites' political involvement. A second important area of similarity between the 1935 and 1937 elections and the 1946 contests was the electoral system. The ROC adopted Japan's basic rules of competition, and SVMV elections became a permanent feature of Taiwanese politics.

Single, nontransferable voting in multi-member districts
It is still possible today to see the influence of Taiwan's Japanese colonizers on the island. Japan left behind a solid infrastructure for economic development, including schools and universities, rural electrification projects, roads and railroads. It also contributed to Taiwan's culture: Taiwanese take off their shoes indoors, eat sushi, use words borrowed from Japanese and install Japanese-style rooms with platforms, sunken tables and sliding screens in their homes. Perhaps the colonial era's most significant political legacy is the system of single, nontransferable voting in multi-member districts (the SVMV system). What follows is a description of that system and its effects on political behavior and outcomes generally.

Taiwan's electoral districts follow administrative boundaries. Most legislative districts consist of a municipality (a county or city), while Provincial Assembly and National Assembly elections are based on towns and city lines. As a result, electoral districts are not remotely consistent in population. In order to provide for equal representation, the number of representatives elected from each district - the district magnitude - varies according to population. For example, in 1995, Taipei County residents elected seventeen national legislators, while voters in the five smallest municipalities chose only one representative each. The average district magnitude in that year was 4.5. Under SVMV, candidates are ranked according to the number of votes each receives, and those with the largest number of votes, up to the district magnitude, are elected. For example, in Taipei County, the seventeen top vote-getters were the winners. This electoral formula is called single, nontransferable voting because each voter chooses one candidate (unlike the Italian two-vote preference voting system), and votes are not redistributed (as they are in the Irish
vote that its other nominees fall short. One strategy for combating this tendency would be simply to assign people to vote for particular candidates. But this would require perfect information about who the party’s supporters are and perfect compliance with the party strategy. Such conditions are unlikely, although not inconceivable. To maximize its share of seats in SWMM elections, the KMT uses a strategy of “dividing the vote” (per pao) and assigning candidates to “responsibility zones” (guanzu). Before elections, potential candidates meet with party leaders and faction bosses to estimate the number of votes the party can capture in the district. In general, the party nominates only as many candidates as it can elect, given the number of votes reported. Before 1986, that meant a candidate for a specific office, a strategy known as “full nomination.” However, the party left room for outside candidates when local cadres believed they might defeat KMT nominees or provoke factional conflict. This “partial nomination” strategy ensures that the party’s votes are not spread so thinly that it cannot maximize its seat share.

Once the KMT’s slate of nominations is set, party cadres meet with the nominees to negotiate the division of the district into responsibility zones. It is the candidates’ responsibility to mobilize the votes in their zones. The allocation of responsibility zones balances several factors. First, zones are assigned to give all the candidates equal access to KMT voters. Second, candidates are assigned to zones in which they have good personal connections, and in which their demographic profile (especially ethnic origin) matches that of the neighborhood. Third, incumbents are normally assigned to the same zones in each race they contest. Fourth, while most zones are geographical in nature, some are functional; that is, the members of a particular occupational group (veterans, postal workers, etc.) are assigned to the same candidate, regardless of where in the district they live. A few such groups are held aside and deployed in the last days before an election to prop up lagging KMT candidates. These are called “spare zones.” The KMT’s most reliable voters are known as “iron ballots” (ne pao).

ROC political campaigns have two faces. A campaign’s public face includes speeches, rallies, posters, newspaper advertisements — beginning in 1991, even television commercials appeared. The private face of a campaign — the mobilization of the responsibility zone — emphasizes clan-telistic methods. Clan-telism is a political style in which politicians (the patrons) form lasting relationships with people below them (their clients). These relationships are based on mutual beneficial exchanges. The patron gives the client access to the spoils of power, and, in turn, the client supports the patron’s political ambitions and activities. The benefits
Learning to vote 45

This rule ... is very difficult to enforce. This is an internal rule of the party, thus no legal sanctions can be taken against a violation. Also, it is hard to make distinctions between old and new connections. All Koumintang candidates in fact pursue old and new support in their colleagues' zones.24

The SVMM system's effects on party strategy are obvious. Its consequences for voting behavior are less visible, but no less profound. Many studies have found that SVMM elections are associated with candidate-oriented voting. For example, according to a detailed voting behavior survey, 80.5 percent of Taiwan's voters were "candidate oriented" when making their voting decisions in the 1989 legislative election.23 Rochon offers strong evidence that the SVMM system causes candidate-oriented voting. He found that Japanese voters (until 1994, Japan's Diet elections used the SVMM system) were no more likely than their counterparts in other countries to base their votes on candidate evaluation when their preferred party nominated only one candidate. But when a voter's party nominated two or more candidates in a voter's district, the incidence of candidate-oriented voting shot up.25 According to his analysis, Japanese vote in parties, but they do not vote for parties, because under SVMM rules, party preference alone is not enough to select a candidate. With several nominees of the same party competing against one another, voters must resort to candidate evaluation in order to choose one.26

Yang Tai-shuen's essay "The Peculiarities of Our Electoral System" takes this argument a step further. In an SVMM election, each voter chooses one candidate from a list. As Yang observes, even candidates in large districts need relatively few votes to be elected, compared to candidates in single-member districts, who must win a majority or plurality. As a result, it is possible to win many Taiwanese elections merely by capturing the votes of people to whom one is personally connected, or to whom one's close followers are connected. So not only is candidate-oriented voting more likely, but also, candidates' views and opinions take a back seat to personal relationships and group mobilization.24 A 1983 National Taiwan University elections workshop poll found that 71.7 percent of respondents were candidate oriented, but only 30.4 percent rated "candidates' political views" most important.29

The candidate-oriented voting that characterizes SVMM elections comes at the expense of issue-based voting and party identification. In a survey of Taipei City voters taken after the 1989 elections, 68 percent of the respondents who preferred the DPP's position on direct presidential elections and 69 percent of those who agreed with the DPP on the independence issue nonetheless reported voting for KMT candidates.30
Issue-based voting is more common among DPP voters than KMT voters; still, other orientations are twice as common as issue-oriented even among DPP supporters. There is evidence to suggest, however, that issues are becoming more important. A survey by the Workshop on Political Systems and Political Change at National Taiwan University found the percentage of Legislative Yuan voters rating issues in their top three reasons for selecting a candidate dipped from 30.4 percent in 1983 to 23.4 percent in 1986, then rose to 54.2 percent in 1989. At the same time, the percentage who mentioned personal connections or social relations fell from 32.4 percent in 1983 to 21.3 percent in 1989.

Lin Jih-wen has elaborated a detailed theory to explain the interaction between mobilization and issue voting. He points out that SVMM electors force candidates to take out distinctive identities to attract voters. In most districts, KMT candidates accomplish this by using the responsibility zone system. However, there is a subset of Taiwanese voters for whom issues, especially national identity, matter. Candidates who wish to appeal to that subset use issues to distinguish themselves from other candidates. They tend to take extreme positions, because that is where the issue voters are most likely to be. To prove his point, he shows that candidates in Taiwan's executive elections, which do not use the SVMM formula, take more centrist positions than candidates in SVMM races. For example, Lin points to Taipei City mayor Chen Shui-bian, who took a strongly pro-independence position when he ran for a legislative seat in 1992, but was far more moderate in his 1994 mayoral campaign.

Mobilizational politics is especially effective in small districts, in which the limited number of candidates makes it easier to negotiate and enforce the division of turf and other agreements. District site is one reason why the opposition's vote share in National Assembly elections lags behind its share in legislative elections, in which the districts are more than twice as large. When the Central Election Commission decided to divide the island into 58 electoral districts for the 1991 National Assembly race the DPP protested vigorously, at one point organizing a demonstration at which its supporters petted the Ministry of the Interior with eggs. In an SVMM election, the larger the district magnitude, the closer a party's seat share will be to its vote share. Districts with five or more representatives will be nearly proportional; the smaller the district, the greater the disproportionality. Because the KMT traditionally has won the largest seat bonuses, small districts have benefited the ruling party more.

If small districts magnify the substance of clientelism, large districts can contribute to clientelistic voting in another way. When district magnitudes are large, ballots contain long lists of candidates, many of whom the KMT has either nominated or recommended. (See Table 2.1.) This can make selecting a candidate very arduous. Reading the election bulletin in which candidates list their positions on major issues is of little benefit, since most candidates reiterate the party line. In most districts, voters do have the option of voting against the KMT, since there is at least one non-KMT candidate. But for voters whose preference is for the ruling party, the large number of candidates and their similarity to one another make it difficult to choose one. Lacking any clear basis on which to make an independent selection, voters are more likely to respond to vote buying, personal appeals and other clientelistic tactics.

The problem of choosing intelligently from among a long list of candidates is one with which many Taiwanese are symptomatic. A newspaper cartoon lampooning this predicament appeared shortly before the 1989 election. It illustrated the exertions of a man who decided to make an informed voting decision. He spent all his working hours reading newspapers, so he lost his job. He spent every evening attending candidate forums, so his wife left him. And so on. By election day, he had lost everything – but his voting decision was well informed.

SVMM elections also discourage political parties from emphasizing issues. It is easier to distribute and mobilize votes if a party's candidates all appear very similar. Otherwise, voters may be too "distracted" by the candidates' individual positions to carry out the planned distribution of

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
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<th>Max.</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>KMT (average)</th>
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<td>Yuan</td>
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<td>48</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Yuan</td>
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votes. Thus, until 1992 the KMT always insisted that its members adhere to the party platform. They were permitted to develop independent positions on issues of local concern only. Voters therefore had little to base their votes on, other than the candidates’ individual qualities and mobilizing efforts. For the DPP, whose candidates do emphasize issues, allocating votes evenly is a perennial headache.

While there is little doubt that the SVM formula promotes candidate-oriented voting and clientelistic campaigning in Taiwan, the electoral system is not the only factor that contributes to Taiwan's mobilizational style of electoral politics. A number of other influences, both environmental and institutional, deserve attention. First, Taiwan’s social and cultural environment is compatible with clientelistic politics. Taiwanese society provides fertile ground for clientelistic practices from pork barrel to vote buying. Kinship, friendship and other ties have been features of the island’s social and political milieu for generations, and gift-giving is a basic principle of Taiwanese etiquette. Some observers link Taiwan’s culture not only to personalistic voting, but even to nepotism in government service. According to Lui Fei-ling,

A customary saying, “to be an official is temporary, to be a man is permanent,” sums up the belief that one cannot perform government duties without taking care of personal duties to friends and relatives at the same time. This is why primary social relations usually come first in measuring the relative importance of factors determining one’s voting behavior.34

There is good reason to believe that Taiwan’s culture tolerates clientelistic politics; still, it is important not to make too much of the cultural explanation. Where one is born is the society in which public officials never try to use their influence to take care of friends and relatives. If anything, Chinese culture is less forgiving of nepotism than most, thanks to its Confucian tradition. Indeed, if we are looking for an explanation for political clientelism in Taiwan, we are likely to find better answers in Taiwan’s institutions, which are both more unique and less ambiguous than its culture. In particular, clues to the strength of clientelistic politics can be found in Taiwan’s party system, government structure and campaign rules.

The SVM system, with its long ballots and issue-less campaigns, promotes candidate-oriented voting and strengthens clientelistic electorating. So, too, does a single-party system. Prior to 1971, the only alternative to KMT candidates were a few independents. Voters relied on KMT cadre andсин-ака to guide them through the complexities of an electoral system without party competition or issue conflict. Between 1977 and 1986, some independent politicians joined together in a loose network, but Taiwan still lacked a true opposition party. And even after more than a decade of multi-party elections, many Taiwanese still are in the habit of turning to vote brokers for advice.

Thanks to its dominant position, the Kuomintang promoted clientelistic political structures directly as well as indirectly. A number of Taiwanese scholars believe the ruling party deliberately channels public resources to clientelistic networks in order to enhance its own power. Others go further, claiming the KMT created the clientelistic networks in the first place. According to Hu Fu, the KMT has built a set of interest exchange-based patron-client networks, taking local political and social forces through the local factional organizations and bringing them into the ruling party structure to enhance its manipulation of them. Under such a political operation, local elections could only become a tool of authoritarian politics.35

A Taiwanese County DPP activist put the matter more bluntly: “As long as there are two factions, the KMT is always the big brother (lao da), because it has its hands on good jobs people want.”

The previous sections described how the SVM formula and the one-party system discourage party- and issue-oriented voting and encourage candidates to use clientelistic strategies to attract supporters. Another factor contributing to the prevalence of clientelistic, candidate-oriented voting in Taiwan is the distribution of power within the ROC state. Assuming issue-based voting is not merely symbolic or expressive, but is intended to influence policy outcomes, when elected officials have no say in policy-making, issue-based voting is irrational. In contrast, candidate-based voting promises immediate pay-offs. The strategic use of ROC government exploits this logic by limiting elected officials’ authority to precisely those arenas through which patronage and other particularistic rewards are dispensed, while allowing the central government to monopolize policy-making.

The imprint of centralized decision-making is evident in both national and local elections. At the national level, elected officials include the members of the National Assembly, whose powers are limited to amending the constitution, and the Legislative Yuan. Both bodies play limited roles in policy formation. Taiwan’s parliamentarians rarely initiate legislation, and the presence until 1992 of a decisive voting bloc of senior legislators in office since 1947 enabled the ruling party to pass any bill it pleased.36 Also, KMT legislators (whose representation in the Legislative Assembly was based on popular vote) had little use for their voting role in the National Assembly.
Yuan has never fallen below 50 percent of the seats) must be careful not to oppose their party too much. Some of the KMT's best-known legislators lost their party's endorsement as a result of their outspokenness. Legislators do, however, enjoy innumerable opportunities to channel economic resources to themselves and their supporters. They have access to information, they have leverage in negotiating with bureaucrats, they can even make laws to benefit their clients. In short, while the legislature still is a rightful place in the policy-making process, it long ago mastered the art of patronage and pork-barrel politics.

Locally elected officials have even less policy-making authority than their counterparts in the central representative body. What power they do have is supervised stringently by higher levels of government and the ruling party. Hence, the source of central control is the ROC constitution, which provides for a unitary state. Power exercised by provincial and municipal governments is delegated by the center. By law, personnel appointments and budgeting are the provincial level and below are subject to central government supervision. In effect, summarized the situation facing politicians at the provincial level in a 1986 article: "In principle, locally elected men of all ranging from their corresponding representative bodies, but the Executive Yuan is the last power holder, which can override any decision made by the local governments at any level."

To make matters worse, bureaucratic agencies parallel each elected organ, so elected officials end up sharing power with appointed officials. Often, their terms of office are arranged so the appointed bureaucrats arrive before his elected counterpart and is therefore more knowledgeable and experienced from the outset. These bureaucrats often serve the party as well as the central government, in 1983, more than 50 percent of ROC civil servants belonged to the KMT. Also, key government agencies may not be under local jurisdiction at all. Police, public health workers, civil defense officials and others report directly to the provincial and national supervision.

Local governments are further constrained by the lack of a local resource base. Most tax revenue collected in Taiwan go to the central government, leaving municipal budgets in the red. Locations depend on subsidies from the provincial government to pay their expenses. (See Table 2.2) Nor are subsidies always distributed fairly. According to Tien, "they are no detailed guidelines for the allocations of these subsidies, the amount received by local governments depends much on politics and favoritism as on merit and need."

This is not to say that elected officials have no power at all. County and city governments are responsible for maintaining local public facilities, including local roads, schools and markets. They hire construction contractors and some public employees. They also make zoning decisions and buy land for public use, creating lucrative opportunities for those in the know. The Provincial Assembly regulates certain economic activities, including banking. As a result, businessmen target assembly members in their lobbying efforts. The prestige of office also can be helped in persuading police to release a suspect or examine officials to drop a tax audit. In sum, elected officials in the provincial, municipal and township governments can use their positions to benefit themselves and their supporters, even if they cannot exact for reaching policy initiatives.

Given that elected officials in the ROC—the local and national—have little power to make policy; we would expect voters to show little interest in candidates' views on the issues. A more pragmatic approach is to vote for candidates who will serve their constituents. Voters receive this message from ka-ka, who cite examples of candidate service, and may even reinforce their appeals with gifts. For their part, the ka-ka are recruited through the low policy realms in which elected officials do influence outcomes: local contracting and patronage. In short, the distribution of authority in the ROC reduces the effectiveness of non-clientelistic appeals, while encouraging the use of clientelistic political strategies.

The alternative to patronistic, clientelistic politics is a mass-based, media-oriented campaign style in which issues preferences and party identification play leading roles. But as Curtis observed, "By its almost total prohibition of the use of the mass media in campaigning...[Japan's election law] has inhibited the development of new political techniques similar to those that have developed in the United States and Western Europe." Until 1991, Taiwanese politicians labored under many of the same campaign restrictions as their Japanese counterparts—with similar results. Nor did the mass media make up for their role in advertising their own coverage. In part because the island's broadcast outlets cover areas that are larger than most electoral districts.
show reports on only the most elite races, leaving voters dependent upon newspapers for information on elections outside metropolitan Taipei. Overall, then, campaign regulations benefited candidates who used the clientele system to mobilize support because the campaign rules curtailed voters’ access to the information they needed to choose among the many candidates in SVMM races.

Among the most restrictive provisions of Taiwan’s election law were campaign time-limits, which ranged from three days for village and neighborhood contests to fifteen days for National Assembly and Legislative Yuan campaigns. Time limits handicapped candidates with low name recognition or weak connections. In practice, this meant opposition and independent candidates. The election law also restricted the activities candidates could use. The law limited campaign activity to direct contact with voters (through canvassing, operating sound trucks, making speeches, and distributing bulletins and handbills). Collective campaign activities, parades, and advertising in the mass media were forbidden. When opposition candidates began attracting large crowds to their speeches, the legislature cracked down on rallies, making it more difficult for the opposition to get its message to the public.25 Prior to 1989, candidates were not allowed to place advertisements on radio, television, newspapers or billboards.26 The ban on newspaper and magazine ads was lifted in 1989, and political parties aired their first campaign commercials during the National Assembly campaign of 1991. These reforms reduced but did not eliminate the obstacles facing candidates who lacked access to the KMT’s mobilization system.

Measuring success in SVMM elections

So far in this chapter we have traced the origins of Taiwan’s unusual electoral system (SVMM) and looked at its implications for candidates, parties and voters. We have seen how SVMM elections promote mobilizational strategies in ROC elections, and we have looked at other factors that reinforced that tendency. The rest of the chapter will be devoted to considering different methods for measuring success in SVMM elections.

Ordinarily, news reports of an election give only the percentage of votes and seats won by each party. These results show the distribution of power within the elected bodies, and how much overall support the parties enjoy. They do not reveal how the distribution of votes and seats was achieved. For example, if party A nominates twice as many candidates as party B, it may not win twice as many votes, but it is very likely to win more, simply because each candidate brings in some supporters. But merely nominating more candidates is not a wise strategy, especially for a small party, which will win more seats if it concentrates its votes on fewer candidates. For a small party to win one seat in every district would require outstanding organization—an accomplishment that would be hard to recognize from the overall election results.

The best way to judge the effectiveness of a party’s organization is to compare its performance with its goals. In most situations, a political party’s objective is to maximize the number of seats its candidates win.24 To accomplish this goal in an SVMM election, the party must estimate its potential support accurately, keep unauthorized candidates out of the race and allocate its votes in a way that optimizes its performance. Traditionally, the Kuomintang has used local factions to mobilize support for its candidates. Local factions recruit vote brokers (tarn-a-ka), who in turn cultivate groups of voters whose support they deliver to selected candidates, based on the party’s overall strategy. If the local factions and tarn-a-ka do their job well, the party can allocate just enough votes to each of its nominees to ensure their election, without wasting any votes.

A party cannot allocate its votes efficiently if more than the optimal number of party members join the race. The number of party votes is finite, and if they are spread too thinly among a large number of candidates, fewer will be elected. Thus, one criterion for judging a party’s organizational success is whether or not it is able to control its members’ entry into the competition. For example, the KMT did a good job of controlling its members in 1991, when only 2.4 percent of the KMT members who registered as candidates did so without the party’s authorization. What is more, these unauthorized (or “maverick”) candidates took a mere 1 percent of their party’s total votes, because the KMT made sure the mavericks did not take votes from its official nominees. In 1992, in contrast, the KMT had a much more difficult time: one-fourth of the KMT candidates in the race were mavericks.

Brown, Moon and Robinson have developed another method for evaluating a party’s popularity, controlling for the vagaries of the SVMM system.25 They compare the ratio of candidates each party nominated to the ratio of votes it received. The DPP cannot nominate as many candidates as the KMT, both because its estimated vote share is lower, and so more nominations would be counter-productive, and because it has fewer potential candidates to recruit. However, we would not want to say that the DPP enjoys no popularity in a district in which it had no candidates, even if the lack of a candidate meant that it received no votes. To account for this phenomenon, Brown et al. look to see how the DPP’s vote share compares to its candidate share. For example, in the municipal council elections held in January 1996, the DPP won only one-third as many votes as the KMT. However, when we consider the fact that the
DDP also nominated only one-third as many candidates as the ruling party, its vote share changes from lackluster to quite respectable.

Another measure of a party's organizational effectiveness is the success rate of its nominees. A party that estimates its strength accurately, nomi- nates the optimal number of candidates and makes the most of the votes available to it will see a higher proportion of its nominees take office. In 1991, 86 percent of KMT nominees were elected, compared to 45 percent of DDP nominees and 2 percent of independents. Looking at a party's seat bonus also is informative, since the seat bonus measures a party's success in translating raw votes into representation in government. The KMT's large seat bonus in 1991 — it captured 78 percent of the contested seats with only 71 percent of the votes cast — indicates that the KMT distributed its votes more effectively than its opponents.

A more subtle way to evaluate a party's effectiveness at mobilizing votes would be to look at whether or not each candidate's votes were concentrated in his or her "responsibility zone." Liu I-chou analyzed the results of the 1989 legislative election in Taipei City's district and found that the KMT candidates who participated in the responsibility zone system won significantly more votes inside their zones than outside. The candidates' votes were within their responsibility zones between 1.5 times and 6.2 times as high as their votes outside their zones (the average was 2.9). This represented a substantial deterioration in the responsibility zone system's effectiveness since 1980, when Taipei's legislative candidates won, on average, more than eight times as many votes inside their responsibility zones as outside. Liu's method works well for evaluating the effectiveness of mobilization in small areas, but it would be difficult to apply at the national level.

A less detailed — but more manageable — approach would be to compare the parties' overall patterns of vote distribution. If each candidate ran as an individual, we might expect the distribution of votes among candidates to be roughly normal; that is, a few candidates would get very few votes, a few candidates would get many votes, and most candidates would fall somewhere in between. But in the SMM system, political parties strive to distribute the votes available to them as evenly as possible. Thus, the distribution that maximizes the number of seats a party can win is one in which all candidates receive about the same number of votes. Candidates who score too low will lose; candidates who score too high may lose votes that could have gone to less secure members of their party.

The frequency distributions in Figure 2.1 illustrate successful and unsuccessful results. Ideally, all the candidates would finish at or just above the minimum number needed for election (the quota). Graphically,

![Figure 2.1 Ideal outcome versus poor outcome in SNTV-MMD elections](image)

this distribution would look like the "max" bar in Figure 2.1 (one tall bar in the middle of the graph). On the other hand, if a party were completely incapable of allocating votes among its candidates, instead of concentrating its votes near the percentage needed to win, it would spread them all over — with some candidates losing, some winning, and many votes wasted at both ends. This scenario is illustrated by the "min" bars in Figure 2.1. Of course, an even worse distribution would be to have all of the party's votes concentrated at the very low end; however, the flat distribution in Figure 2.1 is closer to the distributions parties achieve in reality. In short, the tighter the curve, the better the distribution approximates the ideal. As Figure 2.2 shows, the KMT's distribution of votes in the 1991 National Assembly election resembles the ideal much more closely than does the DPP's. The KMT's votes are concentrated just above the quota needed for election. The DPP's vote distribution is flatter, so we know that it distributed its votes less efficiently than the KMT.

Japanese colonial rule introduced Taiwan to elections, but the form those elections took was problematic. Single nontransferable voting in multi-member districts brought the colonial authorities' indigenous opponents into the political system and introduced them to electoral competition, but it also splintered them into local factions and
encouraged localism and patronage. The Nationalist regime inherited the SVMM system, along with its advantages and short-comings. The rules of the electoral system profoundly shaped Taiwan’s politics, not always in expected ways. As Chen and Lin write,

After the KMT transferred to Taiwan, it could not avoid compromising with the local factions, but it also used the existing system to monopolize power. However, paradoxically, during the subsequent democratization and Taiwanization of power, this system made it difficult for the KMT to unify the local factions, which gradually reduced its supremacy in elections.⁵⁰