

Partisan Issue Competition in Contemporary Taiwan: Is Taiwan's Democracy Dead?

1. Introduction: From optimism to pessimism?

In 2006, Taiwan celebrated the twentieth anniversary of its multi-party politics. Over the last two decades, the Taiwanese party system has seen change and much continuity. During the 1990s, Taiwan was hailed first as a model of democratic transition and then as a polity of the road towards democratic consolidation. It was described as the “First Chinese Democracy.”[1] A crucial aspect of the inter-party politics of the 1990s was competition over political issues. Unlike the issue-less and candidate centred campaigns common in many new democracies, Taiwan's parties did engage in vigorous debate over policy issues at election time. After initially focusing on the single and divisive national identity issue, the parties gradually shifted to competing on multiple issue dimensions, including socio-economic issues such as corruption and social welfare. Another positive change in the island's partisan issue competition in the 1990s was a gradual shift away from extremist positions towards more moderate stances. However, the parties did not converge into indistinguishable catchall parties. Instead, research showed how the parties competed in a state of “moderate differentiation,” in which “although the main parties moved towards a moderate centre and ideological distance between parties has reduced, the parties consistently stress different issues and the public are able to distinguish between parties on core issues.”[2] In short, by the end of the 1990s, the Taiwanese parties' issue competition meant that they increasingly resembled their counterparts in advanced western democracies.

There has been a sea change in the state of inter-party politics in Taiwan since the change in ruling parties in 2000. The positive assessments of Taiwan's party system have been replaced by a deep sense of pessimism. Its political system appears to be facing unprecedented crises. The opposition parties' tactics and failure to accept the result of the 2004 presidential election have severely undermined the legitimacy of Taiwan's democracy and judiciary. Taiwan has also experienced its worst political violence since the late 1980s.[3] A common view is that the main parties are becoming more radical. According to the political scientist Stanley Rosen, “The most striking thing to me about society in Taiwan today is the polarization that exists. The polarization exists between the two major groups of parties and the hardcore supporters of the two parties.”[4] The inter-party relationship has reached an all time low, as there seems to be little space for negotiation or compromise. The year 2006 saw the island's first attempts to depose the president using a recall vote, with the opposition accusing the president, Chen Shui-bian and his family members of corruption.[5] In a sign of declining trust in democratic institutions, anti government demonstrators carried slogans claiming that Taiwan's “Democracy is Dead.”[6]

This study examines whether the pessimistic verdict on the state of Taiwan's party politics is exaggerated. Political propaganda data from before and after the change of ruling parties in 2000 is analysed and compared to answer the following questions:

- 1) Do the parties still fight elections on issues?
- 2) Do the parties still compete on multiple issue dimensions?
- 3) Are the parties still distinguishable in their issue emphasis?
- 4) Are the parties still moving towards the centre on core issues?

The objective is to test whether the positive trends in inter-party issue competition present in the 1990s still feature in the current party system. If the answer to the above four questions is negative, then the island's designation as having a "healthy state of inter-party competition" must be called into question.[7] These four questions have important implications for the island's democracy. Fighting elections on issues and offering voters distinct issue positions are key features of democratic party politics. In the words of Ian Budge and Judith Bara, "In this process manifestos and platforms play a central part, giving voters an indication of what parties would do if elected and thus offering them a basis for informed policy choice. The essential democratic requirements for an electoral mandate policy are that there are some differences between parties so that electors can make a choice; and that once elected the party will do more or less what it promised to do when in government." [8] The alternative is issue-less personality centred campaigns or contests between identical catchall parties.

Fighting elections on issues in itself is no guarantee of stable party competition. Where competition is concentrated on a single and highly divisive issue, such as national identity, democratic consolidation will be hard to achieve. Democratic theorists have argued that a consensus on national identity issues is a pre-requisite for transition and that multiple cross cutting issue cleavages are conducive for democratic consolidation.[9] Lastly, democratic consolidation will be unlikely if the parties become highly polarized and abandon the centre ground.

2. Data and methodology

The main dataset used for this study is a content analysis of the main parties' election newspaper advertisements. Advertisements were collected for thirty one days prior to voting day and from the three newspapers with the highest readership: China Times, United Daily News and Liberty Times. The parties covered in this analysis are the Kuomintang (KMT), Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and New Party (NP) in the 1990s and the KMT, DPP, NP, People First Party (PFP) and Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) in the post 2000 period. Only official advertisements issued by the party centre or the parties' presidential campaign headquarters have been included in this analysis. The elections analysed are presidential, legislative and local executive (county magistrates and city mayors) contests between 1992 and 2005.

The content analysis employed is a revised version of the Manifesto Research Group coding scheme.[10] This has previously been used both for the analysis of Taiwanese candidates' election pledges and election advertisements. In the coding process, each issue mention is coded into one of 72 issue categories. In the first stage of the analysis, the proportion of issue mentions related to each issue category is calculated for each advertisement. Then these figures are used to find the average issue mentions for each category for the party during the entire campaign. For instance, if the KMT had ten newspaper ads in one year and 25 percent of issue mentions in each ad called for greater welfare spending, then the KMT's average percentage of issue mentions for the category of welfare state expansion would be 25 percent. This data can thus reveal the relative party issue emphasis in a single campaign and issue emphasis change over time. Moreover, by using a version of the Manifesto Research Group coding scheme, the Taiwanese data can be compared with a wide range of other democracies.[11] In the final part of the study, the quantitative data is supplemented with a qualitative analysis of the parties' changing positions on the core political issues. Newspaper material is examined to test whether the parties have really become polarized since 2000.

3. Do the parties still fight elections on issues?

Tables 1-3 offer a comparison of the main patterns of party issue emphasis before and after the change in ruling parties in 2000. These show the combined top ten issues for the main parties in presidential, parliamentary and local executive elections in the 1990s and post 2000 period.

(Tables 1-3 about here)

In response to my initial research question of whether parties still fight elections on issues, there is no clear sign of a move away from issue based campaigning after 2000. This can be seen by comparing the proportion of issue mentions for issue and non-issue categories (such as party, candidate, uncategorizable, government competence categories) in Tables 1-3. While there is no significant change in the proportion of issue category mentions in parliamentary elections in the two periods, there was actually an increase in issue category mentions in local executive elections after 2000. There are more signs of variance in the data for the three presidential elections shown in Table 1. Compared to 2000, there was an increase in non issue category mentions and decrease in issue category mentions in 2004. Nevertheless, when 2004 is compared to 1996, it is clear that 2004 saw greater issue category emphasis and lower non issue category emphasis. In short, political issues still do receive considerable attention from the parties at all levels of elections.

4. Do the parties still compete on multiple issue dimensions?

Tables 1-3 can also assist in answering my second question of whether the parties have switched from competing on multiple issue dimensions in the 1990s to a singular emphasis on the divisive national identity question. The answer again is not straightforward, as these tables reveal a complex pattern of continuity and change.

It appears from Table 1 that national identity issues have played a dominant role in presidential issues, particularly in 1996 and 2004. Comparing the figures for 2000 with 2004 shows there is a significant shift away from socio-economic issues towards identity appeals. In 2000, both political corruption and welfare state expansion were among the top five stressed issues, while Taiwan independence: negative was the only identity issue in the top five. But four years later welfare was a minor issue and political corruption was only the eighth most stressed issue. The dominant position of identity in the campaign is clear from the fact that Taiwan nationalism and diluted Taiwan independence came first and third in the 2004 issue top ten.[12]

Since the Republic of China president constitutionally is primarily responsible for external relations it is not surprising that identity matters so much in presidential elections. It would be more disturbing if identity issues also dominate in parliamentary and local executive elections.

Table 2 shows that in parliamentary election there has been a significant shift away from multidimensional issue competition towards a narrow national identity focus since 2000. In the 1990s, socio-economic and democracy appeals appeared in the top ten issue table, with political corruption the most stressed issue of the decade. The only identity issues, diluted Taiwan independence and Taiwan independence: negative, came in seventh and tenth. In contrast, identity issues have predominated in parliamentary elections in the post 2000 period, with five such issue categories in the top ten. In fact, the only non identity issue categories in the top ten after 2000 were economic growth & prosperity and political stability.

Table 3 reveals that local executive elections before and after 2000 have been fought on multiple dimensions. In both periods, political corruption was the most stressed issue category. Other non identity issue categories featured prominently in both periods, though there has been a shift away from emphasis on women's issues and law & order in the 1990s to the economy and democracy since 2000. Although identity issues did play a part in local elections in the 1990s, they never dominated campaigns. In contrast, the post 2000 period has seen a rise in the salience of Taiwan nationalism, with the issue category coming third in the top ten.

We can summarise some critical trends from the data in Tables 1-3. Firstly, issues do remain important in Taiwanese election campaigns. Secondly, issue competition remains multi-dimensional in local executive and parliamentary elections, as political corruption, democracy and the economy all remain salient. However, the salience of non identity issues has been sliding since 2000. Thirdly, at all levels of election, there has been a shift towards a dominant position of national identity issues on the political agenda.

5. Are the parties still distinguishable in their issue emphasis?

Previously my research showed how during the 1990s Taiwan's parties were "talking past each other" in their issue emphasis. In other words, the parties displayed distinct issue emphasis, in which parties appeared to "own" issues.[13] Parties heavily emphasised favourable issues and attempted to steer clear of those issues that would be damaging and would favour their opponents. For instance, the NP and DPP tended to stress political corruption, while the KMT avoided the issue and attempted to shift the political agenda on to more favourable issues. In contrast, the KMT liked to stress economic issues, as it was able to take the credit for Taiwan's economic record. Thus the NP and DPP rarely mentioned the economy in the 1990s.

The next step in this research is to see if the parties have maintained their differentiation or merged into catchall parties. The state of party competition became far more complex in the post 2000 era, as while there were only three significant parties in the 1990s, since 2000 there have been up to five. However, since the third parties have rarely contested presidential or local executive elections, I look at change in these contests first.

(Table 4 about here)

Table 4 compares the top issue categories for the KMT and DPP in three presidential elections in 1996, 2000 and 2004. It is clear that compared to 1996, the two leading parties shared many core election appeals in both 2000 and 2004. This was due to the singular emphasis by the DPP's 1996 candidate Peng Ming-min on Taiwan independence and nationalism, while the KMT preferred to concentrate on its candidate Lee Teng-hui and his achievements in democratization and maintaining Taiwan's defacto independence. Nevertheless, in both 2000 and 2004 the similarities should not be exaggerated. When the data is examined in more detail quantitatively and qualitatively, the parties are clearly differentiated. In 2000, the KMT and DPP shared an emphasis on political corruption and welfare state expansion. However, the substantive content of these appeals was quite distinct. For instance, on the welfare issue, the DPP focused on calls for a universal pensions system. In contrast, the KMT clearly opposed pensions and concentrated on trumpeting its achievements of introducing the National Health Insurance scheme in the mid 1990s.[14] Similarly, the main parties shared an emphasis on Taiwan nationalism and diluted

Taiwan independence in 2004. However, the parties were wide apart in terms of the degree that these appeals were employed and in the actual content. These two identity issues came top of the DPP's issue top ten, compared to only fifth and seventh for the KMT. In addition, the principal component of the DPP's Taiwan independence appeal in 2004 was the referendums held simultaneously with the presidential election, while the KMT encouraged voters to boycott this experiment in direct democracy.

(Table 5 about here)

We see a markedly different picture at the level of local executive elections. Table 5 shows how in the 1990s the parties really were talking past each other in local elections. The DPP dominated emphasis on political corruption and women's issues and had distinctive appeals on welfare, social justice and environmental protection. In contrast, the KMT concentrated on its government ability and economic achievements and argued that a change in ruling parties would mean war, political instability and economic recession. In the post 2000 period, the main parties' appeals in local executive elections have been far less distinctive, sharing an emphasis on political corruption, the economy and showing their love for Taiwan. For instance, the style of the KMT and DPP's anti-corruption campaigns in 2005 were almost identical. Both parties carried half page ads with pictures of allegedly corrupt politicians from the other side and slogans equating their opponents with corruption. A KMT ad showed a \$1000 bill (issued by the Vulture Bank) with pictures of Chen Shui-bian, Frank Hsieh (DPP Premier) and corruption linked political allies such as Chen Che-nan.[15] The ad carried the slogan, "They love bank notes, we have votes." [16] Another anti-corruption KMT ad also made the link between the DPP and corruption, calling on voters to join their anti corruption rally to "Stand Up! End the Green Black Gold System!" [17] In response, a DPP ad showed the pictures of eight KMT corruption linked local executive candidates and asked, "Chairman Ma, can they take part in the KMT's anti corruption rally?" [18]

(Table 6-7 about here)

Table 6 and 7 show the top issues for the main parties in parliamentary election in the 1990s and the post 2000 period respectively. A comparison of the two tables reveals a number of trends. Firstly, as shown in the overall statistics, Taiwan's parties have generally stressed political issues in both eras. The only exception has been the PFP, which has tended to take vague issue positions and concentrate on the appeal of its party image and party leader, Soong Chu-yu. Secondly, these two tables confirm the earlier finding that Taiwan's parties competed on multiple issue dimensions in both eras, but the balance between national identity and socio-economic issues is shifting in favour of the former. Thirdly, despite the proliferation of parties since 2000, the main parties do remain clearly differentiated in their issue emphasis. However, while in the 1990s, the parties were clearly distinguishable on both national identity and a wide range of other social and political issues, since 2000, the party differentiation is essentially a difference on the national identity spectrum. Therefore, the NP dominates opposition to Taiwan independence, is the most enthusiastic about Chinese identity symbols and closer relations with the Chinese mainland. The TSU also has dominated issue emphasis areas, but at the opposite end of the spectrum. With Taiwan independence and Taiwan nationalism its main appeals, the TSU stands in stark contrast to the more cautious approach of the DPP. National identity is also central to the campaign

appeals of the two leading parties. Nevertheless, as the vast majority of voters take more moderate positions on the identity issue, the KMT and DPP need to tone down their rhetoric to win elections.[19] Thus the KMT would see no contradiction in combining Chinese and Taiwan nationalist appeals, as so many voters admit to dual national identity. Similarly, mainstream parties appear content to delegate the unification versus independence debate to the extremist parties. Thus the KMT and DPP rarely raise independence today, but are more comfortable using nationalist symbolic appeals, such as the February 28 Incident for the DPP and Chiang Ching-kuo for the KMT.

6. Are the parties still moving towards the centre on core issues?

Now I come to the fourth and final of my research questions. Have the parties continued the convergent movement of the 1990s or are they becoming more polarized? To answer this question I refer back to the newspaper data but also supplement this with a number of issue cases to show whether the parties are displaying increasing ideological distance or proximity.

Although it was not always evident at the time, the 1990s was a period in which Taiwan's parties moved from polarized to more moderate positions. The occasional brawls in the Legislative Yuan and the instances of extremist identity positions by the DPP in 1991 and 1996 were the exception rather than the rule in that decade. Voter punishment of these extremist positions forced the parties towards the political centre on all the core issues. In the 1990s, there were numerous instances of successful consensual politics. Particularly remarkable were the cross-party consensuses reached on formerly highly controversial constitutional issues at the 1990 National Affairs Conference and the 1996 National Development Conference.[20]

My discussion of the parliamentary election issue emphasis trends shown in Table 7 has shown some preliminary answers to the question of post 2000 party movement. By emphasising what I term pure Taiwan independence, in other words calling for a defacto declaration of Taiwan independence, the TSU is locating itself at a similar extreme position to that taken disastrously by the DPP in 1991. A comparison of the NP's emphasis trends in the 1990s and post 2000 period reveal that the party has become more extreme in recent years. While in the 1990s, the NP mixed its identity appeals with an anti-corruption message, since 2000 it has focussed exclusively on radical Chinese nationalism. From Tables 4-6 it is not clear whether the KMT and DPP have become more polarized on the core issues, as national identity issues have featured prominently in their top tens in both periods. Thus a more detailed examination is required. This is achieved by examining party movement and positions on a number of critical political issues in the post 2000 period.

Cases of convergence and divergence.

The case studies of the post 2000 period reveal that though there were cases of both convergence and divergence of party position in the first Chen Shui-bian term, since 2004, partisan polarization has been an undeniable trend. The cross cutting issue cleavages of the 1990s have been replaced by a pattern of issue competition in which the parties ally in two distinctive political blocs on almost all issues. The Pan Blue bloc incorporates the KMT, PFP and the NP, while the Pan Greens are the DPP and TSU. In this new party system consensual politics has become a rarity. Instead, inter-party bloc relations have become highly antagonistic and at times even violent.

The case of the construction of the Fourth Nuclear Power station set a precedent for polarization of party politics in the Chen Shui-bian era. The issue had already been controversial in the 1990s. In that decade, the DPP and NP worked together to try to block the KMT administration's promotion of this project. In fact the DPP and NP were even able to win a vote in the legislature in 1996 that at least temporarily halted the project.[21] Although the two parties were poles apart on the identity issue, they actually shared an anti-nuclear party platform. In the 2000 presidential election, the DPP's Chen Shui-bian had pledged to prevent the construction of the Fourth Nuclear power station if he won election. However, when the DPP administration stated its intention to suspend work on the new power station in late 2000, the NP joined the other Pan Blue parties in opposing the move. The Pan Blues even threatened to recall the president if he did not order a resumption of construction. Eventually the DPP backed down and construction was resumed in spring 2001.[22] The case shows how the pattern of issue competition has been transformed since 2000. An important cross cutting cleavage had been lost, as nuclear power became another issue that followed the Pan Blue/Green divide.

The cross-party consensus that was achieved on relaxing economic restrictions on trade and investment with mainland China at the 2001 Economic Development Conference has been compared with similar conferences of the 1990s. All parties agreed that Lee Teng-hui's formula which required businesses to "Go Slow, Be Patient" in their dealings with mainland China should cease to be government policy. However, the comparison between this conference and those of the 1990s should not be taken too far. The scope of the 2001 conference was far more limited than the earlier models. When the DPP government organized a similar consensus seeking convention, the Conference on Sustaining Taiwan's Economic Development in 2006, the event was boycotted first by the Pan Blue parties and later even the TSU.[23] While in the 1990s, the opposition parties had been united in steering clear of the economy, after 2004 it appeared to have become another addition to the list of divisive issues.

One of the most controversial social issues in the 1990s was whether or not to offer universal pensions.[24] After initially facing united KMT and NP opposition to the DPP proposals for universal pensions in 1993-4, the issue became cross-cutting. At times the DPP and KMT joined in support of pensions, and at others the KMT and NP blocked DPP pensions proposals.[25] However, during the post 2000 period a consensus was finally reached and in 2002 a Pensions Bill was passed with cross-party support.[26] In the 1990s, Lien Chan and Soong Chu-yu had been among the KMT's most vocal opponents of pensions, but in the 2004 presidential campaign they even tried to outbid the DPP on pensions, promising even higher pensions.[27] The 2002 Pensions Bill effectively took the issue off the agenda. While it was wonderful news for millions of old aged citizens, it has its political costs. It removed an important cross-cutting political issue from the agenda, thus contributing to the domination of national identity and division of party competition into two blocs.

There have been some successes in achieving political and constitutional reforms in the post 2000 period, however; once again these were far more limited in their scope and periods of cross camp cooperation far briefer than in the 1990s. In November 2003, the KMT surprised many observers by passing a Referendum Law.[28] The DPP had been calling for referendum legislation since the late 1980s, and this was widely seen both in Taiwan and abroad as a component of Taiwan independence. The provisions of this law were highly restrictive and meant that the government

would need the approval of a Pan Blue dominated committee to hold a meaningful referendum. The DPP used a loophole in the law allowing a referendum at a time of national security threat, calling two referendums on the same date as the presidential election on matters of military procurement and cross-strait negotiations. Without doubt, the DPP was using the new referendum law as a political mobilization tool for the 2004 presidential election, and in many ways this was its primary election issue appeal. The KMT could have taken a conciliatory approach and supported the referendum, as the KMT could have no real objection to the referendum questions.[29] Such an approach would have removed the issue from the agenda and detracted from the DPP's election campaign. Instead, the KMT instructed its supporters to boycott the referendum. Although this enabled the referendum to fail to reach the required 50 percent of the electorate turnout, it gave the impression of polarized parties and that the KMT was anti-democratic, thus helping the DPP to increase support significantly.

The KMT took a similar polarizing approach to the 2004 February 28 Hand in Hand rally. The rally was aimed to demonstrate Taiwan's unity in the face of the mainland missile threat and involved a human chain linking the far north to the far south of the island.[30] As with the referendum, the KMT could have joined this rally. This would have not only promoted more consensual politics, it would have nullified the DPP's use of the rally as a political mobilizing tool. The KMT was moving away from its stance in the 1990s, when it attempted to make February 28 a non partisan issue. While Lee Teng-hui was president, he joined the DPP in commemorating the February 28 Incident every year, apologized for the incident, approved a victim compensation package and even claimed to have been a victim himself.[31] Moreover, in 1996 the KMT has made its resolution to stand up to PRC military threats a central point in its presidential campaign. Thus the Pan Blue and Green campaign tactics in 2004 again reinforced the appearance of increasing ideological distance.

The events of the 2004 presidential election and its immediate aftermath also widened the partisan divide at both elite and mass levels. The central plank of the KMT's presidential campaign was personal attacks on Chen Shui-bian. For instance, the slogan of its largest pre election rally was "Change the president, save Taiwan." [32] In its propaganda, the KMT associated Chen with some of the most notorious dictators and terrorists, such as Hitler, Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein.[33] By concentrating on the personality of the opponent rather than offering a platform of what the KMT would do once in power, the KMT stoked up a passionate hatred of Chen among its supporters and politicians that has contributed to the increasingly antagonistic state of party politics in Chen's second term.

Although on position issues the parties did not seem particularly far apart in 2004, there was a polarization of personalities exacerbating inter-party tensions. This was a major factor in the serious cases of violence involving Pan Blue politicians and supporters following the DPP's narrow and controversial victory. Particularly serious were Pan Blue attacks on the Central Election Commission and the Kaohsiung District Court. In the latter case, the PFP legislator Chiu Yi directed his campaign truck to attempt to ram through the court's iron gates.[34] Such violent antics and the Pan Blue failure to accept the results of the recount and court judgement that upheld the election result reinforced the polarized party image.

The most remarkable instance of cross-party consensus in the second Chen administration was the

constitutional reform of the electoral system passed by the National Assembly in 2005. This approved the replacement of the single member non-transferable vote in a multi-member district electoral system that has been used in Taiwan since the Japanese colonial era. The new single member district two vote system will come into effect for the first time in the 2007 legislative elections. Equally controversial was the provision in this package to halve the total number of legislators from 225 to 113. All parties supported the passage of the legislative bill in the summer of 2004. Then in the 2005 National Assembly election, this reform issue saw the KMT and DPP united in support of the new system against the TSU and PFP's opposition. This was perhaps the only instance in the post 2000 period in which the KMT and DPP worked together as allies against the challenger parties. However, as with the referendum law and the Economic Development Conference, this instance of consensus was limited in scope and very short lived. It came at a time when the main parties were deeply divided on other issues and thus as soon as the reform was passed the polarized two bloc pattern of competition resumed. The DPP and TSU are promoting either a new constitution or significant revisions to the existing constitution, but the current KMT leadership has ruled out further revisions in the near future. While in the 1990s, the KMT actually promoted extensive constitutional reform, in recent years, the KMT leaders have come to associate further such reforms with Taiwan independence. Therefore, though the DPP and even some KMT politicians propose more constitutional change, these programs appear doomed to failure. The divisive nature of the issue can be attributed to the way that Chen increasingly framed constitutional reforms in partisan and identity terms. The resulting divisions and stalemate are very unfortunate as the political system has a number of serious flaws that have contributed to the political instability of the post 2000 period.[35]

Relations with China are another arena where the parties in the two blocs have been diverging since 2004. This was an area where the main parties had actually been moving closer together since 1995 and even for much of Chen's first term. By the late 1990s, the DPP and KMT appeared to have reached a tacit consensus that Taiwan was a de-facto independent state. The critical turning point on this issue came with the passage of the PRC's Anti Secession Law in March 2005. This law calls for military action to protect China's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Thus in the event of Taiwan independence or if possibilities for a peaceful reunification were exhausted force should be used.[36] This was an occasion when inter-party consensus could have been achieved if the main blocs had put up a united position on the threat of the Anti-Secession Law. However, partisan differences meant that the Pan Blue parties boycotted the Pan Green rally opposed to the new law. The KMT and PFP leaders Lien Chan and Soong Chu-yu's visits to the PRC and face to face meetings with CCP leaders highlighted these divisions between Pan Blue and Green parties. The public statements made by Lien and Soong in China revealed how far the Pan Blue parties had moved away from the centre on the question of relations with China.[37] Neither Lien nor Soong criticized the Anti Secession Law while in China, thus it seemed that they accepted the law. Both Lien and Soong agreed to work together with the PRC against Taiwan independence and accepted the need to conduct relations with the PRC under a one China framework. Also both were openly critical of Taiwan's democracy and Lien even praised China's very limited village level elections. Although these visits did help to reduce cross-Strait tensions in the immediate aftermath of the Anti Secession Law, domestically they served to widen the gulf between the parties.

During the KMT's five decades controlling Taiwan's central government it was able to acquire a

massive business and real estate empire. These are commonly referred to as the KMT party assets. These assets gave the party a substantial financial advantage in running election campaigns against opposition parties once democratic elections commenced. The assets were defended as legitimate by the KMT in the mid 1990s, against DPP accusations that they constituted a form of political corruption.[38] The KMT first acknowledged the need to reform its assets at the 1996 National Development Conference and in the 2000 presidential campaign Lien Chan promised to end KMT involvement in profit making businesses. However, the parties began to diverge on the issue after 2000. Little progress has been made on Lien's pledge by either Lien or his successor Ma Ying-jeou. Only a limited amount of real estate has been returned by the KMT to the state, and the party failed to cooperate fully with a Control Yuan investigation into its assets in 2001. Instead, the party has been more interested in selling off its assets for profit. The change in the KMT's position is clear, as it is once again openly defending the legality of its assets, referring to them as "a legacy of history." [39] The DPP has been consistent in attacking the KMT failure to deal with its assets. In almost every election, the DPP continues to raise the issue of the party assets as a tool to discredit the KMT. In 2006, the DPP attempted to initiate a national referendum on forcing the KMT to return its "ill gotten assets" to the people.[40]

The final area that the main parties have become polarized is on military procurement. During the 1990s, there was cross-party consensus that Taiwan needed to purchase advanced military technology to have the capability to fend off a mainland attack. However, this has also become a hotly disputed partisan issue during Chen's presidency. In 2001, President Bush approved an extensive arms purchase package for Taiwan. However, by including the question of military procurement in the 2004 referendum, the DPP turned this into another divisive partisan issue. In fact, as of October 24, 2006, the KMT and PFP have blocked the government arms bill a total of 58 times.[41] The Pan Blue and Green parties have mobilized their supporters in large rallies opposing or supportive of the military procurement packages. The Pan Blues have claimed that they are trying to prevent a cross-Strait arms race and argue that the referendum failure make these purchases unconstitutional. This blocking tactic has enraged its natural allies both in the ROC military and in the US, and it should not be forgotten that much of this package had been on the KMT government's arms wish list in the 1990s. The comments of KMT legislator Shuai Hua-ming after the latest defeat of the arms bill reflect the divisiveness of this once consensual issue, "The bill has been entangled with too much partisan interest. I can't stand it anymore that we would sacrifice national security for party interests." [42]

6. Conclusion

In previous studies, I have taken an optimistic view of the state of Taiwanese party politics. While I still believe that analysis was valid for the 1990s and the early years of the Chen Shui-bian administration, recent developments cast doubt on the health of Taiwanese democracy. Positive elements of inter-party issue competition present in the 1990s, such as the multi-dimensional issue agenda, cross cutting issue cleavages, convergent party movement and consensual politics no longer feature in the post 2004 era. Instead, parties are increasingly concentrating political debate on the single narrow and divisive national identity issue. Equally worrying has been the increasingly polarized positions on this core dimension and a range of other formerly non-partisan issues. The electoral tactics of all major parties have produced the current high levels of inter-party hostility. Many observers had hoped the replacement of Lien Chan with Ma Ying-jeou as KMT chair in 2005 would facilitate a more cooperative and rational inter-party relationship.

Unfortunately, tensions have actually become greater than ever since 2005. It remains to be seen whether the 2008 presidential election and new single member district system for legislative elections can limit the space for extremists and push the main parties towards more moderate approaches. Claims that “Taiwan’s democracy is dead” are exaggerations. Nevertheless, unless Taiwan’s party leaders can find a way to reduce inter-party antagonism and recover trust in political institutions, the island’s democratic consolidation will be in serious jeopardy.

[1] See Linda Chao and Ramon Myers, *The First Chinese Democracy: Political Life in the Republic of China* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins Press, 1998).

[2] Dafydd Fell, *Party Politics in Taiwan: Party Change and the Democratic Evolution of Taiwan, 1991-2004* (London: Routledge, 2005), 2.

[3] For instance, when Pan Blue and Pan Green supporters clashed at the Chiang Kai Shek International Airport in April 2005. See Ko Shu-ling, “Journey of peace starts violently,” *Taipei Times*, April 27, 2005, 1.

[4] Dan Sanchez, “The Taiwan Policy Challenge and Status Quo Conundrum (Part IV),” *Epoch Times*, June 6, 2006, <http://www.theepochtimes.com/news/6-6-19/42930.html> (accessed October 15, 2006).

[5] At the time of writing, 2006 had already seen two failed recall votes against the president. See Flora Wang and Shih Hsiu-chuan, “Second recall motion fails,” *Taipei Times*, October 14, 2006, 1.

[6] See Huang Tai-lin and Joy Su, “Chen replies to Pan Blue rally request,” *Taipei Times*, March 28, 2004, 1.

[7] Dafydd Fell, *Party Politics in Taiwan*, 2

[8] Ian Budge and Judith Bara, “Introduction: Content Analysis and Political Texts,” in *Mapping Policy Preferences: Estimates for Parties, Electors, and Governments 1945-1998*, ed. Ian Budge, Han-Dieter Klingemann, Andreas Volkens, Judith Bara and Eric Tanenbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1-18, 9.

[9] Dankwart Rustow, “Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model,” *Comparative Politics*, 2 (3), April 1970: 337-363; Chu Yun-han and Lin and Lin Tse-min, “The Process of Democratic Consolidation in Taiwan: Social Cleavage, Electoral Competition and the Emerging Party System,” in *Taiwan’s Electoral Politics and Democratic Transition*, ed. Tien Hung-mao (Armonk: ME Sharpe, 1996), 79-104, 80.

[10] For details of the original Manifesto Research Group coding scheme see Appendix 3, in *Mapping Policy Preferences*, 219-229; For the revised scheme used in the Taiwan case see Fell, *Party Politics in Taiwan*, Appendix 1.

[11] For instance, in a previous study I compared Taiwan’s parties’ emphasis on political corruption and social welfare with Japan. See Dafydd Fell, *Party Change and the Democratic Evolution of Taiwan*, PhD Dissertation, University of London (2003), figure 3.3 and 4.3.

[12] In the coding scheme I distinguish between pure and diluted Taiwan independence. Pure Taiwan independence incorporates appeals such as for a formal declaration of Taiwan independence or a Republic of Taiwan. Diluted Taiwan independence refers to more moderate appeals, such as references to maintaining Taiwan’s de-facto independence, opposition to unification and support for pragmatic diplomacy. For details see Fell, *Party Politics in Taiwan*, 87.

[13] See Dafydd Fell, “Party Platform Change in Taiwan’s 1990s Elections,” *Issues and Studies*, 38, no. 2 (2002): 31-60.

- [14] See Fell, *Party Politics in Taiwan*, 38-45.
- [15] Chen Che-nan, the former presidential office deputy secretary general, was accused of corruption in relation to the Kaohsiung metro construction project.
- [16] *China Times*, November 28, 2005, A5.
- [17] *China Times*, November 26, 2005, A7
- [18] *Liberty Times*, November 27, 2005, A5.
- [19] Opinion polls show how the majority of voters are located in the middle on the unification versus independence and Taiwanese or Chinese self identification spectrums. See National Chengchi University, Election Study Center, "Important Political Attitude Distribution," available at <http://esc.nccu.edu.tw/eng/data/data03.htm> (accessed October 27, 2006).
- [20] For details on the 1990 National Affairs Conference see Chao and Myers, *The First Chinese Democracy*, 197-215. For details on the National Development Conference see Linda Chao, Ramon Myers and James Robinson, "Promoting Effective Democracy, Chinese Style: Taiwan's National Development Conference," *Asian Survey*, 37, no. 7 (1997): 669-682.
- [21] See Lin Chia-long, *Paths to Democracy: Taiwan in Comparative Perspective*, PhD dissertation, Yale University (1998), 442.
- [22] For a discussion of the Fourth Nuclear Power Station controversy and environmental policy under Chen Shui-bian see Linda Arrigo and Gaia Puleston, "The Environmental Movement after 2000: Advances and Dilemmas," in *What has Changed? Taiwan Before and After the Change in Ruling Parties*, eds. Dafydd Fell, Henning Klöter and Chang Bi-yu (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 165-186.
- [23] Jessie Ho, "Economic conference generates much disillusion," *Taipei Times*, July 29, 2006, 12.
- [24] For a discussion of the electoral politics of social welfare in Taiwan see Fell, *Party Politics in Taiwan*, 28-54.
- [25] For instance, in 1995 the DPP proposed an amendment to the Farmers' Insurance Law, which would have given aged farmers an annual allowance. This proposal was initially supported by the NP and some KMT legislators. However, in 1997, the NP and KMT allied to defeat a DPP universal pensions bill.
- [26] Crystal Hsu, "Seniors to get pensions," *Taipei Times*, May 11, 2002, 2.
- [27] *China Times*, March 1, 2004, A11. The KMT promised a pension of NT\$ 8,900 per month, compared to the existing rate of only NT\$ 3,000.
- [28] Fiona Lu, "Legislature passes referendum law," *Taipei Times*, November 28, 2003, 1.
- [29] In fact the KMT did not even take part in the televised debates on the two referendum questions.
- [30] Chang Yun-ping, "Two million rally for peace," *Taipei Times*, February 29, 2004, 1.
- [31] See Lee's biography: Henry Tsai, *Lee Teng-hui and Taiwan's quest for identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 67.
- [32] *China Times*, March 11, 2004, A10.
- [33] *China Times*, March 12, 2004, A7.
- [34] Chiu-Yu-tzu, "Kaohsiung mayor asks for calm," *Taipei Times*, March 21, 2004, 2.
- [35] For a discussion of these problems see Shelley Rigger, "The unfinished business of Taiwan's democratization," in *Dangerous Strait: The US-Taiwan-China crisis*, ed. Nancy Bernkopf Tucker (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 16-43: 25-41.
- [36] Joy Su, "MAC blasts law as an irrational act," *Taipei Times*, March 15, 2005, 1.
- [37] Caroline Hong, "Lien-Hu share vision for peace," *Taipei Times*, April 30, 2005, 1.

[38] For a review of the politics of political corruption in Taiwan see Fell, *Party Politics in Taiwan*, 55-84.

[39] KMT Press Release, "KMT responds to the Depose Chen headquarters promotion of party assets regulations," available at http://www.kmt.org.tw/category_3/category3_1_n.asp?sn=312 (accessed October 28, 2006.)

[40] "Assets referendum proposal submitted," *Taipei Times*, September 5, 2006, 3.

[41] Shih Hsiu-chuan, "KMT flip flops, joins the PFP in blocking arms budget," *Taipei Times*, October 24, 2006, 1.

[42] Shih Hsiu-chuan, "Li Ao gasses legislative meeting," *Taipei Times*, October 25, 2006, 1.