

Polarization Perception and Support for Democracy: The Case of Taiwan

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Abstract

Recently, the decline in support for democracy in consolidated democracies has gained substantial attention and provoked a heated scholarly debate (Foa and Mounk, 2016). As multiple reasons may contribute to explaining why citizens have lost faith in democratic systems, this article focuses on the linkage between political polarization and democratic support at the mass level. By using data from a recent survey conducted in Taiwan, we first construct two measures of party polarization—namely, the affective polarization score and perceived issue polarization score. While the former can be regarded as an identity-based polarization measure, the latter is a policy-based measure. Then, we explore the associations between the two polarization measures and various attitudes toward democracy. Our empirical findings suggest that Taiwanese people who have more diverse affects toward the two major parties are more likely to make a negative assessment of Taiwan's current and future democracy and be less supportive of the democratic system. However, people who perceive a greater issue polarization between the two major parties do not necessarily have more positive or negative attitudes toward democracy. As an implication for future democratic development, this analysis suggests that affective party polarization may be harmful to the health of democracy.

Keywords

Party polarization, democracy, affect, issue, Taiwan

Introduction

After the so-called third wave of democracy, democracy seems to be widely recognized worldwide as the best form of government. Based on Freedom House measures, both the number of democratic countries and the level of freedom worldwide have gradually increased since 1974. However, this increasing trend has stagnated or even reversed since 2005 (Diamond, 2015). A recent study using public opinion survey data has also shown that support for democracy has declined even in

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some consolidated democracies (Foa and Mounk, 2016). Such a phenomenon of democratic recession or retreat has become an important topic that has attracted numerous and various academic discussions.

Some scholars argue that the so-called democratic recession is just a myth that reflects past mistakes regarding the definition and measurement of a democratic transition—that is, the period of time during which authoritarian regimes temporarily give up power or simply tolerate political dissent should not be categorized (or coded) as a democratic transition (Levitsky and Way, 2015). On the other hand, some support the claim that a democratic recession has been happening and posit that the poor performance of democratic governments, particularly economic stagnation or prevailing corruption, damages people's faith in democracy. Additionally, an authoritarian regime such as China has consistently enjoyed rapid economic growth and become one of the great powers in the world over the past decades. The China model frustrates people's belief in democracy, particularly among the middle class (Kurlantzick, 2013). As Fukuyama (2015: 15) posits, for some democratic countries, the legitimacy of rule depends on their capability to provide high-quality governance rather than on their institutions that can deepen democracy. Plattner (2015) further concludes that three factors have contributed to the recent democratic recession: first, some democratic countries have failed to facilitate economic growth and political reform; second, authoritarian countries have demonstrated a seeming vitality and self-confidence; and third, democratic countries led by the United States have failed to maintain the geopolitical balance against their authoritarian counterparts, including China and Russia.

However, although the quality of governance may influence the legitimacy of democracy, government performance is supposed to be evaluated via objective criteria. If citizens evaluate government performance mainly based on, for example, their affects toward parties—that is, supporters of the ruling party are always satisfied with government performance while supporters of the opposition party are always not—it is not necessarily healthy for the development of democracy. In particular, affective partisanship becomes increasingly salient along with the increasing intensity of party competition. Kurlantzick (2013) argues that a series of confrontations between the “red shirt” and “yellow shirt” supporters in Thailand over the past few years can be regarded as a result of affective mobilization by political elites and may lead to the decay of democracy. In Taiwan, Chu et al. (2016) also show that the conflicts between the political elites of the “blue” and “green” camps during the Chen Shui-bian era had set a starting point for party polarization that has gradually influenced the attitudes and behaviors of party supporters since then.¹ While people in the blue camp simply reject everything proposed by the green camp and vice versa, policy confrontation between the two camps and policy gridlock seem to be inevitable. If such policy confrontation leads to affective confrontation between the camps of supporters, not only will policy consensus become hard to reach but democratic support could also be hampered. In other words, party polarization, to some extent, can be a challenge for Taiwan on its way toward democratic consolidation.

Thus, from the voters' perspective, does party polarization truly matter? Specifically, is there any linkage between polarization perceptions and democratic support? Using recent survey data, this article analyzes whether party polarization perceptions have any impact on one's assessment of democracy and support for democracy. Particularly, we pay special attention to the impact of affective party polarization on democratic support. Based on social identity theory, this article adopts the approach developed by Iyengar and his colleagues (Iyengar et al., 2012; Iyengar and Westwood, 2015) to measure one's affects toward copartisans and opposing partisans. Then, this “social distance” measurement can be regarded as a test of the affective polarization of partisans. In the section that follows, we address the literature on mass polarization and introduces the possible linkage between polarization perceptions and attitudes toward democracy. In subsequent sections we explain the methods and data, who the empirical findings, and provide a conclusion. In

short, our research question focuses on whether polarization perceptions affect Taiwanese support for democracy.

Literature review

The phenomenon of political polarization has attracted significant scholarly attention over the past few decades. Numerous empirical studies, starting from the field of American politics, have shown that political elites, particularly those in Congress, are clearly divided along the party line or ideological cleavage (Poole and Rosenthal, 1984; Theriault, 2008). The partisan confrontation at the elite level also influences the American electorate. That is, voters are also more likely to vote by partisan cues, and split ticket voting has significantly declined accordingly (Bartels, 2000; Weisberg and Christenson, 2007; Weisberg and Devine, 2010).

Beyond research on congressional politics and mass voting behavior, Abramowitz and his colleagues used survey data to investigate the ideological distribution of the mass public. Their findings suggest that although people who have less political engagement remain ideologically moderate, those who are highly engaged in politics tend to move toward the two ends of the ideological spectrum. As ideological positions coincide with partisan policy preferences, Democrats tend to move toward the liberal end, while Republicans tend to move toward the conservative end. The authors call the phenomenon “partisan-ideological polarization” and highlight “the disappearing center” as the American electorate has increasingly engaged in politics (Abramowitz, 2010, 2011; Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008). Thus, elite polarization could be regarded as a response to mass polarization and vice versa.

However, Fiorina and his colleagues refute Abramowitz’s mass polarization argument by also using survey data (Fiorina and Abrams, 2009, 2011; Fiorina and Levendusky, 2006; Fiorina, et al., 2008). Specifically, they show that the majority of American voters remain positioned at the center on various important issue dimensions. Fiorina emphasizes that the term mass polarization implies a bimodal distribution of public opinions. When the electorate is highly polarized, the ideological middle ground vanishes, and voters tend to cluster at the extremes rather than hold views toward the center. Fiorina and his colleagues then use the term “party sorting” to identify a divided but not polarized American electorate—that is, a clear line divides the general public into two distinct groups differentiated by partisanship. Either an ideological overlap between the two parties still exists, or the majority of the general public still holds a moderate, centrist position on the ideological spectrum, despite the divide between the parties themselves.

Some of the differences between Abramowitz’s and Fiorina’s arguments can be explained by their different uses of methods and data.² More importantly, they posit completely different concepts of polarization. Abramowitz’s (2006) definition of polarization includes the role of the party, and he argues that partisan conflicts in the law-making process deepen the ideological cleavage at the elite level and are then transformed at the mass level. On the other hand, Fiorina does not regard such a phenomenon as polarization unless the formation of bimodal distributions of ideological preferences as well as the disappearance of ideologically moderate views can be observed. A close alignment between partisanship and ideology, according to Fiorina, should be regarded as party sorting, not polarization. Brady and Han (2006) try to incorporate both arguments by including the two factors featuring policy distance and party coherence. Specifically, they argue that polarization means that the two parties are far apart from each other on the policy spectrum and that the two partisan blocks should be internally coherent. By examining recent survey data, Lupu (2015) verifies the association between party polarization and mass partisanship and finds that the greater the ideological distance between the two parties, the stronger the mass partisanship that can be observed.

In addition to the policy-based perspective, an alternative perspective based on social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) can also be adopted to understand political polarization. The definitional test of social identity requires not only a positive sentiment toward one's own group but also a negative sentiment toward those identifying with opposing groups. If party identification represents meaningful group affiliation, polarization can refer to the extent to which partisans view each other as a disliked out-group (Iyengar et al., 2012). Kimball and Gross (2007) find that voters' emotional feelings toward the two major presidential candidates are negatively associated and that the degrees of such negative correlations have increased over time, particularly among those who have high levels of political engagement. Likewise, partisan biases also exist when voters assess policies or candidate performances. Hetherington (2009, 2011) argues that even though the majority of American voters remain moderate on the ideological spectrum, they are more likely to take partisan perspectives to assess candidates and policies so that the animosity between the two parties becomes more salient.

Iyengar and his colleagues use longitudinal survey data to assess whether partisans' dislike of each other has risen since the 1960s. They find that in recent years, party supporters are more likely than they were before to hold negative feelings toward those who identify with the opposing party. As both Democrats and Republicans increasingly dislike and loathe their opponents, polarization is not caused by different policy preferences but by partisan identity. In particular, exposure to political campaigns that consistently attack the out-group and reinforce partisans' biased views of their opponents can be regarded as a potential contributory factor to such affective polarization (Iyengar et al., 2012). The media's portrait of political polarization not only shapes the public's perception of polarization but also reinforces the feeling of dislike toward the opposition party (Levendusky and Malhotra, 2018). Furthermore, recent experimental results also show that party cues exert powerful effects on nonpolitical judgments and behaviors (e.g. scholarship assessment) and have become intrusive in Americans' daily lives (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015). Given that partisan views have explicitly or implicitly penetrated almost all the decisions made by American voters, Iyengar and his colleagues conclude that mass polarization in the United States should be understood as affective polarization by party, not as ideological polarization as defined by either Abramowitz or Fiorina. In short, when hostile feelings for the opposing party are ingrained in voters' minds, affective polarization based on party seems to be inevitable.

Does any type of political polarization exist in Taiwan? Tsai et al. (2007) analyze the 2004 presidential election and find that Taiwanese voters are likely to polarize on the spectrum of national identity and future relations between Taiwan and mainland China. Arguably, the combination of presidential and referendum elections in that year helped mobilize the voters' moving toward the two ends of the spectrum. From the viewpoint of the political elite level, scholars in legislative politics have also found that party cohesion has been strengthened in the Legislative Yuan so that over the past decades, partisanship has become a more important cue for legislators' roll-call voting (Hawang, 2004; Sheng, 2008). Recently, the two party camps have competed against each other on some other issue dimensions beyond those related to cross-strait relations. In the law-making process of some significant legislations such as the "import of US beef" or "nuclear power planet" in President Ma Ying-jeou's era as well as "labor laws providing for one fixed and one flexible day off per week," "pension reforms," or the "Forward-Looking Infrastructure Plan" in President Tsai Ing-wen's era, the Kuomintang (KMT) and Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) have almost no common ground for making any compromise. The dynamic of party competition at Taiwan's elite level seems to suggest that the KMT always opposes the policy proposed by the DPP and vice versa.

Given the tension between the two major party camps at the elite level, are Taiwanese voters also polarized by parties? Previous empirical studies have identified two important features of

Taiwan's mass party polarization. First, we need to look at the unification–independence spectrum rather than the left-right or liberal-conservative ideological spectrum to identify Taiwan's mass party polarization. Second, mass polarization does not necessarily mean that the divided public moves toward the two ends of the unification–independence spectrum (Yu, 2016). In fact, the majority of people in Taiwan identify themselves in the middle of the unification–independence spectrum. Thus, the rise and fall of polarization in the electorate depends on the positions of the partisan supporters along the unification–independence spectrum under different administrations (Wang, 2019). Additionally, people who belong to one party camp almost always regard those who belong to the other party camp as moving toward the extreme position of the spectrum. As electoral campaigns tend to mobilize voters by emotion, the antagonism between the two party camps has gradually increased and facilitated party polarization (Hsiao, 2014; Hsiao and Cheng, 2014; Hsiao et al., 2017). While past studies used measures of issue positions or party feelings to identify the key features of mass polarization in Taiwan, there exist no further analyses regarding the extent to which polarization may help shape other political attitudes or behaviors.

What are the consequences of political polarization? In particular, is political polarization good or bad for the development of democracy? There is also considerable debate over whether polarization has positive or negative impacts on democracy. Somer and McCoy (2018) posit that political polarization can be regarded as a double-edged sword—that is, it can help deepen democracy on the one hand, but it may also cause backsliding and the decay of democracy on the other. From the viewpoint of policy or issue positions taken by parties or candidates, polarization may help voters differentiate one party/candidate from another given a wider gap between/across parties' policy or issue positions in the election. Given the clear policy positions taken by the parties in the election, voters become more informed and can accordingly more easily make their vote choices. Thus, polarization facilitates not only issue voting but also policy representation (Lachat, 2008; Levendusky, 2010). As a result of party polarization, a relatively high level of political participation and electoral stability could be reached, and a competitive party system is more likely to be consolidated (Hetherington, 2007; LeBas, 2018).

As to the situation after an election, polarization may increase the policy accountability of the election winner or the ruling party (Layman et al., 2006)—that is, the opposition parties can easily review the policy implementations of the ruling party and prevent the government from corruption if a better information disclosure system can be adopted (Brown et al., 2011). As argued by LeBas (2018), if a country's preexisting identity cleavages do not lead to formal group exclusion or differential citizenship rights and the country's power distribution is not strongly imbalanced, polarization may strengthen the democratic system, particularly in emerging democracies. Wang (2014) also finds a positive correlation between polarization and democratic development by using cross-national aggregate-level data—that is, the higher the level of polarization a country has, the higher the level of democracy it enjoys.³ In short, some empirical analyses using either individual- or aggregate-level data indeed show that political polarization can have positive impacts on democratic development.

However, in a two-party system, if both parties always take extreme positions on the two ends of the ideological spectrum, it will be difficult for both parties to reach any policy agreement. Then, public policies may change back and forth solely depending on which party is in charge. Additionally, in some cases that need bipartisan support, such as the Senate's confirmation of the nomination of the Supreme Court Justice in the United States, a gridlock that impairs the constitutional design could happen if one party always opposes the nomination made by the other. As a result, political polarization may have negative impacts on democracy, as it not only hampers the policy-making procedure but also erodes public trust in the government (Galston and Nivola, 2006). Scholars of comparative democracies have also pointed out that party polarization is almost

always associated with intense party confrontations. Excessive party competition is in fact not healthy for democratization. The German Weimar Republic and the French Fourth Republic, both examples of failing democracies, can be highlighted as uncontrolled political competition (Huntington, 1991; Lijphart, 1984; Powell, 1982; Sartori, 1976).

McCoy et al. (2018) regard polarization as a dynamic process and build a causal chain between polarization and democratic erosion. They find that in the polarization process of the electorate, the starting point could be the formation of two divisions based on any single-dimensional cleavage. The gap between the “us” group and the “them” group could be gradually enlarged due to affective opposition—that is, voters in one group grow sympathy and loyalty to their group members while they loathe those in the other group with growing antipathy and prejudice. Thus, the two groups are less likely to tolerate each other, and any consensus or negotiation between the two cannot be reached. Additionally, in the election, they tend to use negative and populist campaigns to mobilize their supporters. Through mass media rendering and exaggeration, affective polarization could be nothing but strengthened. As the cleavage dividing the two groups becomes increasingly deeper, the social distance between them becomes enlarged. While people in one group always possess a negative affect toward their counterparts, the two groups have no incentive to cooperate. Thus, political competition becomes a zero-sum game, and policy gridlock happens almost all the time. Such a phenomenon may deteriorate people’s trust in democracy. Furthermore, people may begin to use undemocratic extra-constitutional measures to consolidate their own groups and to punish the opposition. Eventually, democratic norms and institutions will be weakened under such circumstances. McCoy et al. review the recent democratic developments in four cases, including the United States, Hungary, Turkey, and Venezuela, to illustrate the abovementioned casual chain between political polarization and democratic erosion. Indeed, Venezuela, a long-term polarized society along with racial, economic, and social cleavages, was trapped in a constitutional crisis in early 2019, as each of the ruling and opposition camps only supported and legitimized its own president.

In short, we should be aware of different types of impacts of polarization on democracy. From the viewpoint of policy-based polarization, distinctive party positions on the policy spectrum indeed help voters rationally choose their preferred parties that are close to their ideal policy positions. Thus, polarization could improve the quality of democracy in terms of providing distinctive choices. However, from the viewpoint of identity-based polarization, if hostile feelings for the opposing party are automatic in both the politicians’ and voters’ minds, democracy could be impeded due to the lack of rational debates on policymaking. In this article, we use Taiwan as a case study to investigate the impacts of political polarization on democracy. Instead of using objective aggregate-level data, we use subjective individual-level survey data to examine the extent to which one’s perception of polarization affects his/her support for democracy in Taiwan. Specifically, we incorporate both identity-based and policy-based polarization indicators as well as different measures of attitudes toward democracy.

Data and methods

The survey data used in this study were collected via telephone interviews conducted by the Election Study Center at the National Chengchi University but commissioned by Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (i.e. Survey on Democracy Project). A total sample of 1597 independent cases was collected in January 2018, based on the survey population of adults over 20 years of age in Taiwan, except for those in Kinmen and Matsu.⁴

To answer our research question, we use multiple survey items to measure voters’ affects toward the KMT and DPP as well as their perceptions of the two parties’ positions on the unification–independence spectrum. After constructing measures for affective polarization (i.e. identity-based

polarization) and perceived issue polarization (policy-based polarization), we further examine the extent to which polarization perception affects the assessment of democracy and support for democracy.

The measurement of the key independent variable, polarization perception, includes two elements—one's affects toward the two major parties and perceptions of the parties' positions on the unification–independence spectrum. As mentioned earlier, the main focus of this study is guided by social identity theory. Thus, we assume that partisan cues are at the core of voters' thinking. As a result, their affects toward the parties and perceptions of parties' issue positions may exhibit a bipolar distribution. That is, voters tend to have strong positive sentiments toward the party they support while having strong negative sentiments toward the party they dislike. Regarding voters' perceptions of the parties' issue positions, we assume that due to their subjective assessments, they may consider their own positions to be close to their supported party; simultaneously, they may have a tendency to put the positions of their disliked party at the extreme end of the spectrum.

The questions about party support to inquire about people's tendencies to support the parties are as follows: "Among all political parties in our country, which party do you think of yourself as supporting?"; "Do you support the party very strongly or somewhat?"; and "Relatively speaking, do you lean toward any political party?" Then, KMT supporters, DPP supporters, and independents are classified into three categories. We exclude those respondents who support other parties due to the limited number of cases.

Regarding one's affects toward the two major parties, we adopt two questions to measure the respondents' negative affects toward the KMT and the DPP, respectively. The first question enquires about the degree of antipathy toward the two parties. The wording is as follows: "Using 0 to 10 to express the degree of antipathy toward a party: '0' represents that you do not feel antipathy toward the party at all; in contrast, a '10' means that you feel extremely antipathy toward the party. Which number do you want to give to the KMT and to the DPP?" The other question wording is as follows: "Using 0 to 10 to express the degree to which a party can be regarded as a threat to our country: a '0' represents that the party is not a threat to our country at all; in contrast, a '10' means that the party is a serious threat to our country. Which number do you want to give to the KMT and to the DPP?"

For these two questions, the larger the number a respondent gives to a party, the greater is the negative affect that he/she has toward the party. On the other hand, the smaller the number a respondent gives to a party, the lesser is the negative affect that he/she has toward the party. Additionally, we utilize these two measures to obtain the relative distance of one's negative affects toward the two parties, which is called the affective polarization score. Thus, a higher affective polarization score indicates that the respondent clearly differentiates one party from the other with respect to negative sentiments.

As to the questionnaire regarding the positions on the unification–independence issue, the wording is as follows: "Concerning the relationship between Taiwan and mainland China, which of the following six positions do you agree with: 1) immediate unification with mainland China, 2) immediate independence, 3) maintain the status quo and move toward unification with mainland China in the future, 4) maintain the status quo and move toward independence in the future, 5) maintain the status quo and decide on either unification or independence in the future, and 6) maintain the status quo forever." Additionally, a set of questions regarding the KMT/DPP positions are asked to see the relative distances between the respondent's position and the two parties'. The wording of the questions is as follows: "Please compare the position of the KMT/DPP with yours. Do you consider the KMT/DPP positioning as close to unification, independence, or the same position as yours?" In short, the entire set of the questionnaire not only measures the respondent's position but also regards the respondent as a center/reference point to calculate the relative differences between the two parties on the unification–independence spectrum. Thus, for example, when

Table 1. Respondents' affects toward KMT and DPP.

		Antipathy toward KMT (0~10)	Antipathy toward DPP (0~10)	KMT as a threat (0~10)	DPP as a threat (0~10)
KMT supporters	Mean	4.64	6.40	4.36	6.85
	<i>n</i>	416	416	419	411
	SD	2.321	2.968	2.490	2.740
DPP supporters	Mean	6.09	5.06	6.52	4.95
	<i>n</i>	272	274	273	274
	SD	2.423	2.009	2.241	2.162
Independents	Mean	5.69	6.05	5.75	6.21
	<i>n</i>	669	667	652	662
	SD	1.987	2.224	2.262	2.365
All	Mean	5.51	6.00	5.55	6.20
	<i>n</i>	1466	1465	1452	1454
	SD	2.255	2.474	2.469	2.516

KMT: Kuomintang; DPP: Democratic Progressive Party.

Note: The total number of respondents in the survey is 1597. Missing values are excluded here and each column has different numbers of deleted observations (i.e. non-response observations). For more information regarding the distribution of partisan supporters, please refer to Appendix 1 (Supplemental material).

a respondent thinks that one party is far away from her and close to the unification end while the other is also far from her but close to the independence end, her perceived issue polarization tends to be large.

As the purpose of this study is to detect whether polarization perceptions have any negative impact on the assessment of democracy and support for democracy, a battery of questions regarding Taiwan's democracy is implemented. First, we measure the extent to which the respondents are satisfied with Taiwan's current democracy by asking the following question: "On the whole, are you satisfied with the way democracy works in Taiwan?" Second, we wonder if the respondents feel optimistic or pessimistic about Taiwan's future democratic development and ask the following question: "Do you have a pessimistic or an optimistic view of Taiwan's future democracy?" Last, we use a common question to measure the level of support for the democratic system. The wording of the question is as follows: "Some people say 'there might be something wrong with democracy but it is still the best system.' Do you agree or disagree with this statement?" In short, the above measures are constructed as the dependent variables in the following analysis.

Empirical findings

Do the Taiwanese people perceive party polarization? To answer this question, we first look at voters' affects toward the two parties and their perceptions of parties' positions on the unification–independence spectrum. Then, we conduct *t*-tests of means of various polarization measures and construct binary logit models to detect the associations between the two polarization measures and multiple attitudes toward democracy. Table 1 shows clear partisan biases regarding affects toward the two parties. Specifically, the KMT supporters have a high level of antipathy toward the DPP (with a mean score of 6.4).⁵ Additionally, they normally consider the DPP as the major threat to the development of the country. On the other hand, the DPP supporters strongly feel antipathy toward the KMT (mean = 6.09) and consider the KMT as the major threat to the development of the country (mean = 6.52). It seems that on average, the KMT's negative affect toward the DPP is relatively

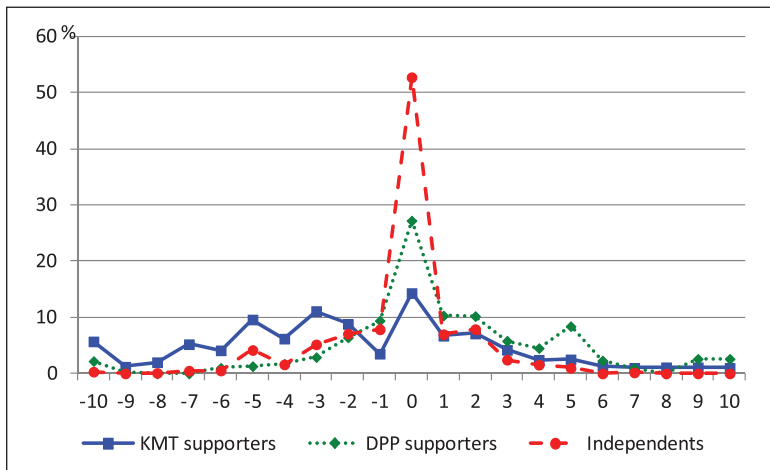


Figure 1. Relative antipathy scores (calculated by KMT's minus DPP's) by KMT supporters, DPP supporters, and independents.

higher than the DPP's toward the KMT. How can we explain the differences? Is it because of different types of party attributes? Alternatively, can this result be explained by the viewpoints of election winners and losers? Indeed, the winning party can obtain the government resources, and its supporters are less likely to feel a sense of relative deprivation. However, the winners versus losers interpretation needs to be confirmed using longitudinal survey data. As for the independent voters, they tend to have moderate affects toward the two parties. However, they seem to feel antipathy toward the DPP slightly more and give the DPP a higher threat score. The reason why independent voters hold more negative sentiments toward the DPP could simply be due to the poor performance of the current DPP administration.⁶

Affects toward the two parties can be regarded as the results of partisan identity. We calculated the relative antipathy and threat scores by using each respondent's antipathy and threat toward the KMT minus those toward the DPP to form a continuous index of -10~10. Thus, a positive value suggests that the respondent feel antipathy toward the KMT more than the DPP or considers that the KMT is more of a threat to the country than the DPP. In contrast, a negative value means that the DPP is either more antipathetic or threatening than the KMT. Figures 1 and 2 indicate that the KMT supporters' scores are mainly located on the left side of 0 (between -10 and 0), while the majority of the DPP supporters' scores are located on the right side of 0 (between 0 and 10). Although a clear partisan difference can be observed in both Figures 1 and 2, it is worth noting that neither one of the relative affect measures exhibits a bimodal distribution. For the purpose of comparison, Figures 1 and 2 also include independent voters' scores as a baseline case. And their two measures are not skewed toward either left or right.

It is assumed that the larger the affect differences one possesses, the less likely he or she may treat the party competition in a fair and rational way. Such identity-based sentiment may exert negative impacts on her assessment of democracy and support for democracy. Therefore, the next part of the analysis focuses on the absolute differences in the relative affect measures without considering the directions of these measures. Table 2 indicates that the KMT supporters' average difference in their antipathy scores toward the two parties is approximately 3.7. Their average threat difference is also approximately 3.7. On the other hand, the DPP supporters' average antipathy and threat differences are approximately 2.5 and 2.3, respectively. The independents' two difference

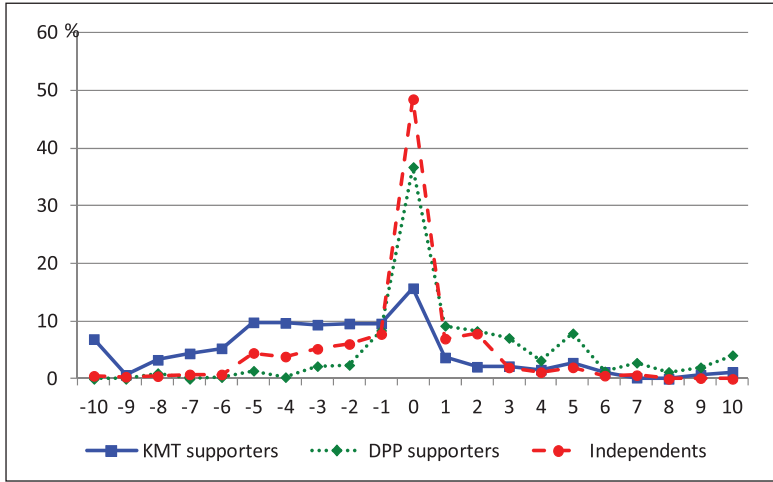


Figure 2. Relative threat scores (calculated by KMT's minus DPP's) by KMT supporters, DPP supporters, and independents.

Table 2. Absolute differences in affects toward the two parties.

		Difference in antipathy (0~10)	Difference in threat (0~10)	Pooled score (0~10)
KMT supporters	Mean	3.707	3.696	3.6896
	n	416	411	418
	SD	2.881	2.963	2.7250
DPP supporters	Mean	2.518	2.341	2.4148
	n	272	273	278
	SD	2.731	2.829	2.5233
Independents	Mean	1.175	1.480	1.3176
	n	664	651	678
	SD	1.652	1.999	1.6636
All	Mean	2.190	2.309	2.2326
	n	1460	1443	1483
	SD	2.543	2.661	2.4213

KMT: Kuomintang; DPP: Democratic Progressive Party.

Note: The total number of respondents in the survey is 1597. Missing values are excluded here and each column has different numbers of deleted observations (i.e. non-response observations). For more information regarding the distribution of partisan supporters, please refer to Appendix 1 (Supplemental material).

measures are only approximately 1.5 and 1.2. It seems that an average KMT supporter tends to have a larger difference in her affects toward the KMT and the DPP. Due to a strong statistical correlation between the antipathy and threat measures (Pearson's $r = 0.734, p < 0.001$), we further combine the two measures and create a single score (a mean score of the two measures)⁷ to indicate the distance of one's affects toward the two parties. We label it as the "affective polarization score," and the last column of Table 2 shows the pooled measure.

In addition to the identity-based polarization measure, we need to form a policy-based polarization measure to fully uncover the mass perception of polarization. Based on the respondents' own

Table 3. Respondents' positions on the unification–independence spectrum.

	All (%)	KMT supporters (%)	DPP supporters (%)
Immediate unification	1.5	1.2	0.4
Move toward unification in the future	14.3	25.9	6.8
Status quo first, then decide in the future	34.0	31.1	32.5
Status quo forever	27.8	32.9	23.0
Move toward independence in the future	15.0	6.4	28.3
Immediate independence	2.4	0.1	5.5
Non-response	5.2	2.2	3.5
Total (<i>n</i>)	100.0 (1597)	100.0 (428)	100.0 (295)

KMT: Kuomintang; DPP: Democratic Progressive Party.

Table 4. Perception of KMT's position in comparison with the respondents' position on the unification–independence spectrum.

	All (%)	KMT supporters (%)	DPP supporters (%)
Much more pro-independence	1.2	0.7	2.1
More pro-independence	3.6	4.7	3.9
The same position	20.8	43.8	7.4
More pro-unification	29.1	30.8	27.5
Much more pro-unification	26.0	11.2	47.7
Non-response	19.3	8.8	11.4
Total (<i>n</i>)	100.0 (1597)	100.0 (428)	100.0 (295)

KMT: Kuomintang; DPP: Democratic Progressive Party.

preferences toward the unification–independence issue, Table 3 shows that a relatively large proportion of the KMT supporters favor unification (27.1%), while a larger proportion of the DPP supporters tend to support Taiwan's independence (33.8%). In general, more than 60% of the respondents support maintaining the status quo (including maintaining the status quo and making decisions later and maintaining the status quo forever). Hence, the majority of Taiwanese people still hold a moderate position on the unification–independence spectrum. We do not observe a typical policy-based polarization that features a bimodal distribution of policy preferences.

However, voters' perceptions of the parties' positions on the unification–independence spectrum may tell a different story about polarization. Table 4 suggests that more than 50% of the overall respondents perceive that the KMT is located in a more favorable position toward unification than they are (including 29.1% who think that the KMT is more pro-unification and 26.0% who think that the KMT is much more pro-unification). At the same time, less than 5% of the respondents think that the KMT is in a more favorable position toward independence than they are (i.e. 1.2% are much more pro-independence and 3.6% are more pro-independence). In contrast, Table 5 shows that more than 60% of the respondents think that the DPP has a more favorable position toward Taiwan's independence than they do (including 27.8% who think that the DPP is more pro-independence and 36.1% who think that the DPP is much more pro-independence). Only 3% of the respondents perceive that the DPP has a more favorable position toward unification with mainland China than they do. In short, while the majority of Taiwanese people support maintaining the status quo, they think that the KMT and the DPP tend to favor unification with mainland China and Taiwan's independence, respectively. Figure 3 summarizes the respondents' perceptions of the

Table 5. Perception of DPP's position in comparison with respondents' position on the unification–independence spectrum.

	All (%)	KMT supporters (%)	DPP supporters (%)
Much more independent	36.1	58.4	24.9
More independent	27.8	24.3	29.1
The same position	13.6	7.2	28.4
More unification	3.0	1.5	2.1
Much more unification	1.3	1.4	1.0
Non-response	18.2	7.2	14.6
Total (n)	100.0 (1597)	100.0 (428)	100.0 (295)

KMT: Kuomintang; DPP: Democratic Progressive Party.

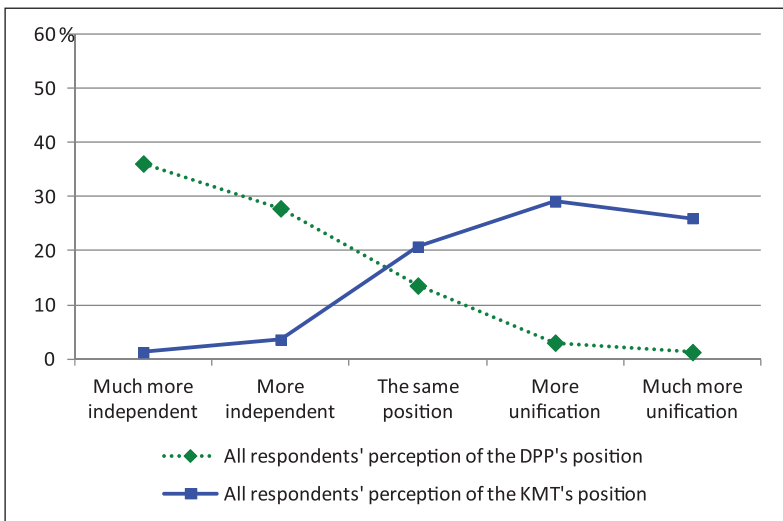


Figure 3. Perceptions of parties' positions in comparison with the respondents' positions on the unification–independence spectrum.

KMT's and DPP's locations on the unification–independence spectrum. A bimodal distribution clearly shows that the Taiwanese electorate has a polarized perception of the two parties' positions on the most salient issue dimension in Taiwan.

Furthermore, if we take partisanship into consideration, people not only consider the party they support close to themselves but also move the party they detest to one of the two extreme positions on the unification–independence spectrum. In Tables 4 and 5, we find that 75.2% of the DPP supporters consider the KMT more pro-unification than they are, including 27.5% who consider it more pro-unification and 47.7% who consider it much more pro-unification; in contrast, 82.7% of the KMT supporters consider the DPP more pro-independent than they are, including 24.3% who consider it more pro-independence and 58.4% who consider it much more pro-independence. By only looking at the KMT and DPP supporters, Figure 4 again shows a bipolar U distribution of the perceived issue positions of the two parties. Apparently, if we use the unification–independence issue as an ideological spectrum, the preferences of the respondents are certainly distributed as a normal distribution. However, their perceptions of the two parties' positions exhibit a bimodal

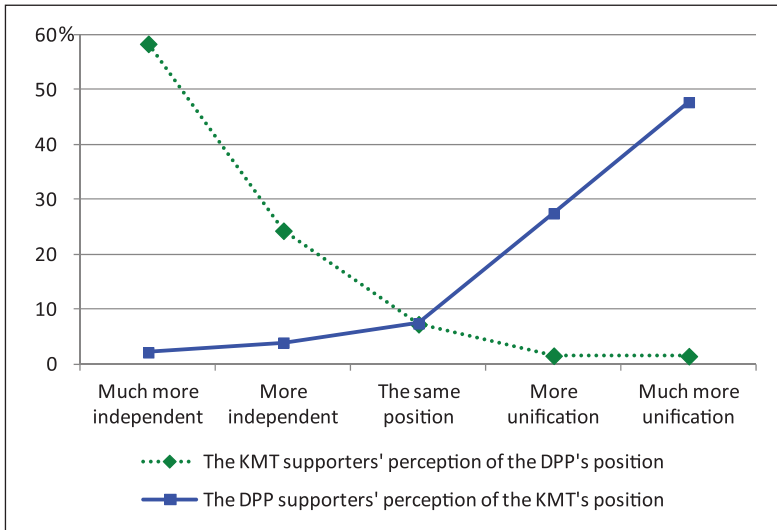


Figure 4. Perceptions of parties' positions in comparison with party supporters' positions on the unification–independence spectrum.

distribution, and partisan perspectives make the perceived party issue positions even more polarized, as shown in Figure 4.

To construct a perceived difference of the two parties' positions on the unification–independence spectrum, we use the difference (1~5) between the KMT's position and the respondent's position minus the difference (1~5) between the DPP's position and the respondent's position to form a score of -4 to 4, called the "perceived issue polarization score." It is true that the KMT has a more favorable position than the DPP regarding the future unification with mainland China. Thus, if the score is negative, the respondent believes that the KMT favors Taiwan's independence more than the DPP. Such situation is doubtful and puts the validity of the measurement into question. Table 6 indicates that only 41 cases have negative values. We exclude those observations in the following analysis and regard them as measurement errors.

After constructing the two polarization measures, including the affective polarization score and the perceived issue polarization score, we examine whether these two polarization measures have any impact on the assessment of democracy and support for democracy. We expect that if a person has a larger affective or perceived issue polarization score, he is more likely to make a negative assessment of democracy and exhibit low support for a democratic system. Table 7 shows that most of the respondents are not satisfied with the recent democracy in Taiwan (58.2%) and that they also feel pessimistic about Taiwan's future democratic development (54.4%). The good news is that most respondents still support a democratic system (76.4%).

Because the numbers of samples in some response options are quite limited, we combine some options for the purposes of further statistical analysis. Specifically, satisfaction with the democracy variable is recoded as "satisfied" and "unsatisfied"; Taiwan's future democratic development is recoded as "optimistic" and "pessimistic"; and support for the democratic system is recategorized as "agree" and "disagree." By using simple *t*-tests, we first explore whether the polarization scores have any significant association with the various measures of attitudes toward democracy.

Table 8 indicates that there are significant associations between affective polarization and attitudes toward democracy. Specifically, the respondents who are "dissatisfied" with Taiwan's current

Table 6. Respondents' perception of party positional polarization.

	<i>n</i>	%
-4	0	0.0
-3	2	0.2
-2	12	1.0
-1	27	2.3
0	104	8.7
1	193	16.1
2	410	34.2
3	296	24.7
4	152	12.7
Total	1198	100.0

Table 7. Assessment of democracy and support for democracy.

	<i>n</i>	%
Assessment of whether Taiwan's democracy works		
Very dissatisfied	361	22.6
Dissatisfied	568	35.6
Satisfied	476	29.8
Very satisfied	59	3.7
Non-response	132	8.3
Assessment of Taiwan's future democratic development		
Very pessimistic	280	17.5
Pessimistic	589	36.9
Optimistic	522	32.7
Very optimistic	59	3.7
Non-response	147	9.2
Democracy is the best system		
Strongly disagree	51	3.2
Disagree	199	12.5
Agree	1005	62.9
Strongly agree	215	13.5
Non-response	127	7.9

democracy, feel "pessimistic" about Taiwan's future democratic development, or "disagree" that the democratic system is the best system tend to have higher means of affective polarization scores than those who are "satisfied" with Taiwan's current democracy, feel "optimistic" about Taiwan's future democratic development, and "agree" that the democratic system is the best system. In other words, the respondents who have polarized affects toward the two parties tend to have negative attitudes toward democracy in Taiwan. However, the same type of association is not observed between the perceived issue polarization score and attitudes toward democracy. In other words, it seems that the respondents' perceptions of issue polarization between the two parties have no significant correlation with their attitudes toward democracy.

However, the above tests for associations were set up only with bivariate analysis. To test the robustness of the statistical results, we construct binary logit models that include demographic and

Table 8. *T*-tests of polarization score and attitudes toward democracy.

	Assessment of Taiwan's current democracy		
	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Difference (t-test)
Affective polarization	1.918	2.529	0.611***
Issue polarization	2.122	2.190	0.068
	Assessment of Taiwan's future democratic development democracy		
	Pessimistic	Optimistic	Difference (t-test)
Affective polarization	2.518	1.896	0.622***
Issue polarization	2.220	2.124	0.096
	Support for a democratic system		
	Agree	Disagree	Difference (t-test)
Affective polarization	2.099	3.047	0.948***
Positional polarization	2.159	2.208	0.049

other related attitudinal variables as control variables on the right-hand side of the equations. In particular, the party support variable is essential, in the sense that it correlates with both affective and perceived issue polarization scores and should be included in the model. Additionally, voters belonging to the ruling party or the opposition party may have different attitudes toward democracy. Specifically, the respondents who belong to the elected-ruling party tend to have more positive attitudes toward democracy than those who belong to the opposition party. Table 9 indeed suggests that the ruling DPP supporters are more likely to have positive assessments of Taiwan's current and future democracy as well as support for democracy. Regarding the two polarization measures, the coefficients for the affective polarization score are negative and statistically significant in all three models. In other words, affective polarization is negatively associated with attitudes toward democracy. On the other hand, the coefficients for the perceived issue polarization score are not significant in all three models. That is, perceived issue polarization seems to have no association with various attitudes toward democracy.

Concluding remarks

Does political polarization affect democracy? In this analysis, we use survey data to examine whether there exists any association between various polarization measures and attitudes toward democracy. Our empirical findings suggest that Taiwanese people who have more diverse affects toward the two major parties are more likely to have a negative assessment of Taiwan's current and future democracy and are less supportive of the democratic system. Yet, people who perceive greater issue polarization between the two major parties do not necessarily have more positive or negative attitudes toward democracy.

As one of the symptoms of the recent decay in liberal democracy is the decline in popular support for democracy, affective party polarization may contribute to such a decline. That is, identity-based party competition may exert harmful impacts on the health of a democracy. How to fix the problem is certainly beyond the scope of this article. However, the consequences of affective party

Table 9. Binary logit models of attitudes toward democracy.

	Model I		Model II		Model III	
	β	(SE)	β	(SE)	β	(SE)
Constant	-0.758*	(0.312)	-0.010	(0.305)	2.020***	(0.395)
Affective polarization	-0.097**	(0.033)	-0.098**	(0.033)	-0.123**	(0.039)
Perceived polarization	-0.058	(0.063)	0.075	(0.061)	0.010	(0.084)
Party support (Independent $t=0$)						
KMT	-0.219	(0.173)	-0.258	(0.171)	-0.088	(0.214)
DPP	1.284***	(0.185)	1.106***	(0.181)	1.368***	(0.341)
Male (female=0)	0.115	(0.139)	0.016	(0.137)	0.199	(0.182)
Education (university and above = 0)						
Junior high and below	0.305	(0.233)	-0.393	(0.231)	-0.969**	(0.283)
Senior high and college	-0.063	(0.168)	-0.405*	(0.165)	-0.209	(0.240)
Age (more than 60 years = 0)						
20 to 39 years	0.509*	(0.244)	-0.308	(0.241)	0.145	(0.297)
40 to 59 years	0.180	(0.221)	-0.306	(0.215)	0.016	(0.249)
Model information						
n	1021		1011		1031	
-2Log-likelihood	1214.408		1237.494		800.460	
LR χ^2	96.941		83.125		67.409	
P-value	<0.001		<0.001		<0.001	
Cox & Snell R^2	0.093		0.081		0.065	

KMT: Kuomintang; DPP: Democratic Progressive Party.

Note 1. The dependent variable in Model I is "assessment of whether Taiwan's democracy works" (satisfied=1, dissatisfied=0);

The dependent variable in Model II is "assessment of the development of Taiwan's future democracy" (optimistic=1, pessimistic=0);

The dependent variable in Model III is "democracy is the best system" (agree=1, disagree=0).

Note 2. *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

polarization indeed deserve more scholarly attention. Additionally, factors that contribute to the emergence of affective party polarization also deserve scholarly attention.

Finally, it is important to note a couple of limitations when interpreting our findings here.⁸ First, one should be cautious in generalizing the findings by using the result of a single survey. In particular, the survey used in this study undertaken in January 2018, which could be regarded as a salient moment for the opposition (i.e. the KMT) because the DPP government had just passed the pension reform plan for civil servants. The new pension system harmed the interests of retired civil servants, who are disproportionately long-term KMT supporters. Thus, it is possible that these core KMT supporters would have been quite angry at that time, and expressed disappointment and pessimism about democracy. But of course, while analyzing only one wave of survey data, we do not know whether such specific event may trigger any short-term variation on perceived polarization or democratic support/satisfaction measures. Second, in addition to the possible impact on public opinion brought by any specific event, another related but broader issue should be addressed—that is, the "winners versus losers" prospect for democracy (Moehler, 2009). For example, after the narrow margin victory of Chen Shui-bian in the 2004 Taiwan presidential election, Chang (2009) shows that voters whose preferred candidate lost in the election became more pessimistic about the current/future development of Taiwan's democracy. In contrast, other empirical research using the

survey data collected after Taiwan's second party turnover (i.e. the 2008 presidential election) does not show the same pattern (Huang, 2011). As the "winners versus losers" effect on democratic support/satisfaction is still puzzling, we should keep in mind that findings based on any single survey do not necessarily represent a permanent state of affairs in Taiwanese politics. Our empirical results indeed need further investigation for robustness.

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Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. Taiwan's political competition has gradually become a two-camp competition since 2000 (Yu 2016). Specifically, the blue camp, led by Kuomintang (KMT), is normally pro-China and anti-Taiwan independence. On the other hand, the green camp, led by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), is anti-China and pro-Taiwan independence. The two party camps almost always oppose each other on cross-strait relations issues and have difficulties reaching compromises on related policies.
2. They use different ways of processing their data regarding the selection of issue items, measures of political engagement, coding schemes of the variables, ways of dealing with item non-response, etc.
3. As mentioned by the author, this counterintuitive finding could be the result of data limitations. The article used the Polity IV dataset and incorporated 37 democratic countries. The average democracy score for these countries was about 9.34 on a -10 to 10 scale. Only 4 out of the 37 countries had scores below 8. In other words, the empirical findings of the article may not be able to be generalized due to the limitations of case selection.
4. For those who are interested in the data and command files employed in this study, please refer to the corresponding author's personal webpage at <http://www3.nccu.edu.tw/~ericyu/>. Two separate files (in the SPSS format) have been stored and can be found under this article's title.
5. This survey includes 1597 respondents. Among them, 428 (26.8%) respondents support the KMT and 295 (18.4%) support the DPP. Meanwhile, 80 (5%) respondents support other parties, 751 (47%) regard themselves as independent voters, and 43 (2.7%) respondents do not answer this question. For details of partisan support, please refer to Appendix 1 (Supplemental material).
6. Regarding the raw distributions of the affect measures (i.e. antipathy and threat) towards the two major parties across the DPP Supporters, KMT supporters, and independents, please refer to Appendix 2 (Supplemental material) (i.e. Figures A2-1~A2-4).
7. To avoid the potential problem of too many missing values, we adopt the following two steps to calculate the pooled scores: first, if both affect measures are available, we calculate the mean score of the two measures. Second, if only one measure is available but the other is missing, we use that available measure as a proxy for the pooled score. Thus, in Table 2, for each type of party supporter, one may find that the number of observations for the pooled scores (in the third column) is slightly larger than that of either antipathy or threat measure.
8. The authors appreciate the reviewer pointing out the limitations of this research.

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