

Political Cycle of Voters' Understanding of the New Electoral System: The Case of Taiwan^{*}

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abstract: On 6 June 2005, the National Assembly in Taiwan ratified the constitutional amendment to cut the number of legislative seats from 225 to 113, to extend legislators' terms of office from three years to four, and most importantly, to adopt a new mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) electoral system to replace the single non-transferable vote (SNTV) system for legislative elections.

The election of the 7th Legislative Yuan on 12 January 2008, was the first instance of this new mixed electoral system being practiced in Taiwan. Several scholars and political pundits have examined the impacts of adopting the mixed-member majoritarian system. However, almost all assume voters were fully aware of the new two-ballot electoral system and made their choices accordingly. The purpose of this paper is to question this assumption by exploring the vicissitude of voters' knowledge of the new electoral rules and their determinants. This paper argues that most voters are ignorant of, and oblivious to, the changes in the electoral system. That is, voters' awareness of the electoral system is a function of legislative electoral cycle as well as the efforts of political parties and candidates' campaigns to maneuver the electorate and take advantage of the new rule. If this notion is correct, the cycle of voters' knowledge can be expected to move in tandem with the electoral cycle. That is, voters become more and more aware of the new electoral rules before the legislative election and then tend to forget about it during the mid-term period. The awareness picks up again a few months before the next legislative election is scheduled. We test this political cycle hypothesis by comparing the results from the five waves of pre-election rolling surveys during the late 2007 and two waves of post-election surveys conducted in early 2010 and early 2011. We find that voters' knowledge of the new electoral system, including term of office, district magnitude, ballot structure and PR (Proportional Representation) threshold, indeed rose gradually during the campaigning period before the 2008 legislative election. Then, with the exception of the office term, voters' knowledge of all the other three elements of the new electoral rules declined substantially after election.

Introduction

Political scientists generally agree that electoral systems matter. As electoral systems convert votes into seats in the legislature and (to a large extent) determine who wins and who loses in the political arena, changes in systems and consequences thereof always attract wide attention.

Taiwan's recent electoral reform in 2005 constitutes one of such rare cases that deserve close examination.

On 23 August 2004, the Legislative Yuan in Taiwan passed constitutional amendments to:

1. cut the number of legislative seats from 225 to 113;

2. extend legislators' terms of office from three years to four; and
3. adopt a new parallel mixed-member electoral system to replace the previous single non-transferable vote under multimember district (hereafter SNTV-MMD) system for legislative elections.

On 7 June 2005, the amendment was ratified by 83.6 percent of delegates present at the National Assembly meeting (Huang, Chen and Chou 2008). The election for the 7th Legislative Yuan on 12 January 2008 marked the beginning of a new era in Taiwan's legislative politics. Several scholars and political pundits have examined the impacts of the new mixed-member majoritarian (hereafter MMM) system.⁽¹⁾ However, almost all assume that voters are fully aware of the new two-ballot electoral system and make their choices accordingly.

The purpose of this paper is to question this assumption by exploring the magnitude of voters' knowledge and understanding of the new electoral rules and their determinants. We argue that most voters are ignorant of and oblivious to the changes in the electoral system. That is, voters' awareness of the electoral system is a function of the legislative electoral cycle, as well as efforts of political parties and candidates' campaigns to maneuver the electorate and take advantage of the new rules. If our theory is correct, we expect to see the cycle of voters' knowledge to move in tandem with the electoral cycle. That is, voters become more and more aware of the new electoral rules before the legislative election and then tend to forget about it during the mid-term period. The awareness picks up again a few months before the next legislative election is scheduled.

Changes in the Legislative Electoral System in Taiwan

Before evaluating the political cycle of voters' knowledge shifting from SNTV-MMD to the MMM system, we need to examine changes in legislative electoral rules in Taiwan. Rae (1967) identified three key elements of electoral systems: ballot structure, district magnitude and electoral formula. Lijphart (1994) added assembly size to Rae's list. For the purpose of comparison, Table 1 traces the changes since 1992 when all seats in the Legislative Yuan were first subjected to re-election.

Table 1 shows the changes in elements of rules for legislative elections over the past decade. Among these elements, the assembly size has changed dramatically. The number of assembly seats was 161 in 1992, then it increased to 225, and later decreased to 113. The 2005 constitutional amendment, as mentioned earlier, cut the total number of seats by half from 225 to 113. The distribution of seats between district elections and proportional representation (PR) also changed following the changes in assembly size. PR seats accounted for an average of a little more than 20% of the total seats under the SNTV system but increased to more than 30% under the MMM system. The new MMM system prescribes 73 seats (64.6% of the total 113 seats) to

Table 1 Features of the Legislative Electoral System in Taiwan Since 1992

Election Year	Electoral System	Total Seats	PR Seats (%)	PR Legal Threshold	Average District Magnitude ¹
1992	SNTV	161	36(22.4%)	5%	4.41
1995	SNTV	164	36(22.0%)	5%	4.52
1998	SNTV	225	49(21.8%)	5%	5.79
2001	SNTV	225	49(21.8%)	5%	5.79
2004	SNTV	225	49(21.8%)	5%	5.79
2008	MMM	113	34(30.1%)	5%	1

Source: revised from Huang (2008, 132).

Notes: 1. (Total number of seats elected from districts)/(Total number of districts).

be elected based on single-member districts (SMD), 34 seats on the basis of PR in a nationwide district, and 6 seats for the aboriginals on the basis of SNTV.

The changes in assembly size also triggered changes in the number of legislators from individual districts. The previous SNTV system maintained an average district magnitude (M) between 4.41 and 5.79. In fact, under the former SNTV system, district magnitude ranged from 1 to 17. For example, in the 1992 and 1995 Legislative Yuan elections, Taipei County as a whole was the largest SNTV district with 16 and 17 seats, respectively. Likewise, Taoyuan County had 12 seats in 1998 and then grew to 13 seats in 2001 elections (Huang 2008, 133). Nonetheless, under the new mixed-member system, the SMD tier is limited to $M=1$. This of course also means that the whole nation is restructured into 73 single member districts (Yu 2008, 39-44).

Other vital changes are the ballot structure and electoral formula under the new MMM system. Under the previous SNTV system, a voter had only one ballot and cast his/her ballot in district elections; however, results of district elections also decided PR-based elections.

The ballot structure under the new MMM system allows each voter to cast two ballots in elections: one for the SMD candidate, and the other for a political party. PR-based elections are no longer dependent on results of district elections. Furthermore, the new MMM system is a parallel mixed-member system under which the SMD tier is based on the plurality rule. PR seats, on the other hand, are allocated based on the largest remainder Hare formula with a 5% legal threshold a provision which dis-

criminate against small parties. As a result, as shown in Table 2, only two major parties, Kuomintang (KMT) and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), met this threshold requirement in the 2008 Legislative Yuan election, the first election in Taiwan under the new system. Although two small parties, the New Party (NP) and the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU), did receive 3.95% and 3.53% votes, respectively, for PR seats, neither of them reached the 5% threshold required for parties to be allocated PR seats.

In addition to these changes in elements of electoral rules, the new MMM system also changes length of terms of legislators. Under the previous SNTV system, the term of legislators was three years, which has been increased to four years under the new system. Compared with other changes, the impact of changing legislators' term of office was less discussed during the process of electoral reform in 2005. However, the extension synchronizes legislators' term with other elected officials, including the president, which may lead to concurrent presidential and legislative elections.

In sum, starting from 2008, voters in Taiwan

Table 2 Vote/Seat Shares of Major Parties¹ in 2004 and 2008 Legislative Elections

	2004			2008					
	SNTV ²			SMD ²		PR		Seat Total	
	Vote%	Seats	Seats%	Vote%	Seats	Vote%	Seats	Seats	Seats%
KMT	32.83	79	35.11	53.50	61	51.23	20	81	71.68
DPP	35.72	89	39.56	38.17	13	36.91	14	27	23.89
NP	0.12	1	0.44	—	—	3.95	0	0	0.00
PFP ³	13.90	34	15.11	0.29	1	—	—	1	0.89
TSU	7.79	12	5.33	0.95	0	3.53	0	0	0.00
NPSU	3.63	6	2.67	2.42	3	0.70	0	3	2.66
Other	6.00	4	1.78	4.68	1	3.68	0	1	0.89
Total	100.0	225	100.0	100.0	79	100.0	34	113	100.0

Sources: Huang and Lin (2009, 20). Data on vote/seat share for each party are from the Central Election Commission of the Ministry of the Interior, Republic of China.

Notes:

1. Parties: KMT, Kuomintang; DPP, Democratic Progressive Party; NP, New Party; PFP, People First Party; TSU, Taiwan Solidarity Union; NPSU, Non-Partisan Solidarity Union.

2. Vote statistics includes 2 aboriginal SNTV constituencies.

3. PFP won one seat from an aboriginal SNTV constituency in 2008 elections.

cast two ballots on the day of elections to the Legislative Yuan. They can still vote for one candidate on the now single-member districts they reside in, but have the additional vote to choose political parties. These developments are brand new for Taiwanese voters. However, unlike candidates and political parties who have high stakes in implementation of the new electoral system, the voter is less attentive to these new electoral designs, though the voter is the key player who has to use the new electoral system which differs sharply from the previous SNTV system. Therefore, how the voter recognizes and understands the new electoral designs is considered an appropriate and urgent concern for the study of Taiwan's electoral systems and politics.

Political Knowledge and Political Cycle

Figures in Table 1 in the previous section show striking differences between SNTV-MMD and MMM systems. Even though the MMM system is not rare (it is operative in other countries), in 2008 it was a completely new experience for the voter in Taiwan. The new system also implies the need to examine the way Taiwanese voters recognize and understand the new electoral system. Or, in other words, the new electoral system not only impacts significantly Taiwan's party system but also gives rise to the need for research on voters' knowledge of the system in Taiwan.

Essentially, the study of voters' knowledge of the MMM system can be seen as a sub-area of voters' political knowledge. Few scholars will deny the importance of voters' political knowledge for sustaining democracy. As Delli Carpini and Keeter put it:

"Political information is to democratic politics what money is to economics: it is the currency of citizenship. And as with other currencies,

the ability to acquire it is only partially and imperfectly the result of the personal abilities of individuals. The opportunity to learn about the political world is also influenced by social, economic, and political forces that are beyond the short-term control of individual citizens and that have different effects on citizens situated in different places on the socioeconomic ladder." (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 8).

In their often-cited book "What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters," Delli Carpini and Keeter undoubtedly state the importance of political knowledge for democracy. For these authors, citizens' political knowledge is more a resource that can generate political, social and economic advantages than a personal trait distinct from other individuals. Even though there are debates over informed citizens being a prerequisite for a healthy democracy, none of these debates can easily deny the positive impact of existence of informed citizens on democracy (Dalton 2008, Ch. 2).

Mainstream literature on political knowledge has persistently addressed three dimensions: the contents of citizen's political knowledge, the factors affecting citizen's political knowledge, and the (political) outcomes of citizen's political knowledge. The first dimension of political knowledge is citizen's awareness of political affairs. Political knowledge in this regard is broadly defined as knowledge of contents of the constitution, structure of the government, key political leaders, important parts of political history and issues, important political parties and organizations and individual political rights and duties, which are seen as components of political knowledge. Citizens get political information from school, family, church, work place, mass media as so on; these are the primary sources of citizens' politi-

cal knowledge. For example, from the perspective of political socialization, Jennings proposed three types of political knowledge: textbook knowledge acquired from school education; surveillance knowledge acquired from daily lives and mass media; and historical knowledge acquired from specific events or history (Jennings, 1996).

Of course, broadly defined political knowledge is easy to understand. Yet, it falls short of providing identifiable objects which carry meaningful implications. More specifically, contents of political knowledge, unlike other information, must be politically relevant to the operation of the government. Therefore, as Delli Carpini and Keeter suggest, there are three kinds of political knowledge specific to the functioning of democracy: the rule of the game concerning the institutions and processes of elections and governance; the substance of politics such as crucial political, economic and social issues and their policy implications; and the performance and stands of important political leaders and parties (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996, 14). These three types of political knowledge do not contradict Jennings's textbook, surveillance and historical political knowledge. Instead, these constituents of political knowledge can be deemed perfectly compatible with each other. While Jennings's ideas show the advantage of using civic education as a key source of nurturing citizen's political knowledge, which is crucial for the study of political socialization, Delli Carpini and Keeter highlight a practical guideline in comparative studies of political knowledge.

The second dimension of the study refers to the issue of factors contributing to voters' political knowledge. Several researchers have tried to explain citizens' different levels of political knowledge. Some focus on the relationships between citizens' political knowledge and their demographic characteristics, such as gender, race

and education. Others underline the importance of political interests in enhancing citizens' political knowledge. Still others highlight the importance of organizational participation by individual citizen to facilitate accumulation of political knowledge (Clawson and Oxley, 2008, 198-203). A more influential and systematic study by Luskin (1990) specified three types of factors that are of special importance. Luskin argued that individual attributes, such as education (which can contribute to citizens' political skills and acquisition of information, motivation (based on individual desires and interest in political activities, such as attention to political news and information) and opportunities (the availability and the kind of processes that facilitate citizens' role in with political affairs, such as participating in political activities and becoming a member of political organizations) are the three crucial factors affecting citizens' political learning.

The third dimension deals with attitudinal and behavioral consequences of political knowledge. Majority of researches have pointed out that voters' political knowledge is a strong facilitator of political participation. When voters have more political knowledge, they are more likely to understand political institutions and acquire information needed for political actions. In specific, a positive association between voter turnout and voters' political knowledge has been reported in extant literature. Additionally, political knowledge also helps voters accumulate more political knowledge and is conducive to enhancement of voters' political sophistication (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996, Ch. 6; Larcinese, 2007).

The three dimensions of political knowledge continue to be dominant in research at present. Besides, some researchers have longitudinally examined voters' political knowledge. Yet, one noticeable research development is the change in

voters' political knowledge before and after elections. Conventional wisdom maintains that voters' political knowledge can be affected by many factors such as voters' resources, motivations and opportunities. These findings fall short to provide the unique patterns of voters' political knowledge during campaign periods, as well as non-campaign periods (Chong and Druckman, 2010).

In fact, there is some literature on the relationship between campaign messages and voters' political knowledge. They regard campaign as an open forum in which voters face competing messages from political parties and candidates. Voters' political information increases when they have more opportunity to expose themselves to various campaign efforts, such as advertisements, speeches and other events. Of course, there are always conflicting campaign messages that can confuse voters' preferences in elections. These studies have reached the conclusion that compared with low information voters, those having more information are more likely to vote in elections (Chaffee, Zhao and Leshner, 1994; Brians and Wattenberg, 1996). It is reasonable to argue that during campaign periods, voters are likely to come in contact with more political information. This information may be presented by competing political parties or candidates and the ultimate goal is to affect voters' political preferences. Consequently, voters' political knowledge might also be different in campaign and non-campaign periods. It is anticipated that voters' political knowledge surges following the appearance of elections and then declines when there are no elections.

The relationship between voters' political knowledge and election periods is even more crucial when voters encounter a brand new electoral system (Karp, 2006). But in contrast with New

Zealand, where its Electoral Commission tried to promote public awareness of the new mixed-member proportional (MMP) voting system in 1996, Taiwan's Central Election Commission did not publicize the new MMM rules until two weeks before the polling day. The delay was mainly due to a bitter quarrel between the ruling DPP and opposition KMT over how ballots for the concurrent referendums should be distributed. However, this does not mean that voters are totally oblivious of the new electoral rules. Actually, parties and candidates have every incentive to educate voters about the MMM system and its potential consequences while mobilizing their own supporters. Interestingly enough, information is often disseminated because of bitter fights between major and small parties in pan-blue and pan-green camps. Knowing that the single-member district is biased against small parties, the latter try to persuade their supporters to cast party (PR) ballot in their favour, so as to cross the 5% threshold that can ensure their survival as parties. Two major parties, on the other hand, have tried to convince their supporters that if their former allies' votes fell below 5%, these votes would be wasted. This kind of internal rivalry has broken out not only between the DPP and its ally TSU in the pan-green camp, but also between the KMT and its ally NP in the pan-blue camp. The TSU, which fields candidates for both tiers, tries to attract voters in the pan-green camp at the expense of the DPP. The NP, although returns all of its legislators to the folds of the KMT, decided to fight for the at-large seats. Yet both the KMT and the TSU listed 34 candidates, determined to win all PR seats.

One typical example of this bitter fight is that at the end of 2007 the KMT advertised on news media calling for pan-blue voters to "consolidate their support and back the KMT." NP legislators

immediately expressed outrage and accused the KMT of trying to boost its support at the expense of its ally (the NP). In response to NP's condemnation, then KMT Chairman Wu Poh-hsiung said, "There's a 5% threshold for party votes, and not every party can pass that threshold." The former KMT chairman Lien Chan further commented, "It would be a waste of ballots if they were split." (*Taipei News*, 2008/1/1, p. 3). Although parties and politicians are no educators, several pieces of information concerning the new MMM system were repeatedly emphasized and passed on to the voters during campaigning.

Taiwan's legislative elections in 2008, therefore, constitute an event eminently suitable for exploring the relationship between election period and voters' political knowledge. Due to the new MMM system's significant impacts, competing political parties and candidates try their best to exploit the mechanism of the new electoral system in elections and there are many messages sent by parties and candidates telling voters how to cast their ballots in voting booths. This information in turn increases voters' political knowledge. However, as the deluge of messages during elections stopped after the 2008 election, voters' political knowledge started fading.

Data and Method

We hypothesize that voters' awareness of the electoral system is a function of legislative electoral cycle as well as the efforts of political parties' and candidates' campaigns. If our hypothesis is correct, we expect to see the cycle of voters' knowledge moving concurrently with the electoral cycle. That is, voters become more and more aware of the new electoral rules before the legislative elections and then tend to forget them during the interim period, i.e. until the next

elections. The awareness remains low until a couple of months before the next legislative elections.

In order to test this political cycle theory of voters' knowledge of the new MMM system, this essay adopts a repeated cross-sections design by comparing several waves of telephone interviews conducted before and after the 2008 legislative election by the Election Study Center of National Chengchi University. Three data sets are included in our study. The first data set⁽²⁾ is a five-wave pre-election rolling cross-sections (RCS, see Huang, 2009; 2011) between late 2007 and early 2008. The first wave began on 13 December 2007, 30 days before the election. Then the second, third, fourth and fifth waves of the survey followed, until 11 January 2008, one day before the election day. Each wave successfully collected around 700 cases. The five wave pre-election rolling surveys were designed not only to collect an overall understanding of voters' knowledge before election, but also to provide a dynamic picture of changes in voters' knowledge during the campaign period. The second data set is a cross-sectional survey comprising 1629 cases, collected between 19 to 23 March 2010, i.e. roughly two years after the 2008 election. The third data set was collected during 2 to 7 March 2011 and is a cross-sectional survey with 1616 cases. Both data sets are provided to examine changes in voters' knowledge two years and three years after the 2008 election. In particular, these two data sets represent voters' knowledge of the new MMM system during the non-campaigning period, when less information was provided by competing political parties and candidates.

All the seven waves of telephone interviews used a set of the following four questions to

gauge respondents' knowledge of the new MMM electoral rules discussed in the first section:

1. [District Magnitude] Do you know how many legislators will be elected in your district in this Legislative Election?
2. [Ballot Structure] Do you know how many ballots you can cast in this Legislative Election?
3. [PR threshold] Do you know the threshold of the PR vote that a party must poll in order to get some seats under the PR system?
4. [Four-year Term] Do you know how long the term of the office is for the new legislators? (Assuming there is no premature dissolution of the legislature).

Based on the data collected, this essay presents a trend analysis of the proportion of respondents who answered these four questions correctly during the campaigning period and off-year non-campaigning period. Meanwhile, bivariate analyses of voters' knowledge of the new MMM system and voters' education and party identification are provided to investigate the im-

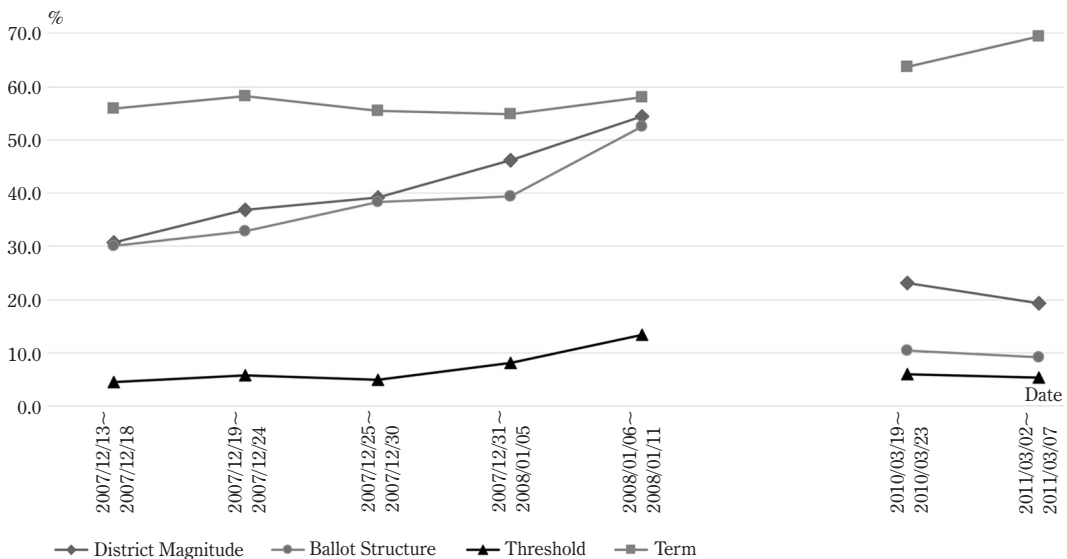
portance of voters' education and partisan attachment.

Findings and Discussions

Figure 1 depicts the results of several surveys over the past three years on voters' knowledge of the MMM system. The overall distribution reveals a mixed trend. It is obvious that voters have different levels of knowledge regarding different elements of the system. The new term of legislators was the easiest question; more than half of the respondents answered correctly. This is rather stable during the 2008 campaigning period. Moreover, voters' recognition of the new term continues to increase and reaches close to 70% in 2010 and 2011.

District magnitude was the second easy component of the system for respondents in the surveys. Yet, unlike the question on the new term of legislators, not many voters had clear idea of how many legislators are to be elected by their respective constituencies. Only around one third of respondents were able to answer the question in the early period of 2008 election.

Figure 1 Voters' Overall Knowledge of MMM System



However, following the progress of campaigning, more and more voters became aware of the number to be elected in district election. There is an increasing trend of voters' knowledge of this issue and the trend peaks in the last week before election day. Unfortunately, voters' memory fades away so badly after the elections that only about a fifth of respondents were able to answer the question correctly in 2010 and the proportion continued to drop, dipping below 20% in 2011.

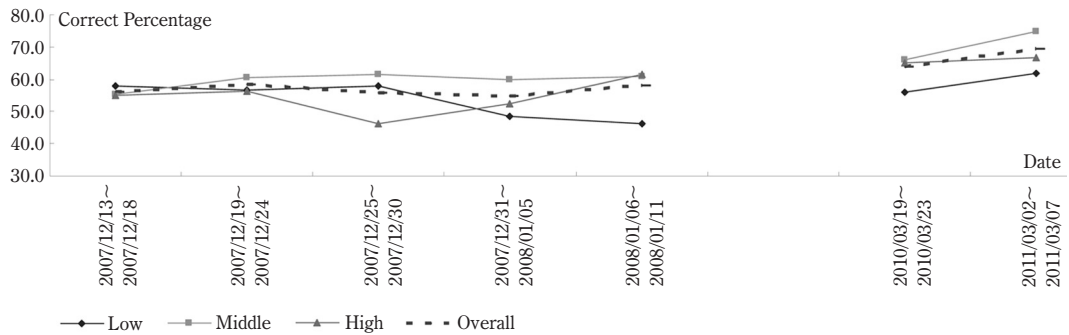
The distribution of voters' knowledge of ballot structure goes hand in hand with distribution of voters' knowledge of district elections. In the beginning, less than 30% of respondents knew there were two votes a voter could cast in election. This number increased as campaigning evolved and peaked in the last week of election. However, the number fell sharply in the first half of 2010 to less than 25% of respondents (who knew there were two ballots in elections) and continued to drop in the first half of 2011. Relatively speaking, the patterns of voters' knowledge of district magnitude and ballot structure share a certain degree of similarity but the latter suffered a more dramatic decrease after the 2008 election.

Threshold for PR seats was the most difficult question for majority of respondents. Less than 5% of respondents were able to answer the question correctly. Moreover, unlike the questions of district magnitude and ballot structure, voters continued to be rather ignorant during the campaigning period also. Until the last week of election only a little more than 10% of respondents were aware of the vote share needed for a political party to secure PR seats. Understandably, this most-difficult-to-answer question remained embarrassing for majority of respondents in the next two years. Following the 2008 election, less than 6% of respondents were aware of regulations of

the threshold for PR seats. One notable issue to be kept in mind is that the threshold of the new MMM is not exactly a new provision. It was used under the previous SNTV-MMD system from 1993 to 2004. The low degree of knowledge implies that voters were completely oblivious of this component of the system in previous elections. This ignorance improved only slightly during campaigning in 2008 but persisted in non-campaigning period, i.e. in 2010 and 2011.

Figure 1 suggests that Taiwanese voters do not have a high degree of knowledge of the new MMM system implemented in 2008. But more importantly, three out of four trends seem to endorse our political cycle hypothesis. That is, campaigning contributes to voters' understanding of the new system. With the exception of term of legislators, voters' knowledge of district magnitude, ballot structure and threshold indeed declines substantially during non-campaigning period. Underneath this general picture, one legitimate academic curiosity is to enquire in greater detail the dynamics that help voters acquire more knowledge of the MMM system. Previous literature on sources of voters' political knowledge have suggested that education and partisan attachment are the two crucial factors affecting voters' political knowledge. It is anticipated that these two factors also exercise significant impact on voters' knowledge of the MMM system.

Figure 2 shows a mixed association between voters' degree of education and knowledge of the extended term of legislators. Voters with higher education do not necessarily have a high level of knowledge of term of legislators, particularly in the early period of campaigning. Voters having at least college education performed less well than those with high school education in the first four surveys. Then these highly educated voters

Figure 2 Voters' Education and Knowledge of Term

catch up in the last week before election. However, they fall behind again in 2010 and 2011. By contrast, voters with high school education have the most knowledge of term of legislators. The distribution is rather stable in the period of campaigning and increases after the 2008 election. Less educated voters also perform better than college educated voters in the early period of campaigning but fall behind as election approaches. These less educated voters are also the least knowledgeable during the non-campaigning period.

Voters' knowledge of district magnitude, as indicated in Figure 3, resembles to the distribution of voters' knowledge of the term of legislators in Figure 2. High school educated voters are the most knowledgeable as compared to college educated voters. College educated voters receive

relatively less information (compared with high school educated voters) during the period of campaigning but turn more knowledgeable than high school educated voters in the last week of campaigning. Less educated voters, except for the first week of campaigning, had persistently less awareness about district magnitude than the other two categories of voters. Yet, unlike the distribution of term of legislators, one notable development (Figure 3) is the sharp increase in knowledge about district magnitude during the campaigning periods in all the three groups of voters. Regardless of the differences in education, voters experienced significant increase of knowledge of district magnitude before the election. And, again, the knowledge almost disappears in 2010 and goes even lower in 2011.

Figure 4 suggests voters' education is closely

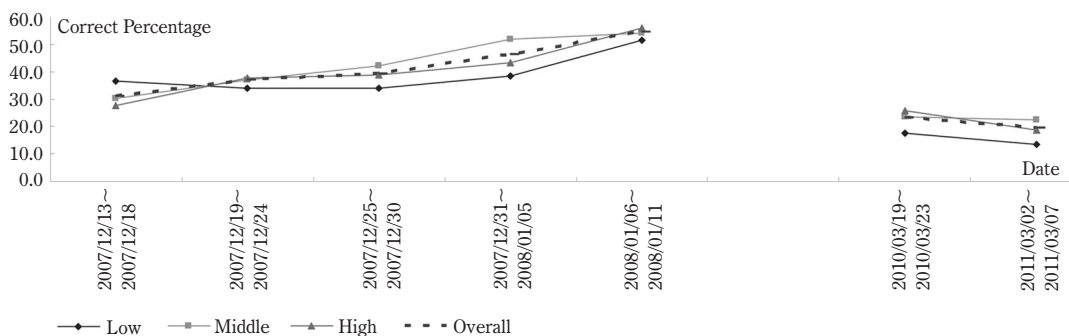
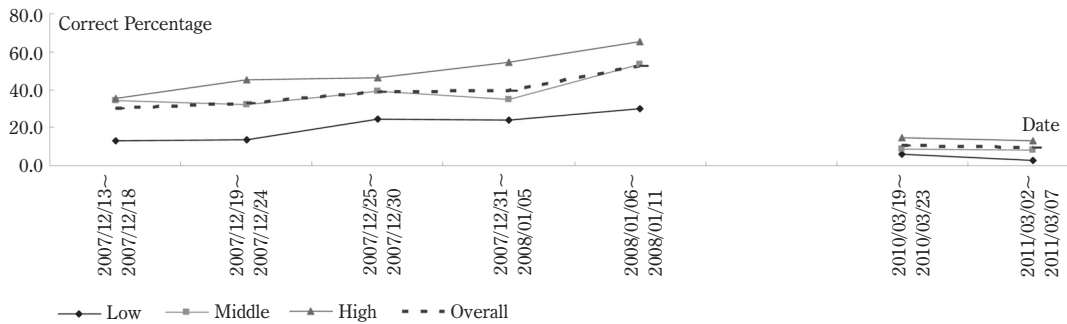
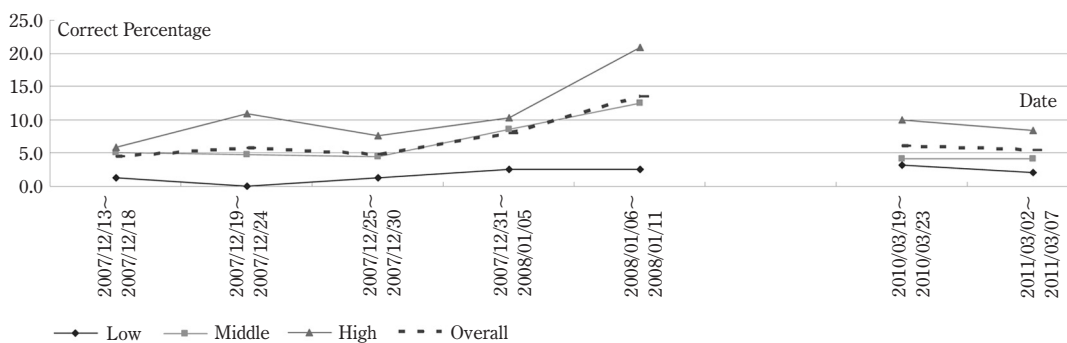
Figure 3 Voters' Education and Knowledge of District Magnitude

Figure 4 Voters' Education and Knowledge of Ballot Structure

associated with their knowledge of ballot structure. There exists a clear difference in knowledge of ballot structure among voters with different educational backgrounds. Voters with college education tend to be more knowledgeable than voters with only high school education. Similarly, voters having high school education are more well-informed on ballot structure than the less educated voters. Figure 4 also reveals that during the campaigning period in 2008, all the three groups of voters experienced a strong increase of knowledge of ballot structure. In particular, college educated voters experienced an impressive rise in their knowledge of ballot structure. However, as campaigning ends, voters' knowledge of ballot structure also decreases to a remarkable low in 2010 and 2011.

Knowledge of the threshold (for PR seats) is

doubtless a critical test for voters, regardless of levels of education. As shown in Figure 5, voters having higher education are also having more knowledge of the threshold. There are sharp differences between college educated voters and less educated voters. Also, campaigning activities do help voters receive more information of the threshold. Voters tend to be more knowledgeable of threshold as election gets closer. The campaigning effect is even more clear among college educated voters who increased their knowledge of threshold to 20% in the week before the election day. Furthermore, in surveys of 2010 and 2011, voters' knowledge of threshold shows a sizeable decrease. Less than 10% of college educated voters were able to answer the threshold question while less than 5% of both high school educated and less educated voters were able to

Figure 5 Voters' Education and Knowledge of Threshold

answer the question.

Partisan attachment is an often-cited factor affecting voters' political attitudes and behaviors. On the one hand, voters who have a party identity tend to maintain stable political attitudes and orientations. As voters turn into partisans, they become more politically attentive. On the other hand, political parties are agents of socialization providing crucial political information to voters during elections. The information provided by political parties, though highly selective, is a short cut for voters to reach their voting decisions. These effects are also applicable to voters' knowledge of the electoral system. As indicated in Figure 6, voters with strong partisan attachments are more knowledgeable about the term of legislators than those with moderate and weak partisan attachments. The weaker the partisan attachment voters have, the lower is the knowledge of

the term of legislators. However, unlike the general pattern, one interesting development depicted in Figure 6 is that campaigning activities do not significantly help voters acquire knowledge about term of legislators. On the contrary, voters with strong partisan attachments experience a moderate decrease of knowledge of term during the campaigning period. Also, voters' knowledge of term of legislators continues to increase in surveys of 2010 and 2011.

Voters' knowledge of district magnitude shows a similar pattern as knowledge of term of legislators. In Figure 7, voters with strong attachment to specific parties tend to have more knowledge of district magnitude than those with moderate and weak party attachment. Also, moderate party identification voters are more knowledgeable than weak party identification voters. One notable commonality among these three

Figure 6 Voters' Party Identification and Knowledge of Term

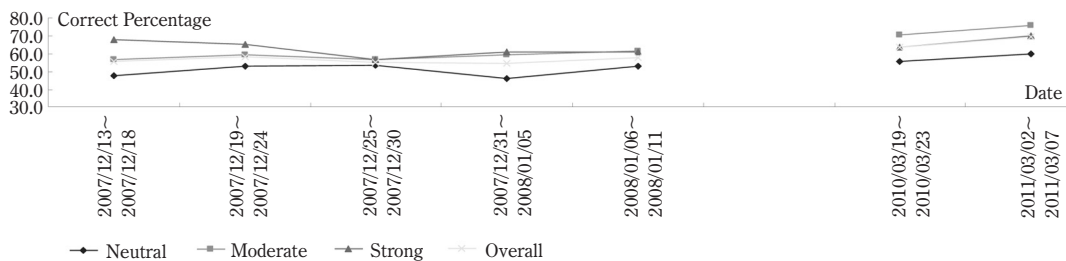
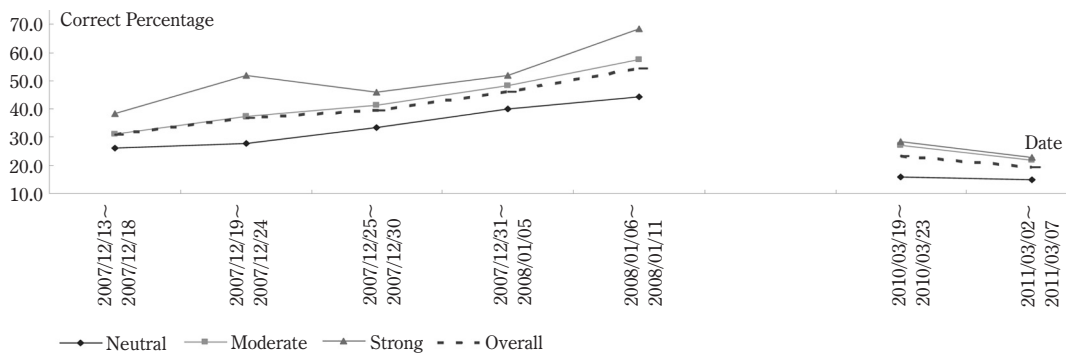


Figure 7 Voters' Party Identification and Knowledge of District Magnitude



groups of voters is the solid increase of knowledge of district magnitude during the campaigning period. It is also clear that voters having stronger party identification also increased their knowledge of district magnitude during the 2008 election. The increasing trend of knowledge of district magnitude, however, does not sustain. Voters' knowledge of district magnitude fell sharply in 2010 and 2011.

The impact of partisan attachment on voters' knowledge of ballot structure reveals a slightly mixed result. As demonstrated in Figure 8, both strong and moderate party identification voters are more knowledgeable than weak party identification voters. Yet, the three groups of voters basically share a similar pattern of increasing knowledge of ballot structure during the 2008 campaigning period. This similar pattern continues in the 2010 and 2011 surveys; all of them experi-

ence a great decline in knowledge of ballot structure.

Figure 9 suggests that partisan attachment matters in voters' knowledge of threshold for allocation of PR seats during the campaigning period. Strong party identification voters clearly have more knowledge than both moderate and weak party identification voters. In particular, the differences in knowledge of threshold amplify following the process of electoral campaigning. There are not significant differences in the early period of campaigning among the three groups of voters. However, strong party identification voters take a strong lead as the election day approaches. As anticipated, after the 2008 election, none of the groups of voters is able to maintain the same level of knowledge of threshold as in 2008. Partisan attachment plays a less significant role in voters' knowledge of threshold.

Figure 8 Voters' Party Identification and Knowledge of Ballot Structure

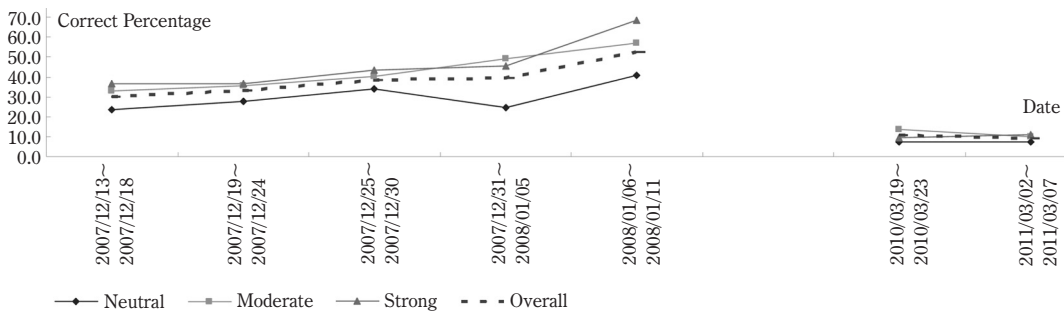
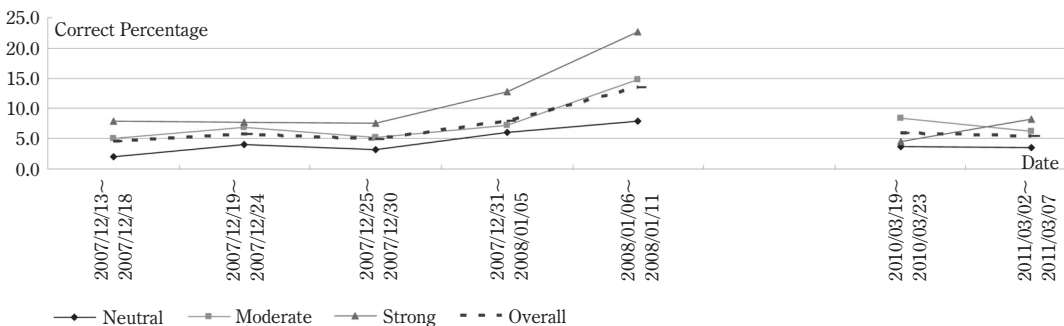


Figure 9 Voters' Party Identification and Knowledge of Threshold



In a nutshell, survey results not only point out the different degrees of difficulties voters face when answering the four questions on their knowledge of the new MMM system but also the changes in voters' knowledge during campaigning and non-campaigning periods. The threshold for PR seats, though applied under the SNTV-MMD system also, has continuously bothered a great majority of voters. By contrast, the term of legislators and district seats were relatively easy questions for voters. Meanwhile, campaigning activities do play an important role in facilitating voters' knowledge of the new MMM system. Voters are exposed to various types of information disseminated by competing political parties and candidates during campaigning. The potential impacts of the new MMM system are also included. Owing to the assistance of political parties and candidates, voters had their first experiences of understanding and using the new MMM system in the 2008 election. However, once the legislative elections were over, and messages from political parties and candidates stopped, information about the new electoral system stopped increasing. Voters became less informed, or tended to forget the elements and implications of the new MMM systems. Also, voters' partisan attachment and education do have strong influence on voters' understanding of the new MMM system. Compared with low educated and non-partisan voters, those having higher education and stronger partisan attachment are more knowledgeable of the new MMM system. Education and partisan attachment also facilitate voters' learning during the campaigning period; higher education and strong partisan voters have demonstrated quicker accumulation of knowledge than their low education and non-partisan counterparts.

Concluding Remarks

In a small but content-rich pamphlet published by the Electoral Commission of New Zealand in 1996, the Commission's Chief Executive, Paul Harris, indicated that "One of the Electoral Commission's statutory responsibilities is to promote public awareness of electoral matters. As part of that task, the Commission saw the need for a general account of New Zealand's electoral system which not only described the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) voting system adopted in the 1993 referendum and how an election would be held under MMP, but also covered the constitutional context within which MMP will operate and the administration of the electoral system." (Electoral Commission 1996, v). Majority of literature on New Zealand's electoral reform, like many of its counterparts engaging in electoral reform, have consistently focused on political implications of the reform process and outcome. The above pamphlet by New Zealand's Electoral Commission has received relatively less attention from the academic community. Nonetheless, Harris's argument in the pamphlet makes an important point that introducing a new electoral system is not merely an issue of electoral administration but a crucial political reform. Moreover, during the campaigning period in the 1996 election, New Zealand voters were kept informed about the practical implications of the new electoral system. The Electoral Commission continued to inform the voters not only of the new components of the electoral system but also the operation of these new components. For example, voters were told there would be two ballots in election, one for the proportional parliamentary seats to be cast in favor of a voter's preferred political party and the other was for electing parliamentary members from individual

constituencies. Similarly, individual political parties also made every effort to convince voters to cast the two votes to meet the party's best interests (Vowles, Aimer, Banducci and Karp, 1998, 102). Both the official Electoral Commission and competing political parties tried to "educate" voters about the new electoral system, though for different purposes. Voters were thus exposed to messages which contributed to their understanding of the new electoral system.

This essay starts from an interest in enquiring voters' knowledge of the new electoral system in Taiwan before and after the legislative election in 2008. The findings are exploratory but call for a deeper thought when evaluating the overall impact of the new MMM in Taiwan's legislative election. First, it is found that majority voters in the 2008 election had limited knowledge of the new electoral system. Though there are significant differences between the previous SNTV-MMD system and the new MMM, voters lack enough information to grasp these differences and their implications. Voters' prudent voting behavior based on their full understanding of how the new MMM operates is perhaps debatable.

Secondly, this essay indicates a clear association between electoral mobilization and voters' knowledge of the electoral system. Irrespective of different complexities of each component of the electoral system, there was a clear increase in voters' understanding of the new electoral system during the campaigning period in 2008. As election approaches, voters have more information on the new MMM system. It is, therefore, reasonable to argue that campaign mobilization accelerates the flow of electoral information, including the mechanism of the new electoral system, which enriches voters' knowledge of the electoral system. Of course, campaign period also offers various opportunities for competing politi-

cal parties to "educate" voters on how to cast their ballots. In contrast, voters' knowledge of the new electoral system declines during the non-campaigning period. On the one hand, the first experience of elections under the MMM system in 2008 did help voters acquire some knowledge of the new system. Voters came to know that only one legislator is to be elected from their constituency after 2008. So is the term of new legislators. Therefore, in 2011, voters' recognition of the term of legislators witnessed a moderate increase. On the other hand, voters' knowledge of the number of ballots and threshold continues to decrease post-2008 election. In particular, unlike the number of legislators from the constituency, both the two-ballot issue and the threshold issue are more complicated for voters to understand. The messages that voters received from political parties and candidates to cast their votes "correctly" during the 2008 election campaign disappeared in non-election years of 2010 and 2011.

Thirdly, it is anticipated that voters' knowledge of the new electoral system is likely to bounce back as the next legislative election approaches in January of 2012. This essay maintains that the change in voters' knowledge is contingent upon the appearance and contents of campaign mobilization in elections when competing political parties try to convince voters to vote. Experiences during and after the 2008 campaign do confirm this political cycle hypothesis. Voters' knowledge declines once the political parties stop offering further electoral information. Yet, the experience of the electoral campaign in 2008 does imply a possible surge in voters' knowledge of MMM in the next legislative election. Therefore, a cyclical pattern of voters' knowledge of the new electoral system during the election period and non-election period is another important research agenda to be explored. In particular, a well-designed exer-

cise for collection of data on the interaction of voters' information exposure and electoral tactics employed by political parties is of special importance.

Last, but not the least, is that voters' individual attributes play a crucial role in determining their knowledge of the electoral system. The data in this essay indicate that voters' education and partisan attachment are important factors that affect their knowledge of the electoral system. Either during the campaigning period or non-campaigning period, voters with higher education and stronger party identification tend to have higher level knowledge of the electoral system. This finding is congruent with conclusions of mainstream literature on voters' political knowledge. Therefore, there exists a need to investigate deeper into the relationship between voters' personal attributes and knowledge of electoral system under the cyclical pattern mentioned above. It calls for a more dynamic analysis of the interactions among voters' personal attributes, political parties' electoral tactics, and the effects of campaign information in different periods. This will be our research agenda following this essay.

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(1) Here we adopt the classification of two subtypes of mixed-member systems by Shugart and Wattenberg (2001, 13-14). They call the mixed-member system "majoritarian" when there is no linkage between nominal and list

tiers in the allocation of seats to parties. On the other hand, mixed-member proportional (MMP) systems prioritize the list tier, i.e., the second ballot.

(2) The first data set analyzed in this paper was from "Taiwan's Election and Democratization Study, 2008: Legislative Election (TEDS 2008L) (NSC 96-2420-H004-002-025). The coordinator of the multi-year project TEDS is Professor Chi Huang (National Chengchi University). TEDS2008L is a yearly project on the Legislative Yuan election in 2008. The principal investigator is Professor Yun-han Chu for TEDS 2008L. More information is available on TEDS website (<http://www.tedsnet.org>). The second data set was from "Core Questionnaire for Comparative Surveys of Taiwan, Japan, and Korea: Taiwan, March 2010." The principal investigator is Professor Chi Huang. The third data set was from "Political Knowledge of Electoral Systems." The principal investigator is Professor Chi Huang. The authors appreciate the assistance provided by way of making data available by the institute and aforementioned individuals. The authors alone are responsible for views expressed herein.

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