

RESEARCH NOTE

## Vote Misreporting and Survey Context: The Taiwan Case

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*The misreporting of votes in elections is an important topic for survey research, and it has received comparatively little attention other than in some Western countries. This study employs Taiwan as the case and analyzes the propensity of non-voters to report that they voted in surveys. The main task is to present the results of a split-sample experiment in the "2004 Taiwan's Election and Democratization Study" (TEDS 2004L), which is designed to examine whether survey context can reduce vote misreporting. The findings reveal that although the experiment with changes in the questionnaire context was far from successful, it should be noted that vote misreporting is a field worthy of continued research.*

**KEYWORDS:** vote misreporting; electoral turnout; political behavior; survey research; questionnaire design.

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[N]either high nor low rates of participation and voting are in themselves good or bad for democracy; the extent and nature of that participation reflect other factors which determine far more decisively the system's chances to develop or survive. But the extent of apathy and the varying levels of participation of different segments of the population do clarify the underlying consensus and conflict within the political process.<sup>1</sup>



The topic of vote misreporting is important theoretically and practically. Research on both electoral turnout and vote choice depends heavily on self-reported behavior, but it is generally found that a number of respondents do not accurately report their electoral behavior.<sup>2</sup> One cause of errors in survey research is that more respondents claim to have voted in post-election interviews than have actually cast ballots. A possible consequence is that misreporting does indeed produce some misleading conclusions, since much of the scholarly work tests models of electoral behavior based on survey measurements containing a relatively large amount of error.

The proportions of vote misreporting are substantial, but vary across different investigations. Taking American elections as an example, the discrepancy between the self-reported and validated turnout rates ranges from approximately 12 percent to 25 percent, and the gap has remained

<sup>1</sup>Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*, expanded edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 229.

<sup>2</sup>Concerning the issues of vote misreporting, see Paul R. Abramson and William Claggett, "The Quality of Record Keeping and Racial Differences in Validated Turnout," *Journal of Politics* 54, no. 3 (1992): 871-80; Robert F. Belli, Michael W. Traugott, Margaret Young, and Katherine A. McGonagle, "Reducing Vote Overreporting in Surveys: Social Desirability, Memory Failure, and Source Monitoring," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (1999): 90-108; Carol A. Cassel and Lee Sigelman, "Misreporters in Candidate Choice Models," *Political Research Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (2001): 643-55; John P. Katosh and Michael W. Traugott, "The Consequences of Validated and Self-Reported Voting Measures," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (1981): 519-35; Paul Gronke, "Overreporting the Vote in the 1988 Senate Election Study: A Response to Wright," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1992): 113-29; Brian D. Silver, Barbara A. Anderson, and Paul R. Abramson, "Who Overreports Voting?" *American Political Science Review* 80, no. 2 (1986): 613-24; Gerald C. Wright, "Misreports of Vote Choice in the 1988 NES Senate Election Study," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (1990): 543-63; and Gerald C. Wright, "Reported versus Actual Vote: There is a Difference and it Matters," *ibid.* 17, no. 1 (1992): 131-42.

rather stable across time.<sup>3</sup> In addition, it is systematically found that misreporting voters are more likely than actual voters to claim that they voted for the winner.<sup>4</sup> As for the effects of survey methods, some researchers confirm the assumption that the misreporting error is lower in telephone surveys than in face-to-face interviews, because of the greater degree of anonymity and thus the smaller social desirability bias over the telephone (i.e., respondents self-presenting themselves in a favorable way as good citizens),<sup>5</sup> while others find that there is virtually no difference in misreporting between respondents interviewed by telephone and those who are interviewed in person.<sup>6</sup>

Although the questions about misreporting and over-reporting are important, they have received relatively little attention from a comparative perspective. Only a few Western countries have been researched empirically.<sup>7</sup> The United States is one example, and therefore an important

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<sup>3</sup>Stanley Presser, "Is Inaccuracy on Factual Survey Items Item-Specific or Respondent-Specific?" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (1984): 344-55; Stanley Presser and Michael Traugott, "Little White Lies and Social Science Models: Correlated Response Errors in a Panel Study of Voting," *ibid.* 56, no. 1 (1992): 77-86; Michael W. Traugott and John P. Katosh, "Response Validity in Surveys of Voting Behavior," *ibid.* 43, no. 3 (1979): 359-77; and Carol H. Weiss, "Validity of Welfare Mother's Interview Responses," *ibid.* 32, no. 4 (1968): 622-33.

<sup>4</sup>Concerning systematic misreporting for the winner, research finds that the difference between the reported vote and actual vote is about 7 percent for the House of Representatives, 4 percent for U.S. Senate races, and 4.7 percent for gubernatorial elections. See Gerald C. Wright, "Errors in Measuring Vote Choice in the National Election Studies, 1952-88," *American Journal of Political Science* 37, no. 1 (1993): 295. As for presidential elections, Wright noted that there appears to be little bias and thus little cause for attention, while Atkeson empirically demonstrated that misreporting in presidential primary elections is a serious problem, with the average overestimate for Democrats at 15 percent and for Republicans at 11 percent from 1972 through 1992. See Lonna Rae Atkeson, "'Sure, I Voted for the Winner!' Overreport of the Primary Vote for the Party Nominee in the National Election Studies," *Political Behavior* 21, no. 3 (1999): 198.

<sup>5</sup>William Locander, Seymour Sudman, and Norman Bradburn, "An Investigation of Interview Method, Threat and Response Distortion," *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 71, no. 354 (1976): 269-75; and Theresa F. Rogers, "Interviews by Telephone and in Person: Quality of Responses and Field Performance," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (1976): 51-65.

<sup>6</sup>Paul R. Abramson and William Claggett, "Race-Related Differences in Self-Reported and Validated Turnout in 1984," *Journal of Politics* 48, no. 2 (1986): 412-22.

<sup>7</sup>Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, "Government Statistics and Conflicting Explanations of Nonvoting," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 22, no. 3 (1989): 580-88; G. Bingham Powell, Jr., "American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective," *American*

one, because of the myriad systematic quantitative analyses to which it has been subjected.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, systematic analyses of misreporting in developing countries remain scarce.<sup>9</sup> This work aims to address the theme of vote misreporting in a developing country, the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan.

There are two reasons why this work focuses on vote misreporting in Taiwan. First, free, open, and fair elections, in which eligible voters play the most crucial role in the electoral process by casting their ballots, are central to democracy.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the intention and behavior of the general public are important measures of a society's level of democratization.<sup>11</sup> Second, Taiwan is a robust, growing country in the midst of broad social, economic, and political transition. As mentioned below, Taiwan has

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*Political Science Review* 80, no. 1 (1986): 17-43; Michael S. Rendall, Lynda Clarke, H. Elizabeth Peters, Nalini Ranjit, and Georgia Verropoulou, "Incomplete Reporting of Men's Fertility in the United States and Britain: A Research Note," *Demography* 36, no. 1 (1999): 135-44; and Kevin Swaddle and Anthony Heath, "Official and Reported Turnout in the British General Election of 1987," *British Journal of Political Science* 19, no. 4 (1989): 537-51.

<sup>8</sup>For example, Abramson and Claggett, "Race-Related Differences in Self-Reported and Validated Turnout in 1984," 412-22; Abramson and Claggett, "The Quality of Record Keeping and Racial Differences in Validated Turnout," 871-88; Atkeson, "Sure, I Voted for the Winner!," 197-215; Belli, Traugott, Young, and McGonagle, "Reducing Vote Overreporting in Surveys," 90-108; Cassel and Sigelman, "Misreporters in Candidate Choice Models," 643-55; Katosh and Traugott, "The Consequences of Validated and Self-Reported Voting Measures," 519-35; Presser, "Is Inaccuracy on Factual Survey Items: Item-Specific or Respondent-Specific?" 344-55; Traugott and Katosh, "Response Validity in Surveys of Voting Behavior," 359-77; Wright, "Misreports of Vote Choice," 543-63; Wright, "Reported versus Actual Vote," 131-42; and Wright, "Errors in Measuring Vote Choice," 291-316.

<sup>9</sup>An article on urban/rural voter turnout in Korea reports that the difference between the sample and actual turnout percentages was 22.6 percent in the 1988 National Assembly election, and the gaps were rather stable across regions. In addition to the misreporting rates, the study does not go so far as to examine the misreporting pattern in Korea. See Jongryn Mo, David Brady, and Jaehun Ro, "Urbanization and Voter Turnout in Korea: An Update," *Political Behavior* 13, no. 1 (1991): 24.

<sup>10</sup>Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972); Lipset, *Political Man*; and Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

<sup>11</sup>Norman H. Nie and Sidney Verba, "Political Participation," in *Handbook of Political Science*, volume 4: *Nongovernmental Politics*, ed. Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1975), 1-74; and E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960).

moved from a Leninist-style regime with characteristics of a one-party authoritarian system toward a weak democratic regime with aspects of institutionalized electoral competition.<sup>12</sup> For those of us who study politics in newly industrializing countries, the Taiwan case might help further our understanding of the voting behavior in other developing countries.

With this end in mind, this research explores two interrelated issues. It first of all briefly reviews the rates of electoral turnout in Taiwan over the past decade and then presents statistics on self-reported and validated votes in the 2004 election to the Legislative Yuan (立法院). Second, it employs the method developed by Stanley Presser<sup>13</sup> and reports the results of a split-sample experiment in the "Taiwan's Election and Democratization Study, 2002-2004 (IV): The Legislative Yuan Election, 2004" (TEDS 2004L), which is designed to explore whether the question context can reduce vote misreporting in surveys.

### **Electoral Turnout and Vote Misreporting in Taiwan**

The island of Taiwan, also known as Formosa from the Portuguese for "beautiful," looks roughly like a sweet potato, and is about 234 miles long and 88 miles broad at its widest point. At 13,900 square miles, it is approximately the size of the U.S. state of West Virginia. At the time of its return to China from Japan in 1945, Taiwan had a population of about six million. By 2006, its population numbered approximately 22.5 million, making Taiwan one of the most densely populated countries in the world.

In 1949 the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) government retreated to Taiwan after the civil war in mainland China. From the early 1950s

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<sup>12</sup>For socioeconomic change and political transition in Taiwan, see Tun-jen Cheng, "Democratizing the Quasi-Leninist Regime in Taiwan," *World Politics* 41, no. 4 (1989): 471-99; Tun-jen Cheng and Stephan Haggard, eds., *Political Change in Taiwan* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1992); and Hung-mao Tien, ed., *Taiwan's Electoral Politics and Democratic Transition: Riding the Third Wave* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1996).

<sup>13</sup>Stanley Presser, "Can Changes in Context Reduce Vote Overreporting in Surveys?" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (1990): 586-93.

through the mid-1980s, the KMT regime was characterized as an authoritarian one-party state with elements of totalitarianism in view of its comprehensive domination over the ruling mechanism.<sup>14</sup> The control seized by the KMT was comparable to that in a Leninist-style state, two exceptions being the existence of private ownership and, more significantly, the institutionalization of local elections.<sup>15</sup>

The first local elections for executive posts were held in two stages in 1950 and 1951. Since then, voting has gradually expanded from local to national elections over the past five decades. From 1950 to 1968, electoral competition was limited to the chief executives and representative bodies at the city, sub-county, and county levels and to the provincial assembly. In these elections, no organized political opposition existed to compete with the governing KMT. In 1969, the authorities initiated limited electoral competition for national supplementary representative seats; beginning in 1991 and 1992, all members of the national parliamentary bodies were subject to direct popular election. The most important development was the first popular presidential election that took place in 1996. Up to the present, all representative bodies and major executive officials—except the premier who is appointed by the president—are subject to popular election.

During the past decades, voter turnout in Taiwan has been relatively high, with an average of about 70 percent, in comparison with that of other democratic countries. After the lifting of martial law in 1987, voting participation in Taiwan's national elections was relatively high. However, it has declined substantially in recent years. Generally speaking, the rates of voter turnout in the presidential elections are somewhat higher than those of the parliamentary elections, as shown in table 1. For presidential races, the popular votes increased from 76.04 percent in 1996 to 82.69 percent in 2000, then slightly decreased to 80.28 percent in 2004. The turnout rates in the 1989 and 1992 elections to the Legislative Yuan were 75.16 percent

<sup>14</sup>Hung-mao Tien, *The Great Transition: Political and Social Change in the Republic of China* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1989); and Edwin A. Winckler, "Institutionalization and Participation on Taiwan," *The China Quarterly*, no. 99 (September 1984): 481-99.

<sup>15</sup>Cheng, "Democratizing the Quasi-Leninist Regime in Taiwan," 477-78.

**Table 1**  
**Voter Turnouts in Taiwan's National Elections, 1989-2004**

Year	Type of Election	Turnout (%)
1989	Supplementary representatives of the Legislative Yuan	75.16
1991	2nd session representatives of the National Assembly	68.32
1992	2nd session representatives of the Legislative Yuan	72.02
1995	3rd session representatives of the Legislative Yuan	67.65
1996	President	76.04
	3rd session representatives of the National Assembly	76.21
1998	4th session representatives of the Legislative Yuan	68.09
2000	President	82.69
2001	5th session representatives of the Legislative Yuan	66.16
March 2004	President	80.28
December 2004	6th session representatives of the Legislative Yuan	59.16

**Sources:** Election Study Center of National Chengchi University, <http://www.esc.nccu.edu.tw/>.

and 72.02 percent which were relatively high compared to those that followed. In 1995, 1998, and 2001 the average percentage was approximately 67 percent. The level of voter turnout afterwards plunged to 59.16 percent in the 2004 year-end Legislative Yuan election. Viewed in this light, the 2004 election to the Legislative Yuan could provide an appropriate setting for this analysis of vote misreporting.

By examining the differences between validated and self-reported votes in the 2004 presidential election, it is found that Taiwan respondents are more likely to report that they voted for the winning ticket, that of the current ruling political party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民主進步黨). Of the two viable tickets competing in the 2004 presidential race, the DPP incumbents Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) and Annette Lu (呂秀蓮) received 50.11 percent of the popular vote, while the "pan-Blue" challengers Lien Chan (連戰) and James Soong (宋楚瑜) shared 49.89 percent of the vote (see table 2). The difference in validated votes was a mere 0.22 percentage points. However, concerning the vote decisions of the 2004 presidential election surveyed in the TEDS 2004L, the

**Table 2**  
**Actual and Reported Votes in the 2004 Presidential Election**

	Actual Votes	Reported Votes
Lien Chan and James Soong	49.89%	862 (44.43%)
Chen Shui-bian and Annette Lu	50.11%	1,078 (55.57%)
<i>N</i>		1,940 (100.00%)
Forget		107
Refuse to answer		152
Do not know		10
Do not vote		262
Not qualified to vote		15

**Sources:** Election Study Center of National Chengchi University, <http://www.esc.nccu.edu.tw/>; and TEDS 2004L.

magnitude of reporting errors was substantial, since the discrepancy between the two candidates was approximately 11 percentage points. It is also found that the respondents tended to report that they had voted for the two major political parties, the DPP and KMT, in the parliamentary contest. As presented in table 3, the DPP gained 35.72 percent of the vote, the KMT 32.83 percent, and others picked up 31.44 percent in the 2004 election to the Legislative Yuan. However, according to the TEDS 2004L, at least 10 percent of the sample respondents were deemed to be misreporting; the DPP received 42.06 percent of the self-reported vote, the KMT 36.08 percent, and others achieved merely 21.87 percent.

After the discussions about electoral turnout and vote misreporting in Taiwan, this study turns to the split-sample experiment in the TEDS 2004L, which is designed to examine whether survey context can improve the accuracy of vote reporting.

### **Data, Experiment, and Hypothesis**

The population of the TEDS 2004L survey data includes the twenty-one counties and cities of Taiwan as well as the two municipalities of



**Table 3**  
**Actual and Reported Votes in the 2004 Election to the Legislative Yuan**

	Actual Votes	Reported Votes
Kuomintang	32.83%	561 (36.08%)
Democratic Progressive Party	35.72%	654 (42.06%)
People First Party	13.90%	204 (13.12%)
New Party	0.12%	6 (0.39%)
Taiwan Solidarity Union	7.79%	74 (4.76%)
Non-Partisan Solidarity Union	3.63%	7 (0.45%)
Independents	6.00%	49 (3.15%)
<i>N</i>		1,555 (100.01%)
Pan-Bue		1
Pan-Green		1
Forget		130
Refuse to answer		170
Do not know		52
Did not vote		594

**Sources:** The Election Study Center of National Chengchi University, <http://www.esc.nccu.edu.tw/>; and TEDS 2004L.

Taipei (台北市) and Kaohsiung (高雄市), but excludes Jinmen County (金門縣) and Lianjiang County (連江縣; Mazu 馬祖) which are parts of Fujian Province (福建省).<sup>16</sup> This post-election, personal-interview survey was separated into two sets, questionnaires A and B—each of the two sets was conducted on a national basis and treated separately and scored accordingly. The half-sample survey was carried out from January to March 2005, with the result that 2,510 eligible voters (Questionnaire A: 1,252 respondents; Questionnaire B: 1,258) over the age of 20 were interviewed.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup>In 1992, the government announced the end of martial law and military rule in Jinmen and Lianjiang counties. They elected their county magistrates for the first time in 1993. Even though the TEDS 2004L survey did not take these two counties into consideration, I firmly believe that the data are complete and representative of Taiwan as a whole.

<sup>17</sup>The TEDS 2004L data are weighted by the factors of "gender," "age," "education level," and "region" (based on the level of socioeconomic development). The aggregative indexes

In the set of Questionnaire B, respondents were asked the following questions:

1. Do you happen to know the location of your voting booth in last year's election to the Legislative Yuan? (If yes, where is it? [open-ended question]; 98. Do not know; 91. Refuse to answer) (請問在去年立委選舉時，您的投票所在那裡？【訪員請直接記錄下來】)
2. In talking to people about last year's election to the Legislative Yuan, we find that some people went to vote, while many people were not able to vote, because of various reasons. How about you? Did you vote in the election last December? (01. Yes; 02. No; 90. Others; 91. Forgot; 95. Refuse to answer) (請問這次〔去年十二月〕的立法委員選舉中，有很多人去投票，也有很多人因各種原因沒有去投票，請問您有沒有去投票？)

The respondents of Questionnaire A were interviewed only with question 2, which was the conventional way of measuring voting participation in the previous surveys.

An experiment like this is designed to test whether the sequence of questions could motivate respondents to supply the correct information about the turnout item. This involves preceding the vote question with a knowledge item asking for information that has to be perceived in order to vote, but would be impossible for non-voters to know. The assumption is that non-voting respondents would be less apt to claim they voted if they were first asked whether they were familiar with the location of the poll, and hence this reduces the possibility of vote misreporting.<sup>18</sup> As for

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of gender, age, and socioeconomic development are based on the official documents, *2004 Taiwan-Fujian Demographic Statistics, Republic of China* (民國九十三年中華民國台閩地區人口統計), released by the Ministry of the Interior (內政部), Republic of China. Note that since the level of education in the official documents might be underestimated, the index of education comes from the adjusted estimates of Professor Yung-tai Hung (洪永泰) of the Department of Political Science, National Taiwan University.

<sup>18</sup>Presser, "Can Changes in Context Reduce Vote Overreporting in Surveys?" 587-88.

**Table 4**  
**Report of Turnout by Question Context**

	Not asked poll location	First asked poll location
Vote	962 (76.8%)	954 (75.8%)
Did not vote	273 (21.8%)	281 (22.3%)
Forget	11 (0.9%)	9 (0.7%)
Refuse to answer	6 (0.5%)	10 (0.8%)
Invalid vote		4 (0.3%)
<i>N</i>	1,252 (100.0%)	1,258 (99.9%)

**Notes:**  $\chi^2 = 3.325$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p = .343$ .

the accuracy of the answers to the location question, it is not a major concern in the survey although interviewers had to record the exact polling places.<sup>19</sup>

### **Discussion of Findings**

If the survey context can strengthen the impulse to answer accurately, it is expected that the proportion of respondents claiming to have voted would be significantly lower for the experimental version of the questionnaire. The findings in table 4 suggest that the question sequence has considerably less influence than expected on the accuracy of reported voting. Turnout for respondents who were first asked the polling station location is 75.8 percent, compared to 76.8 percent among those who were not asked the question. It is worth mentioning that the difference is in the predicted direction, but it does not exceed sampling error.

The data reported in table 5 illustrate the relationship between voting and knowledge of the poll's location. Compared to informed respondents,

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<sup>19</sup>In theory the location question should be verified by the interviewers, but in practice it is difficult to do so for two reasons. First, information is not available on the exact location of all the polling stations in Taiwan. Second, most answers are plausible, but there are some that would not be feasible to verify (e.g., the answer: "the village temple at the corner").

**Table 5**  
**Report of Turnout by Knowledge of Polling Location**

	Know location	Refuse to answer	Does not know location
Vote	934 (79.3%)	3 (50.0%)	17 (23.0%)
Did not vote	225 (19.1%)	1 (16.7%)	55 (74.3%)
Forget	8 (0.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.4%)
Refuse to answer	7 (0.6%)	2 (33.3%)	1 (1.4%)
Invalid vote	4 (0.3%)		
N	1,178 (100.0%)	6 (100.0%)	74 (100.1%)

those who said they did not know the location of their polling station are much less likely to claim they voted. The results are in the anticipated direction. Note that 17 of the respondents who admitted that they were unaware of the poll's whereabouts (23.0 percent of the group) still said they cast ballots in the 2004 Legislative Yuan election.<sup>20</sup>

In Taiwan there is still no facility for an absentee ballot, and this raises the question: How could uninformed respondents claim they voted? They are apparently telling little white lies, but why do they do this? It can be argued that social desirability or social conformism, rather than memory

<sup>20</sup>The findings indicate that there are 17 respondents (out of 1,258) who answered that they had voted but had no knowledge of where the polling station was. These are obviously misreported votes, but this method only detects 1.4 percent of misreporting cases among all respondents. Comparing the actual vote with the survey data, there is a discrepancy of at least 10 percent of misreporting cases. In other words, among the 1,258 respondents, there are at least 120 who reported they voted but actually did not. How about the other 100 cases? There are many possibilities. It could be due to the sampling issue, where the misreporting cases are not represented. According to Bernstein, Chadha, and Montjoy, the most likely people to misreport in the United States are those who are more educated, more partisan, and more religious. See Robert Bernstein, Anita Chadha, and Robert Montjoy, "Overreporting Voting: Why it Happens and Why it Matters?" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (2001): 22-44. This study is limited by the data and it has not been possible to conduct a multivariate model to estimate the probability of misreporting cases. Even if I use the 17 cases for such a model, the power will be questionable. Another possibility is that there could be other misreported votes but they were not detected using the method in this paper. Examples include respondents who did not vote and said they did and said they knew where the polling station was but actually did not. One way of detecting this is to verify the answers to the location question. However, I addressed the practical and technical difficulties involved in this in note 19 above, and suggested that such verification was infeasible.

failure, is the explanation for the misreporting. The respondents could hardly forget their vote choices, since the time gap between the election (December 11, 2004) and the survey (from January through March 2005) was small. Therefore, I am of the opinion that respondents might endorse a socially favorable statement more frequently than they would agree with its opposite, as the foregoing narrative has noted.<sup>21</sup> Viewed in this light, it should be not surprising to find that in surveys some non-voters who admit they are unfamiliar with the location of the poll still claim to have participated in the election.

## Conclusion

To the ordinary citizen, voting is the commonest, simplest, and least costly behavior in electoral politics. For the political system, however, the implications of voting are profound. According to Seymour Martin Lipset, "[v]oting is the key mechanism of consensus in democratic society."<sup>22</sup> Under conditions of voluntary suffrage, voter turnout not only signifies how much interest the electorate has in the election and its candidates, but also reveals the degree of psychological attachment of the electorate to political matters.<sup>23</sup> As for the measurement of levels of political participation, a burgeoning amount of literature has noted the serious problem that many non-voters report to survey interviewers that they have indeed voted.<sup>24</sup> Vote misreporting presents an interesting question to both public

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<sup>21</sup>Robert P. Abelson,, Elizabeth F. Loftus, and Anthony G. Greenwald, "Attempts to Improve the Accuracy of Self-Reports of Voting," in *Questions about Questions*, ed. Judith M. Tanur (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1992), 138-53; Belli, Traugott, Young, and McGonagle, "Reducing Vote Overreporting in Surveys," 90-108; and Presser, "Can Changes in Context Reduce Vote Overreporting in Surveys?" 586-93.

<sup>22</sup>Lipset, *Political Man*, 12.

<sup>23</sup>Lester W. Milbrath and M. L. Goel, *Political Participation* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1977), 46-47; and Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 245-48.

<sup>24</sup>Abramson and Claggett, "The Quality of Record Keeping and Racial Differences in Validated Turnout"; Atkeson, "Sure, I Voted for the Winner!"; Belli, Traugott, Young, and

opinion and political science researchers. It reflects the effectiveness of survey instruments and, more importantly, affects the reliability of vote data and interpretations of multivariate vote models.

With these considerations in mind, my focus in this work is electoral participation in Taiwan, in terms of validated and self-reported voting participation. In summing up electoral turnout and vote misreporting in Taiwan, the findings are rather similar to those in some Western democracies. For one, voting participation in Taiwan's national elections has declined substantially in recent years. Furthermore, the percentages of vote misreporting are rather consistent and stable, in the range of approximately 12 to 20 percent between validated and reported votes.

This study employs the 2004 Legislative Yuan election as the case and presents the results of a split-sample experiment designed to examine whether the question context can reduce the propensity of non-voters to report in surveys that they have voted. The experiment tests the effects of preceding the turnout item with a knowledge question about the location of the polling station by analyzing the TEDS 2004L. If respondents who might misreport do not know where their polling station is, then they would be apt to report correctly about their turnout after being asked the location of the poll. The evidence indicates that there is little support for the hypothesis, although the difference is in the anticipated direction and is well within sampling error. However, compared to those who said they knew the polling station, as hypothesized, uninformed respondents are less likely to claim they voted. Likewise, the findings also show that a substantial proportion of non-voters are likely to misreport that they voted, probably because of the pressure of social desirability or social conformism. As such, though the experiment with changes in the questionnaire context was unsuccessful, vote misreporting from a comparative perspective is in need of much more research.

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McGonagle, "Reducing Vote Overreporting in Surveys"; Cassel and Sigelman, "Misreporters in Candidate Choice Models"; Silver, Anderson, and Abramson, "Who Overreports Voting?"; and Wright, "Errors in Measuring Vote Choice in the National Election Studies, 1952-88."

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