

## Was 2016 a Realigning Election in Taiwan?

### ABSTRACT

The January 2016 presidential and legislative elections in Taiwan produced a dramatic and unprecedented victory for the Democratic Progressive Party over its long-time rival, the Kuomintang. The party had never had a parliamentary majority before 2016. The elections indicated the potential for fundamental change in Taiwan's party system. This is what political scientists call a critical realigning election. The problem with identifying these elections, such as the 1896 and 1932 ones in the United States, is that we can only be sure of such an interpretation after a significant amount of time has passed. Still, some of the changes in Taiwan are fundamental enough to make such an evaluation worthwhile. We summarize realigning elections; discuss the factors that may lead to a change in the partisan balance; and describe the growing role of protest parties and social movements in Taiwan politics.

**KEYWORDS:** Taiwan, Democratic Progressive Party, Kuomintang, political parties, realigning elections

THE JANUARY 2016 PRESIDENTIAL and legislative elections in Taiwan produced a dramatic and unprecedented victory for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) over its long-time rival the Kuomintang (KMT). While Chen Shui-bian had captured the presidency in 2000 with 40% of the vote and 50% in 2004, in 2016 Tsai Ing-wen swept to victory with a decisive 56%

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majority over the KMT's Eric Chu (31%) and James Soong of the People First Party (PFP, 12%). The DPP's victory in the Legislative Yuan represented even more impressive gains. The DPP had never had a parliamentary majority before 2016, either alone or in a coalition with smaller allied parties. Yet in 2016 it increased its seats from 40 to 68 (out of 113), as KMT membership collapsed from 64 to 35.

Moreover, this followed the DPP's unprecedented success in the 2014 local elections. One seeming contribution to the DPP's 2016 triumph was that many KMT voters, especially those in China, stayed home, leading to smaller turnout (66% in 2016, compared to 74% in 2012). Furthermore, while this received less notice, the New Power Party (NPP) won five seats, marking the first electoral success in Taiwan politics of a "protest party" not associated with a defecting faction or the leader of one of the two major parties (Clark and Tan 2016; Copper 2014, 2016; Fell 2016; Hsieh 2016; Templeman 2016; Wu 2016).

The 2016 presidential elections indicated the potential of fundamental change in Taiwan's party system. Tsai's first administration was a political rollercoaster, in which her popularity first plummeted, resulting in a KMT victory in the 2018 local elections, and then rebounded strongly. She kept her post in the 2020 presidential election, while the DPP retained its parliamentary majority. Two new parties, the NPP and the Taiwan People's Party, drew very significant support, as they combined to garner 20% of the vote in the proportional representation part of the legislative elections, in which the two major parties together could only get two-thirds of the vote (Aspinwall 2020; Central Election Commission 2020; Chung 2020b; Hsu 2020; Lin 2020; Sam 2020; Yang, Shih, and Lin 2020).

Taken together, these election results suggest that a fundamental change in Taiwan's party system may have commenced. This is what political scientists call a critical realigning election (Burnham 1970; Key 1955; Sundquist 1983). The problem with identifying realigning elections, such as the 1896 and 1932 ones in the United States, is that we can only be sure of such an interpretation after a significant amount of time has passed. Still, some of the changes in Taiwan are fundamental enough to make such an evaluation worthwhile. Our analysis is presented in three sections. The first summarizes realigning elections; the second discusses the factors that may lead to a change in the partisan balance; and the third describes the growing role of protest parties and social movements in Taiwanese politics.

## REALIGNING ELECTIONS

### The Theory of Realignment

The idea of the critical realigning election rests on the observation of V. O. Key (1955) that fundamental changes in the party systems of the United States had occurred after specific elections. Three types of changes are possible. First and probably most fundamentally, the balance between the major parties may be altered. For example, the 1896 presidential election ushered in an era of Republican domination after three decades of fairly balanced competition; the 1932 election marked the beginning of a similar period of Democratic superiority. Second, the social basis of support for the party may change. Quite dramatically, for instance, the American South was solidly Democratic as the twentieth century opened and solidly Republican when it closed. Finally, the major issues motivating voters may change. For example, the period from the late mid-1960s to the mid-1980s witnessed the emergence of cultural issues and the decreasing salience of economic ones as America moved from an industrial to an information-age society.

Key also distinguished between “maintaining” elections, when the normal pattern prevails, and “deviating” ones, in which the pattern is broken but only temporarily. For example, Democrat Woodrow Wilson won twice during a period of Republican domination; and Republican Dwight Eisenhower did the same during a period of Democratic control. Finally, Key recognized the possibility of a “secular realignment” that occurs more slowly, over several election cycles (Burnham 1970; Key 1955, 1959; Sundquist 1983; Templeman 2016).

### Realignment in Democratic Taiwan

Applying this theoretical framework to Taiwan’s democratic era suggests three periods and two realigning elections (Table 1). Here, we date Taiwan’s democracy to 1992, when all the members of the Legislative Yuan were directly elected for the first time. The 1992–2000 period witnessed no realignment, as KMT domination of the government continued from the authoritarian era. But the victory of the DPP’s Chen Shui-bian in the 2000 presidential election marked the beginning of strong two-party competition, in which the major parties alternated power like a pendulum. In addition, the stagnation of Taiwan’s economy during the twenty-first century has changed

TABLE 1. Three Eras in Taiwan’s Democratic Politics

<i>Period</i>	<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Realigning election</i>
1992–2000	KMT domination	None
2000–2016	Two competitive parties, alternating power; economic issues switch from helping KMT to hurting incumbents	2000
2016–	Change in issues and constituencies; partisan balance uncertain	2016

the political impact of economic issues from helping the KMT to hurting incumbents. Finally, the 2016 and 2020 elections were marked by important changes in issues and constituencies, as well as by more open-ended possibilities for the evolution of the partisan balance.

THE POSSIBILITIES FOR CHANGE IN TAIWAN’S PARTISAN BALANCE

The Implosion of the Ma Administration

Turning to the Taiwan case in detail, the decisive 2016 DPP victory had been building for four years. In January 2012, President Ma Ying-jeou won re-election by a margin of 52% to 46% over the DPP’s Tsai Ing-wen. This was considerably smaller than his margin in 2008, and the KMT’s majority in the Legislative Yuan saw a similar reduction. Still, Taiwan’s citizens had given Ma and the KMT a vote of confidence. It turned out to be an extremely short mandate, however. Within six months of his election, Ma’s approval rating had plummeted to 15%, which broke Chen Shui-bian’s record low of 18%, and his popularity never rose very significantly after that.

This tumultuous drop reflected the confluence of several factors. First, as is common among incumbent chief executives, Ma put off several unpopular policies until after he was safely re-elected. These included steep raises in oil and electricity prices in response to the global jump in energy prices, a capital gains tax on stock transactions in response to the country’s budget squeeze, and the re-emergence of the ongoing controversy over beef imports from the United States. But also, the secretary-general of the Executive Yuan, a Ma protégé, was arrested for bribery, marring Ma’s image as a clean politician. China undercut Ma’s claim that he was successfully managing relations with

Beijing by issuing a thinly veiled rebuke of a speech he made on cross-Strait relations. Taiwan's economic growth slowed considerably in 2015 and 2016. And finally, Ma's troubles were compounded by growing strain within the KMT, which weakened his ability to get his initiatives through the legislature (Chen 2013; Clark and Tan 2016; Hsieh 2014; Templeman 2016).

Popular discontent with Ma and the KMT came to a head in the spring of 2014. The Ma administration sought to expand the free-trade pacts with China that had been negotiated earlier, in the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) of June 2013. This was a major proposal that included financial services, communications, health and social services, business services, transportation, tourism, environmental services, and distribution services. It was highly controversial from the start. This was far from surprising, for two reasons. First, since the 1990s, cross-Strait relations had probably been the most important issue dividing the DPP and KMT; and trade agreements for services are generally harder to negotiate than those for goods, in part because issues regarding communications and financial services are often seen as threatening the sovereignty of small nations, which is a highly salient and sensitive issue in Taiwan. Second, the CSSTA had been negotiated in secret. This was noted amid growing fears among Taiwanese citizens of Chinese domination of Taiwan and concern that economic integration across the Strait was contributing significantly to the growing inequality in Taiwan and transmitting China's slowing economic growth to Taiwan, which especially threatened the future prospects of students (Fan 2014; Hsieh 2014, 2015).

The Ma administration seemingly realized the breadth and seriousness of the opposition to the CSSTA. Within a week of concluding the agreement with China, it agreed to a clause-by-clause review in the Legislative Yuan. However, a stalemate soon emerged between the DPP and KMT, which led Ma in September to try to remove the speaker of the Legislative Yuan, Wang Jin-pyng, from office. Many observers believed that Ma intended to ram the CSSTA through the Legislative Yuan, which Wang's more conciliatory relations with the DPP might have prevented. Ultimately, there was some reconciliation between Ma and Wang, and Wang continued as speaker (Hsieh 2014; Shieh, Mo, and Wang 2013).

No progress was made for almost six months, as the Ma administration showed no interest in compromise and the DPP showed no interest in moving forward with the Legislative Yuan's consideration of the CSSTA. But in mid-March 2014 a volcano erupted. On March 17, a joint committee

review meeting on the CSSTA ended in chaos. Lawmakers from the DPP and Taiwan Solidarity Union seized the podium and prevented the KMT's Chang Ching-chung from presiding. Three hours of slogan chanting and confrontation ensued. Finally, Chang declared that the meeting was over and that the review was complete, clearing the way for a vote on the trade pact. The DPP protested vociferously that this move violated the cross-party consensus on reviewing the CSSTA item by item. The next day, protests commenced outside the Legislative Yuan, and in the evening, students, along with some DPP legislators, entered and occupied the Legislative Yuan, inaugurating the Sunflower Movement (Fan 2014; Hsieh 2015; Smith 2015; Wang 2014).

The Ma administration ignored the demands of the Sunflowers and said that the CSSTA should be approved as is, creating a stalemate. For his part, KMT Speaker Wang Jin-pyng allowed the occupation to continue but did not try to negotiate with the students. Massive demonstrations were held around the island. Late on May 23 some students managed to enter the Executive Yuan, but they were later expelled with considerable force, deepening the crisis. The occupation of the Legislative Yuan continued for five weeks, until Speaker Wang agreed to develop and implement a program for monitoring cross-strait agreements before acting on the CSSTA. Due to partisan polarization, however, nothing happened on this (Hsieh 2015; Liu 2014; Smith 2015; Sui 2015; Wang 2014; Wei, Wang, and Hsu 2014).

Public opinion polls in the spring of 2014 showed the Sunflower Movement to have extremely strong public support. In political terms, its success was a major factor, although certainly not the only one, in the fall of the KMT, which was trounced in the 2014 local elections. For example, the KMT could only win the mayorship of one of the nation's six special municipalities, where it had previously held four, and five of the other 17 county executives and city mayorships, where it had previously held 11 (Copper 2014; Hsieh 2015).

### **Tsai's Political Rollercoaster**

There was only a little over a year from the November 2014 local elections to the January 2016 presidential and legislative elections. Little occurred that would have brightened the spirits of KMT members. Rather, the economy worsened, enhancing the problem of inequality and reinforcing public

perceptions that the Ma administration cared little for the poor or the young, whose bleak job prospects had led them to be called “Taiwan’s lost generation.” Furthermore, secondary school students appeared to be strongly opposed to ongoing attempts to mandate a more China-centric curriculum. Thus for the younger generation, economic pessimism added to the repression of the Sunflower Movement as a reason to feel alienated from the KMT.

Two other issues that reinforced this disillusionment also were cited as affecting the campaign. First, the death under suspicious circumstances of Corporal Hung Chung-chiu just before he was to be discharged raised more suspicions about the regime.<sup>1</sup> (His sister was elected to the Legislative Yuan in 2016.) Second, shortly before the election a Taiwanese member of a South Korean pop group was forced to publicly apologize to fans in a video interview after she appeared on a variety show with the ROC flag, raising criticism of the KMT’s pro-China policies (Chen 2017; Copper 2016; Gerber 2016b; Hickey and Niou 2016; Wu 2016).<sup>2</sup>

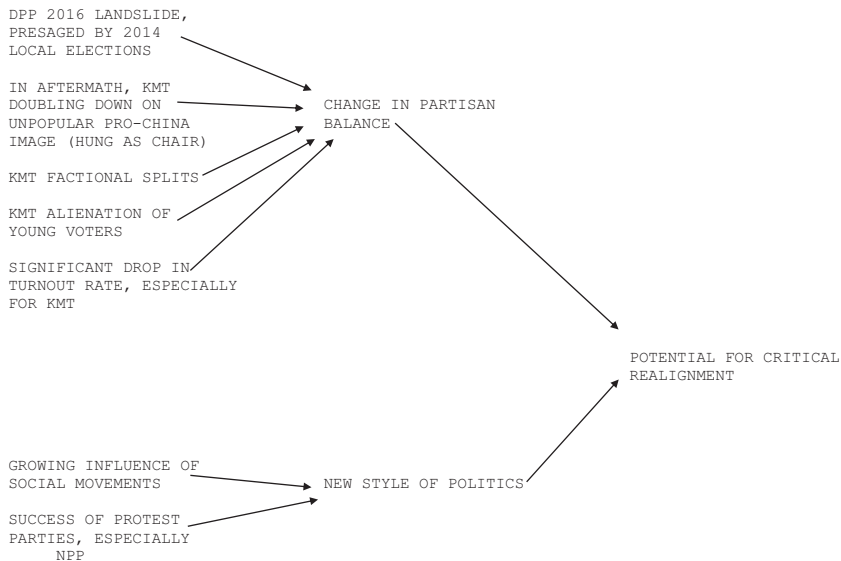
Consequently, as the campaign commenced, the DPP appeared to be far better situated than its major party rival. The DPP nominated Tsai Ing-wen as its presidential candidate with no formal opposition and went into the campaign as a united party. And Tsai was able to negate the usual KMT advantage on the central issue of cross-Straits relations. In the past, those who wanted unification with China supported the KMT, and those who favored independence voted for the DPP. But half of the electorate, or more, wanted the ambiguous “status quo” to continue. On average, these citizens saw the KMT’s stated policy of “one China with different interpretations” as supporting the status quo, in contrast to the DPP’s total rejection of the “1992 consensus” between China and Taiwan—a position Beijing called totally unacceptable. But Tsai stated that she supported the status quo in cross-Straits relations and made no mention of the 1992 consensus.

Meanwhile, disarray within the KMT made Tsai’s position look moderate. Presumably because they believed that Tsai would win easily, none of the

1. Corporal Hung Chung-chiu was a military conscript who died under suspicious circumstances while in detention for violating military discipline. His death sparked nationwide protest against military abuse that eventually resulted in the conviction of several military officers.

2. Chou Tsu-Yu, a Taiwanese member of the popular K-pop band Twice, appeared in a video waving the South Korean and Taiwanese flags. The latter is a symbol of public support for an independent Taiwan separate from China. The band has a huge following in China, and the Chinese government and fans demanded an apology for violating the One China principle. Chou later released an apology on video.

FIGURE 1. Dynamics Promoting a Critical Realignment in Taiwan's Party System



senior KMT officials who were expected to contend for the KMT presidential nomination entered the fray. Instead, the deputy speaker of the Legislative Yuan, Hung Hsiu-chu, won without much opposition. Hung was a fierce critic of Taiwanese independence and stated that she believed in “one China, same interpretation,” which was widely interpreted as support for unification. But the polls showed her to be quite unpopular, and the KMT’s prospects looked ever more dismal when James Soong of the PFP announced that he would run. In October, the KMT dumped Hung as a candidate, which enraged her supporters, and replaced her with Eric Chu, the party’s chairman and the mayor of New Taipei City. But Chu did little to revive popular support for the KMT (Copper 2012; Hickey and Niou 2016; Hsieh 2015, 2016; Wu 2016). Furthermore, Tsai was seen as more capable of handling cross-strait relations than Chu, by a margin of 36% to 26%, among citizens who believed that this was the most important issue facing the nation (Taiwan Election and Democratization Study 2016).

The top part of Figure 1 summarizes the possibilities for a change in Taiwan’s partisan balance that were created by the 2016 elections. The DPP landslide, especially its unprecedented success in securing a large



parliamentary majority, suggested that the stage may have been set for a critical realignment in Taiwan's party system. Yet, just the size and the scope of the victory were not sufficient to predict such a realignment. For example, the KMT won by a similar magnitude in 2008 after the unpopular administration of Chen Shui-bian (Copper 2008).

However, several aspects of the 2016 elections and their aftermath implied that the KMT would have a considerably harder time reviving its fortunes than the DPP did earlier. First, the KMT was riddled with factional disputes—between Hung's supporters and opponents, between the Ma and Wang factions, and between the party center and some of its local factions—which undercut its ability to appeal to Taiwan's citizens. In particular, Hung Hsiu-chu was elected party chair in March 2016 (with 56% of the vote in a four-candidate contest), which almost certainly hurt the party's attempt to broaden its appeal, given her unpopular pro-China image. There was also a significant drop in overall turnout in 2016 (to 66%, from 74% in 2012). A large part of this came from a collapse in the number of Taiwan citizens returning home from the Chinese mainland to vote, presumably because these mostly KMT supporters saw little reason to make the trip for a lost cause. In contrast, the turnout among potential first-time voters was 76%, suggesting that the composition of the electorate might be moving in a direction unfavorable to the KMT (Taiwan Election and Democratization Studies 2016). Finally, the KMT's alienation of young voters was a cause for concern, given that their share of the electorate will inevitably increase over time (Copper 2016; Hickey and Niou 2016; Hsiao 2016; Wang and Cheng 2020; Wu 2016).

Tsai remained quite popular for her first year in office; in May 2017 her approval rate was near 70%. But it dropped to just over 40% over the next six months and then plummeted to around 20% in May 2018, due to a combination of factors. First, the DPP's dominant political position following the 2016 elections probably made it the target of some of the resentment directed toward the political establishment. For example, the NPP's electoral cooperation with the DPP in 2016 did not prevent it from subsequently criticizing and conflicting with the ruling party in the Legislative Yuan (Lin 2017; Maxon 2018; Tang 2018; van der Horst 2016). Second, several of the DPP's policies toward pensions and labor relations became quite controversial. Third, while the country's economic performance improved over the late Ma era, it was not perceived as especially good. Finally, the freeze in relations

with China that ensued after Tsai refused to endorse the 1992 consensus evidently hurt her popularity as well. Still, the decisive KMT victory in the 2018 local elections was generally considered something of a surprise. In races for the mayors or magistrates of special municipalities and counties, the KMT won 15, with 49% of the vote; Han Kuo-yu's election as Kaohsiung's mayor was especially striking. The DPP won only six, with 39% of the vote, and Independent Ko Wen-je was re-elected mayor of Taipei (Bush 2018; Luo and Chen 2018; Tsai 2018, 2019).

The KMT had very little time to savor its victory, however, as increasing tensions in cross-Straits relations led to a surge in support for Tsai Ing-wen. Two separate factors were at work here. First, in January 2018 Chinese President Xi Jinping made a very harsh speech demanding unification, which undercut the KMT's position on Taiwan's relationship with China; second, the escalating protests in Hong Kong greatly increased the sense of a Chinese threat in Taiwan. Tsai's strong response in standing up for Taiwan against these threats from China was popular. By May 2019, for example, her approval rating had doubled to over 40%. For its part, the KMT nominated a deep Blue<sup>3</sup> presidential candidate, Han Kuo-yu (the mayor of Kaohsiung), and placed several pro-China politicians high on its list of candidates for the proportional representation seats in the Legislative Yuan, which very probably helped Tsai. In the end, Tsai won in a landslide, with almost exactly the same share of the vote as in 2016 (57%); and the DPP retained a comfortable absolute majority of 61 in Taiwan's parliament. The turnout jumped back up to 75%, indicating that the DPP did not need a small turnout to score a decisive victory (Everington 2019; Pan 2019; Sam 2020; Smith 2019; Templeman 2020; Wang and Weng 2020).

The rollercoaster ride that the DPP and KMT took in just the four-year span of 2016 to 2020 strongly suggests that partisan allegiances in Taiwan are surprisingly unsettled. First, a comparison of Ma's approval ratings in March 2016 with Tsai's in March 2018 shows similar negative perceptions of both

3. Taiwanese politics is divided along the national identity dimension, with 'Blue' attitudes being more China-friendly and 'Green' more pro-independence and anti-China. (The KMT's party flag is blue, and the DPP's is green.) The 'pan-Blue' camp, led by the KMT and its allies PFP and NP, is more pro-China and sees Taiwan as part of a larger Chinese nation. The 'pan-Green' camp is led by the DPP and includes other minor parties, such as the NPP and TSU, that are more pro-independence. The 'deep Blue' are those politicians and voters who are not China-friendly but do see Taiwan as part of a larger China.

TABLE 2. Presidential Approval, March 2016 and March 2018

	<i>Ma</i>	<i>Tsai</i>
Overall	29%	33%
Cross-Strait relations	41%	27%
Diplomacy	41%	37%
National defense	35%	40%
Economic development	19%	21%
People's livelihood	20%	27%

SOURCE: Wang and Weng (2000, 99)

parties at a gap of just two years (Table 2). For example, Ma’s overall approval rating was 29%, while Tsai’s was only slightly better at 33%, and the greatest public discontent was about the economy, for which both parties received dismal rankings of about 20%.

Second, the data on Taiwanese party identification in June 2018 were consistent with this somewhat blurred image (Table 3). Neither of the major parties was very popular—both received the support of less than a quarter (23%) of the citizenry—and over a third (35%) of the public was nonpartisan. As for the two minor parties in the Legislative Yuan, the NPP got 8%, and the PFP, 2% (Chen 2018; You 2018). Thus there was little sign of a KMT resurgence, despite the declining fortunes of the DPP.

POSSIBILITIES FOR THE EMERGENCE OF A “NEW POLITICS”

This last section considers the factors promoting and inhibiting a major change in the partisan balance in Taiwan, and the possibility that the calls for a new, much more participatory and transparent politics that were voiced by the Sunflower Movement might bear some fruit in the future. Both protest parties and social movements have brought up new issues and put pressure on the political establishment to act on them (Figure 1, *bottom*).

General Trends

The last several decades have witnessed the rise of protest or anti-establishment parties throughout Western Europe and in both new and old democracies (Ignazi 1999; Lane and Ersson 1996; Schedler 1996; Smith 1991).

Often, this type of “new politics” challenges the mainstream from a different political orientation. In most political systems, the established parties can be classified as left, right, or center. However, “new politics” parties are often new issue mobilizers and introduce new issue dimensions that were seemingly absent in the political discourse or ideological continuum (Smith 1991). The now classic example of a new politics party is the Greens, the environmentalist and post-industrialist parties of Western Europe, which are often associated with post-materialist concerns. These parties bring a confrontational style of politics and introduce a new political discourse about the policy failures of the established parties. They accuse the established parties of “forming an exclusionary cartel, unresponsive and unaccountable, and they portray public officials as a homogenous class of lazy, incompetent, self-enriching and power driven villains” (Schedler 1996, 291).

There is a long history of social movements in modern democracies, dating back to the pre-democratic late eighteenth century. Social movements present challenges to the political elites from ordinary people who are marginalized and harmed by the current regime. They are marked by campaigns that are sustained for substantial periods, using such techniques as petitions, public meetings, and street demonstrations. Thus they are based on a populist style of politics, but they also require entrepreneurial political leaders and an effective organization to maintain the campaign. Finally, social movements focus on specific issues. For example, the first social movements of the mid-eighteenth century focused on religion, as religious minorities pushed for acceptance and toleration. Labor groups emerged as probably the most salient social movements during the nineteenth century, but other social movements also were formed around the treatment of farmers and of ethnic and religious groups, as well as women’s suffrage. After the Second World War, social movements coalesced on such post-industrial issues as environmentalism, feminism, gay rights, and (most recently) immigration (Tilly and Wood 2016).

### **The Taiwan Case**

Taiwan’s switch “from hard to soft authoritarianism” (Winckler 1984) opened up space for social movements. They became active and important in the country’s democratic transition for two reasons. First, because they were independent of the political opposition that was formalized in the DPP

in 1986, they were treated with more toleration by the ruling KMT. Second, because the KMT and DPP were focused on the democratization process and, at first covertly and then centrally, on the interlinked questions of national identity and cross-Strait relations, the formal party system paid scant attention to other concerns. Consequently, in the 1980s, independent social movements such as environmental groups and farmers' and women's associations (but perhaps surprisingly not labor unions) took the lead in bringing their issues of special concern to the national agenda (Chen 1994; Chu 1994; Hsiao 1991).

With full democratization attained by the mid-1990s, the situation facing social movements became somewhat mixed. On the one hand, freedom for political activism had improved considerably. On the other, partisan politics in Taiwan now revolved around the national identity question. In particular, the DPP, the seeming natural ally for many of the liberal social causes, concentrated its efforts elsewhere (Clark and Tan 2012; Fell 2005, 2012; Rigger 2011). Thus, on balance, the influence of social movements appeared to be fairly limited.

Democratization in the early 1990s opened the door for new political parties, too. More than 50 were formed, many of them protest parties. However, none of these had much electoral success. Instead, the party system grew more complex, due to the defection of leaders or factions from the KMT: the New Party (NP) in 1993 and the PFP and the Taiwan Solidarity Union in the aftermath of the 2000 presidential elections, although the latter became associated with DPP in the pan-Green bloc, which was opposed by the pan-Blue bloc of the KMT, PFP, and NP. Then, the constitutional change of 2005, which transformed Legislative Yuan elections from multi-member districts with proportional representation to primarily single-member districts (SMDs), undercut the position of the minor parties (Clark and Tan 2012; Fell 2005, 2012, 2016; Hsieh 2009).

The Sunflower Movement marked a resurgence of interest in protest parties and social movements (Figure 1, *bottom*). Whether it was a cause or an effect of the growing populism in Taiwan politics is hard to untangle, but it certainly indicated a widespread rejection of the KMT as a manifestation of the political establishment and the domestic status quo. At the most explicit level, the Sunflower Movement was a student protest against the CSSTA and growing ties with China. There was much more to it, though. As mentioned, the student protests also encompassed opposition to China-centric

educational reforms, the broader alienation of the “lost generation” of young Taiwanese, the growing income inequality that was destroying the “growth with equity” that the nation had previously achieved, and the Confucian, elite-centric style of decision-making that prevailed in the government (Fan 2014; Hsieh 2015; Lee and Hetherington 2016; Smith 2015; Wang 2014).

Indeed, the growing demands for a “new politics” were easy to discern as early as the 2014 elections. As Cooper (2016, 25) notes: “The 2014 election campaign saw a steep rise of populist emotionalism manifested in street politics, demands for more economic fairness, appeals for equality and compassion, etc. This contributed to increased citizen participation, especially by younger citizens.”

The appeal of protest parties and social movements was apparent in the 2016 presidential and legislative elections as well. Most spectacularly, the NPP, which was strongly associated with the Sunflower Movement, made an impressive debut. It put three candidates in seats in SMDs (with the help of a pact with the DPP, which did not run candidates in those districts): Huang Kuo-chang (a major leader in the Sunflower Movement), Freddy Lim (a media personality), and Hung Tzu-yung (the sister of the young soldier who had died in controversial circumstances). The NPP also won 6.2% of the party-list vote, which gave it two additional seats, for a total of five, making it the third-largest party in the Legislative Yuan (Copper 2016; Fell 2016; Gerber 2016a). Social movements were also quite active in the elections, and the DPP made a substantial effort both to appeal to liberal social movements and to recruit the leaders of social movements as DPP candidates (Copper 2016).

Table 3 summarizes the results of the 2016 parliamentary elections. The 113 seats in the Legislative Yuan are divided between 79 for SMDs and 34 for proportional representation lists. Taiwan followed the normal pattern, in which SMDs magnify the advantage of large or majority parties. For example, while the DPP only outpolled the KMT 45% to 39% in the SMDs, it received just over twice the number of seats (50 to 24). (There is one anomaly here in that the NPP won three seats with just 3% of the vote because the DPP, in an electoral deal, did not run any candidates in these districts.) The PFP and NPP did much better in the proportional representation election, in which the voter just indicates his or her party preference, strongly suggesting that in the single-member contests many people who identified with small parties voted for their preferred major party.

TABLE 3. Results of the 2016 Legislative Elections

	<i>Single-member districts</i>		<i>Proportional representation lists</i>	
	<i>% vote</i>	<i>Seats won</i>	<i>% vote</i>	<i>Seats won</i>
Democratic Progressive Party	45%	50	45%	18
Kuomintang	39%	24	27%	11
New Power Party	3%	3	6%	2
People First Party	1%	0	7%	3
Other	12%	2	15%	0

SOURCE: Central Election Commission (2016)

TABLE 4. Results of the 2020 Legislative Elections

	<i>Single-member districts</i>		<i>Proportional representation lists</i>	
	<i>% vote</i>	<i>Seats won</i>	<i>% vote</i>	<i>Seats won</i>
Democratic Progressive Party	45%	48	34%	13
Kuomintang	41%	25	33%	13
Taiwan People’s Party	2%	0	11%	5
New Power Party	1%	0	8%	3
People First Party	1%	0	4%	0
Taiwan Statebuilding Party	1%	1	3%	0
Other	9%	5	7%	0

SOURCE: Central Election Commission (2020)

The 2020 election results for the Legislative Yuan had several important parallels to those for 2016 (Table 4). The SMDs again considerably magnified the victory margin for the DPP. The DPP’s advantage in these contests was only 45% to 41%, but it won nearly twice as many seats (48 to 25). Of the smaller parties, only one seat was won by the pro-independence Taiwan Statebuilding Party (TSP). In total votes, the most successful small party in the SMDs was the new Taiwan People’s Party of Independent Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je, which won just 2% of the vote and did not elect any legislators (the NPP, PFP, and TSP each got 1%). As in 2016, the smaller parties did much better in the proportional representation part of the

election, in which a party must garner 5% of the vote to gain representation in the Legislative Yuan: TPP, 11%, five seats; NPP, 8%, three seats; PFP, 4%; TSP, 3%. Unlike 2016, the larger drop-off for the two major parties occurred for the DPP, which only outpolled the KMT 34% to 33%, but whose earlier support went to the other small parties that are also anti-KMT. In addition, three of the five Independents who were elected to the Legislative Yuan are expected to caucus with the DPP (Central Election Commission 2020; Hsu 2020; Sam 2020).

While the emerging “new politics” in Taiwan and Western Europe were similar in many respects, they differed significantly in their relationship to the right-to-left political spectrum. In Europe, the new politics challenged the traditional major parties, which could generally be arranged along the conventional ideological spectrum. At first this challenge primarily came from the left, but right-wing parties have been increasing their influence considerably over the last few decades. So, in the strictest usage, the new parties and movements are introducing a fresh dimension to the existing left–right dimension.

In Taiwan, the major cleavage between the DPP and KMT rested on the national identity question of what Taiwan’s relationship should be with China, which has little association with the normal left–right ideological divide. The attack on the traditional political establishment came from increasingly active social movements and protest parties, such as the NPP, which denounced the elitism and cartelization of the establishment parties. The new issues include demands for more inclusionary politics, a social justice dimension of reducing income inequality and mitigating the bleak situation facing young Taiwanese, and preventing China from using its growing leverage to undermine Taiwan’s sovereignty and democracy. Thus, the relationship of new politics to the normal ideological spectrum is considerably more complex in Taiwan than it has been in Europe. In Taiwan, the challenge to the political establishment comes almost entirely from the left; its call for social justice adds a left-to-right dimension to the country’s politics; and it contains a significant part of the traditional cleavage on national identity.

## IMPLICATIONS

This paper has evaluated the possibility that Taiwan’s 2016 presidential and legislative elections represented a “critical realignment” in Taiwan’s party



TABLE 5. Components of the 2016 Realignment

<i>Constituencies</i>	<i>Issues</i>	<i>Partisan balance</i>
Rise of social movements and protest parties	Public opinion on cross-Strait relations changes from moderate to anti-China	Open-ended: Can KMT recover?
Youth alienation from KMT		Can minor parties expand?

system. Such a realignment would involve a major change in one or more of the following factors: the partisan balance, the constituencies for the major parties, and the central issues on the political agenda. In terms of the partisan balance, the DPP scored dramatic and decisive victories in 2014, 2016, and 2020. By itself, this might just be one in a succession of political transitions between the two major parties, especially given the KMT’s victory in 2018. After all, both the DPP Chen administration and the KMT Ma administration served two terms that were followed by strong victories for the other major party.

Still, as summarized in Table 5, the 2016 elections were associated with fundamental changes in constituencies and issues, which are seemingly stable enough to constitute a realignment in themselves. One of the two constituency shifts was the jump in the importance of social movements and protest parties, both of which have been spurred by the rapid development of social media. The other was a switch in allegiance as young people became increasingly alienated from the KMT. A change in popular views on cross-Strait relations constituted a realignment in the relationship between issue position and electoral behavior. Before 2014, public opinion on this issue was moderate, in the sense that both independence and unification were widely rejected, which benefitted the KMT. In 2016, public opinion was probably still moderate, but this time it benefitted the DPP. The reverse occurred in 2018, suggesting that, like the poor economy, this had become a pendulum issue working against incumbents: neither major party’s position and performance satisfied the citizenry. However, in 2020, public opinion clearly switched to fear and suspicion of China.

These changes in the dominant constituencies and issues in Taiwan politics imply that the future of the party balance in the country remains open-ended. In particular, four factors strongly suggest that Taiwan will not continue with a regular alternation between the DPP and KMT. First,

neither of the major parties is very popular, and support for the small parties is increasing, although their power in the Legislative Yuan is sharply limited by the primarily SMD electoral system. Second, the DPP appears far more unified than the KMT. A bitter primary contest between Tsai Ing-wen and her former premier, William Lai, was resolved when Lai agreed to run as Tsai's vice president and presumed successor (Chung 2020c; Pan 2019). In contrast, the KMT is riven by ongoing struggles among leaders and factions (Smith 2019). Third, issue saliency in Taiwan appears to have become a problem for the KMT, since the China threat has intensified in a way that undercuts the KMT's commitment to the 1992 consensus, as even former President Ma Ying-jeou seemingly admitted. Finally, in terms of constituencies, the KMT has alienated the younger generation, certainly a very important constituency whose political attitudes and allegiances are now being set (Wang and Cheng 2020). Even the election of reformist Johnny Chiang as KMT chair in early 2020 may not be able to ameliorate these problems (Chung 2020a). Thus, the two major questions about Taiwan politics to watch in the future are whether the KMT can revive and whether the minor parties can expand significantly. More generally, Taiwan has evidently embarked on a long-term secular realignment.

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