

POLITICAL SUPPORT AND VOTING PARTICIPATION OF TAIWAN COLLEGE STUDENTS*

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the local election held in November, 1977, several phenomena attracted the attention of students of political science. Among those phenomena were the amazing increase of voting turnout as well as the increase in number of the independent candidates who won in the election. More than eighty percent of eligible voters cast their votes to elect four levels of officers for Taiwan Province. In Taipei City, more than seventy percent of the voters took part in the City Council election. Both of these voting turnouts are the highest since local elections have been held in Taiwan, starting in 1950. On the other hand, in three out of five kinds of election – Taiwan Province Assemblymen, Taipei City Councilmen, and magistrates (which are more important than the other two), the number of independent candidates who won election increased to a record high in the past twenty-seven years. Independent candidates won 21 out of 77 seats in the Provincial Assembly, 8 out of 51 seats in Taipei City Council, and 4 out of 20 magistrates¹. These two phenomena seemed independent, yet I suspect they were in fact related. Those who had failed to vote in former elections took part in the election in November, 1977, increasing the turnout. And these new voters were apparently more likely to support the independent candidates. But who were these new voters?

To describe the new participants, we must also know who were those who participated less. There are some studies concerning voting behavior in Taiwan. Almost all of them took voters' social backgrounds as independent variables of voting behavior. Age and education were two among those variables. All the studies indicated that young people and highly educated people were two groups

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1. *United Daily* (November 20, 1977), pp. 1-3.

in Taiwan who participated less in voting². This is different from the United States where the higher levels of educated older men were more likely to go to the polls³. Though the young as well as the higher-educated were less participative, they were the two groups most interested in politics⁴. And they showed the strongest support for democratic elections⁵. This contradictory phenomenon has been interpreted as a low evaluation of contemporary election practice in Taiwan⁶. And this attitude can deeply affect the young generation through political socialization. Legend has it that Taiwan students of all levels showed a low evaluation of the election practice⁷. Though students showed a high intention to vote⁸, they actually voted less when they were first eligible. We assume that their political support for the system were relatively low.

But now, things have been changed. Those who used to give up their rights now go to the polls. That introduces another question: isn't it contradictory? Those who have showed low support for the political system participated less in former elections but now changed their behavior; is their support for the political system rising? I suspect – No.

In his study of political support, Muller found that any type of political action can be a result of low political support, depending upon personal political influence and efficacy of past aggression⁹. It is not strange that those young and well educated people who had previously failed to go to the polls now take conforming action because their sense of efficacy have increased. This is an effect of moderni-

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2. See Joseph P. L. Jiang, "Political Culture and Voting Orientations in Taiwan" (Unpublished report sponsored by the National Science Council, 1973), pp. 205-6; Lee-Jinn Hwa, "Voting Participation in Taiwan Area" (Unpublished report sponsored by the National Science Council, 1973), pp. 124-5; Tien-Chung Hwang, *The Voting Behavior of Taipei Voter* (Master Dissertation, the National Chengchi University, 1971), p. 48.
 3. P. F. Lazarsfeld, B. Berelson & H. Gaudet, *The People's Choice*, 3rd ed. (N. Y.: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 45.
 4. Tien-Chung Hwang, *op. cit.* pp. 40-1.
 5. Lee-Jinn Hwa, *op. cit.*, p. 110, p. 181.
 6. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
 7. Song-Shi Yuan, "Children and Politics: A Study of the Political Attitudes of the Elementary School Children in Taipei", *The Annals of the Chinese Association of Political Science*, No.1 (September, 1971), p. 82; S. Appleton, "Regime Support Among Taiwan High School Student", *Asian Survey*, 13 (1973), pp. 754-55; I-Yen Chen, *The Political Socialization of Taiwan College Student* (Taipei: Chiasin, 1978), p. 85.
 8. Song-Shi Yuan, *op. cit.*
 9. E. N. Muller, "Behavioral Correlates of Political Support", *American Political Science Review*, 71 (June, 1977), p. 467.

zation. Modernization of man will increase the demands of political participation¹⁰. According to Deutsch's theory of social mobilization, a rising education level is an important index of modernization¹¹. It is worthy to note that Taiwan lengthened compulsory education from six years to nine years in August, 1968. The last election was the first time students of that generation had a chance to cast their votes. A high demand to participate in politics of this generation can thus be expected. But as we know, they cannot escape from the process of political socialization. Though their participation increased, their political support may have remained low. What is the result? They are more likely to vote for the independent candidates to show their dissatisfaction with the ruling party. Thus more independents won in the election.

Now we want to know how those young as well as highly educated people—the college students behaved? Those junior and senior students in colleges are the first and second year's graduates of nine-years-compulsory-education. We questioned 354 college students from three departments (Physics, Economics, and Chinese Language and Literature) in four universities (Taiwan University, Chengkung University, Tunghai University, and Tamkang College) in Taiwan after the 1977 election. All of them are either juniors or seniors.

Since they are young as well as highly educated, the effects of modernization will be obvious. But as I have mentioned above, the effects of political socialization in early years still exist. My hypotheses are listed as follows:

1. The political support of Taiwan college students remains relatively low.
2. All those with low, medium, or high political support showed high participation.
3. The more they participated, the more likely they tended to support independent candidates.

II. Data and Findings

Political Support

In order to measure political support, we borrowed five items of political

10. K.W. Deutsch, "Social Mobilization and Political Development", *American Political Science Review*, 55 (Sept. 1961), pp. 493-514; see also A. Inkeles, "The Modernization of Man", in M. Weiner ed., *Modernization: The Dynamics of Growth* (Washington: Voice of American, 1966), pp. 151-63.

11. K. W. Deutsch, *op. cit.*

support index which Muller created in his former research¹². These items are: (a) I believe that we can get fair treatment from the courts. (b) Generally, the national government can be trusted to do the right thing. (c) The police deserve our great respect. (d) The basic policies of the national leadership have, in the recent past, been sound. (e) Laws made by Legislative Yuan should be obeyed, even if one does not agree with them.

We asked the respondents to choose among “strongly disagree”, “disagree”, “agree”, “strongly agree” to each one scoring from 1 (low support) to 4 (high support) respectively. We find that, to our surprise, the outcome is quite different from what I expected. The average political support index is high to 3.28 (see Table 1). 324 out of 345 respondents showed relatively high political support. That is very high support of the system.

Table 1. Relationship between Political Support Index and Voting Participation

Voting Participation	Political Support Index								Total	
	Low						High			
	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)
Voted	0	(0)	47.4	(9)	63.7	(130)	61.7	(74)	61.3	(213)
Not voted	100.0	(2)	52.6	(10)	36.3	(74)	38.3	(46)	38.3	(132)
Total	100.0	(2)	100.0	(19)	100.0	(204)	100.0	(120)	100.0	(345)

$\chi^2=4.972$ $df=3$ $p > 0.20$ Political support index $\bar{x}=3.28$

Voting Participation

I assume high participation of college students despite their level of political support. Since those young voters and highly educated voters had previously participated less, I suspect the increase of voting turnout must be a result of the participation of these two groups. The college students, young as well as well educated, were thus assumed to be highly participative. From Table 1, we find that the turnout (61.3%) is far below average (lower than 70% in Taipei City and 80% in Taiwan Province). Their average participation index is 2.36 (see Table 2). That is relatively low.

12. E. N. Muller, *op. cit.*

Table 2. Relationship between Political Support Index and Participation Index

Participation Index	Political Support Index										
	Low					High					Total
	1		2		3		4		%	(N)	
%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%			(N)
Low	1	0 (0)	17.6 (3)	18.0 (36)	20.3 (24)	18.6 (63)					
	2	66.7 (2)	35.3 (6)	43.5 (87)	38.1 (45)	41.4 (140)					
Medium	3	33.3 (1)	47.1 (8)	24.0 (48)	29.7 (35)	27.2 (92)					
	4	0 (0)	0 (0)	12.5 (25)	8.5 (10)	10.4 (35)					
High	5	0 (0)	0 (0)	2.0 (4)	3.4 (4)	2.4 (8)					
Total		100.0 (3)	100.0 (17)	100.0 (200)	100.0 (118)	100.0 (338)					

$\chi^2=9.398$ $df=12$ $p > 0.70$

Participation index $\bar{x}=2.36$

No matter whether their political support was low or high, the college students showed low participation. My hypothesis 2 was on the other hand confirmed: there is no relationship between political support and voting participation. Both Table 1 and Table 2 showed no statistical significance.

Party Choice

My third hypothesis concerned the student's party choice. That means whether they supported Kuomintang (KMT) candidates or not. I made my hypothesis from the fact that the number of independents who won election increased to the highest point since 1950. I suspect this outcome was an effect of the new participants' voting. The data below is the result of a questionnaire for respondents in Taiwan Province, not including Taipei City.

Table 3. Relationship between Participation Index and Party Vote

Party Vote	Participation Index										
	Low				Medium				High		Total
	1		2		3		4		5		
%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)
KMT	82.4 (14)	58.3 (14)	59.4 (19)	46.7 (7)	0 (0)	60.7 (54)					
Independent	11.7 (2)	12.5 (3)	6.2 (2)	13.3 (2)	100.0 (1)	11.2 (10)					
Both	5.9 (1)	29.2 (7)	34.4 (11)	40.0 (6)	0 (0)	28.1 (25)					
Total	100.0 (17)	100.0 (24)	100.0 (32)	100.0 (15)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (89)					

$\chi^2=15.80$ $df=8$ $0.02 < p < 0.05$

The data in Table 3 shows statistical significance. That means though the students participated less, the more they participated, the weaker their support was for the KMT candidates. They tend to vote the independents or split their votes. I will discuss this further in the next paragraphs.

III. DISCUSSION

My hypotheses presented before were: low political support, high participation and a tendency to vote independents. Two of them have been rejected, only the last one was accepted.

In discussing the meaning of political support, Muller and Jukam distinguish affect for a political system (which they defined as political support) and affect for an incumbent administration. And they insisted that political support is a more powerful explanatory variable. Some studies about Chinese students showed their lack of trust in the government¹⁴. I assume this is an expression of low political support, it is rather for the low affect toward the incumbent administration. But what is the reason for high political support? I assume this is an effect of political socialization. The Chinese students have been socialized in security-orientation society, prefer a good-strong government to a democratic one according to western concepts of democracy, and are proud of national character, cultural tradition, strong national leadership and economic growth¹⁵. This political socialization has successfully created high political support for the system.

But in the process of socialization, there is a contradictory phenomenon, especially about elections. The students learned democratic election in school (clean and fair), then were informed corrupt practices of elections in family. This phenomenon is probably an important reason for their withdrawing from election¹⁶. Lee-Jinn Hwa argued that low evaluation of election practice was the reason why the highly educated participated less¹⁷. Maybe we can assume this accounts for

13. E. N. Muller and T. O. Jukam, "On the Meaning of Political Support", *American Political Science Review*, 71 (Dec. 1977), pp. 1561-95.

14. Yung Wei, "The Political Socialization of College students in Taiwan", an unpublished research report, but the main finding had been cited in Yung Wei, "A Methodological Critique of Current Studies on Chinese Political Culture", *Journal of Politics*, 38 (Feb. 1976), pp. 114-40; see also footnote 7.

15. Appleton, *op. cit.*; see also I-Yen Chen, *op. cit.*

16. Song-Shi Yuan, *op. cit.*

17. Lee-Jinn Hwa, *op. cit.*

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eligible college students' low voting rate in spite of their high political support. Yet there is another possible reason: In Taiwan, we can only vote in our hometown which is usually far away from the campus. The costs of voting include money and time which are too high. So they prefer to stay at campus. Table 4 shows that those who lived near polls voted much more than those who did not. If we had a mail-voting system, the situation might be improved.

Table 4. Relationship between Resident Polling District and Voting Participation

Voting Participation	Resident Polling District					
	Near the Polling District		Not near the Polling District		Total total	
	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)
Voted	87.0	(167)	28.6	(40)	62.3	(207)
Not Voted	13.0	(25)	71.4	(100)	37.7	(125)
Total	100.0	(192)	100.0	(140)	100.0	(332)

$\chi^2=117.71$ $df=1$ $p < 0.001$

After the rejection of my hypotheses of low support and high participation, can we explain the whole story even if the third hypothesis has been accepted? I am sure we can.

Our research is restricted to college students. But they are the minority of their generation. The total numbers of graduates of first two years of nine-years-compulsory-education are 241,428 and 248,017 respectively¹⁸. Only 22.2% and 23.1% of them were enrolled in colleges¹⁹. We cannot ignore that their participation may be increased to a level that influenced the result of election. Why? I have mentioned that the modernization of men has increased demand for participation²⁰. And education under high school is the most important stage in the moderniza-

18. *Educational Statistics of the Republic of China, 1977* (Taipei: Ministry of Education), p. 30.

19. *Ibid*, pp. 32-33. Include universitives, colleges, 2 year jr. colleges, and 3 year jr. colleges, both day and evening.

20. A. Inkeles, *op. cit.*; K. Deutsch, *op. cit.*; see also Tiao-Yuag Yang, "The Communicate Behavior, Modernizing and Political participation of College Students" in *Youth Magazine*, V. 41, No. 4, pp. 10-17.

tion of Chinese students²¹. We can expect this generation to have a high intention to participate.

Though we have not surveyed those who did not enter universities, we assume they are just the same as the college students. The more they participate, the more they incline to support independents. I assume this for two reasons. First, dissatisfaction. Failure to place college graduates as well as non-college graduates in positions befitting their education could provide an impetus toward dissatisfaction. Low evaluation of election practices also is an origin of dissatisfaction. All these dissatisfactions can result in the support for independents as a punishment to the incumbents. Second, the effect of modernization. One effect of modernization is that man tends to pursue chances of choice²². To vote for independents is thus a new choice.

IV. Conclusion

In concluding the findings of this article, we can say that the R. O. C. has a good condition for democracy, since the system enjoys very strong support among young intellectuals. And they will become the future leaders of the country. Though their evaluation of the contemporary practice is low, their support is relatively important. Muller and Jukam argued that high support with negative affect for the incumbent administration will not seriously threaten the stability of the system²³. What we need pay attention to is that young students are under cross pressures in their socialization process. There are contradictions between what they have learned in school and from the real political world. Since they learned democracy, a western-oriented value, in school, they hold strong supportive attitudes toward democracy²⁴. Appleton argued that the more they are western-oriented, the more they will be dissatisfied²⁵. Only when the situation is improved, can we assure the fulfillment of democracy. Devotion of the Government to a "Fair, Justice, and Open" election, which was emphasized by the Government in 1977 election, will provide a solid foundation for the success of democracy in the Republic of China.

21. Chung-I Wen and Hai-Yuan Hchu, "Change of Value in the Process of Modernization", in Chung-I Wen and others, *Modernization and Change of Value* (Taipei: Thought and Words, 1977), p. 74.

22. D. E. Apter, *The Politics of Modernization* (Taipei: Hongchiao, 1971), pp. 9-12.

23. Muller & Jukam, *op. cit.*

24. I-Yen Chen, *op. cit.* pp. 68-80.

25. Appleton, *op. cit.*