

Citizens' Awareness of the New MMM Electoral System in Taiwan

A Cohort Analysis*

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Electoral systems provide the rules of translating votes into seats and thus decide who wins and loses in elections. Few would doubt the critical roles that electoral systems play in politics. Yet current literature is curiously silent about how ordinary citizens perceive and understand the electoral system, especially during the transition period when the system is undergoing fundamental changes. The experiences of electoral reform in Taiwan provide an opportune case to fill up this gap.

Taiwan transformed its legislative electoral system from a half-century long SNTV (single non-transferable vote) system to a MMM (mixed-member majoritarian) electoral system in 2008. The new MMM system is a sharp departure from the original SNTV system in the total

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number of legislative seats, the district magnitude, electoral formula, and ballot structure. This essay intends to introduce the new MMM system and explore citizens' awareness of the new MMM system in general. Also, it explores the changes of citizens' knowledge of the new electoral system before and after the 2008 legislative election. Given the significant differences between the SNTV system and the MMM system, it firstly tests of citizens' overall knowledge of the new MMM system. Then, with the help of survey data, it examines the changes of citizens' knowledge in election periods and non-election periods. The findings show a majority of citizens are not fully aware of the institutional components of the new MMM system. In particular, the threshold regulation receives the least attention by citizens. Furthermore, it finds that citizens' knowledge of the new MMM system is a function of electoral momentum, i.e., citizens' knowledge rises as the election date approaches and declines after the election date. Then we proceed with a more detailed cohort analyses to examine which groups of citizens are more likely to pick up information related to the electoral system changes. Our findings partially support our electoral cycle hypothesis of electoral system knowledge.

Keywords: Electoral system, Single non-transferable vote system,
Mixed-member majoritarian electoral system, Cohort analysis

I . Introduction

Like its neighboring countries, Korea and Japan, Taiwan began its electoral reform in the mid-2000s. The target of reform, the then-existing SNTV system, suffered from several setbacks. For