

# Democratic Stability Under Taiwan's Semi-Presidentialist Constitution: Implications for Cross-Strait Relations

JIH-WEN LIN

*Domestic stability is believed to be a key factor affecting cross-Strait peace. This article examines whether Taiwan's evolving democratic institutions may nurture greater political stability, defined as a government's ability to make changes while keeping itself irreplaceable. The main argument is that, in a semi-presidential system, legislative assertiveness and executive-parliamentary congruence are each sufficient to induce stability, and that instability accompanies a powerful president if the government is divided. Depending on the nature of the status quo, a government can be both stable and responsive at the same time. As a result of the increased number of legislative seats occupied by the ruling party and the adjustment of the president's political style, stability has indeed increased in Taiwan. There is also room for the president to break the current cross-Strait gridlock, moreover, if he can moderate his ideological position gradually and consistently.*

**KEYWORDS:** democracy; stability; cross-Strait relations; semi-presidentialism; Taiwan.

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Although the policies of the People's Republic of China (PRC) toward Taiwan tend to zigzag between military threat and peaceful offensive, several principles remain unchanged.<sup>1</sup> First, Beijing has so far declined to rescind the use of force against Taiwan as a policy option. Second, concerning the conditions under which military means will be employed, Beijing has always specified the pursuit of independence by Taiwan's government as a sufficient one. Third, Taiwan's political stability is always a critical factor that explicitly or implicitly affects Beijing's bellicosity. In the early 1980s, Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平) hinted that political chaos following a regime transition on Taiwan might incite a confrontation across the Strait.<sup>2</sup> To Deng's successors, this condition is no longer to be emphasized verbally, but gauged carefully when formulating their strategies toward Taiwan.<sup>3</sup> The more divided are Taiwan's political forces, for instance, the better the chance for Beijing to manipulate the domestic situation on the island. Conversely, Beijing will be compelled to soften its tone as Taiwan becomes more stable—as long as the latter also tunes down its pro-independence voices.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See the following two articles by Suisheng Zhao: "Military Coercion and Peaceful Offense: Beijing's Strategy of National Reunification with Taiwan," *Pacific Affairs* 72 (1999): 495-512, and "Chinese Nationalism and Beijing's Taiwan Policy: A China Threat?" *Issues & Studies* 36, no. 1 (January/February 2000): 76-99.

<sup>2</sup>Meng Qiao, *Tansuo ershiyi shiji Zhonggong junli: Maixiang daying gaojishu zhanzheng zhilu* (Probing the PRC's military strength in the twenty-first century: Toward winning high-tech wars) (Taipei: Quanqiu fangwei zazhi, 2001), chap. 4.

<sup>3</sup>Other conditions include Taiwan's alignment with Moscow, development of nuclear weapons, being controlled by foreign forces, and indefinite postponement of reunification negotiation. For the PRC's latest official statement, see "The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue" released by the Taiwan Affairs Office and the Information Office of the State Council, the People's Republic of China, February 21, 2000; reprinted in *Issues & Studies* 36, no. 1 (January/February 2000): 161-81.

<sup>4</sup>On January 24, 2002, PRC Vice-Premier Qian Qichen (錢其琛) mentioned in the seventh anniversary of Jiang Zemin's (江澤民) "Eight Points" (江八點) statement that he left open the possibility for higher-level cross-Strait exchanges, and that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) differentiated between DPP members and the minority of hard-line independence advocates. This was interpreted by optimists as an important signal that Beijing may be preparing to show more flexibility in its Taiwan policy. The cause of this shift was attributed to the DPP's victory in the legislative election of December 2001. See *Taipei Times*, January 25, 2002.

The propensity for leaders in Taipei to stress Taiwan's independent sovereignty depends on their ideology and determination, as well as the international environment. The last condition is so unalterable that even the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP 民主進步黨), Taiwan's pro-independence ruling party, finds its lips muffled by reality. Political stability, in contrast, hinges mainly on domestic factors that change quickly as Taiwan's democracy progresses. How Taiwan can maintain political stability in tandem with its democratization thus becomes a critical determinant for cross-Strait peace: Taiwan cannot live without democracy, and Beijing's arms are tied as long as Taiwan's democracy does not result in instability. Democratic stability in Taiwan will also make extremist voices unlikely to dominate on the island, moreover, and is thus conducive to tranquilizing cross-Strait relations.

Democratic stability in Taiwan is not only an issue to be studied in retrospect, but is also an ongoing phenomenon to be observed and forecasted. Will the fact that the DPP has now become the largest legislative party following the December 2001 election remove the chaos and deadlock that has hamstrung the Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) administration during the first eighteen months of his incumbency? Will the fragmentation of Taiwan's party system, as indicated by the decay of the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨, or the Nationalist Party) and the electoral triumph of both the People First Party (PEP 親民黨) and the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU 台灣團結聯盟), plant seeds of instability? What are the policy consequences of party reconfiguration, and how will Beijing react to Taiwan's recolored political map?

This article seeks to provide some thoughts on whether Taiwan's evolving democratic institutions may nurture greater political stability, drawing implications for cross-Strait relations. The first section reviews related studies and suggests how they can be applied to the Taiwanese case. Drawing from this literature review, section two redefines democratic stability as the ability for a popularly elected government to make changes while keeping itself irreplaceable. This section also presents a theory of the necessary preconditions for this type of stability to occur. The main argument, articulated through four hypotheses, is that democratic stability can be reached

via multiple ways, even under a minority government, although none guarantees responsiveness. Section three examines the five cabinets that have followed Taiwan's adoption of a semi-presidentialist constitutional system in 1997, and uses these case studies to confirm the preceding argument. The concluding section finds that, given the island's gradually enhanced democratic stability, there is indeed room for President Chen Shui-bian to break the current cross-Strait gridlock, if he can moderate his ideological position gradually and consistently.

### Democratic Stability Reconceptualized

Tackling the aforementioned problems requires a clear and consistent definition of democratic stability. Intuitively, "stability" implies "the absence of change." To cite some encyclopedic definitions, stability can mean "a condition of a system whose components tend to remain in some constant relationship with one another, which is identified with the absence of basic or disruptive change,"<sup>5</sup> "a situation of equilibrium that is likely to be sustained," or "the ability of a political system to retain the support of its citizens for government policies within a stable range, and to avoid radical and sudden changes."<sup>6</sup>

All these definitions characterize stability as a form of equilibrium, a state that cannot be improved further unless perturbed by external shocks. In particular, the last depiction highlights citizen support as an important foundation, which makes the characterization akin to discussions of the legitimacy of the democratic system. Barry Weingast, for example, suggests that in order for democratic stability to be viable the state cannot transgress citizens' fundamental rights and must retain a sufficient degree

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<sup>5</sup>Jack C. Plano, Robert E. Riggs, and Helenan S. Robin, eds., *The Dictionary of Political Analysis*, second edition (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 1982), 149.

<sup>6</sup>The last two quotations are both from Jay M. Shafritz, Phil Williams, and Ronald S. Calinger, eds., *The Dictionary of 20th Century World Politics* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), 628, 541.

of support from the citizenry.<sup>7</sup> Civic culture, or the capacity to sustain democracy through coordinated citizen efforts, is thus of crucial importance to democratic stability.<sup>8</sup> By the same token, all political players, the losers in particular, must accept the results of the democratic game.<sup>9</sup> Divided societies are susceptible to democratic failure because the members are separated by different belief systems, and cannot act concertedly to fend off nondemocratic practices.

The political culture approach certainly points out a critical condition of stable democracy, yet there must be other requirements: not all divided societies suffer from political instability, and ascribing stability to citizen support may be tautological in some sense. In addition, we still need to explain why societies sharing similar levels of civic culture enjoy variant degrees of political stability. This requires us to differentiate between levels of democratic stability. At the bottom level, the term designates the consolidation of the democratic system, which should be based on the value consensus of the political participants. This is the level at which Weingast and others have focused. At the middle level, democratic stability requires the political institutions to be persistent and legitimate. A democracy becomes less stable if most citizens find difficulty in articulating their interests through existing institutions, and are therefore motivated to make new choices. The best reference to these issues can be found in the literature on constitutional choice, which tends to focus on transitioning societies. At the top level, democratic stability involves the endurance of government: office-holders in a stable democracy should not be toppled abruptly, and policymaking should enjoy continuity and consistency.

In Taiwan, few can deny the centrality of democracy as a value and an institution in political life. Given the difficulty of passing constitutional

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<sup>7</sup>Barry R. Weingast, "Democratic Stability as a Self-enforcing Equilibrium," in *Understanding Democracy: Economic and Political Perspectives*, ed. Albert Breton, Gianluigi Galeotti, Pierre Salmon, and Ronald Wintrobe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), chap. 1.

<sup>8</sup>Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, 1965).

<sup>9</sup>Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

amendments (approval of three quarters of the legislature is required) and the fact that no party controls a legislative majority, the current constitutional structure is most likely to persist in the near future. Government endurance under the status quo constitution therefore becomes the key to evaluating Taiwan's democratic stability—and is thus the focus of this article.

A review of existing research provides a helpful starting point. Scores of studies have been published concerning government stability, among which four groups of variables are tested most frequently: partisan composition of the legislature, ideology or cleavage structure, institutions, and special events.<sup>10</sup> Out of these studies some general conclusions can be drawn.

Regarding the impact of partisan structure, the conventional wisdom holds that government stability decreases with the fragmentation of the party system because the number of contending coalitions increases with the number of bargainers. This conjecture was confirmed by a carefully designed empirical study.<sup>11</sup> Other research has linked legislative stability to whether the government controls a majority of the seats,<sup>12</sup> or whether the opposition is divided. Some have contended that what really matters is not only the composition of the ruling coalition, but also its size. Most famous is the minimum winning coalition thesis originating from William Riker's seminal work, which suggested that a winning coalition should be as small as possible in order to maximize the gains of its members.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless,

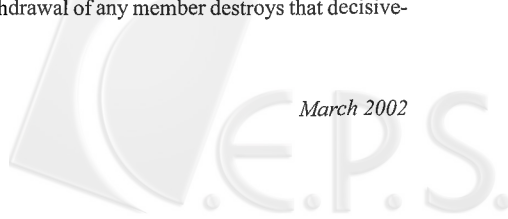
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<sup>10</sup>For comprehensive reviews, see Bernard Grofman and Peter Van Roozendaal, "Modelling Cabinet Durability and Termination," *British Journal of Political Science* 27 (1997): 419-51 and Michael Laver and Norman Schofield, *Multiparty Government: The Politics of Coalition in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 147-63.

<sup>11</sup>For empirical evidence, see Gary King, James E. Alt, Nancy E. Burns, and Michael Laver, "A Unified Model of Cabinet Dissolution in Parliamentary Democracies," *American Journal of Political Science* 34 (1990): 846-71.

<sup>12</sup>Jean Blondel, "Party Systems and Patterns of Government in Western Democracies," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 1 (1968): 180-203.

<sup>13</sup>William H. Riker, *The Theory of Political Coalitions* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1962). A minimum winning coalition requires two necessary conditions: first, it has to be decisive (i.e., winning); second, the withdrawal of any member destroys that decisiveness.



Bernard Grofman issued a warning that even if coalition size explains stability, the correlation can be spurious: countries corroborating this hypothesis tend to have only two or three major parties, helping to confirm that a coalition must be minimal in order to be stable.<sup>14</sup>

Evidently, politics is not just about number and size, but also about ideas and policies. The second group of variables assumes parties to be policy-oriented, and studies how their policy or ideological positions shape stability. As suggested by the classical work of Lawrence Dodd, ideological polarization makes the maintenance of a stable government difficult.<sup>15</sup> In a similar vein, Paul Warwick examined the ideological compatibility of coalition members, and found cleavage-spanning coalitions to be less durable.<sup>16</sup> Combing the "office-seeking" and the "policy-oriented" approaches, Robert Axelrod hypothesized that an ideal coalition should be "ideologically connected" while minimizing its winning size.<sup>17</sup> Other research has noticed that the multiplication of issue dimensions, by unleashing more competitive coalitions, makes stability more unattainable.<sup>18</sup>

The third group of variables examines the institutional environment of political stability. Democracy involves the configuration of various kinds of institutions, resulting in a great number of possibilities.<sup>19</sup> Some are conducive to, while others obstruct, stability. For example, certain arrangements of cabinet portfolio allocation can generate stability, even when the government is a non-centrist minority; this occurs if the dissatis-

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<sup>14</sup>Bernard Grofman, "The Comparative Analysis of Coalition Formation and Duration: Distinguishing Between-Country and Within-Country Effects," *British Journal of Political Science* 19 (1989): 291-302.

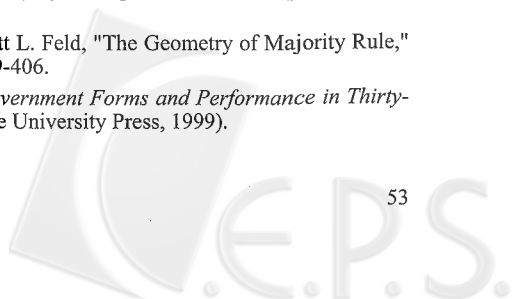
<sup>15</sup>Lawrence Dodd, *Coalitions in Parliamentary Government* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976). Gary King and others also found a negative correlation between government duration and the support for extreme parties. See note 11 above.

<sup>16</sup>Paul Warwick, "Ideological Diversity and Government Survival in Western Democracies," *Comparative Political Studies* 25 (1992): 332-61.

<sup>17</sup>Robert Axelrod, *Conflict of Interest: A Theory of Divergent Goals with Application to Politics* (Chicago: Markham, 1970).

<sup>18</sup>Nicholas Miller, Bernard Grofman, and Scott L. Feld, "The Geometry of Majority Rule," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 1 (1989): 379-406.

<sup>19</sup>Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999).



fied opposition cannot offer an alternative portfolio.<sup>20</sup> Another important factor concerns the procedures of government formation. The greater the freedom enjoyed by the government—such as being able to initiate a vote of confidence or to actively dissolve the parliament, the less enduring the cabinet appears to be; the outcome, however, may yet be in the government's favor.<sup>21</sup>

Lastly, an increasing number of works adopt an "event" approach to explain government survival. Arthur Lupia and Kaare Strøm surmise that cabinet termination becomes more likely as the mandated election draws near, because maintaining the status quo becomes less attractive to the government.<sup>22</sup> Following the work of Gary King and others, there are also many scholars who take the "hazard approach" and use stochastic tools such as event history models to deal with extra-legislative factors.<sup>23</sup> Overall, these arguments apply only to democracies where the parliament can be dissolved before the mandated election.

There are also theories that attempt to unify the above variables. David Baron has built a dynamic model that considers simultaneously the variables of institution, preference, and random shocks. He has shown that under conditions of a majority confidence procedure: governments are generally stable, a censure motion initiated by the opposition can result in voluntary dissolution of government, and the approach of required elections increases the likelihood of dissolution.<sup>24</sup> George Tsebelis posits a

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<sup>20</sup>See Michael Laver and Kenneth A. Shepsle, "Coalitions and Cabinet Government," *American Political Science Review* 84 (1990): 873-90 and Michael Laver and Kenneth A. Shepsle, *Making and Breaking Government: Cabinets and Legislatures in Parliamentary Democracies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>21</sup>Grofman and Van Roozendaal raised an interesting hypothesis that countries where the process of cabinet formation is relatively determinate should experience lower cabinet duration because uncertainty increases stability and parties are usually risk-averse. See Grofman and Van Roozendaal, "Modelling Cabinet Durability and Termination," 440.

<sup>22</sup>Arthur Lupia and Kaare Strøm, "Coalition Termination and the Strategic Timing of Parliamentary Elections," *American Political Science Review* 89 (1995): 648-65. Their claims are confirmed by the empirical study of Daniel Diermeier and Randolph T. Stevenson, "Cabinet Termination and Critical Events," *ibid.* 94 (2000): 627-40.

<sup>23</sup>See note 11 above.

<sup>24</sup>David P. Baron, "Comparative Dynamics of Parliamentary Governments," *American Political Science Review* 92 (1998): 593-609.



positive correlation between policy stability and the number of veto players (i.e., the indispensable actors in a winning coalition), contending that this focus explains political outcomes more effectively than any other institutional variable.<sup>25</sup>

Despite their diverse nuances, most of the preceding studies point in the same direction: government endurance is hampered by the multiplication of parties, the incompatibility of ideologies, and the institutional freedom of the government. As demonstrated by the works of Yu-Shan Wu (吳玉山) on the Taiwan case, party system, ideological congruence, and institutions (presidential powers) are also the three major variables affecting Taiwan's constitutional stability.<sup>26</sup> When constructing a theory of government endurance and hence democratic stability, therefore, one should first consider these variables.

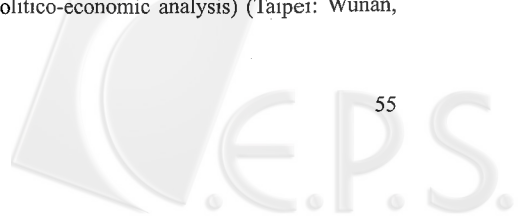
Before doing so, however, several conceptual issues must be clarified. The first concerns the definition and measurement of stability. In particular, stability should be analytically distinguished from two related concepts: chaos and efficiency. While "gridlock" and "chaos" are normally used concurrently to describe the predicament of the incumbent regime, these two terms in fact refer to opposite things: the former indicates "nothing is changeable," whereas the latter implies "everything is changeable." Although stability is closer to "gridlock" in this sense, the two are far from interchangeable. Efficiency is another concept that should be differentiated from stability.

Second, the afore-cited studies all focus on parliamentary democracy, and the so-called "institutions" are mainly related to parliamentary proce-

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<sup>25</sup>George Tsebelis, "Decision Making in Political Systems: Veto Players in Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, Multicameralism and Multipartism," *British Journal of Political Science* 25 (1995): 289-325.

<sup>26</sup>See the following works by Yu-Shan Wu: "The ROC's Semi-Presidentialism at Work: Unstable Compromise, Not Cohabitation," *Issues & Studies* 36, no. 5 (September/October 2000): 1-40; "Taiwan's Constitutional Framework and Cross-Straits Relations" (Paper delivered at the 1999 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Atlanta, Georgia, September 2-5, 1999); and *Eluosi zhuanxing 1992-1999: Yige zhengzhi jingji xue de fenxi* (Russia's transition 1992-1999: A politico-economic analysis) (Taipei: Wunan, 2000).



dures. Taiwan has adopted a semi-presidentialist constitution in 1997, and should be studied under a different institutional context. Such a system includes a directly elected president who enjoys substantial constitutional power, yet also has a government headed by a premier who is responsible to the parliament.<sup>27</sup> The institutional features to be underscored are thus the power of the president vis-à-vis the premier and the parliament.

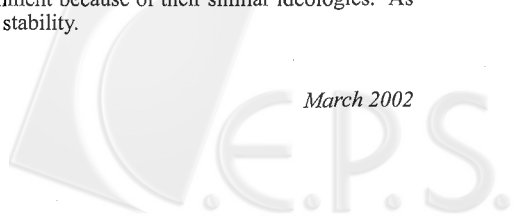
Third and most important, we must establish a more dynamic relationship among the partisan, ideological, and institutional variables. These factors can of course be independent of each other, so that their impacts on political stability are cumulative.<sup>28</sup> These variables can also be correlated, however, creating two possibilities. The first is that, because these variables are confounded, adjusting any of them suffices to affect stability. The second possibility is that these variables are necessary conditions of each other, so that the degree of stability changes only if all of them vary.<sup>29</sup> There are reasons to believe that the first possibility should prevail: a congruent relationship between the president and the parliament enhances stability both in two-party and multiparty systems, and the president-parliament relationship will always be incongruent if the president's party is a legislative minority. For a weak president, his ideological distance to the legislative majority does not matter much because the parliament will always dominate. To sum up these claims, the next section presents a simple theory that unifies the aforementioned variables and derives propositions to be verified later in the article.

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<sup>27</sup>See Maurice Duverger, "A New Political System Model: Semi-Presidential Government," *European Journal of Political Research* 8 (1980): 165-97.

<sup>28</sup>That is, the change of any variable can produce a discernable effect, and the changes of multiple variables additively increase or decrease stability. Taking this assumption, one has to specify the weight assigned to each variable when adding up their values.

<sup>29</sup>To give a concrete example, suppose multipartism and a centrifugal distribution of ideological positions are correlated, and both are needed to cause instability. Without the first condition, antagonistic parties can be forced to give up extreme ideologies in order to maximize their vote shares in a biparty competition; without the second condition, the opposition cannot justifiably overthrow the government because of their similar ideologies. As such, the lack of either condition can create stability.



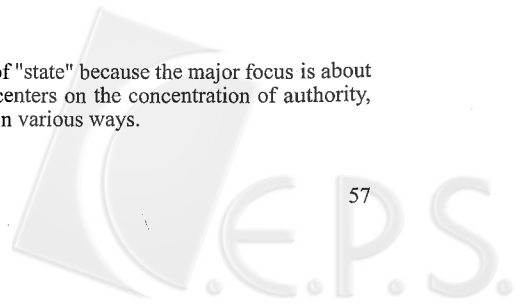
### **Hypotheses Regarding Democratic Stability**

Three critical elements of democratic stability can be inferred from the previous discussion: *democracy*, *government endurance*, and *government responsiveness*. Democracy, no matter how minimally defined, is by definition an indispensable component. At the most basic level, "democracy" describes a situation where decision-makers are chosen through fair election, and important policies are objectionable through majority rule. This is far from being a sufficient condition, but cannot be reduced further. "Government endurance," defined as the ability for a government to survive the mandated incumbency, is one of the many indicators that reveal the health of a democratic system.<sup>30</sup> This endurance is nonetheless an indispensable one: we cannot imagine any discussion of political stability that leaves this dimension aside. Lastly, "responsiveness" designates a government's capacity to improve the status quo by implementing new policies. This element is needed to distinguish "stability" from "deadlock": the latter describes a situation where the status quo is unsatisfactory but cannot be changed, while the former implies a condition where the government is both endurable and able to remove the undesirable status quo. Thus conceptualized, *a democratic system is stable if the government can provide welfare-improving changes while keeping itself endurable*; the system is in deadlock if the government itself is an unwanted status quo but cannot be replaced. In contrast to political stability, which is the hope of all governments, responsiveness therefore reflects the wishes of the people. An endurable but irresponsive government will bring disappointment, and in the long run undermine the stability of the whole system.

These elements can be operationalized and measured probabilistically. The indicators for the extent to which a country is democratized can be identified in the existing literature. Some commonly used indicators include: the freedom of speech and association, the right to organize com-

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<sup>30</sup>This article uses the term "government" instead of "state" because the major focus is about governance. The concept of state, in contrast, centers on the concentration of authority, which can be wielded by different governments in various ways.



petitive political groups (parties), the free and fair election of the head of state (or government) and legislative representatives, the possibility to hold office-holders accountable, and the protection of minority rights.<sup>31</sup>

Government endurance can also be gauged via different methods. Minimally, a reshuffle of the cabinet could signal the government's lack of capacity to endure.<sup>32</sup> For Arend Lijphart, government insecurity is manifested in a change in the party membership of the government.<sup>33</sup> More severe signs include the formal resignation of a government or a change in prime minister.<sup>34</sup> These indicators, ranging between ministerial replacements to government resignation, can in fact be ranked to demonstrate the magnitude of government endurance.<sup>35</sup> Applying the definition to Taiwan requires, of course, the exclusion of situations that are institutionally impossible, such as the president's active dissolution of the parliament.

Responsiveness is revealed by the total social welfare improved by a government. Measuring its scale requires calculating the difference between the status quo and the outcome of governmental actions. A government can appear responsive because the status quo is unwanted by a great majority and thus easily improved upon, or because the government is capable of creating new values for society. Thus defined, responsiveness is not as observable as the previous two variables, and has to be judged case-by-case.

The issues delineated above belong to the realm of several analytical tools, among which the most commonly used is probably the spatial model.

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<sup>31</sup>For instance, the Freedom House has used several indices to "judge all countries and territories by a single standard." See <<http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2000/methodology.htm>>.

<sup>32</sup>However, such stability does not necessarily have an effect on bureaucratic behavior. See John D. Huber and Arthur Lupia, "Cabinet Instability and Delegation in Parliamentary Democracies," *American Journal of Political Science* 45 (2001): 18-33.

<sup>33</sup>Arend Lijphart, "Measures of Cabinet Durability: A Conceptual and Empirical Evaluation," *Comparative Political Studies* 17 (1984): 265-79.

<sup>34</sup>Laver and Schofield, *Multiparty Government*, 145.

<sup>35</sup>In some cases, defining instability by short cabinet duration can prove to be incorrect. As indicated by the Italian example, transitory cabinet and permanent coalition members can coexist. See Carol Mershon, "The Costs of Coalition: Coalition Theories and Italian Government," *American Political Science Review* 90 (1996): 534-54.



The spatial model is based on very straightforward assumptions: policy or ideological positions of political actors can be conceived as points in a "space," and individual actions are determined by the distance between these points.<sup>36</sup> All spatial models take stability as their central concern, so we only need to specify the institutional assumptions to make them applicable to Taiwan.

Consider a polity that consists of a president, a premier, and a parliament. Under the semi-presidentialist constitution, the president appoints a premier, who must win parliamentary support in order to survive. We say that the president is powerful if the appointment does not require a legislative approval, while the converse is also true.<sup>37</sup> The ideological composition of the parliament is represented by the distribution of ideal points, or the positions most favored by each legislator. The parliament is marked by multiparty competition if the distribution is centrifugal and multimodal. A uni-modal centripetal distribution of policy positions suggests a biparty system where the party positions are convergent. In either case, a median voter can be identified from the legislators to signify the ideological center of the parliament. A unified government is indicated by the congruence of the positions of the legislative median and the president; the latter should certainly appoint a premier who takes the same position. The greater the difference between the president and the legislative median, the more divided is the government. Ideally, the president should choose a premier who can meet three criteria: he will not be overturned by the legislature, is able to improve the status quo, and is as close to the president's policy position as possible. To the parliament, any proposal offered by the premier is acceptable that improves the benefits of at least a majority. In a democratic institution, stability is reached if the legislature approves the premier's policy proposal, and the government is responsive if this proposal

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<sup>36</sup>Melvin J. Hinich and Michael C. Munger, *Analytical Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3-20.

<sup>37</sup>The appointment of the premier is certainly the most important concern of the president. For a more comprehensive measurement of presidential powers under semi-presidentialism, see Lee Kendall Metcalf, "Measuring Presidential Power," *Comparative Political Studies* 33 (2000): 660-85.

improves the welfare of a legislative majority.

When the issue is single-dimensional, two propositions follow immediately from the "median voter theorem," which is a central finding of the spatial models.<sup>38</sup> First, the government's position is endurable only if it is identical to the legislative median. Second, the government is responsive only if the status quo is not a legislative median. The reasoning is simply that, in a one-dimensional issue space, only the median point beats all other points under majority rule. With multiple dimensions, the "median point in all directions" has this property.<sup>39</sup> Although the probability for such a point to exist in a multi-dimensional issue space is very small, scholars have found that the policy proposals that can indirectly survive through agenda manipulation still cluster around the center area of the space.<sup>40</sup> We can thus hypothesize that, under majority rule, the centrality of policy position is a critical determinant of stability. The second proposition is simply a corollary of the first: in a legislature using majority rule, no alternative can replace the median voter, and all other points are substitutable. Note that this proposition states only a necessary—but not sufficient—condition for the government to be responsive. To beat a non-median status quo, the government's position has to be in its "winset," the set of proposals that a legislative majority finds more attractive to the status quo.<sup>41</sup>

To illustrate these arguments, consider the following one-dimensional example (see figure 1). Suppose the issue positions of the legislators are

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<sup>38</sup>A "median" is one that lies in the middle of the distribution of ideal points. When the issue space is multi-dimensional, a vector that maps the median of each issue is the "issue-by-issue median." When a party controls a majority of the seats, it necessarily contains the legislative median. However, the legislative median exists even if no party controls such a majority. Since a majority party does not always exist, this article uses "legislative median" rather than "legislative majority" to signify the spatial position of the legislature. For details of the concept of the median voter, see Hinich and Munger, *Analytical Politics*, 35.

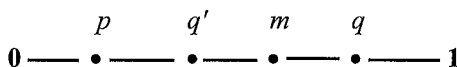
<sup>39</sup>This is the intersection of all median planes that divide the voters into halves. Whenever this point exists, it must be identical to the issue-by-issue median.

<sup>40</sup>This area is called the "uncovered set," which tends to be centrally located regardless of institution. See Richard D. McKelvey, "Covering, Dominance, and Institution-Free Properties of Social Choice," *American Journal of Political Science* 30 (1986): 283-314.

<sup>41</sup>For a more thorough discussion on winset, see Jih-wen Lin, "Two-Level Games Between Rival Regimes: Domestic Politics and the Remaking of Cross-Strait Relations," *Issues & Studies* 36, no. 6 (November/December 2000): 7-10.



**Figure 1**  
**An Example of the Model of Stability Under Semi-Presidentialism**



located uniformly in a spectrum between 0 and 1, while points  $p$ ,  $m$ , and  $q$  respectively designate the positions of the president, the legislative median, and the status quo. This figure depicts a typical divided government, where a leftist president and the legislative median are separated by a considerable distance. The status quo, however, lies to the right side of the legislative median.<sup>42</sup> The president's own position is of course not acceptable to any legislative majority, so he has to nominate a premier who stands closer to the legislative median. Given the right-biased status quo, any position between  $q'$  and  $q$  will be supported by a legislative majority, and considered a responsive move.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, the position that beats the status quo is not necessarily enduring unless it matches the legislative median. The president thus faces a difficult dilemma: he can appoint a premier at position  $q'$ , which is the closest responsive point, or forsake his own ideology and select a responsive and stable point at  $m$ .

More general propositions can be derived by considering the three variables addressed earlier. First, regarding presidential power, the most important measurement concerns the relationship of the president to the premier and the parliament. A powerful president should be able to control the premier despite parliamentary objection. This command can be achieved if the appointment of the premier is exempted from legislative approval, or if the parliament is unable to form or exercise a collective voice. The latter can occur if the parliament is disorganized because of, for instance, multiparty altercation.

<sup>42</sup>In democratic regimes, a biased status quo originates most possibly from two forces. First, it could be the median of the preceding parliament, which is rejected by the voters when selecting the current parliament. Second, it can result from a random shock that is unwanted by most people.

<sup>43</sup>Because the distance between  $q$  and  $m$  is equal to that between  $m$  and  $q'$ , any point between  $q$  and  $q'$  will make a majority better off than if  $q$  is unchanged.

Second, whether the government is unified or divided is best seen in the ideological distance between the president and the legislative median. Thus, we are measuring president-parliament congruence not on a partisan base but rather along a continuum. This approach also solves the problem of how to identify government congruence when no party enjoys a majority in the parliament.<sup>44</sup>

Lastly, the nature of the status quo also affects government performance because all democratically elected governments are mandated to "make some difference," even if the same party remains in power. The status quo is related to stability because, when making changes, a government is shifting its vote bases and is therefore vulnerable to instability. In the spatial model, the changeability of the status quo depends on its location and the decision-making rule. With a single issue, a status quo is unalterable through majority vote if it lies at the median. When votes are tradable across multiple issues, qualified majority rules are required in order to prevent the status quo from being changeable.<sup>45</sup>

The three independent variables expounded upon above yield eight possible scenarios (see table 1), from which four hypotheses can be deduced.

**Hypothesis 1:** *Irrespective of ideological congruence, a strong parliament is sufficient to induce an enduring government.* As suggested earlier, the power of a president under semi-presidentialism should be judged in accordance with his ability to subordinate the premier vis-à-vis the parliament. A parliament wins the battle if it leads government formation—the appointment of the premier in particular—and is able to articulate its will forcefully. These conditions are sufficient to produce an enduring

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<sup>44</sup>Defining the president-parliament relationship on a partisan base, the government necessarily becomes divided when no party dominates the parliament. As multipartism is a common feature among semi-presidentialist regimes, this definition weakens the explanatory power of the congruence variable.

<sup>45</sup>Here the author is assuming that political actors care only about policy or ideological distance, and that a status quo can be changed as soon as a required majority is obtained. There are of course other factors lying beyond the scope of this article. For example, the government's policy implementation capability is also very important.



**Table 1**  
**Determinants of Democratic Stability**

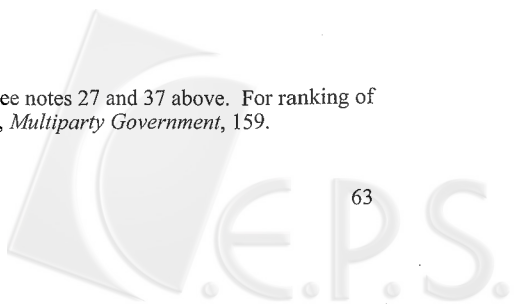
Case	Is the parliament more capable of controlling the premier than is the president?	Are the president and the legislative median ideologically congruent?	Is there a majority support to change the status quo?	Government endurance?	Government responsiveness?
1	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
3	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
4	No	No	No	No	No
5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
6	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
7	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	Yes	No	No	Yes	No

government even under a divided government because the president has no means to veto legislative decisions, and the parliament is capable of selecting its own agents to staff the government. Insofar as the preferences of the legislators remain unchanged, the government is of course supported by the parliament. Therefore, this hypothesis confirms an earlier conjecture that an assertive and capable parliament is sufficient to produce an enduring government.

This hypothesis results from the last four of the six scenarios in table 1 where political stability can be reached. Cases 5 and 6 illustrate semi-presidentialist regimes where the president, though coming from the same party as the legislative median, is a figurehead. For cases 7 and 8 the government is "divided" in appearance, but government endurance is unaffected. The best examples to confirm this hypothesis are Austria and Ireland: their presidents wield limited power and they indeed enjoy the longest government endurance among the European states, even when the ruling parties change.<sup>46</sup>

Important is to note that the assertiveness of the parliament is not

<sup>46</sup>For presidential powers in Austria and Ireland, see notes 27 and 37 above. For ranking of government endurance, see Laver and Schofield, *Multiparty Government*, 159.



necessarily weakened by multipartism. Insofar as the government appeals to the legislative median, stability can be reached even if the ruling party is a minority. This claim is best supported by the Swedish case: in the entire period since 1949, only twelve years witnessed majority governments, but stalemates or chaos have almost never occurred. The key to this stability is that the governments always contain the centrist parties.<sup>47</sup>

**Hypothesis 2:** *Irrespective of presidential power, ideological congruence is sufficient to induce an enduring government.* The logic of this hypothesis is exactly the same as in the first hypothesis. Ideological congruence is sufficient, though not necessary, for government stability because the president—no matter strong or weak—has no incentive to tamper with legislative decisions. That the president and the legislative majority can share the same ideology suggests that the parliament is itself able to affirm a collective will, and is thus not in chaos. This situation can be seen in all semi-presidentialist regimes where the government is undivided and the legislative majority is unambiguous. The typical case would be the French Fifth Republic in the non-cohabitation period.

**Hypothesis 3:** *When the president and the parliament are ideologically incongruent, government endurance declines as the parliament becomes weak.* This statement is deducible from cases 3 and 4. The president's deviation from the legislative median suggests that he is only supported by a minority, and should have the incentive to enforce his will by appointing a premier who shares the same political stance. The president can indeed do so, for a weak parliament has no way to control the premier. The sources of parliamentary feebleness may be institutional—such as the inability to approve premier appointment, or political—such as the failure to act collectively. Since the parliament still has a strong incentive to de-

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<sup>47</sup>Henrik Bystrom, "The Swedish Experience of Coalition Government" (Paper presented at the International Conference on Coalition Government in Europe, Taipei, December 13, 2001). For more comprehensive discussion on why minority governments can rule, see Kaare Strøm, "Minority Government in Parliamentary Democracies: The Rationality of Nonwinning Cabinet Solutions," *Comparative Political Studies* 17 (1984): 199-227 and Kaare Strøm, *Minority Government and Majority Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).



pose the government, and can indeed do so whenever the legislature can garner enough votes, the durability of the government is always at risk. This case has been quite common among semi-presidentialist regimes in democratizing societies. Many of these countries are deeply divided, and must institute a powerful president to keep the newborn polity from breaking up. For the same reason, however, the competing social forces find most suitable the setting up of a multiparty parliamentary system that prevents the winner from taking all. Rarely are these "crisis societies" steered by a centripetal competition, and the president is never in a short supply of political enemies in the parliament.<sup>48</sup> The results are either total chaos if the parliament decides to challenge the president (such as the Weimar Republic), or presidential supremacy if the parliament must yield.<sup>49</sup>

**Hypothesis 4:** *Responsiveness depends solely on the persistence of the status quo.* Table 1 suggests that government responsiveness has a different source from government endurance, and such responsiveness varies exclusively with the nature of the status quo. All governments, irrespective of the number of seats they control, can initiate some reforms as soon as enough legislative support is gathered. Still, the greater the number of legislative seats occupied by the ruling party, the more likely the new status quo will match the government's ideal position. Even a minority government has a chance to realize its goal if the status quo lies so far away that even the opposition party finds the government platform a better choice.

Juxtaposing endurance and responsiveness as outlined in the above analysis renders four regime types (see table 2). A regime is responsive and enduring if it is mandated to change an undesirable status quo and is itself non-challengeable. According to the analysis above, this government is not necessarily president-dominated; if so, however, the government and the parliament must share the same ideology. Paradoxically, the regime can be transformed into a status quo-preserving force as soon as the old prob-

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<sup>48</sup>For the concept of crisis society and its impact on semi-presidentialist regimes, see Lin Jih-wen, "Triangular Equilibrium Under the Semi-Presidentialist Constitution," in *Zhengzhi zhidu* (Political institutions), ed. Lin Jih-wen (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 2000), 135-75.

<sup>49</sup>Wu, "The ROC's Semi-Presidentialism at Work," 25-31.

**Table 2**  
**Four Regime Types**

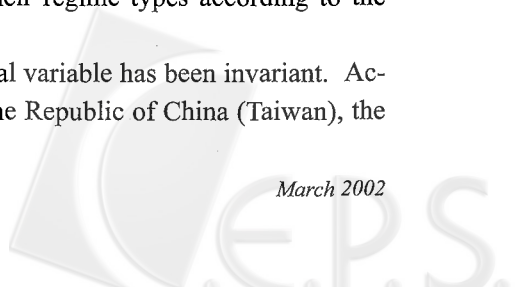
	<b>Endurable</b>	<b>Not Endurable</b>
<b>Responsive</b>	A problem-solving centrist regime	A problem-solving non-centrist regime
<b>Irresponsive</b>	A status quo-preserving centrist regime	A status quo-fighting non-centrist regime

lems are disentangled and satisfying solutions are found; these new solutions thus become the new status quo. Only new crises can restore the regime to responsiveness. As for non-endurable regimes, the most likely causes are an incapable parliament and a strong president. The government can still be responsive, however, because these regimes tend to live in societies with no shortage of problems to solve. The result would be disastrous if, in this unstable regime, the status quo is socially unwanted but nonetheless unmovable. In such a case, the government itself becomes the most vulnerable target in the next election or even via open revolt.

### **The Stability of Taiwan's Semi-Presidentialist Governments**

The above has focused on constructing theories and hypotheses regarding stability. Table 3 identifies the five cabinets under Taiwan's semi-presidentialist constitution (created in 1997 and continuing until today). Given the preceding discussions, three variables are needed to explain the stability and responsiveness of each regime: institution, ideology, and status quo. After highlighting the contours of these three variables, the analysis will turn to examining the five cabinets under Taiwan's semi-presidentialism. By identifying the endurance and responsiveness of each government, we can also determine their regime types according to the schema of table 2.

In these five years, the institutional variable has been invariant. According to the current constitution of the Republic of China (Taiwan), the



**Table 3**  
**Taiwan's Cabinets Under the Semi-Presidentialist Constitution, 1997-2002**

Premier	Ruling party's legislative seat share <sup>1</sup>	Status quo	Endurance ranking <sup>3</sup>	Responsiveness ranking
Lien Chan (連戰) (May 1996 - Sep. 1997)	50.6%	Cross-Strait relations in flux; crime-haunted society	2	5
Vincent Siew (蕭萬長) (Sep. 1997 - May 2000)	54.7% <sup>2</sup>	Cross-Strait relations in crisis; Asian financial crisis	1	4
Tang Fei (唐飛) (May 2000 - Oct. 2000)	31.1%	Cross-Strait relations in crisis; rampant corruption	5	3
Chang Chun-hsiung (張俊雄) (Oct. 2000 - Jan. 2002)	31.1%	Deadlocked cross-Strait relations; capital outflow and economic depression	4	3
Yu Shyi-kun <sup>4</sup> (游錫堃) (Feb. 2002 -)	38.7%	Deadlocked cross-Strait relations; globalized economic competition	3	2

**Notes:**

1. The KMT for the Lien and Siew administrations, the DPP for the remaining three.
2. From February 1999.
3. For both stability and responsiveness, the figures can be translated as: 1 = high, 2 = medium-high, 3 = medium, 4 = medium-low, 5 = low. These figures are the author's personal judgment.
4. The Yu cabinet was too young to be evaluated properly at the time this article was written. The scores are therefore based on public anticipation.

president appoints the premier (行政院院長) without legislative approval; the Legislative Yuan (parliament 立法院) can issue a vote of no confidence in the premier, after which the president can dissolve the Legislative Yuan; and the president appoints cabinet members upon the premier's suggestion. The constitution is thus semi-presidential according to Duverger's definition. The president is constrained by his inability to dissolve the parliament actively, but his freedom to appoint the premier without legislative intervention makes him more powerful than many of his counterparts in other semi-presidentialist countries. By the same token, the Legislative Yuan

is far from a powerful parliament, being left out of the government formation process yet still maintaining enough means by which to subdue the government.

In contrast to the ambiguous effects that institutional arrangements have on stability, ideological congruence exerts a more visible impact. Political parties in Taiwan can be located along a spectrum that orders different attitudes toward Taiwan's sovereignty status. On the one extreme, there are some fundamentalists who insist that Taiwan's sovereignty is independent from China and that the current constitution is illegitimate. The Taiwan Independence Party (TAIP 建國黨) voices this position most ardently, yet has so far had no legislative representative. Supported predominantly by native Taiwanese, the DPP shares a similar pro-independence view, but is becoming more moderate as the party's political territory expands. On the opposite extreme, the New Party (NP 新黨) has been most consistently calling for a peaceful reunification of China; some of their members have even echoed the PRC's "one country, two systems" (一國兩制) formula. The PFP, assembled by the 2000 presidential election runner-up James Soong (宋楚瑜), has been carefully distancing itself from the NP, although the supporters of the two parties overlap to quite an extent. The bottom line is that the PFP has been so far outspokenly anti-independence. The KMT therefore has been besieged by the DPP on the left and the PFP on the right. There are, moreover, those KMT members who support or sympathize with former president Lee Teng-hui's (李登輝) "Taiwanization" policy, and those who are against this movement. As a result, the Nationalist Party is not only mixed in sub-ethnic composition, but also has a fuzzy stance on the issue of national identity. Most recently, a group of Lee Teng-hui loyalists organized the TSU after Lee handed the chairmanship of the KMT over to Lien Chan, and attempted to grab votes from both the DPP and the KMT. On cross-Strait relations, however, the TSU has been so far more hawkish than the DPP on such critical issues as the "one-China" principle and trade regulations. Overall, we can rank the legislative parties from the most pro-independence to the most pro-unification as the TSU, the DPP, the KMT, the PFP, and the NP. The party that contains the "median" position on the spectrum will be the "median

voter party."<sup>50</sup>

Seat share designates not only the location of the median voter, but also the congruence between the government and the parliament: the farther the ruling party deviates from the legislative median, the greater the degree of executive-parliament incongruence. According to Hypothesis 3, this incongruence furnishes a critical test for political stability when the Legislative Yuan is not assertive enough. In terms of responsiveness, the distance between the position of the ruling party and the status quo provides useful information. As suggested by Hypothesis 4, the more unpopular is the status quo, the more likely the government will be responsive. To gauge this relationship, table 3 lists the issues on which most voters find the status quo unacceptable. Having provided a brief overview of the three main variables, we now turn to examining the five cabinets via a look at four case studies.

**Case 1: *The Lien Chan and Vincent Siew cabinets under President Lee Teng-hui.*** This period began with the constitutional reform of 1997, when a semi-presidentialist system was introduced. At the time, Lee Teng-hui was already serving as Taiwan's first popularly chosen president (having been elected in 1996). Upon his reappointment, Lee chose to keep Lien Chan, his vice-president-elect, as the premier.<sup>51</sup> As a newly elected president, however, Lee did not subject Lien's premiership nomination to a new legislative approval, and this move antagonized legislators. The KMT, controlling only 50.6 percent of the parliament seats, was unable to prevent the Legislative Yuan from keeping Lien from presenting an administrative report to the legislature. The 1997 amendment of the constitution was in fact partially motivated by this earlier clash.

This event, however, did not much weaken political stability. In addition to the KMT's legislative majority, which made the policy positions

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<sup>50</sup>Taking the current (2002) Legislative Yuan for example, we see that the TSU, the DPP, the KMT, the PFP, and the NP each respectively controls 13, 87, 68, 46, and 1 of the total 225 seats. The median voter party is thus the KMT.

<sup>51</sup>Lien was nominated by Lee to replace Hau Pei-tsun (郝柏村), a mainlander with military credentials, as the premier in 1993. This nomination was approved by the Legislative Yuan, including DPP legislators.

of the government coincide with the legislative median, the party's authoritarian hierarchy also unified decision-making. The real challenge to the Lien administration was in terms of responsiveness. On cross-Strait relations, Lee's visit to the United States in June 1995 triggered incessant saberrattling by Beijing and the suspension of cross-Strait talks. Domestically, moreover, Taiwan was haunted by several gruesome crimes in this period, reflecting the overall deterioration of the social and economic environments. The international and domestic crises were both rooted in the two methods by which the KMT maintained power: Taiwanese populism and crony-capitalist development. Thus, the ruling party was not expected to be responsive, and indeed was not.

Lien did step down as a result, however, and Lee appointed Vincent Siew as the premier in September 1997. The Lee-Siew and Lee-Lien governments were structurally similar, except that the constitutional reform of 1997 freed Siew's appointment from legislative confirmation, and the KMT's electoral victory in the 1998 Legislative Yuan election granted the party an even tighter control over the parliament. The president's enhanced authority could have fermented a confrontation with the parliament, but the KMT's seat expansion prevented this scenario from occurring. Consequently, Siew's term enjoyed higher stability than did his predecessor's, yet the premier also appeared more like the president's attaché. On many important matters, the president seemed to be directly in charge. The decisions to provide aid to Kosovo and to reduce the stock market transaction tax, for example, both seemed to have bypassed the premier. Dissatisfied with this figurehead premier, the opposition parties tried to initiate a vote of no confidence, which was easily defeated by the KMT's majority.

In addition to widespread corruption and crime, the thorniest issue confronting the Siew cabinet was the Asian financial crisis that broke out in 1997. Taiwan was inevitably threatened by the storm, but remained relatively unscathed due to the government's quick response and the country's healthy economic base. In terms of cross-Strait relations, Hong Kong was returned to China in the summer and PRC President Jiang Zemin had consolidated his power at the national party congress of 1997. Trying to break the deadlock, Lee remarked on July 9, 1999 that cross-Strait relations



should be defined as "state-to-state" or at least as "a special state-to-state relationship." This statement outraged not only Beijing, but the White House as well. Strangely, no domestic turmoil followed Lee's statement, demonstrating again the stability of the Lee-Siew system.

In brief, the two cabinets under President Lee were both enduring, with ideological congruence between the president and the parliament (Hypothesis 2) offering an obvious explanation. For the same reason, however, no institutional effect could be discerned in these two cases. Many saw the two governments as being irresponsive to demands for social and political reform, and also blamed the ruling party as being part of the problem.

**Case 2:** *The Tang Fei cabinet under President Chen Shui-bian.* Winning the presidency in March 2000, Chen Shui-bian was destined to put Taiwan's semi-presidentialism to a critical test. Not only was he elected with only 39 percent of the vote, his DPP was also a legislative minority. This could be a useful case to verify Hypothesis 1 (which envisions an enduring government) or Hypothesis 3 (which predicts a non-enduring government), and the key hinges on the ability of the Legislative Yuan to voice its collective will. This possibility, in turn, depends on the president's government formation strategy.

At first, Chen promised to assemble a "government of all people" because the DPP was a minority party and did not have enough experienced members to run the government. Meanwhile, the president refused to negotiate with the KMT for fear that the former ruling party, a loser in the presidential election, would dominate government formation. The Finnish model of a division of labor between the president and premier also did not apply because foreign affairs did not appear to be Chen's expertise and his campaign promises were in fact more focused on domestic reform. Not surprisingly, many key positions in the ministries that related to foreign or security affairs were awarded to KMT members, yet Chen was determined to claim domestic affairs his turf. To help reconcile with his political foes, Chen picked Tang Fei, a mainlander and the former minister of defense, to head the Executive Yuan. Nonetheless, the government still suffered from an ill-organized decision-making structure. While the president chaired neither the cabinet meetings nor the DPP, everybody still assumed he was

the boss. Given also the lack of trust between the politically appointed ministers and the senior government officials, uncertainty and inconsistency became the greatest problem of the Chen-Tang government.

The fatal blow came from the controversy over the building of the Forth Nuclear Power Plant. The DPP had long held an anti-nuclear stance, but the preceding Legislative Yuan had already passed a resolution to construct this power plant. The government thus faced a dilemma of whether or not to implement an adopted policy to which the DPP had long objected. Worse, Chen and Tang seemed to hold different views on this issue, and Tang resigned on October 3, 2000 when he failed to sell a compromised proposal. The opposition parties were so outraged by the government's decision to halt plant construction that they pushed for the recalling of the president. In this way, instability peaked just five months after Taiwan's regime transition. The political instability was believed to be partially responsible for an economic downturn unprecedented in post-World War II Taiwan. For example, the economic growth rate declined from 7.92 percent in the first quarter of 2000 to only 4.08 percent in the fourth quarter; the stock price index plummeted from 9,119 on May 20, 2000 to a mere 5,659 on October 30.<sup>52</sup>

The Chen-Tang administration was indeed expected to carry out political and economic reforms on Taiwan, and the regime transition itself was a significant accomplishment. The DPP's coming to power implied that Taiwan's political and economic resources would be redistributed, and that the corrupt forces would find hiding behind political shields to be more costly. Chen and his team indeed did work hard to exterminate black-gold politics and wipe out old malpractices by drafting new laws and indicting corrupt public officials. In this sense, the government was responsive to some extent. These achievements were overshadowed by political chaos and deadlocked cross-Strait relations, however, which in turn diminished

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<sup>52</sup>F or Taiwan's national statistics, see the website of the Third Bureau of the Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting, and Statistics of the Executive Yuan (行政院主計處第三局) at <<http://www.dgbas.gov.tw/>>.

the government's credibility. Thus, the Chen-Tang government, although mandated to make changes, was mired in political turmoil and failed to meet popular expectations. This case is thus a perfect example of Hypothesis 3: the Legislative Yuan, although dominated by a KMT-PFP coalition, was institutionally incapable of subjugating the premier or the president. Political chaos naturally followed the confrontation between the parliament and the government in every case where the two were ideologically incongruent.

**Case 3: The Chang Chun-hsiung cabinet under President Chen Shui-bian.** In October 2000, Premier Tang was replaced by Chang Chun-hsiung, Tang's vice-premier. Chang had been a senior DPP legislator, and his presiding over the Executive Yuan shows that the government was handed over from "all people" to the ruling party. Not only was Chang more trusted by the president and the DPP, but the government had also learned to be less confrontational. Nevertheless, the moderation of attitude improved neither the DPP's minority status nor the government's predicament. Due to the reluctance of opposition parties to pass a vote of no confidence in Premier Chang, however, political instability did not surface in the form of cabinet turnover. Problems appeared, however, in the process of legislation,<sup>53</sup> rarely did the Legislative Yuan leave Chang's bills and budgets intact, and as a result policymaking was often criticized as being inefficient and inconsistent.

Note, however, that "gridlock" or "stalemate" might not be the most appropriate characterization of the executive-parliament relationship in this period because the Legislative Yuan did pass a plethora of bills. In response to the DPP's accusation that the opposition was responsible for the political chaos, the KMT rebutted in a press conference on November 21, 2001 that, in comparison with his KMT predecessors, the cabinet under Chang saw more laws adopted and less budget cut. By pressing that claim,

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<sup>53</sup>There are two plausible explanations: (1) the KMT was doomed to lose its legislative majority after a reelection and (2) the prohibitively high costs of campaigning. The latter occurs because, under Taiwan's peculiar electoral system, candidates coming from similar backgrounds are rivals, thereby making it very costly to secure a stable vote base.

the KMT was actually ascertaining legislative dominance rather than applauding government efficiency. The press, in fact, coined the phrase "the ruling party was executing the opposition's policies" to depict the executive-legislative relations under Chang's premiership. Naturally, the DPP did not give in easily, and policymaking became a tug of war between the ruling and opposition parties. Chang was still caught up in instability, although the situation seemed slightly better than during his predecessor's tenure.

Premier Chang carefully reserved foreign and security affairs for the president, and focused instead on domestic reforms. The status quo confronting the premier was plagued by such daunting problems as unemployment, capital outflow, a rising crime rate, and plummeting social confidence. The government's responsiveness can be judged by the degree to which the Chen-Chang administration solved these problems.<sup>54</sup> At the top of the list, the government managed to introduce financial reform bills to allow bank mergers. Most notably, the government orchestrated the Economic Development Advisory Conference (EDAC 經濟發展諮詢委員會) in August 2001, which gathered together Taiwan's leading political and business leaders in search of consensus on critical issues. The Conference participants unanimously approved 322 proposals, such as replacing the "no haste, be patient" (戒急用忍) policy with the strategy of "active opening, effective management" (積極開放有效管理), allowing mainland Chinese to visit Taiwan and invest in Taiwan's real-estate and stock markets, and actively pursuing direct links with the mainland.

In comparison with the fate of the preceding cabinet, the above agreements are laudable achievements. However, many of the EDAC's recommendations were not immediately embodied in legislative resolutions. Note that the crackdown on crime and corrupt politicians, another accomplishment for the government, was conducted by prosecutors who were basically independent from the executive and the parliament. Many other

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<sup>54</sup>For the government's self-evaluation, see "Bold Reforms and Foundational Transformation," Premier Chang's press conference on January 18, 2002, at <<http://www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/>>.

reforms, such as government reorganization, are still pending. On cross-strait relations, the government implemented the "three mini-links" (小三通), yet the political stalemate with Beijing has not seemed to have been broken as a result. Right before being dissolved on January 31, 2002, the cabinet was still struggling to erase the negative economic growth rate and to repress the soaring unemployment rate. Therefore, the Chang cabinet did not fundamentally change the government-legislative relationship, although in appearance this cabinet did seem less confrontational. Hypothesis 3 still applies here.

**Case 4:** *The Yu Shyi-kun cabinet under President Chen Shui-bian.* In many ways, the outcome of the legislative election in December 2001 was unexpected. With few signs of an improving economy, the DPP was still able to expand its seat share from 29.8 percent to 38.7 percent, thus becoming the largest party in the parliament.<sup>55</sup> In sharp contrast, the KMT's seat share shrank from 54.7 percent to 30.2 percent, and Chairman Lien Chan was soon forced to acknowledge the fiasco. He and PFP Chairman James Soong both conceded that the president should lead government formation, and maintained that their parties would not join the new cabinet.

The problem, however, is that even with the remarkable victories of the DPP and the TSU—which together have been called the "pan-Green camp" to show their pro-independence views, they are still thirteen seats away from securing a legislative majority. Interestingly, no one was surprised by this result. Anticipating the Green camp's inability to win a majority, President Chen announced before election day his plan to establish a Cross-Party Alliance for National Stabilization (跨黨派國家安定聯盟) as a kind of post-election coalition mechanism. The Alliance would be responsible for promoting four specific reform platforms, the president would consult its members about important decisions, and the Alliance would help coordinate between the executive and legislative branches.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>The DPP captured 31.1 percent of the legislative seats in the 1998 election, after which five delegates left the Legislative Yuan for various reasons.

<sup>56</sup>The four reform goals are: reforming the legislature, defending the ROC's sovereignty,

As if foreseeing the opposition's boycott, the president announced that the Alliance would welcome individual legislators as well as parties.

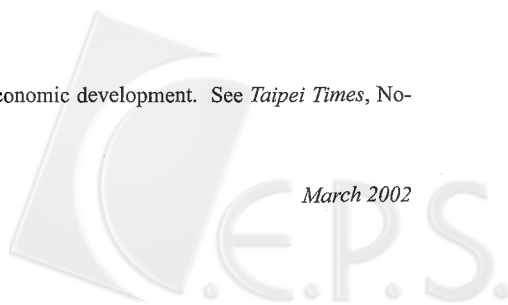
When planning the Alliance, the president was doubtlessly aiming to build a majority coalition. One should not overemphasize the necessity of a legislative majority to the president, however. Insisting on such a preponderance may in fact be unwise because that would make all coalition members essential and thus a potential threat to the president. Perhaps for this reason, talk of the Alliance ended right after the electoral results were revealed. Instead, the media now chases Yu Shyi-kun, the new premier, and his ministers.

The Alliance now in fact functions more like a potential cushion, which is to be geared up when the government fails to garner enough legislative support to carry out its political goals. Most important, there are other ways for the government to maintain stability, and this author holds that ideological congruence is the key. Distinguished by the TSU on its left side, the DPP now appears closer to the legislative median. Adding the fact that the president has also been moderating his tone toward Beijing and that national security remains in his exclusive domain, unlikely is that issues of cross-Strait relations will weaken government endurance in the near future. In terms of domestic affairs, the Yu cabinet still faces a gloomy challenge. Taiwan has just entered the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the full impact of membership has yet to be understood. The pressure to ease barriers on cross-Strait economic exchange is mounting, due especially to the anxiety that Taiwan has been lagging behind in global competitiveness. The budget deficit is multiplying, moreover, in tandem with the growing demands for government expenditures. The government will be responsive, but whether the direction adopted will be correct is still unknown.

The Yu cabinet has at least shown one sign of being responsive (if not necessarily efficient). Yu himself worked closely with President Chen as the secretary-general to the president, and is generally believed to have a

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promoting social welfare, and enhancing economic development. See *Taipei Times*, November 22, 2001.



conciliatory personality. Core members of his team are either the president's close partners or new faces whose political connections are yet to be consolidated.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, the Chen-Yu administration should be more cohesive than its predecessors, and more capable in implementing policies. Meanwhile, the president is also expected to exert a stronger influence on the operation of the DPP, such as by making himself the party chairperson. Hopefully, the centralization of power will also help unify the government, and even more so result in increased political responsibility.

### **Conclusion**

In the past five years, democratic stability in Taiwan has gone through a circuitous evolution. People in Taiwan craved democracy in order to dispel the legacies of authoritarianism, particularly inefficiency and corruption, and for this reason selected the DPP's Chen Shui-bian as president. Stability and responsiveness both declined sharply as Chen took over the President's Office in May 2000, however, although performance has since gradually improved on both indicators. Nonetheless, this meandering trajectory does not immediately imply that democracy is vulnerable to regime turnover. If democracy is itself included in the evaluation, Taiwan did indeed make great triumphs in the elections of both March 2000 and December 2001. The first marked a long overdue milestone, depriving the former authoritarian party of its executive power; the second was important for stripping the KMT of its legislative dominance. Together, they denote Taiwan's progress toward—although not yet fulfillment of—democratic consolidation.<sup>58</sup> Also noteworthy are the facts that, for the Taiwanese case

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<sup>57</sup>Worthy of note is that Premier Yu himself handpicked many of his ministers. Some others, especially those in charge of security and foreign affairs, have close ties with former president Lee Teng-hui. For a complete list of the Yu cabinet, see the website of the Executive Yuan: <<http://www.ey.gov.tw/web/english/>>.

<sup>58</sup>With the peaceful (though still noisy) regime turnover of March 2000, Taiwan has passed a critical test of democratization. Democracy has not yet been totally consolidated, however, given the failure for the turnover to bring effective governance. For an evaluation,

at least, government endurance and responsiveness do not necessarily share a negative correlation (see table 3), and that neither seem to be vulnerable to democratic transition.

This article has focused on institutions, arguing that constitutional arrangements play an important role in shaping political stability—even if all other conditions remain the same. Especially worthy of note is how a semi-presidentialist constitution has structured the political game between the government and the parliament. The findings do shed some new light on the issue: a dominant president does not necessarily induce instability, but a powerful parliament is sufficient for stability. The political chaos that immediately followed Chen's inauguration is largely attributable to the uncertainty of who is the ultimate power. The president believed he was elected to take charge, whereas the Legislative Yuan tried to show the president otherwise.

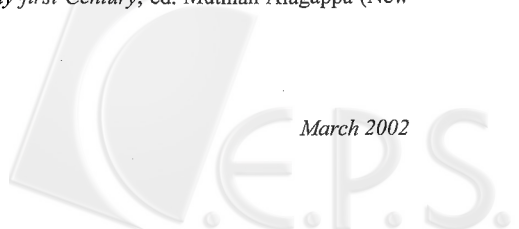
Above all, political congruence plays the most consequential role, and this factor depends not only on the constitutional structure. The electoral system, for example, also affects the attention politicians give to ideological or policy debates, and whether the policy stances of politicians are inclined to converge or diverge. Also important are the dimension and saliency of the political issues at stake. In Taiwan's case, political ideologies tend to be incongruent because of both the dominant and divisive issue of national identity and the centrifugal effect of electoral competition. As a result of this ideological divergence, political stability must be pursued through institutional engineering, especially the building of a cohesive and effective parliament.<sup>59</sup> If this approach proves to be difficult, an alternative solution is to strengthen the president's authority and responsibility.

The worst case is a mixed system that fails to distinguish between

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see Larry Diamond, "Anatomy of an Electoral Earthquake: How the KMT Lost and the DPP Won the 2000 Presidential Election," in *Taiwan's Presidential Politics: Democratization and Cross-Strait Relations in the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 81-84.

<sup>59</sup>See Hypotheses 2 and 3.





presidential and parliamentary dominance. According to the previous discussions, the situation is especially worrisome when the government and the parliament are controlled by different parties. Taiwan has suffered much from this uncertainty, and these experiences have taught the president to be less confrontational. Additionally, as a result of the ruling party's increased number of legislative seats and the adjustment of the president's political style, stability has indeed increased in Taiwan.

The more democratic and stable Taiwan becomes, the more illegitimate and infeasible Beijing's military coercion will be. By the same token, Beijing's forceful moves may appear more justifiable if Taiwan's democracy becomes more fragile and unstable. As explained earlier, this could happen if Taiwan's executive and legislative branches are ideologically incongruent, but neither is capable of dominating decision-making. More important, there is also room for President Chen to break the current cross-strait gridlock if he can moderate his ideological position gradually and consistently. To the decision-makers in Beijing, who have presumed the current Taiwan government to be pro-independence, Chen's abrupt shift of policy may look incredible or even deceiving. It is therefore better for President Chen to adjust his mainland policy gradually. Also important is for Chen, who has been distrusted by Beijing, to make his policy changes consistent so that mutual trust can be enhanced. Cross-strait relations are not only endangered by the offensive moves of either side, but also by uncertainty. Vacillating attitudes undermine trust, especially between rival regimes.<sup>60</sup> Stability refers to, above anything else, "the absence of change."

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<sup>60</sup>Lin, "Two-Level Games Between Rival Regimes."

