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**Identity, Democracy, and Single-Issue Polarization: A Study of Taiwanese
Politics and Democratic Mechanisms**

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Abstract

This thesis aims to study Taiwanese politics with respect to cross-strait relations, and aims to uncover the unique effects of “single-issue polarization” on the development of democracy. Due to the rise of Taiwanese identity and the prominence of issues related to cross-strait relations, voters and politicians have become “polarized” on cross-strait policy. This singular issue in turn affects and polarizes other tangentially related issues, leaving unrelated issues in relatively unpolarized. As a result of this unique dynamic, polarization in Taiwan creates a conducive environment for third-party participation and electoral viability. This is crucial for the advancement of Taiwanese democracy. It also indicates that Taiwan may belie the conventional opinion that polarization hurts democracy. Thus, Taiwan presents an intriguing case for policymakers grappling with the implications of polarization for democracy.

In this study, I will first analyze the historical and recent rise in “Taiwanese” national identity by tracking the frequency of Taiwanese identification by respondents in the Taiwan Election and Democratization Survey (TEDS). Next, I will examine news coverage prior to the recent nationwide election to estimate the prominence of the cross-strait relations issue and to establish the effects of the cross-strait issue on other issues. Finally, I will use publicly available ballot data to study how single-issue polarization potentially affects democratic procedures and third-party involvement in the most recent election. I conclude that policymakers in Taiwan must address the implications of growing national identity, to avoid exploiting politically salient policies for inequitable distribution among citizens. Moreover, policymakers should also formulate legislation to tackle media polarization and the marginalization of non-related issues. Finally, Taiwan may serve as a template for policymakers intrigued by its peaceful democratic apparatuses despite the presence of a deep political cleavage.

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Introduction

Few other countries have experienced a boom in democratic activity like Taiwan. Its rapid transition from tight-fisted authoritarian rule to true multi-party democracy in less than forty years is of interest in and of itself (Sullivan 2015). However, simply analyzing the history of political transition within Taiwan does not fully depict Taiwan's democratic aspirations and consequently its implications on the study of democracies. In order to truly understand Taiwan's successful democratization process, one must consider the historical and geographic factors that Taiwan continues to grapple with; specifically, Taiwan's precarious and rocky relationship with neighboring power China, which has informed Taiwanese politics since the Chinese Civil War in 1949.

Despite its authoritarian beginnings, Taiwan was still a critical asset against Communist China and a vanguard of anti-Communism in the South China Sea for fellow anti-Communist countries. This reputation garnered support for Taiwan in the Western hemisphere - most notably from the United States, which signed the Taiwan Relations Act in 1979, in the hopes of using Taiwan as a buffer against the communist Chinese state. Hence, the democratic standing and shifting political systems in Taiwan are of interest still to global powers contending with the Chinese state even today. The study of Taiwanese politics thus is critical to the study of global democratization and political systems, given Taiwan's now longstanding status as the only true democracy in the Chinese-speaking sphere.

As Taiwan's democracy develops further, it behooves us to consider why democracies like Taiwan flourish, and what relationship, if any, democratization has with the precariousness of the cross-strait relationship. Beyond considering the reasons why Taiwanese democracy developed in such a way, we can also make observations about the presence of polarization

within Taiwanese democracy, and how that polarization might be harmful or helpful to its democratic standing.

Because of Taiwan's unique standing in the South China Sea and beyond, it faces constraints and political challenges unlike most other nation-states. As such, I argue that due to the recent predominance of strictly "Taiwanese" national identity, divergent stances by the two major political parties on China, and growing animosity across the strait, there is now an ever-present focus and divergence on the issue of cross-strait relations. Not only has this issue become supremely important, but it has also further polarized the main political parties, which in turn creates a polarized environment for voters as well. This focus on cross-strait relations, which will be termed *single-issue focus*, permeates all levels of Taiwanese political life, from the presidential level to lower level elections and down to the individual voter. Furthermore, not only is the issue of cross-strait relations the most important source of cleavages, it is now in fact the only significant source of polarization in Taiwanese politics – contributing to the phenomenon of *single-issue polarization*. This mechanism can be uncovered through a study of public opinion, media coverage, and political developments, ultimately culminating in the developments of the most recent presidential election.

The presence of a single standout, polarized issue also creates a democratic landscape that is friendly to further democratic development. Taiwan's political spectrum is unique compared to many other democracies – it lacks a clearly defined left-right political spectrum that is widely accepted by Taiwanese citizens (Achen and Wang 2017). However, in the absence of such a spectrum, Taiwanese parties and voters have increasingly sorted themselves on a spectrum of pro- and anti-independence attitudes. Such a strong focus on cross-strait relations has led to strong polarization over the issue. As such, this single-issue focus creates a landscape

in which political stakeholders are motivated to be polarized on the cross-strait issue and issues that are immediately tied to the cross-strait issue, but find themselves less polarized on all other purely domestic issues. This has a vortex-like effect, in which tangential issues are pulled into the polarized “center”, leaving only the unrelated issues outside of polarization.

Despite the polarized landscape, this single-issue focus and polarization improves, rather than detracts from, the overall health of Taiwanese democracy. The focus on cross-strait relations and the subsequent pull away from polarization on other issues provides an environment that is conducive to democracy. Parties and voters alike spend much time and energy solidifying their stances on China and sorting themselves along the spectrum according to their views on cross-strait relations. This detracts from the possibility of polarization on every other issue, and allows for smaller political parties to flourish by using the single-issue focus to their advantage. They can either stake claims about cross-strait relations that differ from major parties, or they can establish their position on other non-China issues in an attempt to woo voters on their unique stance. This unique single-issue focus does not limit voters’ choices to the two main parties. Rather, it gives way to more chances for the third parties to find their niche positions on both cross-strait issues and other issues. This fosters democracy in a way that is unique to Taiwanese politics.

Of course, issues such as economic development, environmental policy, or others are always important to parties and voters. However, the state of the economy, which may be the second-biggest issue for voters (Templeman 2019), is intricately linked to cross-strait relations as well given that Taiwan’s economy is inextricably linked with China. Indeed, economic issues, especially those with regards to China, have always been associated with policies and stances on China – the Sunflower Movement of 2014, in which youth activists took over the floor of the

Legislative house in protest, was in response to a proposed trade pact that would open up services sectors on both ends of the Strait. Another clear example is the popular rise of the KMT presidential candidate Han Kuo-Yu, who won a landslide election in the traditional DPP stronghold of Kaohsiung by promising economic growth through ties with China (LA Times 2019). Hence, even as the issue of the economy looms large, much of it is inseparably tied to concerns over the relationship between Taiwan and China. This symbiotic relationship between economics and cross-strait relations encapsulates the totality and universality of the issue.

The best way to observe recent effects of the single-issue focus on Taiwanese democracy is by analyzing the most recent presidential election, which occurred on January 11th, 2020. Prior to the election, regional experts identified Taiwan's relationship with China as the first major issue, coining the phrase "the China factor" to refer to its major influence on the election. Amid growing concerns of foreign interference (The New York Times 2019) and regional turmoil in Hong Kong (Bloomberg 2019), Taiwanese presidential candidates and parties positioned themselves strongly on opposite ends of the spectrum in hopes of capturing different parts of the electorate. I will thus analyze the circumstances and results of the 2020 election, as it is the most prone to the recent influence of this "single-issue focus".

The issue of relations between Taiwan and China is not only of interest because of its importance in the upcoming election. It is also crucial to the study of partisan polarization and its effects on democratic strength. My thesis aims to study how single-issue focus affects partisan polarization in Taiwan, and the implications of single-issue polarization for the health and vitality of Taiwanese democracy. Political polarization has been identified as a major threat to democratic health, often pitting people in terms of "Us" versus "Them". Moreover, political polarization can directly induce negative outcomes for democracy, including gridlock,

democratic erosion, and eventual collapse (McCoy et al. 2018). As such, polarization has become a major topic on the minds of politicians and policymakers alike as they contend with its effects and consequences.

Likewise, Taiwan is no stranger to political polarization. Furthermore, recent events in Taiwan show that polarization over cross-strait relations in turn affects other tangentially related issues, creating further polarization over issues such as trade policy or education. Both trade and education have seen a significant amount of polarization as a result of entanglement with cross-strait relations. The aforementioned Sunflower Movement was a response to a proposed trade pact with China, and eventually engendered the rise of the staunchly pro-independence New Power Party. Similarly, both the KMT and DPP have come under fire for their educational reform policies, in no small part due to both parties' recalibration of the amount of "Ancient Chinese" writings and teaching materials in textbooks. Both examples are indicative of the impact of the cross-strait issue on other tangentially related issues.

Though the issue of cross-strait relations is so utterly predominant and generates polarization for related issues, the presence of such a significant central issue detracts from Taiwanese polarization on other issues such as social justice or environmental policy. Since Taiwanese political identity is so crucially tied to the questions of cross-strait relations, the act of taking more polarizing stances on other types of political issues may be less lucrative for parties. Thus, polarization in this case may not just be a nuisance for democracy, but rather, as a driving force for democratic health (Levendusky 2009). In contrast, countries such as the United States do not have such a critical issue to which voters can tie their political preferences. Thus, political preferences between factions grow apart and become "polarized" on a number of issues.

This creates a polarization on economic, social, ethnic, and environmental issues, among others (Achen and Wang 2017).

Given these factors, Taiwan is a pertinent case for study in an increasingly polarized world and may serve as a point of consideration for countries struggling with political divides and declining democracy. As such, I aim to study Taiwanese political conditions to uncover crucial democratic mechanisms that may have implications for democracy in Taiwan and beyond. My study will first examine the formation of Taiwanese identity and an uptick in “Taiwanese” national identity. Next, I will examine the degree to which the issue of cross-strait relations weighs on voters’ and parties’ minds. Finally, I will look for the presence of a single-issue focus, and how this potentially affects the dynamics of polarization and strengthens democratic practices. This thesis will contribute to the existing literature by tying together past phenomena and trends in Taiwan with the results of the recent presidential election. Through my work, I aim to uncover a critical mechanism – the impact of the “single-issue focus” on polarization – and to add on to the preexisting literature on Taiwanese democratization and politics. Finally, I hope to observe such a phenomenon if it exists, and to see the implications that single-issue focus and polarization has upon the health of democracy. Contrary to popular opinion, polarization of this sort may in fact strengthen a democracy by creating narrow gaps on other political issues. Policymakers can accordingly relate the results to other democracies in hopes of better understanding and potentially improving the current state of political polarization across the globe.

Background

Taiwan's political landscape is not only of interest because of its role as a unique democracy. A complicated historical mix of foreign pressures and internal developments continues to inform Taiwan's democracy and voting behavior in ways that are not readily observable elsewhere in the world. This is for a plethora of reasons, but can be most aptly summed up in the following. First, the Taiwanese electorate has undergone a significant shift in terms of national identity. Second, the historical origins and political ideology of the two main parties, the Kuomintang and the Democratic Progressive Party, have culminated in an alignment with pro and anti-independence stances, which further emphasizes the shifting paradigms of politics and national identity. Finally, given the aforementioned historical trends, the worsening relations between Taiwan and China combined with a shift in policy on both sides of the strait have rendered the implications of cross-strait policy more serious than ever.

In January 2019, Chinese Premier Xi Jinping staked an eventual claim to Taiwan by stating: "unification between the two sides of the strait is the great trend of history" (New York Times 2019). China's iron-clad stance on unification, however, meets growing resistance in Taiwan, as identification as "Taiwanese" has reached a historical apex on the island nation. One survey by the Taiwan's Election and Democratization Study (TEDS) after the 2016 presidential election found 58.6% of respondents identified as "Taiwanese", 3.7% identified as "Chinese", and 33.1% as "both". When the same study was performed in 2004, 48.1% of voters responded "Taiwanese", with 42.6% responding "both". Such a dramatic increase shows a shift away from identifying as both "Chinese" and "Taiwanese" towards a more pronounced and clear Taiwanese identity. Thus, it is precisely this tension between a young Taiwanese democracy which increasingly sees itself as "Taiwanese" and not Chinese, and the Chinese authoritarian state with

plans of unification that is of interest here. Indeed, scholars have identified identity as the “most important – and most divisive – issue in Taiwan’s democratic politics today” (Jacobs 2012).

The development of a distinctively Taiwanese identity among some Taiwanese has led to an ideological schism between citizens with a pro-unification leaning and those with a pro-independence leaning. This schism not only deals with identity but also carries implications about what courses of action to take vis-à-vis China. Taiwan has thus seen the development of two major political parties with differing views on the question of China: the pro-unification-leaning Kuomintang (henceforth referred to as the KMT), and the pro-independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party (henceforth referred to as the DPP) (Lin 2006).

After the KMT government was defeated by the Chinese Communist Party in the Chinese Civil War, it retreated and took base in Taiwan in 1949. For the next four decades, Taiwan was a one-party state ruled by tight KMT authoritarian rule. Though the KMT allowed for outside competition in elections in 1986, the turning point was the first national election for the Legislative house in 1992. KMT policy towards China also met a turning point in 1992, where unofficial talks with Beijing led to the “92 Consensus”. Both sides agreed to adhere to the one China principle, while never clarifying precisely what “one China” meant politically. Despite internal efforts to move toward a two-state outcome, the KMT decided to take on a pro-mainland approach after losing in the 2000 presidential election – the first election where the KMT ran against DPP opponents. After the defeat, the KMT fell back on the “92 Consensus”, and espoused the principle of unification as the ultimate goal of the party (Schubert 2004). Though the party line has softened somewhat on the claims for unification, the KMT still remains largely the pro-unification party in the eyes of the Taiwanese people (Lin 2006).

On the other hand, the DPP was first established in 1986, and first competed with KMT candidates in local elections. It was formed by activists who believed in party competition in order to establish democratic freedoms, and focused on self-determination for people considered to be ethnically Taiwanese. The party attained national prominence after a surprise victory in the 2000 presidential election with the election of President Chen Shui-Bian. Chen first proposed to make “one China” an issue of future discussion, and encouraged the spirit of the “92 Consensus”. However, Chen and his DPP allies began to express preference for the “one side, one country” approach, where both Taiwan and China are sovereign countries on each side of the Taiwan Strait. Since then, the DPP has been perceived to be “pro-independence” and opposed to a one China approach.

It should be noted that the terms “pro-independence” and “pro-unification” are only meant to denote the two extreme poles in Taiwanese politics. In fact, both parties have a certain bent, but have not taken and likely will not make any significant moves towards either outcome in the near future. This also goes for the Taiwanese populace as well. Though supporters turn out in droves for both parties, as well as for smaller parties, they have overwhelmingly supported the “status quo”. In the most recent TEDS study, less than 5 percent of respondents preferred either unification or independence respectively. Most people responded with “Maintain the status quo”, with 5.9% preferring to do so and “move toward unification in the future”. 21.2% of respondents preferred to “move toward independence in the future”, and 28.8% expressed their wishes to “decide either unification or independence”, presumably at a later date. It is with this caveat that the terms “pro-unification” and “pro-independence” are used throughout the rest of the study. Nevertheless, the presence of two widely recognized political goalposts in Taiwan still serves as proxies, however extreme, for voters’ and politicians’ preferences. As such, I will

continue to use the terms “pro-unification” and “pro-independence” to represent the two ends of Taiwan’s political spectrum.

In addition to the development of a consistent two-party race, another significant characteristic in Taiwanese politics is the Pan-Blue and Pan-Green coalitions. The Pan-Blue party includes the KMT, the New Party, and other traditionally pro-unification parties that are documented in further detail in my Analysis section. Similarly, the Pan-Green coalition includes the DPP, the Taiwan Solidarity Union, the Taiwan Statebuilding Party, and other traditionally pro-independence parties. Citizens’ partisanship can thus be understood not just through their support of specific parties, but also in terms of their allegiance to either coalition, which presents an overall bipartisan structure (Achen and Wang 2017). It is this discrepancy, and consequently, the difference in opinion on cross-strait relations that becomes the titular focus for most elections held in Taiwan. As such, the difference in opinions between the two major parties on “how to deal with a threatening and emerging China” is the “most important cleavage” to the political system (Wang 2019).

Finally, a quote from Chinese Premier Xi Jinping in 2019 serves as a succinct encapsulation of worsening cross-strait relations. Besides offering reassurance that unification is inevitable, Xi also warned Taiwan that China would “make no promise to abandon the use of force” in its efforts to reunify Taiwan. In general, Beijing has traditionally taken a more hardline attitude towards the pro-independence DPP, and have been more willing to work with the KMT (this despite the KMT’s initial intentions to reclaim mainland China after their defeat in 1949). This is best displayed by examining the difference between former President Ma Ing-Jeou and current President Tsai Ing-Wen’s records in dealing with China. Ma, a longtime KMT party elite, was able to grow economic ties and ushered in an influx of mainland Chinese tourists. In

contrast, Tsai's presidency has seen relations worsen with Beijing due to an ongoing war of words and diplomatic measures. These include a Chinese ban on all tourist groups to Taiwan, increased efforts by China to poach diplomatic ties in countries that recognize Taiwan as the one China, and Taiwanese legislators' introduction of an anti-infiltration bill designed to target undue Chinese influence (The Diplomat, 2020). All of these measures serve to underline the worsening relations between China and Taiwan. This decline is especially important to Taiwanese voters not only for the very palpable threat of military action, but also because of the rise of a distinctly separate national identity and the polarization between parties on the issue of cross-strait relations. Given the combined effects of 1) a rise in and prominence of Taiwanese national identity, 2) a growing clarity and divergence in parties' stances vis-à-vis China, and 3) a significant worsening of cross-strait relations, it is not surprising that the issue of cross-strait relations is now of supreme concern to Taiwanese voters and political elites concernChina will take violent action to reunify the two sides of the strait

Literature Review

The Literature Review section is divided into the interlinked mechanisms that are of paramount importance to this study of s First, the existing literature elucidates the development of Taiwanese national identity as a separate concept from Chinese national identity. With this established, we can then turn to the well-documented and currently ubiquitous nature of cross-strait relations. Finally, the importance of these relations, coupled with the growing consciousness of "other-ness" in some parts of the Taiwanese electorate, provide the tinder needed for the rapid growth of political polarization in Taiwan. This is reflected by strong party polarization on the issue of cross-strait relations. By establishing these three facets through a

review of scholarly literature, I hope to set up a strong base of connected democratic mechanisms in Taiwan. This sets the stage for my study of the impact of single-issue focus on polarization, and of single-issue polarization on democratization.

Background to the Development of Taiwanese National Identity

Scholars have written extensively on the presence of a “double identity” in Taiwan. Many citizens are cognizant of two identities: Chinese and Taiwanese. Indeed, much of what could be construed as “Taiwanese” identity were subject to efforts of governmental suppression during single-party Kuomintang rule beginning from 1949 and ending in 1986 (Achen and Wang, 2017). During that period, many Taiwanese were forbidden from speaking Taiwanese in schools, as the government pushed hard for Mandarin as the official language as well as the “Sinicization” of the Taiwanese population and eradication of “Taiwanese” customs. However, political scholars (Huang et al., 2004) identified “Taiwanese” and “Chinese” identity as being neck-to-neck among the Taiwanese population as early on as 2004. As time goes by, Taiwanese and Chinese identities have consistently trended in opposite directions. Now more than ever, Taiwanese citizens are labeling themselves as exclusively Taiwanese. Additionally, the presence of two identities may work in opposite directions depending on the context. When Chinese and Taiwanese identity are invoked in a political context where allocative distributions are to be made, they act in an antagonistic manner. For instance, the conflicting stances over the Diaoyu islands has led to political tensions between Chinese and Taiwanese politicians, not to mention tensions between citizens as they spar about the rights to the territories. On the other hand, when Chinese and Taiwanese identities are made salient with regards to cultural issues, such as festivities or historically significant moments, they tend to converge (Huang et al., 2004).

This issue is further complicated by ethnic differences: Taiwan is composed of approximately 75% “Mingnan Taiwanese”, most of whom emigrated to Taiwan during the Ming and Qing dynasties, and 15% “outside-province Taiwanese”, most of whom emigrated with the KMT following their defeat in the Chinese Civil War. Another ethnic group, the Hakka Taiwanese, are also long-term residents on the island. Due to this historical difference, there are diverging tendencies among these subgroups – the “Mingnan Taiwanese” tend to identify more with “Taiwanese” and are associated with movements towards independence from the mainland, while the “outside-province Taiwanese” tend to think of themselves more as “Chinese” when it comes to political decisions.

Despite this ethnic cleavage on the topic of identity, the overall trend remains that the Taiwanese voter - whether Mingnan Taiwanese, outside-province Taiwanese, or Hakka – have developed a stronger “Taiwanese” identity over time. In addition, this corresponds to an overall diminishing sense of “Chinese” identity. This trend can be tracked over time, both in terms of the overall populace and within each ethnic group. According to a study conducted by the Election Study Center at National Cheng-Chi University (NCCU), the overall rate of those who identify as “Taiwanese” doubled from 20 percent to 40 percent between 1992 and 2000 (Wang 2017), and increased to 56 percent in 2012. During the same period, the proportion of Chinese identifiers on the island shrunk from around 30 percent to about 4 percent in 2012. The percentage of dual identifiers – those who identify as both Chinese and Taiwanese – stayed relatively constant, though it has experienced a slight decrease. This trend can be observed beyond 2012 by using a different set of data from the TEDS study. The surveys conducted after the 2016 presidential election found 62.7% of respondents identified as “Taiwanese”, 4.1% identified as “Chinese”, and 29.7% as “both” (TEDS 2016).

This pattern of identity change appears to happen across the main ethnic lines. For the Mingnan Taiwanese, identification with “Taiwanese” skyrocketed between 1992 and 2012, while identification with “Chinese” plummeted to single-digits. The outside-province Taiwanese saw a modest rise in Taiwanese identity from 5% to 30%, while strictly Chinese identification has dropped from 50% percent in 1992 to around 10% in 2012. The Hakka have also experienced a similar trend – a rise in identification with “Taiwanese” and a drop in identification with “Chinese”. This trend will most likely continue in the same direction, due to the identity formations associated with age demographics. More than 60 percent of fifth generation respondents identified as “Taiwanese”, while “Chinese” identity clocked in at close to zero. The first-generation respondents, corresponding to those 81 years of age and above, also displayed a growing Taiwanese consciousness over time, but still held onto “Chinese” identity at a 15% clip, surpassing all other generations. This phenomenon is most likely due to historical ties and educational background. Most first-generation respondents were more likely to have come from the mainland or had familial ties across the strait. They were also likely to have received the “Sinicized” forms of education and government propaganda about the eventual reunification efforts by the KMT, along with the third and fourth generations.

Given these trends, it is almost certain that there will be continued growth in “Taiwanese” identity and, subsequently, a further decline in the remaining vestiges of “Chinese” identity on the island. As the youngest generation takes a more proactive role in politics and replaces the first generation, historical and physical ties to the mainland will no longer play as big of a role in identity consciousness. This will further crystallize the nascent stages of Taiwanese national identity and should continue to define Taiwanese politics. Now, by the time that many college-age students are voting, many of them have had three or more generations of

elders who have only lived in Taiwan their entire lives. These shifting demographics have and will continue to increase psychological and cultural distance from Chinese aspirations. This will not only serve to lessen feelings of interconnectedness, but may also foster an increased sense of antagonism from younger generations who feel completely Taiwanese and utterly disconnected from China. Thus, while the status quo points to a significant gap between “Taiwanese” and “Chinese” identity, demographic trends indicate that the gap will continue to grow over time. If the trend continues, Taiwanese voters will eventually overwhelmingly identify as strictly “Taiwanese”, leaving a lot of room for potential capture by traditionally pro-independence political parties and forcing traditionally pro-unification sides to reevaluate their electoral viability.

The Importance of Cross-Strait Relations and Recent Developments

The importance of cross-strait relations cannot be understated. This relationship sets the Taiwanese political landscape apart from others. Indeed, the “China factor” has come to the forefront of political consciousness, both for foreign scholars and for Taiwanese citizens (Achen and Wang, 2017) (Templeman 2019). Taiwan’s relationship with China, and the political decisions that stem from the nature of such a relationship, has primary importance over all other issues. Achen and Wang write, “no other topic or relationship plays so central a role in Taiwan’s politics. It structures foreign policy; it structures the political party system; it structures much of how ordinary citizens orient themselves to politics.” The issue of cross-strait relations is thus closely intertwined with domestic politics, as it constrains much of what politicians can do and separates out voters along party lines. Domestic politics are tied to the cross-strait relationship in at least three ways. First, the major political divide is structured by political parties’ views of and relations with mainland China, which weighs on elections even when strictly domestic issues

are discussed. Second, voters identify with parties based on the presented ethos of each party – the KMT and its Pan-Blue allies are more friendly to Beijing, while the DPP and its Pan-Green allies are more supportive of independence. As such, parties perhaps take more extreme stances than an independent analysis would warrant, in an effort to conjure up more political support for a defined, extreme position. Third, Taiwan’s economy and prosperity are increasingly dependent on a beneficial and stable trade relationship with the mainland. This interdependence raises the stakes of cross-strait policy and makes the issue of cross-strait relationships crucial to national well-being (Cabestan 2013). A harder stance against Beijing has entailed retaliatory action, whereas better cross-strait conditions lead to warmer economic ties. There is a certain tradeoff between claims of sovereignty and economic benefits, further raising the stakes of policies that govern cross-strait conditions.

The issue of cross-strait relations has effects on the Taiwanese citizen beyond simply political or economic dividends. Beyond allocative implications, the presence of Chinese pressure and the perceived distance between voters on the issue of cross-strait relations has effects on voters’ levels of political tolerance (Wang and Chang, 2006). Findings have shown that the political intolerance of some Taiwanese stems from their perceptions of threats regarding Taiwan’s future relations with China. Regardless of their preferences over the future status of Taiwan, residents who sense a threat either from the pro-independence movement or from Beijing’s efforts of unification tend to be less tolerant of the related groups that support those causes. Even islanders who support independence or unification but see these solutions as harmful to Taiwanese society are “reluctant to extend democratic rights to their corresponding advocates” (Wang and Chang 2006). The profound impact that cross-strait relations have on

voters' levels of political tolerance, and their overall psychology, are sufficient to show that the relationship between Taiwan and China is of utmost concern to the Taiwanese.

Beyond past trends that indicate the importance of cross-strait relations, developments between China and Taiwan in the past year have taken the issue to new heights. The gravity of the issue to voters cannot be directly discerned easily, but statements by political elites should reflect, to some degree, widespread anxiety about the issue. In a foreign media interview after the recent presidential election, President Tsai Ing-Wen told BBC (BBC 2020): "The situation has changed. The ambiguity can no longer serve the purposes it was intended to serve." She was referring to the One China concept (BBC 2020), which China and Taiwan had long understood as a de facto principle. Because of these changes, Tsai no longer believes that the U.S.'s diplomatic acknowledgement of China's position as the sole legitimate Chinese government is valuable or viable. The vague nature of the understanding is complicated by the changes that have taken place. These changes include China's intensification of threats with aircraft and military vessels circling Taiwan and the Hong Kong protest movements. Because of the escalation of tensions and recent political developments, President Tsai has publicly expressed her renewed focus on the cross-strait issue. Recent escalations have thus brought the issue to the utmost forefront of Taiwanese political consciousness.

Political Polarization

The phenomenon of political polarization is one that fails to escape rhetoric in today's political climate. Much work has been done to uncover and categorize the polarization around the world today, both here in the United States and elsewhere. This discourse is often characterized by attaching negative connotations to polarization: "polarized societies make

democracies vulnerable” (McCoy et al., 2018). In addition, there has been a documented increase in polarization and democratic erosion around the world. The effects of polarization are evident in the growing concentrations of power and democratic erosions in Turkey, Venezuela, Poland and Hungary; in paralysis and gridlock in the United States; and in British unrest stemming from the Brexit vote, among other examples (McCoy et al., 2018). Polarization fosters these conditions by aligning opinions under two (or sometimes more) camps with mutually exclusive identities and interests. When groups of people are united around one pole of a social or political cleavage, politicians can manipulate rhetoric to further polarization. This usually polarizes parties and voters across social, economic, and cultural goals, fostering a polarized environment for many issues. Political divides in the United States, for example, have formed around attitudes on climate change (Dunlap et al., 2016) and racial divides and social movements (McAdam and Kloos, 2014), among other issues. Thus, not only has polarization increased in general, but its far-reaching consequences have subsequently shaped how people discuss all kinds of political issues across the world.

Unlike the United States or many other countries, however, political preferences in Taiwan do not fit neatly onto a traditional left-right spectrum. Instead of stances on social or economic issues, the main Taiwanese political cleavage is best identified by looking at stances regarding cross-strait relationships. An example will suffice to show this. In the 2016 edition of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES 2016), the Taiwanese surveyors did not choose to ask respondents to rank political parties on the left-right dimension. Instead, they petitioned to use an alternative dimension. The researchers chose to label the left-hand position as “Taiwan should declare independence” and the right-hand position of “Taiwan and China should unify immediately”. This crucial decision shows the importance of the Taiwan-China

issue and coincides with Achen and Wang's 2017 work, *The Taiwan Voter*. The two authors write: "conflict and political polarization are generally the most extreme when there is just one major cleavage in the society... the current central axis of politics in Taiwan is the issue of unification vs. independence. Citizen's opinions on that issue are closely tied to their identity... ethnic identity, national identity, and preferences over how to deal with a rising China are all interrelated and reinforce each other in Taiwan.... This dominant issue structures party ideology and electoral strategies, while citizen's party identifications and vote choices map closely onto those issue positions."

Moreover, the issue of cross-strait relations remains the "most influential issue in Taiwan politics... from 2000 to 2008, party positions on the independence/unification issue became more polarized." Based on the authors' construction of a left-right spectrum from a scale of 0 to 10, they estimated that the KMT and DPP had significant differences on the topic of independence and unification: in 2012, the KMT was pegged at 7.0, while the DPP sat at 2.6. Over the last eight years, more tensions have arisen across the strait that has enhanced polarization on this issue. This polarization over the issue of Taiwanese status has led to "serious political conflicts and unusually bitter party divisions since Taiwan's democratization in the late 1980s and early 1990s, including fistfights on the floor of the national legislature." Such vitriol has been well-documented over time. However, perhaps the most telling excerpt from the two experts is as follows: "Taiwan thus has a complex and ambivalent relationship with China that is characterized by cultural affinity, security menace, and opportunities for economic prosperity. Precisely because cross-Strait ties are close but unsettled, they have formed the basis of the key political cleavage on the island that has effects on every aspect of Taiwan's politics." Because the issue of cross-strait relations is so exceedingly crucial, it has effects on every aspect

of Taiwanese politics, particularly those that are tangentially or directly affected by the status of cross-strait relations. The KMT and DPP have thus correspondingly built their identities around the political fissure around cross-strait relations, and have found related issues to be the most contentious between voters (Lin 2006). As such, Taiwan's biggest political cleavage coincides with the issue that most voters consider of paramount importance. However, Taiwan's unique status and political landscape may provide different implications as compared to other nations currently suffering from the adverse effects of polarization.

Methodology

My thesis aims to study the effects of single-issue focus on political polarization, which may have interesting implications for democracy. This study is of importance to political studies, in light of perceived increasing polarization across the globe. Within this section, I will explain the steps and methodologies I employed to confirm observations made in the Literature Review and to establish new relationships between polarization and democratization. First, I conducted a study of the Taiwan Election and Democratization Survey to solidify the claim that Taiwanese national identity is on the rise. Next, in order to gauge the importance of the cross-strait relations issue in relation to other issues, I employed two Taiwanese newspapers and conducted an in-depth analysis of prominent headlines in the month prior to the 2020 election. In addition, I continued to use one of the papers, the United Daily News, to approximate the degree of polarization on cross-strait relations and other issues. Lastly, I chose to focus on party and candidate stances along with election results from the most recent election, in order to

solidify the relationship between single-issue polarization on cross-strait relations and improvements in Taiwanese democracy.

TEDS Analysis of National Identity

National identity in Taiwan is a tricky subject, given that the Taiwanese electorate is made up primarily of those of Chinese descent. Thus, the ethnic identity of voters (i.e. Hakka, Aborigine, Chinese, etc.) may differ from the national identity of voters. However, national identity is the measure of interest here, as it strictly pertains to identification along the Taiwanese-Chinese spectrum. Indeed, though approximately 95% of Taiwanese are of Han Chinese descent, the uptick in identification with “Taiwanese” on surveys indicates a divide between ethnic and national considerations. Thus, to demonstrate Taiwanese voters’ increased sense of identification with being Taiwanese, I analyzed the most comprehensive survey of Taiwanese voters: the Taiwan’s Election and Democratization Survey (TEDS). TEDS is a government-funded, continual large-scale survey project that has covered questions of national identity, political preferences, and other topics of note since 2004. As such, it provides a prime opportunity to glean national-level data over a significant timeframe of seventeen years.

I had no issue getting access to the TEDS website by filling out a website form. A follow-up data request gave me access to a list of past projects. The initial studies were less uniform in structure – though the committee did conduct surveys each year of the presidential election in 2004 and 2008, the surveys in between were less frequent and of a slightly different nature than the surveys in the 2010s. For instance, the 2005 survey was focused on County Magistrates and mayoral elections. As such, I chose to study only presidential election data, with the exception of one particular data set – the Survey of Nine-in-One Local Elections in 2018 – to keep a standard procedural baseline that would not fluctuate over time. The choice to use the

Nine-in-One survey was in no small part due to its unique structure. While most available surveys only garnered national-level data, this particular survey applied many of the same questions to Taipei and Kaohsiung, the two biggest cities in Taiwan. As such, this particular data set was conducive to studying the differences in North/South regional preferences and identity. I also chose to include one survey every two years, but chose to add on 2017 and 2019 surveys as well in order to closely track the most recent developments in national identity trends.

Each survey is conducted via telephone, and includes questions on topics such as “Politics and Media”, “Government Performance”, “Economic Evaluations”, “Feeling thermometer towards political figures”, and “Position on Unification and Independence”.

The key TEDS question of interest, listed under “National Identity” or “Taiwanese/Chinese identification”, is:

“In Taiwan, some people think they are Taiwanese. There are also some people who think they are Chinese. Do you consider yourself as Taiwanese, Chinese, or both?”

The options presented to the respondents were:

- Taiwanese
- Both
- Chinese
- Refuse to answer
- It depends
- No opinion
- Don't know

TEDS provided simple tabulated results from the study, including the number of respondents for each answer, the total number of respondents, and the percentage frequency of each answer. Thus, by using the TEDS study as a looking glass into Taiwanese citizens' tendencies, it was easy to track the ebb and flow of various national identity leanings throughout the past two decades.

The exact breakdown and trends are discussed more explicitly in the Analysis section. Nevertheless, the shifting trends seen in TEDS provides invaluable insight into the development of Taiwanese national identity and the subsequent shift away from identification with “Chinese” or “both Chinese and Taiwanese”, despite a persistent regional difference.

Issue Prominence in United Daily News and Liberty Times Headlines

As Taiwanese national identity transitioned from a fledgling ideal into an established majority, the issue of cross-strait tensions and its implications also moved to the forefront of public consciousness. To study the importance of the issue to the Taiwanese public and to political elites, I chose to examine the databases of two prominent newspapers – the United Daily News and the Liberty Times – to assess the prominence of cross-strait relations. The prominence of the cross-strait relations issue and other issues can be approximated by looking at the frequency of media coverage on the topic of relations between China and Taiwan. Coverage prior to the election is also most likely to reveal the facets of political life that are most pertinent to the media elites. Though this is not a direct proxy of how voters feel, media coverage is at least partly indicative of the issues closest to the hearts of the Taiwanese electorate.

As all media outlets have some unavoidable bias, a certain degree of caution must be applied to the study of newspaper headlines and coverage. I have chosen to study two publications. The United Daily News has an informal and formally documented reputation as

“Pan-Blue”, referring to a set of stances that align closely with those of the KMT. On the other hand, the Liberty Times has also been associated with “Pan-Green” coverage tendencies, aligning more with the preferences of the DPP. I hope to get a fair look at the importance of cross-strait relations and other closely related issues by looking at tendencies for media coverage.

An analysis of coverage by the two papers reveals both ends of the political spectrum among Taiwanese media. Even if potential political ends could come of exploiting or suppressing any China-related news, a close look at one “right-wing” and one “left-wing” news source gives a more impartial overall view of media coverage tendencies. The choice to select these two papers was also not simply a matter of impartiality, but also of accessibility. I went through various channels to obtain access for other sources, such as the China Times or the Apple Daily News, but the United Daily News and the Liberty Times were the only sources that allowed access to their archived headlines. Only the United Daily News allowed access to the full articles, but I believe that analysis of headlines is sufficient to reveal media tendencies and issue prominence.

Using the online archives for the two newspapers, I took aim at the prevalence of cross-strait relations in press coverage as compared to other prominent issues. I tracked and analyzed the frequency of media coverage on the issue of cross-strait relations, and performed the same analysis for issues unrelated to cross-strait relations. This was performed over the period of one calendar month (from December 10th, 2019, to January 10th, 2020) ending in the day before the election. This duration was chosen to reflect the most recent coverage, which would likely yield the political issues that voters were invested in prior to the 2020 presidential election, while also maintaining a manageable number of data points to study. I chose to select my keywords by using the 29th Wave of the Telephone and Mobile Phone Interview Survey of Presidential

Satisfaction from TEDS. My research concluded that this was the best way to ascertain the specific issues that Taiwanese respondents and researchers labeled as important.

Respondents were faced with a list of forty-three options when asked the question: “Regarding following problems that our country is facing, what do you think is the most priority that President Tsai Ing-Wen should handle?” Of those options, six garnered over three percent each in responses. Those were: Cross-strait relations (兩岸關係) (21.7%), education policy (教育政策) (12.5%), annuity reform (年金改革) (5.9%), economic development (經濟發展) (39.7%), judicial reform problem (司法改革) (8.9%), and transitional justice (轉型正義) (3.3%).

Upon establishing these six topics, I then conducted a keyword search of each topic on both newspaper archives. I only chose to include articles that explicitly included the keyword in the title, and further filtered out the few headlines that were tagged with the keyword but did not include it in its actual topic or headline. After applying this filter, I performed a keyword search of an array of key issues over that time span for both publications, then tabulating the number of cases for each issue over the two publications. Despite concerns about potential discrepancies in the terms that are used between publications, an in-depth research session revealed that all six terms are common and up-to-date phrases used to refer to their respective policy realms. Hence, I was able to single out and track the frequency of newspaper coverage on each distinct issue. This gave insight into the frequency of media coverage and of the public political milieu, all within the timeframe of the crucial pre-election phase.

Polarization in United Daily News Headlines

Because political parties are not defined in the same way in Taiwan as with other conventional political systems, political polarization on a left-right scale is not the best way to visualize polarization in this scenario. However, political polarization can instead be measured

on stances regarding cross-strait relationships, like the one by the CSES displayed in the Literature Review section. I continued my analysis of newspaper coverage to identify a clear pattern of behavior surrounding issues of cross-strait relations, and subsequently, a lack of cohesive polarization on other unrelated issues. This process was designed to better substantiate the claim that partisan polarization exists and is most prominent on the issue of cross-strait relations,

I chose to filter for articles featured on the A1 to A4 sections of the United Daily News in the two months prior to the presidential election (November 10th, 2019 to January 10th, 2019). The articles analyzed were ones coded under the categories previously identified: Cross-strait relations, education policy, annuity reform, economic development, judicial reform problem, and transitional justice. After analyzing the articles under each category, I assigned each article a “polarization score” based on the topic of the article, the language used, and the significant political terms mentioned in the headline. The criteria used is as follows:

Polarization Score	Criteria for Assignment
0 (not polarized)	No explicit mentions of political parties/political preferences, unless if strictly news on campaign movements
1 (somewhat polarized)	Explicit mention of one political party/preferences, but no underlying tones of conflict over the issue
2 (very polarized)	Explicit mention of both parties/political preferences, but underlying tones of conflict over the issue
3 (extremely polarized)	Explicit mention of both parties/political preferences, explicit mention of conflict/clashing between two sides

I chose to assign these values for polarization based on the level of conflict and the key actors involved (either singular persons or larger organizations).

The choice to use the United Daily News was one engendered by ease of access – the UDN is the only newspaper source that allows free access and which identifies the page number of individual articles. Though the UDN has a traditional Pan-Blue reputation, it is considered more centrist than other publications like the deeply Pan-Blue Want Daily or the China Times, as well as the deeply Pan-Green Apple Daily News. As such, the UDN should provide relatively moderate coverage. Even if it is not impartial, a newspaper with some partisan leanings still reveals strong effects supporting my hypothesis – effects that should be present in any newspaper, and which might be stronger in a more partisan publication.

By examining the degree of polarization over 1) cross-strait issues, 2) issues closely related to cross-strait issues, and 3) unrelated issues, I established a clear delineation in media and politicians' tendencies between issues dealing with China and issues that are completely unrelated. A sufficient difference between the levels of polarization in media coverage should in part uncover strong partisan polarization on the issue of cross-strait relations. Subsequently, any polarization over tangentially related issues should support my claim that the powerful cleavage pulls other related issues into its “vortex” of polarization. Finally, the lack of polarization over unrelated issues illuminates the lack of polarization over those issues as a result of hyper-polarization over the cross-strait issue.

However, I recognize the difficulties inherent to singling out the effects of single-issue focus and polarization on the polarization over other issues. For instance, it is difficult to control for the polarization on cross-strait relations when examining voting behavior on economic issues. As such, I do not aim to establish a concrete connection between these two; rather, I aim to

uncover a pattern of discrepancies between polarization on cross-strait relations and polarization on other unrelated issues. Any striking similarities between cross-strait relations and economic issues should still accrue to the crossover between the two as alluded to previously, and thus would not greatly impact my argument about the unique effects of polarization over cross-strait relations. Moreover, I recognize that the selection of the United Daily News can expectedly skew coverage towards the pan-Blue camp. This may have led to a stronger stance against the pan-Green camp and its candidate Tsai Ing-Wen, especially considering the pan-Blue candidate was losing heavily in the polls at the time. Beyond the obvious implications for the issue of cross-strait relations, the UDN may also have chosen to frame issues such as environmental or educational policy in a certain way, depending on the party responsible for the policy.

Candidate Stances, Party Platforms, and Democratic Health in the 2020 Election

If it is indeed true that partisan polarization exists on the issue of cross-strait relations, and that this polarization draws attention away from polarization on other unrelated issues, the next question to be asked is: what are the impacts of single-issue focus on democratic health? Given the well-documented negative effects of polarization on democracy, one might expect polarization to negatively affect Taiwanese democracy. However, Taiwan has experienced an uptick in democratic health coinciding with the rise in single-issue partisan polarization. Democratic health in this case can be approximated by the prominence of third parties in elections. In addition, the wellbeing of a democracy can be approximated by the number of third parties that are on the ballot, the variety of stances that they take along the political spectrum, and the electoral viability of said third parties. Thus, I chose to examine publicly disseminated electoral ballot data from the most recent presidential election, including individual candidate stances, party platforms, and election results. I believe that a study of this most recent

information lends invaluable insight into the current state of Taiwanese democracy and allows for better connections to be made between historical trends and the current state of affairs.

Taiwan mandates that every eligible voter be sent a packet informing voters of parties' stances, candidates' educational and vocational backgrounds, and so forth. This packet contains information on the candidates for the presidency, as well as for local and national legislative positions. Votes were given thorough information on the educational backgrounds and resumes of the candidates. In addition, each voter received information on their local representatives and their personal policy proposals. Finally, all political parties vying to fill national legislative positions were required to publish their electoral platforms. These usually came in the form of a bullet-pointed list of aspirations, hovering around ten stances per party.

Given this information, I chose to focus specifically on any key words in the candidate or party stances that were associated with the issue of cross-strait relations. This helped forge a clear connection between third parties' success and the focus on cross-strait relations. Because terminology surrounding the issue often fluctuates depending on the context, I chose to only examine cases where the following phrases were involved:

- “Taiwan” and “China” or “Chinese Communist Party”, both explicitly mentioned in the same line
- The phrase “two sides of the strait”, used commonly to denote cross-strait relations
- “One Country, Two Systems”, the Chinese policy used to govern Hong Kong and Macau
- “Chunghwa”, usually used to denote the Chinese diaspora or of Chinese culture
- “Cross-strait relations”
- “Taiwanese independence”

By looking at these instances, I was able to make observations about the frequency and primacy of the cross-strait issue. Additionally, I gained insight into the decision-making and political strategy of major and smaller parties vis-à-vis cross-strait relations. Ultimately, the ballot information was studied to establish the diverse political environment in Taiwan as indicated by the number of third parties.

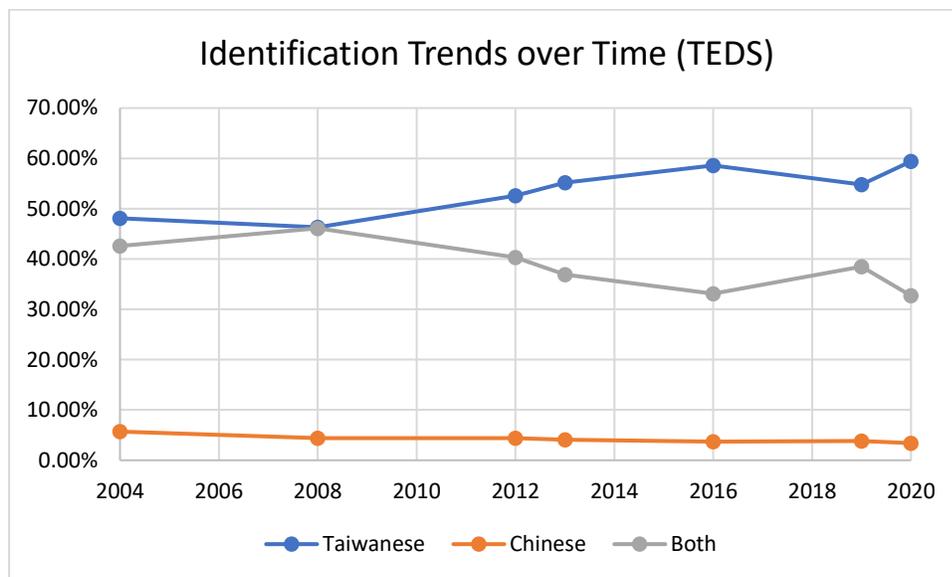
Simply establishing the prevalence of third-party involvement is not enough. Beyond the ballot information provided, I also analyzed the results of the most recent election to better estimate the effects of single-issue polarization on democratic development. If single-issue polarization did in fact foster a better environment for third-party involvement, then the electoral results would reflect a significant number of third parties with national representation. As such, I studied the breakdown of seats held by each political party to gauge the most up-to-date approximation of voters' preferences nationwide. The study of election results, combined with an in-depth analysis of candidates' and parties' political expressions, gave a close look at the current state of Taiwanese democracy and its symbiotic relationship with the cross-strait issue.

Analysis

TEDS Analysis of National Identity

Based on the data gathered thus far from the TEDS datasets and the NCCU study of core political attitudes provided in Achen and Wang 2017, there is a strong base of knowledge that should support the core hypothesis. First, the TEDS datasets and NCCU study have combined to show a predominance in Taiwanese citizens' identification as strictly "Taiwanese". As alluded to in the Literature Review, the overall rate of those who identify as "Taiwanese" doubled from

20 percent to 40 percent between 1992 and 2000. Moreover, there has been a slight decrease in the minority of citizens who identify as “Chinese”. Since the TEDS data extends back to 2004, it is possible to track the responses to identical questions by voters over time. As such, I selected a set of eight TEDS surveys between 2004 and 2020 to track the trends and big picture phenomena in national identity. Seven of the eight surveys performed were on a national scale, and with the exception of the inaugural survey in 2004 (which had 505 respondents) and the most recent (2,847 respondents), had between 1,075 and 1,381 respondents. This provides a similar scale and sample size across the surveys and maintains consistency on top of the consistent questions posed by survey staff over time.



As seen in the graph, identification as “Chinese” has seen a slight decrease over time, from 5.7% in 2004 to 3.8% in 2019. Identification as “both” has maintained a steady presence, though it has also decreased slightly from 42.6% in 2004 to 38.5% in 2019. Finally, identification as “Taiwanese” saw an overall increase over time, from 48.1% in 2004 to 54.8% in 2019. When factoring in the data points from the 2020 survey conducted after the presidential

election, the trend is even more striking. A record high 59.4% of respondents identified as “Taiwanese”, corresponding with the weakest numbers ever for “both” and “Chinese”, at 32.7% and 3.4% respectively. The declining frequency of those who consider themselves both Chinese and Taiwanese is on par with the demographic trends and also indicates a significant coming shift in mentality. While Chinese-identifying individuals are already outnumbered, those who identify as “both” may also soon find themselves in the minority. Thus, my analysis of TEDS reveals a longstanding historical trend towards a ubiquitously “Taiwanese” population, likely without plans of ceding its various freedoms to an unfamiliar and unfriendly China.

Another interesting phenomenon is the perceived difference in identification between voters in the capital city, Taipei, and the second largest city, Kaohsiung. After the nine-in-one local elections in 2018, TEDS conducted another survey where the same question garnered different magnitudes of responses between the two cities. The 1130 respondents in Taipei identified with being Taiwanese at a 50.6% clip, with 43.3% responding “both” and 4.2% responding “Chinese”. In comparison, 61.8% of the 1189 respondents in Kaohsiung identified with being Taiwanese, 33.6% chose “both” and 3.6% chose “Chinese”. Kaohsiung citizens thus more closely identify with being strictly Taiwanese rather than being both. This aligns with past political studies of the geopolitical tendencies in Taiwan. According to Achen and Wang (Achen 2017), Taiwan has “increasingly displayed a strong north-south divide” since 2000, with the KMT and its allies garnering consistent support in the northern region where Taipei is located. Conversely, the DPP has enjoyed consistent advantages in the South, where Kaohsiung is located. This regional disparity serves to illuminate the political nuances that exist within Taiwan. Moreover, this regional disparity also corresponds to differences in access to resources and in socioeconomic conditions between the North and the South. It is thus helpful to keep that

nuance in mind while studying the overall trends of polarization and voter preferences, in order to account for the disproportionate effects of any policy on either region.

Overall, the data shows a particularly strong national identity that has been solidified in the South, with the North trailing but trending in the same direction. The general milieu of the populace has also undoubtedly swung in favor of identification as “Taiwanese”, which crossed the 50 percent mark for the first time in 2012 and has not looked back since. As such, the question of national identity has become increasingly important to the Taiwanese citizen. Consequently, this recent boom and consolidation of national identity has laid the ground work upon which political parties can exploit voter preferences. Given that the majority of people now seem to be strictly “Taiwanese”, the question of China’s influence and its relationship with Taiwan becomes even more important. The growth in national identity means that cross-strait relations are now of paramount importance. As the next section displays, the importance of this issue is on display through the strong media attention and coverage from a selection of media sources with political leanings.

Issue Prominence in United Daily News and Liberty Times Headlines

I chose the United Daily News and the Liberty Times to gauge the importance of cross-strait relations and of other issues to the Taiwanese public and political elites. While both papers have a reputation for being somewhat politically skewed, analysis of both should have revealed a more neutral view of the Taiwanese political landscape. The issues I chose to study from the TEDS questionnaire were: Cross-strait relations, education policy, annuity reform, economic development, judicial reform problem, and transitional justice.

In the month before the presidential election, newspaper coverage hammered home the importance of economic development and cross-strait relations. The United Daily News published 78 articles involving cross-strait relations and 72 articles on economic development. The closest in coverage behind those two topics was on annuity reform, with 23 articles. Likewise, the Liberty Times focused heavily on cross-strait relations and economic development. Economic development led in coverage with 226 articles, followed by cross-strait relations with 156 articles and annuity reform with 104 articles. As evidenced by this analysis of newspaper coverage, Taiwanese media on both ends of the perceived spectrum chose to cover the race and news in a way that stressed cross-strait relations and discussed implications on other matters. Moreover, as documented in the Introduction, economic issues in Taiwan are intricately linked with the issue of cross-strait relations. The extensive coverage on economics had significant overlap with cross-strait relations coverage. In the United Daily News articles, 6 of the 72 articles involving economic development also included the cross-strait relations issue. This overlap is even more evident in the Liberty Times: 65 of the 226 articles mentioning economic development also mentioned cross-strait relations. The analysis of both newspapers strongly supports the idea that the cross-strait relations issue is of supreme importance to daily political discourse in Taiwan. Even when cross-strait relations are not explicitly the main focus, the topic still features prominently in discussions about economic development. These two topics are irrefutably linked to each other in a way that makes distinguishing their distinct effects difficult.

Consequently, as political considerations in Taiwan are simultaneously reflected in and influenced by the topics covered, the focus on cross-strait relations highlights its importance in the Taiwanese political psyche. When cross-strait relations and related issues are discussed, they are discussed at length and frequently. Economic development, which is discussed at a higher

clip by the Liberty Times, is also covered in conjunction with cross-strait concerns. Now, there is both an established dominance of Taiwanese national identity and a documented prominence of the cross-strait issue in media coverage. The combination of these two factors is a key contributor to the currently polarized atmosphere in Taiwan. Political parties and media sources have found it both politically and economically lucrative to cover the cross-strait issue, given its prominence in Taiwanese consciousness. As such, the following section details my study of media coverage tendencies to uncover the political polarization over the cross-strait issue. This will help discern the effect of single-issue focus on the polarization over all other issues.

Polarization in United Daily News Headlines

Since this thesis aims to study the different levels of polarization surrounding the cross-strait issue vs. all other issues, I chose to examine the coverage of those issues in search of a defining pattern of polarization. In terms of pure quantity, the issue of cross-strait relations featured most prominently over the two-month period on the A1-A4 sections, clocking in at 62 articles. Economic development came in second, at 17 articles, followed by transitional justice with 12, judicial reform and annuity reform with 9, and 4 articles on education policy.

Topic	Number of Articles	Polarization Score
Transitional Justice	12	1.25
Judicial Reform	6	1.50
Annuity Reform	9	1.00
Education Policy	4	0.25
Economic Development	17	1.35
Cross-Strait Relations	62	1.63

To begin, transitional justice had an average polarization score (total polarization score/number of articles) of 1.25. I categorized one article as “extremely polarized”, an opinion article titled “DPP, stop abusing Hong Kong”. In this case, the most polarizing topic in the coverage on transitional justice coincided with the broader issue of cross-strait relations and perceived threats from China. Most other transitional justice news was largely about a reparation payment to the small island of Lanyu off the coast of Taiwan, and did not contain much explicit polarizing language. Judicial reform had the second highest polarization score, though only with a sample size of six articles. The most polarizing article here was an opinion piece titled “Who can stop President Tsai Ing-Wen’s Arrogance?” Other honorable mentions, receiving a 1 and 2 respectively, were about the judicial system as it pertained to former President Chen Shui-Bian. Though this coverage is not a direct link to cross-strait issues, it is reasonably polarized as it deals with the imprisonment of a prominent DPP figure – an issue that would probably galvanize any party in the world.

Next, annuity reform received a paltry polarization score of 1. The most polarizing article was titled: “Tsai and Lai criticize Pan-Blue camp for trivializing annuity reform; Lee Chia-Fen strikes back and calls Tsai government a ‘prank’”. Another article which received a score of 2 concerned labor unions and their appeal for both Pan-Green and Pan-Blue camps to stop pandering and to start considering serious reform. The first article is an example of a severely polarized take on an issue unrelated to cross-strait relations. However, the second makes mention of the Tsai government’s efforts to sell “芒果乾”, which is slang that can be best translated as “anxiety over the death of the nation”. As such, the labor unions’ stance is in fact a rebuke of the political moves made by the DPP to exploit cross-strait tensions, in an effort to court more voters. Most other coverage focused on a scattered set of new statements made by

politicians on the reform process. The issue of education policy, on the other hand, had relatively non-polarized coverage, with only one article receiving a score of 1.

The final two topics, economic development and cross-strait relations, generate the most interesting findings. Though economic development received a modest polarization score, it had many articles that were considered “extremely polarized”. Two of these four articles explicitly dealt with party cleavages that coincided with cleavages on cross-strait relations. The headlines were as follows: “War over air pollution grows closer as central government looks to step in”, “Tsai claims the economy is great, Han claims she is working in futility”, “Former President Ma claims that his presidency did more to defend sovereignty”, and “Tsai criticizes Pan-Blue camp for unifying behind a pro-China stance”. Of those articles, the last two are especially interesting: though they deal with economic development, they are also clearly influenced by the polarization over cross-strait relations. Discussions on economic development still led to a war of words between a former KMT president and the sitting president from the DPP. Thus, economic development is still tangentially affected by the polarization over cross-strait relations, hereby demonstrating the pull of single-issue polarization. The rest of the articles, mostly rated 0 or 1 on the polarization scale, were about interest rate policies by the Chinese central bank, statistics on economic development, or proposed policies for the economy. As such, there is little polarization present in articles that deal with issues that are completely unrelated to the issue of cross-strait relations.

Finally, the topic of cross-strait relations received the most coverage on the main sections, on top of receiving the most polarized coverage. 16 of the 62 articles received the highest polarization score, and 36 of the 62 articles received a score of 2 or 3. In comparison, the issue with the next highest number of “very” or “extremely” polarized articles was economic

development, with 8 out of 17 articles receiving a 2 or 3. The most polarized articles mainly covered open feuds between Pan-Green and Pan-Blue camps over the issue of cross-strait relations. I have listed a selection of headlines below:

- “KMT Presidential Candidate Han: I am not pro-China, my opponents are ‘smearing me with red’”
- “Society is polarized, fake news has emerged victorious”
- “Han criticizes Pan-Green camp for infringement upon free speech”
- “Han criticizes Tsai camp, Pan-Blue camp continues attack”
- “Protecting sovereignty? Tsai and Han camps spar”
- “The future of One China? Han and Tsai’s war of words”
- “Ma questions Pan-Green officials on cross-strait policy”
- “Han, Tsai, Soong light sparks with discussion of cross-strait relations”

Interestingly enough, labor unions were once again a source of discord: two of the articles signaled a labor union endorsement for the KMT candidate, Han Kuo-Yu, and disavowed DPP candidate Tsai Ing-Wen. Their reason? “Han will normalize cross-strait relations again”. Though labor is not directly subsumed under cross-strait issues, the universality of the issue polarizes domestic organizations in press coverage, once again demonstrating the effects of single-issue polarization.

Other articles involving cross-strait relations mostly received scores of 0 due to the topic at hand: the bankruptcy of a prominent domestic airline that also flies to the mainland, economic agreements in the Asia-Pacific region, the effects of the election on housing prices, and so forth. Nevertheless, the coverage on cross-strait relations was clearly fundamentally different from

coverage on other issues. As the most salient political cleavage, cross-strait relations have enjoyed the most extensive coverage and has sparked the most public conflict between the major parties.

There are a few findings stemming from this analysis of newspaper headlines. First, the prominence of cross-strait relations coverage on the first four pages of the newspaper further reinforces the importance of the issue as established in the previous section. Not only is the discrepancy in news coverage illuminating, but the real estate on which that coverage is placed is a further testament to the ubiquity of the cross-straits issue. Next, there is a clear polarization over cross-strait relations. It received the highest polarization score and had an overwhelming amount of news and opinion articles that received a polarization score of 3. Thus, not only is the issue of utmost importance, parties fiercely fight over this issue in a way that makes other issues pale in comparison.

Such strong polarization lends credence to the concepts of single-issue focus and single-issue polarization over cross-strait relations. Moreover, tensions between factions were much higher on issues that are tangential to cross-strait relations. Coverage on labor unions and their preferences, as well as coverage on Hong Kong and economic development, heavily coincided with terminology and concepts familiar to the issue of cross-strait relations. This supports the idea that polarization over the cross-strait relations issue draws other related issues into its “vortex” of polarization. Finally, because of this single-issue polarization, unrelated issues have much less coverage and are subject to less polarizing coverage by the newspapers. This phenomenon coincides with my theory that single-issue polarization draws attention away and detracts from polarization on all other unrelated political issues. After establishing a strong and growing national identity, the prominence of the cross-strait issue, and strong polarization over

cross-strait relations corresponding with less polarization on unrelated issues, I now have a basis upon which to evaluate the recent election. If it is indeed true that there is a single-issue focus and polarization, then an analysis of the most recent political race will reveal the potential effects of those two phenomena.

Candidate Stances, Party Platforms, and Democratic Health in the 2020 Election

Ballot data and election results in the 2020 presidential election revealed a broad pattern of democratic activity and third-party policy choices, both indicative of the positive effects of single-issue polarization on democracy. At the booth, voters were presented with the option of choosing their Legislative Yuan representatives based on their respective districts. Of the 113 members elected to the Legislative Yuan – the highest lawmaking institution in Taiwan – 73 are elected under first-past-the-post rules in single-member constituencies. As such, many parties pushed out candidates who could be directly elected to one of those 73 seats in the Legislative Yuan. Many of these candidates expressed views that adhere to the spectrum of independence-unification and fall somewhere along the line established by KMT and DPP stances.

To further substantiate the established sides of the spectrum, I have included here the KMT and DPP's most recent platforms on cross-strait relations, accessible to every eligible voter in Taiwan. The DPP listed as their first policy: "Defend against China and protect Taiwan – we vehemently reject the "One Country, Two Systems" approach, and we will secure democratic mechanisms and pass legislature to strengthen national security." The KMT's word on the issue: "Defend the Republic of China; oppose independence movements, oppose the One Country, Two Systems approach, and maintain the 92 Consensus. Establish stronger ties with the United States and Japan, increase diplomatic efforts, continue status quo of the One China policy, and maintain

steady development across the strait. We will also solidify legislative powers and establish laws to protect individual liberties.” Though the language used by both parties is somewhat similar, the Kuomintang is clearly more willing to negotiate and work with Beijing on matters of economic cooperation, while the DPP’s sole focus is on defending Taiwan against infringement by China. Interestingly, both parties found it important to disavow the One Nation, Two Systems approach, which has been applied to Hong Kong and Macau, and which Beijing wishes to apply to Taiwan as well. The Chinese government would maintain one official China, but would allow these regions to maintain their own economic and administrative systems. This approach came under fire in light of the Hong Kong protests (The Economist 2019), and would likely have caused problems for either party had they not disavowed the proposition.

Next, I turned to local elections to study the implications of single-issue polarization for local candidates, who should theoretically be less disposed to discuss foreign policy issues. In this past election, voters in the Neihu/Nangang voting district of Taipei were presented with a choice of seven local legislative candidates for one legislative seat. Though many of these candidates represented more recently formed parties, those seven candidates’ profiles clearly contain multiple references to or outright articulated policies on cross-strait relations. These stances included advocating for using strictly Taiwanese government identity cards, the establishment of a sovereign Taiwan, and protecting “traditional Chinese culture”. Essentially, participants representing the third-party forces had aligned across the spectrum of pro- or anti-independence as laid out by the predominant KMT or DPP stances. Moreover, as evidenced by the stance on Chinese culture, candidates and parties alike find cultural or economic issues to be entangled with cross-strait relations. Though the seven candidates were vying for seats as local representatives, their stances indicated a universal desire to articulate nuanced positions on the

matter. The prominence of the issue gives third-party candidates an opportunity to stake claims that are different from mainstream parties, giving them greater leeway to be politically viable.

The diversity of candidate stances and party platforms went beyond local elections. The strength of the current democratic state in Taiwan is also evident in the nationwide legislative race. Like the local legislative elections, the race for the nationally-decided 34 seats were both extremely diverse in terms of party involvement, yet almost unanimously alert to cross-strait policies. A total of nineteen parties combined to vie for the seats, including the seven parties already mentioned in the previous discussion of local legislative representatives. The remaining twelve parties also included stances on the cross-strait relations issue, often listing them as the first or second policy proposal in the list of proposals. Smaller parties predictably took stances along the spectrum, though some were more extreme than the DPP and KMT attitudes towards Beijing. Of those in the pro-independence camp, parties such as the United Action Alliance, the Taiwan Statebuilding Party, and the New Party all expressed a desire to defend Taiwanese sovereignty and to protect against Chinese infiltration into Taiwanese business/intelligence communities. The Taiwan Statebuilding Party even included the following illustration depicting China and Taiwan, with the caption “Protect Mother Taiwan – The younger parties will take this on... Don’t let the next generation live in Hong Kong’s disastrous conditions.”



On the other end of the spectrum, pro-unification parties such as the New Party and the Labor Party expressed desires for a cross-strait peace treaty, closer economic ties, a fortification of “Chinese traditions and history” in schooling, and looser immigration measures for the Mainland Chinese. Finally, parties such as the Congress Party Alliance and the People First Party staked out claims in the middle ground, ostensibly in the hopes of securing votes from the many Taiwanese who prefer to keep the status quo. Both parties called for keeping the “status quo”, and the Congress Party Alliance echoed globally familiar sentiments by calling for an end to political polarization on the issue.

The recent election has unveiled a landscape in which smaller Taiwanese parties have aligned themselves accordingly along the spectrum of pro-independence and pro-unification. By conceptualizing the KMT and DPP stances as goalposts on opposite ends, we can situate stances like the Formosa Alliance – supporting a separate Taiwanese sovereign state and official ties with the U.S. – as even more extreme than those of the DPP. Similarly, the New Party expressed more extreme pro-unification views than those espoused in the official KMT stances. Because polarization is so predominant over this issue of cross-strait relations, many smaller parties have found their niche along the spectrum as they are incentivized to stake their claims and to align or distance themselves from certain views. Moreover, because polarization over one issue takes away from polarization in other issue areas, smaller parties are afforded the freedom to develop their own visions for society across a variety of topics. Though it is difficult to single out the factors that make Taiwanese politics so amenable to small parties, even on a national scale, the double effect of single-issue focus and polarization is certainly a strong factor in favor of the development of democracy.

The overall results of the election further support the interlinked mechanisms between single-issue polarization and third-party involvement. While the two predominant parties won most of the legislative seats, three other parties earned seats in the Legislative Yuan. The DPP took the cake with 63 seats, followed by the KMT with 39 seats, then the newly formed Taiwan People's Party with 5 seats, the New Power Party's with 3 seats, and the Taiwan Statebuilding Party with 1 seat. The ability of third parties to not just get on the ballot, but to stay electorally viable, is a further testament to the strength of Taiwan's democratic mechanisms. In particular, both the New Power Party and the Taiwan Statebuilding Party have been vocal about their aspirations and fears regarding cross-strait relations, in both cases situating themselves as even further pro-independence than the DPP. The New Power Party in particular was formed as a result of the aforementioned Sunflower Movement, in response to a legislative bill on trade that was perceived by pro-independence camps to have overtly pro-unification implications. Again, the issue of cross-strait relations seems to permeate the political considerations of parties and voters alike, even when the topic at hand does not explicitly deal with cross-strait relations. In this particular case, the NPP was borne directly out of anti-unification sentiment stemming from a trade pact proposal. The formation of parties specifically established as a response to KMT or DPP cross-strait policies thus further underlines the impact that single-issue focus and polarization have on democratic development. These mechanisms lead the way for a flourishing democracy in Taiwan, giving more opportunities for small parties with distinct ideals to form. In addition, the primacy of the issue gives small parties a plethora of opportunities to vie for voters' attention. In essence, Taiwan's democratic development has been backed by the phenomenon of single-issue polarization, which has in turn boosted the volume and viability of smaller parties.

Recommendations

Taiwanese National Identity

After uncovering many of the political mechanisms that drive and shape democratization in Taiwan, policymakers are faced with a set of interesting findings. First, the rise in Taiwanese national identity, coupled with a marginalization of Chinese identity, has profound implications for parties and lawmakers. More specifically, political actors who are aligned with “pro-unification” stances may find it increasingly difficult to capture a sufficient portion of the electorate. Not only is national identity on the rise overall, but there is a large divide between DPP and KMT supporters in identification. A study conducted by the Election Study Center at the National Cheng-Chi University pegs the Pan-Blue (associated with KMT) supporters’ rate of Taiwanese identification at a little under 40 percent as of 2012. On the other hand, pan-Green (associated with DPP) supporters identify as Taiwanese at above 80 percent. Much has happened in the past eight years as well that further exacerbated tensions and deepened political cleavages between the two camps on the issue of China. Nevertheless, the recent presidential election reveals a popular base of support for Pan-Green policies that continues to grow and threaten the Pan-Blue camp. Besides receiving 57% of the popular vote for the presidency, the DPP claimed massive victories in the Legislative Yuan by capturing 61 of the 113 seats. The KMT only received 38 of the 113 seats in comparison.

Thus, given their dismal performance and the rise in Taiwanese national identity, the KMT and its policymakers must seriously consider the problems inherent with their current stances, as it seems to run against the current grain of popular opinion. As national identity and cross-strait relations continues to become a significant issue for voters, the KMT will find it

increasingly harder to reflect and represent voters' preferences given their current stances. This study is therefore a tool that can be of use to KMT policymakers, as they continue to deal with the growth of Taiwanese national identity and associated pro-independence preferences.

Policymakers must also take measures to address the discrepancy between the North and the South. The two parts of the island have historically different trajectories of development, with Southern Taiwanese being more traditionally agrarian, lower-income, and less educated.

Funding projects and legislation must be evaluated to ensure an adequate level of development in the South, while tending to the current economic climate in the technology and finance-focused North.

Like any other democracy, the presence of traditional regional political divides and strongholds creates incentives for political capture. As such, policymakers on both sides of the spectrum must make efforts to make equitable changes to society instead of enacting policies that disproportionately benefit one side. Policymakers must take actions to review any policy put forth by "Pan-Green" or "Pan-Blue" camps without any tinted glasses on. For instance, much of the recently passed "Anti-Infiltration Act" backed by the DPP was written with China as the main infiltrator in mind. If this policy has adverse economic and diplomatic consequences for Pan-Blue regions relying on strong ties with the mainland, then policymakers should reevaluate the equitability of the policy. Similarly, if the policy has beneficial consequences for geographic pockets of DPP voters, policymakers from the DPP should push for policies that reflect and act in the best interests of Northern and Southern voters alike. Policymakers in ruling parties should also ensure that their environmental, economic, or other policies do not just benefit their traditional voter base, in order to avoid widespread regional disillusionment.

Importance of Cross-Strait Relations

As the question of cross-strait relations heats up, policymakers should carefully assess the dissatisfaction and distrust that citizens feel towards politically skewed media sources. While print media still operates under tighter legal controls, the preferences of each newspaper and its publishers will become harder to hide as the polarization over cross-strait relations grows in scale. Policymakers thus may face a challenge in which the free press and television media are increasingly seen as partisan mouthpieces and not as objective sources of information. This would reduce citizens' trust in the apparatus of journalism and media that is so crucial to democracy. Beyond newspapers, prominent news channels in Taiwan are also painted with a Blue or Green brush, so much so that it is possible to approximate a store or restaurant owner's political stance by observing which channel they put on. As such, citizens have begun to express strong pro- or anti- sentiments regarding certain news channels that they perceive to be working against their interests. This perhaps culminated in the "Anti-Red Media" march on June 23rd, 2019 (BBC, 2019), which was directed at perceived pro-Chinese lobbying by the Want-Want corporation. This corporation funds the China Times and Want Daily, on top of the Chung Tien Television Channel. As people get access to opposing views on Facebook and other popular social media sites, they may find themselves further polarized (Bail et al., 2018), which can further exacerbate the current situation. As such, policymakers in Taiwan can consider a publicly subsidized program to establish a news source generated from an independent organization or thinktank. Public subsidies or potentially a slight increase in nationwide taxes may be conducive to largely avoiding the pitfalls of privately funded media. If this is not viable, policymakers should also consider conducting a study of media sources and ease of access in all regions of Taiwan. Though citizens are likely to have their own opinions regardless of media, a

plethora of accessible and politically diverse materials may be a key to closing the gap between citizens' opinions and their perceived rival media sources. If there is a large disparity between how people in cities and rural areas can obtain media sources, then policymakers should endeavor to provide equal access to all regions by establishing a national fund for such matters.

Policymakers should also assess the recently dominant concerns of undue influence by mainland Chinese or other foreign actors who are intent on sowing discord. This is a concern that has been widely expressed by both Pan-Green and Pan-Blue supporters. Taiwanese policymakers cannot risk losing public confidence in media outlets due to rumors and perceptions of insidious efforts by foreign actors. Any explicit media ties to Chinese state apparatuses and/or efforts to lobby and fund major outlets on behalf of Beijing should be heavily publicized and made aware, if not punished. Moreover, policymakers should double down on enforcement prior to major elections to ensure that media polling and publications are not carried out on behalf of foreign actors. Policymakers must also take steps to address and curb misinformation from any media source immediately, especially where misinformation about candidates or political figures may contribute to political gains or losses. This can be done via a publicly accessible website or even as a regular segment on a public channel akin to C-SPAN in the U.S. If such misinformation is found to originate from foreign sources, policymakers should follow the protocol established for improper media ties.

Political Polarization

The presence of single-issue focus and its effects on the polarization of other non-related issues permeates all of Taiwanese political life. Political elites consistently act under the constraints of such an overshadowing issue, and as such, are constrained in the number of issues

that they can tackle. Consequently, policymakers must make sure that the polarization over cross-strait relations and the lack of polarization over unrelated issues does not induce a marginalization of unrelated issues for political saliency.

The lack of polarization over unrelated issues indicates a need to assess the mechanisms of representation for those affected by those issues. If the popular news is overwhelmingly about the main cleavage and other surrounding issues, the single-issue focus may instead hurt the quality of democratic discourse and of public policy. Similarly, if cross-strait relations are the bread and butter of major and smaller parties, then other unrelated issues, especially those affecting marginalized communities, may be left undiscussed. If single-issue focus and polarization only energizes discourse on the topic of cross-strait relations, democracy loses much of its nuance on other socioeconomic, environmental, and social justice issues. As such, policymakers, especially those in the smaller parties, must consider how the costs of single-issue focus compare to the benefits of having greater chance at representation. If in fact the polarization over a single issue leads to unidimensional politics instead of a multifaceted discussion, policymakers must look at making structural changes to the current system. Policymakers can involve a mandatory section of debate and discourse on issues such as Aboriginal representation, elderly care, healthcare funding, etc. The mandatory period of debate and discourse could be instituted in the annals of government – in the presidential debate and Legislative Yuan deliberation – and also in local government and local legislatures. Testimony for these periods of debate would also be open to advocates for issues, including the party members of smaller parties focused on specific other issues, such as the Green Party and environment. By improving the conditions of discussion, policymakers can share more of the platform with marginalized voices and thus further improve democratic standing. Moreover,

policymakers can utilize media sources as forums for exploration and discussion about unrelated issues. It is difficult for government to monitor and make suggestions to media without crossing into totalitarian territory. As such, the best way to ensure that less “politically valuable” topics are covered is to establish an independent, impartial organization responsible, most likely the same organization as mentioned in the section above. This publication can intentionally focus each of its sections on unrelated issues that are still critical to specific groups or to the Taiwanese population as a whole. Measures like this can ensure that unrelated issues are not tragically left in the wake of political frenzy to fight over the issue of cross-strait relations.

Polarization over a Single Issue and Democratic Health

As a whole, policymakers in Taiwan and other countries can extract wisdom from Taiwan’s unique development. If a democracy can indeed be improved with the presence of a single, strongly polarized issue, then policymakers can look to Taiwan’s democratic mechanisms as an opportunity to reexamine polarization and democratic decay worldwide. Of course, this comes with several caveats: first, Taiwan is a particularly unique example because of its historical and geopolitical conditions. This might be the underlying cause for many of the mechanisms studied here and could make the findings hard to generalize or extrapolate. Taiwanese democracy is also extremely young, having had its first multiparty election in 2000. It is possible that its youth is the reason for such a singular focus, since other issues may not have been crystallized over time along the political spectrum as is possible in more aged democracies. Perhaps with time, Taiwanese democracy will decay because of its unipolar landscape. However, even if Taiwan’s democratization trajectory is a product of its unique conditions, policymakers may still find valuable insight in the effects of national or ethnic identity on political alignment. Perhaps policies to foster a stronger national identity are not the best idea

for countries trying to avoid polarization or conflict; similarly, perhaps countries can try to improve weak national identity by tying it to an already highly polarized issue. Policymakers can also take a page from Taiwan's playbook to better manage polarization. Despite divisions over a key issue, Taiwanese civilians regularly organize mass marches without coming close to any violence. For example, civilians held a massive political march in the city of Kaohsiung, with an estimated attendance of 850,000 citizens. Yet, no political violence was reported, and the entire process was organized, orderly, and clean (CNA News 2019). Taiwanese citizens have managed to be civil and encouraging of free speech while pushing for their preferences over a very contentious issue. Taiwan's willingness to allow, or even encourage, such protests is a key factor in its success. Protests are often widely coordinated by city officials, local vendors, and protest leaders to allow for ample space for marches, and are often meticulously planned by key players to follow a route that boosts local business and keep protestors organized, fed, and safe. These measures should be replicated by officials who see a similar political cleavage in their jurisdictions and are looking to foster better democratic practices.

Thus, policymakers can study the development of political norms in Taiwan, government regulation of political movements, and other facets that greatly benefit Taiwanese democracy. Finally, if polarization is indeed a potential good and not a universal bad, then political scientists and policymakers must assess the different kinds of partisan polarization. As technology and social media continues to influence and contribute to the global growth in polarization, policymakers must consider the pivot from polarization prevention to polarization management. This study of Taiwan thus can lend insight into how to manage polarization, and how to best employ or present it in a way that enhances democracy.

Conclusion

Taiwan's historical trajectory, and its current democratic aspirations, have never been more important for its own sake and for broader political implications. Likewise, its democratic aspirations have never been more threatened by the tensions stewing across the Taiwan Strait. In light of these conditions, as well as a growing global concern that democracy is being eroded by polarization, it is now of utmost importance to study Taiwan's democratic mechanisms. First, analysis of the TEDS study has revealed a pattern of rising Taiwanese national identity. Next, analysis of newspaper coverage reveals that the issue of cross-strait relations is of prime importance to voters and elites alike. Consequently, the "single-issue polarization" over the issue of cross-strait relations also affects tangentially related issues, which ultimately detracts from polarization on unrelated issues. Finally, these three phenomena combine to create a democratic landscape that is friendly to political involvement by third-parties, which ultimately helps to bolster Taiwan's healthy and functional democracy.

Taiwan has a history of being marginalized on the world stage, in no small part due to political pressures applied by China. One such example is Taiwan's continued exclusion from the World Health Organization despite the COVID-19 pandemic (AP News 2020). As such, it would not be surprising to see political scientists overlook this unique triumph in democratization. However, if policymakers in Taiwan and elsewhere can corroborate these findings through further study, Taiwan's special mechanisms may lend valuable insight into the process of democratization and the effects of polarization. As President Tsai Ing-Wen recently put it with regards to world health practices: "Taiwan can help." (Twitter, 2020). With the help of Taiwan, political scientists and policymakers alike can proceed to tackle the questions of democratization and polarization with renewed vigor.

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