

Introduction to Recent Research

First Experience: Citizens' Perception, Participation, and Evaluation of the New Legislative Electoral System in Taiwan¹

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Extended Abstract

In 2008, Taiwan adopted a new mixed member system which is significantly different from the long-implemented SNTV-MMD system for the election of legislators. The new system cuts the number of legislative seats from 225 to 113, extends legislators' terms of office from three years to four, and most importantly, adopts a new mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) electoral system to replace the SNTV system for legislative elections. The election of legislators in 2008 was the first time that this new mixed electoral system was implemented in Taiwan. Mainstream literature continues to discuss the electoral impact on political parties and candidates by the new system while citizens' knowledge of the new system and its concomitant effects on citizens' behavior receive less attention. Worse still, almost all of the literature assumes that voters were fully aware of the operation and impact of the new electoral system and cast their ballots wisely. The purpose of this paper is to explore citizen's perceptions, participation and evaluation of this new system.

Based on data from a 30-day rolling poll, it first examines the distribution and change of citizens' knowledge of the new electoral system. It finds that citizens' knowledge of the new electoral system is not high. Also, citizens' knowledge increased as the election approached, when more campaign information was provided (Figure 1 and Table 2). It is followed by a discussion that a citizen's age, education, media

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exposure, political interests, and party identification are closely associated with his increase of knowledge (Table 3). Then, by way of analyzing post-election panel survey data, this paper makes clear that an increase of a citizen’s knowledge also contributes to his intention to vote in the election (Table 4).

Figure 1

Voter’s Knowledge of New Electoral System

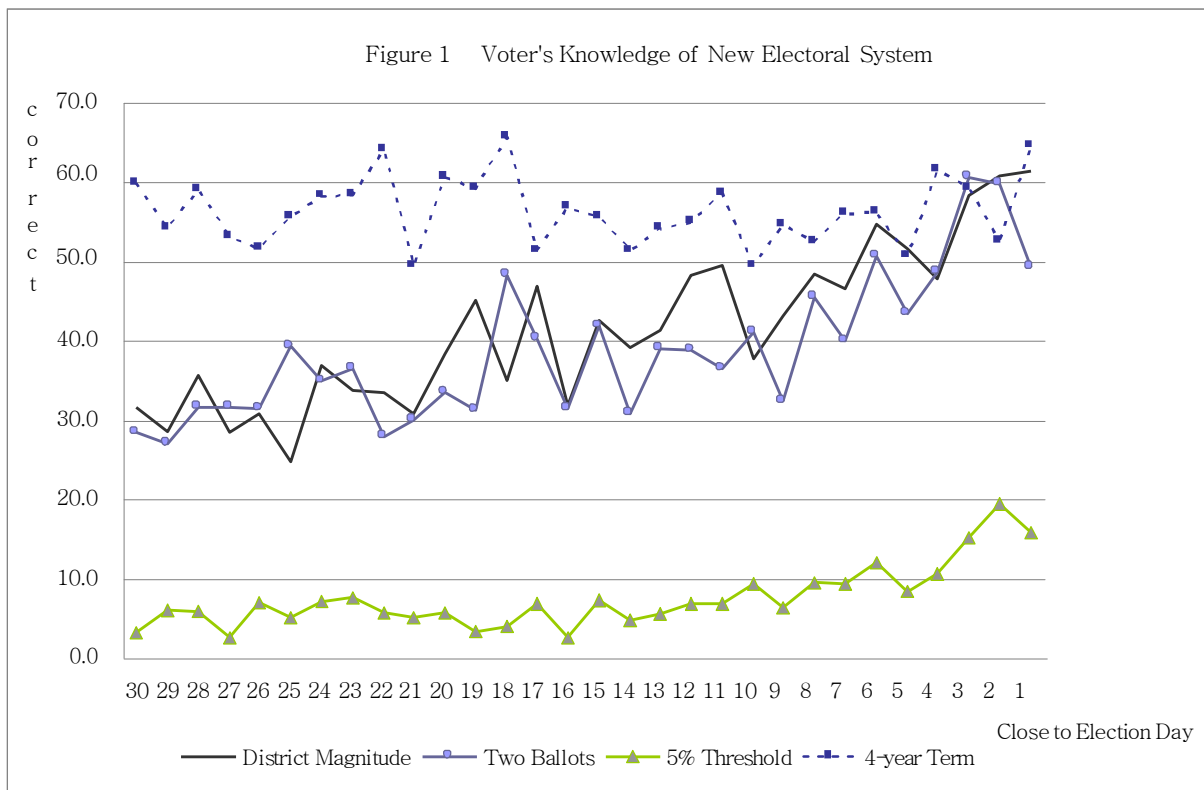


Table 2

Voter’s Knowledge of New Electoral System

	Correct	Incorrect	Sample
4-year Term	56.1	43.9	3843
District Magnitude (1)	41.3	58.7	3843
Two Ballots	38.5	57.8	3843
5% Threshold for PR	7.2	92.8	3843

Table 3

Regression Analyses of Voter's Knowledge of New Electoral System

	β (S.E.)	
Constant	0.260(0.067)	***
Gender (Male=1)	0.469(0.032)	***
Age	0.009(0.001)	***
Education (Middle=0)		
Low	-0.279(0.046)	***
High	0.100(0.041)	*
Strength of Party Identification	0.082(0.014)	***
Attentiveness to Election News	0.216(0.015)	***
N = 3671 ; R ² = 0.163		

Table 4

Binary Logit Analyses of Voter's Intention to Vote (Vote =1)

	β (S.E.)	
Constant	-3.696(0.365)	***
Gender (Male=1)	-0.019(0.154)	
Age	0.033(0.007)	***
Education (Middle=0)		
Low	-0.143(0.221)	
High	0.118(0.186)	
Strength of Party Identification	0.524(0.071)	***
Attentiveness to Election News	0.300(0.073)	***
Knowledge of New Electoral System	0.456(0.083)	***
Vote in Previous Election	1.734(0.176)	***
N = 1433 ; -2 LL = 1140.423 ; Nagelkerke R ² = 0.378		

Table 5

Assessments of New Electoral System

	Positive	Negative	Others	Cases
Increase/Decrease Vote Buying	34.0	30.7	35.3	1530
Increase/Decrease Quality of Legislator	42.4	19.0	38.6	1530
Increase/Decrease Social Tension	27.0	38.6	34.4	1530
Good/Bad for Taiwan's Democracy	45.6	25.0	29.4	1530

However, citizens maintain a mixed assessment of the new electoral system believing that, compared with the SNTV-MMD system, the new electoral system is good for recruiting better candidates and the development of democracy, but fear it causes social tensions. It also finds citizens' party identification plays a significant role in the assessment while citizens' knowledge of the new system does not. In the discussion and conclusion section, it suggests a cautious perspective that citizens in Taiwan have only one experience of the new system. It is reasonable to argue that citizens' knowledge may increase as more elections are implemented under the new system.

Keywords: SNTV-MMD, Mixed Member System, Political Knowledge, Rolling Poll, Panel Survey

Biographical Note

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