



Party Competence and Vote Choice in the 2012 Election in Taiwan

Chiung-chu **Lin***
Soochow University

Abstract

This paper argues that party competence is important in understanding the 2012 presidential vote. By using TEDS2012 survey data, the analysis reveals that the KMT enjoyed advantage on issues of cross-Strait relations, economic development, social welfare, fighting corruption, increasing country's international status, while the DPP owned reputations on issues of reducing the gap between rich and poor, environmental protection and democratic reform. The KMT secured its reputation on issues of cross-Strait relations, economy, ethnic harmony, and the country's international status during the period between 2008 and 2012. By contrast, the DPP dominated the issue of environmental protection. While the KMT gained better assessment on issues of fighting corruption and social welfare, it failed to keep its advantage in reducing the gap between rich and poor. Finally, the binary logit model demonstrates that evaluations of party competence affect voters' voting consideration. It is significantly and positively related to one's vote choice in the 2012 presidential election.

Keywords: *party competence, issues, vote choice, the 2012 presidential election*

JEL classification: *D72, D78, H11, Z18*





1. Introduction

When voters cast their ballots, what will in their minds to reach the decisions? Traditionally, the existing research have been pointed out that several factors play important roles in shaping voting decisions, such as party identification, candidate factors, and issues in Taiwan. Among those factors, party images or party competence was less studied. How a party was perceived is important because it associates with a party's political performance and how well a party can handle politics. Those evaluations bring to affect how voters see the candidate who stands for the election for the party. Thus, voters' assessments on the party performance will relate to their vote choice. By doing so, this paper contributes to the growing various literature on voting behaviour and help us understand the basis of a party system in Taiwan.

Thanks to the electoral system reform in 2008 legislative election, Taiwan's party system has been an obvious change afterword. Only two parties won seats in the Legislative Yuan, this brings the party system evolves into a two-party system.¹ While the reform introduces party-list proportional presentation with 34 legislators are elected through this system, it is without doubting that the importance role a party function in Taiwanese politics.

Therefore in this paper, my interest is in observing how the electorate assesses the two major parties in Taiwan. What kinds of evaluative criteria do voters have on the political parties? Do the political parties enjoy advantages in certain issues? Did the evaluations of political parties affect the electorate's vote choice in the 2012 presidential election? This paper is divided into three sections. The first section briefly introduces literature on party competence and how researchers operationalize it both in western countries and in Taiwan. The second section summarizes the data and method uses in this paper. The third section involves a detailed empirical analysis of the importance of party competence on vote choice in the 2012 presidential election.





2. Concept and Theoretical Importance of Party Competence

E.E. Schattschneider states in his book *Party Government* that “the rise of political parties is indubitably one of the principal distinguishing marks of modern government” indicating the importance of political parties in a democracy. As politicians come and go, the only thing which truly lasts, however, is the political party. As Graham Wallas describes the agents which aggregate and represent voters’ needs, “something is required, simpler and more permanent, something which can be loved and trusted, and which can be recognised at successive elections.” He added: “A party is such a thing.” (1948: 82). It is obvious that political parties are the key institution that performs important functions in a democracy. Moreover, how the party performs is also relate to its electoral performance. The better perception a party has, the more votes it may attracts. This further leads to a strong and positive correlation between voters’ evaluations of the parties and their supports towards democracy (Miller and Listhang, 1990; Dalton, 2004: ch.3). How do we observe the importance of political party in a society? Holmberg (2003) found that the more an individual is attached to a party, the more he/she views the need for political parties in a country. In other words, party identification is a good proxy to explore the importance of political parties among the electorate. A large amount of voters identify with political parties in a society, therefore indicating a strong linkage between voters and political parties. A great percentage of party identifiers in a country also indicates a positive attitude toward the role of political parties in a democracy. Long-term statistics taken from the Election Study Center at the National Chengchi University allow us to observe the pattern. As for party identification in Taiwan, there are around 50 to 60 per cent of Taiwanese voters identifying with political parties for the past decade.² The statistics reveal that more than half of Taiwanese voters are attached to a political party.

The ratio of party membership among the eligible electorate (Member/Electorate ratio) can be treated as an index to display such linkage as well. Compared with the ratio within western democracies, the average ratio in Taiwan is roughly 8 per cent, which is higher than most western democracies (Lin, 2012). Taking those figures together, it





is hard to deny that political parties in Taiwan have a significant role in the political process.

When asking voters to think about a party, the sorts of things which naturally come into one's mind is the development of perceptions of political parties. These images are often related to a party's ability in handling problems and issues are known as party competence (Mangum, 2012; Cover, 1986). Thus, the perception of party competence is how voters evaluate a party's ability in handling problems and issues such as inflation, unemployment, public service, and cross-Strait relations. A party perceived as having a good ability in handling issues, stands a better chance of being voted for. The parties' reputations will matter on voters' vote choice (Rose and McAllister, 1990: 134; Trilling, 1976; Sanders, 1988; McCann, 1990; Geer, 1991; Baumer and Gold, 1995; Lin, 2006; Cover, 1986).

Voters assess the political parties through its performance or its party leaders and elites. This reputation can be gained and lost. It is not deeply rooted or as stable as one's party identification (Mathews and Prothro, 1966: 377). However, the assessments can be critically important to its electoral prospect (Webb, 2000: 141). Party competence can be seen as part of an ensemble of images held in the electorate's minds (Flanigan and Zingale, 2006: 202). For example, the Republican party in the USA has been viewed as the party for cutting taxes, supporting national defence, and traditional values, while the Democrats is the party of education, race, and social welfare (Pope and Woon, 2009; Mangum, 2012).

To gauge the performance image, scholars have been using one question or a set of issues to measure (Cover, 1986; Pope and Woon, 2009; Mangum, 2012). By asking respondents "which party is better able to handle the nations' most important problems", Cover (1986) constructed a "party competence gap" index and demonstrated that party competence forms a large part of vote choice from the period between 1972 and 1982. By contrast, Pope and Woon (2009) and Mangum (2012) explored party reputations by asking respondents' opinion on "which party would do better" in a set issues such as peace, prosperity, unemployment, health care, the environment, and the deficit.





A great deal of research on party images were developed to measure separate reactions to each political party based on the respondent's open-ended comments.³ Respondents are asked to list what they like and dislike about both American political parties. By classifying the responses from the respondents, researchers aggregated the responses into issue and performance related issues such as economic issues, social issues, foreign policy, government management, party philosophy, and people in the party etc. (Campbell, Gurin and Miller, 1954; Sanders, 1988; Geer, 1991; Klingemann and Wattenberg, 1992; Balumer and Gold, 1995; Brewer, 2009).

Why study party images in general and party competence in particular? Party competence not only enables us to examine the party's reputational change but also gives us an insight into why a party lose elections. Party competence, to some extent, provides a useful clue in detecting the electorate' attitudes toward the issues and their voting behaviour. By analyzing answers from the respondents, we can know what are long-term issues, short-term issues or salient issues from the electorate's point of view. Moreover, as Trilling (1976: 5) pointed out "the study of party images has directed relevance for the theory of electoral realignment." In Sellers' study, he argues that critical issues could lead to an electoral realignment and this is because they first altered the party images of large numbers of voters (Trilling, 1976: 6). Therefore, studying the electorate' image of parties could give us a better understanding of the changes and continuity within the party system.

3. Data and Methods

Data analyzed in this paper comes from Taiwan's Election and Democratization Study (TEDS), which yielded a great deal of good quality national-wide surveys. The data are drawn from survey in the 2012 presidential election. The survey was conducted through a face to face interview with a national-wide probability sampling. It successfully interviewed 1,826 respondents.⁴ The TEDS survey data used a set of issues to measure how the respondents assess party competence. The questions were designed to inquire into a series of issues which includes





cross-Strait relations, economic development, reducing the gap between rich and poor, resolving the problem of high property prices, environmental protection, social welfare, fighting corruption, democratic reform, ethnic harmony, and raising country's international status. Respondents were invited to compare how well the KMT and DPP can handle those important problems.

3.1. Dependent Variable

To examine the effects of party competence on vote choice, I estimated the vote choice for the 2012 presidential election. Although there are three candidates standing for the election, the competition mainly falls between the incumbent president, Ma Ying-jeou 馬英九, and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate, Tsai Ing-wen 蔡英文.

3.2. Key Independent Variable

The independent variables of interests in this paper are a set of issues which highlights the assessment of party competence mentioned above. For each question, if the Kuomintang (KMT) is seen to be better it is coded 1, for the DPP if it is seen to be better, it is coded -1, and those who can't tell the difference between the two parties is coded 0.⁵ By aggregating 10 questions together, the scale allows for the construction of an index of overall party competence.

3.3. Control Variable

Party identification, Taiwanese/Chinese identity, and position on the cross-Strait relations are significant political attitudes that affect one's vote choice in Taiwan. People who identify with the pan-Green camp, keep a Taiwanese identity and support Taiwan independence are more likely to vote for the DPP candidate. Alternately, people who identify with the pan-Blue camp, keep a Chinese identity and support Unification with China are more likely to vote for the KMT candidate. (Sheng and Chen, 2003; Shyu, 2005; Chen *et al.*, 2012). Candidate competence also plays a role in vote choice. Voters will vote for a candidate who has been assessed as being the most competent (Hawang, 1996; Lin, 2006;





Liu *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, those important political attitudes will be controlled in the model analysis. An individual's socio-demographic characteristics also play roles in vote choice. Among them, gender, age and education are found to be of utmost importance in vote choice. Therefore, variables of gender, age and education will include in the model analysis as well.

During the campaign, social welfare, the cross-Strait relations, income gap, corruption, and economy issues all raise by the two candidates.⁶ Therefore, we might find these issues, more than the rest, will correlate with an individual's vote choice. We shall also find that party competence evaluation is positively associated with one's vote choice. A binary logit model will be applied here to tackle the questions mentioned above. We shall find that the more positive a voter's evaluations of the party, the more he/she is likely to vote for the candidate from that party.

4. Individual-level Evidence for Party Competence

As mentioned above, several issues were raised and hotly debated by political elites during the election such as cross-Strait relations, "92 Consensus", social justice, and unemployment etc. Table 1 shows the most pressing issues during the election from Taiwanese voters' perspective. Not surprisingly, the top two problems are economy and cross-Strait relations. They take up around 60 per cent of respondents. It follows social justice and fairness in the third but only 3.4 per cent.

How do Taiwanese voters assess a party's competence on different issues? Table 2(1) and Table 2(2) give us an overall picture. It is clear that the KMT enjoys advantages in cross-Strait relations, economic development, social welfare, fighting corruption, ethnic harmony, and raising Taiwan's international status. After Ma Ying-jeou took office in 2008, the government had launched direct transport and communication links with China through the "big three links" agenda. In his inauguration in 2008, Ma Ying-jeou proposed "no unification, no independence, and no military force", and the Ma government has resumed bilateral negotiations under the 1992 consensus and encouraged



**Table 1** The Most Important Problems during This Election

	Frequency	Percentage
Economy	709	38.8
Cross-Strait relations	362	19.8
Social justice and fairness	62	3.4
International status and diplomacy	47	2.6
Integrity	32	1.8
Social welfare	27	1.5
Governing competence	22	1.2
Education reform	20	1.1

Source: Chu (2012).

more trade and exchange interactions. In 2010, both sides of the Taiwan straits signed the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA). These measures were seen as reducing tensions on the cross-Strait relations and contribute to economic growth. Moreover, Taiwanese passport holders are allowed to enter more than 120 countries by January 2012. The success of visa-free programmes was emphasized as a key governing performance during the 2012 campaign. Therefore, it is understandable that the KMT was seen a party which is capable of dealing with the cross-Strait relations, economy, and diplomacy.

By contrast, the DPP has a reputation of dealing with the income gap, environmental protection, and democratic reform. Ever since it was established in 1986, the DPP appealed for political reforms and democracy. It has been credited with contributing to democracy for a



long time (Lin, 2006). The DPP is also known for advocating nuclear-free policy. Therefore, it is reasonable that voters assessed the DPP as being more capable of democratic reform and environmental protection. During the campaign, Tsai Ing-wen proposed a social housing programme and to provide a state-run childcare centre to help reduce the burden on young people. Tsai's camp appealed to issue of living justice, income gap, and youth poverty. Thus, it is probably not surprising that more voters think the DPP did better than the KMT in terms of reducing the gap between rich and poor.

On the issues of resolving the problem of high property prices, there are around one-fifth voters assessing that the KMT and the DPP did better, respectively. Moreover, based on the results from Table 2(1) and Table 2(2), 18 per cent of the respondents do not know how to answer this question. Also more than 10 per cent of the respondents on each question could not give their opinions, especially on environmental issues, democratic reform issue, and raising country's international status. The lack of familiarity with the issues suggests that voters pay less attention to these issues. Alternatively, it is possible that these issues are not important either. In any case, more data and a further study are required to answer this puzzle.

Evaluation of party competence was also measured in the 2008 legislative election survey. The data allow us to compare the changes within the party's ability in managing issues both in the KMT and the DPP (see Table 3(1) to Table 3(5)). In summary, both parties gained more positive evaluations in terms of cross-Strait relations, fighting corruption, democratic reform, and improving the country's international status for the past four years. It should be added that the KMT's reputation gained 19.8 per cent more in fighting corruption. Although the KMT has an advantage on the issue of economic development and ethnic harmony, its competence's percentage decreased slightly. The DPP's competence also decreased a bit on the environmental protection issues. As for the issue of reducing the gap between rich and poor, the DPP's reputation gained 18.1 per cent more for the past four years while the KMT lost 13.2 per cent.

Table 2(1) The Descriptive Statistics of Party Competence Assessment (%)

	Cross-Strait relations	Economic development	Reducing the gap between rich and poor	Resolving the problem of high property prices	Environmental protection
DPP better	11.1	14.5	28.4	21.8	25.6
No difference	17.5	23.1	34.4	39.2	36.6
KMT better	62.0	51.9	24.5	21.0	21.9
Don't know	9.4	10.5	12.7	18.0	15.9
<i>N</i>	1826	1826	1826	1826	1826

Source: Chu (2012).

Table 2(2) The Descriptive Statistics of Party Competence Assessment (%)

	Social welfare	Fighting corruption	Democratic reform	Ethnic harmony	Raising our international status
DPP better	24.7	19.3	35.7	15.9	14.4
No difference	34.8	34.1	28.1	30.3	19.9
KMT better	28.2	34.8	21.0	39.9	51.3
Don't know	12.3	11.9	15.2	13.9	14.4
<i>N</i>	1826	1826	1826	1826	1826

Source: Chu (2012).

Table 3(1) Cross-Strait Relations and Economic Development Issues (%)

	Cross-Strait relations			Economic development		
	2008	2012	Diff.	2008	2012	Diff.
DPP better	7.7	11.1	3.4	6.7	14.5	7.8
No difference	23.4	17.5	-5.9	26.0	23.1	-2.9
KMT better	54.3	62.0	7.7	52.5	51.9	-0.6
Don't know	14.5	9.4	-5.1	14.8	10.5	-4.3

Note: Diff. – the difference is by subtracting the percentage between the results in 2012 and 2008.

Source: Chu (2008, 2012).

Table 3(2) Fighting Corruption and Democratic Reform Issues (%)

	Fighting corruption			Democratic reform		
	2008	2012	Diff.	2008	2012	Diff.
DPP better	18.2	19.3	1.1	34.6	35.7	1.1
No difference	51.4	34.1	-17.3	28.1	28.1	0.0
KMT better	15.0	34.8	19.8	16.1	21.0	4.9
Don't know	15.4	11.9	-3.5	21.3	15.2	-6.1

Note: Diff. – the difference is by subtracting the percentage between the results in 2012 and 2008.

Source: Chu (2008, 2012).

Table 3(3) Reducing the Gap between Rich and Poor and Social Welfare Issues (%)

	Reducing the gap between rich and poor			Social welfare		
	2008	2012	Diff.	2008	2012	Diff.
DPP better	10.3	28.4	18.1	27.5	24.7	-2.8
No difference	31.8	34.4	2.6	33.6	34.8	1.2
KMT better	37.7	24.5	-13.2	21.1	28.2	7.1
Don't know	20.2	12.7	-7.5	17.9	12.3	-5.6

Note: Diff. – the difference is by subtracting the percentage between the results in 2012 and 2008.

Source: Chu (2008, 2012).

Table 3(4) Environmental Protection and Ethnic Harmony Issues (%)

	Environmental protection			Ethnic harmony		
	2008	2012	Diff.	2008	2012	Diff.
DPP better	28.6	25.6	-3.0	10.9	15.9	5.0
No difference	33.9	36.6	2.7	31.9	30.3	-1.6
KMT better	15.3	21.9	6.6	40.3	39.9	-0.4
Don't know	22.2	15.9	-6.3	16.9	13.9	-3.0

Note: Diff. – the difference is by subtracting the percentage between the results in 2012 and 2008.

Source: Chu (2008, 2012).

Table 3(5) Raising Country’s International Status Issue (%)

	2008	2012	Diff.
DPP better	11.5	14.4	2.9
No difference	27.7	19.9	-7.8
KMT better	42.8	51.3	8.5
Don’t know	18.0	14.4	-3.6

Note: Diff. – the difference is by subtracting the percentage between the results in 2012 and 2008.

Source: Chu (2008, 2012).

On the whole, the KMT secured its reputation on issues of cross-strait relations, economy, ethnic harmony, and the country’s international status. By contrast, the DPP dominated the issue of environmental protection. Moreover, the KMT gained better assessment than the DPP on issues of fighting corruption and social welfare, however, the KMT failed to keep its advantage in reducing the gap between rich and poor.

Does an evaluation of party competence yield an association with vote choice? The analysis from cross-tabulation analysis which is displayed in Table 4(1) and Table 4(2) indicates that one’s evaluations of party competence are associated with his/her vote decision. Those who assessed the KMT as being more competent tend to vote for Ma Ying-jeou, and vice versa. It is worth to note that those who cannot tell the parties difference on cross-strait relations, economic development, ethnic harmony, and raising international status tend to vote for Tsai Ing-wen. By contrast, those who cannot tell the parties difference on the issue of reducing the gap between rich and poor, resolving the problem of high property prices, environmental protection, social welfare, and democratic reform tend to vote for Ma Ying-jeou. In other words, among the KMT advantage issues, voters with indistinct assessments tend to

Table 4(1) Party Competence by Vote Choice

	Ma Ying-jeou	Tsai Ing-wen	<i>N</i>
<i>Cross-Strait relations</i>			
DPP better	2.5%	97.5%	161
No difference	28.1%	71.9%	196
KMT better	77.4%	22.6%	945
$\chi^2=426.04$ $df=2$ $P<0.001$			
<i>Economic development</i>			
DPP better	6.3%	93.8%	208
No difference	35.2%	64.8%	281
KMT better	84.1%	15.9%	792
$\chi^2=516.73$ $df=2$ $P<0.001$			
<i>Social welfare</i>			
DPP better	24.7%	75.3%	373
No difference	62.3%	37.7%	453
KMT better	88.4%	11.6%	432
$\chi^2=340.72$ $df=2$ $P<0.001$			
<i>Fighting corruption</i>			
DPP better	16.0%	84.0%	294
No difference	50.2%	49.8%	428
KMT better	90.5%	9.5%	546
$\chi^2=464.11$ $df=2$ $P<0.001$			
<i>Ethnic harmony</i>			
DPP better	10.2%	89.8%	235
No difference	45.6%	54.4%	388
KMT better	88.5%	11.5%	628
$\chi^2=491.22$ $df=2$ $P<0.001$			
<i>Raising our international status</i>			
DPP better	8.8%	91.2%	215
No difference	40.0%	60.0%	235
KMT better	80.5%	19.5%	786
$\chi^2=412.94$ $df=2$ $P<0.001$			

Source: Chu (2012).

Table 4(2) Party Competence by Vote Choice

	Ma Ying-jeou	Tsai Ing-wen	<i>N</i>
<i>Reducing the gap between rich and poor</i>			
DPP better	21.3%	78.7%	414
No difference	64.2%	35.8%	450
KMT better	92.9%	7.1%	395
$\chi^2=436.97$ <i>df</i> =2 <i>P</i> <0.001			
<i>Resolving the problem of high property prices</i>			
DPP better	21.3%	78.7%	329
No difference	66.5%	33.5%	514
KMT better	88.4%	11.6%	329
$\chi^2=325.62$ <i>df</i> =2 <i>P</i> <0.001			
<i>Environmental protection</i>			
DPP better	31.6%	68.4%	376
No difference	61.1%	38.9%	481
KMT better	87.8%	12.2%	352
$\chi^2=238.81$ <i>df</i> =2 <i>P</i> <0.001			
<i>Democratic reform</i>			
DPP better	27.3%	72.7%	528
No difference	70.1%	29.9%	351
KMT better	93.9%	6.1%	343
$\chi^2=407.62$ <i>df</i> =2 <i>P</i> <0.001			

Source: Chu (2012).

vote for the DPP candidate rather than the KMT candidate, and vice versa. A possible explanation for this is that these voters might value candidate factors more in making their vote decisions.

5. Party Competence and Vote Choice

In this section, I tested the effect of party competence on vote choice. The results presented in Table 5 suggest that overall party competence yields an effect on vote choice. Holding other variables constant, those

Table 5 Binary Logit Model for the 2012 Presidential Vote Choice

	Model 1 KMT/DPP	Model 2 KMT/DPP
Male (female=0)	-0.54(0.35)	-0.44(0.34)
Age	0.01(0.02)	0.01(0.01)
Education (university and above=0)		
Elementary school	0.82(0.89)	0.29(0.79)
Junior high school	-0.32(0.62)	-0.52(0.59)
Senior high school	-0.31(0.44)	-0.37(0.41)
College	-0.70(0.52)	-0.66(0.50)
Party Identification (independent and nonresponse=0)		
Pan-Blue	2.76*** (0.47)	2.80*** (0.46)
Pan-Green	-2.75*** (0.44)	-2.63*** (0.41)
National identity (join identity=0)		
Taiwanese identity	-0.45(0.37)	-0.39(0.35)
Chinese identity	-0.55(0.92)	-0.43(0.90)
Unification/Independence Issue (status quo=0)		
Unification	-0.29(0.42)	-0.29(0.40)
Independence	-0.08(0.56)	0.01(0.55)
Candidate Competence (no difference=0)		
Tsai is more competent	-3.15*** (0.73)	-3.26*** (0.73)
Ma is more competent	0.87* (0.37)	0.96** (0.35)
Party Competence		
Cross-Strait relations	0.64† (0.33)	
Economic development	0.42(0.30)	
Reducing the gap between rich and poor	0.06(0.27)	
Resolving the problem of high property prices	0.18(0.28)	
Environmental protection	-0.39(0.27)	
Social welfare	0.23(0.26)	
Fighting corruption	0.14(0.27)	
Democratic reform	0.45† (0.27)	
Ethnic harmony	0.18(0.29)	
Raising our international status	0.30(0.29)	
Overall party competence		2.04*** (0.50)
Constant	-0.08(0.71)	0.21(0.65)
<i>N</i>	979	979
pseudo <i>R</i> ²	0.792	0.785

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; † $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Source: Chu (2012).



who assess the KMT as being more competent are more likely to vote for the KMT candidate. Meanwhile, candidate evaluation and party identification also have a significant influence on vote choice.

As mentioned above, the KMT and the DPP are more distinct on cross-Strait relations, economic development and political reform. We might find the evaluations of these three issues showing a significant influence on the vote choice. Indeed, the analysis in model 1 reveals that both cross-Strait relations and democratic reform are positively related to vote for KMT candidate. For a long time, the KMT has been viewed as the party better to handle cross-Strait relations and political stability. The DPP held a similar reputation as the party of democratic reform. The data confirms that these two issues, to some extent, are of importance in Taiwanese politics.

Scholars of voting behaviour have suggested that party identification, candidate factor and issues play roles in voting decision. It is probably not surprising that the analysis in Table 5 also confirms the arguments. Compared with independent and non-response voters, those who identify with the KMT are more likely to vote for the KMT candidate than the DPP, vice versa. Those who assess Ma Ying-jeou as having a better ability to manage most current and important problems tend to vote for him than vote for Tsai Ing-wen. The rest of the variables in the model did not yield any significant effect on the 2012 presidential vote choice.

6. Summary and Conclusion

This paper has argued that party competence is important in understanding the 2012 presidential vote. It has demonstrated that the evaluations of party ability affect voters' voting consideration. The analysis reveals that the KMT enjoys an advantage on the cross-Strait relations, economic development, social welfare, fighting corruption, increasing country's international status, while the DPP has a reputation for reducing the gap between rich and poor, environmental protection and democratic reform. Based on the results from the binary model





analysis, political parties in Taiwan which gain ground on the cross-strait relations and democratic reform contribute to its vote shares.

Overall, the KMT secured its reputation on issues of cross-strait relations, economy, ethnic harmony, and the country's international status. By contrast, the DPP dominated on issues of environmental protection. While the KMT gained better assessment on issues of fighting corruption and social welfare, it failed to keep its advantage in reducing the gap between rich and poor.

On whether there is a steady issue ownership in Taiwanese politics there is still a need for more data to come to any conclusion. However, this paper demonstrates that party competence does yield an effect on vote choice. Party competence is significantly and positively related to voters' preference in the 2012 presidential vote.

Notes

- * Dr Chiung-chu Lin 林瓊珠 is Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at Soochow University, Taiwan. She received her Ph.D. in Government from University of Essex. Her research interests include party politics, voting behaviour, and public opinion. <Email: clinf@scu.edu.tw>
1. There are two more parties won seats in the Legislative Yuan in the 2012 Legislative election, however, the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) together won more than 90 per cent of seats.
 2. Election Study Center, NCCU, Important Political Attitude Trend Distribution <<http://esc.nccu.edu.tw/modules/tinyd2/content/partyID.htm>> (accessed on 10/10/2013)
 3. The questionnaires were asked: I'd like to ask you what you think are the good and bad points about the two national parties: Is there anything in particular that you like about the Democratic Party? (If yes,) What is that? Anything else? Is there anything in particular that you don't like about the Democratic Party? (If yes,) What is that? Anything else? Is there anything in particular that you like about the Republican Party? (If yes,) What is that? Anything else? Is there anything in particular that you don't like about the Republican Party? (If yes,) What is that? Anything else?
 4. The coordinator of multi-year project TEDS is Professor Chi Huang (National Chengchi University). The principal investigator professor Yunhan Chu. The Election of National Chengchi University is responsible for





the data distribution. The author appreciates the assistance in providing data by the institute and individuals aforementioned. The author is alone responsible for views expressed herein.

5. Those with non-response answers are excluded in the analysis.
6. See “Golden 10-year” manifesto announced by Ma Ying-jeou’s and Tsai Ing-wen’s “Next 10-year manifesto”.

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Appendix

A. Questionnaire Wording

Party Competence

Now we'd like to compare how well you think the KMT and DPP can handle some important problems.

1. On cross-Straits relations, how do the two parties compare?
2. On economic development, how do the two parties compare?
3. On reducing the gap between rich and poor, how do the two parties compare?
4. On resolving the problem of high property prices, how do the two parties compare?
5. On environmental protection, how do the two parties compare?
6. On social welfare, how do the two parties compare?
7. On fighting corruption, how do the two parties compare?
8. On democratic reform, how do the two parties compare?
9. On ethnic harmony, how do the two parties compare?

Party Identification

1. Among the main political parties in our country, including the KMT, DPP, PFP, NP, and TSU, do you think of yourself as leaning toward any particular party?
2. Do you feel yourself leaning a little more to one of the political parties than the others?
3. Which party is that?
4. Do you lean very strongly, somewhat, or just a little to this party?





Unification/Independence Issue

Concerning the relationship between Taiwan and mainland China, which of the following six positions do you agree with: 1) immediate unification, 2) immediate independence, 3) maintain the status quo, and move toward unification in the future, 4) maintain the status quo, and move toward independence in the future, 5) maintain the status quo, decide either unification or independence in the future, 6) maintain the status quo forever

Taiwanese/Chinese Identity

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

Candidate Competence

1. During the presidential election campaign, many different problems faced by our country were raised. What do you think is the most important political problem facing Taiwan today?
2. Which presidential candidate do you think is most capable of dealing with it?

B. The Descriptive Statistics of Party Competence Assessment

	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Cross-Strait relations	1654	-1	1	0.56	0.70
Economic development	1634	-1	1	0.42	0.75
Reducing the gap between rich and poor	1595	-1	1	-0.04	0.78
Resolving the problem of high property prices	1497	-1	1	-0.01	0.72
Environmental protection	1536	-1	1	-0.04	0.75
Social welfare	1601	-1	1	0.04	0.78
Fighting corruption	1609	-1	1	0.18	0.76
Democratic reform	1549	-1	1	-0.17	0.80
Ethnic harmony	1572	-1	1	0.28	0.76
Raising our international status	1563	-1	1	0.43	0.76

Source: Chu (2012).

