Party System Change and Nonpartisan Voters: Evidences from Japan and Taiwan†

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This paper attempts to explain why the percentage of the nonpartisan voters—people who have no party affiliation—has been increasing, as the party systems become fragment since 1996 in Japan and 2001 in Taiwan. Using Japan’s JES and JEDS data and a series of survey data collected in Taiwan’s legislative elections, we characterize the nonpartisan voters and show the systematic pattern of the increase of nonpartisan voters. Furthermore, we analyze political ideology of nonpartisans, finding that they were more movable than other partisans. The multivariate analyses show that the distinction between Japanese partisans and nonpartisans lay on the level of political faith and the summarized feeling toward the ruling party. However, Taiwanese partisanship was changeable if the level of political interest, faith, and ruling party’s evaluation would decrease, especially in 2001. The implication is that party system change in Japan did not change the way people identify with their parties. But Taiwan’s party system change indeed highlighted the importance of the incumbent party. Therefore, the consequence of party system change is generation of nonpartisans, but the patterns in Japan and Taiwan are very different.

Keywords: nonpartisan voter, partisanship, voting behavior, party system change

Introduction

With candidate-politics age coming and new issues developing, an extensive literature shows that political parties suffer growing independence from parties among the electorate. Despite scholars characterized the Independents and analyzed their
behaviors, the cause of the considerable increase of political independence is still not clear. In the aggregate level, there is yet a unified theory to explain the decay of party attachment in different countries, including the US, Britain, German, France, and some other European countries. The case study of nonpartisan voters in Asian democracy would help to construct a broad theory that explains this widespread phenomenon. As we will show below, the rise of political independence in the Japanese and Taiwanese electorate is remarkable but follows with different patterns. Both countries gradually have shifted from one-party hegemonic politics to multi-party systems, thank to their semi-proportional electoral systems. Secondly, both political systems share the same electoral system—single non-transferable voting system (SNTV)—before Japan replaced it with the single-member district and PR system in 1994. Thirdly, both countries have reliable survey data with comparable measurements of party identification and other attitudes. Last, and perhaps the most importantly, both countries have either cultural politics or sovereignty issue, instead of social cleavages at the time of mass electoral mobilization like advanced countries do.

The term ‘nonpartisan’ refers to people who fall in the following categories: self-labeled independent from all political parties, self-labeled independent leaners, and no-preference people, who report no identification with any party and call themselves Independents when asked if they are close to any party.\textsuperscript{1} We intend to define nonpartisans as people who have so limited attachment to political parties that no party image flare in their top of their mind when asked to reveal their preference over political parties. They are not necessary “independent” from any party, candidate, or related social groups; instead, they may have their preferences over parties.

\textsuperscript{1} This categorization is used by Wattenberg (1986: 38-46). Also see Miller and Wattenberg’s (1983) discussion on no-preference voters and self-labeled Independents.
However, their party attachment is so weak that they decline to disclose their preferences in the first place.

Decline of Partisanship in Advanced Countries

Partisanship is by definition psychological attachment to a given party. Political parties are endured objective that people can easily identify and obtain information and cues from them (Campbell, Converse, Stokes, and Miller, 1960). Partisanship functions as a stamp on candidates and issue positions (Stokes, 1962:126). According to the previous studies, party identification is transcended from parents to their offspring through discussions (Niemi and Jennings, 1991; Jennings and Markus, 1984). The transmission process ensures the stability of partisanship. Party identification should be stable at the aggregate-level unless dramatic events occur in the environment. It is called “normal vote,” which refers to the situation that voting pattern is the function of partisanship in a long run (Converse, 1969).

Scholars have extensively examined this bundle of party identification theory (Beck, 1986). First of all, some scholars argued that we should characterize partisanship as multi-dimensional conception. Weisberg (1980) has proved that political independence is a separate dimension and its strength and direction can be measured. Petrocik (1974) found the “intransitivities” of partisanship: some independents are more involved and interested in politics than partisans. Nevertheless, Fiorina (1981) argued that the concept of partisanship by definition excludes “political independence;” partisanship is a running tally of party performance instead of self-label. Dennis (1988) identified “unattached” voters who lean towards no

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2 Abramson (1976) examined the cohort data between 1956 and 1974, suggesting that the difference in partisan strength between generations exists. His later analysis (Abramson, 1979) confirmed this finding, yet he noted the period effect related to the race issue may explain the decline of partisanship among the young voters. Regarding the debate on the intergenerational transmission of partisanship, see Carmines, McIver, and Stimson (1987), Luskin, McIver, and Carmines (1989), and Mattei and Niemi (1991). Mattei and Niemi pointed out that the transmission of independence and partisanship is more stable than what Carmines, McIver, and Stimson estimated.
political party, contending that “independents” actually are supportive of the party system. Keith et al. (1992) differentiated “pure independents” and “leaners;” only “pure independents” fits the profile of low political interest, information, and participation. Miller and Wattenberg (1983) found the increase of “no preference” and contended the importance of distinction between “no preference” and “Independent.” In Weisberg and Tanaka’s (2001) analysis of the Japanese voters, however, their multidimensional scaling analysis shows that independence is one of the dimensions of the party competition space.

Although partisanship is characterized as longstanding predisposition, some evidences indicate that partisanship responds to external influence at the individual-level. In the US context, partisanship is less important than public policy issues on voting choice (Jackson, 1975; Converse and Markus, 1979; Page and Jones, 1979; Franklin and Jackson, 1983). Candidate evaluations also have significant effects on the voting decision (Miller and Wattenberg, 1985). According to Clarke and Stewart (1985), English voters may change their partisan strength or even party identification because of party leaders and issue positions. Moreover, the aggregate-level voting trend is unstable within certain range (Allsop and Weisberg, 1988; MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson, 1989).

Observing the trend of partisanship measured by the traditional 7-point scale, the rise of independence is evident. If people who call themselves “Independents” in the first place and think of themselves close to any party in the following question are classified as “nonpartisans,” they and Independents together accounted for one-third of the electorate in the 1980s (Niemi and Weisberg, 1993:211). The trend actually began in the 1960s, when the New Deal party system deteriorated due to generational replacement (Beck, 1979:135). Dalton (1988: 209) reported that the trend of increasing independents continued in the 1990s.
Among the causes of declining partisanship, generational replacement is one of the most influential forces (Abramson, 1976; Beck, 1979; Franklin and Jackson, 1983). Wattenberg (1986:88-89) argued that the declining party leadership led to the growing neutrality toward the parties. The candidate-centered politics that appeared in the 1960s turned the party machine to campaign organization, which eroded the base of political party. Wattenberg (1986) also contended that candidates receive more media coverage than political parties do. Moreover, it is found that candidates increase their visibility by advertising more efficiently than political parties do. He with passivism concluded that the candidate-centered politics would continue and the decline of partisanship is inevitable. Clarke and Stewart’s (1985) analysis of partisan change in Great Britain confirms the influence of party leaders. Clubb, Flanigan, and Zingale (1990) contend that partisan realignment and government control are “integral” factors of the whole political process; the mass public judges the performance of parties and may deviate from the party in case it cannot run a successful government.

In Europe, value priorities of the mass public shifted from materialism to non-economic one, which caused issue-based politics and, as a result, weakening party ties. According to Inglehart (1990), the young cohort embraced post-material values in the 1970s, which emphasized humane society, free speech, ideas, and so on. After experiencing economic growth and seeing the cold war, the young generation place high priority on non-economic needs in contrast to national defense and social order. The value change led to New Politics, which stresses issues of environmental protection, women’s rights, and anti-war. However, the traditional class- or religion-based political parties holding the remaining social cleavages failed to respond to new issues. The strength of political identity therefore became weaker, especially among the younger voters. Dalton (1996) shows the increasing percentage
of nonpartisans in the US, Britain, France, and Germany. He argues that partisanship has lost its influence in voting choice, and that the importance of issue voting has increased due to more information and resources available to the electorate.

Changes in the political environment also have effects on the party system. Clarke and Suzuki (1993) found that independence is a function of economics: inflation, unemployment, scandals, war, and rally events, controlling for recent elections. In their case study of Canadian politics, Bowler and Lanoue (1996) suggested that new party attracts weak partisan voters and weakens party attachment with old parties.

Suffice it is to say that changes of social cleavages are interrelated with the increasing trend of nonpartisans in Europe. As for the US, candidate-centered politics should be responsible for decreasing party ties. Worsening economy and entrance of new parties may also contribute to increase in nonpartisan voters because old parties failed to deal with the new challenge. Individual’s deviation from the party line reflects declining social bases, party leadership, and party unity.

**Theoretical Perspective**

While scholars have characterized the Independents and explained how the declining partisanship occurred, they fell short of examining the causality of party system change and the emergence of nonpartisan voters. According to Mair’s (1997) definition, party system change occurs when the pattern of party competition fundamentally changed. For instance, the relative issue position of parties has a breakthrough due to disappearance of an extreme party. Another example made by Mair is that the Germany Green Party survived while the Free Socialist Party lost votes. The most crucial part of party system change is the transformation of one type of party system to another type of system. The extent of party polarization,
ideological pluralism, and the electoral volatility are all indicators. Based on the
criteria of electoral change, however, the party systems in Europe remain unchanged
because parties with old social bases still held strong share of votes. Despite that the
electoral volatility was significant, Mair pointed out, most voters maintained their
voting preferences while switching between parties of similar ideology (Mair,
suggested, left/right ideology explains much of political parties’ issue positions.

Although Mair characterized party system change, he did not connect it to the
political psychology of the electorate experiencing party system change. If Lipset and
Rokkan’s (1967) thesis is right, social cleavages at the time of mass electoral
participation determine the configuration of contemporary party systems. When
society becomes complex and, as a result, the connection between social cleavages
and parties weakens, party system enters into a period of uncertainty. Although
partisans do not lose their party support as parties reshuffle, new electorate who has
been several generations away from old partisans prefer issue politics more than
traditional party politics.

As for countries that social cleavages do not “imprinted” on the electorate as
parties are organized, party attachment is based on mixed political values, group
support, and various election political issues. Party system change reflects not only
changing political values, but also political leadership, government performance, and
even electoral system change. Unlike advanced countries, which still keep the
influence of social class, religion, or national integration, parties of “mixed group
support and values” are more election-oriented and fall in the catch-all type. In such
countries, partisans may respond to party system change by hiding their partisanship
while waiting for the revival of their parties. The second possible development is
therefore the dealignment of partisans instead of the electorate in general. Whether or
not it lasts long depends on many factors, but the composition of nonpartisans may become heterogeneous for certain years.

If the number of nonpartisans increased because of party system change, the changing composition of the nonpartisan voters during the period of party system change should be observable. More precisely, the existing nonpartisan voters are joined by the ex-partisans, who lose their party attachment momentarily but keep their ideology that serves as their voting guides. Therefore, the level of education and responses to salient issues among nonpartisan voters is expected to increase.

Moreover, there should be some indicators showing the declining political interest and participation among all voters. When ex-partisans hide their partisanship due to party system change, the original nonpartisan voters further cease to turn out and pay attention to politics, which enlarges the gap between partisan and nonpartisan voters in political interest and participation.

**Party Politics in Japan and Taiwan**

To test the hypothesis of party system change, Taiwan and Japan are chosen. Among other countries, Japan and Taiwan have just undergone party system change, in which a dominant party stepped down and opposition parties emerged. Party systems in both countries expanded from one-party politics to multi-party systems due to democratization and dissatisfaction with the ruling party. The expansion of party systems, which should have more voters mobilized, contributed to the increase in nonpartisan voters. In other words, political parties cannot reach out the electorate, though they still goes to vote and their voting choices are conditional on some factors in addition to partisanship.

If empirical evidences prove our hypothesis, then Japan and Taiwan provide another pattern of weakening party bounds; party system change leads to hiding
partisanship of ex-partisans. Party system change, we hypothesize, disconcerts the mass public so that some ex-partisans, who used to have issue positions and even ideology, temporarily cease to reveal their party preferences. The implication is that political identity is not only movable by political issues, candidates, or economy as scholars have proved, but also floating with power alternation and performance of the entire party system.

Japan

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) singlehandedly ruled Japan between 1955 and 1993, in part because of a stable succession of party leaders, the president of the LDP. Richardson (1997) argued that the institutionalized factions had ensured the smooth transfer of power since the 1950s. Factional leaders also decide which candidate can receive the LDP endorsement, and each faction has its own money resources (Scalapino and Masumi, 1964; Tomita, Nakamura, and Hrebenar, 1986). Watanuki (1967) found that “cultural politics” that emphasize traditionalism and conservative values prevailed in Japan, which is responsible for factional, money politics.

The “parties within party” politics eventually led to a split in the LDP in the 1990s. A new-generation of Diet members who saw the demise of one-party politics convinced other members within the same faction to organize new parties, whose emergence began the era of the Second Party System. In short, it was the power struggle rather than policy or ideology rift among factions led to the collapse of the LDP in the 1990s. After the 1993 election, the non-communist parties organized a coalition government. The Japanese Socialist Party (JSP) finally shook off their reputation as a “permanent opposition party,” but new parties that reshuffled the

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3 Before then, there had existed possibilities of inter-party coalition government after the 1976 election. However, the government coalition did not occur until 1993 because of ideological cleavages and complicated factional politics. See Richardson (1997: 86-88).
existing parties gained more seats and the JSP only came in fifth in the 1996 election. The LDP regained the control over the cabinet in the 1996 election.

Miyake (1991) has noted the weakness of party support in Japan. His typology based on party images and anti-party support includes loyal partisans, negative partisans, uninformed partisans, and nonpartisans. According to his analysis, uninformed partisans have less psychological involvement than nonpartisans. Moreover, nonpartisans are more educated and likely to be found in big cities (Miyake, 1991:239). In other words, nonpartisans are self-labeled independents that tend to switch among parties and uninformed partisans only understand easy issues and tend to be mobilized.

Miyake’s findings correspond to Dennis (1988) in that both recognize the existence of nonpartisans and the less informed people who also show low intensity of partisanship. In addition, his analysis reveals the instability of nonpartisans, which suggests that nonpartisans, unlike loyal partisans, are less ideological and unfamiliar with issues. He also warned that unreliable opposition and a competent but corrupted governing party would contribute to negative partisans (p. 261). Reconsidering his conclusion, we contend that unstable party system between 1993 and 1996 led to low political trust and, as a result, increase in nonpartisans.

Taiwan

Since 1986, Taiwan has entered into an era of party competition and witnessed the burgeoning of political parties. The long-term hegemonic party—Kuomintang (KMT)—initially controlled the administration and efficiently transferred votes to seats. The KMT also reserved the seats of the Legislative Yuan to the representatives elected in mainland China until 1992. Moreover, the KMT did not allow any political party to be formed, except the ones that accepted its support. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was formed in 1986 by the opposition activists that ran
elections under the label of tangwai (outside the KMT) back in the 1970s. Facing the challenge from the DPP and dealing with the internal struggle on the unification-independence issue, the KMT then split into the Chinese New Party (CNP) in 1994 and later into the People First Party (PFP) and the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) in 2000.

Taiwan held its first popular legislative election in 1992, and the KMT and DPP were the major competitors in the elections of three-year intervals since then. In 1995, the Chinese New Party joined in the party system, but it was until 2001 that two-party system switched to multi-party system. 4 In the 2001 election, the TSU led by the former president, Lee Teng-hui, won 13 out of 225 seats, while the PFP, led by the former presidential candidate, James Soong, took 46 seats. The two new parties along with the KMT and DPP survived the 2004 election; the multi-party system remained the same despite the DPP and TSU, KMT and PFP aligned respectively as two ideological blocs. 5

While new parties emerge and old parties strive to survive, the number of nonpartisan voters steadily remained between 35 percent and 40 percent for the last decade. Those people who admit no attachment to any party continue to vote, rendering the election outcome unpredictable (Tan, Ho, Kang, and Yu 2000).

The 1994 electoral reform in Japan indeed made a two-party system possible. As for Taiwan, the KMT not only lost the presidential office in 2000, but also failed to keep its majority in the Legislative Yuan. At the meantime, a four-party system was established and each party takes clearer ideological position on each issue; catch-all

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4 The Chinese New Party won 21 seats in 1995 and 11 seats in 1998. In 2001, however, it gained only 1 seat. The KMT kept its majority in the Legislative Yuan even in 1995, when it won 85 out of 164 seats. In 2001, nevertheless, the DPP claimed the largest seat share by winning 87 out of 225 seats while the KMT got 68 seats. For details, see http://www2.nccu.edu.tw/~s00/database/data0405_1-2.htm.
5 The election result was that: DPP 89 seats, KMT 79 seats, PFP 34 seats, CNP 1 seat, and TSU 12 seats.
party does not longer fit in the existing political system. We therefore intend to explore the consequence of party system change between 1993 and 1996, in Japan, and 1998 and 2001, in Taiwan.

Data

The Election Study Center (ESC) at National Chengchi University conducted a national sampling survey after the 1998 election. Three years later, Taiwan Election Democratization Study (TEDS) carried out a wave of post-election survey. In both surveys, respondents were asked their partisan orientation, political interest, party images, and voting behavior. The primary investigation shown in Table 1 confirms the expectation that the proportion of nonpartisan voters increased after party system change in 2000.

(Table 1 about here)

As for Japanese partisanship, scholars conducted several waves of pre- and post-election studies between 1993 and 1996, which was called Japan Election Study (JES). Here the 1993 post-election survey data is used. The 1996 data--the Japan Election and Democracy Survey (JEDS)--was collected in the 1996 general election. The 1993 JES post-election survey used the following question to measure party attachment: “Now changing the subject somewhat, which political party do you usually support, not including the last election?” Among 2,320 respondents, 22.59 percent of them supported no party.

As for the 1996 JEDS survey, respondents were asked:” Aside from elections, what party do you normally support?” Among 1,244 respondents, people who answered that they supported no party, do not know, and refuse to answer together account for 56.59 percent. The significant change between 1993 and 1996 raises the question of validity, thus it is necessary to compare the result of a different question:
“When you think about Japan’s political parties, do you have the feeling that you do not want to support any party? Please choose from the following: (1) There is no party to support; (2) Do not wish to support a party now; (3) I have a party which I support; (4) don’t know; (5) refusal.” If respondents answered 3, we label them as “partisans.” The rest of respondents are categorized as “nonpartisans.” We find that only 43.41 percent of respondents can be classified as “partisans.” In other words, the difference in the number of nonpartisans between 1993 and 1996 indeed exists.

(Table 2 about here)

Profiles of Nonpartisan Voters in Japan and Taiwan

To evaluate the effect of party system change in two different countries, the first step is to look at the composition of nonpartisan voters. As for Japanese voters, Figure 1 shows that the percentage of high-school educated within the nonpartisans rose significantly in 1996. Moreover, Figure 2 displays the increasing level of age among the nonpartisans. The evidences shown in these two charts indicate that nonpartisans in Japan were becoming older but more educated, who perhaps used to be the “middle strata” of the society. Figure 3 confirms that the percentage of public officials within nonpartisan voters increased, while that of workers shrank. While Japan changed from predominant party system to competitive multi-party one, modest educated and old voters who work in the public sectors signaled their independence.

(Figure 1 about here)

(Figure 2 about here)

(Figure 3 about here)

The pattern of Taiwanese nonpartisan voters is somewhat similar to the Japanese counterparts. Figure 4 shows the shrinking percentage of high-educated but rising
portion of low-educated within the nonpartisan voters. Furthermore, Figure 5 presents the slightly increasing trend of nonpartisan voters in their age. Finally, Figure 6 displays that the proportions of workers, farmers and herders within nonpartisan voters were increasing, and that people working in the private sector were more partisan than before. The alternation in power seemed to not only alienate old partisans, but also detach people who were less educated and owned fewer political resources. Overall, the composition of Taiwanese nonpartisan voters changed to the opposite direction as we expect.

(Figure 4 about here)

(Figure 5 about here)

(Figure 6 about here)

The profile studies of nonpartisan voters in Japan and Taiwan have shown the mixed results. The Japanese nonpartisans became older, more educated, and employed in public sectors, but Taiwanese counterparts became older, less educated, and employed in manual labors or farmers. Whether or not the nonpartisan voters in both countries aligned with ex-partisans depends on their responses to salient issues.

**Political Ideology and Issues of Voters**

The demographic analysis presents the changing pattern of nonpartisan voters in Japan and Taiwan. However, the profiles only indicate the diversified background of the voters, but not their political attitudes. Unless we reveal their different idea of politics, changing background of nonpartisan voters cannot help us understand their

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6 To compare our findings with other researches, readers may refer to Tan et al. (2000:74). Notice that they divide people as no school, elementary, junior high, high schools, and college or above, but our analysis only categories people as elementary, secondary, vocational, and college. Combining “no school” and “elementary” as “elementary,” “junior high” and “high schools” as “secondary,” and “vocational” and “college” together, the results provided here and by Tan et al. are very close.

7 In Tsai and Chao’s (2004) analysis of the 2004 presidential election, the percentage that low-educated constitutes actually decreased while that of high-educated increased a little. We consider the difference between two results as the cause of, first, the different time frame and, second, different elections.
behavior.

Political ideology and perception of issues are crucial to the way that party identification influences individual behavior. Political ideology, a left/right continuum, was used to serve the party base in the 1955 party system. Beginning from the 1980s, however, conservative lifestyle became the mainstream ideology, which can be seen in LDP’s election victory in the 1986 election (Kawato, 2004:165). The return of the LDP after several short-live coalition governments and emergence of Shinsedo lead us to expect that partisan voters would show conservative ideology. However, nonpartisan voters would feel alienated from the major parties. We graphed the relative ideological positions of partisans of the top two major parties and nonpartisans in Figure 7 and 8. Despite they remained around the middle point of the continuum, the distance between them and the LDP has become larger. While both two major parties occupied the positions on the right side, nonpartisan voters moved as far as the other side.

(Figure 7 about here)

(Figure 8 about here)

Unlike Japan and other advanced countries, the left-right ideology is not a salient division in Taiwan. Instead, the independence-unification issue has been the center of party competition for two decades. The KMT insisted on unification, claiming that the future of Taiwan rests on China. The DPP, however, managed to mold national identity related to Taiwan independence. Figure 9 and 10 display the relatively stable issue position of partisan and nonpartisan voters. Having said that, it is noticeable that nonpartisan voters slightly moved to the unification side. It is probably because they were ex-partisans leaning to the KMT.

(Figure 9 about here)

(Figure 10 about here)
Furthermore, we compare the way nonpartisans in Japan and Taiwan respond to conservative-liberal ideology and unification-independence issue respectively. Table 3 makes it clear that the percentage of non-response among the Japanese nonpartisan voters was declining. Table 4, like what we anticipate, shows the decreasing trend of non-response rate of the Taiwanese nonpartisan voters. That partly counters against our early observation of the entry of less educated, older, and less paid people in the group of nonpartisan voters. When abrupt change happens to political parties, uninformed voters cannot locate their political identity but they may still keep some ideas about current issues. The mixed results imply the heterogeneous composition of nonpartisan voters in that the aggregate level of issue salience increases, while people are not well educated and in high social positions.

All in all, nonpartisan voters in Japan and Taiwan are somewhat different in terms of their relative locations on the salient issue. Taiwanese voters act more like classical independents who are equally close to each major party, in spite of the emergence of new parties. Japanese nonpartisan voters, however, put themselves away from the two major parties as parties reshuffled. Party system change indeed affected the political perception of nonpartisan voters in Japan, which may increases the prediction power of ideology on partisanship. In Taiwan, however, the variation in independence-unification should be small so that nonpartisanship is not related to the issue position.

**Losing Interest and Faith in Politics?**

One of the main themes of Japanese voters since the 1980s has been “less faithful” on politicians, parties, and the whole political system. A series of scandals not only led to split of parties, but also lowered political trust among the electorate. Amid hopes of reform, the Hosokawa coalition government struggled to settle the
dispute within the cabinet. As for Taiwan, party competition has been intense and involving national identity even before the 1992 election. However, the long-term ruling party stepped down in the 2000 election while the DPP stumbled to take over the administration. Therefore, the alternation in power may also alienate people who were accustomed to the former government.

**Political Interest**

Figure 13 confirms the hypothesis that party system change shadowed the level of political interest among the electorate. Using the mean test, the declining political interest of partisan and nonpartisan voters is apparent.\(^8\) The score of political interest among the partisan voters dropped from 1.416 to 0.859. Moreover, nonpartisan voters lost their political interest by 0.576. The difference in the level of political interest between and after the party system change is the same for the two groups.

(Figure 13 about here)

The situation in Taiwan is similar to that in Japan, which is shown in Figure 14.\(^9\) It is apparent that both partisan and nonpartisan voters slightly lost their political interest. The gap between the two groups in political interest has been stable across three years. Like Japanese voters, Taiwanese voters revealed declining interest in politics.

(Figure 14 about here)

**Political Faith**

There are many indicators about political faith in these two surveys. To be cross-national comparable, we choose the question of whether respondents have trust

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\(^8\) Regarding the 1993 survey, we measure political interest by adding together the responses to the level of concern over politics and the general election. In the 1996 survey, respondents were asked whether they had interest in which party in power and whether they had interest in change of party strength. The responses in both surveys are standardized from 0 to 1.

\(^9\) Being short of comparable measurement, here we use the level of attention paid to the campaign news on television and newspaper as the proxy of political interest.
in national politics. Figure 15 makes it clear that the level of faith in national politics remained the same among the Japanese voters. However, the gap between partisans and nonpartisans has been significant.

(Figure 15 about here)

Taiwanese voters also showed slightly declining political faith; the average score of political faith of nonpartisans dropped from 2.40 to 2.34, while that of partisans slipped from 2.55 to 2.43. The trend shown in Figure 10 is very similar to Figure 16, while the gap between party identifiers and nonpartisans shrank. That suggests political faith in general would decline further.

(Figure 16 about here)

Performance of Ruling Party and Partisanship

Government evaluation is important for voting behavior in that it represents a baseline of choice between two alternatives—incumbent and opposition parties. When the social well-being is not satisfactory, the rational mass public presumably “overthrows” the incumbent party. Tan et al. (2000) found that the rationale also applies to the Korean and Taiwanese nonpartisan voters; people who are not satisfied with the governing party tend to become the Independents. We contend that the level of satisfaction with the incumbent party is the proxy of support for the party system. The influence of party evaluation on the existence of partisanship therefore represents the impact of party system change; people who have the same incumbent party should display the same feelings toward the party, but people who see differing incumbent party should have different ideas.

In Japan, the ruling party remained the same across the 1993 and 1996 elections,

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10 The question of political faith in the instruments used in Taiwan is somewhat different from that of JES and JEDS; the responders were asked if they trust what the government officials say on television.
which was LDP in power. Therefore, we simply count how nonpartisan voters rate the LDP and expect that nonpartisans, even not content with the LDP, should have the same evaluations about the LDP. Figure 17 presents the plain line of nonpartisans’ LDP evaluation and the increasing line of partisans’ LDP evaluation. The difference between the two lines is significant, which suggests that we can tell the two groups by the LDP evaluation. Given the same incumbent party, however, the influence of the LDP evaluation should be the same.

(Figure 17)

Because the KMT and DPP were in the president office in 1998 and 2001 respectively, we expect to find the change of the governing party’s evaluation across two elections. In addition, we propose that the Taiwanese nonpartisan voters are less content with the DPP than the partisans.

(Figure 18)

The two lines in Figure 18 show the increasing evaluation of the incumbent party of partisans and decreasing evaluation of nonpartisans. That implies the distinction between nonpartisans and partisans lay on how warm they felt about the DPP in 2001, which might not be the case in 1998 because people had the similar feeling about the KMT. Should people evaluate both KMT and DPP the same way across the two elections, the two lines would be parallel. Due to the sentiment after power alternation, some resilient KMT partisans may join the nonpartisans and showed their opposition toward the DPP. People who stayed in the group of partisans were probably leaning DPP partisans at best, and they did not hesitate to embrace the DPP. As matter of fact, we found that the rating of the KMT in 2001 was plummeting; nonpartisans’ feeling about the KMT was 4.922 and partisans’ 4.871 (not shown). In other words, some KMT partisans indeed “switched off” their partisanship due to disappointment with its performance.
Explaining Nonpartisanship

Up to this point, we have demonstrated some likely driving forces of partisanship. To reveal the effect of party system change on partisanship, it is necessary to estimate the relative influence of each variable and draw our conclusion from the comparison between two party systems. If party system change indeed led to the increase in nonpartisans, we expect that the level of political faith and interest would account for nonpartisanship to a greater degree than the previous system. Using binomial-probit model, we first estimate the effects of age, education, occupation, ideology, political faith, political interest, and governing party’s evaluation on Japanese voters, presenting the results in Table 3.

(Table 3 about here)

Based on the percentage change transformed from probit coefficients, it is apparent that political interest is the main determinant of party attachment in Japan’s 1993 and 1996 general election. Table 3 plainly shows the similar influence of each independent variable on the change of partisanship between the two elections, except ideology. Figure 19 and 20 illustrate the relative influence of the four main independent variables. The numbers in the figures represent the predicted probabilities of partisanship corresponding to the three independent variables at their means, or their means plus or minus one standard deviation, while controlling other three variables at their means.\textsuperscript{11} The relative influence of each of the three variables can be thus seen from the slopes of each variable. The slope of political faith is very small in Figure 19, and it remains the same in Figure 20. On the other hand, the slopes of the LDP feeling are the largest in both elections. The effects of political interest and ideology and political interest lie between LDP feeling and political faith. This

\textsuperscript{11} The values of the rest of dummy variables are set at one.
result confirms our hypothesis that the LDP is responsible for the alienation of voters during the period of party system change.

(Figure 19 about here)

(Figure 20 about here)

Taiwanese voters before and after party system change have different patterns of partisanship from Japanese voters. Table 4 makes it clear that the influence of political faith was significant in 1998, but not in 2001. Nevertheless, the level of political interest positively affected the holding of partisanship in 1998 and 2001. More importantly, governing party evaluations differentiated partisans and nonpartisans in 2001, but not 1998. That suggests some ex-partisans, probably the KMT supporters became nonpartisans and they were disappointed with the DPP. However, people who remained partisans felt warmer about the DPP as it took the president office and won the legislative election. When one-party dominant politics transited to competitive party system, political faith, which is measured by the extent to which people trust what government officials say in public, became less influential on partisanship for both partisans and nonpartisans converged on this matter (see Figure 16). All in all, we suspect that the partisans were highly interested in politics and favored the DPP, but whether politics was trusted or not did not matter any more. While the incumbent party is changeable, people concentrate on how governing party performs instead of the overall political system. In Taiwan, therefore, party system change contributed to the increase in nonpartisans by “converting” some ex-partisans to nonpartisans.

(Table 4 about here)

(Figure 21 about here)

(Figure 22 about here)

Conclusion
It has been argued that partisanship is not movable, but the revisionist view of party identification has revealed that it is subject to short-term forces like issue positions. In aggregate level, the decline of partisanship in the US, Europe, and Japan has been confirmed. People turn to new issues or rely on the mass media as they give their mandate to political parties. Party government, Clubb, Flanigan, and Zingale (1990) contend, should respond to the mass public in order to maintain the party support and avoid dealignment, which appears to be unrealistic for advanced countries. As new generation who has limited experience about old cleavage enters, new issues rather than long-term social cleavage anchor their political attitude. Therefore, party attachment has been declining in those countries for fewer individuals take it lone.

To increase our understanding about nonpartisans in other countries, we intend to analyze two Asian democracies--- Japan and Taiwan. They shared the same electoral system and experienced party system change, in which a dominant one-party politics was transformed to relatively multi-party system. The major difference is that a new governing party appeared in Taiwan but it was not the case in Japan. Therefore, we can see somewhat different consequences of party system change.

The descriptive analysis finds that the Japanese nonpartisans became more educated and younger, and that more nonpartisans worked for public sectors than in 1993. As for the Taiwanese nonpartisans, they turned out to be older and less educated. In addition, the percentage of working class and farmer increased. The results so far suggest that nonpartisans in Taiwan were similar to the classical model of Independents, but the analysis follows shows that the Taiwanese nonpartisans were more responsive to the unification/independence issue than before. So were the Japanese nonpartisans as to the conservative/liberal ideology. Furthermore, we find that the difference in political interest and faith between Japanese nonpartisans and partisans did not change due to party system change, which suggests that party system
change had the same effect on the two groups despite the demography of nonpartisans changed a little. The Taiwanese nonpartisans showed parallel declining political interest with the partisans, but the gap in political faith between the two groups became smaller. More importantly, we observe how nonpartisans felt about the government party and find that the Taiwanese nonpartisans were strikingly apathy about the new ruling party, DPP, and that the Japanese nonpartisans showed fairly stable feeling about the LDP.

The results of our multivariate analysis accords with the previous evidences, presenting the two patterns of partisanship change. As for Japan, the probability of partisans/nonpartisan was determined by almost the same factors in both elections; the distinction between the two groups did not change, except ideology becoming less significant. As for Taiwan, however, governing party feeling turned to the distinction between partisans and nonpartisans in 2001 and political faith was no longer important. The comparison between the cases of Japan and Taiwan therefore highlights the differing consequence of party system change. The Japanese nonpartisans increased because some new voters joined in the electorate and some ex-partisan turned to nonpartisans for unknown reasons. Nevertheless, ex-partisans in Taiwan, who may be less educated and older, conspicuously turned to nonpartisans for disliking the new governing party. Moreover, party system change leveled off the difference in political faith due to the alternation of power and the following new political landscape.

We unfold the consequences of party system change deductively and compare the cases of Japan and Taiwan to verify our hypothesis. The major implication of our findings is the new cause of declining partisanship—party system change, which may supplement the existing literature on Independents and weakening party ties. Our investigation also indicates that Japan and Taiwan, whose election engineering and
party systems were very similar, have differing pattern of surging nonpartisans. Although we did not systematically explain the difference, it is apparent that a new governing party from an established party-divided society was responsible for the sharp increase of nonpartisans in Taiwan but not Japan.

Tanaka and Martin (2003) argued that new Independents were actually from the LDP but they did not like the new opposition party. Our analysis more or less supports their argument. We find the ideological position of nonpartisans as a whole was more and more away from the LDP, but their feelings toward the LDP were stable across the two elections. Based on the evidences, however, the reason why some nonpartisans were possibly ex-LDP supporters is still not clear.

Our analysis also echoes the findings presented by Tan et al. (2000) in that Taiwanese independents are political interested, which does not fit in the classical Michigan model (Campbell et al., 1960). Every country is a context, we shall argue, and the theory that applies to developed democracies may not be generalizable for other countries. With the help of a unified theory, however, a systematic but context-cautioned investigation is possible and eventually leads to the connection between two different fields---individual political behavior and party politics. We here call for more integral and creative thinking about political behavior from the perspective of party system, electoral system, and democracy.

References


Table 1 Party Identification in Taiwan, 1998 and 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonpartisans</td>
<td>406(33.6)</td>
<td>762(38.8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partisans</td>
<td>801(66.4)</td>
<td>1201(61.2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,207</td>
<td>1,963</td>
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Note: Parentheses are column percentages. See text for the definition of each category.

Data: ESC and TEDS

Table 2 Party Identification in Japan, 1993 and 1996

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>1996</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonpartisans</td>
<td>524(22.59)</td>
<td>704(56.59)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partisans</td>
<td>1,796(77.41)</td>
<td>540(43.41)</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>2320</td>
<td>1244</td>
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Note: Parentheses are column percentages. See text for the definition of each category.

Data: JES and JEDS
Figure 1 Education of Nonpartisan Voters, Japan

Figure 2 Age of Nonpartisan Voters, Japan
Figure 3 Occupation of Nonpartisan Voters, Japan

Figure 4 Education of Nonpartisan Voters, Taiwan
Figure 5 Age of Nonpartisan Voters, Taiwan

Figure 6 Occupation of Nonpartisan Voters, Taiwan

Figure 7 Ideology of Japanese Nonpartisan Voters and Two Major Party Supporters, 1993
Note: The right end means “conservative” and the left end “liberal”.

Figure 8 Ideology of Japanese Nonpartisan Voters and Two Major Party Supporters, 1996
Note: The right end means “conservative” and the left end “liberal”.

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Figure 9 Ideology of Taiwanese Nonpartisan Voters and Two Major Party Supporters, 1998

Note: The right end means “independence” and the left end “unification”.

Figure 10 Ideology of Taiwanese Nonpartisan Voters and Two Major Party Supporters, 2001

Note: Compiled by the authors. The right end means “independence” and the left end “unification”.

Figure 11 Response of Nonpartisans to Ideology Question, Japan
Figure 12 Response of Nonpartisans to Ideology Question, Taiwan
Figure 13 Political Interest of Nonpartisans, Japan

Figure 14 Political Interest of Nonpartisans, Taiwan
Figure 15 Political Faith of Nonpartisans, Japan

Figure 16 Political Faith of Nonpartisans, Taiwan
Figure 17 Ruling Party Feeling of Nonpartisans, Japan

![Graph showing the ruling party feeling of nonpartisans in Japan from 1998 to 2001.](image)

Figure 18 Ruling Party Feeling of Nonpartisans, Taiwan

Table 3 Determinants of Nonpartisanship, Japan 1993 and 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1993(Nonpartisanship=0)</th>
<th>1996(Nonpartisanship=0)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-35</td>
<td>-.580(.147)***</td>
<td>-.477(.177)**</td>
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<tr>
<td>36-50</td>
<td>-.307(.138)*</td>
<td>-.531(.163)***</td>
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<td>51-65</td>
<td>-.088(.134)</td>
<td>-.160(.152)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>.129(.135)</td>
<td>.087(.202)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>.123(.102)</td>
<td>.385(.117)***</td>
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<td>Vocational</td>
<td>.202(.122)</td>
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<td><strong>Occupation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>-.026(.117)</td>
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<td>Manager</td>
<td>.014(.098)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Salary</td>
<td>.365(.186)*</td>
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<td>Farmer</td>
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<td>.542(.081)***</td>
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<td>LDP Feeling</td>
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<td>Pseudo R²</td>
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<td>.102</td>
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Figure 19 Predicted Partisanship by Different Values of Independent Variables, Japan 1993

Figure 20 Predicted Partisanship by Different Values of Independent Variables, Japan 1996
Table 4 Determinants of Nonpartisanship, Taiwan 1998 and 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1998 (Nonpartisanship=0)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<tr>
<td>20-35</td>
<td>-.501(.321)</td>
<td>-.486(.234)*</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>-.384(.243)</td>
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<td>Secondary</td>
<td>-.005(.169)</td>
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<td>Vocational</td>
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<td>Public</td>
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<td>Private</td>
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<td>Worker</td>
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<td>Farmer</td>
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![Graph showing predicted probabilities for different variables](image-url)
Figure 21 Predicted Partisanship by Different Values of Independent Variables, Taiwan 1998

Figure 22 Change in Predicted Partisanship by Different Values of Independent Variables, Taiwan 2001