



Journal of Current Chinese Affairs

China aktuell

Göbel, Christian (2012),
The Impact of Electoral System Reform on Taiwan's Local Factions, in: *Journal of
Current Chinese Affairs*, 41, 3, 69–92.

ISSN: 1868-4874 (online), ISSN: 1868-1026 (print)

The online version of this article and the other articles can be found at:

www.CurrentChineseAffairs.org

Published by

GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies, Institute of Asian Studies
in cooperation with the National Institute of Chinese Studies, White Rose East Asia
Centre at the Universities of Leeds and Sheffield and Hamburg University Press.

The *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* is an Open Access publication.

It may be read, copied and distributed free of charge according to the conditions of the
Creative Commons Attribution-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.

To subscribe to the print edition: <ias@giga-hamburg.de>

For an e-mail alert please register at: <www.CurrentChineseAffairs.org>

The *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* is part of the GIGA Journal Family which includes:
Africa Spectrum ● Journal of Current Chinese Affairs ● Journal of Current Southeast
Asian Affairs ● Journal of Politics in Latin America ● <www.giga-journal-family.org>

This Taiwan edition has been published and edited in cooperation with the European
Research Center on Contemporary Taiwan (ERCCT) at Eberhard Karls University of
Tübingen.



The Impact of Electoral System Reform on Taiwan's Local Factions

Christian GÖBEL

Abstract: In 2004, the single non-transferable vote (SNTV) was abolished in Taiwan. The SNTV had long been seen as a major factor in the sustenance of county- and township-level clientelist networks (“local factions”). It was also associated with phenomena such as extremism, candidate-centred politics, vote-buying, clientelism and organized crime involvement in politics. More recent scholarship, however, has led to doubts that a single formal institution like an electoral system could have such a powerful influence on electoral mobilization. This article puts these positions to an initial test. It examines the impact of the electoral reform on the mobilization capacity of a local faction in a rural county notorious for its factionalism. By illuminating its intricate mobilization structures, it provides support for the second position: These structures are too resilient to be affected by even a radical electoral reform.

■ Manuscript received 29 January 2012; accepted 1 July 2012

Keywords: Taiwan, local factions, electoral system reform, electoral mobilization, clientelism, rural Taiwan

Dr. Christian Göbel is an assistant professor of Chinese Studies at Heidelberg University. His current research interests include the political economy of technological innovation in China and the impact of local change agents on rural reform trajectories. He is the author of *The Politics of Rural Reform in China* (Routledge 2010) and *The Politics of Community Building in Urban China* (Routledge 2011, with Thomas Heberer) and has published numerous papers in journals such as *The China Journal*, *The China Quarterly*, *European Political Science*, and *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* (PVS).

E-mail: <Christian.Goebel@zo.uni-heidelberg.de>

Introduction

While most countries merely modify existing electoral systems, Taiwan is one of the very few countries that have accomplished a radical change. With constitutional amendments passed on 23 August 2004, the Legislative Yuan (LY) abolished the combination of a single non-transferable vote in multi-member districts (SNTV-MMD) and closed-list proportional representation for LY elections. The SNTV-MMD was replaced with a majority system, and the number of legislators was halved from 225 to 113. It was established that from 2008 on, Legislative Yuan elections were to be held every four years, with 73 legislators elected from single-member districts, 34 legislators from an open party-list ballot, and 6 legislators from the aboriginal population (see Stockton 2010; Jou 2009; Lin 2006).

These reforms are radical not only for slashing the number of seats by half, but also because they significantly alter the fashion in which votes are translated into seats. In an insightful experiment, Hans Stockton assesses this difference by comparing the actual results of the 2008 LY election with a hypothetical outcome based on the old electoral system. Not surprisingly, he finds that the new system strengthened the Nationalist Party (KMT, Kuomintang, Guomindang), transformed the multi-party system into a two-party system, and increased the disproportionality of the vote:seat ratio (Stockton 2010; Wu 2008).

Naturally, the real-life impact of electoral reforms is not that straightforward. Candidates wish to maximize the likelihood of getting elected, and voters strive to influence electoral results, so both groups can be expected to adjust their strategies to the new rules of the game (Cox 1997; Nohlen 2007: 224–232). Given the magnitude of change in Taiwan's electoral reforms, the strategic adjustments made by parties, candidates and voters deserve close scholarly attention. Accordingly, previous studies have focused on important questions such as the impact of the electoral system change on proportionality, the party system (Jou 2009; Stockton 2010), voter strategy (Batto 2009), and the campaign strategies of legislative candidates (Sheng 2009).

However, no research currently exists that examines the impact of electoral reform on Taiwan's local factions. This is surprising, because local factions are an integral part of grass-roots electoral mobilization in Taiwan, and a long tradition of scholarship has linked factionalism to the SNTV electoral system. As Wu Chung-li aptly points out, not often have scholars been so unanimously and negatively disposed toward an elec-

toral system as they have been toward the SNTV (Wu 2002: 46). Scholars largely agreed that the SNTV fostered extremism, lowered inter-party competition, heightened intra-party competition, and provided incentives for candidate-centred politics, vote-buying, clientelism and organized crime involvement in politics (Cox 1996; Cox and Niou 1994; Cox and Thies 1998; Hsieh 1996, 1999; Wang 1996; Lin 1996; Huang 1997). As a consequence, many scholars called for a change of the electoral system.

Questioning the idea that the SNTV was indeed the “Pandora’s box” of low-quality politics the mainstream scholarship portrayed it to be, Wu developed alternative hypotheses for the origins of the aforementioned ills and argued that the SNTV had not only vices, but also many virtues. Based on logical reasoning, insights from electoral reform in Japan, and findings about the determinants of candidate and voter behaviour in Taiwan, he argued that the problems were not rooted in the formal electoral system, but in informal practices and the agency of relevant individuals (Wu 2002: 58–59).

The 2004 electoral reform provides a good basis on which to test this contending set of hypotheses. If the SNTV was indeed the chief institutional source of these problems, then electoral reform should have a major mitigating impact. On the other hand, if Wu is correct in his assumption that the roots of these problems lied elsewhere, we would expect these problems to persist. As it is beyond the scope of this article¹ to examine all institutions and actors that are relevant for electoral mobilization, I will restrict my focus to how electoral reform has affected the mobilization capacities of Taiwan’s local factions.

The method of enquiry is a single-case study. In particular, I closely examine a rural county that has gained notoriety for the strength of its local factions and the influence of organized crime on politics. In this respect, this county represents a most likely case (George and Bennett

1 A Faculty Research Grant from the Cultural Division of the Taipei Mission in Sweden enabled me to conduct the fieldwork for this project. I am grateful also to Chin Ko-lin, Chao Yung-mao, Kao Yung-kuang, Lin Jih-wen, Wang Yeh-li and Wu Chung-li for sharing information with me. Huang Sheng-hong and Huang Di-yin have been most helpful in facilitating my interviews in northern Taiwan. Words cannot express my heartfelt gratitude to CKS, who made this project possible in the first place, and to my interview partners, whom I also cannot name, for their trust and their time. Finally, I am indebted to Gunter Schubert for facilitating a visiting fellowship at the European Research Center on Contemporary Taiwan, Tübingen University, and to the two anonymous reviewers for their pertinent insights and valuable suggestions.

2005: 121–122): If the SNTV indeed strongly benefits local factions, the impact of electoral reform should be highest where factions are most entrenched in politics. Most of the information on this rural county was gathered in interviews conducted in October 2010 with members of the leadership stratum of the faction in power, heads of subordinate mobilization networks such as the county's Bureau of Civil Affairs, the former and the present head of the local irrigation association (水利会, *shuilihui*), national and local legislators, a vote-broker (桩脚, *zhuangjiao*), as well as a former acting county commissioner.

As initial findings support Wu's hypotheses that informal structures matter more than formal rules for the relevance of local factions, additional interviews with three vote-brokers and a legislator for a township-level city were conducted in an urbanized setting to generate additional evidence by examining these structures in more detail.

Local Factions, the SNTV and Democracy

As a background to the following analysis, this section will briefly explain what local factions are and how they were integrated into the KMT's political machine with the help of the SNTV electoral system. Against this backdrop, the likely impacts of electoral reform on this machine will be outlined.

Local Factions in Taiwan's Politics

Local factions are a vestige of Taiwan's authoritarian past, where they first helped the Japanese occupants in the administration of rural Taiwan and later constituted an integral part of the KMT single-party regime. They are clientelist networks, and each of Taiwan's counties and municipalities has at least two, sometimes more, local factions, which compete for local economic and power resources. Factions usually are held together by ties of blood, kinship and marriage, but also by personal relationships (Chen 1995: 16–18). The KMT made use of local factions by trading money for support via local-level elections, and political office opened the door to enormous economic spoils, the lifeblood of any clientelistic network (Chen and Chu 1992).

In order to get elected, one usually had to be nominated by the KMT. The party had the organizational means to coordinate votes and candidates, the financial means to co-finance the costly electoral cam-

paigns, and the coercive means to deter non-authorized candidates from standing in a local election. As a consequence, candidates from the various local factions competed for the KMT's nomination, and local alliances against the party were highly unlikely unless the KMT challenged the factions by filing its own candidates. This exchange mechanism was backed up by the rigorous enforcement of a policy that forbade factions to form alliances beyond the county level (Chen 1995). In this way, the KMT managed the astonishing feat of creating enough support to keep the party in power for more than 50 years (see Wu 2003 for a concise English-language introduction of Taiwan's local factions, and Jacobs 2008 for a lucid argument that the patron–client model is inappropriate to model factional interaction in Taiwan).

While local factions depended on the KMT, the reverse was also true. With democratization, the KMT's reliance on local factions increased even further, because for the first time in its history it had to compete with other parties in local and national elections. As it could not afford to pass up the grass-roots support local factions provided, the collaboration between KMT and those factions continued, even intensifying after Taiwan's transition to democracy (Göbel 2004). The position of local factions in Taiwanese politics was further strengthened by the opening of national-level representative organs to popular elections in the beginning of the 1990s. As in local elections, the local factions tended to select the candidates and then present them to the central party for endorsement.

Scholars have found that candidates supported by local factions are more likely to win an election than those who lack such support (Chen 1996; Rigger 1999: 82). The realization of this led to a steady increase of legislators directly hailing from local factions. According to an estimate by Chu Li-lun, who at the time was a KMT legislator, approximately 60 per cent of all representatives in the fourth Legislative Yuan (1998–2001) represented local factions (Li 2000: 74). Because the interest of these legislators was not creating public goods, but securing rents, the legislature became an arena for clientelist politics. Local factions increased their political leverage by occupying important legislative commissions, pork-barreling and engaging in money politics (Göbel 2004). The quality of legislative politics was generally considered to be low, an impression corroborated by frequent outbreaks of fisticuffs in Taiwan's legislature.

The SNTV and Local Factions

As mentioned above, elections were a central element in the interaction between the KMT and local factions, and the application of the rather exotic SNTV system served a clear political purpose. Taiwan inherited the SNTV from the era of Japanese occupation (Wang 1996; Kuo 1999). Of the previously 225 seats in Taiwan's LY, 168 were filled in multi-member districts, and 8 seats each were reserved for Taiwan's native population and Taiwanese citizens who live overseas. Forty-one seats were proportionally assigned according to an open party-list vote. As for the first ballot, the electorate filled between one and twelve (or even more) seats in each of the 29 electoral districts. Each voter could cast one vote for one candidate only. Votes were not transferable, and seats were filled according to the "first-past-the-post" system, meaning that a list was made for every district that listed candidates in order of number of votes received. If a district had ten seats, each of the top ten candidates received one seat (Hsieh 1996: 195).

A general rule for majority systems is that the more seats there are in one district, the more proportional the ratio between votes and seats should be (Wang 1996: 199). In reality, however, the vote:seat ratio could be very disproportional, especially in large districts with charismatic legislators. The 1992 LY elections provide a good example: In Taipei County, the threshold to obtain a seat was 38,845 votes. However, as the top candidates received up to 235,000 votes, the threshold was significantly lowered for the remaining candidates (Wu 1995: 82). As this example shows, the SNTV benefitted small parties and even individual candidates (and is thus considered minority-friendly), but forced big parties to avoid the concentration of votes in popular candidates.

Thus, the incentives provided by this system at first might seem paradoxical: A candidate had to prevent himself from getting too many votes, lest he take away votes from candidates of his own party. The pool of votes one party could get had to be somehow divided between a suitable number of candidates. The consequence was that each party had to know approximately how many votes it could get in an election, had to nominate just enough candidates, and had to ensure that each candidate received a similar number of votes. In order to ensure that these conditions were met, the KMT, but later also the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), made use of the local factions introduced above, which in turn utilized vote-brokers to mobilize and allocate votes. Vote-brokers served as a link between the candidate and the voters and made use of

political campaigns, personal relationships, the mobilization of employees, and vote-buying (Rigger 1994).

Against this backdrop, it is not difficult to see why the SNTV was believed to have benefitted local factions and to have promoted vote-buying. Gregory Noble even regarded the SNTV as a systemic reason for brawls in the Legislative Yuan (Noble 1999: 104).

Expected Impact of Electoral Reforms

Radical reforms can be expected to lead to radical changes in the political landscape, and Taiwan is no exception. As explained in the introduction, electoral reforms effect changes at different levels, and the most immediate changes result from the alteration of proportionality to majority vote and the reduction of seats. As was also pointed out, candidates and voters are aware of the likely impact of technical changes and change their campaign and voting strategies accordingly. They learn to play by the new rules in a way that maximizes their personal benefit. Based on the discussion of the SNTV just provided, I will now briefly outline which behavioural changes electoral systems theory would predict. In theory, electoral reform toward a first-past-the-post system should affect all four features associated with the SNTV: intra-party competition, extremism, factionalism and vote-buying.

As opposed to multi-member districts such as in the SNTV, political parties will nominate only one carefully selected candidate in single-member districts, as is the case with the new electoral system. Intra-party competition is relegated from the elections to the party primaries, and electoral candidates will campaign on a platform that combines district-specific issues with the general party platform. To win as the candidate of a minority party or even as an independent candidate is far more difficult than under the SNTV, because more than half of all eligible voters must be persuaded to vote for the candidate in question. An important intervening variable, as Wu Chung-li is correct to point out, is the size of electoral districts (Wu 2002: 52–53), but the halving of seats seems to have made districts sufficiently large to prevent minority parties or independent candidates from gaining a foothold. The fact that small parties and independent legislators nearly disappeared after the reform seems to confirm this (Stockton 2010).

Relatedly, the new electoral system in theory removes the incentives for candidates and parties to appeal to extremist voters. In order to win the majority of votes in a district, the candidates need to present posi-

tions acceptable to the majority of voters. Hence, first-past-the-post promotes moderate campaign agendas (Adams 1996). For the same reasons, we should expect electoral reform to exert a negative influence on local factionalism as well. Given the power of the major parties to file individual candidates, the latter can be expected to adhere to the party platform instead of the particularist influence of local factions. Indeed, first-past-the-post should incite parties to nominate those candidates who convincingly represent their party and to get rid of members of local factions who are primarily interested in making a profit.

Finally, electoral reform should make vote-buying obsolete. In the SNTV, a small number of votes was frequently enough to tip the balance in favour of a particular candidate, and strategic vote-buying could provide just the amount of critical votes needed. This incentive disappears in (large) single-member districts, unless both parties are nearly equally strong. As mentioned above, the reduction in seats makes it even more difficult for parties and candidates to assess voter preferences and identify swing voters because the ratio between voters and candidates increases. On a related note, this increase also means that each candidate would have to buy far more votes than before. Seen from a systemic perspective, the necessity for political parties to cooperate with local factions should disappear, and the influence of local factions in the electoral process should also vanish in consequence.

The Social Embeddedness of Factional Mobilization

The upshot of the hypothetical effects of the change in electoral rules just described is that if the SNTV was indeed the “Pandora’s box” scholars portrayed it to be, Taiwan’s electoral reform should seriously harm local factions, if not dispense with them altogether. On the other hand, if informal structures and personal characteristics are as important as – or even more important than – the SNTV in sustaining factional politics, then the local factions would have to adapt to the changes but would not be threatened by them. In the remainder of this article, these hypotheses will be tested by means of an in-depth analysis of the impact of the reform on the mobilization capacities of Taiwan’s local factions. As outlined in the introduction to this article, a most likely case was chosen as an object of study, and the findings are contrasted with a least likely case:

an urbanized county-level district in northern Taiwan where positions should prevail over persons in voter mobilization.

The findings of this exercise support Wu's hypotheses and call into question the assumption that the SNTV was the root cause of factional politics in Taiwan. They illustrate that the impact of electoral reform is overestimated, while the standing power of informal mobilization networks is underestimated. Arguably, this is the result of a blind spot of existing scholarship, whose focus has mainly been on the relationship between local factions and the political centre. Far less attention has been devoted to the relationship between local factions and the general public.

How do local factions mobilize their constituencies? The conventional understanding in the research literature is that factions and voters are connected via vote-brokers who mobilize votes for local factions. It is understood that each faction has several vote-brokers hailing from very different backgrounds, which are tied to the voters by means of *guanxi* (关系) – affective relations or “connections” (Bosco 1992). Shelly Rigger makes the very useful distinction between “office-holding”, “social”, and “association-based” vote-brokers, who each operate in different spheres of influence and with different methods, including undertaking political campaigns, utilizing and offering personal relationships, mobilizing employees, and buying votes (Rigger 1994: 167–172, 94–98). The literature leaves unclear, however, how vote-brokers are recruited and how the number of vote-brokers each faction has at its disposal is determined. The underlying assumption seems to be that the recruitment of vote-brokers is a process highly contingent on both the local context and the intensity with which members of local factions maintain or extend their *guanxi* networks. If this assumption is correct, it follows that local factions will be severely weakened if the nodes of such networks – usually the leadership circle of a local faction – die, leave the faction, or are imprisoned.

The field research I conducted in the rural Taiwanese county shows that the networks within which local factions mobilize voters are far more institutionalized than previously assumed. It furthermore reveals the patrimonial character of factional networks. They were organized around not only key persons, but also key political organizations (see below). The mobilization of voters is a similar process for each of the organizations. Persons who are higher in the organizational or social hierarchy mobilize persons lower in the hierarchy, who then “pull the

votes” (拉票, *lapiao*) of their respective constituencies. For example, higher-level officials in the farmers’ or irrigation associations visit lower-level officials and influential community members at home to convince them to mobilize for a specific legislator. In this process, they supply them with the arguments that can then be presented to the next lower level. These arguments range from specific material benefits promised by a legislator in the case of his (re-)election to unspecific future rewards and affective factors (“He is a really nice person”). In this process, use is made of organizational resources such as budgetary allocations, special construction funds, the extension of credit, or promises of future rewards to motivate voters to cast their vote for a specific candidate. Hence, formal politics and clientelism blend into each other in the fashion that is characteristic for neopatrimonial structures.

The following sections will illustrate that vote mobilization is a very systematic process within these organizations, and that several of these organizations are interlinked and form an impressive political machine in which local factions play a key role. This becomes clear from the way in which the members of the faction under study classified their mobilization structures.

Mobilization Systems

As a key informant points out, different spheres of influence in the political, economic and social realms are divided into various “systems” (系統, *xitong*), which can be best understood as clearly defined functional arenas in which mobilization takes place.

The political realm encompasses the administrative apparatus, the (KMT) party organizations, and the national and local legislatures. “Money machines” like the farmers’ and fishermen’s associations belong to the economic realm, as does the influential irrigation association. In the social realm, finally, support is mobilized in schools and civil society organizations. Most important for local factions are the first six *xitong*, which are elected, endowed with public funds, and replicated at all administrative levels. Accordingly, local factions seek to “control” (掌握, *zhangwo*) these organizations. This is different for the other *xitong*, where influence is not absolute, but can only be extended by gaining influence in individual organizations (such as public or military schools, alumni associations, parents, and teachers’ associations) (Anonymous 1 2010). Hence, the classification of spheres of influence into different *xitong* is not merely a heuristic typology, but serves the leadership of local fac-

tions to both measure and strategically extend factional influence. For example, the loss of one *xitong* can be compensated by the gain of another while the loss of two crucial *xitong* can spell the end for a faction even if the leadership remains in place and their personal ties intact (Anonymous 2 2010).

Another crucial finding is the patrimonial character of these *xitong*. In contrast to pure *guanxi* networks, which transcend political hierarchies, the *xitong* are structured by institutional as well as personalistic factors. Personal *guanxi* is the glue that links these *xitong* with each other. The result is a *guanxi* network that is intermeshed with political organizations but at the same time transcends these organizations. For example, the irrigation *xitong* can also mobilize support for candidates in presidential, legislative and gubernatorial elections. Conversely, the administrative and legislative *xitong* persuades voters to cast their ballot for a specific candidate in irrigation association elections. As I will show below, the leaders of these *xitong* play a crucial role in facilitating these processes. These leaders, however, are not indispensable. In the rural county where I conducted my fieldwork, the former head of the irrigation association, who enjoyed great respect in his community and had a very wide social network, fell out with the dominant faction. As a result, he lost his re-election bid despite his considerable experience, charisma and social capital to a young and relatively unknown newcomer.

It is necessary to describe in greater detail the administrative *xitong* and the three *xitong* that provide services for farmers due to their relevance for the case at hand. In addition, this description serves to illustrate the hierarchical and patrimonial character of voter mobilization.

The administrative *xitong* encompasses the county-level bureaus, the township-level mayors and administrative offices (公所, *gongsuo*), and the neighbourhood wardens (邻长, *linzhang*) and village chiefs (村里长, *cunlizhang*). Elections are held for all these offices, giving each unit a degree of independence from the higher unit. Accordingly, all county-level factions strive to control as many townships as possible. It helps in this quest that the township-level administrations heavily depend on transfer payments from the county government, as their own revenue is not enough to meet their expenditures.

The neighbourhood wardens and village chiefs have a peculiar position in this *xitong*, an important detail that the literature has so far neglected: The institution of village and neighbourhood wardens is a relict from the time of the Japanese occupation, where wardens were respon-

sible for the security of a neighbourhood. Today, their function mainly lies in mediating conflicts on the neighbourhood level. Despite their long history, these institutions are far from old-fashioned; indeed, they are in line with modern, communitarian ideas of societal self-government (Etzioni 1968). Solving conflicts without state involvement, it is believed, not only unburdens the government, but also strengthens the local community.

Accordingly, neighbourhood wardens tend to be respected and trusted members of the community, and it is in line with this demand that they are elected in the neighbourhoods they will serve. Their social capital and their control of budgetary resources gives them considerable influence over voting behaviour, especially of those persons with a long history in the village or neighbourhood. The main difference to the township chiefs, however, is that the county-level Bureau for Civil Affairs (BCA, 民政局, *minzhengju*) directly allocates all funding for village and neighbourhood affairs. Thus, the county can bypass the townships when dealing with the village chiefs and neighbourhood wardens, giving it additional leverage over these grass-roots institutions. In fact, as a former head of the BCA explains, much of his time in office was spent touring the countryside and meeting with village wardens to mobilize votes for his faction (Anonymous 3 2010).

Farmers' and fishermen's associations have often been associated with corruption, because the chairmanship gave local factions discretion over the credit departments of these organizations (Chen and Chu 1992: 89–90). In the initial years after democratization, low levels of transparency and lax supervision had made credit manipulation easy, causing a steady increase in the rate of overdue loans (Chiu 2000: 102). These organizations provide, besides rents, an excellent infrastructure for electoral mobilization. The farmers' association is unique in that its organization covers not only the county and township levels, but via its branches also the village level. In the county in question, more than 100,000 families were members of the farmers' association, roughly half of all families in the county (Anonymous 4 2010). The reach of the fishermen's association is somewhat smaller, because farmers outnumber fishermen in most counties. Still, it is a force to be reckoned with – in the rural county under study, it had more than 30,000 members.

Stricter supervision, new laws and the DPP administration's anti-corruption policies have rendered blatant corruption in the legislatures and the farmers' and fishermen's associations difficult. In the county

where I conducted my field research, this seems to have increased the relative importance of the irrigation association *xitong*. In organizational terms, the hierarchical structure of the irrigation association is also very suitable for purposes of mobilization: Each county-level unit commands work stations (工作站, *gongzuozhan*) at the township level and below, which in turn supervise various functional and territorial groups (小组, *xiaozu*). Each group consists of several subdivisions. Combined with a very significant membership density (every fourth inhabitant of the county is a member of the IA), this organization is a powerful machine for generating votes (Anonymous 5 2010). Although it does not penetrate rural society as deep as the farmers' association, it is a more effective instrument for mobilizing voters in county and national elections. In contrast to the county-level farmers' and fishermen's associations, which merely have the power to "guide" (指导, *zhidao*) the affairs of subordinate organizations, the relationship between the irrigation association and its local units is one of command (Anonymous 6 2010).

It should be added that the constellation between the three farmers' *xitong* just presented might be particular to the county in which I conducted my field research, where the irrigation association had long been headed by a very well-connected individual. In other counties, the farmers' association might still be more powerful. Still, the mechanisms of voter mobilization and the interrelationship between the *xitong* should be similar.

How the *Xitong* Interrelate

As implied above, these *xitong* operate independent of each other, but are interlinked by personal relations at all levels. Therefore, each *xitong* can be used to mobilize support for elections taking place in the other *xitong*, and the key persons at each administrative level are in close contact with their counterparts at other levels (Anonymous 4 2010). Most crucial for this to work, however, is that these *xitong* are controlled by the same faction. Interestingly, the linchpin that holds the system in place is not political office, but personal relations: Prior to 2005, the head of the faction served as county commissioner and effectively controlled the administrative *xitong*. The leaders of three other *xitong* were connected to him either by blood or by close friendship: The head of the provincial farmers' association was his brother-in-law, his sister served as a legislator, his "sworn brother" (拜兄弟, *baixiongdì*) headed the irrigation association, the son of his sworn brother held another legislative seat, and his

close friend was the speaker of the county assembly (Anonymous 2 2010).

Since then, the county has seen some changes: The county commissioner has been replaced, but there are strong indications that the dominant faction supported the campaign of the new commissioner and therefore retained much influence in the administrative *xitong*. A number of bureau chiefs and more than half of all townships remain loyal to the dominant faction. In the legislative *xitong*, the most important change is that the seat previously held by the commissioner's sister is now held by his daughter, and that another seat was captured by the opposition (see below). Finally, the irrigation association is no longer controlled by his sworn brother, but by a relative of his godfather (Anonymous 7 2010).

As these sections have shown, electoral mobilization by local factions happens in networks that are far more organized than the existing literature suggests. Horizontally, these networks are divided into different "systems". Vertically, each of these "systems" can be subdivided into different levels, encompassing the apex of the faction, the leadership stratum, township-level political leaders, their subordinates, and finally the vote-brokers at the grass-roots level. This mobilization machine was highly effective, and it is no exaggeration to state that the overwhelming proportion of the county's voters was in direct contact with at least one of the *xitong*. In fact, it was common for one person to be associated with two or more *xitong*. As the following sections will show, these structures were resilient enough to withstand even an electoral system change as radical as the one implemented in 2004. The case will be made by investigating the impact of electoral reform on two of the most important *xitong* in national-level elections: the irrigation association and the administrative *xitong*.

Service Associations in Rural Taiwan

In order to assess the impact of electoral reforms on the mobilization activities conducted by the irrigation association, interviews were conducted with a former head of the provincial irrigation association and the present head of the irrigation association in the county in which I undertook my field research.

I was surprised that both of the aforementioned people seemed puzzled by my introductory question: What was the impact of electoral reform on the mobilization capacity of local factions? When confronted

with the specifics – the reduction in legislative seats and the change to first-past-the-post – the interviewees stated independently from each other that electoral reforms surely necessitated adjustments, but did not affect the factions' abilities to mobilize (Anonymous 8 2010; Anonymous 5 2010). In effect, it became clear that this hypothesis was premised on the assumption that there was a systemic need under the SNTV for the irrigation association to be involved in electoral mobilization, and that this need disappeared with the new electoral system. Seen from the perspective of the voters, this hypothesis assumes that the voters regarded factional mobilization as a necessary evil and would embrace partisan politics once given the chance.

As the head of the county's irrigation association points out, however, this hypothesis neglects the fact that his organization enjoys a high degree of legitimacy among its members, and that the political advice of its functionaries carries much weight in the opinion formation of the voters. Like most other interviewees, he felt the need to elaborate on the ingredients of successful political mobilization, and criticized as too utilitarian the simplistic understanding that voters need to be given either money (vote-buying) or an attractive political agenda (partisan politics). In his view, both elements play a role in electoral mobilization, but neither a dominant one. The most important element, he stressed, was building up affective relations (感情, *ganqing*) with the constituency – visiting them, showing them respect and making them feel important (Anonymous 5 2010).

An anecdote relayed by the former head of the national irrigation association illustrates this strategy well. He was in office when Lee Teng-hui (Li Denghui) campaigned to be re-elected in the first direct presidential elections in 1996, so it fell to him to mobilize support for Lee in his *xitong*. One crucial element, he claimed, was a photo op he arranged with Lee. He placed Lee on a chair, and more than 300 heads of all local irrigation associations were invited to “take a picture with the president”. The photo each functionary obtained provided an incentive to mobilize support for Lee and thereby increase the social value of the picture, and the event gave Lee the chance to exchange a few words with each of the participants. The fact that Lee was charismatic, unassuming and knowledgeable about agricultural issues played to his advantage, and it was not difficult to convince them to get the votes in for Lee (Anonymous 8 2010).

Where does this legitimacy come from? The head of the county's irrigation association stressed that although the association does not have a credit department like the farmers' and fishermen's associations and therefore cannot make strategic loans to "buy" the votes of a constituency, it nevertheless has great influence. He reasoned that his organization was even more influential than the farmers' association:

It is true that the farmers' organizations can use their credit departments to mobilize support, which we cannot. Still, we are more powerful, because all peasants depend on the water we deliver (Anonymous 5 2010).

In reality, however, this difference in influence does not matter much, because both organizations work for the KMT, and the membership overlap is considerable: The membership overlap exceeds 80 per cent (Anonymous 8 2010).

Three aspects are of importance when explaining the influence of the irrigation association on local voting behaviour. First, the peasants are highly dependent on its services and tend to support recommended candidates if they are satisfied with the services rendered. It is not difficult to understand that an organization on which the peasants' livelihood depends commands trust and support if it performs well. Second, the former head of the provincial irrigation association stresses that the members of his organization are "regarded as heroes". They are respected for the hard work they do in maintaining and repairing the waterways, and often work side by side with the peasants. The job is hard and can be dangerous – especially during typhoons, when the workers need to leave their homes to repair damaged infrastructure. Thus, an element of charisma is added to the performance factor described above (Anonymous 8 2010). Finally, the peasants' dependence on water allowed the association to punish deviant behaviour: If a locality supported a rival candidate, fewer or slower services could be provided (Anonymous 5 2010).

Given the organization's scope, its social standing and its large number of members, the irrigation association has maintained its influence even under the new rules, as its leaders claim. The head of the county's irrigation association claims to have more than 3,000 vote-brokers, of which "80 to 90 per cent" could be counted on to mobilize votes for "any candidate I specify, no matter which party he comes from. If I say one candidate must be supported, then he will be supported" (Anonymous 5 2010).

The fact that the former head of the irrigation association lost his re-election bid does not contradict this: among others, his electoral defeat was caused by a loss of support from the other *xitong*.

In this light, it does not make a difference if support is generated for one or for several candidates. One could even say that mobilization has become easier, because there is no need anymore to apportion a specific number of votes to a given candidate. On the other hand, however, the official pointed out that the new system incited him to rely mainly on the “carrots” of providing good service to all constituents, and that it would not be expedient to use the “sticks” of discriminatory service provision anymore if a particular district did not vote for the prescribed candidate. This not only is due to the fact that one candidate’s excessive gain is no longer the KMT’s loss, but is also owed stricter laws and tighter supervision than before (Anonymous 8 2010).

The results of the 2008 election seem to prove the interviewees right. In both electoral districts, members of the core group of the dominant faction were elected with comfortable majorities. Given that it was the first time for one of the legislators to stand for political office, and that all the legislators had limited political experience and lacked charisma, it is not difficult to see that factional influence remained strong. This is further corroborated by the fact that the KMT chose to not let a certain core member of the rival faction, who controlled the party *xitong*, compete with the newcomers, because he was certain to lose. A final test is the result of a by-election for a vacated seat in the Legislative Yuan, in which both factions remained neutral. Neither the non-factional candidate nominated by the KMT nor an independent local heavyweight emerged victorious.

Neighbourhood Wardens in Urban Taiwan

Similar to the irrigation association, the administrative *xitong* is entrenched deeply enough in local society to withstand the impacts of electoral reform. As pointed out above, the central role of neighbourhood wardens and village chiefs as vote-brokers has so far been under-researched, so special attention will be given to their role in electoral mobilization. In the rural county under observation, much that has been said about the social capital of members of the irrigation association is also true for village chiefs (Anonymous 9 2010). In fact, the findings so far

suggest that the social embeddedness of the various *xitong* in rural society is so deep that electoral reform hardly affected them.

The fact that the KMT's support network is so deeply embedded in rural society is of course acknowledged by its largest opposition party, the DPP. Indeed, observers differentiate between the organization-based campaigning of the KMT and the issue-based campaigning of the DPP. In legislative elections (national and local), the KMT is seen to chiefly rely on the networks described in this paper, while the DPP allegedly identifies hot topics that appeal to its voters. Hsiao Bi-khim (Xiao Meiqin), an advisor to DPP presidential candidate Tsai Ying-wen (Cai Yingwen), confirms that her party's strategy is to especially target young and urban voters, as it sees itself unable to defeat the KMT in an organizational battle (Anonymous 10 2010).

I expected this strategy to be replicated at the urban neighbourhood level, and conducted additional interviews with members of a support network affiliated with the DPP in an urbanized setting in northern Taiwan that displayed very weak local factions. However, the mechanisms I encountered there were very similar to those that local factions used to mobilize voters in the countryside. A former legislator of a township-level city in northern Taiwan explained that it is more the political culture of the voters than the electoral system that influences how certain constituencies are mobilized. Specifically, this difference in cultures manifests itself in the rootedness of a person in the neighbourhood: While people with a long history in the neighbourhood tend to be susceptible to being approached and lobbied for a certain candidate, newcomers are difficult to mobilize on such a private basis. They are reluctant to be instrumentalized, especially if they are well educated and young. Such people tend to form their own opinions and are not susceptible to persuasion, not least because they do not want to be part of the local community – frequently, they have both their work and their social life in the city centre, come home only to rest, and value their privacy. They tend to regard contact attempts as a nuisance and often refuse to open the door if the wardens come to visit (Anonymous 11 2010).

The story is different with long-term residents, and again, such support is not necessarily about exchanging money for favours. According to the legislator, the funds she and the wardens receive are used for community projects. Although it is mainly the supporters who profit from these funds, everybody belonging to a specific spatial or functional group can profit from these expenditures: If a neighbourhood play-

ground is built, all parents can send their children there. In contrast to vote-buying, which satisfies individual interests, such projects target group-based interests. This, however, does not mean that individual interests do not matter. As in rural Taiwan, support is generated by establishing affective relations. Describing their work, three neighbourhood wardens explained that they aimed not only to keep existing supporters happy, but also to generate new ones:

When we enter the living room of a new neighbour, we take a careful look around. What newspaper does he read? If we see that he supports the KMT, we exchange a few courtesies and quickly leave. If someone supports the DPP, we try to keep him happy. Those that are neutral we try to win over by explaining to them what they can expect from the candidate. Frequently, we even take the candidate to individual households, be it as a reward for received support, or to persuade those who are undecided. To be visited by a legislator shows people that they are important (Anonymous 12 2010).

Similar to the mechanisms of electoral mobilization with the help of *xitong* in rural Taiwan, people belonging to different political realms also interact with each other in urban settings. Another similarity is the central role of elections in this process: The wardens support the legislator in his/ her campaign by lobbying for him/ her in their neighbourhood and introducing him/ her to residents. In turn, the legislator also supports the wardens ideationally and financially. This is important because elections are a costly affair even at the neighbourhood level. Leaflets to introduce the candidate and his/ her political positions need to be printed, and often the candidates give away small presents like ballpoint pens or, more frequently, paper towels, which allow for more information on the surface. In addition, people need to be hired to distribute the material. As one candidate confides, his campaign costs added up to approximately 30,000 TWD. As most of the wardens earn low to medium wages, this is a considerable investment. If he receives a certain percentage of votes, he will receive compensation for each vote and can recuperate his costs; otherwise, the investment will be lost (Anonymous 12 2010).

In this research location it also became apparent that electoral reform did not change the mechanisms and strategies applied in grassroots mobilization. As in rural Taiwan, the support that went to several candidates is now provided to only one candidate. What does seem to effect a change in how voters need to be mobilized are structural alterations like urbanization, modernization and social mobility.

Conclusion

The mainstream literature used to closely associate the SNTV with the considerable influence of local factions in Taiwan's politics. In addition, the SNTV was made responsible for a number of related ills marring electoral mobilization in Taiwan. Sceptics doubted this and suggested that these problems were rooted in a number of entrenched informal institutions and could not be solved by an electoral reform.

The case studies presented in this article support the view of the sceptics. In rural areas (and presumably also in traditional urban neighbourhoods), local factions managed to entrench themselves deeply enough in local society to not be affected by electoral reform. It is a noteworthy finding that personal *guanxi* is not the only mechanism that connects local factions to voters. Personal relations and connections do of course matter, but they are interwoven with a number of mobilization structures (*xitong*) that penetrate a multitude of political, economic and societal sub-systems. Hence, factions and voters are connected in an intricate patrimonial network where voters are approached by actors of at least one *xitong*, if not several.

Although most of these structures were created during authoritarianism, they not only survived democratization, but even prospered in the new, more liberal climate. It became necessary for the DPP, which during authoritarianism stood outside these networks, to create its own network of vote-brokers, if not its own local factions. The SNTV facilitated these processes but was not the linchpin that held the political machine in place. In other words, the influence of the electoral system on factional politics has been overestimated, while the staying power of these networks has been underestimated.

Another perspective supports this conclusion. The article has shown that the influence of local factions is waning in some locations, as is the personalist mode of mobilization. Once again, the main reason for this development does not lie in the electoral system. Rather, urbanization and modernization make it difficult for vote-brokers to establish affective relations with voters. These processes take time, which people often do not have, and many young and educated people are not easily attracted by the paternalism that often characterizes the relationship between vote captains and voters.

It follows that personalist campaigning is likely to remain strong in rural areas and in traditional urban neighbourhoods, both of which re-

present fertile breeding grounds for local factions. However, their influence will be reduced as Taiwan continues to urbanize and modernize.

References

- Adams, Greg D. (1996), Legislative Effects of Single-Member vs. Multi-Member Districts, in: *American Journal of Political Science*, 40, 1, 129–144.
- Anonymous 1 (2010), Interview, informant close to the dominant faction, Taipei, 15 October.
- Anonymous 2 (2010), Interview, informant close to the dominant faction, rural Taiwan, 4 October.
- Anonymous 3 (2010), Interview, former head of local BCA, rural Taiwan, 10 October.
- Anonymous 4 (2010), Interview, county legislator, rural Taiwan, 9 October.
- Anonymous 5 (2010), Interview, head of the county irrigation association, rural Taiwan, 8 October.
- Anonymous 6 (2010), Interview, head of the county irrigation association, rural Taiwan, 19 October.
- Anonymous 7 (2010), Interview, godfather, rural Taiwan, 19 October.
- Anonymous 8 (2010), Interview, former head of provincial irrigation association, rural Taiwan, 22 October.
- Anonymous 9 (2010), Interview, vote broker, rural Taiwan, 20 October.
- Anonymous 10 (2010), Interview, Hsiao Bi-kim, Taipei, 13 October.
- Anonymous 11 (2010), Interview, township-level city legislator, Northern Taiwan, 13 October.
- Anonymous 12 (2010), Interview, three township-level city vote-brokers, Northern Taiwan, 13 October.
- Batto, Nathan F. (2009), Change and Continuity in the Personal Vote after Electoral Reform in Taiwan, in: *Issues & Studies*, 45, 2, 99–123.
- Bosco, Joseph (1992), Taiwan Factions. Guanxi, Patronage, and the State in Local Politics, in: *Ethnology*, 31, 2, 157–183.
- Chen, Ming-tung (1996), Local Factions and Elections in Taiwan's Democratization, in: Hung-mao Tien (ed.), *Taiwan's Electoral Politics and Democratic Transition: Riding the Third Wave*, Armonk, London: M. E. Sharpe, 174–192.
- Chen, Ming-tung (1995), 派系政治与台湾政治变迁 (*Paixi zhengzhi yu Taiwan zhengzhi bianqian*, *Factional Politics and Taiwan's Political Development*), Taipei: Yuedan.

- Chen, Ming-tung, and Yun-han Chu (1992), 区域性联合独占经济、地方派系与省议员选举：一项省议员候选人背景资料的分析，1950–1986 (Quyuxing lianhe duzhan jingji, difang paixi yu shengyiyuan xuanju: yi xiang shengyiyuan houxuanren beijing ciliao de fenxi, 1950-1986, Regional Oligopolistic Economy, Local Factions, and Provincial Assembly Elections: An Analysis of the Socio-economic Background of Candidates, 1950–1986), in: *Proceedings of the National Science Council C, Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2, 1, 89–90.
- Chin, Ko-Lin (2003), *Heijin: Organized Crime, Business, and Politics in Taiwan*, Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.
- Chiu, Hua-mei (2000), 透观黑金关系 (Touguan heijin guanxi, Seeing Trough Black Gold Relationships), in: 天下杂志 (*Tianxia Zazhi, Tianxia Monthly*), 224, 98–104.
- Cox, Gary W. (1997), *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems*, Cambridge, UK, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Cox, Gary W. (1996), Is the Single Nontransferable Vote Superproportional? Evidence from Japan and Taiwan, in: *American Journal of Political Science*, 40, 3, 740–755.
- Cox, Gary W., and Emerson Niou (1994), Seat Bonuses under the Single Nontransferable Vote System: Evidence from Japan and Taiwan, in: *Comparative Politics*, 26, 2, 221–236.
- Cox, Gary W., and Michael F. Thies (1998), The Cost of Intraparty Competition: The Single, Nontransferable Vote and Money Politics in Taiwan, in: *Comparative Political Studies*, 31, 3, 267–291.
- Etzioni, Amitai (1968), *The Active Society*, New York: The Free Press.
- George, Alexander L., and Andrew Bennett (2005), *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Göbel, Christian (2004), Beheading the Hydra: Combating Corruption and Organised Crime in the KMT and DPP Eras, in: *China Perspectives*, 56, 14–25.
- Hsieh, John Fuh-sheng (1999), Manipulating the Electoral System under the SNTV: The Case of the Republic of China on Taiwan, in: Bernard Grofmann, Chull Lee Sung, Ewin Winkler, and Brian Woodall (eds), *Elections in Japan, Korea and Taiwan under the Single Non-Transferable Vote. The Comparative Study of an Embedded Institution*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 65–84.
- Hsieh, John Fuh-sheng (1996), The SNTV System and Its Political Implications, in: Hung-mao Tien (ed.), *Taiwan's Electoral Politics and*

- Democratic Transition: Riding the Third Wave*, Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 193–212.
- Huang, Teh-fu (1997), Party Systems in Taiwan and South Korea, in: Larry Diamond et al. (eds), *Consolidating the Third Wave Democracies: Themes and Perspectives*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 144–147.
- Jacobs, Bruce J. (2008), *Local Politics in Rural Taiwan under Dictatorship and Democracy*, Norwalk, CT: EastBridge.
- Jou, Willy (2009), Electoral Reform and Party System Development in Japan and Taiwan, in: *Asian Survey*, 49, 5, 759–785.
- Kuo, Cheng-tien (1999), The Origins of State-Local Relations in Taiwan: A New Institutional Perspective, in: *Issues & Studies*, 35, 6, 29–58.
- Li, Mingxuan (2000), 挣钱夺权：混战立法院 (Zheng qian duo quan: hunzhan Lifayuan, Earn Money to Seize Power: Tangled Warfare in the Lifayuan), in: 天下杂志 (*Tianxia Za zhi, Tianxia Monthly*), 235, 70–78.
- Lin, Jih-wen (2006), The Politics of Reform in Japan and Taiwan, in: *Journal of Democracy*, 17, 2, 118–131.
- Lin, Jih-wen (1996), *Consequences of the Single Nontransferable Vote Rule. Comparing the Japan and Taiwan experiences*, PhD dissertation, Los Angeles: University of California.
- Noble, Gregory W. (1999), Opportunity Lost: Partisan Incentives and the 1997 Constitutional Revisions in Taiwan, in: *The China Journal*, 41, 89–114.
- Nohlen, Dieter (2007), *Wahlrecht und Parteiensystem: über die politischen Auswirkungen von Wahlsystemen*, Opladen: Leske and Budrich.
- Rigger, Shelley (1999), *Politics in Taiwan: Voting for Democracy*, London, New York: Routledge.
- Rigger, Shelley (1994), *Machine Politics in the New Taiwan: Institutional Reform and Electoral Strategy in the Republic of China on Taiwan*, unpublished Dissertation, Harvard University.
- Sheng, Shing-Yuan (2009), *The Dynamic Triangles among Constituencies, Parties, and Legislators: A Comparison Before and After the Reform of Electoral System*, paper presented at the Annual Meeting of American Political Science Association, Toronto, Canada, 3–6 September.
- Stockton, Hans (2010), How Rules Matter: Electoral Reform in Taiwan, in: *Social Science Quarterly*, 91, 1, 21–41.

- Wang, Yeh-lih (1996), The Political Consequences of the Electoral System: Single Nontransferable Voting in Taiwan, in: *Issues & Studies*, 32, 8, 96–104.
- Wu, Chung-li (2008), A Simple Model for Predicting the Outcome of the 2008 Legislative Yuan Elections in Taiwan, in: *Issues & Studies*, 44, 4, 1–28.
- Wu, Chung-li (2003), Local Factions and the Kuomintang in Taiwan's Electoral Politics, in: *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 3, 89–111.
- Wu, Chung-li (2002), SNTV 的省思：弊端肇因或是代罪羔羊？ (SNTV de xingsi: biduan zhaoyin huoshi daizui gaoyang?, Reconsidering the SNTV: Pandora's Box or Scapegoat?), in: 问题与研究 (*Wenti yu yanjiu, Issues and Studies*), 41, 2, 45–60.
- Wu, Jaushieh Joseph (1995), *Taiwan's Democratization: Forces Behind the New Momentum*, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.

Contents

Introduction

- Gunter SCHUBERT
Contemporary Taiwan Studies in Europe:
More Institutionalized, More Vital 3

Research Articles

- Cal CLARK and Alexander C. TAN
Political Polarization in Taiwan:
A Growing Challenge to Catch-all Parties? 7
- Jonathan SULLIVAN and Eliyahu V. SAPIR
Ma Ying-jeou's Presidential Discourse 33
- **Christian GÖBEL**
**The Impact of Electoral System Reform on Taiwan's
Local Factions 69**
- WANG Hung-jen
Liberalist Variation in Taiwan:
Four Democratization Orientations 93
- Stefan FLEISCHAUER
Cross-Strait Relations and the Way Forward:
Observations from a European Integration Perspective 117

Analysis

- Gunter SCHUBERT
No Winds of Change: Taiwan's 2012 National Elections and
the Post-election Fallout 143

- Contributors 163