

# Urban Taiwan's State-Structured Neighborhood Governance: Deepening Democracy, Partisan Civic Engagement, Inverted Class Bias

Benjamin L. Read

Associate Professor  
Politics Department  
University of California, Santa Cruz  
bread@ucsc.edu

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**Abstract:** Taiwan's system of neighborhood-level governance has origins in institutions of local control employed by both the Republican-era Kuomintang and the Japanese colonizers. In more recent times, the neighborhood wardens (*lizhang*, 里長) have come to play a complex set of roles, including state agent, political party operative, and community representative. Wardens of a new generation, with more women in their ranks than ever before, have adopted new practices and built different relationships with their communities, parties, and city governments compared to those of the older, often clan-based bosses.

Focusing on Taipei with glances at other locales, this paper draws on ethnographic research, interviews, surveys, public records, and other sources. It explores the particular kind of political and civic engagement that the neighborhood governance system elicits. It is statist; though independent in many respects, wardens have government-mandated duties and work closely with city and district officials. Community development associations (*shequ fazhan xiehui*), as well as other neighborhood groups and wardens themselves, compete for and receive government funding. Warden elections are also deeply democratic in ways that, in global perspective, are unusual for such ultra-local urban offices. Over the past 25 years, elections have become hotly contested, voter turnout has risen to remarkably high rates, and KMT dominance has partially given way to political pluralization. Citizens' participation in this setting, like others, often shows deep divisions along partisan lines, with wardens and local associations split by party loyalties. Finally, civic engagement with the neighborhood system shows an inverted class bias. Residents with less education, for example, are more likely to know their wardens and vote in warden elections. Politics in Taiwan's *lizhang* thus has evolved substantially over time, and also contrasts in multiple ways with Western images of neighborhood politics.

## Introduction

In Western countries, urban neighborhoods are seen as a nurturing cradle for civil society, that is, for citizens' groups organizing and taking action independent of state control (Dilger 1992; Forrest and Kearns 2001; Schmid 2001; Thomson 2001; Nelson 2005).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in liberal settings, units as small and amorphous as neighborhoods can seem, by and large, to lack meaningful and persistent ties to city governments.<sup>2</sup> Matthew Crenson, for example, dubbed such political connections "foreign entanglements" and found them to be limited or fleeting in most parts of Baltimore (Crenson 1983, 237, 290-294). As well, research on civic activity at the neighborhood or community level often focuses on organizations that are separate from political parties.<sup>3</sup>

Neighborhoods in East and Southeast Asia do not fit this general image, or at least complicate it. Though there are exceptions, states in this region generally do not leave the neighborhood space for residents to organize just as they please, or to remain neglected and unorganized. Rather, they maintain elaborate networks of official organizational structures at this level. In some cases they have done so for centuries — in one form or another — through rural as well as urban institutions of administration and control.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I follow Larry Diamond in defining civil society as "the realm of organized social life that is open, voluntary, self-generating, at least partially self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules" (1999, 221).

<sup>2</sup> Some exceptions in the United States are explored in Berry, Portney and Thomson's study of cities that made special efforts to incorporate the participation of neighborhoods in city governance, such as through advisory boards (1993). As the pages that follow should make clear, these are quite different from Taiwan's neighborhood governance institutions.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Sampson et al.'s impressive study of the "community structure of collective civic action" excluded "routine political activity initiated by the state or formal political parties" as unrelated to the civic capacity of citizens (2005, 683).

<sup>4</sup> Cases are found in Japan, China, South Korea, Vietnam, Singapore, and Indonesia in addition to Taiwan. One way in which I have endeavored to survey this landscape is through a co-edited volume that presents case studies by country experts (Read and Pekkanen 2009).

Part of the impetus for this paper, then, is to show how institutions and conditions in East and Southeast Asia create particular forms of civic engagement. But this paper is about Taiwan specifically, and much of its motivation has to do with things that are specific to the ROC. Although Taiwan has similarities to other countries in the region with respect to urban governance, it is also quite distinct. Yet urban politics generally and the micro-politics of neighborhoods more specifically remain under-explored subjects in Taiwan studies. In my work I hope to illuminate a vibrant realm of community participation and contestation that deserves to be appreciated as one component of Taiwan's political scene.

This paper draws on research I have conducted over the course of five trips to Taiwan, starting in late 2003.<sup>5</sup> During these trips I made site visits to 13 neighborhoods in Taipei, in most cases returning on multiple occasions for repeated interviews and observational research. I also conducted many other interviews for this project: including with 30 residents of Taipei (by myself, and with research assistants), and with a range of representatives and officials, including city council members, civil affairs bureau staff, district chiefs, district staff, neighborhood liaison officers, and police officers, as well as staff of the KMT and the DPP. I designed a survey of Taipei residents concerning neighborhood matters and worked with Focus Survey Research to carry it out in March and April of 2006. Called the Taipei Neighborhoods Survey, this yielded data from 1,140 completed telephone interviews. I also spent several days in the small city of Chiayi interviewing neighborhood wardens and city officials to obtain perspective from a locale far from the capital. Finally, public records, including the official records of neighborhood elections and city yearbooks, have provided a crucial source of information.

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<sup>5</sup> These trips were in December 2003, March–April 2006, December 2006–January 2007, August 2010, and July 2011.

Some of my findings about Taipei and its neighborhoods have been published elsewhere (notably Read 2012). As a comparison of Beijing and Taipei, however, that book could only go so far in dealing with certain phenomena. This paper thus probes more deeply into aspects of neighborhood politics that are relatively specific to Taiwan or that pertain particularly to democratic contexts.

## The State-Structured Neighborhoods of Taiwan's Cities

Taiwan's neighborhoods, called *li*, are official components of the geography of urban administration.<sup>6</sup> Defined by precisely delineated boundaries, in large cities they are subordinate to the district offices (*qu gongsuo*). The Local Government Act stipulates that each *li* is to have an office (*li bangongchu*), led by a warden (*lizhang*), who is elected by the residents to one or more four-year terms of office. As of late 2012, the ROC had 5,791 such units, nearly three times the number of its villages.<sup>7</sup> Details of policies concerning neighborhoods and their leaders are left for city governments to formulate, although they appear to be broadly similar around the island. The neighborhoods are subdivided into small blocks or clusters of households called *lin*.<sup>8</sup> These bits of territory also have leaders, *linzhang*, which we might call block captains. Each block captain is hand-picked by the incumbent warden.

Wardens occupy a curious and complex position within their neighborhoods and within the fabric of state-society linkages. Their role has origins in the *bao-jia* (or *hokō*) system that Japanese administrators implemented starting early in the colonial era and that the Kuomintang

<sup>6</sup> Within Taiwan, recent research on the *li* system (sometimes in conjunction with rural villages) has primarily been undertaken by students and scholars of public administration, sometimes in government-sponsored projects (particularly valuable contributions include Hsi and Fan 2003; Chen 2004; Minzhengju 2004; Tseng 2004; Chuang 2005). One older study is by Po Ching-Chiu (1971).

<sup>7</sup> 內政統計年報, Table 01-01, 鄉鎮市區村里鄰數, dated February 27, 2013, accessed on April 29, 2013 at <http://sowf.moi.gov.tw/stat/year/list.htm>. Almost a third of the *cun* in existence as of 2010, fully 955 in total, were redesignated as *li* by 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Some official documents use the English term "neighborhood" for *lin*, but this is misleading given their very small scale.

employed on the mainland, a system that can be traced back to the Qing and earlier dynasties.<sup>9</sup>

Wardens are designated as “unsalaried” (*wuji zhi*) and are quite distinct from civil servants. They are not government officials nor do they see themselves as such. Still, they receive subsidies that amount to a modest salary, and often put in hours comparable to full-time employment.<sup>10</sup> The *li* offices — whether set up in the warden’s home or in a separate building — are furnished and equipped by the city. The wardens ostensibly fall under the command and supervision (*zhihui jiandu*) of mayors and district chiefs. In practice, in the democratic Taiwan of today they are hardly the underlings of the urban hierarchy. Once elected, they can only be removed from their positions prior to the end of their term if they commit a serious crime. Rather than merely taking orders from above, they can question or push back against directives or policies from the city or the district. In part, they pursue their own agendas, which can include such items as encouraging or resisting development plans, or lobbying the city for infrastructure improvements. Still, they are expected to help the city government and its agencies and police with a wide range of administrative tasks, including such duties as verifying the welfare eligibility of poor households and facilitating the conscription of draft-eligible young men. They work together with a neighborhood liaison officer (*liganshi*), a civil servant who is assigned wholly to one *li* and spends about half the work day there.<sup>11</sup> The network of local organizations of which they form a part is nonetheless deeply statist in many respects.

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<sup>9</sup> See, in particular, Caroline Hui-yu Tsai’s work (Ts’ai 1990; Tsai 2009). Chapter Two of my monograph presents a concise overview of historical predecessors (Read 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Taipei wardens received NT\$45,000 per month during the time of my field research. Some of the city’s wardens own businesses or have other jobs; this was even more common in Chiayi.

<sup>11</sup> The wardens do not choose their *liganshi*, although they sometimes might pressure a district chief to reassign one that they do not get along with. These neighborhood liaison officers assist the wardens while also serving as a check on them.

Taipei's twelve districts boasted a total of 456 neighborhoods as of the end of 2012. On average, each *li* there contains 5,862 people, or 2,230 households.<sup>12</sup> A map of the city's *li* (Figure 1) gives a visual sense of the way in which the city is parceled out into these small territorial packages. Neighborhood boundaries are periodically adjusted so that none gets too far out of proportion to others in terms of population. They vary substantially, however, in terms of the area they encompass. The *li* in the city's central districts, built on level ground (such as Zhongshan or Daan) are relatively small in area, often just a tenth or a fifth of a square kilometer, and rectangular or polygonal in shape. In these cases, the neighborhood's boundaries are defined by major streets. In peripheral zones such as Beitou, Neihu, and the southeast portion of Wenshan, *li* contain large swathes of the sparsely populated mountainsides that surround the basin in which Taipei nestles. In such places a single neighborhood can comprise as many as 16 square kilometers.

*Li* are small enough, then, that quite a few of the residents are acquainted with one another and encounter one another in daily life, whether at local businesses, on the streets, at parks, or in parent groups connected to nearby schools. For many in Taipei, *li* have real meaning and relevance. In the 2006 telephone survey, for example, more than 91 percent of respondents were able to tell the interviewer the name of their *li*. Nearly 58 percent could correctly state all or part of the name of their neighborhood warden.

On average, each of Taipei's *li* is subdivided into about 21 *lin*. The city had a total of 9,533 such micro-units as of the end of 2012. Figure 2 shows an arbitrarily selected *li* (encircled by the blue line) divided into its component *lin*, which are numbered and demarcated with red lines. These boundaries, too, are precisely defined by the city's Civil Affairs Bureau. An average block

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<sup>12</sup> Figures in this paragraph come from the Taipei City Statistical Yearbook 2012, accessed on May 10, 2013 at <http://www.dbs.taipei.gov.tw>.

captain is responsible for 287 people, or 109 households. While *li* are known by names, *lin* are designated only by numbers, and have less direct relevance to residents' lives. The *lin* do figure in neighborhood politics, however, as discussed below.

The *li/lin* system can be thought of as the core of neighborhood organizational activity, but many other groups are active at this level as well. Community Development Associations (*shequ fazhan xiehui*) are one important category. Inspired by the rising prominence of "community" in international discourse, these emerged in the early 1990s in an effort to create local organizations separate from the framework of the *li* and *lin*. CDAs pursue various purposes, and in some cases transcend the standard boundaries of neighborhoods. As we will see, they are often far from independent of *li* administration and warden politics. Moreover, though they are created at the initiative of groups of private citizens, they have state-centric features. They are required to register with the city's Department of Social Welfare, and they must report on annual meetings and comply with public service requirements to maintain their registration. They regularly apply to the city government for funding of various kinds. Indeed, in 2012, Taipei CDAs obtained 61 percent of their funding from the government, and raised only 39 percent themselves.<sup>13</sup>

There are also other neighborhood-level groups that have the blessing of government and, often, ties to the formal apparatus of *li* governance, such as citizens' watch patrols (*shouwang xiangzhu xunshoudui*, or simply *xunshoudui*). To be sure, the *li/lin* system and the other state-fostered groups surrounding it are hardly the only story of neighborhood associational life. Taipei has other kinds of organizations that are active at a local level. These include temples and their boards of directors, and local business groups. Local organizations emerge to contest controversies involving (for example) urban redevelopment plans, and development projects on

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<sup>13</sup> Calculated from figures reported in Taipei City Statistical Yearbook 2012, Table 232, page 698.

the environmentally sensitive hillsides. There are also NGOs that work on issues related to neighborhoods, such as the Tsuei Ma Ma Foundation for Housing and Community Services and OURs.<sup>14</sup> Thus, it is important to bear in mind that civil society is alive and well in the streets and alleys of Taipei, and coexists with organizations that are more closely tied to the city government.

In short, core elements of neighborhood organization in Taiwan, and specifically in Taipei, are deeply statist in nature. Some might see these government supports and linkages purely as dead weight, a regrettable holdover from the past. And indeed, ties to the city do have far-reaching implications for what neighborhood groups do. Generally speaking, the *li* do not act in all the ways that a civil society organization might; only rarely would they participate in a social movement, for example. Those important qualifications notwithstanding, this paper argues that state propagation and support underpins important aspects of the system, things that give it vibrancy: its democracy, its partisan tendencies, and its inverted class bias.

## **Democracy**

The stature of the *li* as an official, state-mandated body has helped it to evolve in recent decades into a highly democratic institution. In fact, direct elections for neighborhood wardens in ROC-governed Taiwan began as early as 1950 (Schafferer 2003, 85-91). It is unclear just how open or how restricted these elections were in the early years — at least, I have no solid data on this. The election records available in the National Taiwan Library become more detailed in the 1980s, revealing that at least by that time, if not far earlier, warden positions were almost entirely held by candidates who ran under the Kuomintang party label, and most often ran unopposed. As

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<sup>14</sup> OURs, 都市改革組織, gives its English name as “The Organization of Urban Re-s.” Composed of professionals in fields such as architecture and urban planning, it promotes urban reform and the resolution of community issues.

the ROC state gradually democratized in the late 1980s and 1990s, warden elections became more competitive and less dominated by the KMT.

Thus, Taiwan's Chiang-era rulers, like the Japanese administrators who preceded them, were hardly committed to real democracy in neighborhoods. But once the authoritarian regime evolved and latent democratic norms became more fully realized in practice, the *li* were swept along with this tide. Just as mayoral and city council elections turned into real contests, so too did those for wardenships.

The same municipal election commissions that handle those two higher levels of elections also manage the warden races, and they do so with meticulous attention and care. The election commissions announce timelines for the elections; register the self-nominations of candidates; and distribute election announcements (*gongbao*) to all residents. Figure 3, an excerpt of the 2010 election announcement for one arbitrarily chosen Taipei neighborhood, provides an illustrative example. These documents — one for each neighborhood — contain photographs of the warden candidates in that *li*, background information about them,<sup>15</sup> and statements of their “political views” (*zhengjian*), i.e., what they intend to do if elected. Prior to 2010, warden elections were held on separate days from all other races, and thus the election commissions carried out all the work of putting on an election just for the warden balloting alone: setting up polling stations on a designated Saturday, staffing them from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., publicly counting votes in each polling station, compiling the results, announcing the winners, and publishing a detailed record of the proceedings. On November 27, 2010, warden elections in the “five municipalities” were held together with mayor and city council elections. Whether held separately or in conjunction with higher level races, the point is that the running of these

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<sup>15</sup> In Taipei's warden elections of late 2006, for example, the announcement listed each candidate's ballot number, name, age, sex, birthplace, party affiliation, occupation, home address, and educational background.

elections by city election commissions gives them a level of formality, transparency, and rigor that is seldom seen in neighborhoods anywhere.

Leadership in the Community Development Associations, for example, is chosen in a much less formal process, with little state involvement. In Taipei, the chair of the board of directors (*lishizhang*) is supposed to be elected by members, but the CDAs hold these procedures themselves and merely report the results to the city government. Or consider a comparison with South Korea. There, the *tongjang*, whose position is somewhat analogous to that of Taiwan's *lizhang*, are appointed by city ward offices, perhaps after consultation with communities but usually not through an election.<sup>16</sup>

As one result of neighborhood-level democratization, the dominance of warden positions by the Kuomintang has diminished over time. Figure 4 shows this process in Taipei across the seven elections from 1985 to 2010. The proportion of wardens affiliated with the KMT dropped from 98 percent in 1985 to 53 percent in 2006 and 54 percent in 2010. The fraction of DPP wardens grew to around 9 percent, while the ranks of wardens running for election without a party label grew to as high as 39 percent in 2006.<sup>17</sup> Clearly, we still see the KMT holding a majority of wardenships in Taipei. The capital is, of course, a stronghold of the ruling party, although DPP candidate Su Tseng-chang received nearly 44 percent of the mayoral vote in 2010. The KMT in Taipei clearly benefits from the winner-takes-all nature of warden elections; only in districts where DPP voters are concentrated, notably Datong and Zhongshan districts, can the opposition

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<sup>16</sup> I draw here on field research conducted in Seoul in July of 2004. Further details and comparisons can be found in my other work (Read and Pekkanen 2009; Read 2012, Chapter Eight).

<sup>17</sup> Are wardens who run without a party affiliation truly nonpartisan? Interviews in Taipei revealed cases where wardens personally have clear partisan preferences — some blue, some green — but chose to eschew a party brand. At a minimum, running as a nonpartisan signals some distance from the organized parties and an effort to appeal to voters of various stripes.

party win many neighborhoods.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, KMT dominance of Taipei's *li* has partially given way to political pluralization. The same pattern is seen in Taiwan's other major cities as well, and indeed in village and neighborhood elections throughout the ROC, but in even more exaggerated forms. In other cities, the majority of wardens ran as nonpartisans.<sup>19</sup>

Figure 5 presents three other metrics that illuminate qualities of neighborhood democracy in Taipei. Figures for voter turnout ranged from 31 percent to 39 percent in the last three cycles during which warden elections were held on a separate day from all other elections. Turnout leaped with the introduction of a single election day for all local races, including the much-watched and media-saturated mayoral contests. The earlier turnout figures, then, give a more pure indicator of Taipei residents' level of participation in the warden elections *per se*. Having a third to two fifths of the electorate make a special trip to the polls on a Saturday shows a fairly high degree of involvement by the standards of local elections.

Taipei's warden elections also feature substantial amounts of contestation, as measured by the average number of candidates per *li*. In some neighborhoods incumbents run unopposed, and in others a scrum of many candidates emerges. Starting in 2007, city officials began taking deposits of NT\$50,000 from warden hopefuls, refundable only to those who garner the votes of 10 percent of the neighborhood electorate. The purpose of this reform was apparently to discourage "frivolous candidacies" (*fulan canxuan*), and the practice of gaming elections by

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<sup>18</sup> DPP warden candidates won 16 out of 25 neighborhoods in Datong District in 2010, and 10 out of 42 neighborhoods in Zhongshan District. City of Taipei Election Commission, report on the 2010 warden elections, Table 9-3, page 625.

<sup>19</sup> In the warden elections held in the four other municipalities in 2010, the proportion of winning candidates without a party nomination ranged from 63 percent (Xinbei) to 78 percent (Tainan). Of the remainder — those with declared partisan affiliations — KMT wardens greatly outnumbered DPP wardens in each of the four cities. Indeed, in the local elections held in the counties and smaller cities outside the five municipalities on June 12, 2010, 74 percent of all successful *cunzhang* and *lizhang* candidates ran without a party label. Sources: 99 年直轄市里長選舉政黨席次統計表 and 99 年村里長選舉當選人政黨佔有比例統計表, documents downloaded from the web site of the Central Election Commission.

nominating spoilers to siphon votes away from one's rivals. Certainly the deposit system seems to have discouraged quite a few people from throwing their hats into the ring, as seen in the decline in the average number of candidates. Still, in a majority of neighborhoods, at least two residents vie for the honor of being *lizhang*, thus yielding substantial competition.

Finally, Figure 5 also shows that the election contests regularly replace incumbents with new faces. Across the four election cycles under consideration, newly elected wardens emerged in 25 to 35 percent of neighborhoods. Sometimes this happens when an incumbent chooses not to defend his or her seat, but more commonly it represents an incumbent's defeat at the ballot box. A few neighborhoods do have wardens who have served term after term. Chen Kairen, for example, won the warden post in Zhufu Li of Zhongshan District ten consecutive times since Taipei was given the status of municipality in 1967. Yet for the most part, seats are vulnerable to challenge; indeed, even Chen Kairen, at the age of 89, lost his position to a rival in 2010.<sup>20</sup> This vulnerability has significance far beyond the elections themselves. Wardens attend to their duties in awareness of the fact that challengers may emerge from the ranks of their neighbors to hand them a humiliating defeat. It also has led to a generational shift in the composition of neighborhood leadership. For example, 83 women were elected to warden positions in Taipei in 2010 — still very much a minority, at 18 percent of all wardens, but more than ever before.<sup>21</sup>

To assert the democratic characteristics of Taiwan's neighborhoods is not to say that the *li* are democratic in every possible way. By certain criteria, Taipei's *li* might well be seen as falling short. For example, in theory neighborhood-level bodies could be well-suited to *participatory* as much as representative democracy. Indeed, the Local Government Act stipulates that *li* may hold meetings open to all residents (*limin da hui*). In Taipei, such meetings are held in some

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Chen Kairen on January 19, 2007, and election records.

<sup>21</sup> Future drafts of this paper will explore this generational change in more detail.

neighborhoods, but overall, the practice is uncommon. Wardens, in interviews, stated that they find such meetings to be a hassle.

## Partisanship

The micropolitics of the *li* thus features periodic electoral contests that can be quite fiercely fought. Unlike neighborhood politics in some parts of the world, partisan affiliations play a role in these elections. As seen above, warden candidates may obtain the nomination of a political party (almost always either the KMT or the DPP) and run under its brand. But nominations of warden candidates are only the tip of the iceberg. Party rivalries run deep in the associational life of many *li* and deeply inflect the nature of neighborhood civic engagement.

The KMT, of course, long dominated *li*-level organization. In the authoritarian period, wardens formed one component of its mechanisms of control and cooptation. Since democratization, as shown above, the KMT's grip on neighborhoods has relaxed, yet it retains considerable strength at the grass roots. Both of the two major political parties are keen to have as many of their supporters win warden positions as possible. The role of wardens and others as activists (*zhuangjiao*), helping to mobilize voters in city and national elections, is a well-established feature of Taiwan's politics. To give just one conventional example, a KMT-affiliated warden in a wealthy part of Shilin was called upon in June 2010 to arrange a buffet dinner for more than one hundred supporters for the reelection campaign of incumbent mayor Hau Lung-Bin, with the candidate in attendance.<sup>22</sup> The DPP is also keen to build strength at the alley level. Interviews in Taipei indicated that the DPP has relatively few resources to offer its warden candidates, while the KMT can help provide banners, campaign brochures, and the like.

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with warden, July 3, 2011.

A few wardens try to use their neighborhood positions as stepping stones toward a run for a relatively powerful and prestigious city council seat. Most, however, do not seek upward political advancement. They do, however, build cooperative ties with city council members, who use their positions to ensure that city government treats specific neighborhoods kindly — much as Shelley Rigger once explained (1999, 42). These are not strictly partisan arrangements, but rather personalistic connections that in some cases even cut across party lines. Generally speaking, though, wardens build such ties with council members of their own party.

Of greatest interest here are not the ties between party organizations and the wardens, but the ways in which partisanship shapes the internal politics of the neighborhood. The incumbent warden, and his or her team of chosen block captains, generally constitutes one important and politically active group within a *li*, but there are often others. Often a CDA will be aligned with or led by the incumbent warden, but in other cases, it provides a base for future warden candidates — or wardens who have lost elections but plan a comeback. These associations, and the small grants they might win from the government, allow such hopefuls to sponsor activities and maintain relationships with core supporters and with voters. Not just CDAs, but also citizens' watch groups, can have these functions. Should a leader of one of these rival factions win the wardenship, the new team of block captains is likely to be selected from within the victorious faction. The contending alliances may well align with different political parties, though intraparty competition is also common.

These phenomena are quite complex, with the configuration of leaders and teams varying in every community. Still, the patterns are pronounced enough to leave traces in city-wide data. For example, Taipei neighborhoods that have just experienced competitive elections are more likely than others to have at least one Community Development Association. Also, neighborhoods with

DPP-affiliated wardens are more likely to have CDAs, which in many cases would represent a KMT-aligned rival faction. Neighborhoods with nonpartisan wardens are less likely to have CDAs.<sup>23</sup>

Even more strikingly, the neighborhood political context has measurable and statistically significant effects on individual citizens, with residents behaving differently in different political contexts. Residents who support the DPP, for example, are much more likely to participate in neighborhood activities, and to vote in neighborhood elections, if their warden is also of the DPP than if the warden is either KMT or nonpartisan.<sup>24</sup>

### **Inverted class bias**

The first section of this paper pointed out that more than nine out of ten respondents to the author's Taipei telephone survey could name the *li* in which they live, and a solid majority could name their warden. Conversely, a substantial minority of residents do not know who their warden is. Some people are thus much more in touch with neighborhood life than others. In part, this appears to be a matter of lifecycle. Unsurprisingly, residents in their 20s and 30s are less connected to their neighborhoods, whether due to work schedules or patterns of leisure and sociability that take them to other parts of the city.

More striking, and surprising in international perspective, are the biases in participation levels by class. Research on the United States has found that individuals of high socio-economic status are most likely to be active in neighborhood organizations (Crenson 1983, 211, 299-300; Rossi and Weber 1996). In Taipei, quite the opposite is the case. As the darker bars in Figure 6

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<sup>23</sup> These relationships were observed in data for the 9th round of warden elections, which determined neighborhood leadership from 2003 through 2006. CDA data was compiled from district yearbooks for 2004, except for Songshan District, for which 2005 data was used.

<sup>24</sup> These findings come from the 2006 Taipei Neighborhoods Survey, combined with data from election records.

show, generally speaking, residents with lower levels of education are in more frequent contact with their wardens.<sup>25</sup> A sizable majority of residents with only middle school education or less reported that they had encountered their warden at least two times in the previous two years, while the same was true of less than half of residents who had college education.<sup>26</sup> Defying the very widespread tendency for high-SES citizens to participate in elections more regularly than others, it is in fact lower-class Taipei residents who vote in *li* elections most actively. Residents with only middle school or lower levels of education vote in Taipei's warden elections with almost twice the frequency of those with college or higher degrees.

What are the reasons for this inverted class bias? Site visits and interviews, in conjunction with survey data, revealed answers to this question. As mentioned above, young adults are less in touch with neighborhood life, and in Taipei age and education are negatively correlated.<sup>27</sup> Apart from this, the neighborhood realm in Taipei and other cities is one that has special salience for certain kinds of people. People who are not working, quite naturally, spend more time in their homes and the surrounding lanes and parks.

Perhaps most significant are those whose work and livelihoods are closely linked to one locality in the city — as opposed to those who commute to jobs in office towers. Those who own or operate small businesses, in particular, often are candidates for warden positions. Among the cohort of wardens elected in 2006, about 45 percent listed occupations falling into the categories of “commerce,” “service sector,” or “freelance,” and many although not all of these refer to local

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<sup>25</sup> A very similar pattern is found if we look at residents' familiarity with their warden (measured by correctly stating all or part of the incumbent warden's name).

<sup>26</sup> Such contact included in-person or telephone contacts, and included encounters initiated either by the warden or by the respondent. Also, respondents who were in college (or graduate school) at the time of the survey were put together with those who had college (or graduate) degrees.

<sup>27</sup> In the 2006 Taipei Neighborhoods Survey, which reached residents as young as 20 and as old as 91, this correlation was -0.42.

businesses.<sup>28</sup> Some wardens are part of families that have owned land in their localities for generations, often farmland that became incorporated into the city as Taipei expanded in the second half of the 20th century. On the whole, Taipei's wardens have had relatively modest amounts of schooling. Forty-seven percent of those who came to their positions in 2006 had only high school or technical high school degrees, and 25 percent had only been to middle school.<sup>29</sup>

Keepers of small shops and the like — eateries, stationery stores, garages for car and motor-scooter repair, and so forth — have vested interests in the conditions and upkeep of the neighborhood locale. Seemingly tiny changes in micro-level policy, pertaining to sidewalks or construction plans or permissions granted to competing vendors and merchants, can have an outsized impact on their livelihoods. They thus tend to be key constituents of any *li*, and active participants in its politics. This general finding is not unique to Taiwan. Theodore C. Bestor emphasized the “old middle class,” the self-employed and the small entrepreneurs of the Tokyo neighborhood he studied, as the social core of its *chōkai*, the local association that works closely with local government in managing the community (1989, 9-10).

Low-SES residents in general have more reasons to be in touch with their warden and neighborhood liaison officer. They have greater need for their help. For example, they may need assistance navigating the complexities of the district offices or city hall. It is common for residents to visit the *li* office to discuss eligibility for welfare benefits. Housing patterns contribute to this pattern as well. Relatively modern, upscale apartment complexes have full-time staff to handle some of the day-to-day needs and problems that, in older residential buildings, residents take care of themselves. Sometimes wardens might be asked to resolve disputes arising

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<sup>28</sup> Still, 47 percent of that cohort of wardens indicated backgrounds in the “public sector,” which included retired city workers as well as civil servants. Occupation data — which appear to be somewhat haphazard and imprecise — were compiled by the author from the official records of the 2006 elections.

<sup>29</sup> Educational backgrounds are also compiled from the official records of the 2006 elections.

from such issues as construction problems, noise, or leaking pipes. Wealthy residents often address such problems through the management committees of their apartment buildings; seeking help from the warden would strike them as odd and unnecessary. This general pattern, too, is found elsewhere in the region. Multiple studies have found Indonesia's state-mandated neighborhood organizations, the *rukun warga* (RW) and *rukun tetangga* (RT), to be much more deeply embedded in less-well-off neighborhoods, particularly urban *kampung* or slums, and more intimately intertwined with the lives of residents there (Guinness 1986; Sullivan 1992; Guinness 2009; Kurasawa 2009).

Is this simply a case of political parties building patron-client networks in which to bind the poor and needy? That, of course, is a common story in many parts of the world. The nature of the relationships connecting urbanites and wardens is complex and does not easily lend itself to across-the-board generalization. Certainly, some residents owe their *lizhang* for special favors rendered: overlooking an infraction such as home renovation that does not conform to building codes or a shop operating outside the scope of its official licensing, for example. Yet, to characterize this as client-like dependency would greatly overstate the case. The possibilities for persistent patron-client ties are constrained by the ways in which the city, the district office, and the neighborhood liaison officer exercise oversight over wardens: for instance, *li* expenses must be approved, and important decisions affecting individual households (such as the determination of welfare benefits) are made by the bureaucracy rather than at the warden's discretion. Also, the rigor and anonymity of election procedures makes it difficult for any neighborhood leader to exercise long-term hegemony and certainly makes it impossible for him or her to determine how specific residents voted. Hence, we have to recognize the various forms of exchange

relationships found in this context without necessarily assimilating them to particular stereotypes or templates.

## Conclusion

It is important to acknowledge that there are other dimensions to the realm of the *li*, dimensions that lie beyond the scope of this paper. Neighborhood politics in Taiwan has a seedy side. For example, it is not uncommon for rivals in warden elections to employ dirty tricks against one another, such as distributing attack fliers on the eve of the election containing outlandish allegations of corruption and the like. Wardens in many parts of the island are known for serving as conduits for buying votes on behalf of, for example, candidates for city council positions. Taipei is distinctive from other parts of the ROC in that this illegal practice is rare, and perhaps in other ways as well.

This short overview of neighborhood politics in (specifically) Taipei has emphasized its distinctive aspects: The uncommonly competitive and participatory form of democracy that it features; the ways in which partisan affiliations inflect both the *li/lin* and other community-based associations; and the bias toward greater participation by residents of lower rather than higher socio-economic status.

The key theme here is that these properties all relate to the statist nature of the core organizational structure in Taiwan's urban neighborhoods. The *li/lin* system of today owes its existence to historical predecessors that states used for purposes of repression, control, and cooptation. It is a structure that remains useful to the government as a way to facilitate administrative programs and governance in many forms. If it were not sponsored and reproduced by the state through laws and city agencies, it would probably not exist. At a minimum it would look very different: not every neighborhood would have an office and a leader, for example.

Elections for leadership would be handled informally rather than be organized by city election commissions. This would mean far less assurance that non-incumbents could mount challenges to current leaders, that all potential leaders would be treated equally and that votes would be counted fairly. Less tangibly but also importantly, the imprimatur of the state also helps give the wardenship a certain kind of status, making election an accomplishment that wardens feel proud of and thus contributing to the competitive energy surrounding the contests for these roles.

The relative formality of the *li* office makes it a *de facto* platform for political mobilization and other party-related activities, even as it is constrained by the *liganshi* and the civil service's norms of political neutrality with regard to its administrative and state-serving functions. The state also provides for and encourages forms of activity such as the CDAs, neighborhood watch patrols, and police volunteers that are often enmeshed in the politics of the *li* and add to its vitality. Finally, state institutionalization also contributes to the reverse class bias found in neighborhood participation. Without this institutional support, Taiwan's *li* would have looser and more uneven forms of association, which would quite likely be more cohesive in affluent areas and most responsive to wealthier citizens.

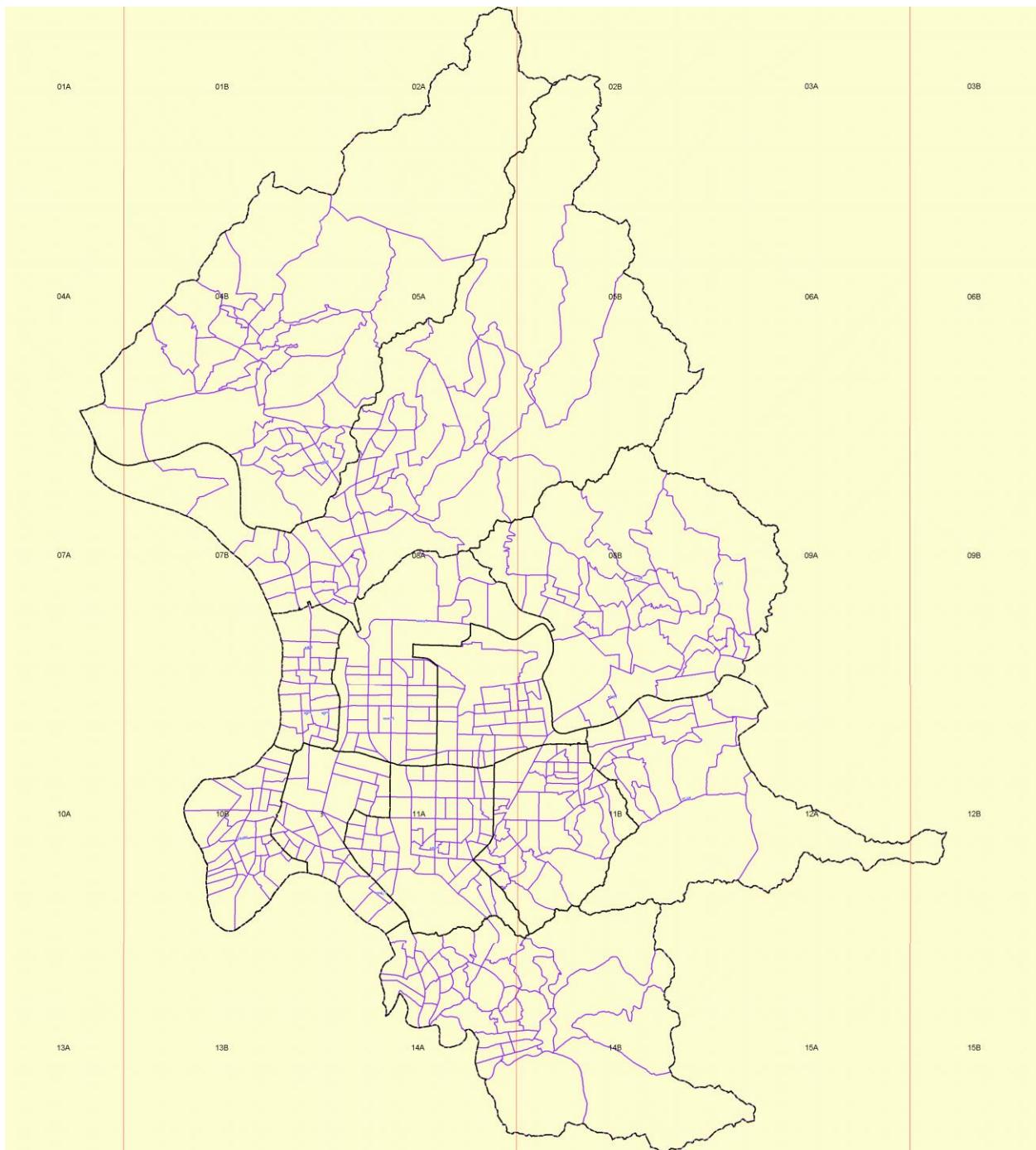
The *li/lin* system is not a manifestation of civil society as it is usually defined. It is something quite different: an extension of the state deep into the alley-level milieu of urban life. It fuses administrative guidance and purposes (via laws, policies, supervision by the district offices and the neighborhood liaison officers) together with substantial and strong bottom-up forces (via contestation for warden positions, fostering of various volunteer organizations, and the everyday openness of the *li* office to residents' requests and demands).<sup>30</sup> Far from a lifeless piece of bureaucracy, the result is a quite lively focal point for civic engagement by city residents.

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<sup>30</sup> In this respect it constitutes a form of "state-society synergy," a concept explored by Peter Evans, Michael Woolcock, and Elinor Ostrom (Evans 1997; Woolcock and Narayan 2006).

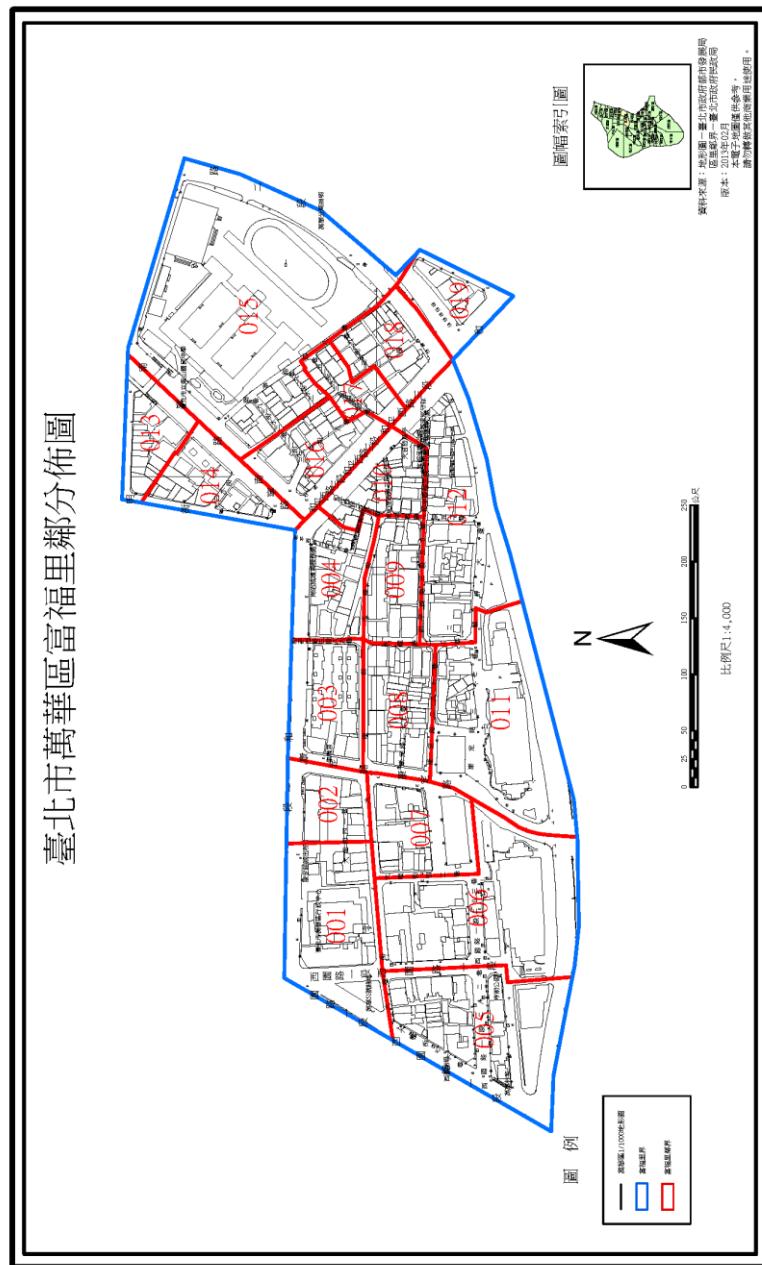
The kinds of political activity found in the neighborhood setting and the kinds of local problems that it addresses tend to fall within a certain range: development projects, problems facing local businesses and homes, and quality of life are the kinds of issues at stake here, not (for instance) constitutional reform. Its scope thus contains both opportunities and constraints, which derive from the nature of neighborhoods in general as well as the quasi-governmental character of the *li*. This domain of activity in Taiwan's cities has attracted relatively little attention from researchers, but contains lessons that are important for understanding the everyday workings of the country's politics as well as the democratic potential and limitations of neighborhood institutions.

**Figure 1: Map of Taipei Districts and Neighborhoods, 2003**



**Note:** Created by the author as a mosaic of partial map tiles downloaded on May 10, 2013 from <http://www.czone2.tcg.gov.tw/tp92-1/index.htm>. Reflects boundaries as of 2003. Taipei's 12 districts (*qu*) are bounded by black lines, and what were then the city's 449 neighborhoods (*li*) are bounded by purple lines. The red lines and numbers are merely an artifact of how the original map tiles were stored and have no apparent significance.

**Figure 2: Map of One Taipei Neighborhood, Showing Lin Boundaries**

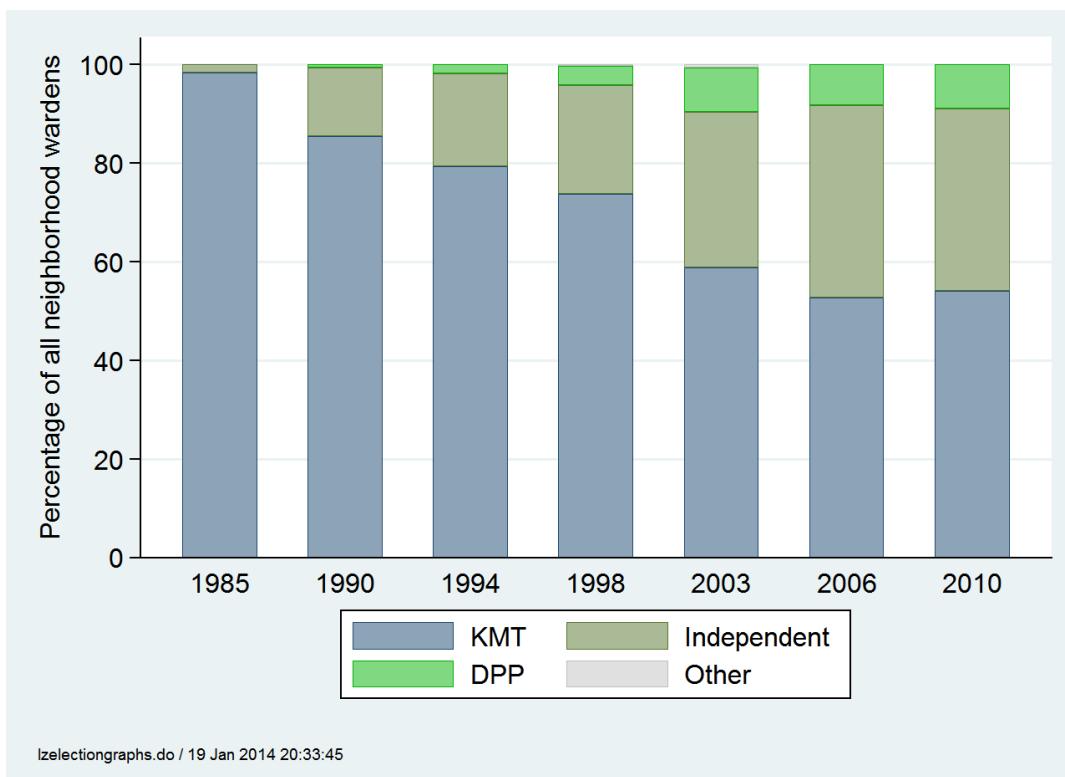


Note: Numbers and boundaries of the 19 *lin* in this *li* are shown in red. The small green inset map shows the location of the neighborhood within the district. This neighborhood, Fufu Li in Wanhua District, was chosen arbitrarily as an example and is not one of the author's research sites. Downloaded on May 17, 2013 from <http://www.czone2.tcg.gov.tw/tp92-1/index.htm>. The date of this map is 2003.

**Figure 3: Part of Warden Election Announcement for One Taipei Neighborhood, 2010**

**Note:** This neighborhood, Fufu Li in Wanhua District, was chosen arbitrarily as an example. Downloaded on February 15, 2011 from the web site of the Taipei Election Commission.

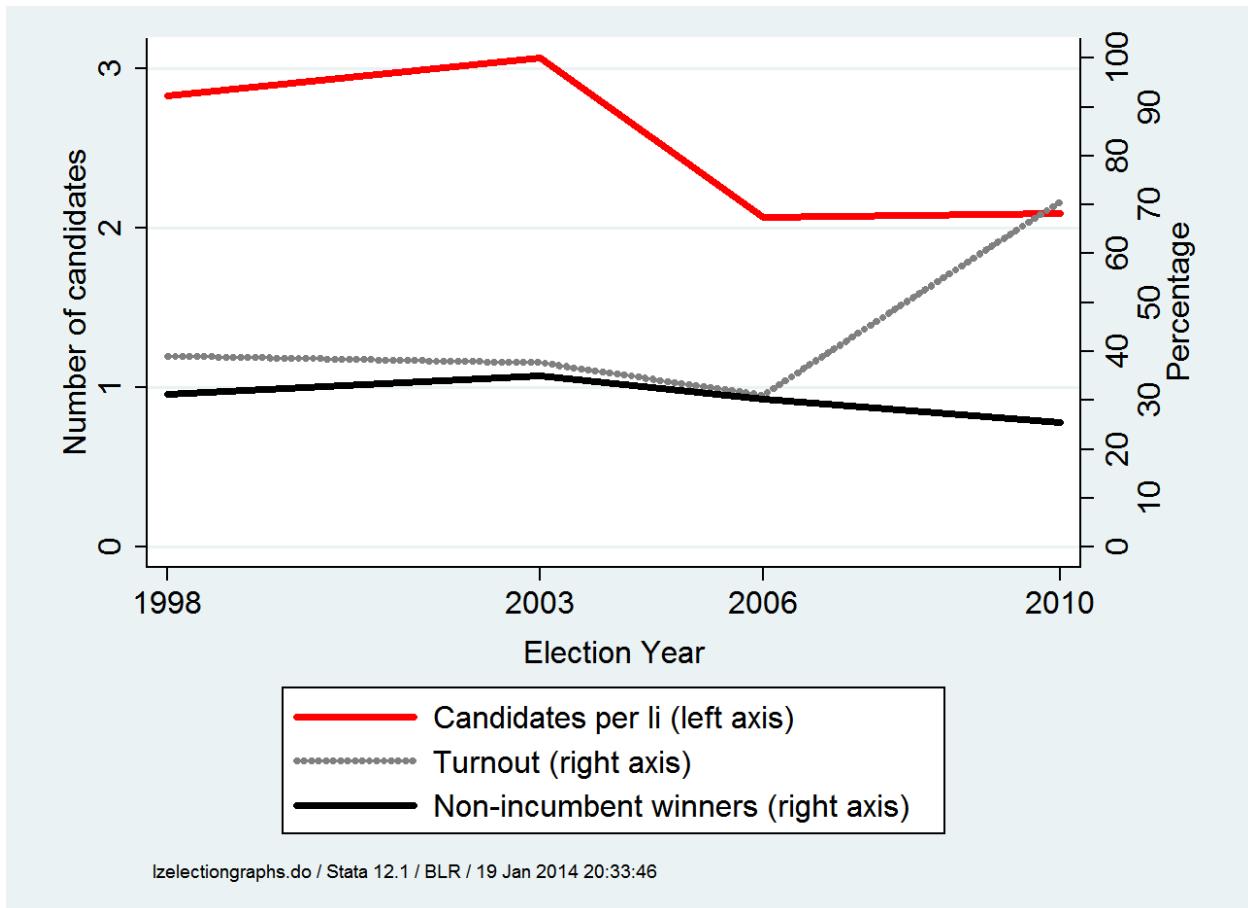
**Figure 4: Party Affiliation of Taipei Neighborhood Wardens, 1985-2010**



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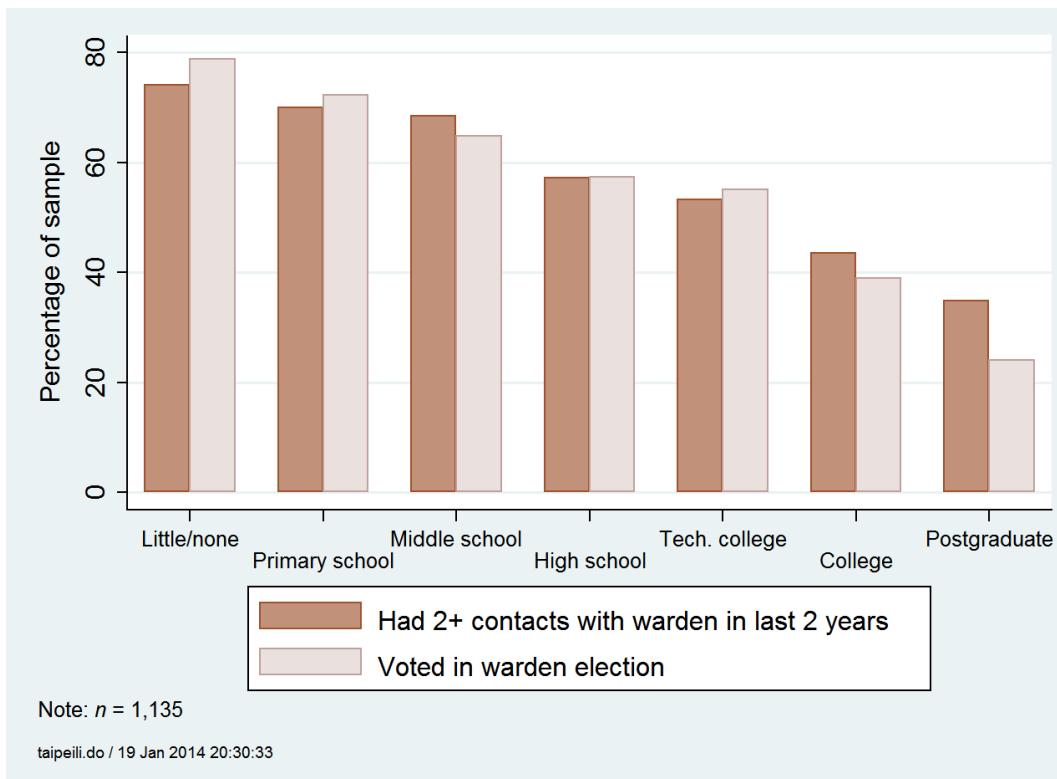
**Note:** Data are from election records from the City of Taipei Election Commission, including published reports and, for 2006 and 2010, records posted on the commission's web site.

**Figure 5: Contestation, Turnout, and Replacement in Taipei Warden Elections, 1998-2010**



**Note:** The measure of contestation, candidates per *li*, refers to the average number of individuals running for a warden position in the given year. Turnout is the percentage of the city's eligible voters who cast votes in the neighborhood elections of the given year. Non-incumbent winners is number of newly elected non-incumbent wardens, as a percentage of all elected wardens, in the given year. Data are from election records from the City of Taipei Election Commission, including published reports and, for 2006 and 2010, records posted on the commission's web site.

**Figure 6: Contact with Warden, and Voting in Warden Elections, by Education**



Note: Data from 2006 Taipei Neighborhoods Survey.

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