

## **Change and the Unchanged of Polarized Politics in Taiwan**

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### **Abstract**

Since the first power alteration in 2000, polarized politics between the pan-blue and pan-green camp has arisen, evolved, and persistently shown its significant impact in Taiwan politics until today. There might have been some moments where the sign of polarized politics seemingly fades away, but things come back swiftly soon as those moments passed. The most salient one are those days and nights when the Sunflower Movement thrived at its peak with students' occupation of the Legislative Yuan and, for one night, even the Executive Yuan during March 18 and April 10, 2014. In this paper, the author intends to illuminate the changing and unchanged features of polarized politics in Taiwan, including the convergent deeds from divergent goals among the main political actors during the Sunflower Movement. The author will first provide an overview of political polarization and discuss its evolution and the current situation. Next, discussion will focus on the Sunflower Movement and an explanation will be provided to the question why this movement might be the culmination of polarized politics instead of the silent moment. We conclude by the empirical findings that suggest Taiwan's democratic achievement was built on the rule of law and strong democratic legitimacy, but both factors have been somewhat compromised during the Sunflower Movement, which might cause potential hazard to Taiwan under its current political polarization.

Keyword: polarized politics, rule of law, democratic legitimacy, Sunflower Movement

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## **I. Introduction**

Polarized politics is probably one of the most preeminent phenomena in Taiwan's post-democratization period. Starting from October 2000 when former premier Tang Fei stepped down due to his disagreement with President Chen Shui-bian (CSB, hereafter) regarding the construction halt of the fourth nuclear power plant, political polarization between the pan-blue and pan-green camp has arisen, evolved, and persistently shown its significant impact until today. There might have been three moments where the sign of polarized politics seemingly fades away, but things come back swiftly soon as those moments passed. Two of them are the honeymoon periods when Ma Ying-jeou (MYJ, hereafter) won the presidential elections by significant margin in 2008 and 2012, respectively. The other one, unquestionably, has to be those days and nights when the Sunflower Movement thrived at its peak with students' occupation of the Legislative Yuan and, for one night, even the Executive Yuan during March 18 and April 10, 2014. Stunning pictures were again and again broadcasted to the general public through 24-hour live camera showing that neither the ruling nor opposition parties could have resolved the controversy, and furthermore, the governing authority seemed not capable to effectively control the protest and simply left the country alone without the legislature for 23 days. In many political scientists' view, the above factual characterization has come very closely to a political coup, because the highest legislature representing the will of the people was invaded and paralyzed, which completely lost its legislative function and other political power granted by the Constitution.

A closer observation of the Sunflower Movement might generate different political understandings and interpretations, which show the divergence and complexity of how various political actors and the general public could have been pondered over this incident. The factual

characterization can be consequently swayed from the least-likely moment to the culmination of polarized politics, featuring a paradoxical result driven by sophisticated partisan calculations. Specifically, the fundamental issues interwoven together and directly associated with the Sunflower Movement includes: (1) partisan rivalry between pan-blue and pan-green (2) economic overdependence on China (3) the ultimate status of the cross-strait relationship (4) the rule of law problem (5) diminishing democratic legitimacy. Convergence of the tri-partisan (pan-blue, pan-green, and Legislative Yuan Speaker Wang Jin-pyng) deliberate inaction during the period of the students' occupation further strengthens the viewpoint that the 23-day legislature paralyzation is a sub-optimal outcome resulted from the optimal strategy in each of the political actors.

This paper intends to illuminate the changing and unchanged features of polarized politics in Taiwan, including the convergent deeds from divergent goals among the main political actors during the Sunflower Movement. I will first provide an overview of political polarization in Taiwan since 2000 and discuss its evolution and the current situation. This lays out the basic understanding of the political dynamics in the current Taiwan politics. Then, I will discuss the Sunflower Movement and unravel why the suboptimal outcome would emerge as a composite result of individual rational behavior. Reflection will follow accordingly to offer some thoughts about the potential impact of the Sunflower Movement to Taiwan's polarized politics.

## **II. An Overview of Polarized Politics in Taiwan**

It has been more than 14 years since Taiwan has its first power alteration for the presidency, and that starts a chain reaction in terms of how political elites learn to behave and interact under a democratic political context. The journey does not go smoothly, particularly showing in the way how the winners misunderstood the-winner-take-all politics and how the losers simply

cannot reconcile themselves to electoral loss. In fact, both of the winning and losing camps in Taiwan politics do not fathom out a remarkable fact that power holders of most well-established democracies do not govern the country alone without sharing their power, formally or informally, in certain forms, regardless of system of government. In Taiwan, however, the two presidents (SCB and MYJ) since 2000 have consistently shown great reluctance to share their power with the losing camp, and even with their colleagues inside the ruling party. This creates a huge problem of political distrust and animosity between the administration and main political actors, including the oppositions, the legislature, and those fellow partisans who believe they are entitled to the share of power.

Unlike the American system, the president office in Taiwan seldom work with the legislature on the individual basis through political trading or bargaining. For both of KMT and DPP, the leadership style is very similar to each other and both adopt a top-down Leninist Party approach: demanding support through exercise of strong party discipline. The bigger problem, nevertheless, resides in the unwillingness of the president to work with anybody outside his inner circle, and thus the political support from his fellow partisans was gradually diminishing soon as they realize their compliance and cooperation will not trade in any political gains in return. This further narrows the decision-making circle and enlarges the gulf between the leadership and those political forces which could have provided great support to the administration, from inside or outside the ruling party.

This explains how polarized politics started from the failed tryout of political cohabitation in the beginning of CSB's first term. From the hindsight, there was plenty of room for CSB to adopt a more eclectic policy that could have achieved the same goal while maintained a workable relationship with his political opponents. Unfortunately, CSB chose a rather dramatic way and later triggered intensive partisan rivalry which developed into severed polarized politics

and political gridlock. Similar problems also happened to the MYJ's administration for his both terms, which show MYJ's unwillingness to tolerate the share of power inside the KMT leadership with the former chairman Wu Poh-hsiung and the Legislative Yuan Speaker Wang Jin-pyng. In fact, tension had long been simmering between MYJ and other KMT or aligned political leaders such as Lien Chan and James Soong regarding the exclusion of their influence in the MYJ's administration. While ostensible conflict was prevented by Wu Poh-hsiung's concession for not seeking the chairman reelection in 2009, serious political fights between MYJ and Wang did burst into the split of KMT's governing power in 2013, by which KMT practically lost its legislative advantage since its majority power would not function effectively without Speaker Wang's indispensable collaboration.

Refusing to share power with those whose political collaboration is needed for effective governance is the most salient feature of Taiwan politics throughout the years and that still remains unchanged for the current MYJ administration. There are three major consequences: first, the President cannot acquire enough political support from the legislature and even within the ruling camp, and this seriously reduces government performance and brings down the presidential approval rate; second, to consolidate its political power and secure future reelection, the incumbent has to engage in political campaigns and passes the buck to the opponents; third, this will lead to more political boycott and retaliation from the oppositions, and the spiral increase of partisan rivalry quickly escalates into political gridlock and partisan rivalry. The chain reaction illustrated above manifests the very nature of Taiwan's polarized politics, and underneath there exist conflicting sentiments for the incumbent and the oppositions, respectively. The incumbent feels that the electoral victory of the presidential election has entitled him to the full governing power and the losing camp should understand this and comply to it; however, the oppositions (including those excluded fellow partisans in the ruling party) believe they should

have a role to share the power because the president needs their political collaboration to govern, otherwise they have no reason to sew the trousseau for someone else.

Another distinct feature of the unchanged in polarized politics is about the resolving mechanism, which could exist in many forms for the incumbent, such as forming a grand-coalition government, gaining popularity by delivering good governance, or reconciling political difference with the opponents. However, the most effective form has to be a popular renewal of the governing power through a free and fair election with an indisputable result. This has been the case in 2008 and 2012 when MYJ won the presidential election with significant margin of 16.9% (58.5% vs. 41.6%) and 6.0% (51.6% vs.45.6%), but not in 2004 when CSB and Annette Lu defeated Lien Chan and James Soong by only 0.2% (50.1% vs. 49.9%). Under the normal situation, the result of the popular election provides an unquestionable answer about who should govern since people have made their choice and that represents the ultimate source of political legitimacy in democracy. However, when the result is too closely to be acceptable, or there is widespread doubt of electoral integrity, a popular election would not resolve the problem of polarized politics, and it could exacerbate even more.

The failure to reinstate CSB's political legitimacy in the 2004 presidential election, no matter how long it could have lasted otherwise, is associated with another feature of polarized politics: the incumbent and the challengers have accumulated so much animosity and distrust in previous political fights, so both of them have strong incentive to stretch the rule and win the election with whatever measures. For most cases, only the incumbent has this prerogative because it controls the administration and monopolizes policy-making power, but in some cases, the opposition might apply the same maneuvers whenever they are capable to influence certain political institutions at the local or national level. This has been exactly the case since August 2002 when Chen made a sudden move toward pro-independence cross-strait policy, which threw

a bomb into the cross-strait relationship and quickly polarized the cleavage between pan-blue and pan-green. It followed with CSB's cutthroat competition that aimed to exploit the administrative power in his favor for winning the reelection, which further aggravated political distrust and intensified partisan rivalry. From pan-blue supporters' perspective, many CSB's political maneuvers had already infringed the law and verged on electoral foul plays, including linking a referendum to the presidential election, or initiating national security measures after the 319 gun-shot incident

Excessive electoral mobilization has resulted in a long-term political effect: almost everyone has been summoned up psychologically to pick a side, and supporters of both camps are cognitively driven through a partisan lens in perceiving, processing, and interpreting all kinds of information, particularly for those which are politically relevant. The persistence of the partisan-laden view signifies the very existence of the polarized politics from the beginning of CSB's second term to nowadays, even though no integrity question was posed to MYJ's twice electoral victories. In fact, KMT has controlled the presidency and legislature majority since 2008, and MYJ did successfully win the renewal of this seemingly unified government in 2012. The level of polarized politics should have been waning down given the unanimous electoral results of presidency and legislature, but the real picture shows rather different, because the government is not so "unified", and the strong political undercurrent associated with KMT internal struggle eventually took its toll on the mediocre performance of the MYJ administration.

We can conclude Taiwan's polarized politics with three unchanged plus one changing features. The three unchanged includes: (1) the controversies all surround the president (2) political animosity and partisan rivalry then develops and erodes the institutional trust (3) partisan-laden prejudice quickly permeates in the society and manifests the sign of political polarization; the changing feature, however, is about the different political institution that comes

to the fore and become the center of controversy. Apparently, the administration that represents the President's power would be always in the spotlight, but other institutions that becomes the center of the controversy are usually associated with the prime campaign issues fought in the previous presidential election. Apparently, they were 319 gun-shot incident and the subsequent legal battle in 2004, the discretionary fund case (or more generally the anti-corruption movement) in 2008, but the issues in contention were much trivial and tedious without explosive consequences in 2012.

### **III. Empirical Findings of Polarized Politics**

The aforementioned features can be best illustrated with the empirical evidence that is found in the four waves of Asian Barometer Taiwan Survey, which collected a nationally representative dataset from surveys of political attitudes and behaviors in 2001, 2006, 2010, and 2014, respectively. Table 1 presents the distinguishing statistics that show the sign of polarized politics in Taiwan since 2001, and the format is standardized into the percentage of positive responses in pan-blue, pan-green, overall sample (number inside the parenthesis), and the index of political polarization (PPI), which is the difference of pan-blue's and pan-green's percentage numbers with a minimum threshold of concern by .15. The first group shows the regime evaluation, in which the two items specifically measure the approval rate of the democratic system and the current administration. The result shows that the pan-blue supporters were less supportive in regime evaluation in 2001 and 2006, but more so in 2010 and 2014. This corresponds to the change of their role from the opposition to the incumbent supporters in the CSB and MYJ presidency. Specifically, pan-blue's figures are 16.0% (42.4% vs. 58.4%) and 16.7% (51.3% vs. 68.0%) less positive in evaluation of how democracy works in Taiwan than pan-green's in 2001 and 2006, but they become 19.0% (77.5% vs. 58.5%) and 16.0% (64.2% vs.

48.2%) more positive in 2010 and 2014. The effect is much more salient when the president's name is mentioned, and result shows that pan-blue's figures are 45.1% (16.8% vs. 61.9%) and 39.3% (4.5% vs. 43.8%) less positive in evaluation of the incumbent government in 2001 and 2006, but 46.6% (57.3% vs. 10.7%) and 30.6% (41.1% vs. 10.5%) more positive in 2010 and 2014.

The second group of statistics is institutional trust, and the result shows, apparently, that supporters of pan-blue and pan-green differed dramatically in terms of their political trust towards the national government, which represents the incumbent President's administration. There are 29.5% (33.5% vs. 63.0%) and 31.4% (23.1% vs. 54.5%) less trustful toward CSB's-led national government for pan-blue than pan-green supporters in 2001 and 2006, but the number sway to more trustful by 34.3% (49.4% vs. 15.6%) and 16.4% (42.7% vs. 26.3%). Notice that the gap has been largely reduced in MYJ's second presidency, this might be related to the many political controversies surrounding Premier Jiang Yi-huah's cabinet members one after another (underlined by frequent changes of ministers). This finding also suggests the saliency of political polarization that has eroded people's confidence in certain political institutions, particularly centering on the administrative department. However, except for the national government, specific institutions in controversy did vary at different time depending on the prime issues in dispute. In 2001 when the polarized politics was starting to develop, there was no significant controversial political events associated with CSB's electoral legitimacy back to the 2000 presidential election, and thus polarized politics stayed in a simpler form reflecting in the lack of trust for CSB leadership. As the polarized politics evolved and intensified, the nature of distrust diffused to other political institutions, particularly in manifestation of pan-blue's suspicion on electoral integrity for the 2004 presidential election and pan-green's apprehension of MYJ's grasp of too much political power in 2008 by winning the presidency and the two-third legislative

majority at the same time. As Table 1 makes evident, people's trust in the courts and the election commission polarized between pan-blue and pan green supporters in the 2006 ABS survey, which clearly reflects the remaining political effect of the 2004 electoral controversy: pan-blue supporters are 16.4% (23.8% vs. 40.2%) and 24.4% (47.1% vs. 71.5%) less trustful towards the courts and the election commission than pan-green supporters. In the 2010 ABS survey, the dissatisfaction in certain campaign-related judicial judgments and the apprehension of KMT's monopoly of power exhibited in low and polarized rating of political trust in the courts and the parliament, despite the fact that the legislative is the least trustful political institution all the time. The latest ABS data is not yet available, but I expect to see no other political institution which shows the sign of political polarization because the 2012 presidential election was fairly smooth and non-contentious.

Divergent perception of governance quality driven by a partisan lens were very significant phenomenon, which can be illustrated by the remarkable polarized evaluation in various measures of quality of democracy, including dimensions of rule of law, control of corruption, vertical accountability, and responsiveness. As the third-group items in Table 1 show, pan-blue and pan-green supporters rate the incumbent government much higher when their favorite party was in power. Particularly, pan-green supporters in the 2006 survey evaluated most of the presented items positively at least near or above 50%, but the pan-blue supporters only showed positive evaluations around 30% or lower. The result was the other way around in the 2010 (except for free and fairness of the presidential election there is a bipartisan affirmation), where the pan-blue supporters evaluated the quality of democracy much favorably.

#### **IV. Consolidated Democratic Legitimacy Under Polarized Politics**

Under the polarized politics illustrated above, a critical question has raised a serious

concern whether Taiwan's democratic stability will be deteriorated or broken down. The answer to this question, while seems somewhat ambiguous at certain moment, particularly when a highly contentious incident seriously comprises the electoral integrity, should be easily derived through the post-electoral evaluation of support for democracy. If the winner and the loser express very polarized attitudes with regard to support of the democratic system, that signifies the failure of the popular election as a resolving mechanism to decide who has the political legitimacy to govern the country. According to this criterion, there is little sign in the previous two presidential elections that the winner or the loser disagreed with the impartiality of the electoral result, nor they express the denial of political legitimacy for the elected government. If this observation can be empirically corroborated, it will provide stronger evidence to indicate the consolidation of democratic legitimacy in Taiwan even under the severe polarized politics for more than a decade.

Table 2 presents a complete set of measures for democratic legitimacy in the three waves of Asian Barometer Survey, which comprises four groups of items: support for democracy, authoritarian orientation, liberal democratic value, and belief in procedural norm. These four groups of measures tap into respondent's support of a democratic political system in outward expression or implicit orientation with the question worded in a positive or negative fashion. The first battery includes four items worded in an outward expressive fashion to measure the support for democracy: desirability, suitability, preferability, and efficacy. The result shows that none of them shows significant polarization between pan-blue and pan-green, and furthermore nearly all of the answers shows very supportive attitude in favor of democracy, except for a slightly lower number (40.9%) among pan-blue supporters in the preferability question, which reflected their deep frustration in the electoral loss due to the KMT's split in the 2000 presidential election. One objection to the above measures is that those questions are worded in a positive fashion that people are likely to agree them habitually but that does not reflect their true attitudes. To rule out

this possibility, the second group of the items reports the rate of displaying agreement to the authoritarianism in three specific questions: experts dictate, one-party rule, and military rule. The result show unanimous and bipartisan rejection to all of three orientations. None of them surpassed 25%, and most of them even under 15% or only have the single digit support, although a slightly higher among pan-green supporters to the items of experts dictate and one-party rule under CSB's presidency in 2001 and 2006. This evidence suggests that people do have strong support of democracy and this support is not artificially created by the questionnaire wording but rather something real and substantial.

Some scholars argue that the support for democracy is only meaningful when people agree with liberal values as well as procedural justice, not simply agree with the label of democracy. In view of this, Table 2 also reports the measures of liberal democratic value and belief in procedural norm. The result suggests that people in Taiwan, regardless of their partisan attachment, whose average rates of agreement with liberal values are between 40% and 70% and the number climbs to between 70% and 80% for belief in procedural norm, which both show positive signals for the consolidation of democratic support in a bipartisan basis. While the below 50% average of liberal attitudes in the 2001 survey seems somewhat lower, the number substantially elevated from 45.9% in 2001 to 59.1% in 2006 and 62.2% in 2010. This means, the liberal attitudes are becoming more rooted in Taiwan society, which corroborates the observation of consolidated democratic legitimacy even under a severe polarized politics.

## **V. The Sunflower Movement: Changing the Unchanged**

Although it sounds weird to argue the co-existence of severe polarized politics and consolidated regime legitimacy in Taiwan, a sophisticated balance does exist between the two seemingly contradictory political phenomena. On the one hand, the competition between

pan-blue and pan-green never stops and none of the winner and loser can get over with the election. The winner feels insecure about the integrity of his political power; the loser just cannot forget the loss and fights every inch of ground all the time. On the other hand, both of pan-blue and pan-green elites and supporters realize that the bottom line of the political competition is to maintain a functional electoral democracy that decides who rules. No matter how polarized is the politics or how fierce is the competition, there is always a prevalent social understanding that the foundation of democracy should not be transgressed whatsoever. And no cause, despite how sacred it is, can be justified to break the democracy. Therefore, while the presidential election itself cannot really solve the polarized politics in Taiwan, at least it alleviates the political heat while provides a common ground for power contenders to fight each other. Overall, political polarization is persistent but manageable despite the lack of efficiency under the current political system in Taiwan.

Even at the height of political confrontation in 2004 and 2006 when pan-blue challenged CSB's political legitimacy by launching mass political movements (protests for alleged election-rigging and Chen's corruption, respectively), the opposition never crossed the line to raid or occupy any government building. No opinion leader or intellectual attempt to make a case to provide legitimate causes to invade democratic political institution. But the happening of the Sunflower Movement in March 2014 all in a sudden completely broke the bipartisan political norm by students, activists, and most importantly some intellectuals. Not only they support the occupation of the Legislative Yuan and, to a lesser degree, the Executive Yuan, but also they justify such an invasion by appealing to the natural law theory and claim that the occupation has its ultimate legitimacy well above the criminal law. They also defend the occupation with an argument that how Taiwan's representative democracy works now has fundamentally violated the will of the people and lost its political legitimacy, and therefore, the student's occupation should

be defined as a democratic participation which restores the true democracy by direct political intervention of the people.

The Sunflower Movement should have greater profound effect than what it shows now in six months later, because it broke the bottom-line consensus about competition rules in Taiwan politics, and more astonishingly, no major power contender dared to express their disagreement. How come public concern of such a game-changer incident waned down this quickly while so many fundamental questions remain unanswered, such as how a new democratic system should be if the current one has a fundamental flaw like protesters claimed? how many or what group of people are suffice for justifying a rule-broken intervention by appealing to the natural law? What violation of law (procedure, or other political events) can be defined an immediate and non-reversible threat to democracy which requires people's action instead of the rule of law? If the problem was so imminent that jeopardized Taiwan's democracy in March, why there is no sustained effort to prevent it from happening or at least a full investigation about those who should be responsible? If none of the above questions is treated seriously (persistent effort to remove the alleged imminent threat to democracy), where the momentum came from in March and why the momentum drains away now?

In hindsight, none of these questions seems important for the activist leaders of the Sunflower Movement, and many of them are soon busy engaging in the upcoming election in various forms. The mainstream view of the society also seems to downplay the participant's legal responsibility but rather treats this movement as a healthy civic engagement that gives a lesson to pan-blue and pan-green politicians. While this optimistic perspective might serve the best for all players in this game, we need to decipher what this movement actually means to Taiwan's democracy, and particularly, the question whether the emergence of this movement represents the marginalization of polarized politics as one of the major slogan states "get beyond blue and green,

citizens awake and help themselves".

Regarding the above question, I believe that the Sunflower Movement does have major impact on Taiwan's democracy, but it is more about potential intensification of polarized politics instead of marginalization. Undoubtedly, the huge energy and widespread support rallied behind this movement are associated with some long-standing problems none of the pan-green or pan-blue government can solve, such as economic overdependence on China, by which it generates serious negative effect that hollows out Taiwan's economy and cause income reduction and the loss of job opportunity. Problems like this are also intertwined with a fundamental political issue about national identity and the ultimate political status in the cross-strait relationship, which is very unlikely to solve in the current international politics. As a matter of fact, Taiwan in the globalization era, especially after the rise of China's economic power, has no choice but stay close with China in economic ties. And it is not just the young people in Taiwan who face the harsh problem of generational economic injustice, the same problem also appears in Hong Kong and, to a lesser degree, South Korea, all of which are part of the export-oriented production chains in East Asia. The situation might have been improved if the government in Taiwan is more capable and efficient, but things always became even worse due to partisan rivalry and legislative gridlock. The greatest impingement, however, is the encroachment of the rule-of-law principle that wears down democratic legitimacy and shows a demonstration effect of potential use of civic movements as boundary-free political maneuvers. If the Taiwan society has neither serious reflection nor consensual rule-reconstruction that is set up to regulate future political competition, chances are power contenders will exploit this strategy and easily cross the line to cause democratic breakdown when the situation is in their favor, regardless of whatever reason that could be used in political justification. This was the huge barrier for previous activist leaders who were afraid to crossing but now it looks so easily to pass over given the case of the

Sunflower Movement. To sum up, there are two pillars of Taiwan's democratic consolidation: rule of law and democratic legitimacy, but unfortunately both have suffered certain degree of damage after the Sunflower Movement. It might be too early to tell how bad the damage is and to what extent both pillars can be repaired and function normally as they were under the severe political polarization. Nonetheless, we should never underestimate the deliberate abuse of civic movements, and we need to restore the rule of law to prevent further erosion of democratic legitimacy that serves as the guardian of Taiwan's democracy.

A review of the causes which prolonged the legislative occupation for 23 days is something that must be done, otherwise this will hamper our understanding of why such unexpected game-changing incident happened in the first place. In hindsight, none of the MYJ, DPP, or Speaker Wang were willing to respond and handle with the occupation. Premier Jiang even announced that the security matter inside the legislative building belonged to Speaker Wang's jurisdiction so he could not do anything about the occupation. Speaker Wang, on the contrary, claimed that his jurisdiction only confines to the maintenance of legislative order when the legislature is in session, not including the security hazard when the legislature building is being invaded. Apparently, the KMT internal power struggle between MYJ and Speaker Wang extended to the blame game of who and how should deal with this political hot potato. In addition, while DPP does not have administrative power on hold, many of the key leaders in the Sunflower Movement were former members of its peripheral organizations and some even publically expressed their pro-DPP political stance. Considering the potential cost and benefit, DPP leadership decided to remain silence and provide low-key substantial support to the movement, which set the basic tone that DPP will side with the protest students against KMT's breach of the law in the legislature. Such a political gesture can prevent DPP from marginalization on the one hand, but would not politicize the movement into the game of

polarized politics between pan-blue and pan-green on the other. So issuing support and keeping silence about legislature paralyzation serves DPP's best strategy to harvest all the political support while not bear any political burden at the same time.

It is never a coincidence that the legislature occupation could last for 23 days, and it is very likely a deliberate result generated by tri-partisan rational political calculation, by which no one actually put the national interest at first, or even care about it at all. None of them really think clearly what if there is a state of emergence that requires the legislature to convene and react on behalf of the people. None of them really think about its potential consequence to the future democratic development in Taiwan. There is no moment more polarized in Taiwan politics when all of the power contenders only care for their own interest and abandon their political responsibility without any hesitation.

## **VI. Conclusion**

I can still vividly remember some fundamental knowledge of modern democratic theory when I sat in the classroom for the elementary political science course: first, a modern democracy is a representative democracy, and no functional democracy can rely on the idea of direct democracy alone; second, a well-established democracy is not solely based on participatory citizen culture but requires citizens' loyalty and deference, either; third, a democracy can maintain its stability only when people delegate their power and trust their chosen representatives to participate politic in daily basis through various political institutions designed by the Constitution; fourth, people should care about politics and prepare to engage anytime when it needed, but their direct intervention only happens provided that all of the legal measures has been running out.

It strikes me that the main political discourse proposed by students and endorsed by many

of my academic colleagues contradicts so much I learned as the fundamental tenets of modern political science. Students claimed their action is a must because the legislature has already transgressed what the Constitution grants it to do. But who decides the findings of fact? Could there be any other legal measure or political action within the legal limit to stop the transgression, if any? Students also claimed that only people's direct participation like theirs counts as the true democracy. But how many and which of them could qualify as the full representation of the people? If all those issues are so emergent that students had to occupy and paralyze the legislature, why did they lose the interest so fast so easy? If the natural law theory can justify students' violation of the criminal law in the state legal system, what are other applicable conditions and who can actually make a judgment call about its qualification? As a political scientist, I have found a very hard time to answer all these questions adequately if I were one of those students.

Over the years there are solid empirical findings suggest that Taiwan survives from the many chances that could have provoked democratic backsliding. The major factor that successfully contributes to Taiwan's democratic achievement is the rule of law and the strong democratic legitimacy in people mind. However, both factors have been somewhat compromised during the Sunflower Movement, and we have to be conscious about this risk carefully. The bottom line is-- we should continue promoting the rule of law and the democratic legitimacy, and meanwhile remain prudent and skeptical toward any argument that justifies boundary-free political actions verging on the legal transgression.

**Table 1 Signs of Polarized Politics, Change and Unchanged (2001~2013)**

Questionnaire Items	2001 ABS			2006 ABS			2010 ABS			TEDS('13)/TSCS('12)		
	Blue	green	PPI	blue	green	PPI	blue	green	PPI	blue	green	PPI
<b>Regime Evaluation</b>												
• On the whole, you are satisfied with the way democracy works in Taiwan, Republic of China.	42.4	58.4 (49.7)	<b>-16.0</b>	51.3	68.0 (59.4)	<b>-16.7</b>	77.5	58.5 (71.2)	<b>19.0</b>	64.2	48.2 (55.8)	<b>16.0</b>
• You are satisfied with the current Chen Shui-ban's/Ma Ying-jeou's government.	16.8	61.9 (37.4)	<b>-45.1</b>	4.5	43.8 (23.8)	<b>-39.3</b>	57.3	10.7 (42.0)	<b>46.6</b>	41.1	10.5 (25.0)	<b>30.6</b>
<b>Institutional Trust</b>												
• Trust in the courts	48.3	51.5 (49.8)	-3.2	23.8	40.2 (31.9)	<b>-16.4</b>	37.9	20.0 (31.9)	<b>17.9</b>	53.9	46.9 (50.3)	7.0
• Trust in the national government	33.5	63.0 (46.8)	<b>-29.5</b>	23.1	54.5 (38.3)	<b>-31.4</b>	49.9	15.6 (38.5)	<b>34.3</b>	42.7	26.3 (34.4)	<b>16.4</b>
• Trust in parliament	20.9	17.9 (19.6)	3.0	21.4	17.3 (19.4)	4.1	25.5	10.4 (20.5)	<b>15.1</b>	Pending		
• Trust in the election commission	55.3	60.0 (57.4)	-4.7	47.1	71.5 (59.0)	<b>-24.4</b>	64.7	58.2 (62.6)	6.5	Pending		
<b>Quality of Democracy</b>												
• Our current courts always punish the guilty even if they are high-ranking officials. (Rule of Law)		NA		34.9	56.3 (45.5)	<b>-21.4</b>	43.8	26.1 (38.0)	<b>17.7</b>	Pending		
• National government officials often abide by the law. (Rule of Law)		NA		30.1	49.8 (39.7)	<b>-19.7</b>	50.3	26.2 (42.4)	<b>24.1</b>	Pending		
• Corruption and bribe-taking are not widespread in your national government. (Control of Corruption)		NA		24.5	43.5 (33.5)	<b>-19.0</b>	46.3	23.5 (38.9)	<b>22.8</b>	Pending		
• On the whole, you rate the last national election as free and fair. (Competition)		NA		23.2	81.4 (51.7)	<b>-58.2</b>	92.3	76.4 (87.2)	<b>15.9</b>	Pending		
• Government officials do not withhold important information from the public view. (Vertical Accountability)		NA		35.0	58.9 (46.6)	<b>-23.9</b>	52.5	30.4 (45.3)	<b>22.1</b>	Pending		
• The government responds to what people want. (Responsiveness)		NA		24.4	52.5 (33.5)	<b>-28.1</b>	51.8	20.6 (41.4)	<b>31.2</b>	Pending		

Entries are percentages of the positive responses or PPI indices. Figures in parentheses are percentages of the overall respondents. NA: not available.  
Data source: *Asian Barometer I-III*.

**Table 2 Signs of Strong Democratic Legitimacy, Change and Unchanged (2001~2013)**

Questionnaire Items	2001 ABS			2006 ABS			2010 ABS			TEDS('13)		
	Blue	green	PPI	blue	green	PPI	blue	green	PPI	blue	green	PPI
<b>Support for Democracy</b>												
• The extent you want our country to be democratic in the future.(desirability)	88.6	89.6 (87.8)	-1.0	91.6	91.8 (91.9)	-0.2	92.8	91.6 (92.4)	1.2			Pending
• Democracy is suitable for our country. (suitability)	67.7	78.0 (72.3)	-10.3	71.7	74.6 (73.1)	-2.9	79.8	76.9 (78.9)	2.9			Pending
• Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government. (preferability)	40.9	54.4 (47.1)	-13.5	50.3	56.0 (53.1)	-5.7	50.3	61.6 (54.0)	-11.3	42.4	50.7 (46.8)	-8.3
• Democracy is capable of solving the problems of our society. (efficacy)	52.6	64.5 (57.9)	-11.9	54.1	64.7 (59.3)	-10.6	62.1	71.6 (65.2)	-9.5			Pending
<b>Authoritarian Orientation</b>												
• We should get rid of parliament and elections and have a strong leader decide things. (experts dictate)	15.2	21.7 (18.1)	-6.5	13.4	21.9 (17.6)	-8.5	14.0	16.1 (14.7)	-2.1			Pending
• No opposition party should be allowed to compete for power. (one-party rule)	12.2	22.3 (16.7)	-10.1	10.2	14.5 (12.3)	-4.3	11.5	9.1 (10.7)	2.4			Pending
• The army should come in to govern the country. (military rule)	5.5	5.8 (5.7)	-0.3	6.2	7.1 (6.7)	-0.9	4.6	3.8 (4.3)	0.8			Pending
<b>Liberal Democratic Value</b>												
• Percentage scores of liberal democratic values (8 items, each item is dichotomized coded, from 0 to 1)	49.6	43.5 (45.9)	6.1	62.9	54.7 (59.1)	8.2	59.9	66.7 (62.2)	-6.8			Pending
<b>Belief in Procedural Norm</b>												
• When the country is facing a difficult situation, it is not ok for the government to disregard the law in order to deal with the situation.	71.3	64.7 (68.3)	6.6	78.8	71.6 (75.3)	7.2	69.8	76.3 (72.0)	-6.5			Pending

Entries are percentages of the positive responses or PPI indices. Figures in parentheses are percentages of the overall respondents. NA: not available.  
Data source: *Asian Barometer I-III*.