

Party Realignment and Democratic Legitimacy in Taiwan

Min-hua Huang and Ka Lun Ng

Abstract

Taiwan's democracy has consolidated since the early 2000s, yet partisan polarization between the pan-blue and pan-green camps remains a defining feature of its politics. The rise of the Taiwan People's Party (TPP) in 2019 introduced a third force into this landscape, culminating in its pivotal role as a legislative minority after the 2024 election. Using six waves of Asian Barometer Surveys (2001–2022), long-term trends in democratic legitimacy were traced and attitudinal profile of TPP supporters were analyzed. The findings show that though polarization persists in evaluations of specific government and institutions, diffuse support for democratic principles remains strong across partisan lines. TPP supporters generally occupy intermediate positions between blue and green camps but exhibit higher commitment to liberal democratic values. These patterns suggest a demand for alternatives to entrenched rivalry rather than a shift toward populist politics, underscoring Taiwan's resilience under evolving partisan competition.

Keywords: Democratic Legitimacy, Party Realignment, Political Polarization, Taiwan People's Party, Taiwan Politics.

Introduction

Taiwan's democratic achievements are remarkable among emerging democracies. Since the first direct presidential election in 1996, the island has experienced three peaceful alternations of power and eight competitive presidential elections. Despite persistent rivalry between the Kuomintang (KMT)—led pan-blue camp and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)—led pan-green camp, Taiwan's democracy remains robust, with strong popular support and institutional performance comparable to advanced democracies.

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Previous studies showed that partisan polarization colors citizens' assessments of government performance, but it does not fundamentally erode support for democratic values and principles.¹ This distinction echoes David Easton's framework of specific support—directed toward incumbents and institutions—and diffuse support—anchored in regime principles and community identity.² Pippa Norris further disaggregates objects of support from political actors to regime performance and principles.³ A democracy remains resilient so long as diffuse support is intact, even if evaluations of leaders and institutions fluctuate. Taiwan's enduring consensus around liberal democratic values, despite partisan division, explains much of its democratic resilience.

Yet comparative research warns that prolonged dissatisfaction with leaders, institutions, or governance can gradually erode diffuse legitimacy.⁴ This dynamic is often linked to the global surge of populism in the 2010s, where disillusionment with elites fueled demands for plebiscitarian leadership and anti-establishment movements.⁵ Populism, while invoking democracy, challenges pluralism by claiming that only one “true” people's voice should prevail.

Taiwan has witnessed its own wave of civic mobilization with anti-establishment overtones. The 2013 Hung Chung-chiu protest and the 2014 Sunflower Movement galvanized younger generations, creating momentum for alternatives beyond the entrenched blue—green divide. This energy translated into the rise of new parties and, most prominently, the Taiwan People's Party (TPP), founded by Ko Wen-je in 2019. Positioning itself as the “white camp” to transcend partisan colors. Its emergence reshaped Taiwan's political competition into a three-way contest. As the share of citizens with partisan attachments remained relatively stable, but many have shifted their party preference toward the TPP, the pattern suggests that Taiwan has undergone party realignment. This raises the question of whether the TPP represents moderation or a new populist current.

Taiwan's democratic development has not been free of challenges—corruption scandals under Chen Shui-bian, controversy over Ma Ying-jeou's

¹ Min-hua Huang and Taehee Whang, “Democratic Legitimacy in the Polarized Politics,” *Korean Review of International Studies* 15, no. 1 (2012): 55-76.

² David Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1965); David Easton, “A Re-Assessment of the Concept of Political Support,” *British Journal of Political Science* 5, no. 4 (1975): 435-457, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400008309>.

³ Pippa Norris, *Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁴ Russell J. Dalton, *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices: The Erosion of Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁵ Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812293784>; Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, “Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash,” *HKS Working Paper No. RWP16-026*, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2818659> (August, 2016).

China-friendly policies, and ongoing tensions with Beijing have each tested public trust. The 2024 minority government of Lai Ching-te, coupled with Ko Wen-je's subsequent arrest in a corruption case, illustrates the volatility of Taiwan's political landscape.

This article reassesses Taiwan's democratic resilience in light of these changes. Using six waves of the Asian Barometer Survey (2001–2022), the study examines trends in political polarization and legitimacy, before turning to the attitudes of TPP supporters under the new three-party system. Specifically, it investigates whether the “white camp” reflects populist discontent or a demand for moderate, middle-ground politics by examining how their political attitudes compare with existing pan-blue and pan-green camp.

Literature Review

Scholars of democratic legitimacy have long distinguished between specific and diffuse support.⁶ Specific support is directed toward officeholders and closely tied to their performance (e.g. the incumbent president, cabinet members, or local representatives). Diffuse support is directed more abstractly toward the regime or the political order and tends to be more reflective of underlying legitimacy. Pippa Norris further disaggregates levels of political support, including: approval of incumbent officeholders, confidence in political institutions, evaluation of the overall regime performance, agreement with core principles and normative values, and belonging to the political community.⁷ This framework highlights why democracies can remain resilient even when governments or institutions are unpopular: as long as citizens maintain faith in the underlying democratic rules, political systems are self-correcting.

Since the 1990s, many scholars have expressed concern about a legitimacy crisis in post-industrial democracies, pointing to declining voter turnout, erosion of trust in political institutions, and rising polarization.⁸ Yet empirical studies reveal no consistent downward trajectory in democratic support; rather, attitudes often show trendless fluctuations. Still, scholars agree that citizens in many countries are dissatisfied with the performance of democracy, leading to what has been termed a “democratic deficit.”⁹ Prolonged dissatisfaction can erode democratic faith, and the rise of polarization and radical-right populism is often viewed as a consequence.

Political polarization has been especially evident in the United States and Western Europe since the 2000s.¹⁰ A polarized society not only

⁶ Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*; Easton, “A Re-Assessment of the Concept of Political Support.”

⁷ Norris, *Democratic Deficit*.

⁸ Dalton, *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices*.

⁹ Norris, *Democratic Deficit*.

¹⁰ Alan I. Abramowitz and Kyle L. Saunders, “Is Polarization a Myth?” *The Journal of Politics*

undermines democratic norms but also fosters distrust in institutions.¹¹ In this environment, populist parties, particularly on the radical right, have gained significant ground.¹² Explanations for this trend vary, but two factors stand out: the backlash against economic globalization and cultural anxieties linked to immigration, gender norms, and multiculturalism.

What is worrying in established post-industrial democracies may be more pronounced in consolidating democracies. In the case of Taiwan, political polarization and populist tendencies have been major concerns since it first democratized. The pan-blue/pan-green divide defines the deeply polarized party politics in Taiwan.¹³ National identity and ethnicity have always been dividing issues in Taiwan since the ROC retreated to the island, with mainland Chinese arriving with the KMT government forming a political and economic elite class over the local Taiwanese. The political divide hinges upon the very basis of the political community and may potentially shake the most diffuse level of political support of the regime. Ma Ying-jeou era policies that deepened cross-strait economic and social ties were met with heightened exclusivist sentiment and the outbreak of the Sunflower movement in 2014.¹⁴ Public opposition to China only intensified after Beijing's repression in Hong Kong and military threats toward Taiwan.¹⁵ Research shows both strong polarization over unification or independence and exaggerated perceived polarization,¹⁶ the latter of which may be especially harmful to democratic support.¹⁷ At the same

70, no. 2 (2008): 542-555, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381608080493>; Endre Borbáth, Swen Hutter, and Arndt Leininger, "Cleavage Politics, Polarisation and Participation in Western Europe," *West European Politics* 46, no. 4 (2023): 631-651, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2022.2161786>; Shanto Iyengar et al., "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States," *Annual Review of Political Science* 22, no. 1 (2019): 129-146, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051117-073034>; Andres Reiljan, "'Fear and Loathing across Party Lines' (Also) in Europe: Affective Polarisation in European Party Systems," *European Journal of Political Research* 59, no. 2 (2020): 376-396, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12351>.

¹¹ Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2018); Murat Somer, Jennifer L. McCoy, and Russell E. Luke, "Pernicious Polarization, Autocratization and Opposition Strategies," *Democratization* 28, no. 5 (2021): 929-948, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1865316>; Milan W. Svoblik, "Polarization versus Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 3 (2019): 20-32, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0039>.

¹² Inglehart and Norris, "Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash."

¹³ Shelley Rigger, "Political Parties and Identity Politics in Taiwan," in *New Challenges for Maturing Democracies in Korea and Taiwan*, eds. Larry Diamond and Gi-Wook Shin (Stanford University Press, 2020), 106.

¹⁴ Kharis Templeman, Yun-han Chu, and Larry Diamond, eds., *Dynamics of Democracy in Taiwan: The Ma Ying-Jeou Years* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2020).

¹⁵ T. Y. Wang and Chi Huang, "The Chinese Threat and Changes of Identity in Taiwan," *Asian Survey* 64, no. 3 (2024): 428-451, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2023.2108868>.

¹⁶ Chi Huang and Tzu-ching Kuo, "Actual and Perceived Polarization on Independence-Unification Views in Taiwan," *Asian Journal of Communication* 32, no. 2 (2022): 75-92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01292986.2021.2022174>.

¹⁷ Yi-ching Hsiao and Eric Chen-hua Yu, "Polarization Perception and Support for Democracy:

time, scholars note that Taiwan still retains a substantial “missing middle” in public opinion.¹⁸

Taiwan also exhibits some, but not all, of the conditions associated with populism elsewhere. The country benefited from globalization-driven growth, but rising living costs, wage stagnation, and inequality—particularly among younger generations—have fueled discontent.¹⁹ Migration has increased but remains relatively modest compared to Europe and North America, while gender inequality is low by regional standards, approaching levels seen in advanced Western democracies.²⁰

Nonetheless, Taiwan has produced two politicians widely regarded as populists: Han Kuo-yu and Ko Wen-je.²¹ Han surged to prominence after his 2018 Kaohsiung mayoral victory and his 2020 presidential run as the KMT candidate. His campaign rhetoric appealed to “ordinary people,” attacked political elites, and downplayed the salience of identity and cross-strait issues.²² Though he lost the presidential race and was later recalled as mayor, he remained influential within the KMT and was elected Legislative Yuan speaker in 2024. Ko Wen-je, by contrast, rose as an independent political outsider with a technocratic background.²³ Emphasizing pragmatism and positioning himself as “beyond pan-blue/pan-green,” he became Taipei mayor in 2014,

The Case of Taiwan,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 55, no. 8 (2020): 1143–1162, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909620911150>.

¹⁸ Huang and Kuo, “Actual and Perceived Polarization on Independence-Unification Views in Taiwan.”

¹⁹ Yi-chun Chang, Thung-hong Lin, and Chun-yin Lee, “Revisiting Income Differences between Cohorts and Social Classes in Taiwan: 1990–2020,” *Taiwan Economic Forecast and Policy* 53, no. 1 (2022): 41–78, <http://www.econ.sinica.edu.tw/pdfs/full?file=/1/archives/cfb579bffe28e76> (accessed October 5, 2024); Ming-chang Tsai and Liang-wei Chen, “When Economic Growth Is Gone: The Global Generation and Disparities in Happiness in Taiwan,” in *Social Well-Being, Development, and Multiple Modernities in Asia*, eds. Jaeyeol Yee, Hiroo Harada, and Masayuki Kanai (Springer Nature Singapore, 2024), 139–155, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-3866-3_9.

²⁰ Executive Yuan, Taiwan, *Gender at a Glance in ROC (Taiwan)* (2025), <https://gec.ey.gov.tw/File/A998EF43A6C1C29D> (accessed October 4, 2025); United Nations, *International Migrant Stock 2024: Key Facts and Figures*, no. UN DESA/POP/2024/DC/NO. 13. (n.d.), <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock> (accessed October, 2024).

²¹ Axel Klein, Frédéric Krumbein, and Hannes Mosler, “The Incurious Approach to East Asian Populism: Why Studies on Japan, South Korea and Taiwan Are Often Overlooked in Political Science,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* 25, no. 1 (2025): 121–140, <https://doi.org/10.1017/jea.2024.19>.

²² Nathan F. Batto, “The Impact of Han Kuo-Yu’s Populist Rhetoric in the 2018 Kaohsiung Mayoral Election,” *Journal of Electoral Studies*, 28, no. 2 (2021): 47–94, [https://doi.org/10.6612/tjes.202111_28\(2\).0002](https://doi.org/10.6612/tjes.202111_28(2).0002); Frédéric Krumbein, “Populist Discourses in Taiwan and the Case of Han Kuo-yu,” *International Journal of Taiwan Studies* 7, no. 2 (2023): 229–263, <https://doi.org/10.1163/24688800-20231313>.

²³ Wei-ting Yen, “Labor Market, Economic Insecurity, and Populism in Taiwan,” *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 17, no. 1 (2024): 161–189, <https://www.tfd.org.tw/backend/upload/publish/quartarly/26efdba0b96ef77e51396575696123b0.pdf>.

and founded the Taiwan People's Party (TPP) in 2019, which secured seats in both the 2020 and 2024 Legislative Yuan elections. Ko's 2024 presidential campaign garnered 26 percent of the vote, marking the TPP as Taiwan's most viable third party since democratization. However, his arrest in August 2024 for alleged corruption has cast doubt on the party's future. Whether the rise of Han and Ko reflects growing populist radicalism or a demand for centrist alternatives remains an open question.

Tracking Partisanship Polarization in Taiwan

Asian Barometer Surveys tracks the political attitudes of the people of Taiwan spanning over two decades from 2001 to 2022.²⁴ Each wave of the survey covers more than 1,200 Taiwan citizens and are representative of the Taiwanese population above the voting age. The following results from the ABS wave provide empirical evidence to assess the political polarization in Taiwan. The concept of polarized politics refers to partisan rivalry and its diffusive effects to the polarization of political behaviors and attitudes.²⁵ The major partisan cleavage in Taiwan lies on whether to improve the relationship with mainland China with the ultimate goal of re-unification, or to cut ties with mainland China and advocate for Taiwan to be an independent country. The pro-unification/pro-independence divide is known as the pan-blue/pan-green divide. The respondents are classified by the presidential candidate they voted for in the previous election.²⁶

The degree of political polarization by partisan affiliation is evaluated in four major aspects of political attitudes: regime evaluation, trust in political institutions, quality of governance, and political legitimacy. In each table, the percentage of positive responses by supporters of each camp, the overall percentage, as well as two measurements of polarization are summarized. Following recent literature on political polarization, partisanship polarization is the ideological divergence between the pan-blue and pan-green camps, and is measured by the overlap coefficient (OC) for each item:²⁷

²⁴ Asian Barometer Project Office, "Asian Barometer Survey," (2024), <https://www.asianbarometer.org/datar?page=d10> (accessed October 8, 2024).

²⁵ Pietro S. Nivola and David W. Brady, eds., *Red and Blue Nation? Characteristics and Causes of America's Polarized Politics* (Hoover Institution on War of Revolution, and Peace and Brookings Institution Press, 2006); Pietro S. Nivola and David W. Brady, eds., *Red and Blue Nation? 2: Consequences and Correction of America's Polarized Politics* (Brookings Institution Press, 2008).

²⁶ Candidates from the KMT, People First Party (PFP), New Party (NP), and Soong Chu-yu (independent in 2000) are classified as pan-blue; candidates from the DPP and Hsu Hsin-liang (independent) are classified as pan-green.

²⁷ M. S. Levendusky and J. C. Pope, "Red States vs. Blue States: Going Beyond the Mean," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2011): 227-248, <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfr002>; Friedrich Schmid and Axel Schmidt, "Nonparametric Estimation of the Coefficient of Overlapping—Theory and Empirical Application," *Computational Statistics & Data Analysis* 50, no. 6 (2006): 1583-1596, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.csda.2005.01.014>.

$$OC=1-\frac{1}{2}\int_{-\infty}^{+\infty}|f(x)-g(x)|dx$$

OC have a range of zero to one, where zero indicates that the distribution of the two groups' views are completely separate, and one indicates that they completely overlap. While there is no agreed cutoff to indicate the degree of polarization, this study proposes that $OC \geq 0.85$ indicates no polarization, $0.7 \leq OC < 0.85$ indicates low polarization, $0.5 \leq OC < 0.7$ indicates moderate polarization, and $OC < 0.5$ indicates high polarization. To ensure comparability with existing literature on Taiwan, the Partisanship Polarization Index (PPI) is also included in the tables.²⁸

Overall Regime Evaluation

Table 1 examines evaluations of government performance, economic conditions, and democracy. Taiwan's economy proved resilient, averaging 3.7 percent annual GDP growth from 2000 to 2020, with brief contractions in 2001 and 2009 quickly reversed.²⁹ Yet public perceptions were more pessimistic: only 9 percent rated the economy positively in 2001 and about 20 percent from 2006 to 2019. Positive assessments rose moderately to 42 percent in 2022. Ruling-party supporters viewed conditions more favorably than the opposition, though partisan gaps were small. Polarization was lowest in 2001 (OC 0.91) and remained low to moderate thereafter (0.69–0.82).

Satisfaction with democracy increased steadily, from 53 percent in 2001 to 78 percent in 2022. Polarization was low through 2014 (OC 0.81–0.89) but grew recently, OC dropping to 0.79 in 2018 to 2019 and 0.70 in 2022. In that year, 91 percent of pan-green but only 61 percent of pan-blue supporters reported satisfaction, i.e., a 30 percentage-point gap.

Presidential and government evaluations have been polarized throughout. From 2001 to 2019, majorities were dissatisfied, but approval rose to 58 percent in 2022, driven by pan-green support (90 percent) versus just 23 percent among pan-blue. Polarization, moderate in earlier waves (OC 0.55–0.61), spiked in 2022 (0.33).

²⁸ Yun-han Chu et al., "Polarized Politics and Support for Democracy," in *Taiwan's Democracy Challenged: The Chen Shui-bian Years*, eds. Yun-han Chu, Min-hua Huang, and Yu-tzung Chang (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2016); Huang and Whang, "Democratic Legitimacy in the Polarized Politics." PPI is the difference in the percentage of positive responses between the pan-blue and pan-green camps. It ranges from -100 percent to 100 percent, where positive PPI indicates pan-blue supporters gave a more positive response than pan-green, and negative PPI indicates the opposite. When the responses are binary, OC can be derived from PPI with: $OC = 1 - |PPI|/100\%$. Note that the OC values reported in the tables are calculated using the raw scale before dichotomization, and therefore do not align exactly with the formula aforementioned. In the existing literature, $PPI > 15$ percent is considered substantively significant, corresponding to $OC < 0.85$.

²⁹ IMF, "IMF DataMapper," *International Monetary Fund* (2024), https://www.imf.org/external/data_mapper/ (accessed October 10, 2024).

Across all three questions, ruling-party supporters consistently rate the regime more positively, with views shifting by administration: pan-green during Chen and Tsai, pan-blue under Ma. While satisfaction with democracy has climbed, regime evaluations remain polarized and divisions have deepened in recent years.

Uneven Trust in Political Institutions

The influence of political polarization in Taiwan penetrates deeply into citizens' trust in political institutions. The ABS survey explores respondents' trust across a range of institutions, from overtly political ones, like the presidency and national government, to supposedly neutral, non-partisan institutions such as the courts, civil service, military, police, and election commission.

As shown in Table 2, trust is consistently higher in non-political institutions than in partisan ones. Most respondents distrust the presidency, government, parties, and legislature, except in 2022 when 52 percent approved of the presidency. Political parties fare the worst, with trust below 20 percent across all waves. Local governments stand out as the only partisan institution trusted by a majority, aside from 2014 (49 percent). Low trust in partisan institutions may reflect sustained exposure to corruption scandals and negative campaigning. Chen Shui-bian's corruption case in 2006, Ma Ying-jeou's abuse-of-power controversy in 2013, and more recent accusations of falsified academic credentials—including those against Tsai Ing-wen's doctorate—have reinforced perceptions of systemic corruption across party lines.

Trust in political institutions follows partisan cues. Ruling-party supporters consistently express more trust, especially in the presidency and the government. Polarization has intensified: for the presidency, OC declined from 0.54 to 0.70 (2001 to 2018/19) to 0.37 in 2022; for the national government, from 0.62 to 0.75 to 0.55. Trust in parties and parliament remains uniformly low, though polarization has grown slightly in recent waves (OC dropped from about 0.9 to 0.8). By contrast, trust in local governments remains high and non-polarized, likely because both camps govern some local jurisdictions, attenuating partisan divergence.

Non-partisan institutions generally command higher confidence. The civil service and military dipped to around 45 percent during Ma's term but rebounded above 60 percent under Tsai, which may be explained by the Hung Chung-chiu army abuse incident. Trust in the police has risen steadily, from about half under Chen and Ma to majorities under Tsai (73 percent in 2018/19, 66 percent in 2022). The election commission retains majority trust (50 to 60 percent). The courts, however, are persistently low: trust fell from 50 percent in 2001 to about 30 percent through 2010–2018/19, recovering only slightly to 37 percent in 2022.

Polarization in non-partisan institutions is limited, but notably intensified for the courts and election commission recently. For courts, OC dropped from 0.85 in 2018/19 to 0.76 in 2022, likely reflecting partisan disagreement over

Table 1. Regime Evaluation by Presidential Election Vote

Questionnaire Item	Camp	Wave 1 (2001)			Wave 2 (2006)			Wave 3 (2010)			Wave 4 (2014)			Wave 5 (2018/19)			Wave 6 (2022)		
		Mean	OC [PPI]		Mean	OC [PPI]		Mean	OC [PPI]		Mean	OC [PPI]		Mean	OC [PPI]		Mean	OC [PPI]	
You rate the overall economic condition of our country today as good or very good.	Blue	6.31	0.91		12.92	0.69		24.70	0.78		26.18	0.82		12.47	0.72		29.90		0.73
	Green	10.53			35.14			11.11			12.64			27.28			53.60		
	Over-all	8.69	[-4.22]		22.79	[-22.22]		17.85	[13.60]		18.34	[13.54]		18.86	[-14.81]		42.44	[-23.70]	
On the whole, you are satisfied with the way democracy works in Taiwan, Republic of China.	Blue	46.17	0.88		51.47	0.83		77.78	0.81		70.03	0.89		56.78	0.79		60.74		0.70
	Green	57.91			68.81			58.35			58.81			77.69			90.98		
	Over-all	53.38	[-11.74]		59.36	[-17.34]		70.25	[19.42]		64.27	[11.22]		68.91	[-20.91]		78.27	[-30.24]	
You are satisfied with the current president/government.	Blue	20.40	0.58		5.31	0.60		57.97	0.53		38.20	0.61		6.73	0.55		16.56		0.33
	Green	62.90			44.12			10.61			6.78			51.69			83.83		
	Over-all	41.28	[-42.50]		23.12	[-38.81]		39.63	[47.36]		24.55	[31.42]		32.44	[-44.96]		58.15	[-67.26]	

Source: Asian Barometer Survey (Wave 1 to Wave 6).

rulings in high-profile political cases. The election commission shows similar dynamics, with OC at 0.81 in 2018/19 and 0.68 in 2022, reflecting disputes over its neutrality, such as the 2019 appointment of Lee Chin-yung, a DPP-affiliated chair. The courts are especially concerning: Since 2010, only about 20 percent of the losing camp expressing confidence, many view rulings as partisan—whether in Chen Shui-bian’s corruption cases or in recent disputes over cases related to the “Ill-gotten Party Assets Act.” This undermines perceptions of judicial impartiality and weakens a core institution of democratic accountability.

Shared and Divergent Views on Quality of Democracy

Given Taiwan’s polarized politics, citizens hold divergent views on democratic governance. Following Diamond and Morlino,³⁰ three dimensions were examined. First, procedural dimensions focus on whether political institutions function as intended. These include rule of law, participation, competition, vertical accountability, and horizontal accountability. Second, substantive dimensions concern the core elements of liberal democracy—freedom and equality. Finally, the responsiveness dimension evaluates the extent to which the government addresses the needs of its citizens. As summarized in Table 3, ABS surveys since 2006 show a consistent pattern: ruling-party supporters rate democracy more positively, though gaps vary across dimensions and time.

Rule of law receives the lowest marks. Majorities across all waves believe officials are not punished for crimes, frequently break the law, and that corruption is widespread. Even in 2022, only 54 percent agreed leaders rarely abuse power. Among pan-green supporters, a slim majority (62 percent) shared this view, while pan-blue remained skeptical. On corruption, even governing-party supporters reported widespread concerns until 2022, when just 53 percent of pan-green respondents said corruption was not prevalent. Polarization is modest but persistent ($OC \approx 0.8$).

In contrast, participation is rated highly. Most Taiwanese agree that elections offer genuine choice and allow voters to remove unpopular governments, with approval reaching nearly 90 percent in 2018/19 and 2022 under Tsai. Polarization is minimal ($OC > 0.85$). Views are less positive on whether elections make governments listen. During Ma’s term, 75 percent (2010) and 67 percent (2014) responded positively, but this dropped to 49 percent in 2018/19 and 56 percent in 2022. Polarization increased in 2022, with only 44 percent of pan-blue versus 69 percent of pan-green respondents agreeing ($OC = 0.75$). This might be related to the plummet of pan-blue supporter’s external efficacy due to the consecutive setbacks of two presidential elections, as well as the wide margin of pan-green legislative majority, which established the dominant advantage in the legislation.

³⁰ Larry Jay Diamond and Leonardo Morlino, eds., *Assessing the Quality of Democracy* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

Table 2. Trust in Political Institutions by Presidential Election Vote

Questionnaire Item	Camp	Wave 1 (2001)		Wave 2 (2006)		Wave 3 (2010)		Wave 4 (2014)		Wave 5 (2018/19)		Wave 6 (2022)	
		%	OC [PPI]	%	OC [PPI]	%	OC [PPI]	%	OC [PPI]	%	OC [PPI]	%	OC [PPI]
Trust in the president	Blue	34.34	0.70	14.85	0.63	54.96	0.56	40.10	0.70	12.77	0.54	13.30	0.37
	Green			51.53		10.65		10.01		59.03		76.26	
	Overall			31.00	[-36.68]	36.17	[44.31]	25.37	[30.09]	37.76	[-46.26]	51.87	[-62.96]
Trust in the national government	Blue	34.34	0.70	23.53	0.69	49.56	0.66	37.93	0.75	18.06	0.62	21.07	0.55
	Green	64.01		54.72		15.59		12.86		56.33		65.91	
	Overall	47.36	[-29.66]	38.74	[-31.19]	35.24	[33.98]	26.71	[25.07]	38.82	[-38.28]	47.88	[-44.84]
Trust in political parties	Blue	17.19	0.93	13.39	0.89	21.00	0.89	15.09	0.95	11.21	0.79	7.35	0.80
	Green	21.72		21.05		11.50		11.01		27.30		27.66	
	Overall	19.62	[-4.53]	17.32	[-7.66]	15.91	[9.50]	12.40	[4.08]	19.26	[-16.09]	19.64	[-20.32]
Trust in the parliament	Blue	22.47	0.93	22.21	0.82	26.13	0.85	18.84	0.92	15.61	0.72	15.60	0.74
	Green	19.17		17.61		10.64		14.95		39.38		41.61	
	Overall	23.10	[3.31]	21.67	[4.60]	20.94	[15.49]	18.05	[3.90]	28.67	[-23.77]	32.52	[-26.00]
Trust in local government	Blue	52.35	0.94	56.01	0.95	59.07	0.95	51.90	0.93	58.12	0.86	55.21	0.94
	Green	58.23		59.45		55.14		45.48		71.63		61.25	
	Overall	56.17	[-5.88]	56.55	[-3.44]	54.21	[3.93]	48.78	[6.41]	63.37	[-13.51]	58.44	[-6.04]

Table 2. Trust in Political Institutions by Presidential Election Vote

Questionnaire Item	Camp	Wave 1 (2001)			Wave 2 (2006)			Wave 3 (2010)			Wave 4 (2014)			Wave 5 (2018/19)			Wave 6 (2022)		
		%	OC [PPI]	%	%	OC [PPI]	%	%	OC [PPI]	%	%	OC [PPI]	%	%	OC [PPI]	%	%	OC [PPI]	%
Trust in the courts	Blue	48.56	0.96	25.37	0.85	38.09	0.82	30.97	0.88	20.89	0.85	19.81	0.76						
	Green	50.87		39.98		19.64		19.08		31.45		44.21							
	Overall	50.29	[-2.31]	35.14	[-14.61]	32.33	[18.45]	27.03	[11.90]	29.81	[-10.55]	37.35	[-24.40]						
Trust in civil service	Blue	59.70	0.99	52.44	0.89	55.30	0.92	50.63	0.86	63.21	0.97	51.60	0.90						
	Green	60.86		63.49		46.97		36.59		63.52		61.26							
	Overall	60.07	[-1.16]	56.40	[-11.05]	51.59	[8.33]	45.14	[14.04]	61.55	[-0.30]	57.02	[-9.66]						
Trust in the military	Blue	70.77	0.96	52.87	0.86	51.14	0.93	51.67	0.87	60.68	0.91	54.54	0.87						
	Green	69.65		66.37		44.54		38.65		67.84		67.47							
	Overall	69.30	[1.12]	59.62	[-13.50]	48.64	[6.60]	44.35	[13.02]	63.46	[-7.16]	61.12	[-12.93]						
Trust in the police	Blue	46.99	0.95	45.42	0.92	55.16	0.86	60.77	0.93	74.37	0.90	64.91	0.95						
	Green	52.00		53.79		41.03		53.78		76.67		69.26							
	Overall	49.51	[-5.01]	48.76	[-8.37]	48.83	[14.13]	56.84	[6.98]	73.02	[-2.30]	66.14	[-4.36]						
Trust in the election commission	Blue	54.73	0.96	46.81	0.75	64.20	0.94	60.53	0.82	46.76	0.81	40.84	0.68						
	Green	58.79		71.64		57.74		42.54		65.68		72.86							
	Overall	55.12	[-4.06]	56.02	[-24.83]	58.79	[6.46]	50.46	[17.99]	56.34	[-18.92]	59.13	[-32.02]						

Source: Asian Barometer Survey (Wave 1 to Wave 6).

On competition, most citizens believe candidates enjoy fair mass media access, with 68 percent to 75 percent positive responses between 2006 and 2014. Polarization was low, although it rose slightly in 2014 (OC = 0.83). Unfortunately, the question was dropped after 2014, which meant more recent trends are untrackable. National elections are also widely viewed as free and fair. However, the 2006 survey showed deep division: 81 percent of pan-green respondents but only 23 percent of pan-blue agreed following Chen Shui-bian's narrow re-election in 2004, producing an OC of 0.42. Subsequent waves showed greater consensus (OC $\approx$ 0.8), but polarization returned in 2022 (OC = 0.61). Still, about half of pan-blue respondents endorsed the fairness of the election even then.

Vertical accountability dimensions remain weak. Only 35 percent to 41 percent agreed in 2006–2014 that government could be held accountable between elections, rising modestly to 50 percent in 2018/19 and 56 percent in 2022 under Tsai. Yet partisan differences widened, with OC falling from 0.89 to 0.73. Freedom of information perceptions are similarly low (37 percent–47 percent), with ruling-party supporters consistently somewhat more positive (OC $\approx$ 0.8). Evaluations of horizontal accountability hover around 40 percent to 60 percent positive, climbing close to 60 percent in 2022, but polarization deepened, with OC dropping to 0.57–0.70.

Substantive democracy is evaluated more positively. Between 75 percent to 81 percent affirm freedom of speech and 80 percent to 84 percent support freedom of association across all waves, while 60–72 percent believe basic needs are met. Equality, however, is rated poorly: only 23 percent to 45 percent agree that everyone/rich and poor are treated equally.³¹ This perception reflects frustration with rising inequality since the mid-2000s, when Taiwan's Gini coefficient rose above 0.30 after decades of relative equality.³² Polarization was limited until 2022, when OC fell below 0.80, with pan-blue respondents less likely to affirm freedom of speech during Tsai's second term (OC = 0.75). Nevertheless, the majority of them still gave a positive response.

Finally, responsiveness receives the lowest marks. Between 2006 and 2018/19, only about 30 percent to 40 percent believed government responds to public demands, dipping as low as 27 percent. A narrow majority (53 percent) responded positively in 2022, but partisan division was sharp: OC dropped from $\sim$ 0.7 in earlier waves to 0.59. Similarly, only 27 to 37 percent believed government could solve the most important problem identified, though polarization remained low (OC $>$ 0.8).

Overall, the Taiwanese people have a mixed evaluation of the country's quality of procedural democracy. They have good perceptions on the

³¹ The statement was "Everyone is treated equally by the government." in Wave 2, and "Rich and poor people are treated equally by the government." in subsequent waves.

³² LIS Data Center, "LIS Inequality and Poverty Key Figures," <https://www.lisdatacenter.org/> (accessed October 6, 2024).

participation dimension and little polarization. However, they have unfavorable perceptions on rule of law and accountability, and are often polarized about it. They are mostly satisfied with the substantive freedom and equality except a low rating on wealth inequality, but the recent uptick in polarization may be of concern. Their evaluation of the government's responsiveness is also unsatisfactory, and have a polarized view on whether it responds to what people want.

Broad Consensus on Political Legitimacy

Finally, political legitimacy, the backbone of Taiwan's democratic resilience, will be examined. The ABS questionnaire covers four aspects. The first one is expressive support which is measured by five to six items on how the people express their support of democracy as the preferred kind of governance. Second is authoritarian orientation which is measured by three items assessing whether the respondents accept different forms of autocracy. Third, liberal democratic values score calculated from seven items. Each item asks the respondents whether they disagree with violations of liberal democratic principles. Finally, an item on belief in the democratic procedural norms. The results are shown in Table 4.

Expressive support is high. Between 87 percent to 92 percent in Waves 1 to 3 wanted Taiwan to be democratic, and 88 percent to 91 percent in Waves 3 to 6 said it is the best form of government despite its flaws. Similarly, 70 percent to 84 percent agreed democracy suits Taiwan. However, support looks weaker in comparative terms: only 45 percent to 55 percent said democracy is always preferable to any other system, and just 11 percent to 29 percent prioritized democratic development over economic growth, or 15 percent to 34 percent over reducing inequality. Partisan polarization has grown over time. While pan-blue and pan-green respondents were on the same page in 2001 to 2010 ($OC > 0.85$), by 2022 pan-green supporters were more likely to endorse democracy in four of six items ($OC\ 0.74\ to\ 0.83$). Importantly, pan-green respondents consistently emphasized democracy regardless of whether their party was in power, reflecting the DPP's prodemocracy legacy.

Authoritarian orientations remain marginal. Across all six waves, 79 percent to 84 percent rejected replacing elections with a strong leader, 82 percent to 93 percent were against banning opposition parties, and 92 percent to 97 percent disapproved military rule. There was no sign of partisan gaps appear ($OC \approx 0.9$).

Support for liberal democratic values has improved gradually. Less than half endorsed them under Chen, rising to about 60 percent during Ma's presidency and remained about the same under Tsai. Polarization is minimal ($OC \approx 0.9$).

On procedural norms, asked only in Waves 1 to 4, 68 percent to 81 percent rejected government disregarding the law in difficult situations, with no partisan division ($OC > 0.9$).

Table 3. Perceived Quality of Democracy by Presidential Election Vote

Questionnaire Item	Camp	Wave 2 (2006)		Wave 3 (2010)		Wave 4 (2014)		Wave 5 (2018/19)		Wave 6 (2022)	
		%	OC [PPI]	%	OC [PPI]	%	OC [PPI]	%	OC [PPI]	%	OC [PPI]
Rule of Law	Blue	36.61	0.80	42.78	0.83	45.80	0.82				
	Green	56.98		26.08		27.64					
	Overall	46.79	[-20.37]	37.50	[16.70]	38.00	[18.16]				
	Blue	29.43	0.79	48.96	0.76	44.82	0.76	30.77	0.80	43.47	0.82
	Green	50.25		25.21		20.74		51.06		61.73	
	Overall	39.31	[-20.82]	39.03	[23.75]	35.36	[24.08]	41.16	[-20.29]	54.24	[-18.27]
Corruption and bribe-taking are not wide-spread in our national government.	Blue	24.61	0.82	45.06	0.78	32.58	0.84	34.27	0.84	30.51	0.78
	Green	42.97		22.65		17.45		49.87		52.81	
	Overall	32.59	[-18.36]	35.93	[22.41]	24.19	[15.12]	41.41	[-15.61]	42.60	[-22.31]
	Blue	62.40	0.97	61.06	0.95	61.98	0.92	88.61	0.97	84.07	0.86
	Green	65.54		59.90		54.91		91.12		86.78	
	Overall	63.80	[-3.14]	58.26	[1.16]	57.59	[7.08]	89.16	[-2.51]	86.64	[-2.71]
People have the power to change a government they don't like. / Citizens are able to remove a government they don't like through elections.	Blue	50.57	0.91	61.85	0.98	53.92	0.98	61.75	0.98	59.76	0.86
	Green	59.25		60.23		52.58		63.04		73.61	
	Overall	54.83	[-8.68]	59.49	[1.62]	50.56	[1.34]	59.58	[-1.29]	66.35	[-13.85]

Table 3. Perceived Quality of Democracy by Presidential Election Vote

Questionnaire Item	Camp	Wave 2 (2006)		Wave 3 (2010)		Wave 4 (2014)		Wave 5 (2018/19)		Wave 6 (2022)	
		%	OC [PPI]	%	OC [PPI]	%	OC [PPI]	%	OC [PPI]	%	OC [PPI]
Participation	Blue			79.54	0.92	70.22	0.96	45.78	0.89	44.23	0.75
	Green			71.40		66.05		57.21		68.75	
	Overall			75.31	[8.14]	66.91	[4.18]	48.71	[-11.43]	56.37	[-24.52]
Having elections makes the government more responsive to people's needs.											
Competition	Blue	23.46	0.42	92.00	0.83	83.59	0.78	77.10	0.78	49.84	0.61
	Green	81.77		76.08		63.13		91.34		88.90	
	Overall	53.28	[-58.31]	85.69	[15.92]	73.57	[20.46]	82.34	[-14.25]	74.08	[-39.07]
	Blue	63.51	0.92	76.85	0.91	80.87	0.83				
	Green	71.27		70.25		64.01					
Political parties or candidates in our country have equal access to the mass media during the election period.											
Vertical Accountability	Blue	68.17	[-7.76]	75.06	[6.60]	72.86	[16.86]				
	Blue	30.07	0.88	45.67	0.87	43.48	0.89	42.12	0.84	40.26	0.73
	Green	40.21		32.36		32.54		57.93		66.98	
	Overall	35.47	[-10.14]	41.00	[13.31]	38.25	[10.95]	49.89	[-15.80]	56.49	[-26.72]
	Blue	34.40	0.77	51.34	0.79	45.61	0.81	34.47	0.85	34.12	0.79
Government officials do not withhold important information from the public view.											
	Green	57.69		29.86		26.57		49.94		54.94	
	Overall	45.93	[-23.29]	43.27	[21.48]	36.53	[19.04]	43.63	[-15.48]	47.06	[-20.82]

Table 3. Perceived Quality of Democracy by Presidential Election Vote

Questionnaire Item		Camp	Wave 2 (2006)		Wave 3 (2010)		Wave 4 (2014)		Wave 5 (2018/19)		Wave 6 (2022)	
			%	OC [PPI]	%	OC [PPI]	%	OC [PPI]	%	OC [PPI]	%	OC [PPI]
Horizontal Accountability	The legal system can do something when the government breaks the laws.	Blue	30.11	0.78	55.32	0.86	56.14	0.80	45.37	0.91	39.93	0.70
		Green	51.12		41.34		35.72		54.16		69.80	
		Overall	40.62	[-21.02]	50.32	[13.98]	47.20	[20.43]	51.10	[-8.79]	59.39	[-29.87]
		Blue	48.82	0.84	61.98	0.71	47.89	0.84	29.48	0.77	30.19	0.57
Freedom	The legislature is ca-pable of keeping the government in check.	Green	63.00		33.31		31.58		52.82		73.61	
		Overall	56.10	[-14.18]	50.44	[28.68]	41.49	[16.31]	42.93	[-23.34]	58.27	[-43.43]
		Blue	67.32	0.81	81.32	0.90	83.39	0.86	78.65	0.89	63.45	0.75
		Green	86.32		71.13		69.67		86.21		88.80	
Equality	Everyone is free to say what they think. / Peo-ple are free to speak what they think with-out fear.	Overall	75.62	[-19.01]	75.42	[10.19]	75.62	[13.72]	81.25	[-7.55]	79.24	[-25.36]
		Blue	77.82	0.90	87.30	0.89	86.18	0.89	82.28	0.92	74.61	0.85
		Green	87.40		76.54		75.60		89.15		89.62	
		Overall	80.81	[-9.58]	81.17	[10.76]	80.11	[10.59]	84.25	[-6.87]	83.31	[-15.01]
Equality	Everyone is treated equally by the gov-ernment. / Rich and poor people are treated equally by the gov-ernment.	Blue	35.80	0.82	31.87	0.90	27.49	0.87	35.25	0.87	32.95	0.86
		Green	54.22		21.48		17.20		42.12		46.92	
		Overall	44.60	[-18.43]	26.32	[10.40]	23.32	[10.29]	38.02	[-6.87]	42.35	[-13.97]
		Blue	58.74	0.85	66.74	0.92	67.62	0.87	72.36	0.97	66.77	0.90
Equality	People have basic ne-cessities like food, clothes, and shelter.	Green	74.04		58.41		55.27		75.14		76.51	
		Overall	64.94	[-15.29]	60.67	[8.33]	61.16	[12.35]	72.46	[-2.78]	71.40	[-9.73]

Table 3. Perceived Quality of Democracy by Presidential Election Vote

Questionnaire Item	Camp	Wave 2 (2006)		Wave 3 (2010)		Wave 4 (2014)		Wave 5 (2018/19)		Wave 6 (2022)	
		%	OC [PPI]	%	OC [PPI]	%	OC [PPI]	%	OC [PPI]	%	OC [PPI]
Responsiveness The government re-sponds to what people want.	Blue	24.41	0.72	51.20	0.69	41.43	0.74	23.23	0.73	29.45	0.59
	Green	52.58		20.69		15.12		50.08		70.27	
	Overall	37.77	[-28.16]	39.30	[30.50]	28.96	[26.31]	37.04	[-26.85]	52.92	[-40.82]
The government is likely to/ will solve the most important problem you have identi-fied above [within the next 5 years].	Blue	37.00	0.92	45.59	0.83	29.64	0.93	26.02	0.87	24.90	0.85
	Green	38.82		28.25		26.02		38.96		40.21	
	Overall	37.66	[-1.83]	37.11	[17.34]	26.85	[3.62]	29.72	[-12.94]	34.02	[-15.32]

Source: Asian Barometer Survey (Wave 1 to Wave 6).

Overall, Taiwanese citizens express broad legitimacy beliefs: democracy enjoys overwhelming support, authoritarian alternatives are rejected, and liberal norms remain widely valued despite fluctuations. The main trend to monitor is growing partisan divergence in explicit support, largely driven by rising affirmation among pan-green respondents, even as both camps remain pro-democracy.

Political Realignment with the Raise of TPP

The creation of the Taiwan People’s Party (TPP) in 2019 and its subsequent electoral success marked its viability as a new third party beyond the pan-blue/pan-green divide. It was coined the “white camp” after its founding chairperson Ko Wen-je’s slogan of going “beyond blue vs. green” in his 2018 Taipei major campaign as an independent candidate. The white camp won five and eight seats respectively in 2020 and 2024 parliamentary elections, and remains the third largest party in the parliament. How do the white camp supporters view Taiwan’s democracy?

To analyze this, the ABS Wave 6 respondents are re-classified by the party they felt closest with in Wave 6, as the white camp first participated in the presidential election in 2024 with Ko as the candidate. Table 5 shows a breakdown of the respondents’ presidential vote choice in 2020 by the party they reported closest to. The voters feeling closest to the White camp are quite evenly split, with about 30 percent of them reported voting for pan-blue and pan-green each, and about 40 percent not reporting a vote for either camp.

Table 5. Presidential Vote and Party Attachment

Party Attachment in 2022	Presidential Vote in 2020			
	Blue	Green	Others / NA	Total
Blue	208.94	26.29	83.15	318.38
Green	4.98	472.98	65.97	543.93
White	43.07	43.41	57.67	144.15
Others / NA	68.97	171.03	285.54	525.54
Total	325.96	713.71	492.32	1532

Source: Asian Barometer Survey (Wave 6).

Who are these people supporting the white camp? Table 6 shows a summary of several socio-demographic characteristics by camp. At risk of oversimplification, the white camp supporters share a lot of characteristics with the pan-green camp, but to a greater extent.

On average, white camp supporters are:

- More likely to be male (pan-blue: 42 percent, pan-green: 52 percent, white: 59 percent).

Table 4. Democratic Legitimacy by Presidential Election Vote

Questionnaire Item	Camp	Wave 1 (2001)			Wave 2 (2006)			Wave 3 (2010)			Wave 4 (2014)			Wave 5 (2018/19)			Wave 6 (2022)		
		%	OC [PPI]		%	OC [PPI]		%	OC [PPI]		%	OC [PPI]		%	OC [PPI]		%	OC [PPI]	
Support of Democracy	Blue	87.19	0.95		91.14	0.95	92.78	0.96											
	Green	89.57			91.82		91.57												
	Overall	86.97	[-2.37]		91.75	[-0.68]	91.79	[1.22]											
Democracy is suitable for our country.	Blue	66.38	0.90		71.92	0.87	79.55	0.91	78.07	0.87	69.67	0.81	75.54	0.74					
	Green	76.75			74.92		76.20		85.21		83.79		91.46						
	Overall	69.83	[-10.37]		74.38	[-3.00]	78.55	[3.34]	79.52	[-7.14]	75.51	[-14.12]	83.50	[-15.93]					
Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government.	Blue	38.96	0.87		49.72	0.93	49.43	0.86	42.89	0.87	41.85	0.85	45.50	0.82					
	Green	51.87			55.42		60.56		56.15		57.09		63.27						
	Overall	45.13	[-12.91]		50.33	[-5.70]	52.32	[-11.13]	46.95	[-13.26]	46.70	[-15.24]	54.69	[-17.77]					
Democracy is capable of solving the problems of our society.	Blue	52.42	0.89		54.34	0.90	62.44	0.91	55.41	0.86	45.40	0.81	64.55	0.83					
	Green	63.07			64.37		71.52		69.72		63.99		81.93						
	Overall	57.61	[-10.64]		61.79	[-10.03]	65.34	[-9.08]	61.49	[-14.31]	54.70	[-18.59]	73.17	[-17.38]					
Democratic development is more important than economic development.	Blue	9.89	0.94		12.67	0.94	12.32	0.90	13.71	0.82	7.05	0.82	19.10	0.82					
	Green	14.44			18.91		19.40		29.60		22.47		36.67						
	Overall	11.08	[-4.55]		15.89	[-6.24]	15.71	[-7.09]	19.90	[-15.89]	16.95	[-15.42]	28.78	[-17.58]					
Protecting political freedom is more important than reducing economic ine-quality.	Blue						14.65	0.92	16.92	0.84	17.65	0.91	27.09	0.85					
	Green						20.88		30.56		23.52		40.84						
	Overall						17.35	[-6.23]	21.59	[-13.65]	19.53	[-5.87]	33.69	[-13.75]					

Table 4. Democratic Legitimacy by Presidential Election Vote

Questionnaire Item	Camp	Wave 1 (2001)			Wave 2 (2006)			Wave 3 (2010)			Wave 4 (2014)			Wave 5 (2018/19)			Wave 6 (2022)		
		%	OC [PPI]		%	OC [PPI]		%	OC [PPI]		%	OC [PPI]		%	OC [PPI]		%	OC [PPI]	
Support of Democracy	Democracy may have its problems, but it is still the best form of government.																		
	Blue	82.06	0.95		86.54	0.92		82.73	0.91		83.83	0.90		85.36	0.96		86.24	0.93	
	Green	77.02			78.58			83.70			84.26			85.09			95.90		
Authoritarian Orientations	Overall	78.57	[5.04]		82.08	[7.96]		83.61	[-0.97]		84.00	[-0.43]		84.24	[0.26]		83.14	[-2.06]	
	Blue	86.39	0.89		89.26	0.96		87.94	0.89		90.85	0.87		92.40	0.95		91.73	0.93	
	Green	77.32			85.64			90.38			92.67			92.72			93.92		
The army should not come in to govern the country.	Overall	81.79	[9.07]		87.90	[3.62]		89.70	[-2.44]		91.21	[-1.82]		92.85	[-0.31]		93.10	[-2.19]	
	Blue	93.46	0.94		93.02	0.98		95.06	0.91		95.11	0.88		97.20	0.96		94.80	0.92	
	Green	93.27			93.25			96.17			96.64			97.15			97.15		
Liberal Democratic Values	Overall	91.88	[0.19]		93.29	[-0.23]		95.48	[-1.10]		96.01	[-1.53]		96.94	[0.05]		96.32	[-2.35]	
	Blue	44.92	0.89		39.10	0.84		56.25	0.90		57.78	0.84		63.98	0.93		64.23	0.92	
	Green	48.03			48.43			62.62			67.34			63.30			60.96		
Belief in Procedural Norms	Overall	46.28	[-3.11]		43.42	[-9.33]		59.33	[-6.37]		62.22	[-9.56]		64.55	[0.69]		62.36	[3.27]	
	Blue	71.74	0.91		79.18	0.92		69.55	0.93		77.79	0.91							
	Green	62.67			71.13			76.18			83.84								
When the country faces a difficult situation, it is not ok for the government to disregard the law in order to deal with the situation.	Overall	67.64	[9.06]		73.79	[8.05]		72.19	[-6.63]		80.56	[-6.06]							
	Blue																		
	Green																		

Source: Asian Barometer Survey (Wave 1 to Wave 6).

- Younger (pan-blue: fifty-four years old, pan-green: forty-nine years old, white: forty-one years old).
- Not married (pan-blue: 61 percent, pan-green: 57 percent, white: 47 percent).
- Less religious (pan-blue: 43 percent, pan-green: 32 percent, white: 29 percent).
- University educated (pan-blue: 31 percent, pan-green: 39 percent, white: 52 percent).
- Working (pan-blue: 59 percent, pan-green: 69 percent, white: 88 percent).
- In professional or management occupations (pan-blue: 14 percent, pan-green: 15 percent, white: 17 percent).

Compared to the supporters of radical-right populist parties found in Western democracies, some characteristics are similar (e.g., being younger, not married and male). However, the white camp supporters also differ in that they are better educated and economically more successful.³³

Table 6. Sociodemographic Characteristics by Camp

Characteristic	Blue	Green	White
Percentage Male	42.32	51.75	58.60
Average Age	54.16	49.35	41.03
Percentage Married	61.25	56.77	47.29
Percentage Religious	42.75	32.22	28.90
Percentage University Education	30.52	39.24	52.48
Percentage Working	58.99	69.16	87.58
Percentage Professional or Manager	13.81	15.11	16.87

Source: Asian Barometer Survey (Wave 6).

A three-way comparison of regime evaluation between the three camps is presented in Table 7. White camp supporters hold views on the economic condition and the current government similar to those of pan-blue supporters. However, their assessment of how democracy works in Taiwan is positioned between the pan-blue and pan-green camps. The OC values indicate that white camp supporters’ views align closely with those of the pan-blue camp and are not significantly divergent from the pan-green camp.

In terms of trust towards political institutions, Table 8 shows that the white camp tend to have similar views with the pan-blue camp towards the explicitly partisan institutions, including the president, the national government, political parties, and the parliament. They are somewhere between the pan-blue and pan-green camps for politicized non-partisan institutions, such as the courts and the

³³ Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash*.

election commission. For other non-partisan institutions, trust levels among the white camp largely match those of the pan-blue camp, but are notably higher toward the civil service and the police—a difference that remains insignificant ($OC > 0.9$). Considering that many white camp supporters are attracted by Ko’s non-partisan professional image, it is not a surprising result.

The white camp’s perceptions of the quality of democracy in Taiwan follows a similar story, as is shown in Table 9. Their views are generally more similar to pan-blue supporters than to pan-green supporters, with a few exceptions. They are closer to the pan-green camp on the prevalence of corruption and the capability of legislature to keep the government in check. In contrast, Table 10 shows that the white camp is generally closer to the pan-green camp in terms of their views on democratic legitimacy. They have a higher degree of overlap with the pan-green camp than with the pan-blue camp, with two exceptions. Their view on whether democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government is right in the middle of the other two camps, where the OC values are similar. White camp supporters also have higher liberal democratic values than both pan-blue and pan-green camp, and have similar OC with them.

Overall, the white camp appears to not have exacerbated political polarization in Taiwan, as their views are generally similar to either of pan-blue or pan-green camps, or somewhere in between. More importantly, like the citizens in the pan-blue or pan-green camps, they exhibited high evaluation of the democratic legitimacy in Taiwan. Unlike the cases found in Western

Table 7. Regime Evaluation by Party Attachment (2022)

Questionnaire Items	Camp	%	OC [PPI]		
			Blue - Green	Blue - White	Green - White
You rate the overall economic condition of our country today as good or very good.	Blue	32.47	0.71	0.89	0.79
	Green	57.80			
	White	37.28			
	Overall	42.44	[-25.33]	[-4.81]	[20.52]
On the whole, you are satisfied with the way democracy works in Taiwan, Republic of China.	Blue	64.22	0.73	0.84	0.88
	Green	90.93			
	White	80.17			
	Overall	78.27	[-26.71]	[-15.95]	[10.76]
You are satisfied with the current president/ government.	Blue	23.02	0.33	0.91	0.32
	Green	89.75			
	White	22.05			
	Overall	58.15	[-66.74]	[0.96]	[67.70]

Source: Asian Barometer Survey (Wave 6).

Table 8. Trust in Political Institutions by Party Attachment (2022)

Questionnaire Items	Camp	%	OC [PPI]		
			Blue - Green	Blue - White	Green - White
Trust in the president	Blue	18.14	0.36	0.91	0.45
	Green	81.88			
	White	27.12			
	Overall	51.87	[-63.74]	[-8.98]	[54.76]
Trust in the national government	Blue	27.87	0.56	0.94	0.58
	Green	71.77			
	White	29.79			
	Overall	47.88	[-43.91]	[-1.92]	[41.99]
Trust in political parties	Blue	11.67	0.80	0.78	0.70
	Green	32.00			
	White	9.54			
	Overall	19.64	[-20.33]	[2.13]	[22.46]
Trust in the parliament	Blue	21.45	0.77	0.81	0.77
	Green	44.56			
	White	25.30			
	Overall	32.52	[-23.11]	[-3.85]	[19.26]
Trust in local government	Blue	57.28	0.95	0.95	0.95
	Green	61.05			
	White	57.24			
	Overall	58.44	[-3.77]	[0.04]	[3.80]
Trust in the courts	Blue	26.16	0.80	0.88	0.88
	Green	45.81			
	White	34.29			
	Overall	37.35	[-19.65]	[-8.12]	[11.52]
Trust in civil service	Blue	52.88	0.93	0.90	0.93
	Green	59.54			
	White	61.61			
	Overall	57.02	[-6.66]	[-8.73]	[-2.07]
Trust in the military	Blue	56.48	0.91	0.95	0.91
	Green	65.95			
	White	56.49			
	Overall	61.12	[-9.47]	[-0.01]	[9.46]
Trust in the police	Blue	62.29	0.94	0.89	0.93
	Green	67.06			
	White	73.33			
	Overall	66.14	[-4.76]	[-11.04]	[-6.28]
Trust in the election commission	Blue	45.30	0.71	0.87	0.84
	Green	73.97			
	White	58.10			
	Overall	59.13	[-28.66]	[-12.80]	[15.86]

Source: Asian Barometer Survey (Wave 6).

Table 9. Perceived Quality of Democracy by Party Attachment (2022)

	Questionnaire Items	Camp	%	OC [PPI]		
				Blue - Green	Blue - White	Green - White
Rule of Law	Our current courts always punish the guilty even if they are high-ranking offi-cials. / Officials who commit crimes don't often go unpunished.	Blue	47.32	0.83	0.91	0.80
		Green	64.77			
		White	44.65			
		Overall	54.24	[-17.45]	[2.67]	[20.12]
	National government offi-cials often abide by the law. / Government leaders don't often break the law or abuse their power.	Blue	30.44	0.73	0.91	0.77
		Green	57.84			
		White	34.49			
		Overall	42.60	[-27.40]	[-4.05]	[23.35]
	Corruption and bribe-taking are not widespread in our national govern-ment.	Blue	84.34	0.88	0.87	0.95
		Green	88.27			
		White	93.72			
		Overall	86.64	[-3.93]	[-9.38]	[-5.45]
Participation	People have the power to change a government they don't like. / Citizens are able to remove a govern-ment they don't like through elections.	Blue	61.12	0.86	0.93	0.93
		Green	74.76			
		White	67.72			
		Overall	66.35	[-13.64]	[-6.60]	[7.04]
	Our elections offer the voters a real choice be-tween different par-ties/ candidates.	Blue	50.36	0.79	0.92	0.77
		Green	71.42			
		White	48.27			
		Overall	56.37	[-21.06]	[2.09]	[23.15]
	Having elections makes the government pay atten-tion to what the people think. / Having elections makes the government more responsive to peo-ple's needs.	Blue	53.41	0.62	0.82	0.64
		Green	91.16			
		White	69.79			
		Overall	74.08	[-37.75]	[-16.37]	[21.38]
Competition	On the whole, you rate the last national election as free and fair.	Blue	46.67	0.77	0.94	0.76
		Green	70.16			
		White	46.52			
		Overall	56.49	[-23.49]	[0.15]	[23.64]

Table 9. Perceived Quality of Democracy by Party Attachment (2022)

	Questionnaire Items	Camp	%	OC [PPI]		
				Blue - Green	Blue - White	Green - White
Competition	Political parties or candi-dates in our country have equal access to the mass media during the election period.	Blue	38.66	0.79	0.90	0.81
		Green	59.31			
		White	42.25			
		Overall	47.06	[-20.65]	[-3.59]	[17.06]
Vertical Ac-countability	Between elections, the people have a way of hold-ing the government re-sponsible for its actions.	Blue	46.65	0.73	0.94	0.76
		Green	73.83			
		White	52.07			
		Overall	59.39	[-27.18]	[-5.43]	[21.75]
	Government officials do not withhold important information from the pub-lic view.	Blue	40.43	0.61	0.94	0.65
		Green	79.12			
		White	44.31			
		Overall	58.27	[-38.69]	[-3.87]	[34.81]
Horizontal Ac-countability	The legal system can do something when the gov-ernment breaks the laws.	Blue	66.57	0.75	0.86	0.88
		Green	91.89			
		White	80.10			
		Overall	79.24	[-25.32]	[-13.53]	[11.79]
	The legislature is capable of keeping the government in check.	Blue	75.00	0.84	0.87	0.93
		Green	91.10			
		White	84.16			
		Overall	83.31	[-16.10]	[-9.16]	[6.94]
Freedom	Everyone is free to say what they think. / People are free to speak what they think without fear.	Blue	36.96	0.88	0.90	0.82
		Green	48.49			
		White	30.58			
		Overall	42.35	[-11.53]	[6.38]	[17.91]
	People can join any organ-ization they like without fear.	Blue	68.33	0.92	0.98	0.91
		Green	76.41			
		White	67.66			
		Overall	71.40	[-8.09]	[0.66]	[8.75]
Equality	Everyone is treated equal-ly by the government. / Rich and poor people are treated equally by the gov-ernment.	Blue	35.01	0.61	0.97	0.62
		Green	74.35			
		White	36.34			
		Overall	52.92	[-39.34]	[-1.33]	[38.01]
	People have basic necessi-ties like food, clothes, and shelter.	Blue	31.22	0.88	0.90	0.81
		Green	42.74			
		White	23.99			
		Overall	34.02	[-11.52]	[7.23]	[18.75]

Source: Asian Barometer Survey (Wave 6).

Table 10. Democratic Legitimacy by Party Attachment (2022)

	Questionnaire Items	Camp	%	OC [PPI]		
				Blue - Green	Blue - White	Green - White
Support of Democracy	Democracy is suitable for our country.	Blue	74.34	0.71	0.75	0.88
		Green	91.78			
		White	91.83			
		Overall	83.50			
	Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government.	Blue	44.84	0.79	0.87	0.85
		Green	65.78			
		White	53.87			
		Overall	54.69			
	Democracy is capable of solving the problems of our society.	Blue	60.10	0.78	0.87	0.90
		Green	82.53			
		White	72.65			
		Overall	73.17			
	Democratic development is more important than economic development.	Blue	15.47	0.76	0.77	0.97
		Green	39.18			
		White	38.50			
		Overall	28.78			
	Protecting political freedom is more important than reducing economic inequality.	Blue	26.97	0.82	0.88	0.93
		Green	43.81			
		White	37.13			
		Overall	33.69			
	Democracy may have its problems, but it is still the best form of government.	Blue	87.06	0.80	0.86	0.94
		Green	96.16			
		White	94.98			
		Overall	91.38			
Authoritarian Orientations	We should not get rid of parliament and elections and have a strong leader decide things.	Blue	78.95	0.90	0.80	0.90
		Green	85.83			
		White	92.84			
		Overall	83.14			
	Opposition parties should be allowed to compete for power.	Blue	89.80	0.85	0.73	0.88
		Green	94.28			
		White	98.50			
		Overall	93.10			
	The army should not come in to govern the country.	Blue	94.13	0.81	0.77	0.95
		Green	96.71			
		White	99.46			
		Overall	96.32			
Liberal Democratic Values	Score of liberal democratic values	Blue	60.91	0.92	0.80	0.80
		Green	59.89			
		White	71.31			
		Overall	62.36			

Source: Asian Barometer Survey (Wave 6).

democracies like Germany and France, the establishment of the new political power is not necessarily a sign of populism or further polarization.

Conclusion

According to Freedom House, Taiwan has scored both of the perfect score in political rights and civil liberty since 2016, and it is no doubt a great political achievement.³⁴ Nonetheless, the analysis using public opinion data suggests this achievement should be taken for granted. In fact, political polarization between the pan-blue and pan-green camps persists in Taiwan. In some aspects, this polarization is still enlarging, particularly in the evaluation of democratic governance, and is even spreading to impact support for democracy.

However, it is also clear that democratic resilience persists as bipartisan consensus on democratic values lays a strong foundation for resolving political differences at the regime level. This explains why Taiwan's democracy has been seen as somewhat precarious, yet it can still function properly, utilizing democratic elections time and again for the renewal of democratic legitimacy.

Taiwan's democracy is far from perfect. The momentum of requesting political reform over partisan blue-green rivalry has channeled to a new wave of political realignment with thriving civic engagement over the past decade. While such energy is still evolving and the stability of the current political dynamics remains doubtful, the formation of Taiwan's People Party (TPP) and its critical role in the latest presidential election certainly deserves close attention for Taiwan's future democracy.

Analysis found that TPP supporters are mostly taking in-between views along the blue-green cleavage, indicating their moderate and neutral orientation, except for their much higher liberal democratic values. Although the lack of individual voter trajectory data prevents direct evidence, this finding suggests that the TPP represents an outcry for middle-ground politics among this rising political force. They loath the long-term partisan rivalry and the colored lens that pan-blue or pan-green supporters held to bias political decisions. The rise of the third party, whether represented by the TPP or earlier by NPP, should not be defined by the personal achievement of specific political stars. Instead, it reflects a collective social need searching for a rational and moderate new politics that moves beyond the cutthroat competition that has deeply threatened Taiwan's democracy over the last two decades.

The recent corruption scandal, particularly surrounding the TPP chair Ko Wen-je, has set the development of the third party into a serious crisis. There is great uncertainty whether the white camp will dissolve and merge back into pan-blue or pan-green camp. Nonetheless, given that supporters of the white camp show even greater liberal democratic orientation than blue/

³⁴ Freedom House, "Freedom in the World," <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world> (accessed October 10, 2024).

green counterparts, a more plausible development could involve leadership reshuffling or even the start of another wave of new party movements. The analysis clearly demonstrates the solid presence of significant social forces composed of young, highly educated, and politically motivated voters who demand greater social justice and clean politics. As generational replacement continues to augment the impact of this demographic group, political realignment is expected to persist, leading to greater strides for pursuing a better democracy.

