

Comparing Polarizing Issues in Asian and African Democracies

Voter Confidence, Electoral Reform, and Polarization in Taiwan and Kenya

Dennis L. C. Weng and Catherine Musuva

Abstract

Literature shows that political polarization has played a role in driving political behavior. An inclusive and diverse society can encourage political pluralism and positively affect economic growth and democratization. Conversely, a high level of ethnic diversity and ideological division can exacerbate intensive polarization, as each subgroup will pursue its political interests if there is no effective reconciliation mechanism. This essay provides a unique comparison between Taiwan and Kenya, two young democracies in which social and political cleavages significantly intensify polarization. Both countries experience political polarization, but the causes are different. In Taiwan, political-ideological differences seem unresolvable, whereas in Kenya, polarization is associated with ethnic identity. Yet, the two seemingly unrelated countries have one thing in common: a promise that more trustworthy elections might potentially unify their divided societies. The essay sheds light on this relationship using data from the World Values Survey (WVS), conducted by the Center for East Asia Democratic Studies at National Taiwan University in Taiwan, and from Afrobarometer. The purpose is to establish to what extent electoral reform might help converge different perspectives and thus reduce polarization.

Keywords: Democracy, electoral reform, Kenya, political polarization, Taiwan.

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The third wave of democracy made the world believe that the number of democracies and the level of freedom would continue to increase and eventually lead the world to the “end of History.”¹ However, the growing trend has stagnated or reversed in recent years.² Unsurprisingly, democratic recession has become an important topic that has attracted numerous academic discussions. Some contend that the current democratic recession is misleading because the definition of the democratic transition during the third wave period was never clear. Thus, the trend of democratization might have been exaggerated. Others suggest that the third wave of democratization was simply those authoritarian regimes temporarily giving up their power or tolerating political dissent.³

However, some observers argue that democratic recession indeed has been happening. This view holds that some newly transformed democracies find it hard to retain democratic value due to the poor performance of their democratic government. Roberto Foa and Yascha Mounk confirm that government performance is closely associated with support for democracy.⁴ One can imagine that citizens in new democracies may feel frustrated more easily when facing economic stagnation or corruption. People expect the democratic government to perform better than the previous regime. The poor performance damages people’s faith in democracy, especially in countries where democratic values have not been consolidated. Another challenge facing new democracies is that authoritarian regimes worldwide consistently have achieved rapid economic growth since the end of the Cold War, in particular, China. The COVID-19 pandemic presented another challenge. Authoritarian regimes seemed more effective than democratic governments, as the democratic system, which is based on deliberations, requires more time to consider various opinions before making decisions. Francis Fukuyama posits that a government’s legitimacy in a democratic system depends more on its ability to provide high-quality governance than its reliance on institutions to deepen democracy.⁵

While the quality of governance may influence the legitimacy of democracy, it is worth noting that the perception of government performance is derived from the competition of political elites, primarily through elections. Most citizens in any given democracy need to evaluate politicians before deciding how they want to be governed and use their voting rights. In that

¹ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1993).

² Larry Diamond, “Facing Up to the Democratic Recession,” *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 1 (2015): 141-155.

³ Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, “The Myth of Democratic Recession,” *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 1 (2015): 45-58.

⁴ Roberto S. Foa and Yascha Mounk, “The Danger of Deconsolidation: The Democratic Disconnect,” *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 3 (2016): 5-17.

⁵ Francis Fukuyama, “Why Is Democracy Performing So Poorly?” *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 1 (2015): 11-20.

sense, elections are critical as an instrument for determining the direction of a country's policy and a key differentiator between a democracy and a nondemocracy. In a democratic system, being elected and maintaining power are always the priorities for political elites. According to a prominent theory, political actors seek to maximize their share of the vote and they must, therefore, consider the distribution of public opinion.⁶ However, worsening levels of political polarization in many democracies appear to challenge the median voter theory, as political parties seek support through politicizing various controversial issues. Indeed, political polarization presents severe problems for democracy, but it also provides the opportunity to delineate natural competition among political elites.

In recent years, research has linked the polarization of left- and right-leaning parties in democracies to legislative gridlock, elite incivility, and mass disengagement. Across various countries, polarization also contributes to democratic mishaps, corruption, ethnic conflict, and economic slumps.⁷ Political polarization is one of the main factors playing a role in driving political behavior. While an inclusive and diverse society might encourage political pluralism and positively affect economic growth and democratization, a higher level of ethnic diversity and ideological division can intensify polarization. Owing to the lack of an effective reconciliation mechanism, polarization between different political actors in democracies is bound to deepen. The speed of polarization may differ but the common denominator across democracies is that societal subgroups must make choices about their political affiliation or face various difficulties. For instance, in many democracies, civil society organizations allied with the opposition find themselves restricted by harsh policies and are subject to stricter bureaucratic procedures.

In this study, we contend that polarization is highly correlated with short-term strategies of political elites, as they utilize it to gain support and identify nonsupporters. Polarization is not a necessary consequence of democratization, nor does mobilization occur only along the lines of preexisting ethnic cleavages. Instead, polarization arises because of the instrumental interest of competing political parties to adopt confrontational strategies, strategies that are likely to divide the electorate into opposing camps. Political actors' aggressive strategies might be effective in politicizing electorates and mobilizing supporters, but they can damage confidence in elections and in democracy itself.

The above dynamic is explored here by offering a unique comparison of two young democracies, Taiwan and Kenya, two countries where social

⁶ Anthony Downs, "An Economic Theory of Political Action in a Democracy," *Journal of Political Economy* 65, no. 2 (1957): 135-150.

⁷ David S. Brown, Michael Touchton, and Andrew Whitford, "Political Polarization as a Constraint on Corruption: A Cross-National Comparison," *World Development* 39, no. 9 (2011): 1516-1529; Timothy Frye, "The Perils of Polarization: Economic Performance in the Postcommunist World," *World Politics* 54, no. 3 (2002): 308-337; and Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela, eds., *The Failure of Presidential Democracy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

and political cleavages have significantly intensified polarization in recent years. Although both Taiwan and Kenya experience political polarization, the causes are different. In the case of Taiwan, the two major political parties—the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the Kuomintang (KMT)—have become increasingly polarized on the strongly inter-linked issues of national identity and cross-Strait relations.⁸ In Kenya, polarization is associated with ethnic identity. Negative ethnicity (i.e., the instrumentalization of ethnicity for political ends) is identified as a divisive issue and a negative part of Kenya’s political culture. The link between ethnic polarization and elections is discussed in the context of Kenya’s history of electoral violence and compromised elections.

The sharp and often vicious polarization of political elites in the two democracies differs. Yet, the two seemingly unrelated countries have one thing in common—the pursuit of free and fair elections to unify their divided societies. The present work aims to shed light on the relationship between elections and political polarization in the two countries. Specifically, we look at the causes of polarization in Taiwan and Kenya and their correlation with the attitude toward specific elections held in both countries. Using data collected from the World Values Survey and Afrobarometer, we contend that the effect of having a fair election on resolving polarizing issues varies, depending on the nature and level of disagreement. We argue that electoral reform might be able to converge slightly different perspectives, but the overall effect is limited.

The Causes of Polarization in Young Democracies

Identifying the causes of polarization might help to better understand both declining confidence in democracy and elite competition in each political setting. There is a growing amount of academic literature discussing political polarization in new democracies. The scholarship suggests that polarization denotes a separation of some consequence over one or more dimensions of race, religion, political issues, and language. However, separation by and of itself does not tell us much about polarization. Political manifestations of significant social cleavages in a nation beg the question of how polarization is exacerbated. Previous studies suggest that political manifestations of polarization can be studied by examining political actors when they compete in

⁸ Cal Clark and Alexander C. Tan, “Political Polarization in Taiwan: A Growing Challenge to Catch-all Parties?” *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 41, no. 3 (2012): 7-31; John F. Copper, “Using Aid and Investment Diplomacy to Isolate Taiwan,” in *China’s Foreign Aid and Investment Diplomacy, Volume II* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 141-169; Daffyd Fell, “Measuring and Explaining Party Change in Taiwan: 1991–2004,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* 5, no. 1 (2005), 105-133; John Makeham and A-chin Hsiau, eds., *Cultural, Ethnic, and Political Nationalism in Contemporary Taiwan: Bentuhua* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); and Shelley Rigger, “Democratic Transition and Consolidation in Taiwan,” paper presented at the American Enterprise Institute conference, Future in the Asian Century: Toward a Strong, Prosperous and Enduring Democracy, Washington, D.C., November 2011.

elections. These commentators illustrate how polarization gradually worsens at the electoral, party elite, and party in government levels. Min-hua Huang argues that polarized politics imply “the polarization of political behaviors and attitudes originated from political rivalry.”⁹ As political parties are supposed to collect voices and represent diverse subgroups in a country, the competition between partisan rivalries does not necessarily mean polarization. If rival parties represent different views but still share some common ground, a disagreement may not lead to polarization. However, if the rivalries divide elites and the electorate without maintaining any shared values in society, people will become more polarized.

While partisan competition may be one of the driving forces behind polarization, studies on party polarization generally have not considered ethnic structure as conditioning the impact of elections on instability. However, the prevalence of ethnic divisions and elections as a cause of violent conflict in many developing democracies has been discussed.¹⁰ Hanne Fjelde and Kristine Höglund¹¹ demonstrated that majoritarian electoral institutions strongly affect electoral violence in Africa, where ethnic groups are largely divided and exclusive. In other words, political instability in an ethnically divided country is likely caused by elections rather than by factors endogenous to the electoral competition. Electoral violence, therefore, can be understood as the attempt by political actors to manipulate election results,¹² because any anticipated political instability could influence the electoral behavior. Other studies suggest that the relationship between elections and polarization may be conditioned by various external contexts,¹³ by the presence of strong institutions capable of enforcing electoral integrity and leadership turnover,¹⁴

⁹ Min-hua Huang, “Polarized Politics, Divided Perception, and the Political Consequences in Taiwan,” paper presented at the International Conference on Polarized Politics in a Comparative Perspective in America, South Korea, and Taiwan, Taipei, January 26, 2008.

¹⁰ Jeffery Gettleman, “Kenya, Known for Its Stability, Topples into Post-Election Chaos,” *New York Times*, January 3, 2008, and Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, updated edition with a new preface (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

¹¹ Hanne Fjelde and Kristine Höglund, “Electoral Institutions and Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa,” *British Journal of Political Science* 46, no. 2 (2016): 297-320.

¹² Thad Dunning, “Fighting and Voting: Violent Conflict and Electoral Politics,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55, no. 3 (2011): 327-339; Fjelde and Höglund, “Electoral Institutions and Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa”; and Andreas Schedler, “Elections without Democracy: The Menu of Manipulation,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 36-50.

¹³ Lars-Erik Cederman, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Simon Hug, “Elections and Ethnic Civil War,” *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no. 3 (2013): 387-417, and Paul Collier and Dominic Rohner, “Democracy, Development, and Conflict,” *Journal of the European Economic Association* 6, nos. 2–3 (2008): 531-540.

¹⁴ Dawn Brancati and Jack L Snyder, “Time to Kill: The Impact of Election Timing on Post-Conflict Stability,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 57, no. 5 (2013): 822-853; Thomas Edward Flores and Irfan Nooruddin, “The Effect of Elections on Post-Conflict Peace and Reconstruction,” *Journal of Politics* 74, no. 2 (2012): 558-570; and Idean Salehyan and Christopher Linebarger, “Elections and Social Conflict in Africa, 1990–2009,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 50, no. 1 (2015): 23-49.

or by opposition performance in an election.¹⁵ Accordingly, we contend that ethnic fractionalization in some democracies may be more critical than conventional party elite competition. Elections in fractionalized states may reduce uncertainty in the country where information is not easy to access and if voters view the election as fair. The two different causes of political polarization imply that election matters for political stability in a polarized society. The following section turns to Taiwan and Kenya to discuss the relationship between elections and polarization.

Partisan Polarization in Taiwan

In Taiwan, political polarization gradually has worsened since the first democratic power transition in 2000. Empirical research based on survey data and used to explore polarization in Taiwan found that national identity and attitudes toward cross-Strait relations have been the two critical polarizing issues. In 2004, the concurrent presidential and referendum elections stimulated Taiwanese voters to move toward either of the two ends of the spectrum. Legal scholars studying voting records found that political parties were more cohesive than earlier, with vigorous partisanship and party loyalty becoming more critical for political elites in their endeavor to secure their political careers.¹⁶ In the last few years, the two major parties competed against each other on almost all other issues rather than the two critical polarizing concerns.

Moreover, political parties even switched their positions on similar policies to oppositional viewpoints after the transition of power. An example is the legislation on imports of U.S. beef as well as labor laws providing for one fixed and one flexible day off per week, a policy in force under President Tsai Ing-Wen's administration. Upon assuming power, the Democratic Progressive Party changed its position from strong opposition to the legislation to full support of it. The two major parties have almost no common ground for compromise, as party polarization has been utilized to ignite party support. On the surface, the cause of polarization in Taiwan has been ascribed to political issues, but, in fact, it is derived from elite competition.

Our interest here is to determine whether polarization has changed Taiwan voters' confidence in democracy. Earlier empirical studies contended that polarization issues in Taiwan have had very little to do with the traditional liberal–conservative ideological spectrum and much more to do with

¹⁵ Tore Wig and Espen Geelmuyden Rød, "Cues to Coup Plotters: Elections as Coup Triggers in Dictatorship," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 60, no. 5 (2016): 787-812.

¹⁶ Shioh-Duan Hawang, "A Comparison of Voting Coalitions in the Legislative Yuan before and after Party Turnover," *Journal of Electoral Studies* 11, no. 1 (2004): 1-32, and Shing-Yuan Sheng, "The Dynamic Triangles among Constituencies, Parties and Legislators: A Comparison before and after the Reform of Electoral System," APSA 2009 Toronto Meeting Paper, August 13, 2009.

unification—independence attitudes. However, more recent studies show that most people in Taiwan now stand in the middle of the unification—independence spectrum. As the purpose of electoral campaigns is to mobilize voters for victory, it is reasonable to believe that the party system that encourages two-party competition may gradually increase tensions and further polarize the electorate over time.¹⁷

Ethnic Polarization and Electoral Reforms in Kenya

Kenya presents a very different story with regard to how people take sides on issues. The country has a history of high-stakes electoral contests, particularly since the reintroduction of multiparty politics in the 1990s. Kenya is an electoral autocracy, with a history of flawed elections and electoral violence. Elections take place within the context of a weak and poorly institutionalized political party system. The issue of electoral reform became a priority on the country's political agenda in 2008, after Kenya experienced its worst-ever post-election violence that lasted two months. The country descended into chaos when the contested December 2007 presidential election results were announced, with a thin margin of 231,728 votes between the two primary candidates. The incumbent was announced as the winner, and a hasty and low-key swearing-in followed. The opposition, which had won a parliamentary majority, also claimed it had won the presidential election. Evidence soon emerged of manipulation, fraud, and rigging by both sides. The elections were flawed, and the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) was compromised. Much later, when calm was restored, the ECK chairperson publicly declared that he did not know who actually had won. The aftermath of the 2007 elections was a moment of reckoning for the country.

As part of the reconciliation process mediated by the African Union and select African statesmen, far-reaching changes to the country's political governance followed to prevent a repeat of the 2008 post-election violence and to lower the stakes of elections. A coalition government was initiated, bringing together the ruling party and the opposition. The government, along with the parliament, established a reform agenda, passed a set of laws, and established various commissions. The reform agenda also included the adoption of a new constitution.

At the same time, a Commission of Inquiry into Post-Election Violence (CIPEV) was instituted to investigate the post-election violence, while an Independent Review Committee (IREC) was created to review the bungled elections. The CIPEV and IREC became commonly known as the Waki and Kreigler Commissions, respectively, named after the judges who were appointed to head them. The Waki Commission attributed the violence largely

¹⁷ Yi-ching Hsiao, "Political Polarization in Taiwan: An Analysis on Mass Feeling Thermometer toward Political Parties," *Taiwanese Electoral Studies* 21, no. 2 (2014): 1-42.

to the interplay of divisive issues that had been allowed to fester. Among them was ethnic polarization or the mobilization of ethnic sentiment by political leaders.¹⁸ The report stated that the violence was ethnically directed. It increased distrust among different groups and vastly eroded any sense of national identity. It also presented evidence that the violence was “planned and guided from above.”¹⁹ Electoral justice was sought in the International Criminal Court. The IREC pointed out several irregularities, particularly in the presidential election, and the incompetency of the electoral commission. In addition, it found gaps in Kenya’s electoral legal framework. The report also called for a review of the plurality and majoritarian electoral system inherited from the British.

The IREC report laid out the basis for electoral reforms. Essentially, the report recommended changing the imperial presidency and decentralizing the power of the national government by reviewing the political and electoral systems. It also recommended restoring confidence in the electoral process and the electoral management body, deemed defective and incompetent.²⁰

Significantly, the political system was reorganized. Kenya moved from a semi-presidential to a presidential system. In addition, power was redistributed and shared between the national government and forty-seven new county governments. This was done to reduce presidential powers, address marginalization, and increase representation. Decentralization can decrease tensions compared to highly centralized unitary states. The electoral system, which determines how votes translate into seats and representation, also was changed. The presidential election system was changed in 2010 from a plurality with at least 25 percent of the vote in at least half of the provinces (since 1992) to an absolute majority plus run-off. To ensure more national representation and build nonethnic parties, victors are required to win an absolute majority (50 percent + 1) and at least 25 percent in more than half of the forty-seven counties. Thus, a winning president will better represent all Kenyans and incentivize outreach to several communities, not just to their ethnic group.²¹ Reforms to the electoral framework included the consolidation and streamlining of the country’s electoral laws in the Constitution of 2010, the Elections Act of Kenya 2011, the Political Parties Act of 2011, and the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) Act of 2011.

Following these political and electoral reforms, Kenya held two general elections in 2013 and 2017. However, it is worth noting that there was another

¹⁸ Dialogue Africa Foundation, *Kriegler and Waki Reports Summarised* (Nairobi, Kenya: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2009), 52.

¹⁹ Tim Murithi, “Kenya—A Year after the Crisis: The Quest for Electoral Reform and Transitional Justice,” Situation Report (Pretoria, South Africa: Institute for Security Studies, 2009).

²⁰ Dialogue Africa Foundation, *Kriegler and Waki Reports Summarised*, 234.

²¹ Ulrike G. Theuerkauf, “Presidentialism and the Risk of Ethnic Violence,” *Ethnopolitics* 2, no. 1 (2013): 72-81.

attempt to institute a new set of reforms after the 2017 elections. The president and his main rival created the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) to push for constitutional changes that would return the country to the semi-presidential system and expand the executive and legislative arms of government. The promoters of this initiative argued that the proposed reforms, which would have led to a referendum, would ensure peaceful elections and promote national unity. Those opposed to the BBI challenged the initiative in court, and the High Court, the Court of Appeal, and the Supreme Court all ruled against the constitutionality of the BBI.

Polarization, Democracy, and Elections

Having shed some light on the causes of polarization in Taiwan and Kenya, we now explore the extent to which political polarization affects democracy, and the role of elections in young democracies in cases where the causes of polarization differ. There is a considerable debate about whether polarization has a positive or negative impact on democracy. In a relatively stable democracy, scholars argue that political polarization can be regarded as a double-edged sword—that is, it can help deepen democracy, on the one hand, but also it may cause backsliding and the decay of democracy, on the other.²² On the positive side, polarization helps voters differentiate one party or candidate from another by specifying their positions in an election. A clear policy position is taken not only to connect the parties to their supporters but also to make voters better informed before they make their vote choices. In that sense, one may argue that polarization facilitates policy representation.²³ As a result of party polarization, it is possible that a relatively high level of political participation and electoral stability could be reached, and a competitive party system might be consolidated.²⁴

After an election, polarization also may increase the policy accountability of the election winner or the ruling party.²⁵ As the party competition continues, the opposition parties will apply the checks and balances model to closely review the policy implementations of the ruling party and dissuade the government from corruption, if a better information disclosure system can

²² Murat Somer and Jennifer McCoy, “Déjà Vu? Polarization and Endangered Democracies in the 21st Century,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 62, no. 1 (2018): 3-15.

²³ Romain Lachat, “The Impact of Party Polarization on Ideological Voting,” *Electoral Studies* 27, no. 4 (2008): 687-698, and Matthew S. Levendusky, “Clearer Cues, More Consistent Voters: A Benefit of Elite Polarization,” *Political Behavior* 32, no. 1 (2010): 111-131.

²⁴ Marc J. Hetherington, “Putting Polarization in Perspective,” *British Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 2 (2009): 413-448, and Adreinne LeBas, “Can Polarization Be Positive? Conflict and Institutional Development in Africa,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 62, no. 1 (2018): 59-74.

²⁵ Geoffrey Layman, Thomas M. Carsey, and Juliana Meansce Horowitz, “Party Polarization in American Politics: Characteristics, Causes, and Consequences,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 9 (2006): 83-110.

be adopted.²⁶ Research also suggests that in a stable democracy where no significant preexisting identity cleavages lead to exclusion or differential citizenship rights and the country's power distribution is not strongly imbalanced, polarization may strengthen the democratic system, particularly in emerging democracies.²⁷ Furthermore, Ching-Hsing Wang finds a positive correlation between polarization and democratic satisfaction.²⁸ Accordingly, empirical analyses suggest that political polarization can positively impact democratic development.

However, even in a stable democracy where a two-party system exists, a gridlock could happen if the parties decided not to compromise and took extreme positions on any controversial issue. As a result, political polarization would negatively impact democracy as mutual trust in society eroded.²⁹ Scholars comparing democracies also have pointed out that party polarization is almost always associated with intense political confrontation. Excessive competition without mutual trust to compromise is not healthy for democratization. Furthermore, not all new democracies enjoy the same stable political climate. Many developing democracies have ethnic divisions preventing the democratic system from becoming consolidated. Research on polarization using cases from relatively stable democracies such as Taiwan, tells one story, but the circumstances in Africa are very different.

In this study, Kenya illustrates the difference. Unlike Taiwan, where polarization emerged from a particular cleavage, in Kenya it is about ethnic divisions. Jennifer McCoy et al. regard polarization as a dynamic process leading to democratic erosion.³⁰ They claim that the gap between the “us” group and the “them” group can be gradually enlarged. Thus, political competition becomes a zero-sum game, and policy gridlock happens almost always. Despite quantitative studies of polarization having discussed various causes and their impacts, few researchers consider ethnic structure as conditioning the effect of elections on instability. In the context of new African democracies, we argue that ethnic fractionalization is a key conditioning factor, as elections provide little further information about mobilization potential and do not encourage coalition-building to the same extent in polarized and homogeneous settings.

²⁶ David S. Brown, Michael Touchton, and Andrew Whitford, “Political Polarization as a Constraint on Corruption: A Cross-National Comparison,” *World Development* 39, no. 9 (2011): 1516-1529.

²⁷ LeBas, “Can Polarization Be Positive?” 59-74.

²⁸ Ching-Hsing Wang, “The Effects of Party Fractionalization and Party Polarization on Democracy,” *Party Politics* 20, no. 5 (2014): 687-699.

²⁹ William A. Galston and Pietro N. Nivola, “Delineating the Problem,” *Red and Blue Nation* 1 (2006): 1-47.

³⁰ Jennifer McCoy, Tahmina Rahman, and Murat Somer, “Polarization and the Global Crisis of Democracy: Common Patterns, Dynamics, and Pernicious Consequences for Democratic Politics,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 62, no. 1 (2018): 16-42.

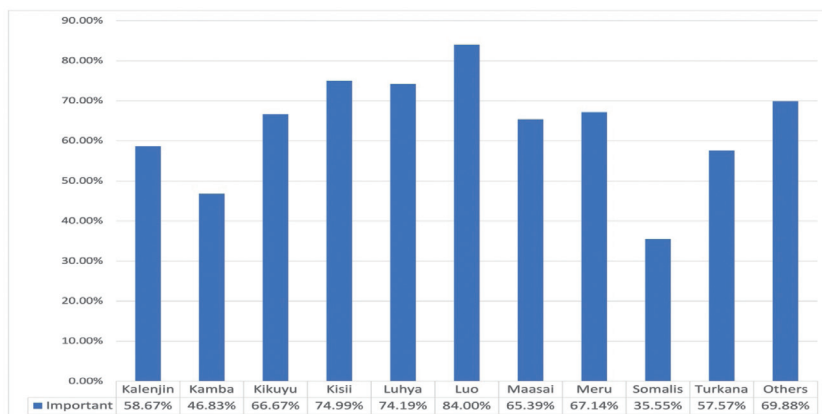
Accordingly, one should be aware of the different effects of polarization on democracy. From the viewpoint of party-based polarization, specific party positions on the policy spectrum help voters to rationally choose their preferred parties close to their ideal policy positions. Theoretically speaking, if confidence in the election is high and the losers feel that they can come back the next time, a slightly polarized position could potentially improve the quality of democracy by providing distinctive choices. However, from the viewpoint of identity-based polarization, if hostile feelings for the opposing groups are automatic in both the politicians' and voters' minds, democracy could be impeded due to the lack of discussion about policymaking. More importantly, the losers do not consent.

In countries with no ethnic-identity divisions or multiparty systems, elections are unlikely to change the probability that losing groups will polarize society further. They cannot form coalitions with other groups to increase their share of political power in future elections. Elections may lead to a greater incentive for losers to act, as losing groups face a situation in which the winning group has incentives to avoid future elections. The winning group may create institutional mechanisms through legislation to prevent the rival ethnic bloc from assuming power. The motivations for electoral losers to consent to a post-election bargain over any attempt to revise that deal through large-scale violence are stronger after elections in highly fractionalized states. Elections reduce uncertainty to a greater degree in ethnically divided states and enable governments to create post-election coalitions that compensate the most threatening groups. This requirement for coalition-building also means that electoral losers can plausibly believe that political gains can be made in the future through institutional means, either through another election or by joining a government coalition. We do not expect the exact mechanisms to operate in polarized and ethnically homogeneous settings. Therefore, we do not expect elections to increase or decrease the probability of violent political instability in these circumstances.

Data and Measures

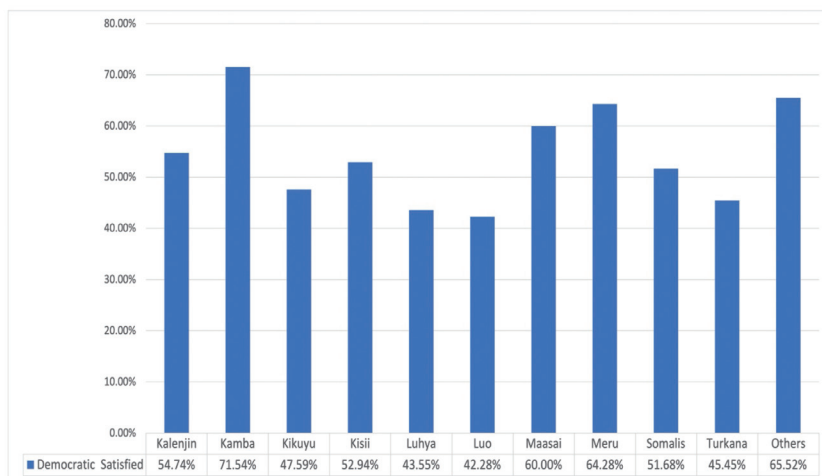
To examine the relationship between confidence in elections and the causes of polarization and how it may influence individual support for democracy, we use data from the seventh wave of the World Values Survey (WVS) managed by the University of Michigan. The Center for East Asia Democratic Studies at National Taiwan University was responsible for the data collection and distribution from Taiwan. In contrast, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi oversaw the data collection from Kenya for the Afrobarometer project Round 8 survey. The data from Taiwan were collected from March 25 through June 16, 2019, by means of a telephone survey using Taiwanese citizens aged twenty and above as the population. Interviews were conducted mainly in either Taiwanese or Mandarin, and a total of 1,223 respondents completed the survey via telephone. The Kenya

Figure 1. Democracy Is Important by Ethnic Group—Kenya



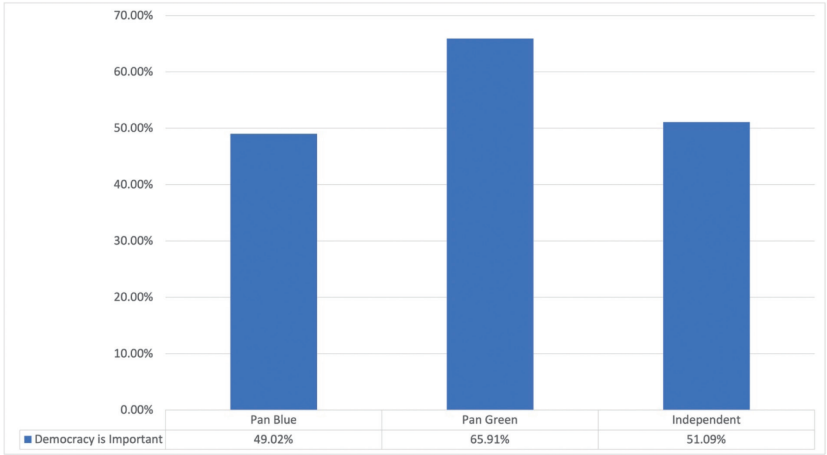
Source: World Values Survey.

Figure 2. Democratic Satisfaction by Ethnic Group—Kenya



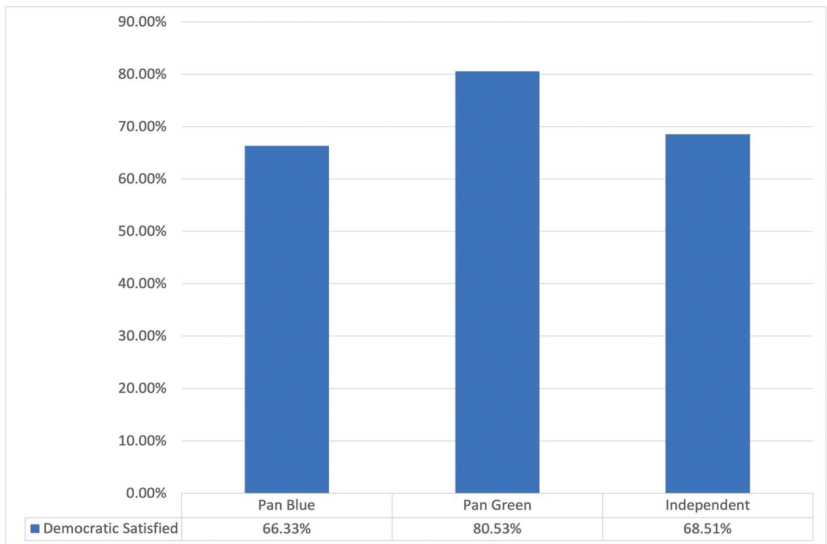
Source: World Values Survey.

Figure 3. Democracy Is Important by Partisanship—Taiwan



Source: World Values Survey.

Figure 4. Democratic Satisfaction by Partisanship—Taiwan

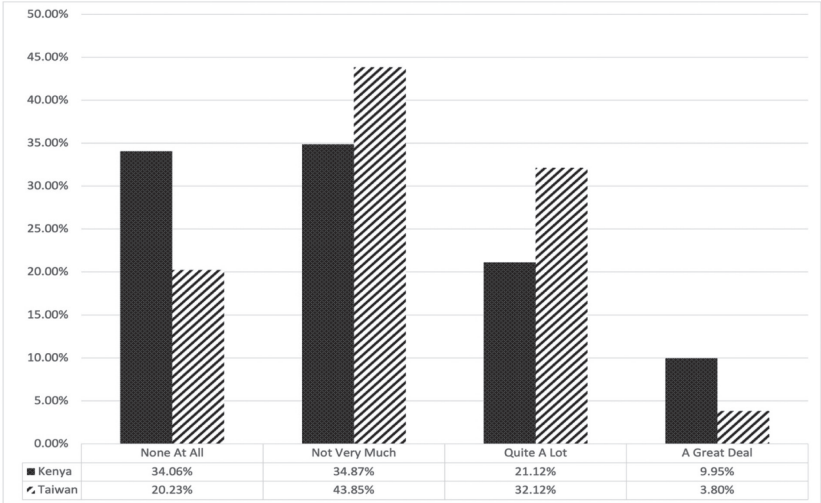


Source: World Values Survey.

data were collected in 2019 through face-to-face interviews with 2,400 respondents. However, given missing values due to nonresponses, the observations were reduced to 1,223 for Taiwan and 1,103 for Kenya. Besides, the data were weighted by gender, age, education, and residence area to ensure that the sample was representative of the target population. Consequently, we employed the weights to generate estimates that are nationally representative. Next, we explain the operationalization of variables for empirical analysis.

The dependent variable of this study is the individual’s confidence in the electoral system. While most people in democracies agree that it is necessary to have free and fair elections, political elites in different countries have competing opinions regarding how to evaluate the electoral system. Thus, they may have other proposals regarding how to initiate electoral reforms. Given the various causes of polarization in Taiwan and Kenya, it is worthwhile to explore the relationship between the cause of polarization and the confidence level in elections, as it can influence support for democracy. We operationalized confidence in the election by asking the respondents to indicate the extent to which they felt confident in their country’s election. The respondents answered this question on a four-point ordinal scale, and the responses were recoded to range from 1 to 4, 1 being “No Confidence,” 2 being “Low Confidence,” 3 being “Some Confidence,” and 4 being “High Confidence.” As shown in figure 5, only one-third of the respondents (31.07 percent in Kenya and 35.92 percent in Taiwan) expressed confidence in elections, whereas approximately two-thirds expressed concerns. Overall, most people in both young democracies lack confidence in elections.

Figure 5. Confidence in Elections—Kenya vs. Taiwan



Source: World Values Survey.

To explain individual concerns about elections, this study focuses on the causes of polarization in the two countries. That is to say, the key independent variable is the different causes of polarization in the two countries. The political-ideological position in Taiwan is considered the primary cause of polarization in the island state. Therefore, Taiwan's voters' ideological position is proxied through the traditional party identification question by asking the respondents to identify their partisan preference. Accordingly, a partisan dummy variable was generated to measure individual partisan attachment and was coded 1 for those who identified themselves as a supporter of a specific political party and 0 otherwise.

Furthermore, in this study, we want to know if democracy matters. Support for democracy is measured by two single questions, with a ten-point scale indicating the individual evaluation of the democratic system. For the first question, the respondents answered whether they believed democracy was essential. A higher value means that the respondents believed the idea of democracy was quite crucial to them. Also, the respondents answered how they evaluated the current democratic status in the country, as the answer implied the gap between reality and their expectation of democratic government. Accordingly, the two questions provide a brief overview of how people in the two countries view democracy. That could help us to further explore the relationship between the cause of polarization and the confidence in an election.

Most people in both countries generally support democracy, but the level of support varies across different groups. The variation not only occurs in Kenya but also in Taiwan. Figure 3 shows that over 65 percent of the ruling party supporters in Taiwan believe that democracy is essential, whereas the opposition party supporters are less likely to support democracy. Also, figure 4 presents the level of satisfaction with Taiwan's democratic government. The respondents' partisanship polarizes the evaluation of government performance. Over 80 percent of ruling party supporters are happy about Taiwan's current democratic level, but only 66 percent of opposition party supporters feel the same.

To avoid overestimation of the effects of our key variables on an individual's confidence in an election and the democratic system, in general, we control for some relevant variables in the model, including political interests, perception of financial satisfaction, trust in other religions and in other nationalities, and demographic factors such as education level, income, age, and gender. A ten-point scale about personal financial satisfaction was generated to measure the individual's perception of his or her own financial condition and was coded 1 for those who thought that their financial situation was extremely poor; the higher score refers to a more comfortable financial position. Concerning the social trust level in the society, we used two four-scale questions from the survey to gauge different social trust. The first question is whether individuals trust other nationalities; the second question asks whether the respondent trusts someone with different religious beliefs. The first question reflects how people

view foreigners, whereas the second variable shows the trust level among fellow citizens in the same country. The individual's trust level was coded 1 if there was no trust, whereas the highest level was coded 4.

We also included the social demographic variables in our research. A three-level variable regarding respondents' education level was used. The respondents with a college degree were coded 3, and lower levels of education were coded accordingly. Age was coded into six age groups. The youngest group was coded 1 if the respondent was 16 to 24 years old, and the most senior group was coded 6 for respondents who were 65 years old and above. Finally, gender is a dummy variable coded 1 if the respondent was female and 0 if the respondent was male. Table 1 and table 2 report descriptive statistics of all variables used for empirical analysis for the two countries.

Since the dependent variable—confidence in an election—is an ordinal variable, we employed the ordered logit model to estimate the effects of polarization causes, namely ethnic difference in Kenya and political-ideological differences in Taiwan. The general form of the model can be presented in the following equation:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \textit{Confidence in Election} &= \beta_1(\textit{Political interest}) + \beta_2(\textit{Democracy Important}) \\
 &+ \beta_3(\textit{Democracy Satisfaction}) + \beta_4(\textit{Race Identities}) \\
 &+ \beta_5(\textit{Partisanship}) + \beta_6(\textit{Financial Satisfaction}) \\
 &+ \beta_7(\textit{Trust Foreign Identity}) + \beta_8(\textit{Trust Other Religious}) \\
 &+ \beta_9(\textit{Education Level}) + \beta_{10}(\textit{Sex}) + \beta_{11}(\textit{Age}) + \varepsilon
 \end{aligned}$$

Empirical Results

This study reveals that financial satisfaction and trust are also significantly associated with how people view the fairness of an election. A higher level of trust in foreigners and other religions and a better financial situation provide a more comfortable feeling for individuals in Kenya to have more confidence in elections. However, the negative correlation between educational level and the belief in election implies that people with a higher level of education view the current government more critically. In addition, we examine another model to include the partisanship variables and find that partisanship influences individual confidence in elections (see model 2 of table 2). The effects of ethnic division on personal belief in an election are weakened, as political parties change the confidence level. The finding implies that if political elites want to reform the electoral process, the political party may play a role in reconciling ethnic differences and increase the probability of successful reform. While past studies have emphasized the importance of ethnic division on individual support for government policies in Kenya, our findings suggest that politicians can overcome the challenge of ethnic polarization and win public support for reform through cooperation across parties.

Our findings also imply the transformative impact of constitutional and legal reforms more than a decade later in Kenya. Winnie Mitullah argues that the 2013 elections were peaceful because of negotiated democracy.³¹ Negotiated democracy in Kenya³² seems to rely on incentives for the elite to cooperate and thus has perpetuated patronage. It is sustained by the distribution of influence

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Variables (Kenya)

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.
Confidence in Election	2.07	0.97	1	4
Political Interest	2.47	1.04	1	4
Democracy Important	7.92	2.50	1	10
Democracy Current Level	5.49	2.86	1	10
Race				
Kamba	0.11	0.31	0	1
Kikuyu	0.19	0.40	0	1
Kisii	0.06	0.23	0	1
Luhya	0.16	0.36	0	1
Luo	0.13	0.33	0	1
Maasai	0.02	0.15	0	1
Meru	0.06	0.24	0	1
Somalis	0.08	0.26	0	1
Turkana	0.03	0.16	0	1
Others	0.05	0.21	0	1
Financial Satisfaction	4.88	2.70	1	10
Trust				
Trust Other Nationality	2.12	0.92	1	4
Trust Other Religious	2.39	0.89	1	4
Education Level	1.93	0.74	1	3
Sex	1.49	0.50	1	2
Age	2.15	1.06	1	6
N	1,259			

³¹ Winnie Mitullah, "Negotiated Democracy: A Double-Barrelled Sword," in *Kenya's 2013 General Election: Stakes, Practices and Outcomes*, ed. Kimani Njogu and Peter Wekesa (Nairobi, Kenya: Twaweza Communications, 2015), 344-360.

³² Negotiated democracy is used in contexts where cleavages in society are challenging to resolve through the conventional liberal democracy of majoritarianism. It is regarded as a mechanism for making democracy work in societies divided along ethnic lines, such as Kenya.

Table 2. Ordered Logit Analysis of Confidence in Election (Kenya)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coef.	(S.E.)	Coef.	(S.E.)
Political Interest	0.274 ***	(0.058)	0.228 ***	(0.066)
Democracy Important	-0.041 \$	(0.025)	-0.053 \$	(0.028)
Democracy Current Level	0.038 \$	(0.021)	0.036	(0.023)
Race				
Kalenjin	0.176	(0.294)	0.024	(0.317)
Kamba	0.128	(0.297)	0.212	(0.316)
Kikuyu	-0.394	(0.280)	-0.410	(0.302)
Kisii	-0.041	(0.334)	-0.099	(0.353)
Luhya	-0.563 \$	(0.288)	-0.514	(0.313)
Luo	-0.857 **	(0.297)	-0.615 \$	(0.336)
Maasai	-0.631	(0.455)	-0.603	(0.518)
Meru	-0.363	(0.344)	-0.357	(0.368)
Somalis	0.031	(0.329)	0.004	(0.350)
Turkana	-0.234	(0.407)	-0.473	(0.433)
Party				
Jubilee			0.416 *	(0.196)
Orange			-0.101	(0.222)
UPK			0.172	(0.193)
ANC			0.128	(0.301)
Labour			0.708 *	(0.326)
Financial Satisfaction	0.076 ***	(0.023)	0.074 **	(0.025)
Trust				
Trust Other Nationality	0.245 **	(0.081)	0.287 ***	(0.087)
Trust Other Religious	0.257 **	(0.084)	0.296 ***	(0.090)
Education Level	-0.418 ***	(0.080)	-0.447 ***	(0.089)
Sex	0.268 *	(0.116)	0.196	(0.130)
Age	0.020	(0.054)	-0.010	(0.060)
Cutpoint 1	0.673	(0.498)	3.359	(0.880)
Cutpoint 2	2.373 ***	(0.502)	4.629 ***	(0.892)
Cutpoint 3	3.932 ***	(0.512)	6.126 ***	(0.907)
N	1,103			

Note: ***: $p < 0.001$; **: $p < 0.01$; *: $p < 0.05$; \$: $p < 0.10$.

Source: Afrobarometer.

in the public sector to ensure the representation of groups. The impact of political and electoral reform on resolving polarizing issues varies, depending on the level of trust and ethnic accommodation among elites. The effect of reforms is limited as coalition-building may not include all perspectives or groups, thus creating new tension among the elites, who feel excluded, and their constituencies.

The decision to divide Kenya into forty-seven smaller counties—as opposed to seven larger provinces—has reduced the capacity of any one county or group of counties to break away from the rest of the country, as some aggrieved regions have threatened to do in the past.³³ However, the situation remains fluid, and further opposition losses at the subnational level in future elections could undermine the stabilizing effects of devolution. Decentralized governments have the potential to moderate “winner-takes-all” politics—the continued prevalence of presidentialism notwithstanding—but they may also exacerbate subnational identities in a way that generates new challenges for the political system and prevailing constitutional order that may ultimately undermine efforts to build a cohesive national polity and confidence in democracy.³⁴ As shown in figures 5 and 6, the Afrobarometer survey suggests that the level of confidence in democracy and the electoral system varies, confirming that ethnic cleavages are still a salient factor in Kenya’s politics.

In Taiwan, the cause of polarization, namely the political-ideological position, plays an essential role in driving people’s confidence level in an election. Individuals’ interest in politics and satisfaction with the current democratic regime positively correlate with confidence. Unsurprisingly, supporters of the ruling party are more likely to have a higher level of confidence in an election, whereas opposition party identification does not have a significant impact. Our finding also shows that a higher level of trust in a fellow Taiwanese has a particular effect on confidence in an election, but trust in foreigners is not essential in the case of Taiwan. As in the case of Kenya, people with a higher level of education are more critical about the fairness of elections.

To see the substantive effects of the cause of polarization on individual confidence in an election, we calculated predicted probabilities according to the procedure outlined by previous studies. As our focus is on the cause of polarization in the two countries, we computed predicted probabilities based on model 1 with only the expected fundamental reason for the two cases and set the rest of the explanatory variables to their mean values. Figures 4 and 5 show that both ethnic division and political and ideological positions display a clear polarized outcome. In Kenya, different ethnic groups have different

³³ Nic Cheeseman, Karuti Kanyinga, Gabrielle Lynch, Mutuma Ruteere, and Justin Willis, “Kenya’s 2017 Elections: Winner-Takes-All Politics as Usual?” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 13, no. 2 (2019): 215-234.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Variables (Taiwan)

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.
Confidence in Election	2.19	0.80	1	4
Political Interest	2.11	0.85	1	4
Democracy Important	8.95	1.51	1	10
Democracy Current Level	7.39	2.15	1	10
Race				
Hakka	0.11	0.31	0	1
Minnanese	0.79	0.41	0	1
Mainlander	0.07	0.25	0	1
Aboriginal	0.01	0.12	0	1
Others	0.02	0.14	0	1
Party				
Pan Blue	0.34	0.47	0	1
Pan Green	0.25	0.43	0	1
Independent	0.41	0.49	0	1
Financial Satisfaction	6.42	2.19	1	10
Trust				
Trust Other Nationality	2.38	0.66	1	4
Trust Other Religious	2.53	0.64	1	4
Education Level	2.31	0.79	1	3
Sex	1.51	0.5	1	2
Age	3.81	1.61	1	6
N	1,223			

Note: ***: $p < 0.001$; **: $p < 0.01$; *: $p < 0.05$; \$: $p < 0.10$.

Source: World Values Survey.

Table 4. Ordered Logit Analysis of Confidence in Election (Taiwan)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coef.	(S.E.)	Coef.	(S.E.)
Political Interest	0.290 ***	(0.071)	0.292 ***	(0.071)
Democracy Important	-0.002	(0.041)	0.002	(0.041)
Democracy Current Level	0.143 ***	(0.029)	0.145 ***	(0.029)
Race				
Hakka			0.701	(0.424)
Minnanese			-0.354	(0.394)
Mainlander			-0.055	(0.451)
Aboriginal			-0.418	(0.548)
Party				
Pan Blue	0.226	(0.133)	0.210	(0.135)
Pan Green	0.511 ***	(0.110)	0.521 ***	(0.144)
Financial Satisfaction	0.124 ***	(0.026)	0.133 ***	(0.027)
Trust				
Trust Other Nationality	-0.166	(0.111)	-0.166	(0.111)
Trust Other Religious	0.538 ***	(0.115)	0.548 ***	(0.115)
Education Level	-0.377 ***	(0.084)	-0.377 ***	(0.085)
Sex	-0.135	(0.110)	-0.158	(0.111)
Age	0.039	(0.042)	0.042	(0.042)
Cutpoint 1	1.162	(0.513)	0.898	(0.627)
Cutpoint 2	3.377 ***	(0.522)	3.130 ***	(0.633)
Cutpoint 3	6.234 ***	(0.549)	5.995 ***	(0.655)
N	1,210			

Note: ***: $p < 0.001$; **: $p < 0.01$; *: $p < 0.05$; \$: $p < 0.10$.

Source: World Values Survey.

confidence levels in elections, whereas partisanship contributes to the variation of confidence level in an election among Taiwanese citizens.

In addition to the causes of polarization in the two young democracies, this study finds that perceived financial situation, social trust, and education level are associated significantly with individual support for the current electoral system in the country. The empirical results confirm a relationship between the cause of polarization and confidence in elections; Taiwan and Kenya are alike. More importantly, our findings imply that a trustworthy electoral process could reduce the conflict between winners and losers. In other words, the cause of polarization in different democracies needs to be considered while examining the relationship between polarization and democratic support and vice versa. If political elites were willing to ask their competitors to find a common ground to consolidate the democratic system, our study suggests this would increase the level of confidence in the electoral system and could help change people's hostile attitudes toward opponents, thus decrease the levels of polarization.

Conclusion

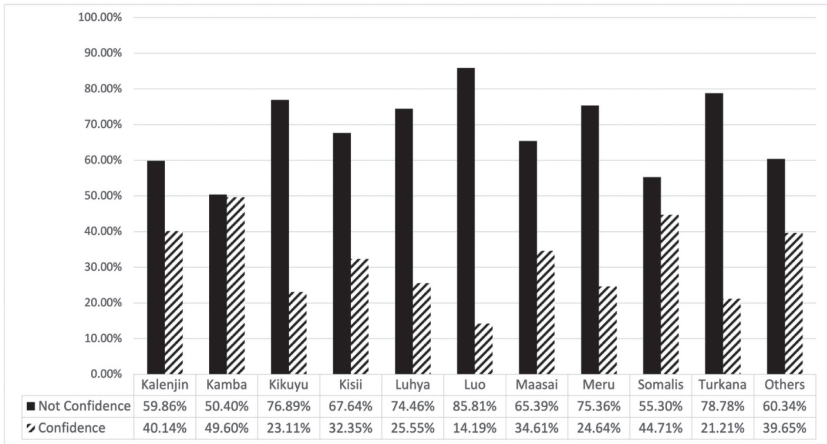
Our two cases of Taiwan and Kenya help investigate the effects of political polarization on different types of democracy. We have used subjective individual-level survey data collected by the World Values Survey and the Afrobarometer projects to examine the extent to which the cause of polarization affects confidence in elections and support for democracy in the two young democracies. Specifically, we incorporated both identity-based and party-based polarization indicators and different measures of attitudes toward democracy.

The results indicate that partisan divides are characteristic of Taiwan and political polarization across ethnic lines exists in Kenya. Interestingly, even though the causes of polarization differ between the two cases, the solution to deal with polarization might be the same, as our findings show that in both cases citizens are still willing to count on elections as a means by which to maintain support for the current democratic system.

This exploratory study has arrived at two main conclusions. In the case of new Asian democracies, where partisanship and ideological divisions lead to polarization on various policies, the electoral system must ensure that voters always have viable alternatives. If the electoral system provides too many advantages to the incumbent party, such a party could effectively disable the ability of challenger parties to survive, causing lowering confidence in democracy among the losers.

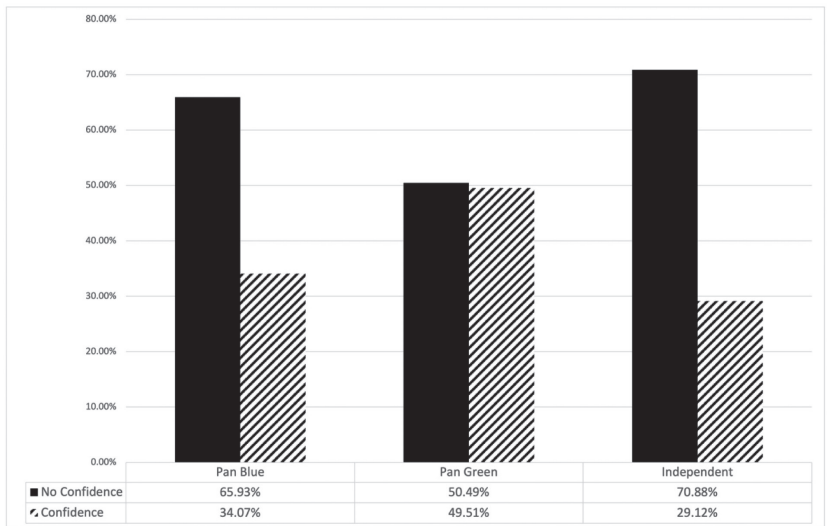
In the case of young African democracies, where ethnic division is the fundamental reason for unstable societies, the electoral process needs to provide fair opportunities to all ethnic groups. While electoral reform could potentially deal with different ethnic interests, there is no guarantee that losers will consent if the reform process does not satisfy all subgroups. Therefore, the

Figure 6. Confidence in Election by Ethnic Group in Kenya



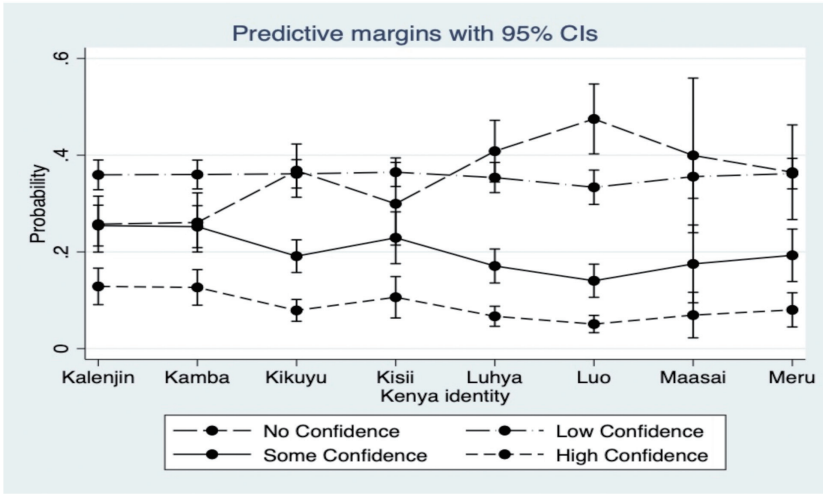
Source: World Values Survey.

Figure 7. Confidence in Election by Partisanship in Taiwan



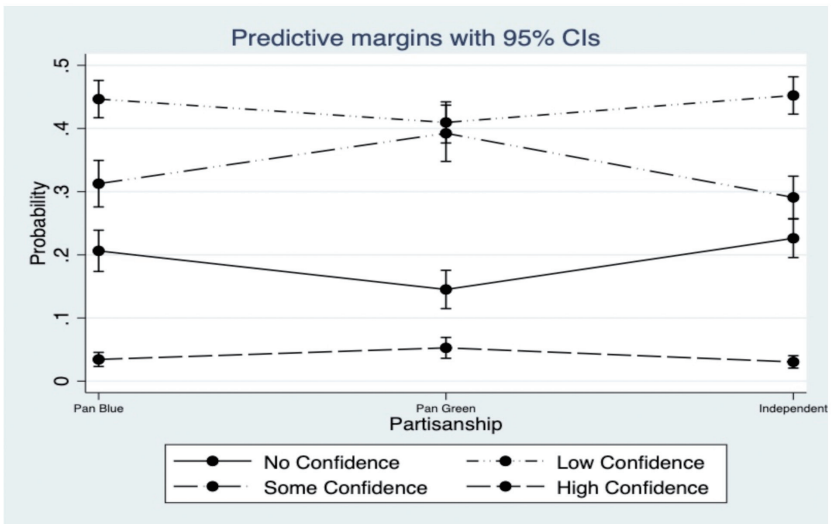
Source: World Values Survey.

Figure 8. Predict Margins of Confidence in Election by Ethnic Groups: Kenya



Source: World Values Survey.

Figure 9. Predict Margins of Confidence in Election by Partisanship: Taiwan



Source: World Values Survey.

effect of electoral reform on resolving polarizing issues varies, depending on the nature and level of disagreement. Electoral reform might converge slightly different perspectives, but the effect is limited if the cause of polarization is not resolved.

