

An International Conference on
Democracy in East Asia and Taiwan in
Global Perspective

Session II: Culture, Institution and Democratic Consolidation

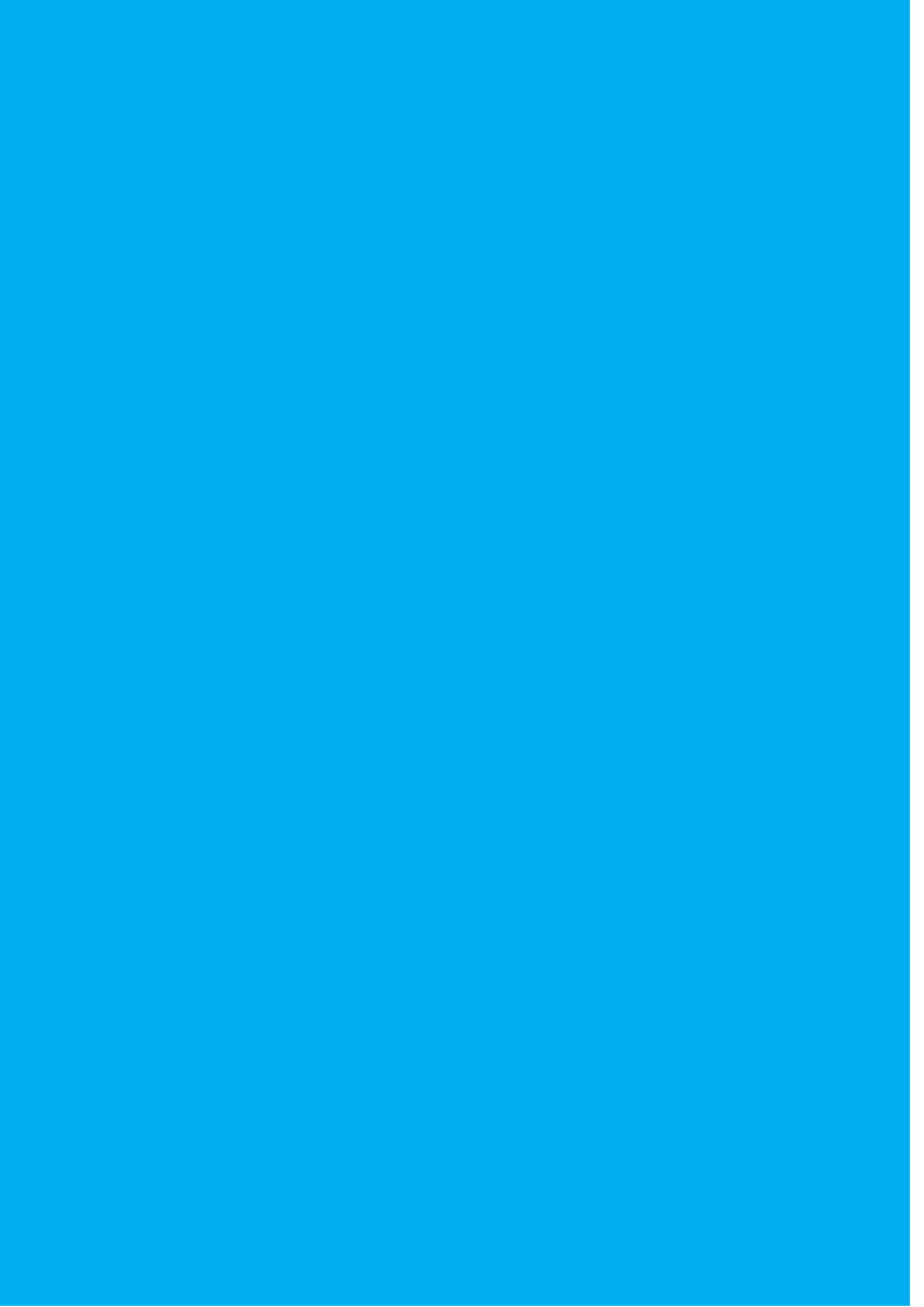
Executive Structure and
Democratic Governance in East Asia

Jih-wen Lin

Research Fellow, Institute of Political Science, Academia Sinica

ljw@sinica.edu.tw

This is only a draft. Please do not cite or quote without the author's permission.
Paper prepared for delivery at an international conference on Democracy in East Asia and
Taiwan in Global Perspective, organized by the Department of Political Science at National
Taiwan University, Taipei, ROC, August 24-25, 2011.



Executive Structure and Democratic Governance in East Asia

Jih-wen Lin

Abstract

Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan are similar in many dimensions but vary by their executive structures, making the latter a plausible variable to explain their different experiences in democratic governance. The three regimes are distinguishable not only by their constitutional systems but also by the possible configurations of partisan players. The Japanese parliamentarism may encounter gridlock if the two houses are controlled by competing parties, Taiwan's president-parliamentarism makes divided government an unavoidable threat, and the South Korean premiers can be trapped between the parties of the president and the legislative majority. This paper presents two empirical findings to demonstrate the impacts of executive structure on democratic governance. First, government stability declines with the number of partisan players, indicating the negative effect of power fragmentation on the sustainability of policies. Second, the shorter a cabinet lasts the lower the vote share of the ruling party in the subsequent election, implying the self-corrective function of democratic competitions. Overall, multiparty competition has fundamentally transformed the three developmental states.

Keywords: democratic governance, executive structure, veto player, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, East Asia

Executive Structure and Democratic Governance in East Asia

Democratic Governance in East Asia

The East Asian model of development has been seen as a challenge to the free-market theory of economic growth.¹ Best represented by Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, this subtype of the East Asian model is characterized by a rapid economic growth under the coordination of the developmental state.² Recent changes in these countries, however, have undermined the legitimacy of the developmental state model. Beginning with the collapse of Japan's bubble economy in the early 1990s, the South Korean financial system almost toppled in the 1997 Asian financial crisis (Woo-Cumings 1999). Taiwan survived this crisis (Chu 1999), but suffered from a serious recession since about 2001 (Wu 2007). Facing these crises, the developmental states seemed ineffective, if not insensitive.

Concomitant with the economic fluctuations were grand political transformations. Japan replaced its perennial multi-member electoral system with a majoritarian-leaning mixed system in 1994, expecting the political parties to take over the country's helm from the bureaucracy. In South Korea, 1992 and 1997 marked the years when Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung, the opposition leaders in the authoritarian period, were elected presidents.³ Taiwan saw two regime turnovers in the past four presidential elections, although the legislative majority did not always shift hand in hand. Are the economic crises and political changes correlated? If yes, how? Has the new political system undermined the developmental state, or even transfigured it?

Economic crises can have external causes and historical roots that no single agent is responsible for, but political changes certainly affect the government's capability to steer through the turbulences. If the political trend in the three East Asian countries has been the widening and deepening of partisan competitions, democratic governance becomes the fundamental issue. On the one hand, those in power are

¹ Studies on the East Asian model, if interested in the stage of economic development, tend to focus on Japan alone or South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong, the four Newly Industrialized Economies, as a group. From the perspective of state-society relations, Korea and Taiwan are strongly affected by the Japanese colonial legacies while the infrastructures of Singapore and Hong Kong are more alike. For a defense of the model of developmental state, see Woo-Cumings ed. 1999; for a theoretical review on developmental state, see Weyland 2008.

² The official titles of Taiwan and South Korea are respectively the Republic of China and the Republic of Korea. To facilitate description, I will call them by the colloquial name.

³ I will call the head of state "he" and the prime minister (premier) "she" unless the gender of a specific actor is known.

expected to represent as many people as possible; on the other the hand, the transaction cost of policymaking rises with the number of participants. Some believe that a democratic government improves the quality of decision making because competition reveals corruption and improper policies; some hold the opposite view because democracy tends to increase the number of veto points; democratic deficit occurs when the government fails to carry out the mandate it receives from the people.

The three East Asian countries are good cases to test the competing hypotheses about democratic governance: they are similar in most dimensions but the executive structure, making it a plausible explanatory variable to account for the variance of government performances across regimes or within the same country. This paper elaborates this point by first giving democratic governance an operational definition, followed by a discussion about related studies. Literature review suggests that the veto player theory synthesizes existing works most effectively, but has to be revised to fit the East Asian cases. The subsequent section characterizes the features of the three East Asian cases and presents a “most similar system design” to examine how executive structure may affect the sustainability of government policies. The empirical analysis tests two hypotheses: how the number of partisan players impacts government sustainability, and whether electoral competition can redress the unwanted consequences of a country’s democratic system.

Theories of Democratic Governance

Whether a democratic government is conducive to good governance is a classical question that troubles generations of scholars.⁴ Some would think democratic governance an oxymoron—efficiency is usually associated with dictatorship rather than pluralism—while some others insist that power is corrupt. Huntington (1968) posed a question several decades ago whether democratization favors stability, which should be established before any desirable policy outcome can be fulfilled. There has also been attempts to measure the efficiency of democratic governance in order to gauge whether a regime suffers from democratic deficit (Diamond 2008). A current study by Bevir (2010) cast doubt on the traditional setting of democracy by showing that new ideas of governance gave way to market-oriented techniques.

⁴ It is easier for an advocate of democratic governance to emphasize the responsiveness dimension than the efficiency of governance. For example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) sets the goal of democratic governance to be the development of institutions and processes that are more responsive to the needs of ordinary citizens and that promote development. See < <http://www.beta.undp.org/undp/en/home/ourwork/democraticgovernance/overview.html> >.

What these studies suggest is not that democracy per se hinders or fosters good governance, but that the result of democracy varies by how competing forces are arranged. On this account, the most renowned is Lijphart's work (Lijphart 1999) on democratic systems. A majoritarian system—a majority party dominating the making and approval of policies—may be efficient but unfavorable to pluralist representation; a consensus system—policymaking rests on the agreement of minority groups—looks fairer but the bargaining cost is high. Implicit in Lijphart's model is the tradeoff between pluralism and efficiency.⁵ Lijphart's works are highly theoretical but may encounter a difficulty in operationalization: adding consensus institutions in different dimensions does not necessarily make the result more consociational. For example, a presidential system, by separating powers between the executive and legislative branches, is closer to the consensus model than a pure parliamentary system is, just as a multiparty system represents minority interests better than a two-party system. However, a multiparty presidential system gives the government much greater powers than a multiparty parliamentary system.

Also studying institutional consequences from a systematic perspective, the veto player theory (Tsebelis 1995; 2002) is built to handle the aggregation problem and to posit propositions about how institution works. The veto player theory can be characterized by the following theses. First, the veto player theory aims to replace the dichotomy between parliamentarism vs. presidentialism and multipartism vs. two-party system by the number of veto players, whose agreement is needed to change the status quo. We cannot count the number of veto players without knowing the institutions a country has, but just by institutions we are unable to explain the changeability of the status quo. The veto player theory is thus a theory about how different institutions work together. Second, the same logic can be extended to other institutions such as the European Union (Tsebelis 1994). Third, the propositions of the veto player theory are straightforward and easy to test: the capacity of a political system to produce policy change increases only if the number of veto players decreases, the policy distance among veto players shrinks, and the collective veto players become less cohesive (Tsebelis 2002: 19-63).

It is clear that the veto player theory solves Lijphart's aggregative problem and provides helpful hypotheses about how democratic institutions work. Since the focus

⁵ Following a similar logic, Treisman (2007) challenged the view that decentralization enhances effective and responsive governance. Concerning the nature of policy outcomes, Gerring and Thacker (2004) argued that three types of political institutions are fundamental in securing a centripetal style of democratic governance: unitary sovereignty, a parliamentary executive, and a closed-list proportional representation electoral system.

of this study is not policy making per se but democratic governance, we should modify the veto player theory to focus on the number of players who have the partisan incentive to remove the other players from office or to prevent others from realizing their policy goals. Broad as it seems, this definition has two analytical advantages: first, removing a political player from office is the most extreme way to stop her from making policies (and thus to preserve the status quo temporarily); second, this definition applies to all constitutional systems. We shall call this variable the number of partisan players (NPP). If, say, the president, the premier, and the parliamentary majority are in the same party, there is only one NPP. If the three players belong to three competing parties, NPP equals three. In a bicameral system in which one house can veto the proposal initiated by another house, NPP is two.

How then is the number of partisan players related to democratic governance? As long as a government is mandated to improve the status quo, the increase of partisan players will decrease the changeability of the status quo and undermine the government's legitimacy.⁶ The increase of partisan players, by decreasing the options to replace the status quo, should produce the following effects: the number of proposals the agenda setter can initiate reduces, the regime becomes less stable, and the bureaucratic and judicial independence increases. By the same logic, if good governance requires a legitimate government to adopt policies satisfying as many people as possible, the increase of partisan players will dampen this goal because people cannot expect the government they choose to govern long; when the representatives people select are in power, their policy proposals may not be implementable if there are other partisan players. A model of partisan players also sheds light on accountability, another indispensable element of good governance. The greater the number of partisan players, the harder for the people to ascribe policy failures to a particular agency. Nevertheless, democracy gives people the power to vote down some partisan players to remove the barriers of policymaking. If so, democracy is a way to alleviate its own drawbacks.

We can therefore derive from the theory of partisan players the following two propositions concerning democratic governance:

Proposition 1. The increase of partisan players undermines government stability, hence the sustainability of policies.

⁶ The status quo should be understood in a dynamic way. A government aiming to protect the status quo is implying that its existence is necessary to prevent the status quo from "shifting away". So status quo refers to the likely outcome—which may be what it is or what it can be—if the political system cannot pass any resolution or policy.

Proposition 2. The less stable a regime is the lower the vote share of the ruling party in the subsequent election.

Some explanations are needed to make these propositions relevant to democratic governance. The underlying assumption of Proposition 1 is the positive relationship between regime stability and the satisfaction with government performance. If there is indeed this connection, the increase of partisan players will diminish the government's capacity to perform well and thus create instability. Later on we will discuss how regime stability is to be measured for different constitutional systems. Proposition 2 is about the self-corrective function of democracy that we discussed above.

In sum, a theory of partisan players provides helpful propositions to link democratic governance with the executive structure, which can be characterized by the configuration of partisan players. The next section will discuss how the propositions can be turned into hypotheses after we operationalize the major variables for the three East Asian cases.

The Most Similar System Design for the Three East Asian Cases

When the cases under investigation are identical, a treatment separating the experimental and control groups will be considered the cause of the difference these two groups may have. In comparative politics, this logic was characterized by Lijphart (1975) as the "most similar system design", in which the cases are similar in all dimensions but the one related to the explanatory variable. Two methodological considerations should be noted when applying this design to the three East Asian cases. First, the three cases are indeed similar in many dimensions but have a high variance of the number of partisan players across governments. Second, culture, which has been commonly used to account for the political consequences of these countries, is an important background factor but not a plausible explanatory variable exactly because it lacks variance. The following will first explain why culture is a background factor that can associate the configuration of partisan players with democratic governance.

That the East Asian politics can be understood by a shared cultural heritage is best exemplified by the works of Pye (1985: 55-89), who claimed that the Confucian tradition makes people in China, Japan, and Korea group-oriented and respectful of authorities. As a source of political legitimacy, the paternalistic form of power rests on the traditional kinship-based order and satisfies people's desire for personal security.

A modern embodiment of this cultural tradition is the patron-client relations that can be clearly identified in the three cases. In variant ways, the patron-client relations are featured by elected politicians (as patrons) providing their supporters (as clients) personal favors in exchange for votes and donations; in the long-term, this relations is consolidated by personal connections between individuals and families.

The impact of the patron-client network on East Asian politics is quite significant, and has been embodied as the electoral system that encourages personal vote. Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea are the only cases that had used the single nontransferable voting under multi-member district (SNTV) to elected their legislators for a considerable period of time.⁷ Since the voters cast their ballot to a single candidate and the winning threshold is low, the best winning strategy is to cultivate personal ties with the constituents. This electoral system is considered a hotbed of money politics in all three cases, eventually compelling all to adopt the mixed-member majoritarian systems (Reilly 2007), which is expected to promote policy-oriented and centripetal competitions.

It is true that, in all three cases, the prevalence of personal and informal connections reduces the transparency of the political system, hence the capacity of the civil society to oversee those in power. So what political culture explains is why the overall quality of democracy in East Asia remains to be upgraded. The cultural factor, while successfully distinguishes East Asia from the Western world, should not be treated as a variable because it focuses on the commonality rather than the inter- and intra-regime variances. As will be explicated later, government performances are evaluated differently in the same country, and there is certainly disparity across countries.⁸ A more plausible approach is to start from the factor that has the greatest variance across the regimes.

As theorized in the previous section, the number of partisan players is the key variable we are looking for. The maximum number of partisan players is constrained by constitution, and the actual number eventually depends on elections that determine the party (or parties) controlling a particular agency. We begin by examining the features of the constitutional system of the three cases, in particular the powers of the head of state, the head of government, and the legislative body, followed by a discussion

⁷ The book edited by Grofman et al 1999 provide detailed accounts of the history and consequences of SNTV.

⁸ A recent study (Wong et al. 2011) shows that in six Asian countries—including the three discussed by this paper—government performance explains political trust more effectively than culture does.

about partisan players.⁹

Postwar Japan adopted a pure parliamentary system. The head of state is the Emperor who has limited and ceremonial powers. The Constitution of Japan stipulates clearly that “the advice and approval of the Cabinet shall be required for all acts of the Emperor in matters of state, and the Cabinet shall be responsible therefore” (Art. 3); “the Emperor shall perform only such acts in matters of state as are provided for in this Constitution and he shall not have powers related to government” (Art. 4), and “the Emperor shall appoint the Prime Minister as designated by the Diet” (Art. 6).¹⁰ The executive powers are controlled by the Cabinet headed by the Prime Minister (Art. 65, 66). The Prime Minister is designated from among the members of the Diet by a resolution of the Diet; if the two Houses disagree with the designation, the decision of the House of Representatives shall be the decision of the Diet (Art. 67). The Prime Minister appoints the Ministers of State (a majority of whom must be Diet members) and can remove them as he chooses (Art. 68). If the House of Representatives passes a no-confidence resolution or rejects a confidence resolution, the Cabinet shall resign en masse (Art. 69).

It is a misperception that these rules make the survivability of the Japanese government solely dependent on the House of Representatives. Although the House of Councilors (upper house) has limited power, it is still an effective veto player exerting significant impact on policymaking.¹¹ The Constitution of Japan states that a bill becomes a law on passage by both Houses. If the House of Councilors rejects a bill passed by the House of Representatives, the latter can pass it for a second time by a two-thirds majority and make it a law; failure by the House of Councilors to take final action within sixty days after receipt of a bill passed by the House of Representatives can be seen as a rejection of the said bill (Art. 59). In other words, the House of Councilors is the only partisan player that may deter a ruling party from fulfilling its goals.

⁹ The following are the official website of the constitution of each country. Japan: <http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html>; Taiwan (the Republic of China): <

http://www.president.gov.tw/en/prog/news_release/document_content.php?id=1105498684&pre_id=1105498701&g_category_number=409&category_number_2=373&layer=on&sub_category=455>;

South Korea (the Republic of Korea):

<https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http://english.ccourt.go.kr/home/att_file/download/Constitution_of_the_Republic_of_Korea.pdf>. (Accessed on April, 15, 2010).

¹⁰ Accordingly, the Emperor can only reactively appoint a person designated by the Diet as the Prime Minister, making his role in government formation ceremonial.

¹¹ For example, the House of Councilors cannot reject a budgetary bill—if it disagrees with the budget passed by the House of Representatives and when no agreement can be reached through a joint committee of both Houses, the decision of the House of Representatives becomes the decision of the Diet.

To escape veto, the only way out is for the ruling party (or coalition) to control the majority of seats in the House of Councilors or to have a two-thirds majority in the House of Representatives. This turns out to be difficult given Japan's non-concurrent electoral timing. According to the Constitution, the term of office of the members of the House of Representatives is four years, which may be terminated if the House is dissolved (Art. 45). The term of office of the members of the House of Councilors is six years, and election for half of the members shall take place every three years (Art. 46). While the House of Representatives is elected by the mixed-member majoritarian system (and SNTV before 1994), the House of Councilors adopts electoral rules that are more proportional. Given these rules, it is very likely that the two Houses are controlled by different majorities. Gridlock may take place as soon as the ruling parties fail to dominate the House of Councilors.

Taiwan's constitution (the Constitutional of the Republic of China, henceforth called the Constitution) is parliamentary by design but highly presidentialized in practice. By Constitution, some of the president's powers are titular, and the highest administrative organ, the Executive Yuan, is headed by the premier rather than the president (Art. 53). According to the main text of the Constitution, the president's appointment of the premier should be consented by the Legislative Yuan (Art. 55); a premier failing to veto a legislative resolution should consider resignation (Art. 57). The Constitution also detaches the president from the daily functioning of the Executive Yuan: he appoints the cabinet ministers through recommendation of the premier and cannot attend the weekly meetings of the Executive Yuan.

For several reasons, such a parliamentary design does not fit Taiwan's constitutional practice. To begin with, the main text of the Constitution has almost no chance of being realized: the Republic of China was in civil war when the Constitution was promulgated in 1947, followed by a very long period under the Temporary Provision (1948-1991) in which the restraints on presidential powers were cast aside. The authoritarian rule under the KMT reinforced the practice that the president—typically the chair of the KMT—was the paramount leader. The constitutional reforms adopted since 1991 attempted to constitutionalize the president's de facto powers by instituting a popularly elected president and depriving the Legislative Yuan of the power to approve the appointment of the premier. In exchange, the Legislative Yuan can pass a no-confidence motion in the premier, making the current system semi-presidential.¹²

¹² Taiwan's semi-presidential system was built by adding additional articles to the Constitution rather than amending the old ones. For Taiwan's constitutional reforms and their consequences, see Lin 2002.

Nevertheless, the president still cannot attend the Executive Yuan meeting and must rely on the premier to control the government. For this reason, so far no popularly elected president consulted the legislature when appointing the premier. Shugart (2005) counted Taiwan as a president-parliamentary regime, suggesting that the president is free to remove the premier.

By these rules, Taiwan's semi-presidential constitution creates two possible partisan players for the premier: she can be sacked if the Legislative Yuan passes a vote of no confidence or if the president dismisses her. Which scenario is more likely depends on the preferences and costs of the president and the legislators. For the president, removing a premier signals the difficulties of carrying out his goals; for the legislators, a no-confidence vote may lead to the dissolution of the Legislative Yuan, hence a snap election. Most likely, the cost of the legislators is higher than that of the president. As for preferences, the president's unilateral appointment power gives him the incentive to choose a reliable premier if he lacks legislative support. The same logic suggests that a president who is unable to control the premier may find the latter a threat because the constitution defines the Executive Yuan as the highest executive organ.

Like Taiwan, South Korea also institutes a popularly elected president who names a prime minister accountable to the National Assembly. Unlike Taiwan, the executive system designed by the Constitution of the Republic of Korea is very close to (though not the same as) a presidential system. Ceremonial powers aside, the South Korean president is defined by its Constitution as the head of state and the head of the executive branch (Art. 66). As the head of state who are mandated to safeguard the country, the Korean president is advised by the National Security Council on policies related to national security before they are sent to the government for deliberation (Art. 91). Also different from Taiwan, the South Korean president is authorized by the Constitution to rein the government. The State Council, composed of the president, the prime minister, and other members, deliberate on important policies that fall within the power of the executive (Art. 88). In the State Council, the prime minister and other members are positioned to assist the president (Art. 87). The South Korean president also enjoys considerable prerogatives to direct the government. For example, the Constitution gives the president the powers to issue act-like decrees and Martial Law (Art. 76, 77) or launch a referendum related to national security (Art. 70). The president also enjoys veto power: the president may return a bill to the National Assembly for reconsideration; the National Assembly shall reconsider it and can re-pass it in the original form only if more than half of the members turnout to vote and at least two-thirds of them cast an affirmative vote (Act. 53).

But the South Korean Constitution still contains some semi-presidential elements. According to the Constitution, the prime minister shall assist the president and direct the executive ministries under order of the president (Art. 86) and may recommend to the president the removal of a member of the State Council from office (Art. 87); the acts of the president should be countersigned by the prime minister and concerned members of the State Council (Art. 82). The Constitution also makes the prime minister accountable to the national legislature. The accountability of the prime minister to the National Assembly is established in two ways: the president appoints a prime minister with the consent of the National Assembly (Art. 86), and the National Assembly may pass a recommendation for the removal of the prime minister or a State Council member from office (Art. 63).

So the South Korean system is peculiar in that the appointment of the prime minister can be vetoed by the National Assembly but the removal of the prime minister can only be decided by the president. In other words, the prime minister may be trapped between the president and the National Assembly, especially when the two are hostile to each other. Since the president has a five years term in office (Art. 70) and the members of the National Assembly serve a four-year term, it is not uncommon for the two to be representing rival parties. It is interesting to see how the prime minister survives when the president cannot control the National Assembly.

Table 1 summarizes the above analysis by describing the powers of the head of state, the head of cabinet (from now on called the premier), and the parliament. The results suggest that the three cases can be divided into two groups. The first group is represented by Japan, a bicameral parliamentary democracy with a titular head of state. Since the Japanese premier is to be elected by the Diet (with the House of Representatives making the default decision), minority governments are very unlikely to be formed. However, the House of Councilors elections, which are distinguishable from the House of Representatives elections in timing and electoral systems, do not necessarily render the ruling party (coalitions) the majority of seats. On this occasions, the House of Councilors can veto important government bills and damage the government's credibility. Japan's House of Councilor election therefore becomes the major factor determining the number of partisan players. Taiwan and South Korea, although having different constitutional systems, belong to the second type. In Taiwan, the president, as the head of state, is constitutionally restrained but practically powerful and can unilaterally appoint and dismiss the premier. The Legislative Yuan has the constitutional power to pass a no confidence vote in the premier but most

legislators are reluctant to endorse such a motion that may lead to an early election. Cabinet stability is therefore strongly affected by the president even if he does not control the legislative majority. In South Korea, the National Assembly approves the president's appointment of the premier but cannot directly remove the premier. Like Taiwan, the untimely replacement of the South Korean premier is often decided by the president, although the National Assembly has a stronger influence on who should be appointed the premier.

Table 1. Constitutional System of Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea

	Japan	Taiwan	South Korea
Head of state	Emperor: symbolic head	President: de facto supreme leader	President: de jure and de facto supreme leader
Premier	Designated by House of Representatives; usually holds House of Representatives majority	Appointed by president without parliamentary consent	Appointed by president with parliamentary consent
Parliament	Bicameralism; House of Representatives can pass vote of no confidence in premier, House of Councilors can veto policy proposals	Unicameralism; Legislative Yuan can pass vote of no confidence in premier	Unicameralism; National Assembly cannot pass vote of no confidence in premier but can ask the president to dismiss the premier
Partisan players affecting cabinet stability	House of Representatives, House of Councilors	President, Legislative Yuan	President, National Assembly

The table shows that all three countries institute premiers (hence cabinet) with unfixed tenure. What this section explains is the likely impact of partisan players on how long the premier can be in power, hence the sustainability of government policies. There is no doubt that the importance of premier vis-à-vis the head of state varies by constitutional systems, but the premier's tenure does signify the capacity of the executive (which may include the head of state) to cope with the problems of democratic governance. The more the performance of a premier is approved by the people the more unjustifiable for the other players to veto her policies, let alone

sacking her. The next two sections will operationalize the major variables and examine how the configuration of partisan players affect democratic governance.

Partisan Players and Cabinet Stability

Cabinet stability is a good approximation of democratic governance for the three East Asian countries because it signifies the sustainability of government policies and is a common denominator shared by the three constitutional systems. The premiers of the three countries are named and constrained by different principals, but in no regime will the principal have the incentive to unseat the premier if she has fully carried out the assignment. Reversely, the early dismissal of the premiers typically reveals their failure to satisfy the principal. The survivability of the premier can thus be seen as an indicator of how the principal (or principals) evaluates the performance of the cabinet. For example, a Japanese premier ousted in a no-confidence motion is one who loses support from the parliamentary majority that elected her. In Taiwan, a president removing the premier she appointed is unlikely to be content with the performance of the Executive Yuan. The situation in South Korean is more complicated because its premier is appointed by the president with legislative consent: her resignation may result from the president, the National Assembly, or both.

As theorized above, the configuration of partisan players should be the most significant variable affecting cabinet stability. Another factor that may have some influence on cabinet stability is the fragmentation of the parliament. Existing works showed the noticeable impact of partisan structure of the parliament on cabinet duration (Blondel 1968). Taagepera and Shugart (1989: 99-103) demonstrated quantitatively that cabinet stability decreases with the effective number of legislative parties. This is an understandable result, because the cost of policymaking tends to increase with the number of parties, especially those in the coalition government. Whether the ruling party (or coalition) controls the parliamentary majority should have some effect on cabinet duration. However, this factor will not be included in the empirical analysis for two reasons. First, it lacks variance in Japan, where the premier cannot be elected by the House of Representatives without receiving the support from the parliamentary majority. Second, this factor is highly correlated with the number of partisan players: premiers in all three cases depend on the parliamentary endorsement to survive, whether they are supported by the parliamentary majority therefore determines whether the parliament is a partisan player.

While the effective number of political parties can be calculated for any regime type,

the number of partisan players is determined by constitutional system and partisan structure. The variables are operationalized as the following.

1. DURABILITY: the number of days a premier is in power divided by the maximum days of her term.

Cabinet stability is represented by the time a premier is in office because the replacement of the premier leads to the resignation of all ministers. Since the maximum length of a cabinet varies by country, I use what Lane and Ersson (1999: 301-302) called “government durability” to measure cabinet stability. The maximum length a premier can be in power is four years in Japan and South Korea and three years in Taiwan before 2008 (extended to four years thereafter).

2. NPP: the number of partisan players who have the incentive to remove the other players from office or veto policymaking

This is the most important variable deserving a detailed explanation. As explained in the beginning, NPP is an extension of the veto player theory constructed by Tsebelis (1995; 2002). Broader than the veto players, NPP includes partisan players who have the motivation to dismiss the other players from office, because it is the most radical way to stop the others from changing the status quo. In brief, NPP is determined by the number of parties an adoptable policy has to go through; a partisan player can stop policymaking by removing others from office or simply exerting his veto player. The following considers how to measure NPP for Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea.

For Japan, the premier rests on the confidence of the House of Representatives to survive and the House of Councilors can veto government bills unless the House of Representatives re-passes the bill by a two-thirds majority. Accordingly, $NPP = 1$ for Japan if the ruling party (parties) control the majority of seats in both houses; $NPP = 2$ if the majority of the House of Councilors is beyond the government’s control. Since the elections for the members of the two houses do not take place concurrently, we need to consider the change in the seats of the upper house when a premier is still in office. First, if the ruling party always controls the majorities of the two houses, $NPP = 1$ regardless of the timing of the elections. Second, $NPP = 2$ if the ruling party never holds the upper house majority. Third, for any other situation, NPP is determined by the weighted upper house seat ratio of the ruling party. Formally, the weighted average is $\sum d_i s_i$, where i represents period i partitioned by two upper house elections, d_i the weight of this period, and s_i the upper house seat share of the ruling party in this

period. $NPP = 2$ if $\sum d_i s_i > 0.5$, otherwise $NPP = 1$.

Counting the number of partisan players for South Korea and Taiwan is more straightforward. In both countries, the premier can be dismissed by the president, the chief executive leader, and the parliaments have the means to affect the appointment or removal of the premier. When the government is divided, whether the president will appoint a person from his party to be the premier is a strategic choice. In Taiwan, the president can appoint an opposition leader as the premier even though no legislative consent is required; in South Korea the National Assembly confirms the appointment of the premier but cannot sack her directly, making executive incongruence a likely scenario. As a result, for both Taiwan and South Korea, $NPP = 1$ if the premier, the president and the parliamentary majority belong to the same party; $NPP = 2$ if the partisan background of the premier is different from the president or the parliamentary majority; $NPP = 3$ if the partisan background of the premier is different from both the president and the parliamentary majority.

3. ENP (effective number of parties) = $1/\sum S_i^2$, where S_i stands for the seat share of party i in the national parliament (or lower house for bicameral countries).

4. COUNTRY DUMMIES are categorical variables showing the likely difference among countries.

The country dummies can be defined in two ways to serve different purposes. First, if the goal is to show the variation across countries (or constitutional systems), Japan (= 1) and South Korea (= 1) are two dummies to be compared with baseline Taiwan (= 0). Second, if we are to compare Japan, an older parliamentary democracy, with Taiwan and South Korea, two younger democracies with strong presidency, Japan (= 1) will be compared with Taiwan and South Korea (= 0).

The unit of analysis is premier. Since we are counting the likely effects of partisan players on cabinet stability, premiers serving across parliamentary elections will be treated as different cases. Thus defined, there are 81 cases, including 46 from Japan, 23 from South Korea and 12 from Taiwan.¹³ In average, these premiers ruled by 446.74 days, or 0.32 in terms of durability, the number of partisan players is 1.70, and the effective number of parliamentary parties is 3.12. We now examine whether cabinet stability in the three countries is really affected by the variables theorized

¹³ The Japanese data exclude cabinets formed before 1949, for the country was occupied by the General Headquarter in that period. Taiwan and South Korea start from 1993 and 1988 respectively when the governments began to expect direct presidential elections.

above.

Table 2. Explaining Cabinet Stability

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	Coefficient (S.E.)	Coefficient (S.E.)	Coefficient (S.E.)
NPP	-0.088*** (0.030)	-0.075* (0.033)	-0.094*** (0.033)
ENP	-0.007 (0.031)	-0.002 (0.033)	-0.001 (0.034)
Korea		-0.178* (0.072)	
Japan		-0.132 ⁺ (0.067)	-0.026 (0.054)
CONSTANT	0.494*** (0.109)	0.580*** (0.111)	0.500*** (0.110)
Adjusted R-squared	0.080	0.128	0.071

Dependent variable = DURABILITY

Source: Author's calculation

Note: *** $p < 0.005$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; ⁺ $p < 0.1$

Table 2 reports the results of three OLS regression models distinguished by the different arrangements of country dummies. The three models reveal a consistent message: NPP and ENP both exhibit the expected impact, though the coefficients of NPP are all statistically significant while those of the ENP are not. Concerning the comparison across countries, model 2 does show a difference among the three countries: when compared with Taiwan, the durability of the South Korean premiers is much shorter, followed by that of Japan. As shown by model 3, the gap between Japan, a mature parliamentary democracy, and Taiwan and South Korea, two nascent democracies with strong presidency, is not salient. What model 1 shows is that, when not considering country-specific effect, the increase of one partisan player decreases cabinet durability by roughly 0.088 (about 129 days if the maximum is four years). The increase of one ENP reduces durability by about 0.007, a negative but insignificant effect.

So the empirical study largely confirms the theoretical expectations. Partisan players do have a visible impact on the durability of the cabinet, hence the policies it initiates.

The effect number of parties, although having the expected effect on cabinet stability, is not as significant as what has been found for other democracies. The reason is that existing studies tended to focus on the parliamentary system, which applies only to Japan for this study. The empirical study also leaves an important question for those who care about democratic governance to ponder: Is the multiplication of partisan players inevitable for a democracy? If so, will most governments suffer from instability? Is it unavoidable that democracy hinders efficiency? These are lessons for the next section to consider.

Is Democracy Self-Corrective?

Does democracy necessarily fragment the political system, multiply partisan players, and undermine the government's efficiency, as what the preceding analysis hints? We need to consider an advantage of democracy that is unparalleled by authoritarianism: it gives people the power to dismantle governments suffocated by gridlocks by electing new agents to unify the political system. In this way, election helps reenergize the government's policymaking capability. To see if this advantage really exists, this section examines whether the voters can penalize the ruling party responsible for cabinet instability. The empirical analysis studies the following variables.

1. VOTE: the vote share of the ruling party in an important election subsequent to its governance.

The important elections refer to the House of Representatives election in Japan and the presidential elections in Taiwan and South Korea, for they give the voters an opportunity to select the country's paramount leader. For Japan's House of Representatives election held since 1996 under the mixed-member majoritarian system, votes cast in proportional representation blocks will be used to indicate the ruling party's performance because they are less vulnerable to strategic voting as those in the district races; they are also more comparable with results of the SNTV elections. For Taiwan and South Korea, the ruling party indicates the president's party; in Japan, it means the largest party controlling the cabinet.¹⁴ The total number of cases for the three countries is 29 after caretaking cabinets are excluded.

¹⁴ In Japan, parties in a coalition government rarely run the campaign as a group, and voters can clearly make a distinction among them. The 2007 South Korean presidential election saw the split of the Democratic Party, so its vote share is measured by the sum of the vote shares of the United New Democratic Party and the Centrist Reformist Democratic Party. In a similar way, the vote share of the KMT in the 2000 Taiwanese presidential election adds up the votes won by the party's former secretary-general, who ran as an independent candidate.

2. AVGDURABILITY: the average durability of cabinets expecting a subsequent election.
3. PRESIDENT: whether the important election stands for presidential election (= 1, in Taiwan and South Korea) or not (= 0, in Japan).

If voters are able to replace short-lived premiers with their competitors, there should be a positive correlation between VOTE and AVGDURABILITY. If verified, this relationship suggests that eventually people will eliminate parties proven incapable of governing. While this mechanism is an essential element of parliamentarism, we are not sure if it works for the non-parliamentary systems. PRESIDENT will be a variable to test if constitutional system matters.

Figure 1. How Durability Affect the Performance of the Ruling Party

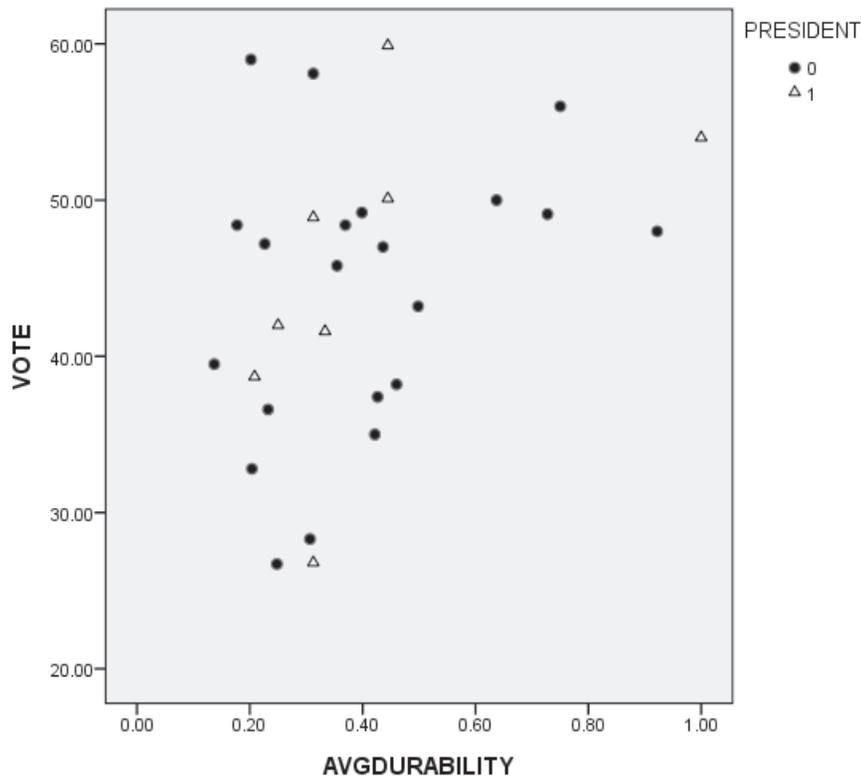


Figure 1 illustrates the scatterplot of VOTE by AVGDURABILITY. Note that the performance of the ruling party in an important election is subject to the influence of many factors, and 29 cases, although representing the population, is a small number. Even so, the picture shows the expected positive correlation between VOTE and AVGDURABILITY. Table 3 reports the result of the OLS regression when PRESIDENT and AVGDURABILITY are the two explanatory variables. It turns out

that AVGDURABILITY is significant at the 0.05 level while PRESIDENT has a positive but insignificant coefficient. The data shows that ruling parties forming ephemeral cabinets are indeed more likely to be penalized by the voters. The somewhat positive coefficient of PRESIDENT can be attributed to the fact that presidential elections usually see the competition between the top-two candidates, while the parliamentary elections, especially those held under Japan's multi-member SNTV system, tend to cultivate multipartism.

Table 3. How Durability Affect the Electoral Performance of the Ruling Party

Variables	Coefficient (S.E.)
	15.877*
AVGDURABILITY	(7.736)
	1.081
PRESIDENT	(3.684)
	37.608***
CONSTANT	(3.664)
Adjusted R-squared	0.077

Dependent variable = VOTE

Source: Author's calculation

Note: ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; + $p < 0.1$

The empirical findings can be the consequence of the self-corrective function of electoral competition in the three East Asian democracies. What the quantitative analysis cannot answer is a fundamental question: can the transfer of votes between competitive parties really improve the quality of democratic governance? The answer can be considered by re-examining the policymaking structure of the three countries. Two issues are worth noting: Which kind of structure is more conducive to the making and implementation of regular policies? Which ones are more capable of handling imminent crisis? Which ones are more accountable? In theory, the quality of democratic governance can be improved if the following conditions are satisfied: a single leader is in full charge of decision making and held responsible to as many people as possible; executive agencies assist rather than resist the leader's policymaking; when the leader fails to satisfy people's demand, she is replaced rather than being vetoed and cornered in a gridlock. Simply put, veto playing stops the government from improving the status quo but regime transition gives the people more hopes that democracy can work.

Using these conditions to evaluate the executive structure of the three countries, we find each faces different hurdles to good governance. In theory, Japan's premier, who is elected by the House of Representatives to head the government, is supposed to make and implement policies as long as they are supported by the ruling party. Recent development defies this intuition. The important policies of the Japanese cabinet are often vetoed by the House of Councilors but very few premier is able to re-pass them again. The most serious challenge to good governance probably comes from the bureaucracy, a target of administrative reform in recent years, whose help is needed to implement government policies. Unlike the one-party dominance under the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), who maintained a reciprocal relationship with the upper echelon of the bureaucracy, the current Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) government has a hard time reforming and relying on the bureaucracy at the same time. And intra-party competition makes the premier a compromise among factional leaders than a farsighted executive leader.

By contrast, South Korea institutes a popularly elected president to command the executive body, with the parliament-approved premier responsible for the implementation of government policies. Among the three East Asian countries South Korea has the shortest cabinet stability, but people see clearly the shadow of the president behind the displaced premiers. So the Korean system is peculiar in that the president, who cannot run for the second term, is accountable to the people and can dispose the premier if she fails to carry out the president's goals.

The Taiwanese system looks similar to that of South Korea but is in fact different. Taiwan's Constitution defines the Executive Yuan (presided by the premier) as the highest administrative organ, not the presidential office, and the president does not attend the weekly meeting of the Executive Yuan. Detached from the daily functioning of the government, the president can only achieve his policy goals by controlling the premier tightly. Unlike his South Korean counterpart, who chairs the State Council, Taiwan's president dictates the premier not just by his power to dismiss the latter, but also by the ruling party. Taiwan's history shows that whenever the president chairs the ruling party and the premier is a member of this party, the president is the supreme leader. Otherwise the president can be a figurehead.

The litmus test for the resilience of the executive structures is imminent crisis, for it gives the leader the opportunity to rally resources to overwhelm the opposition forces. Japan's northeast earthquake and tsunami that devastated the country on March 11, 2011 exposed the fragility of the system. Kan Naoto, the prime minister from the DPJ,

could have used this calamity to change Japan's nuclear power plant policy. He did try, but triggered not only the opposition from the House of Councilors, in which the DPJ is a minority, but also intra-party plot to pull him down. Although Kan survived a no-confidence motion proposed by the opposition parties on June 2, 2011, his position in the DPJ was further weakened because the censure motion proved that he was at the mercy of the factional leaders to keep his position.

South Korea tells a different story. Kim Dae Jung was elected president after the financial crisis of 1997 broke out. Despite the inability of President Kim to control the National Assembly, he made himself the center of the economic reform and actively negotiated with the business and the labors, demanded a greater transparency from the *chaebol*, and cut the state subsidies to large corporations, all reshaped the South Korean economy. In 1999, the economy grew by 10.2 percent, in sharp contrast with the recession caused by the crisis. South Korea is different from Japan in two ways. First, the premier is a compromise between the president and the parliament; cabinet reshuffling thus signals the president's attempt to reach a new deal with the legislators. Second, the president himself was in full charge of the administration and bore the ultimate responsibility. The financial crisis shows that the South Korean system was at least responsive, if not necessarily more effective.

For Taiwan, some people would select Typhoon Morakot, which hit Taiwan on August 6, 2009, as a critical test for the health of the executive system because it marked the decline of the popularity of Ma Ying-jeou, the current president. Unlike Kim Dae Jung, Ma was not troubled by the executive-legislative relation because he has been leading a unified government. It is the executive response to domestic crisis that revealed the inconsistency between the president and the ministers. Typhoon Morakot took the lives of hundreds of people instantly while the premier and his general-secretary were both away from their duties. An explanation for this slow response is that local officials think the boss to be the president, not the premier. What the president did exacerbated the situation. President Ma, the commander in chief, declined the request to issue the decree of emergency, and the National Security Council under the president's control was believed to be responsible for the rejection of US support. From this event we see the mismatched expectations of Taiwan's executive system: Ma thought himself the head of state in charge of national security and the premier the head of government responsible for domestic affairs, but most people and government officials expect the president to be the paramount leader for everything. Such a gap can be mitigated by non-constitutional mechanisms, but that would make policymaking less transparent and unaccountable.

Conclusion

Buttressed by merit-based bureaucrats, the developmental states in Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea are famous for having the capacity to pursue rapid economic growth while keep wealth distribution relatively equal. The rise of middle class inevitably undermined one-party dominance, fostered multiparty competition, and eventually led to regime turnover. It happens that regime transitions in these three East Asian countries coincided with the raids of crises, testing the capacity of the new executive structures to handle the dilemmas of democratic governance. The performance varied by governments, making the similarities of the three countries unlikely to be a convincing explanatory variables.

Similarity is in fact methodologically helpful, because it allows us to adopt the “most similar system design” to situate the cases in an almost identical setting so that the critical difference among them can be isolated. This paper extends the veto player theory and posits that the number of partisan players explains the sustainability of government policies. Quantitatively, the statistical analysis shows that the increase of one partisan players will reduce cabinet durability by about 0.088. Qualitatively, the case studies suggest that constitutional system and partisan structure work together to shape the result of democratic governance. Even a parliamentary system, like the one adopted in Japan, can suffer from gridlock if the two houses of the parliament are controlled by different parties. In South Korea, the president, the prime minister, and the parliamentary majority may come from different parties; in Taiwan, the president has a strong incentive to subdue the premier no matter the government is unified or divided. The key point is that the configuration of partisan players varies not only by countries but also within the same country. Neither can we associate the results of democratic governance to the culture of a particular country, nor is it easy to claim that a specific constitutional system is superior to the others.

A follow-up question is whether democracy will be caved into a vicious cycle: the more responsive a system is the greater the number of partisan players, hence the more inefficient policymaking becomes. Fortunately, the empirical study demonstrates the self-corrective function of democratic competition: voters in all three countries have the tendency to penalize the ruling party responsible for short-lived cabinets. It implies that elections give democracy an opportunity bounce back to the situation in which the government does not have to worry about its policies being sabotaged by the partisan players. Beyond the quantitative analysis, a

more general question is whether the top decision maker can amass sufficient supports in the executive body to carry out his policy goals, and meanwhile faces a challenger threatening to replace her rather than just vetoing policymaking. The South Korean president, even if unable to control the parliamentary majority, is in tight control of the government and fully accountable to the people. Japan's parliamentarism frequently makes the prime minister a compromise of factional leaders rather than a strong executive head, let alone an administrative reformer. Taiwanese people expect the president to be the chief leader, but the Constitution detaches the president from the daily functioning of the Executive Yuan. As long as the president relies on non-constitutional means to narrow the gap, policymaking is nontransparent and the cost to coordinate government agencies is high.

This paper certainly leaves some factors unanalyzed. As hinted by the discussion on how the three executive systems handled crises, party cohesion and executive unity both affect democratic governance. Japanese prime ministers facing different factional structures may behave differently—a good contrast is the LDP's Koizumi Junichiro and his successors. Taiwan's Lee Teng-hui and Ma Ying-jeou, both chairing a dominant KMT, differ not only by policy goals but also by the cohesions of their party. Some of the South Korean parties are highly personalized, resulting in the frequent changes in party names around the same set of elites; it is in fact hard to measure party cohesion if parties are not institutionalized. Another issue is how the executive heads interact with the bureaucrats. In the old days, one-party dominance gave the bureaucracy considerable autonomy, which explains to a great extent the effectiveness of the developmental state. Nowadays partisan competition nurtures politicians who wish to see the government providing pork policies to their constituencies on the one hand, but streamlining the heavy bureaucracy on the other. Such a dilemma exists in all three East Asian cases, and the most likely response from the bureaucracy is just to be bureaucratic: no service will be provided unless it is legal and politically mandatory. The developmental states are gone, and partisan competition has altered the nature of policymaking in the three East Asian countries.

References

- Bevir, Mark. 2010. *Democratic Governance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Blondel, Jean. 1968. "Party Systems and Patterns of Government in Western Democracies." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 1 (2): 180-203.
- Chu, Yun-han. 1999. "Surviving the East Asian Financial Storm: The Political Foundation of Taiwan's Economic Resilience." In T.J. Pempel ed., 1999, *The Politics of the Asian Economic Crisis*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, pp. 184-202.
- Gerring, John, and Strom C. Thacker. 2004. "Political Institutions and Corruption: The Role of Unitarism and Parliamentarism." *British Journal of Political Science* 34 (2): 295-330.
- Grofman, Bernard, Sung-Chull Lee, Edwin A. Winckler, and Brian Woodall eds. 1999. *Elections in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan under the single Non-Transferable Vote*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Huntington, Samuel P. 1968. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Kim, Taekyoon, Huck-Ju Kwon, Jooha Lee, and Ilcheong Yi. 2011. "'Mixed Governance' and Welfare in South Korea" *Journal of Democracy* 22 (3): 120-34.
- Lane, Jan-Erik, and Svante Ersson, eds. 1999. *Politics and Society in Western Europe*. London: Sage Publication Inc.
- Lijphart, Arend. 1975. "The Comparable-Cases Strategy in Comparative Research." *Comparative Political Studies* 8 (2): 158-77.
- Lijphart, Arend. 1999. *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Lin, Jih-wen. 2002. "Transition through Transaction: Taiwan's Constitutional Reforms in the Lee Teng-hui Era." *American Asian Review* 20 (2): 123-55.
- Pempel, T. J. ed. 1999. *The Politics of the Asian Economic Crisis*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Reilly, Benjamin 2007. "Democratization and Electoral Reform in the Asia-Pacific Region." *Comparative Political Studies* 40 (11): 1350-71.
- Shugart, Matthew Søberg. 2005. "Semi-Presidential Systems: Dual Executive And Mixed Authority Patterns." *French Politics* 3 (3): 323-51.
- Taagepera, Rein, Matthew Soberg Shugart. 1989. *Seats and Votes: The Effects and Determinants of Electoral Systems*. New Heaven: Yale University Press.
- Treisman, Daniel. 2007. *The Architecture of Government: Rethinking Political Decentralization*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Tsebelis, George. 1994. "The Power of the European Parliament as a Conditional Agenda Setter." *American Political Science Review* 88 (1): 128-42.
- Tsebelis, George. 1995. "Decision Making in Political Systems: Veto Players in Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, Multicameralism and Multipartyism." *British Journal of Political Science* 25: 289-325.
- Tsebelis, George. 2002. *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Weyland, Kurt 2008. "Toward a New Theory of Institutional Change." *World Politics* 60 (2): 281-314.
- Wong, Timothy Ka-yung, Po-san Wan, and Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao. 2011. "The Bases of Political Trust in six Asian Societies: Institutional and Cultural Explanations Compared." *International Political Science Review* 32 (3): 263-81.
- Woo-Cumings, Meredith ed. 1999. *The Developmental State*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Woo-Cumings, Meredith. 1999. "The State, Democracy, and the Reform of the Corporate Sector in Korea." In T.J. Pempel ed., 1999, *The Politics of the Asian Economic Crisis*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, pp. 116-142.
- Wu, Yu-Shan. 2007. "Taiwan's Developmental State: After the Economic and Political Turmoil." *Asian Survey* 47 (6): 977-1001.

