DRAFT

Party Polarization in New Zealand and Taiwan: An Exploratory Study[1]

Alexander C. Tan
University of Canterbury and
National Chengchi University

Introduction

In a New York Times article published in April 12, 2019 titled "Is America Hopelessly Polarized, or Just Allergic to Politics?" the authors reported that as high as 87% of Americans think that political polarization is threatening to the American way of life. Citizens tend to point to the strong partisan camps in Congress and the seeming demise of 'bipartisanship.' This situation is a far cry from what is observed in the 1950s that prompted a committee of party scholars of the American Political Science Association to publish a document titled "Towards a More Responsible Two Party System." This document laments that American parties do not provide clear and meaningful choices to the voters especially when compared to its parliamentary counterparts.

By the time Robert Harmel and Kenneth Janda published their 1982 book, *Parties and their Environment*, it seems that the advise of the APSA committee have fallen on deaf ears. Harmel and Janda (1982) highlighted the unique situation of American politics whereby partisan voting (at least in the legislature) is rather nebulous and not as clear cut as the parliamentary systems such as the United Kingdom. Since at least 2006, however, scholars began noticing increasing cohesion in American political parties. As Galston and Nivola (2006) notes, "the US Congress is more polarized ideologically than it was just a generation ago. In the House of Representatives, ideological overlap between the political parties has all but disappeared, and the rise of 'safe' districts with partisan supermajorities has tended to push representatives away from the center" (p.1).

Since the election of President Donald Trump in 2016, everyone – from the media to academia – have noted the unprecendented level of 'hunkering down' between Republicans and Democrats as well as the voting public. For Americans that pride themselves about bipartisanship and 'finding the middle,' the politics of the last four years is frustrating. Interestingly, the wish of the APSA committee may have just come through albeit many decades late.

Within the US political science community, a cottage industry sprouted scrambling to explain the polarization of American politics into two camps. Amongst these excellent research is a common theme best summed up by Gerald Pomper and Marc

[1] Paper prepared for presentation at the 2020 Taiwan Institute of Governance and Communications Research International Conference on "Political Polarization: Perspective of Governance and Communication," at National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan, October 30, 2020.

Weiner (2014) when they suggest that "the partisan polarization currently dominating American public life is a serious threat to the long-term political health of the United States" (p. 129).

Yet, outside of the United States 'sticking to your camp' is a rather common occurrence and is actually expected of party politicians. In Westminster systems such as New Zealand, for example, partisanship at the legislative and the voter levels are strong and 'crossing the aisle' is rather rare. In parliamentary systems, party polarization do not seem to carry as much negative connotation as those expressed by scholars of American politics (Satherley et al. 2019).

In Taiwan, partisanship has been quite pronounced for quite some time – at least since 2000 – leading scholars to also note the partisan polarization at the elite level (Hsiao 2014, 2019; Hsiao and Cheng 2014; Tsai et al. 2007). While bipartisanship is not necessarily a part of Taiwan's political parlance as in the United States, there seems to be a shared sentiment regarding the baneful effects of polarization (Hsiao 2014).

The variance in the views regarding party polarization, leads me to ask why the difference in sentiments exist. In this exploratory paper, I examine the state of party polarization in Taiwan and New Zealand and offer some tentative observations of why the sentiments vary. In the next section, I briefly review the extant literature about party polarization. Following the brief literature review, I examine existing data on the various indicators of polarization in Taiwan and New Zealand.

Party Polarization

In the 2019 TIGCR international conference, Clark et al (2019) suggested that one defining characteristic of polarized public is that there is fairly even balance between the supporters of party A and party B on most issues. This definition suggests that in the case of the public there is the existence of clear camps and differences in issues. In the case of political parties, Marc Hetherington suggests there are two features that characterize polarization – increased party strength, and ideologically distinct policies. Paulson (2014, p. 75) notes "that in an ideologically polarized party system, the parties have become ideologically homogenized internally" which can be viewed as contributing to increased party strength. On the second point – that of ideologically distinct policies – allows voters to be able to distinguish parties more easily. Lupu (2015, p. 334) also shares this view stating that "the further apart the political parties, the easier it may be for citizens to distinguish among their electoral options."

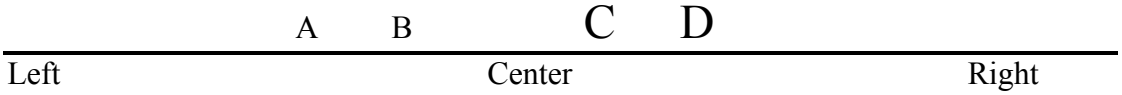
Thus far, the above views of party polarization are benign. Clear distinct programmatic parties help voters to identify with their preferred political parties making the voting calculus a lot simpler. Plus, "party polarization implies that it should reflect the distribution of parties along an ideological dimension" (Dalton 2008, p. 903) that in turn should mirror the electorate's distribution along the ideological continuum. In more than one ways, then, clear and distinct programmatic parties allow political parties then to perform its representative, linkage function as well as its interest aggregation and articulation functions.

In multiparty systems, polarization is a feature of the party systems as political parties compete to differentiate themselves from a 'crowded electoral market,' so to speak. In two-party systems, Downs (1957) suggests that political parties would tend to converge towards the center of a single ideological continuum. The centripetal forces would force these parties to move to the center presumably capturing the large number of median voters in this single-peak ideological continuum. This would imply that polarization can be affected by the number of competitive political parties. Due to this, past studies have used the number of competitive political parties as a surrogate for polarization.

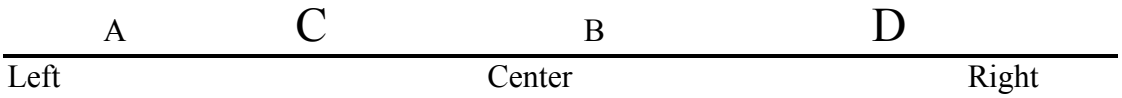
As Dalton (2008) correctly argues that while the increase in the number of competitive political parties may contribute to polarization it may not be necessarily so. Assume two countries (country A and B) with four competitive political parties each and the parties are arrayed along a single dimension as below:

Figure 1. Placement of multiple parties on L-R scale and polarization

Country I



Country J

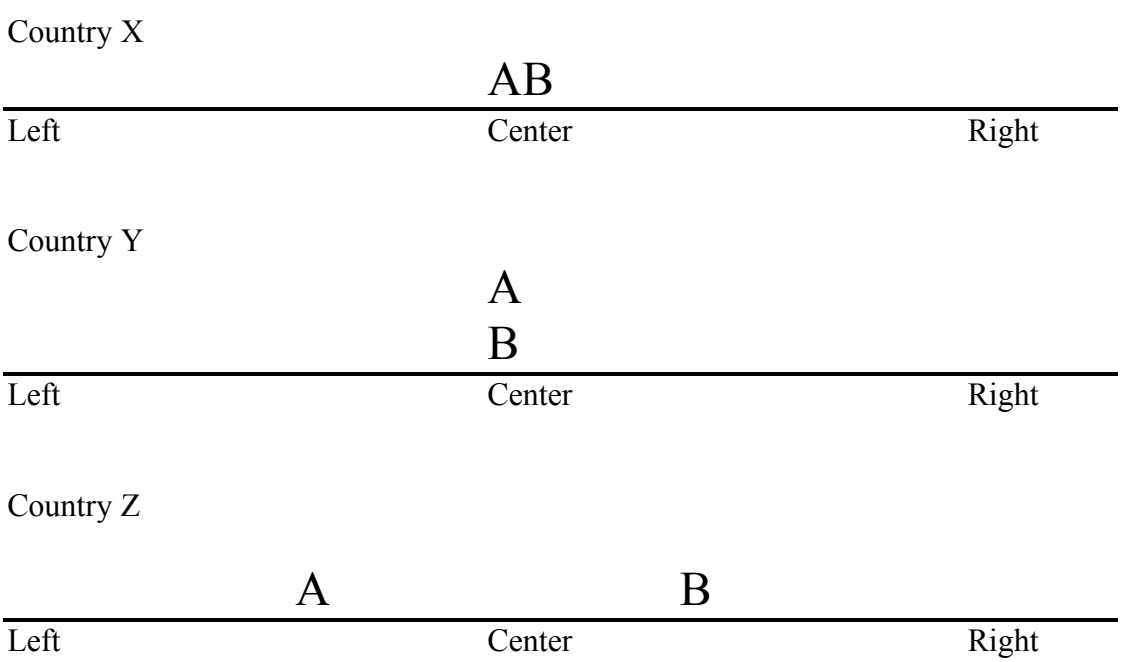


Referring to figure 1, the two largest parties (C, D) of country I are next to each other in the ideological spectrum while for country J the two largest parties (C, D) are much further apart. From this example, we can discern that the numbers of parties alone do not provide enough information regarding party polarization. In both cases – countries I and J – there are four competitive political parties (two large parties and two smaller ones) in the legislature. Yet, in one country (I) the party system is less polarized vis-à-vis the other (J).

Although party system fragmentation may be similar for both country I and country J, party polarization is different as the gap between the two largest parties – party C and party D – is much smaller in country I than in country J. As Lupu (2015, p. 332) states, that "from a rationalistic perspective, polarization implies that the utility differential between parties increases," which we can definitely observe in the case of country J in figure 1.

Now let us consider three countries (X, Y, Z) with two parties each (A, B) each with different placement of the two parties as in figure 2. For country X, parties A and B are side by side on the left-right scale. Country Y also has two parties that can be described as challenger parties and stacked in the same placement in the same left-right scale. And lastly, country Z has a clear leftist party (A) and a clear rightist party (B).

Figure 2. Party placement of 2-parties on a L-R scale



For these three hypothetical cases, country Z's parties are furthest apart and allows their electorate to distinguish between the two parties. Indeed, we are more likely to claim that Z's party system is more polarized that X's and Y's. Comparing the multiparty systems and the two-party systems (figures 1 and 2), it is important to note that it is not necessarily the number of parties in a party system that leads to polarization but instead it is the placement of the political parties in the ideological continuum. The further apart the political parties are from each other, the more polarized they are.

One other important dimension that we also need to consider is the distribution of the electorate along the ideological continuum. Dalton (2008) notes that the placement of these parties often times mirror the voter's distribution along the continuum. In fact, the 'size' of the political parties along this ideological continuum is a good indication of the proportion of the electorate in that particular 'spot' where the parties occupy. Even assuming a single-peaked distribution of the electorate, it is not a stretched to consider that there is variation in skewness and kurtosis of the voter distribution across democratic political systems. Needless to say, bimodal distribution of voters provides a different environment for political parties in their function as linkage mechanism to civil society and the state.

On the idea of linkage mechanism, the above discussion has implications to who represents the voters. Indeed, in studies on the calculus of voting, the extant literature consistently finds – amongst others – that voters will vote for political parties that are closest to them on an issue or ideological position. In terms of distance between the electorate and political parties, what is observed in a two-party system and a multiparty system will be different. A cursory inspection of the hypothetical cases in figure 1 and figure 2 above show that for a multiparty system, the ideological distance between a particular voter and a political party is likely to be small given that there are more political parties spread out in the ideological continuum. In contrast, there is a non-trivial proportion of voters whose distance from their 'closest' party is quite

significant. In terms of two-party systems, when political parties move away from the example of country X and Y in figure 2 to country Z's situation, the divergence and consolidation of party position becomes alarming (Crotty 2014; Pomper and Weiner 2014; Abramowitz and McCoy 2019), though this 'alarm' is not a sentiment universally shared by multiparty parliamentary systems.

In the case of Taiwan and New Zealand, there also seem to be a variance in the attention paid to the topic of political polarization. Since 1996 when New Zealand switched from the first-past-the-post (FPP) electoral system to the mixed-member proportional representation (MMP) system, there is scant attention paid to the topic of political polarization. Indeed, a cursory survey of recent publications in New Zealand's main political science journal shows only one recent academic paper written on the topic (Satherley et al 2020). By comparison, there are more attention paid on political polarization in Taiwan and there is more expression of concern about the consequences of political polarization (Hsiao 2014, 2019; Hsiao and Cheng 2014; Tsai et al. 2007).

Political polarization in Taiwan and New Zealand by most measures are relatively high in both countries. Hsiao (2014) finds that political polarization has appeared in Taiwan at least since 2000 – with the first executive turnover – and has continually increased. Although Dalton (2008), using CSES data, finds that Taiwan's party polarization level is low, Hsiao and Cheng (2014) correctly argues that Dalton's application of the left-right continuum in the case of Taiwan actually masked the polarized nature of Taiwan's party system. For Taiwan, the independence-unification cleavage is the most salient divide in Taiwan's political landscape. In the case of New Zealand, polarization does exist in many political and social issues that confront the country (Satherley et al 2020) although there is less expression of concern about its consequences.

In sum, polarization can be viewed from various dimensions. We can view polarization by examining the placement of political parties along a salient ideological continuum and its relation to the number of parties and its fractionalization. We can view polarization via ideological homogeneity and party cohesion in the legislature. And lastly we can also view polarization from the viewpoint of the electorate and how they relate to their political parties. In the next section, I briefly describe the data and method I employ for exploring the status of political polarization in New Zealand and Taiwan that may help us uncover why there is a difference in sentiments about the matter.

Data and Method

As mentioned, in the previous section, political polarization is considered high in both Taiwan and in New Zealand. But why is it that in Taiwan there is more expression of alarm while in New Zealand there has hardly been any attention paid to it? To help us explore the status of political polarization in these two countries. I used data from the New Zealand Election Studies for 2011, 2014, and 2017. The NZES 2011 survey is a post-election mail survey that with the recommended weighting has an N of 2475. The NZES 2014 survey has an N of 2835 while the NZES 2017 survey has an N of 3445. For the Taiwan data, I used multiple years from the Taiwan Election and

Democratization Survey (TEDS)[2] as well as the 2018 Taiwan Institute of Governance and Communications Research Survey.[3]

To calculate the party polarization index, I referred to Dalton's (2008) suggested formula to calculate party polarization. For this index, 0 indicate no polarization when political parties occupy the same ideological position and 10 indicate high polarization when parties occupy the extremes.

$$PI = \sqrt[2]{\sum (party\ vote\ share_i) * ([party\ l-r\ score) - (party\ system\ ave\ l-r\ score)/5]^2}$$

For the New Zealand data, I simplified the calculation by only employing the two large parties for the polarization index scores. In the NZES survey, respondents were asked how they rate the political parties in a left-right scale. As per the Dalton formula, I used the average of the respondents' party left-right score. For the party vote share I used the vote share of the political parties in the respective elections. These figures were obtained from the NZ Electoral Commission.

For the Taiwan data, I follow Hsiao and Cheng's (2014) suggestion to employ the unification-independence continuum as the more appropriate spectrum in the case of Taiwan. In TEDS and TIGCR surveys, respondents were asked to place the political parties on the unification-independence scale. I used the average score from the all respondents as the party score on the unification-independence scale. The party vote share was obtained from the Central Election Commission using the vote the parties received for their party vote.

Besides ideological dispersion of the party system, I also obtained data for the effective number of parliamentary parties as well as the fragmentation index of the parties in parliament. These indices give us an additional tool to view and compare the party systems.

---

[2] Data analyzed in this paper are from Taiwan's Election and Democratization Study 2008, 2012, 2016, 2020. The coordinator of multi-year project TEDS is Professor Chi Huang (National Chengchi University). More information is on TEDS website (http://www.tedsnet.org). The author appreciates the assistance in providing data by the institute and individual(s) aforementioned. The author alone responsible for views expressed herein.

[3] Data analyzed in this paper are from Taiwan Institute for Governance and Communication Research (TIGCR), 2018: Political Polarization Survey (TIGCR-PPS 2018). The principal investigators of multi-year project TIGCR are Professor Chi Huang (National Chengchi University) and Professor Chingching Chang (National Chengchi University). TIGCR-PPS 2018 is the first-year Face-to-Face interview survey data of the TIGCR citizen's panel survey on "Political attitude, Policy-making and Governance Communication in Taiwan". The principal investigators are Professor Chi Huang and Professor Chingching Chang. More information is on TIGCR website (http://tigcr.nccu.edu.tw/). The author appreciates the assistance in providing data by the institute and individual(s) aforementioned. The author alone responsible for views expressed herein. DOI：10.6923/TW-TIGCR-PPS2018 (For more archives: https://tigcr.nccu.edu.tw/en/survey-search)

Effective number of parliamentary party (Ns) is calculated as:

$$Ns = {}^{1}\Big/_{\sum_{i=1}^{j} s_i^2}$$

Fragmentation index (Fs) is calculated as:

$$Fs = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^{j} s_i^2$$

For both Ns and Fs, I chose the simplest calculation by only looking at the two largest parties in the parliament rather than all of the political parties in parliament. While including all political parties that have gained seats will provide a more precise Ns and Fs score, for the purposes of this study the gains from precision is not substantial to affect the general inferences.

Voter self-placement scores for New Zealand and Taiwan were obtained from both NZES, TEDS, and TIGCR surveys. In these surveys, respondents were asked how they place themselves in scale from 0 to 11. In the case of New Zealand, respondents placed themselves on a left-right scale. For Taiwan, I used the independence-unification scale for the voter self-placement.

Comparing Polarization in NZ and Taiwan

What is the status of political polarization in New Zealand and Taiwan? Why is it that in New Zealand polarization has raised fewer eyebrows than in Taiwan? Using the measures proposed by Dalton (2008) and Hsiao and Cheng (2014), table 1 and table 2 provide the polarization index, effective number of parliament parties, and fragmentation index for New Zealand and Taiwan.

Table 1. New Zealand data

	Polarization Index	Ns	Fragmentation Index
1996	3.81		
2002	3.35	3.64	0.73
2008	3.33	2.79	0.64
2011	3.84	2.99	0.67
2014	3.88	3.23	0.69

Source: CSES Party System Polarization Index for CSES Modules 1-4; NZ Electoral Commission and author's calculation

Looking at table 1, we can see that the polarization index for New Zealand has stayed relatively constant since the introduction of MMP. In 1996, polarization index was at 3.81 with dips in 2002 and 2008 but returned to its levels above 3.80. It is important to note that according to Dalton's (2008) polarization index if PI = 0 then there is no polarization while if PI = 10 the parties are extremely polarized. From a comparative context, the CSES data on party system polarization for modules 1-4, have PI scores recorded from a low of 0.10 (Brazil 2014) and a high of 5.85 (Hungary 2002). The

average polarization index in the dataset is 3.25. From these comparative figures, we can infer that New Zealand's polarization index is above the CSES average and its party system can be considered quite polarized.

Effective number of parliamentary parties (Ns) in New Zealand has remained around 3.0 weighted parties with National, Labour, Greens, and New Zealand First having had consistent representation in parliament since MMP.[4] For the Greens and New Zealand First, voter support fluctuates from 6 percent to 11 percent in most elections, solidifying their status as a small party. In New Zealand, there is prevalence of micro-parties since MMP due to the structural incentives as identified by Shugart and Tan (2016). The prevalence of smaller parties since MMP and the higher Ns have seen NZ parliament more fragmented. Coalition governments are the norm in New Zealand since 1996.

Turning our attention to the Taiwan data on table 2 gives us a comparison with New Zealand. Dalton's (2008) data provides an interesting picture of Taiwan's polarization when it reported 1.18 for 1996 and 1.14 for 2001. This would indicate that Taiwan party system polarization is extremely low. Hsiao and Cheng (2014) argue, however, that if the independence-unification spectrum is employed to place Taiwan parties it would provide a different picture of Taiwan's level of party system polarization. For example, using the TEDS 2012 data on voter placement of the KMT and the DPP on the economic development versus environmental protection spectrum, voters placed the DPP at 5.46 (weighted mean) and the KMT at 6.82 with a range of 1.36.[5] In contrast, on the independence to unification scale, the DPP is placed at 2.17, the KMT at 7.41 translating to a large range of 5.54.[6] Independence-unification scale is, indeed, still the most salient societal divide in Taiwan.

Table 2. Taiwan data

	Polarization Index	Ns	Fragmentation Index
2008	4.92	1.75	0.43
2012	3.96	2.24	0.55
2016	3.57	2.18	0.54
2018	4.10	2.17	0.54
2020	4.07	2.47	0.60

Source: TEDS 2008, 2012, 2016, 2020; TIGCR 201; Central Election Commission; and author's own calculation

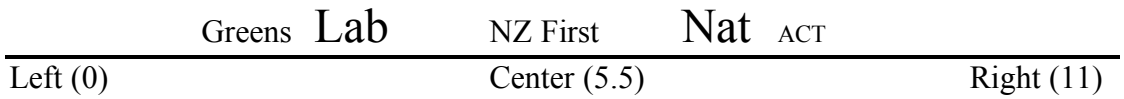
Hsiao (2014) suggests that polarization in Taiwan has increased since 2000 and data from table 2 most definitely corroborates that. Except for 2016 where PI is 3.57, Taiwan's PI score has stayed close to 4.0. With the CSES average at 3.25, Taiwan's polarization is considered high. This high polarization index scores are paired with lower effective number of parliamentary parties (approximately 2.0) as well as lower fragmentation index. These figures would indicate that there is an increasing party cohesion within two party camps.

[4] New Zealand First was out of parliament from 2008-2011 but have held seats in all other NZ parliaments under MMP. Together with the Greens, New Zealand First can be considered a small party.

[5] Voters weighted position on the economic development and environmental protection spectrum is 5.90.

[6] Voters weighted position on the independence-unification spectrum is 4.54.

Figure 3. Voter placement of New Zealand political parties



Source: NZES 2014; Electoral Commission, and author's calculation

Dalton (2008) points out "to the extent that political parties are supposed to be channels of expression that allow citizens to vote their preferences, then party system polarization substantially strengthens this process" (p. 916; Sartori 1976). That is, party system polarization can provide a better match between preference and choice for the electorate. He argues, though, that fractionalization of the party system has less impact on this particular relationship but admits that the number of parties is a good representation of party diversity. Yet, we can argue that if preferences are diverse and choices are equally diverse then it follows that there is a likelihood that preferences can be better matched and paired with the choices available.
In corollary to this, it follows that if preferences are diverse and choices are limited, the match will be poorer.[7]

In comparing the New Zealand and Taiwan data, we can see that both countries share a high level of party polarization but diverge in the effective number of parties and fragmentation. New Zealand's high PI is accompanied by an equally fractionalized party system. Figure 3 is the voter placement of New Zealand political parties from the New Zealand Election Study 2014 survey. The visual representation of the placement of NZ's parties show that the party system is clearly polarized. However, because there are more political parties the multiplicity of preferences is better matched with the number of available political party choices.

The situation is not similar for Taiwan as the data table 2 can attest. In this instance, the greater polarization of the party system in Taiwan is not equally matched by the number of party choices, although the 2020 data seem to indicate a deviation from the past that there is a marginal increase in party system fractionalization. Overall, despite the high level of polarization supposedly offering distinct positions, party system polarization in this case only serves to accentuate the clear differences between the two parties without providing more choices to the electorate.[8]

Polarization can also be observed in the level of party cohesion (Hetherington 2011) especially in the legislature. In the case of the United States, there has been an increasing trend of parties now more clearly far apart that in the past. Using DW-Nominate scores developed by Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal and applying it for members of the House of Representatives in 2005-2006, Hetherington (2011) shows

[7] A consumer analogy to the preference and choice issues is a consumer's car buying experience. Consumer color preferences are more varied than the color choices that the car manufacturer can offer. In this instance, consumers pick a color closest to their preference. The fewer the choices available, the more consumers have to 'compromise' from their preferred color.

[8] One way to view the dynamics of polarization and fragmentation of the party system is that in high levels of polarization and fragmentation political parties and voters are spread across the ideological spectrum that can ameliorate the distinctness due to the presence of 'bridge' parties. In a low fragmentation party system, higher level of polarization accentuates the distinctness as the two parties in the absence of 'linking' or 'bridge' parties.

Democrats clearly on the left and Republicans on the right with no overlap of the ideology of the members.

Using measures of party cohesion in the legislature, Sheng (2008) and Sheng and Huang (2016) show that since the first party turnover for the presidency in Taiwan, party cohesion is on the rise and that roll-call voting in the Legislative Yuan are increasingly becoming a thing of the past as the majority party in the Legislative Yuan has been able to successfully shepherd its bills to its final reading.

Table 3 is from Sheng's 2008 article that shows the changes in party cohesion in the Legislative Yuan from the 1996 to 2008. The general observation that one can make is the obvious increase in party cohesion from 1996 to 2008. More interesting, however, is the fact that of the two major parties the DPP's party cohesion is consistently high. Since 2000, DPP's party cohesion has stayed above 0.85. The KMT, on the other hand, has low levels of cohesion prior to 2002 and then slowly increased from 2002 onwards.

Table 3. Party Cohesion in Taiwan

LY Term	KMT	DPP	NP	PFP	TSU
3rd (1996-1999)	0.50	0.76	0.68		
4th (1999-2000)	0.32	0.66	0.44		
4th (2000-2002)	0.32	0.85	0.47	0.57	
5th (2002-2005)	0.68	0.86		0.86	0.69
6th (2005-2008)	0.90	0.93		0.74	0.85

Source: Sheng 2008, p. 25

In Taiwan's semi-presidential system, the separate survival and separate origin of the legislature operates more like the US Congress and unlike a Westminster parliamentary system. This is especially true of the KMT members where the low level of party cohesion also indicates relatively poorer party discipline amongst a host of other reasons that other scholars have pointed to. For our purposes, it is sufficient to point out that the increasing party polarization is clearly a consequence of the KMT becoming more ideologically homogenized internally (Paulson 2014). From the data provided by Sheng (2008), since the 5th Legislative Yuan, the two major parties have become more cohesive. The high level of party cohesion and internal homogenization of the two major parties certainly contribute to party system polarization which concurs with Hsiao's (2014) observation.

Table 4. Degree of Party Opposition/Antagonism on Roll-Call Voting

LY Terms	80% party vote	90% party vote
3rd (1996-1999)	22.40	16.50
4th (1999-2000)	17.00	0.40
4th (2000-2002)	7.40	9.60
5th (2002-2005)	31.80	14.40
6th (2005-2008)	12.50	76.60

Source: Sheng 2008, p. 28

Table 4 also from Sheng (2008) provides another view of the increasingly cohesive party as shown by the party line voting. In Table 4, I only showed the top level of

party vote where at least 80% of the one party's members stand in opposition to at least 80% of the other party's members. It is very clear that since the 3rd Legislative Yuan, the KMT and the DPP has become more cohesive as evidence by their roll-call voting.

Sheng and Huang (2016) provided another viewpoint of the increasing cohesion of Taiwan's Legislative Yuan through the use of party negotiation mechanism for legislative bills. In this excellent work, Sheng and Huang (2016) show that in the 8th Legislative Yuan from 2012-2016, there is a decline in the use of roll-call voting as party cohesion and party line voting have increased. The increasing strength of party line voting certainly solidifies the view of polarization in Taiwan.

In the case of New Zealand, since the introduction of MMP in 1996, party vote is a standard feature of New Zealand parliamentary politics. Table 5 shows the number of party votes as opposed to personal votes in the New Zealand House of Representatives. In the New Zealand parliament when a party vote is held the votes are cast as a block by party representatives of the recognized parties in the House of Representatives. A personal vote is cast when the issue is considered a conscience issue as determined by the Speaker of the House.

Table 5. Numbers of Party Votes versus Personal Votes in NZ since 1996

Term of Parliament	Party	Personal	Total	Party Votes/Total (%)
45th Parliament: 1996–1999	1,443	40	1,483	97.3
46th Parliament: 1999–2002	2,496	54	2,550	97.9
47th Parliament: 2002–2005	3,428	116	3,544	96.7
48th Parliament: 2005–2008	1,187	8	1,195	99.3
49th Parliament: 2008–2011	2,672	7	2,679	99.7
50th Parliament: 2011–2014	1,370	35	1,405	97.5

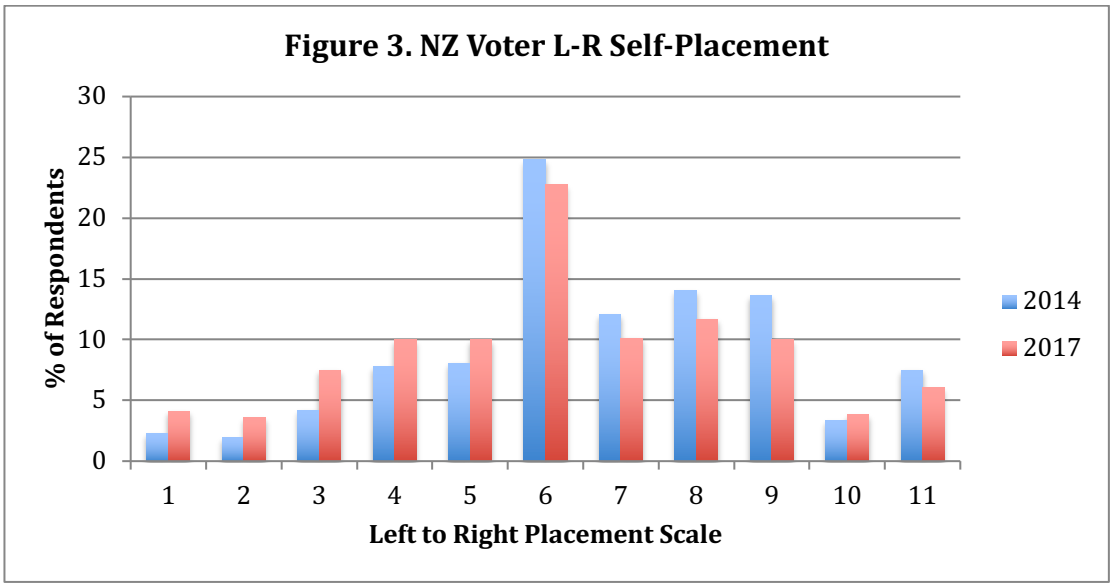
Source: New Zealand Parliament, *Journals of the House of Representatives*: [1996–1999] 3 JHR 1334; [1999–2002] 3 JHR 1670; [2002–2005] 4 JHR 2243; [2005–2008] 3 JHR 1341; [2008–2011] 3 JHR 1377; [2011–2014] 3 JHR 943; author's calculation.

Clearly, in the case of the New Zealand parliament party vote is the norm and personal votes are the exception as shown in table 5. Since the adoption of MMP beginning the 45th Parliament, the percentage of party votes is consistently above 96 percent and in the case of the 49th Parliament nearly 100 percent. In New Zealand's parliament 'crossing the aisle' to vote with the 'other' party is extremely rare as evidenced by the above table.

The difference between the New Zealand and Taiwan cases is that legislative party cohesion is a constant and generally accepted feature of New Zealand parliamentary politics. For Taiwan, party cohesion is not a constant feature of Taiwan's legislative politics. Using the data provided by Sheng (2008) as replicated in table 4, shows that party cohesion and party voting only became a feature more recently. It is important to note here that even the highest category in Sheng's (2008) measure of party cohesion shows an opposition between 90 percent of the KMT versus 90 percent of the DPP which is not exactly equivalent to the party vote in New Zealand's House of Representatives where party vote means a block vote (all members of parliament of the party voting together). As party cohesion and ideological distinctions are accepted feature of New Zealand's parliamentary politics, partisan polarization does

not carry a negative stigma as such which is different from Taiwan's situation (Hsiao 2014).

Besides parliamentary party cohesion that supports the view of party polarization, we can also view it from the vantage point of the electorate. How do voters see themselves in the their own country's ideological spectrum? Figure 3 and figure 4 are the ideological self-placement of New Zealand voters and Taiwanese voters. For figure 3, I used the 2014 and 2017 New Zealand Election Study survey data to construct the voter distribution along the left-right scale. For figure 4, I used the Taiwan Election and Democratization Study survey data for 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020 to construct the voter distribution along the independence-unification scale.



Source: NZES 2014, 2017 and author's calculation

The self-placement of New Zealand electorate in the NZES surveys for 2014 and 2017 are quite curious ones given the general impression that New Zealand voters are more left of center rather than slightly right of center. While there seems to be a general self-identification as right of center from 2014 and 2017, data on figure 3 seem to indicate that New Zealanders perceive themselves to be center or center-right. The 2014 election was won by the center-right National Party where voters place it at 7.08 in the continuum. The 2017 election resulted in the National Party gaining a plurality of parliamentary seats but unable to form a majority coalition leading to a Labour-led coalition with the centrist New Zealand First and leftist Greens.

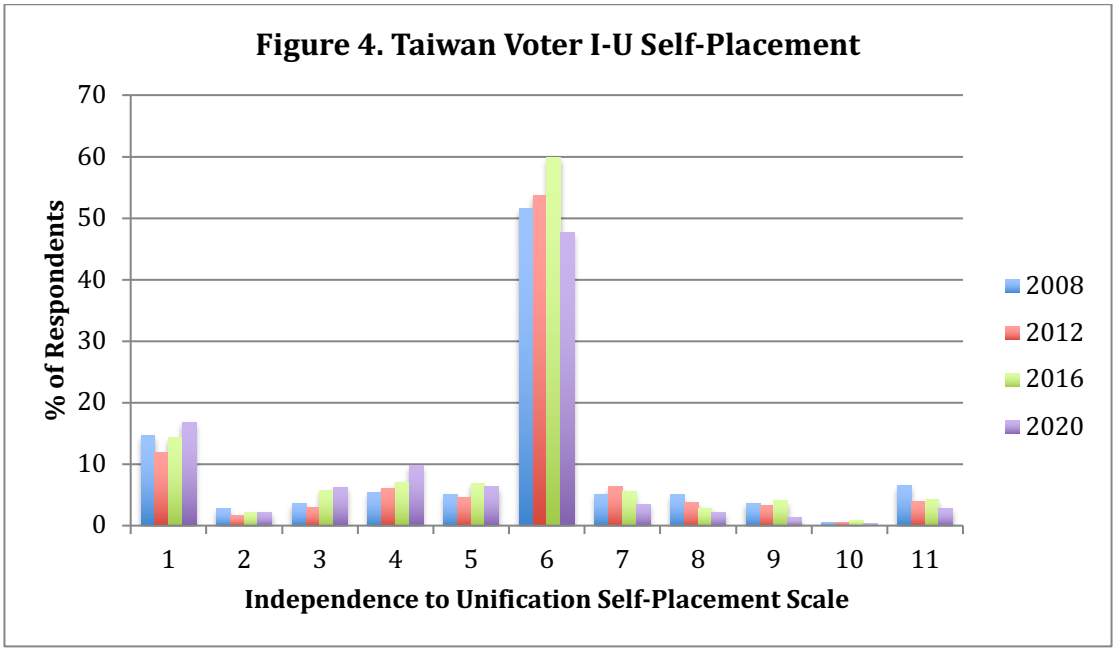
In terms of how the average voters relate to the two major parties – Labour and National – table 6 provides another perspective on the gap between the mean voter position on the left-right scale and the two major parties. In 2014, the weighted mean voter position on the left-right scale is at 5.76 (quite centrist). This position moved slightly to the left in 2017 at 5.23. However, in 2014 voters place Labour at 3.23 and National at 7.08 showing that the average voters feels closer to National (gap of 1.32) than to Labour (2.53). Indeed, National Party won this election and formed the government. Considering these two poles of New Zealand politics, then, the total gap from the voters' mean position to the two major parties is 3.85.

Table 6. NZ voter self-placement on L-R scale vis-à-vis two major parties

	Voter	LAB	NAT	LAB-Voter	Voter-NAT	Distance
2014	5.76	3.23	7.08	2.53	1.32	3.85
2017	5.23	3.83	7.29	1.40	2.06	3.46

Source: NZES 2014, 2017 and author's calculation

In 2017, the voters moved slightly left to a weighted mean position of 5.23, while voters perceived that Labour moved right to 3.83 while National moved further right to 7.29. This time around voters' gap with Labour shrunk to 1.40 while the gap with National increased to 2.06. This evidence supports the actual election result with Labour able to form a majority coalition and ended its nine-year drought in forming government. The total perceived gap between the voters and the two major parties was reduced to 3.46 from its levels in 2014. The evidence in figure 3 and table 7 corroborate Satherley et al's (2020, p. 17) finding that while New Zealanders became "slightly more ideologically sorted over time, there is little evidence of social sorting by party vote."



Source: TEDS 2008, 2012, 2016, 2020 and author's calculation

Figure 4 is the self-placement of Taiwanese voters on the independence-unification scale. The centrist position here is a preference for status quo (neither independence nor unification). Taiwanese voters status quo position has been quite consistent over the years with the most recent TEDS surveys showing over 45 percent of the voters. The relatively large drop from the 2016 to the 2020 figures is likely an effect of the Hong Kong pro-democracy protests and China's strong reaction to the supposed 'one country, two systems' model. Except for the position of outright independence that command above 10 percent of the electorate, all other positions in the continuum (except the centrist status quo) have less than 10 percent of the voters.

Table 7. Taiwan voter self-placement on I-U scale vis-à-vis two major parties

	Voter	DPP	KMT	DPP-Voter	Voter-KMT	Distance
2008	4.54	2.17	7.41	2.37	2.87	5.24
2012	4.54	2.59	7.04	1.95	2.50	4.45
2016	5.02	3.13	7.37	1.89	2.35	4.24
2020	3.89	2.52	7.48	1.37	3.59	4.96

Source: TEDS 2008, 2012, 2016, 2020 and author's calculation

Table 7 shows how the Taiwanese voters relate to the two major parties on the independence versus unification scale. The 2020 weighted mean voter position is quite a drastic change from prior positions. From 2008 up until the most recent national elections, the mean voter position is definitely closer to the status quo position. As mentioned earlier, the 2020 voter position may have been affected by events in Hong Kong and China especially the pro-democracy protest movement in Hong Kong. Looking at the gap between voter position and party position, it is clear from table 7 that the DPP and voters' gap has been decreasing over time. The 2020 figures show such a large gap between how voters relate to the DPP and the KMT with voters being a lot closer to the DPP than to the KMT. The KMT has lost two consecutive presidential and legislative elections in 2016 and 2020. Yet, KMT is still (for now) the second largest party in parliament. So just looking at the two major parties, the gap from the electorate position to the two major parties have remained consistently high. In 2008, the combined gap was 5.24 and dropped in both 2012 and 2016 only to increase again to 4.96 in 2020.

Comparing the New Zealand data on table 6 and the Taiwan data on table 7 provide interesting observations. In terms of the electorate's perception of the two major parties in their respective party systems, Taiwanese voters view their two major parties are farther apart while New Zealander voters view their two large parties as closer to them. With the absence of credible party choices, the polarization becomes amplified.

In this section we compared New Zealand and Taiwan on various features of political polarization. The data presented certainly support the view of high levels of party system polarization for both countries, yet there are nuanced differences. In comparing the two countries, we find that there are differences in the dynamics between polarization and fractionalization, consistent and lengthy experience of high level of party voting in the legislature, as well as the ideological gap between voters and the two major parties. These nuanced differences may have contributed to the variance in sentiments about high level of polarization in these two countries.

Conclusion

William Crotty (2014, p.1) avers that, "polarization is a term meant to describe the condition of hyper-partisanship/ideological extremism, policy representational imbalance, and institutional paralysis that combine to make contemporary governing

so problematic."[9] While Lupu (2015) suggests that party polarization have desirable outcomes such as increased voter turnout, more consistent ideological voting, and clear electoral options and choices for the citizens. In this exploratory study, I asked why there is such a variation in sentiments regarding political polarization.

To offer some insights regarding this difference in sentiments, I examined two democracies that have high level of party system polarization – Taiwan and New Zealand. In New Zealand, polarization is part and parcel of parliamentary politics. Political parties are expected to be ideologically distinct and cohesive. In Taiwan, polarization has been observed to be increasing since 2000 and is noted with certain amount of concern by scholars and observers (Hsiao 2014). Viewing polarization from the placement of parties along ideological continuum, the fractionalization of the party system, legislative party cohesion, and voters' position vis-à-vis the political parties, we are able to form some tentative inferences to explain why there is less concern in New Zealand for polarization vis-à-vis Taiwan.

Needless to say, this exploratory study is only an initial and incomplete attempt at uncovering why there are such different views about polarization. Much remains to be done for us to strengthen the inferences made in this exploratory study. Besides a more systematic and rigorous test of the propositions, other factors (e.g. institutional design) would need to be considered in future studies.

[9] Crotty's concerns about the negative consequences of polarization seem to be exaggerated especially in the New Zealand situation. In the Taiwan case, institutional paralysis occurred under divided government and less so in periods when executive and legislature are controlled by the same party. In this study, I have not examined the differences between fusion of power versus separate power systems that can affect the perception of party system polarization and its consequences on the political system.

References

Abramowitz, Alan and Jennifer McCoy. 2019. "United States: Racial Resentment, Negative Partisanship, and Polarization in Trump's America." *Annals of the American Political and Social Sciences* 681:1, 137-156.

Brady, David W. and Hahrie C. Han. 2006. "Polarization Then and Now: A Historical Perspective," in Pietro S. Nivola and David W. Brady (eds.) *Red and Blue Nation? Characteristics and Causes of America's Polarized Politics.* Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

Clark, Cal, Alexander C. Tan, and Karl Ho. 2019. "Political Polarization in Taiwan and the United States: A Research Puzzle." Paper presented at the Taiwan Institute for Governance and Communication Research (TIGCR) International Conference on "Political Polarization: Perspectives of Governance and Communications, National Chengchi University, Mucha, Taiwan, October 29, 2019.

Crotty, William. 2014. "Polarization in US Politics and Policy," in William Crotty (ed.) *Polarized Politics: The Impact of Divisiveness in the US Political System*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Dalton, Russell J. 2008. "The Quantity and the Quality of Party Systems: Party System Polarization, Its Measurement, and Its Consequences." *Comparative Political Studies* 41:7, 899-920.

Disch, Lisa. 2002. *The Tyranny of Two-Party System*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Galson, William A. and Pietro S. Nivola. 2006. "Delineating the Problem," in Pietro S. Nivola and David W. Brady (eds.) *Red and Blue Nation? Characteristics and Causes of America's Polarized Politics*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

Gross, Donald A. and Lee Sigelman. 1984. "Comparing Party Systems: A Multidimensional Approach." *Comparative Politics* 16:4, 463-479.

Hetherington, Marc. 2011. "Partisanship and Polarization" in Adam J. Berinsky (ed.) *New Directions in Public Opinion*. New York: Routledge.

Hsiao, Yi-Ching. 2014. " Political Polarization in Taiwan: An Analysis on Mass Feeling Thermometer toward Political Parties." *Journal of Electoral Studies* 21:2, 1-42. [*in Chinese*]

Hsiao, Yi-Ching. 2019. "The People's Partisan Polarization and Its Influence on the Attitudes Toward Democracy in Taiwan." *Taiwan Political Science Review* 23:2, 41-85. [*in Chinese*]

Hsiao, Yi-Ching and Su-Feng Cheng. 2014. "Citizens' Perception of the Left-Right Ideology: Replacing Left-Right with the Unification-Independence issue to Measure Taiwan's Polarization." *Taiwan Democracy Quarterly* 18:2, 79-138. [*in Chinese*]

Lupu, Noam. 2015. “Party Polarization and Mass Partisanship: A Comparative Perspective.” *Political Behavior* 37:2, 331-356.

McCoy, Jennifer, Tahmina Rahman, and Murat Somer. 2018. “Polarization and the Global Crisis of Democracy: Common Patterns, Dynamics, and Pernicious Consequences for Democratic Polities.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 62:1, 16-42.

Paulson, Arthur C. 2014. “From Umbrella Parties to Polarized Parties,” in William Crotty (ed.) *Polarized Politics: The Impact of Divisiveness in the US Political System*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Pomper, Gerald and Marc D. Weiner. 2014. “Structural Sources of Political Polarization,” in William Crotty (ed.) *Polarized Politics: The Impact of Divisiveness in the US Political System*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Sartori, Giovanni. 1976. *Parties and Party System*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Sheng, Shing-Yuan. 2008. “Party Leadership and Cohesion in the Legislative Yuan: Before and after the First Party Turnover in the Executive Branch.” *Taiwan Democracy Quarterly* 5:4, 2-46. [*in Chinese*]

Sheng, Shing-Yuan and Shih-Hao Huang. 2016. “Party Negotiation Mechanism: An Analysis through the Lens of Institutionalization.” *Soochow Journal of Political Science* 35:1, 37-92. [*in Chinese*]

Shugart, Matthew S. and Alexander C. Tan. 2016. “Political Consequences of New Zealand's MMP in Comparative Perspective,” in Nathan Batto, Gary Cox, Chi Huang, and Alexander C. Tan (Ed.), *Mixed-Member Electoral Systems in Constitutional Context*: 247-277. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Thornton, Judd. 2013. “The Impact of Elite Polarization on Partisan Ambivalence and Indifference.” *Political Behavior* 35:2, 409-428.

Tsai, Chia-Hung, Yung-Ming Hsu, and Hsiu-Tin Huang. 2007. “Bi-Polarizing the Politics: Explaining the 2004 Presidential Election in Taiwan.” *Journal of Electoral Studies* 14:1, 1-31. [*in Chinese*]