

## Introduction: Parties, Party Choice, and Partisanship in East Asia

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Political parties are widely seen as “a *sine qua non* for the organization of the modern democratic polity and for the expression of political pluralism.”<sup>1</sup> The manner in which parties articulate political interests largely defines the nature of electoral competition, the representation of citizen interests, the policy consequences of elections—and ultimately the functioning of the democratic process.<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, the linkage between citizens and parties is an essential aspect of democratic politics—and the focus of the articles in this collection. By connecting citizens to the democratic process, political parties should give voice to social groups and their policy interests. Electoral choice is a vehicle for expressing the policy interests and political values of the public. Electoral studies in Western democracies have demonstrated how partisanship is a core element in political identities and behaviors, as well as a heuristic for organizing political information and guiding political choice.<sup>3</sup> Partisan ties also supposedly motivate citizens to participate in the political process. Thus, partisanship is routinely a strong predictor of a wide range of political predispositions and participatory actions ranging from political efficacy, to political involvement, to voting choice.

These various linkages between citizens and parties are the main theme of this collection of articles, which is motivated by an overarching question: *are the theoretical presumptions about the nature of electoral choice and the impact of partisan attachments equally applicable to the consolidated and emerging democracies of East Asia?* To answer this question, we assembled a group of leading comparative scholars using a set of new cross-national public opinion surveys of East Asian nations.<sup>4</sup>

Needless to say, East Asian political parties and party systems are quite diverse and were created under very different historical conditions. Therefore, the context of party competition differs across nations,

and perhaps in comparison to other developing democracies. The trajectories of regime evolution also produce cross-national differences. Any sweeping region-wide generalization about the nature of electoral choice and the implications of partisanship is unlikely to be fully accurate. However, some characteristics are widely assumed to apply to many of these party systems. These features are salient enough to generate some reasonable assumptions about the “normality” of the region while bearing in mind that most nations deviate from this “normality” at least to some extent.

Several East Asian democracies have experienced socioeconomic modernization in a compressed time. East Asian parties thus did not follow the same development trajectory as political parties in Western democracies, which gradually emerged from preexisting social cleavages and patterns of elite politics.<sup>5</sup> A firm social group base can provide a foundation for party ideology and identity, and without such group connections, parties may be more personalistic or patronistic organizations. Thus, much of the literature on East Asia notes the shallow social base of most parties, although this literature is typically limited to a single nation and election.<sup>6</sup>

There are frequent claims that most East Asian party systems do not exhibit institutionalized programmatic electoral competition. Many Asian parties appear more pragmatic than programmatic. Many try to be all things to all people. The traditional left-right economic cleavage or similar broad ideological frameworks that are familiar in Western democracies appear underdeveloped in most East Asian democracies. Political parties often compete based on valence issues, such as anti-corruption, prosperity, efficiency, or personal charisma of the party leader, or based on clientelism and district service. In South Korea and Taiwan, for example, cleavages anchored on regionalism and national identity respectively have structured party politics.

The extent of party system institutionalization also varies greatly among these democracies.<sup>7</sup> Institutionalized party systems are emerging in Japan and Taiwan and to some extent in South Korea and Mongolia. However, the evidence of electoral system change and party system change in East Asia indicates continuing volatility (see Benjamin Reilly's contribution to this issue). Similarly, Scott Mainwaring and Edurne Zoco find that interelection party volatility in Japan, Taiwan, Korea, and the Philippines is approximately two and a half times the level of volatility in established Western party systems, although comparable to many Latin American nations.<sup>8</sup>

Lastly, most of the major political parties in East Asia are of recent creation. With few exceptions (such as the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan and the Kuomintang in Taiwan), most parties have a life span shorter than twenty years. In addition, the founding of these parties was usually synchronized with the rise of a new political leader. The condition under which these leader-centered parties were created makes it very difficult to distinguish voters' partisan attachment from the popularity of their charismatic leaders. Most East Asian parties also appear organizationally thin. The degree of organizational structure, mass member support, and a party administrative elite—as exists in most Western parties—still appear rare in most Asian democracies. Even in the longest-established democracy in East Asia, Japanese membership in political parties is only a fraction of the level in most Western democracies.<sup>9</sup>

In a nutshell, the nature of political parties in East Asia may weaken the linkage between parties and citizens, as well as attenuate the usefulness of partisanship in structuring citizens' political orientations. In addition to these formative factors, East Asia parties may be experiencing the seemingly global trend of the decreasing relevance of parties as vehicles of political mobilization and interest articulation. The “decline of parties” literature argues that parties are increasingly failing in their capacity to engage the ordinary citizen, people are increasingly reluctant to commit themselves to parties, citizens are less likely to show up at polling stations, and they vote with a weaker sense of partisan consistency.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, interest associations and social movements are becoming much more vigorous competitors to parties for the opportunity to represent and mobilize citizens outside the electoral arena.<sup>11</sup>

We began our research with these questions about the strength of citizen-party linkages in East Asia. However, there are also reasons why parties and partisanship may become more central to contemporary East Asian politics. As the number of elections increases, parties have stronger incentives to develop an institutional base to perpetuate their voter base—and party stability and constancy should increase.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the past decade has witnessed other signs of democratic maturation, such as the transition in the control of government in Taiwan, Korea, and Japan. Thus, our research tries both to test past theories of partisanship as applied to East Asia and to provide an initial cross-national comparison of the bases of party choice, and the implications of partisanship for these publics.

## **The Framework of Comparison**

A decade ago, broad cross-national comparisons of voting choice, party preferences, and the impact of partisanship in East Asia would not have been possible because the necessary research resources did not exist. Our comparative analyses are possible only because of the recent development of several cross-national public opinion surveys in East Asia. Indeed, one of the major research lessons of these articles is to demonstrate the rich range of cross-national surveys that now exist.

The articles of this issue draw upon three different cross-national public opinion surveys (see Table 1).<sup>13</sup> The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) focuses on electoral choice and partisan images; it asks a common battery of questions in postelection surveys. Five East Asian nations were included in the second module of the CSES. A consortium of public opinion scholars conducted the East Asia Barometer (EAB) survey, which included six East Asian democracies. Finally, the 1999–2002 World Values Survey expanded its data collection in East Asia to incorporate most of the democracies in the region, thereby increasing the potential to compare Asia to other regions of the world. From these surveys we include all the East Asian nations that qualify as electoral democracies where party competition and partisan behavior can be meaningfully compared.<sup>14</sup> Each article in this issue typically draws upon the one survey project that best addresses the theoretical concerns of the article, and in some cases compares results between surveys. Moreover, the existence—and continuance—of these three large projects signals a new era of potential comparative public opinion studies of East Asia.

Our theoretical interests focus on the electoral choices and partisanship of East Asian publics. However, much of the theorizing on party choice and partisan behavior is derived from literature and theories from established democracies. For example, theories of social cleavage voting in established party systems provides a benchmark for judging the extent of cleavage voting in East Asian democracies, just as the level of party identifications in established Western democracies is a benchmark for comparing the extent of partisanship in East Asia. Comparison is the essence of comparative politics, and many of our theoretical interests imply the need for cross-regional comparisons to Western democracies or other emerging democracies.

We address this point in two ways. First, several of the chapters have explicit comparisons to other nations available through these international survey projects, such as the comparisons of partisanship in

**Table 1** The Survey Projects on East Asia and the Nations Surveyed

Nations Surveyed	CSES		EAB		WVS	
	Year	Sample <i>N</i>	Year	Sample <i>N</i>	Year	Sample <i>N</i>
<i>East Asia</i>						
Indonesia	—	—	—	—	2002	1,004
Japan	2004	2,010	2003	1,408	2000	1,362
Mongolia	—	—	2003	1,144	—	—
Philippines	2004	1,200	2002	1,200	2001	1,200
South Korea	2004	1,500	2003	1,500	2002	1,200
Taiwan	2001	2,022	2001	1,415	1995	1,452
Thailand	—	—	2002	1,546	—	—
<i>Established democracies</i>						
Australia	2004	1,769	—	—	1995	2,048
New Zealand	2002	1,740	—	—	1998	1,201

*Note:* Table describes surveys field dates and sample sizes from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, module 2 (CSES); the East Asia Barometer, wave I (EAB); and the World Values Survey (WVS).

Emile Sheng's article. In addition, we cite literature from other developing democracies as a comparison to East Asia. Second, we selected two established democracies—Australia and New Zealand—that were part of both the CSES and World Values Survey, as specific comparisons. We are not arguing that Australia and New Zealand are typical established democracies, because there is not a single typical Western nation. Elements of both electoral systems and party systems are distinct.<sup>15</sup> However, including these nations in several chapters allows us to see how these two established Western democracies compare with East Asian nations in various models of individual-level behavior.

In summary, the contributions in this issue vary in the set of nations they examine because these three datasets only partially overlap, but together these surveys provide valuable perspectives on parties and public opinion in East Asia.

## Studying Partisanship in East Asia

Despite the fundamental importance of the topic of party development and institutionalization for the democratization process, there is little systematic cross-national evidence on the linkage between citizens and political parties in East Asia. Individual country studies are often in-

sightful, but it is difficult to draw broad conclusions from separate studies that use different theoretical or empirical approaches to this topic. Moreover, just as party politics is still relatively new in several emerging democracies of East Asia, research on public opinion and voting behavior is also developing.

The contributors to this issue focus on three broad themes. First, we begin by describing the structure of party systems across East Asia. Benjamin Reilly describes the electoral systems of Asian democracies and how electoral reforms have recently reshaped the framework of party competition. Reilly notes that reformers enacted these changes to counterbalance the lack of institutionalization and representation of East Asian parties described above; later chapters examine in more detail whether such countertrends are observable. Russell Dalton and Aiji Tanaka describe the polarization of parties in these systems, and find that the clarity of electoral choice varies substantially across these nations, almost independent of the electoral structures that Reilly describes.

A second set of articles examines the sources of party preferences. Ian McAllister analyzes the social group bases of party choice. He concludes that traditional social cleavages—such as class, religion, and urban/rural differences—exert a weak overall impact on party choice in East Asia, while age differences in party support emerge in several nations as a residue of the transition to democracy. Aie-Rie Lee presents a parallel analysis of how values and policy attitudes guide party preferences. She shows that a new authoritarian-libertarian value cleavage is emerging as a consequence of social modernization, and these values now have more weight than traditional economic policy attitudes in shaping party preferences. Sheng describes the extent of partisanship on four different indicators among Asian publics as a measure of party system institutionalization. He finds that when compared to most Western democracies, partisanship in East Asian nations is relatively weak, reflecting the less institutionalized nature of Asian party systems.

The third and final section considers the consequences of partisanship on citizen behavior. Yun-han Chu and Min-hua Huang examine whether partisanship mobilizes individual participation in electoral and nonelectoral participation. Despite weaker party ties among Asian publics, they demonstrate that partisanship has a similar mobilizing effect as in established democracies. This implies that party system institutionalization in Asian democracies will generate similar consequences as in the established democracies. Doh Chull Shin and Rollin Tusalem describe how partisanship is linked to popular images of the democratic

process. They demonstrate that partisanship motivates East Asians to endorse the democratic performance of their political system and embrace democracy as the best possible system of government. This is not a complete agenda of the ways that partisanship affects citizens and the political process, but we feel this research provides the first systematic comparisons of key features of partisan political behavior across Asian democracies.

In summary, this collection attempts to move forward the comparative study of political behavior across East Asia. We understand that citizen connections to parties and the implications of these ties are essential for judging the vitality of democracy. In addition, we believe that only by comparing nations can we understand the nature of party politics in any single nation and their overall development in the region as a whole. We hope the articles in this special issue make progress in moving us forward.

## Notes

1. Ingrid van Beizen, "How Political Parties Shape Democracy." Center for the Study of Democracy, University of California, Irvine, working paper 04-16.

2. Joseph LaPalombara and Myron Weiner, eds., *Political Parties and Political Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966); Larry Diamond and Richard Gunther, eds., *Political Parties and Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Russell J. Dalton and Ian McAllister, eds., "Political Parties and Political Development," special issue of *Party Politics* (March 2007).

3. Angus Campbell et al., *The American Voter* (New York: Wiley, 1960); Warren Miller, "The Cross-National Use of Party Identification as a Stimulus to Political Inquiry." In Ian Budge, Ivor Crewe, and Dennis Farlie, eds., *Party Identification and Beyond* (New York: Wiley, 1976); Russell J. Dalton and Martin P. Wattenberg, eds., *Parties Without Partisans: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

4. These articles were first presented at a research conference held at the East West Center in Honolulu. We want to acknowledge Chung Nam Kim and the POSCO program, the East Asian Barometer Program, and the Center for the Study of Democracy at the University of California, Irvine, for their support of this project.

5. Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, eds., *Party Systems and Voter Alignments* (New York: Free Press, 1967).

6. Scott Flanagan et al., *The Japanese Voter* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Yun-han Chu and Tse-min Lin, "The Process of Democratic Consolidation in Taiwan: Social Cleavages, Electoral Competition and the Emerging

Party System.” In Hung-Mao Tien, ed., *Taiwan’s Electoral Politics and Democratic Transition* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1996); Doh Chull Shin, *Mass Politics and Culture in Democratizing Korea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

7. Stefano Bartolini and Peter Mair, “Challenges to Contemporary Political Parties.” In Diamond and Gunther, eds., *Political Parties and Democracy*, pp. 327–343.

8. Scott Mainwaring and Edurne Zoco, “Political Sequences and the Stabilization of Interparty Competition,” *Party Politics* 13 (March 2007): 155–178.

9. Only 3.5 percent of Japanese reported a party membership, which was about half the average among the fifteen European Union member states in 1999 (5.6 percent). Ronald Inglehart et al., *Human Values and Beliefs: A Cross-Cultural Sourcebook* (Siglo XXI Editores, 2004).

10. See Dalton and Wattenberg, *Parties Without Partisans*; Dalton and McAllister, “Parties and Political Development.”

11. Philippe Schmitter, “Parties Are Not What They Once Were.” In Diamond and Gunther, eds., *Political Parties and Democracy*.

12. See Mainwaring and Zoco, “Political Sequences,” pp. 164–167.

13. The data used here were generally downloaded from the websites of each project, which also include further documentation for each survey. These data are available free to other researchers: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems ([www.cses.org](http://www.cses.org)), East Asia Barometer Survey ([eacsurvey.law.ntu.edu.tw/](http://eacsurvey.law.ntu.edu.tw/)), and the World Values Survey ([www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org)). We express our appreciation to all the relevant principal investigators for sharing their data with the research community.

14. Using 2002 as the approximate date for most of our survey data, the Freedom House ranked Mongolia, the Philippines, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand as free. Of course, Thailand then experienced a coup in 2006, but this occurred subsequent to the EAB Thai survey. Indonesia was rated as only partly free, but because of the rapid advance of electoral democracy since 1998, we include Indonesia in our study where possible.

15. Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); David Farrell, *Comparing Electoral Systems* (London: Macmillan, 1998); Pippa Norris, *Electoral Engineering* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).